



Friday 2nd March 2018

Dear Parents and Carers,

RE: LETTER 5 OF 5 – UPPER SCHOOL

In my final letter of the week, following our recent Ofsted inspection, the focus ends on our oldest students in the sixth form. The recent inspection witnessed the very highest standard of teaching and learning in those A-level lessons and this came as no surprise to us given what we know about standards and students in our sixth form.

“Teachers use a wide variety of tasks which challenge them. Inspectors saw examples of independent work, development of research skills, sharing ideas and deep discussion. Teachers effectively ensure that students do not merely recount formulaic answers but learn to reason and argue for themselves.” (Ofsted, January 2018)

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The inspectors were greatly impressed by the widespread ambition amongst our sixth formers and their commitment to their studies and their future. Our current Year 12 and Year 13 students are simply fantastic.

“Students value their sixth-form experience and are glad they chose to stay in the sixth form. They enjoy the challenges of their courses, have clear views about what they want to do in future, are supported well by teachers and succeed as a result.” (Ofsted, January 2018)

Sixth formers work really hard, follow their teachers’ advice and guidance, are driven to succeed and perhaps most importantly care for one another; motivating and encouraging others when the inevitable pressures or self-doubts come and go.

“Students value the non-qualification activities leaders arrange. There are assemblies, pastoral time, talks from experts, visits to university and apprenticeship experiences. Students say that this range of opportunities inspires them. Some have been spurred to apply to university as a result.” (Ofsted, January 2018)

Being a young adult has never been simple and this is certainly the case in the modern age with the innumerable pressures and additional demands placed on young people today. Rather than simply having a narrow focusing on getting high grades, the sixth form team ensures that the whole student is nurtured:

“Leaders make sure that students are supported to keep themselves safe. Students say that they know who to go to if they have any problems, and that talks on sexual and mental health and recent work on sexual consent are useful.” (Ofsted, January 2018)

The good news...

Both our current Year 13s and Year 12s are on course for very good results this summer. They are working very hard and their teachers broadly feel they cannot ask or expect much more from them and this is a very happy position to be in given the pressures of A-level courses and examinations.

HEADTEACHER
Mr Barry Doherty

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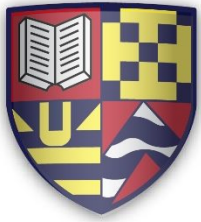
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Approximately one in three of our students opt to remain with us at Colmers. Many of the others have good reason to study elsewhere because our current offer does not try to compete against the super-sized further education colleges' vocational offers, or seek combinations that we cannot provide.

We continue to attract our most ambitious and dedicated students and whilst this is certainly no bad thing, we are also aware of the need to appeal to more students by persuading them that our focus on university entry is ambitious and entirely appropriate.

Just before half term I asked one Year 11 student about their college decision for next year. He told me he intended to join a particular college away from Colmers. When I asked why he said it was because they had a really good coffee lounge. Perhaps he has a point but it also raised questions about his decision-making and his priorities. However, by the age of 16 he is a young man and has to make his own decisions on his own terms.

So, how are we going to improve?

- Students:** For those currently in our sixth form... keep going. You are great and will be successful. For those considering whether or not to join our sixth form... we can't offer you an unrivalled coffee lounge and we can't promise to stay off your back and let you paddle through Years 12 and 13. But we can promise to teach and support you in a way that will enable you to be the best version of you that is possible.
- Families:** For those who currently have children in our sixth form... keep in contact over the coming months to ensure they are feeling okay and know exactly what they have to do to be successful. Whilst some long hours are essential for success, the race to the A-level finishing line is a marathon and not a sprint and therefore timing and pace are equally important to ensure they remain fresh for the final miles. For those who may have children in our sixth form in the future... please talk to us about our offer and our expectations. We aren't afraid to admit that we promise very high expectations and demands that will only be overshadowed by the amount of support the students will always receive.
- Colmers:** We will continue to review our curriculum offer with the hope of increasing the proportion of Colmers students staying on in our sixth form to approximately 50% over the next five years. This has already begun with the expansion of our BTEC and A-level courses, totaling 16 from September 2018. However, increasing our range of courses will never be at the expense of making our sixth form unaffordable and therefore much of that expansion has to come from raising the expectations of students who want to be more successful in school and in life and therefore choosing to study Level 3 qualifications at Colmers.

Yours sincerely,

Barry Doherty, Headteacher

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