Dear Parents and Carers,

Welcome back to a new school year. We are certainly well into our new term and we are again delighted with the punctuality, attendance and behaviour of our superb students. Despite our outstanding start to last year in terms of attendance, we are already one percent higher now than we were this time last year and three percent higher than the same time two years ago. Our new Year 7s have settled in really well and apart from being the highest attending year group for three of the first seven weeks of term, their attitudes to learning and ability to cope in a much bigger environment have been great!

Monitoring Meeting – Wednesday 12th November 2014

The first opportunity of the year for parents and carers to learn more about their children’s progress and start to the new academic year is around the corner. A wonderful 86% of parents and carers attended our meetings last year and we hope this figure grows again this year. We continue to offer appointments to suit you between 2pm and 7pm but this year we will be offering additional voluntary drop in sessions (lasting 10 -15 minutes) on a range of topics. More on this from Mr Boardman straight after half term.

I wish to take this opportunity to again stress that the monitoring meetings are the beginning of further conversations with your children’s teachers. Where concerns, queries or questions arise then you are invited to take part in follow on face-to-face meetings, telephone calls or email communication to suit your needs and time commitments. We want to avoid an old fashioned perception that contact with the school happens a few times per year – it ought to be around the clock and as and when the need arises. We look forward to seeing as many families as possible on the 12th but please be assured that we shall organise alternative dates for you if your circumstances do not permit a meeting on the 12th. The first report of the year will be issued at these meetings.

Sixth Form Open Evening and Applications – the S.M.A.R.T. choice

Following on from our outstanding AS Results (see page 2) the window for application for our next cohort of students is open. The Open Evening for our Sixth Form took place last Wednesday 15th October and was the first of many opportunities for students to learn more about our sixth form offer and why we believe that the majority of students ought to consider applying and accessing our outstanding teaching and learning opportunities.

In September 2015 we are offering the following subjects: English, Geography, History, Biology, Psychology, Mathematics, Philosophy & Ethics and Art. Depending on healthy numbers, we shall also consider offering Business Studies, Chemistry, Physics and PE.

Why Colmers’ Sixth Form College?

✓ We believe that Colmers is the SMART choice because we offer the level of support for each student that bigger colleges cannot deliver. We know that high quality support and guidance is often the difference between success and disappointment and may involve help to tackle social, emotional, academic or financial problems.
✓ We ensure that our sixth form is a meaningful experience that is not just about grades but also about developing the individual’s self-confidence and participation in society.
✓ We unashamedly aim-high and expect all our students to go the extra mile to get to university and all of the joys and securities that path will lead to in the years ahead.
✓ Our results give students and families the confidence that our experienced teaching staff give your children every chance of success. That commitment is no longer based on faith but on the fact that our first round of results were outstanding (see page 2).
✓ The quality of teaching and teachers is high and based on a very experienced and successful core of staff who know the students personally and track their progress accurately and carefully throughout their two years. Smaller class sizes and greater-than-average time for each subject enables each student to enjoy the personal touch that makes all the difference.

You will be aware that we do not wish to compete against providers who compact courses into two or three days. We do not have a relaxed view on standards of appearance or permit our students to come and go from the site or lessons. As a school-based sixth form we offer all the security of knowing your children and provide a very safe and very comfortable environment, but we do not offer or wish to offer the attractions of a large college environment. We believe that will come in two years’ time when we wish them well on their university courses.

AchEving ExCellence by Belonging Together & Challenging MInd-sets
Achieving Excellence

Outstanding AS Level Results...

We are absolutely delighted to share with you the exciting news regarding our very first AS results. We have always set out to match the local offer in this community but we have been thrilled by the outstanding achievements of our first group of Year 12s who will be off to university next year. In summary:

- 95% pass rate across all subjects (Grades A to E)
- 58% pass rate across higher grades (Grades A to C)
- 35% pass rate across highest grades (Grades A to B)

The results means that we are placed in the top 15% of all sixth form providers (ref. Alps). For this reason I am very proud of the students who can now reflect on the wisdom of their decision to join our new sixth form. But also the incredibly hardworking teachers and sixth form leaders who have done everything they can to maximise the students’ chances of success.

But Disappointing GCSE Results

We have all known that GCSEs have become significantly harder for all students, particularly for those students on the border of grade Ds and Cs. This year, 59 students achieved a Grade D in GCSE English Language – most of them within a tiny margin of the all-important Grade C. The same was true of 30 students in Mathematics. The margins between success and disappointment are tiny and therefore even the smallest of improvements can lead to a transformation in a student’s performance.

In the past we have consistently seen over 50% of our students leaving with five or more good GCSEs including English and Mathematics. This fell to slightly below half and reflects both a local and national pattern.

The pass rates in each subject were as follows: English: 64%, Maths: 64%, Statistics: 73%, Biology: 87%, Chemistry: 93%, Physics: 93%, Core Science: 60%, Economics: 86%, RE: 79%, History: 48%, Geography: 64%, BTEC PE: 100%, BTEC Music: 100%

It is very unwise to make year on year comparisons because answers that would have got a grade C several years ago might only get a Grade D or even an E today. Also, the proportion of marks arising from coursework/controlled assessment is now much reduced and from next year every subject (including the BTECs) will have an examined or controlled assessment element.

Nevertheless, our current Year 11s are on course to achieve our highest ever GCSE results – despite the cranking up of grade thresholds. We shall continue to provide our vast array of support and interventions to ensure as many students as possible maximise the chances of success.

In the meantime, I share, left and right, a summary of the characteristics of students who did well in their GCSEs and those that did not. **Whilst we shall continue to go the extra mile for every child, that must be matched and exceed by a determination from each individual.**

Students who do well in their GCSEs are more likely to...

- Revise early and regularly
- Have a planned revision programme
- Respond positively to teachers’ assessment and advice
- Take most of the responsibility for their own actions and grades
- Read for pleasure
- Not wait to be told what to do
- Have goals and ambitions
- Have parents and carers who check up on them
- Have parents and carers who offer emotional support and encouragement
- Look inwards when disappointed
- Seek help when they are worried

Students who don’t do well in their GCSEs are more likely to...

- Revise late and ineffectively
- Lack a planned revision programme
- Respond negatively to teachers’ assessment and advice
- Take little of the responsibility for their own actions and grades
- Don’t read
- Wait to be told what to do
- Have vague goals and ambitions
- Have parents and carers who don’t check up on them
- Have parents and carers who don’t offer emotional support and encouragement
- Blame others when disappointed
- Bury their head in the sand when they are worried

Achieving Excellence by Belonging Together & Challenging Mind-sets
BELONGING TOGETHER

First World War Centenary Commemorations

Sometimes images speak much louder than words... Details of the exhibition of students’ experiences to follow next term.

The Itinerary
41 students from Years 8 to 13 along with six staff...

Wednesday 1st October 2014
04.30 Depart Colmers
10.00 Depart from Dover
13.00 Arrive in Dunkirk
14.45 Lissentheouck Cemetery
14.30 Menin Road
15.30 Hill 62
17.30 Arrive Ypres hotel
20.00 Menin Gate Ceremony
22.00 Lights Out

Thursday 2nd October 2014
07.00 Roll Call
07.30 Breakfast
09.00 Essex Farm
10.00 Tyne Cott Cemetery
11.45 Toc H
13.30 Execution Cells
16.00 Depart from Dunkirk
17.30 Arrive in Dover
21.30 Return to Colmers

“In twenty years of teaching, I have never accompanied such gentle, kind, well behaved and intelligent students. They were a complete credit to Colmers and to students in general. It was a privilege being with them.”
(A.Teacher)

“Langemarck was heart-breaking, it really made me feel emotional.”
(LS - Student)

“Every student should be able to have this wonderful opportunity to really see the emotions of war.”
(PR – A Student)

“What a wonderful experience, I have learnt so much and have been able to really reflect on the terror of war.”
(AC – A Student)

“"It was an absolute privilege to take such a fantastic group of young adults on this trip. Students ranged from Year 8 to 13 and were reflective, mature and diligent in all aspects, from the application process to the production of the outstanding work on their return. It was inspirational for me to spend time with students whose interest developed as the trip progressed. It was exactly what teaching is all about.”
(Mrs Hodgson, Trip Organiser)
**CHALLENGING MIND-SETS**

**Homework and Revision**

You will be aware that we have amended our homework policy so that there is an even greater emphasis on literacy and numeracy in Years 7, 8 and 9 in particular. In simple terms, if your son or daughter is not reading an appropriate book each day for at least 15-20 minutes then we have a problem. Please discuss this with us on the 12th!

In Years 10 to 13 the emphasis is somewhat different and there is a much more significant emphasis on the completion of homework or independent study tasks in each subject PLUS revision for forthcoming examinations. In simple terms, if your son or daughter is not completing homework every day or revising for examinations then we have a problem. Please discuss this with us on the 12th!

The forthcoming Monitoring Meetings (12th November, 2pm to 7pm) will give you an opportunity to discuss this issue (and others) with your child’s learning tutor. In addition we are also going to be running short presentations (10-15 minutes) for parents to drop in and learn about a range of topics that will help you to help your son or daughter (see left).

It is becoming clearer at Colmers, and indeed across many school communities, that the gap between disappointment and success can be closed by every student working much more effectively at home – in the 85% of their life not studying here at Colmers. The more we can equip students, yourselves and each other with the skills and the tips to make best use of that time, between now and those examinations, the more certain we can be of success. (See opposite).

The true measure of a student is how they learn when no one is looking or threatening them with a detention.

The famous American author of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain, once wrote that character is what we are like when no one is looking. The idea behind that quotation could very easily be applied to us all as learners.

The true measure of a student is how they learn when no-one is looking or threatening them with a detention. In this respect I ask all parents and carers to ask what kind of learner your son or daughter is right now.

**DATES FOR YOUR DIARY...**

- **INSET Day - Fri 24th October**
- Autumn 15 Term – Mon 27th to Fri 31st October
- Year 11 Careers Fayre – Morning of Wednesday 5th November
- Parents’ Monitoring Meetings – Wed 12th November, 2pm to 7pm.
- Key Stage 4 Drama Showcase (4 nights) – Monday 24th to Thursday 27th November
- **INSET Day - Friday 28th November**
- Presentation and Celebration Evening – Thursday 11th December
- Final day of the Autumn Term - Friday 19th December at 2pm

**ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE BY BELONGING TOGETHER & CHALLENGING MIND-SETS**