



## THE CEDARS SCHOOL

16<sup>th</sup> December 2016

Dear Parents,

Christmas is such an evocative time of year! It brings back so many memories and casts a glow over the world for a few brief days, both literally and figuratively. My own memories from childhood are of joyful, carefree occasions, celebrated against a backdrop of decorations that would now be deemed tasteless. These memories seem further and further away as I get older and, of course, Christmas tends not to be quite so carefree for us adults.

But with each passing year, I grasp with a little more clarity that the joy of my childhood Christmases was rooted in a deeper reality than the concerns that came later and crowded in. The stable is not merely a sentimental sideshow to engender vague feelings of warmth; it is the deepest reality. I recently came across a passage written by Fr Alfred McBride that expresses this idea powerfully:

*“As children we had a sense of wonder. Our eyes were wide open and drinking in the fascinating gifts we beheld... Our thirsty souls could not have enough of the wonders of creation. Then, somehow, we grew too old to dream. We tired of the abundance of the world, or at least grew weary of keeping up with the feast of life, and stepped away from the banquet of life. The natural gift of wonder God gave us as children was meant to be kept alive... Instead we let wonder go to sleep. We entered the typical dream state of most humans.”*

Perhaps this is why the liturgy of the First Sunday of Advent urges us to “Stay Awake!” We do not focus on the crib to escape our concerns but to give them meaning.

### *Ten terms*

We reached another mini-milestone today as our tenth term came to an end. So much has happened that it seems incredible that we have been around for such a short time. There is a buzz around the school and a feeling that we are quietly building momentum. This term has seen further progress in many areas, not least in the academic sphere, while sport and music have continued to develop.

And there is a great desire to keep moving forward. Among the changes in the offering for next term are the introduction of weekly enrichment talks for all pupils (on Friday mornings) and a new, more formal approach to scheduling tutorials. We will also be putting plans in place for work experience in the summer and continuing to prepare for the opening of The Cedars Sixth Form in September 2017. Architects have been in and out of the school on a regular basis as we prepare for further expansion.

### *An unexpected guest*

One of the more unexpected events of the term was the appearance of Cardinal Turkson at our concert on Wednesday. I have thought for some time that the boys' playing deserved a wider audience but it was still a surprise when one of Pope Francis's closest collaborators walked into the hall, having flown in from Rome just a few hours before.

I would like to think that stories of the boys' musical prowess are at last starting to filter through to the Eternal City but, in truth, the Cardinal was in London at the invitation of one of our parents, Mr Singham, who had invited him to give a lecture at the Legatum Institute in Mayfair. Even so, it was an honour to welcome him to The Cedars and we

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were grateful that he had made the journey during the rail strike and without having eaten. Mrs Rodrigues provided sustenance in the form of her signature spring rolls and the Cardinal gave an impromptu talk about two exciting projects that are taking place in Ghana, his country of birth. I will not go into detail here but one of the projects is of an educational nature and we have agreed in principle to collaborate in any way that we can. Further details will follow. I am grateful to Mr Singham, a personal friend of the Cardinal, for facilitating the link, not just with the Cardinal but also with the Legatum Institute.

Amid all the excitement, it should not be forgotten that the boys played beautifully! The concert was a real credit to the performers, their parents and to Mr Holden and his colleagues in the Music Department.

*Goodbye*

On a sadder note, we say goodbye to two colleagues this Christmas. **Mr Javier Maldonado**, our Spanish teacher, is relocating for family reasons and leaves to take up a new job in Kingston in the New Year. Mr Maldonado is a most conscientious colleague and we are grateful to him for his hard work over the last four terms. His concern for his pupils was evident. **Mr Ciaran Daly** has been volunteering at the school for much of the last term but he will start paid employment at another PACT school, Oakwood, in January. We are pleased for Mr Daly but his cheerful hard work will be greatly missed. Both Mr Maldonado and Mr Daly leave with our very best wishes.

From next term, Spanish will be taught by **Mrs Natalie Bowers**. Mrs Bowers is an experienced linguist having taught Spanish at secondary school and university level. Hailing from Trinidad, she gained a BA from the University of the West Indies and an MSc from Edinburgh University. She has a strong interest in Spanish culture as well as the language itself.

*Dates*

You will receive a pdf copy of next term's school diary before Christmas to give you more notice of key dates. For now, I would like to draw your attention to two particularly important ones that are fast approaching.

There will be an INSET day on **Friday 13<sup>th</sup> January** and there will be **no school** for Years 7 – 10. Year 11 should attend school as normal and the day will be spent on study skills and revision planning. The 11+ and 13+ entrance examinations will also take place on this day.

The next parent information evening takes place at 7.30pm on **Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> January**.

*Bishop Javier Echeverria*

Finally, I would like to mention Bishop Javier Echeverria, the Prelate of Opus Dei, who died on December 12<sup>th</sup>. Bishop Javier was a great friend of The Cedars. He took great interest in the school's development and was always keen for news about the school's progress. I met him once, several years ago, and the meeting left a deep impression on me. He combined great serenity with a warm, affectionate manner and I am quite sure that he will continue to take an interest in the school. In his last pastoral letter, dated December 1<sup>st</sup>, he wrote about preparing for Advent:

*"When our relationship with God takes on this serene and joyful air so proper to the stable at Bethlehem, there spreads around us, as its ripe fruit, a more intense family atmosphere overflowing with joy, so closely united to these dates. Therefore the Church urges us to better prepare our heart during Advent, and to set aside unimportant matters, distractions that lead us astray, the superficiality of the immediate... Perhaps we have in hand many concerns, and we lack peace in our relationship with God. If we strive to maintain our peace and calm with God, we will also offer it to others."*

I would like to wish you all a blessed and joyful Christmas and every success in 2017.

Yours sincerely,



Robert Teague  
**Headmaster**