



## THE CEDARS SCHOOL

20<sup>th</sup> December 2017

Dear parents,

### **Thank you**

Now that another term has come to a close, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your support of the school. Whether this is your first term as a Cedars parent or your thirteenth (it can't be any more than that!), I hope you feel that the school genuinely wants to collaborate with you in the education of your son. A phrase we often use to describe the relationship between staff and parents at The Cedars is that we regard each boy as a "joint project" between both parties. All of this is underpinned by a recognition that it is you parents who are the first, and most important, educators of your children. From this insight, a number of consequences follow. Not least that the purpose of our shared project is to help your son flourish now and in the future, and not just to achieve in those areas by which schools are measured.

### **A Cedars term**

It has been a busy term and, in many ways, a typical Cedars term. There have been plenty of new developments and the boys, with their usual energy and enthusiasm, have contributed to a sense of optimism and excitement around the school.

The most obvious developments have been the continuing growth of the school, with over 50 new boys and 9 new staff joining us in September, and the establishment of a Sixth Form. As term ends, the early signs are that our newest members of the community are settling well and they are certainly making a great contribution to school life.

I would like to record my thanks to **Mr Joseph Adunse** for taking over some of Dr Mullaney's classes at short notice and I hope very much that his involvement with the school will continue after Christmas in some capacity. Dr Mullaney's long-term replacement has been appointed and will take up his post at the start of the new term. **Dr Daniel Adams** graduated with 1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours from Bath University where he was recently awarded his PhD. Dr Adams, who completed his teacher training in Essex earlier this year, is also a keen athlete and an aficionado of English literature and fine art.

### **Academic life**

On the academic front, I am pleased to report that the number of talks and visits continues to grow. Most of our Sixth Formers attended masterclasses in various subjects at the University of Cambridge earlier this term and we have welcomed several visiting speakers to school. Weekly enrichment sessions have continued to flourish and regular readers of the weekly bulletin will know that pupils are now starting to deliver, and not just listen to, academic talks. Next term, we will introduce a series of weekly lunchtime seminars given by members of staff, pupils and external speakers.

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### **Music**

Weekly music concerts – another of this term’s innovations – will continue next term. Judging by the assured performances on show in our Christmas Concert last Thursday, they have already helped to raise the standard of Cedars music. There were some wonderful moments in the Advent Service too, though the logistical problems of performing ‘off-site’ certainly presented challenges. Dr Bonnici’s Schola Cantorum made its debut this term and now provides musical accompaniment to the Mass every Thursday morning.

### **Sport**

Sport has continued to flourish and most age groups have been able to at least maintain their previous win rates even though the standard of opposition has increased overall. Congratulations to Mr Thisanayagam and his team for doing so much to put Cedars sport on the map. Dramatic confirmation of our growing sporting reputation was received a few days ago when all 15 places at our March Rugby 7s Tournament were snapped up - within hours! - by great sporting schools such as Wellington College and Tonbridge School. Unfortunately, many of our local rivals are on the waiting list this year.

### **House competition**

One of the great benefits of our house system is that it provides all boys with opportunities to compete and win glory for their houses. Mr Ashton and Mr Harris have done much to promote house competition and it has been great to see such new additions to the calendar as the ‘House Egg Drop’ and ‘Mob Football’. (For those of you unfamiliar with egg drops, the aim is to drop an egg from a great height and by the ingenious use of straws, pieces of sponge, string and carrier bags, to allow it to come to earth without breaking.) Mr Ashton’s poster advertising mob football almost sent our Health and Safety Committee into a frenzy but I am pleased to report that it went off very peacefully. “It’s a gentleman’s game, Mr Teague,” one of the Year 9s later assured me.

### **The co-curriculum**

We have never been short of barrack room lawyers at The Cedars (especially in Year 8) but now, thanks to Mr Trafford and a committed group of pupils, debating is now deeply embedded within school life. We have started to compete, and two of our Year 10 boys, William Awomoyi and Nathan Brown-Bennett, received high praise from judges after their first outing in which they had to pit their skills against an experienced duo of sixth formers from Wilson’s School. Next term, we will be starting a ‘Model United Nations’ group at the school.

Why are enrichment sessions, clubs and talks so important? In part because they help to engender a culture in which learning is valued for its own sake. Education has several worthy aims - such as preparation for employment and citizenship - but if the search for goodness, beauty and truth is forgotten altogether, education becomes something much poorer. That is why I am so encouraged by the number of requests from boys for after-school classes on topics of interest which are not “on the syllabus”. Though intellectual curiosity is hard to quantify, these requests augur well for the academic life of the school.

I have not forgotten, by the way, your feedback on extra-curricular activities from our October survey. Aside from the serious academic business of the school and the sport and music, we recognise that there is a need to provide a greater range of practical activities and I hope you will notice some changes very soon.

### **Pedro Ballester**

On a more sombre note, some of you will remember that back in 2015 we were visited by a young man, Pedro Ballester, who had been diagnosed with cancer in December 2014. At the time of his diagnosis, Pedro was expected to live for only a few months. He is still with us but he is seriously ill. Pedro made a

deep impact on staff and boys when he visited and I have met him and his parents several times since. Knowing the Ballester family has been an inspiration and a lesson to me and to many other people. I mention Pedro now partly so that you can keep him and his family in your prayers but also because he and they have set such a powerful example of living well in the most difficult of circumstances.

### ***The spirit of Christmas***

Christmas is a time when we are presented with two contrasting paths to happiness. At one extreme, Christmas advertising tells us that our happiness is to be found in 'things', though there is usually at least a nod to the idea of 'Christmas spirit' and goodwill to all. I don't know whether you have seen the new Curry's ad? It starts with parents telling their children that they are going to spend Christmas "singing carols and having long conversations". At this unhappy news, the children's faces fall. But it's OK! It's only a joke – the real Christmas surprise is an enormous TV from Curry's! The children's faces duly light up and the ad finishes with a smiling sales assistant from Curry's telling us: "360 degree surround sound – it's what Christmas is all about!"

Then there is the so-called Dickensian Christmas, exemplified by *A Christmas Carol* and summed up in the novel's famous last words: "God bless us. Every one." I suspect most of us would prefer this to Curry's 'surround-sound Christmas' but even Dickens fails to fully capture its Christian meaning. T S Eliot's poem, *The Journey of the Magi* attempts to do so. Indeed the whole point of the poem is that the world after the first Christmas is a completely changed place. Nothing is the same. Once God has entered into human affairs through the incarnation and birth of Jesus Christ, nothing will ever be the same again. It is from the joy of Christmas, of knowing that we are sons and daughters of God, that the Ballester family, and others like them, draw their strength.

What is the recipe for a happy Christmas? Speaking last Sunday, Pope Francis identified "Joy, prayer and gratitude" as the attitudes which help us "to live Christmas in an authentic way". Long conversations are not essential, then, and a good Christmas is compatible with a big TV, so long as we don't expect the TV to bring us real happiness. "The joy of the Christian comes from faith and from the encounter with Jesus Christ, the reason for our happiness," the Pope said. "The more we are rooted in Christ, the more we find inner serenity, even in the midst of everyday contradictions."

Regardless of the size of your TV, I would like to wish you and your families a joyful and blessed Christmas and every happiness in 2018!

Yours faithfully,



Mr Robert Teague  
**Headmaster**

Note: The new term begins on **Tuesday January 9<sup>th</sup>** which is also the day of our entrance examinations for those joining the school in September 2018. Year 11 should follow the GCSE trial exam timetable; Year 12 should be in school at the earlier time of 7.45am and Years 7 – 10 begin at 11.30am.