



Headteacher's Half Term Newsletter



November 2016

Dear Parents and Carers,

Welcome to the latest edition of my newsletter. As you are aware we introduced a new assessment calendar and cycle to the school in September. Instead of three unevenly split terms we have decided to create four assessment 'seasons'; each lasting exactly nine weeks. In Week 4, all of the teachers carry out 'interim assessments' to check the progress made by each child in each class. Then, in Week 8, a full and formal assessment is carried out in every subject in every year group. This means that how we assess has changed as well - instead of



a little very often we have moved to much more detailed assessments, but less regularly. This does not change how often we shall report to you but you can look forward to more accurate and more valuable information. In Week 9 (last week), the students had an opportunity to reflect on the season that is coming to a close and both teachers and students can plan ahead so that the next season is better than the last. I have decided to tie my own newsletters to these four seasons and this is why you are receiving this newsletter in the first week of our second season – The Winter Season!

Very best wishes,
Mr Barry Doherty, Headteacher

Barcelona Bound – Big Trip to Spain Coming Up!

The response to Mrs Lewis and Mr Warner's launch assembly a few weeks ago has been tremendous. You will be aware that we have created a true once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for your children to go on a jam-packed trip to Spain's greatest city in July next year. The cost of the trip is massively subsidised and places are available for just £125 per student. That includes flights, hotels, coaches, passes and entry to a wide range of venues. If this is the first you have heard of this then I'm afraid it'll be too late to apply but it is so important to share with parents and carers the lengths we will travel to ensure your children have every opportunity on offer in schools today. On the back of the visit to Belgium and France in 2014, the visit to Poland last year and now this, we look forward to more students having stories to tell and speculation about next year's big trip growing once more...



Switzerland Bound – A-Level Triple Science Visit as Well!

And if that wasn't enough, Mrs Gladstone is also organising a very, very special visit to Geneva to complete a Biology, Chemistry and Physics enrichment experience later this year. Lake Geneva will be the focus of a field study as will a visit to the world famous CERN Large Hadron Collider (opposite). Again, the knowledge that Colmers students get the opportunity to visit such places is wonderful and I am deeply grateful to Mrs Gladstone, Mrs Lewis and Mr Warner for agreeing to put in the hours and hours of planning necessary to get dozens and dozens of students across the continent and home again safe and sound. Good luck with those applications!

Year 11 Work Experience – welcome back!

We are delighted to welcome back our Year 11s. Last week they enjoyed an opportunity to participate in a week of work-experience. Every year we see how students bring a lot back from such weeks. Either realising that they really don't like the thought of that career after all, or feel even more inspired to work hard and reach their career goal. In almost every case the effect is an increase in how seriously Year 11 students concise their future and the importance of doing well in all of their GCSE examinations.



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A Night At The Musicals – Forget London's West End!



Mrs Brereton is tirelessly preparing dozens of students for our forthcoming event. It will be taking place in the school hall in neighbouring Colmers Primary School and will start at 6.30pm on Tuesday 6th and Thursday 8th of December.

There will also be a surprise arrival from a very special group of young people. Placed, as it is, just before the holiday, we can really look forward to a magical event and get us in the spirit for Christmas!

Serious Misbehaviour – No Place at Colmers

I have been delighted with the responses to my communication to parents and carers several weeks ago regarding the possession of offensive articles. We hope it is very, very clear to all students (and families) that if they are in possession of such objects or items they will forever lose their place at this school. I think some students and families underestimate others' intolerance of such behaviour. This is because we are always quietly approached by young people or families who know that their silence is violence and that such things have no place in a safe school. It is always sad when we have to end the place of a student at this school. It would be easy to demonise such young people, but the vast majority are from very good homes with loving parents – but on a particular day their children made a very bad decision that would have a long-lasting effect. I do hope that I never have to permanently exclude another student at this school and with your help and support this becomes a real possibility.

If It Snows – STAY CALM AND DON'T GET YOUR HOPES UP...

You will be aware that in the event of snow disruption or closure we shall inform all families by: (1) **Group Call** text message, (2) our **web site**, (3) via **local radio** and (4) via the School's **Twitter** accounts: @ColmersSchool and @ColmersParents.

Our website remains the most accurate and instant source of information. In the event of snowfall it is possible that the school will open one hour later at 9.45am, giving time for staff to arrive safely and for the entire site to be cleared and assessed. Students who arrive earlier would be able to wait in the canteen.



Stonewall – Champion School Status Our Goal

As part of our moral duty and (statutory requirement) to appropriately deal with all forms of bullying, we will be completing some work in relation to the Stonewall organisation. Stonewall is an organisation that champions equality and acceptance in the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) community. As a school we will be using bespoke sessions and assemblies to address these issues. Our aim this year is to become a Stonewall 'Champion' school. We look forward to starting these sessions in the New Year. If you would like further information regarding Stonewall you could visit their website: Stonewall - <http://www.stonewall.org.uk/>



Year 11 Maths Revision – and the GAP!

Year 11 have made a great start with their preparations for the summer exams by engaging fully with their GAP booklet each month. As well as the GAP there are lots of help clubs going on after school each day to ensure that every Year 11 pupil gets the support they need. For more details see the back of the GAP booklet. The next round of assessments are only weeks away! Each week the Mathematics Department produces a multiple choice quiz to help them with their revision. Here's the tenth quiz. Scan the QR code to get started! Any questions about revision? Feel free to contact Mr Fox (Assistant Headteacher) directly at mfox@colmers.school.

Sixth Form Applications – and the GAP!

Following our very busy Sixth Form Open Evening, applications for 2017 are now open and coming in thick and fast. The interview process has started and it is clear that word has got out not just to our own Year 11s, but also to other local schools, about what a supportive environment Colmers represents for 16-19 year olds.





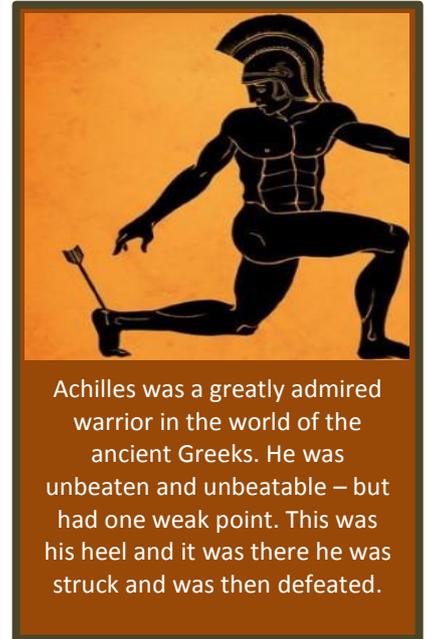
ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE

Attendance – Some Disturbing Facts

In this Season's edition I wish to share with you some striking if not disturbing facts about the progress and outcomes of students at Colmers in recent years. Whilst this newsletter is not printed for every single family (although they are available as paper copies on both receptions), I shall be posting this newsletter home to every family whose son or daughter has attendance below 94%. I hope the message will truly reach home and change patterns of attendance and absence going forward as we start a brand-new Season.

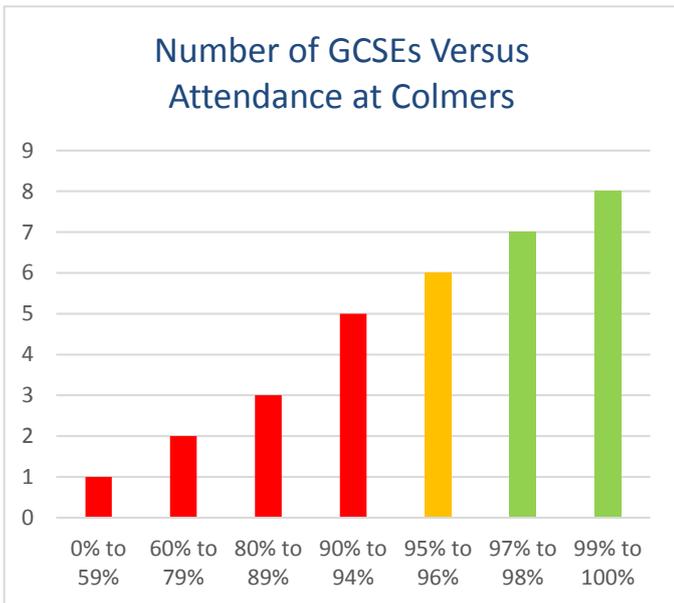
Attendance - Our Achilles' Heel

On one hand we saw a massive increase (33%) amongst the number of students who managed to achieve 100% attendance during the last academic year. We are proud of those students and they understand the value of being at school every single day. Our target is for 200 students (out of 1120) to reach this prized goal by the last day of July 2017 – if they do a wonderful free trip is planned. Right now that figure stands at 466 – which means the vast majority of students at Colmers have already missed at least day one of school! This isn't great and isn't going to help your children's grades.



Achilles was a greatly admired warrior in the world of the ancient Greeks. He was unbeaten and unbeatable – but had one weak point. This was his heel and it was there he was struck and was then defeated.

Attendance – The Effect on Your Son or Daughter's Life



We know much illness and appointments are legitimate and often unavoidable. However, we ask that all appointments do take place outside school hours. Medical and orthodontist professionals are very aware of this need and in some schools medical appointments during the school day are banned. I don't think we need to go down that road; we shall not have to if the number reduces vastly. However, the data shows that when Colmers children are poorly they are more likely to have a couple or three days off school instead of one – or none at all. To emphasise this point, please have a look at the graph opposite.

This graph shows us, on average, how many GCSEs students at Colmers leave with in Year 11 (seen on the y-axis of this graph) against their attendance during Year 11 (seen on the x-axis)

As we can see, there is a direct relationship between absence and disappointment or failure at school. Every day at school really does matter and the information that appears below will perhaps shock you further and prove that every day your child is at home chips away at their future and their success.

Students whose attendance is 97% or higher typically gain seven or more good GCSEs at Colmers. This falls to just five or six when attendance falls down into the mid-90s. Most strikingly, once attendance falls to 90% and below, the chances of being successful fall sharply.



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Attendance – The Effect on Our School

You will be aware that the Department for Education publishes data on schools that enables families to compare and contrast all schools locally and nationally. Let's take a look at how this school was judged in 2015 (2016 data is not yet validated).

This table might seem quite complicated but the colours ought to help you navigate your way through some numbers that many of us inside education also find a little tricky. Where you see an amber box that points to satisfactory progress or outcomes. Where you see green that equates to good performance and the blue boxes point to outstanding performance. Red boxes indicate where outcome and progress isn't good enough!

Persistent Absence is defined as a student whose attendance is less than 90% - that's one day off per fortnight or more!

Groups of Students	Progress 8 Score	Progress 8 minus Persistent Absentees	
All Year 11s	0.09	0.43	<p>This data is showing us that the progress made by those Year 11s was slightly better than national averages (0.09), exactly the same amongst boys (0.00) but much higher amongst girls (0.18) and all students who are not eligible for the pupil premium (0.25).</p> <p>However, once we take out the students who missed one day per fortnight or more, the data is transformed and we two groups making very good progress (boys and students eligible for the pupil Premium) whilst all year 11s on average, girls and those not eligible for the Pupil Premium make outstanding progress.</p>
All Boys in Year 11	0.00	0.36	
All Girls in Year 11	0.18	0.50	
Students eligible for the Pupil Premium	-0.13	0.30	
Students not eligible for the Pupil Premium	0.25	0.47	

Groups of Students	GCSE Grade C or above in English and Maths	GCSE Grade C or above in English and Maths minus Persistent Absentees	
All Year 11s	62%	76%	<p>We see the same pattern again when we look at those who left with 'the basics' – a grade C in English <i>and</i> Maths.</p> <p>When taken as a whole, all groups, except those eligible for the Pupil Premium perform very well indeed.</p> <p>However, once we look at those whose attendance was 90% or higher, the picture is utterly transformed.</p> <p>Put simply: Attenders have outstanding outcomes! Non-attenders do not!</p>
All Boys in Year 11	67%	81%	
All Girls in Year 11	60%	70%	
Students eligible for the Pupil Premium	50%	68%	
Students not eligible for the Pupil Premium	71%	78%	

And so all of this should, I hope, indicate that the quality of your children's education is tied to how much they attend school. If they do badly at school then we all need to look at the attendance before we make any other judgments. Now that this picture is so clear, it is time to step things up and ensure that every child has good attendance – 95.0% or more!





BELONGING TOGETHER

Attendance Watch – What’s Going To Happen?

This next section will affect you if your son or daughter’s attendance was below 93% (3 or more days off) during the Autumn Season AND their attendance was less than 95% in the last academic year.

If your son or daughter’s is on Attendance Watch then he or she will be required to stay behind after school for an hour for at least four consecutive nights. This may place an inconvenience on families, but weighed against the risk of academic failure this is a price worth paying and I trust families will work with us to when these additional hours are required.

Going forward, if your son or daughter is on Attendance Watch he or she will not notice a thing if they have 100% attendance over the next 45 school days. However, once they have a single day or half-day off school, they will be required to stay on the school site until 4.15pm, Monday to Thursday. During this time they will catch-up on the five lessons they have missed on that day of absence, plus intervention activities.

CHALLENGING MIND-SETS

Attendance- Who’s Problem Is It?

In every class at Colmers there are about 3 or 4 children who are Persistently Absent – which means they miss at least one day every fortnight. This is much higher than in other schools and higher than our local schools. If every Persistently Absent student left Colmers we’d be the best school in the city and all might seem well in the world.

But Colmers isn’t just about one group of children and not another. Colmers is about EVERY SINGLE CHILD. We are only as good as our lowest attending and most underperforming student. No child can be ignored, be left behind or not counted when we decide how good our school is. And so the problem and the solution is shared as follows.

Below is handy table that we should all be using; questions that I hope we all ask and then do something about. We can’t work in isolation, we have to play our part so that the sum of our parts is greater than it is right now! The table sets out all the various factors that help explain why your son or daughter will do well at Colmers, or when their success is at risk.

Themes	Questions for Students	Questions for Parents and Carers	Questions for Staff at Colmers
Attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does my attendance this Season compare to last year? Have I been more resilient / tougher when I am feeling a bit poorly? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why is your son or daughter better off at home? Do you worry about the lessons and homework your son or daughter has missed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we follow up every absence and make sure the student has fully ‘caught-up’?
Punctuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do I get to school every single day before 8.40am? Why? Do I get to every lesson on time? Why? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do I help or motivate my son or daughter to leave for school on time? Are they left to their own devices? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we treat every instance of lateness exactly the same way? Do we ensure families know about this problem?
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How many books have I read since September? Have you thought about non-fiction, graphic novels or a Kindle if you aren’t keen? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you believe reading is something that only little children need to do? Have you given up trying? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are we helping students find the right books to get them keen? Do we show how much easier lessons are when they are prepared to do a bit of reading?



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Themes	Questions for Students	Questions for Parents and Carers	Questions for Staff at Colmers
Homework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How long is spent completing homework each evening or at weekends? Is there a suitable place for homework to take place, free of distractions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When was the last time you checked their homework diary? Do you believe homework is something that only other children need to do? Have you given up trying? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are we setting the right kind of homework every single lesson? Are the students completing that homework and being praised / rewarded or sanctioned accordingly?
Attitudes to Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you think your role is in a classroom? Who is the master or captain of your own learning? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you ask them about their lessons and what they learned that day? Do you give them opportunities to deepen their love of a topic through visits or activities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we design our lessons and activities so that all types of learner from every background can be interested and wants to take part?
Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How well have you done this year in each subject? In which subjects have you made the most or least progress? Why do you think this is? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do you know how well your son or daughter is doing? Do you believe their future is fixed or can be changed? Do you know who to speak to at Colmers if you are concerned? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we rewards and celebrate achievements and progress more quickly than we pick them up on their mistakes or poor choices?

CONCLUSIONS

If you've read this far then you'll no doubt agree that attendance is both Colmers' weakness and our solution.

This newsletter has tried to describe what is happening in our community rather than point fingers of blame. The partnership of students, families and school remains the best way to secure higher levels of attendance amongst a small proportion of our students – and the way to avoid students with good attendance slipping into some bad habits.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY...

-  Friday 2nd December
-  Wednesday 7th December
-  Tuesday 6th & Thursday 8th December @6.30pm
-  Friday 16th December
-  Wednesday 4th January
-  Monday 9th to Friday 13th January
-  Monday 16th to Friday 27th January

- INSET Day*
- Monitoring Meetings (2pm till 7pm / all Years)*
- Colmers' Night at the Musicals*
- Last day of the autumn term*
- First day of the spring term*
- A-Level Mock Examinations*
- GCSE / Year 11 Mock Examinations*

