

# HEADTEACHER'S HALF-TERMLY NEWSLETTER



February 2013

Dear Parents and Carers,

We are well and truly into our new year and we hope we have seen the back of the snow for another year! Just in case you have missed our various communications, the school is open to pupils as normal on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> February and will not be an INSET Day as planned. This reduces the loss of learning time caused by the white stuff, particularly for the Year 11s whose examination season beckons.

## ***The Big Breakfast***

It is becoming increasingly obvious that many pupils are arriving at school without having had a good breakfast. Most tell me it's because they get themselves up too late or just don't feel like eating for an hour or so after they get up. A good breakfast can help us all to improve our concentration, energy and engagement levels – and put us in a good mood for the day ahead. This is why we are going to trial a free breakfast for all pupils after half term; available between 8.00am and 8.30am each morning. Hot chocolate, juice, cereal, toast, jam and marmalade will be available to your children for no cost. If this proves successful and we find that pupils and families welcome the trial we shall look at ways of making this a long term offer, using our Pupil Premium funding.



## ***What Went Well (WWW) and Even Better If... (EBI)***

As headteacher I receive a lot of correspondence from parents regarding the things that are going well and the things that are not! In all honesty I tend to get more of the latter and perhaps that's in the nature of things. What is clear is that we could all benefit from expanding how you can share your thoughts and feelings about Colmers – both "What Went Well" and "Even Better If..." After half term two new postcards will be available – WWW and EBI postcards. Copies can be picked up and dropped off in the canteen by your children. Your confidential feedback can then be read and acted upon without delay.

## ***Site development...***

Over February half term, building works will transform E15 into two brand new history classrooms; kitted out with the latest furnishings and brand new laptops. This will enable us to bring Mrs Snell and Mrs Brooke's classes into East Building, alongside the other English teachers and groups. Vacating the bungalow allows us to begin work on our new Sixth Form Centre later this year, ready for the opening of our new Sixth Form College. These projects will take place without any interruption to lessons and will ensure we maximise the use of our excellent site. In the summer term we shall also begin work on the development of a brand new science laboratory. Work will begin on this leading to a brand new classroom and the relocation of our laboratory technicians. This will enable us to create a state of the art A-Level laboratory, again kitted out with the latest equipment and facilities.

## ***Parent Visitors***

I wish to take this opportunity to remind parents that the only access to the school is through either the main entrance or through student services; both in the East Building. Please do not access the site through the Belton Grove entrance, which is used for pupils to enter and leave the school site at the start and end of the day.

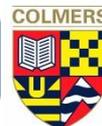
## ***Sixth Form Matters...***

The development of the sixth form continues, with several year 11 pupils trialling a range of digital devices, to help make the final decision about which device will be used. All Colmers' Sixth Formers will have a digital device for anytime, anywhere learning. Miss Whipp will be extending the Sports Leaders programme to include Community and Higher Sports Leaders, enabling pupils to take their progress in this exciting area even further. Specific coaching certificates will also be available as extra-curricular qualifications too. Links continue to be established with university outreach programmes, and an exciting range of enrichment activities including the Gold Arts Leaders Award is being planned ready for action in September. We have been delighted to be making our first offers of places in the Sixth Form this half term. The application deadline is February 28th, please ask at reception for an application form, or download one from the school website. Ms Toynbee and Miss Pearson are always happy to help with enquiries.



ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE BY BELONGING TOGETHER & CHALLENGING MIND-SETS





## ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE

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### *Year 11 Examination Readiness*

In my last newsletter I wrote about the need for all pupils to achieve excellence and make outstanding progress during their time at Colmers School. You may recall that I shared data on what is known as 'expected levels of progress'. In straightforward terms, this encourages pupils, schools and families to treat every child as an individual and expect every child to achieve their own excellence.

Excellence cannot be defined by how many A, C or E grades a child achieves. Excellence is all about how much progress we make in the five or seven years at Colmers. Every child has a different starting point when they arrive in Year 7 and therefore every child has a different expected end point when they leave in Years 11 or 13.

In the remaining seventy or so school days left for our Year 11s, they have many opportunities to make a real difference to their final grades. Throughout Year 11, we provide booster and revision classes in all examination subjects and our teachers continue to go above and beyond to help your children make their expected progress. This year we are introducing additional interventions to give your children every single chance of success. One such intervention includes the reorganisation of Year 11 tutor groups. After half term we are bringing together pupils with similar needs and expectations into new groups. The focus of learning in those groups will differ according to those pupils' needs – personalising their learning to ensure they can be successful this summer.

It is important to ensure that our Year 11s don't treat the marathon that is education as a sprint and feel exhausted before the finishing line. This is why we are also going to be introducing additional social activities and events for our Year 11s to look forward to and motivate them to work hard and be successful.

## BELONGING TOGETHER

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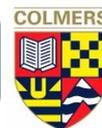
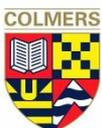
### *Parents' Survey*

Last summer 40% of families participated in our annual survey of parents. My thanks go out to Mr Boardman who organised this survey and has collated the results for me to share with you on the facing page. The results are really interesting and they are now used to determine the way we shall seek to further improve the school. Naturally, we tend to look for the negatives or the areas for improvements but it is worth saying how good the feedback has been and how motivating this is for every single member of staff at the school.

### *How can we improve?*

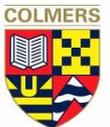
Statements 6 and 7 appear to reveal a desire amongst parents for closer partnerships with families to secure improved learning and better lifestyles. Statement 10 could be viewed as pretty good (given the 90% agreement) but when 10% of families disagree, this means we have still work to do in this area. This is backed up by the response to statement 13 which clearly demonstrates that the behaviour of some pupils must improve and that we can find more ways to deal with instances of bullying more effectively. As headteacher I agree and we remain determined to improve the behaviour of every pupil in every class. (See my December Newsletter, page 2).

Survey results are tricky in that it is hard to know exactly what each person means when they respond to a statement. This is why Parents' Evenings and all other forms of communication with the school are there to pass on your personal experiences and thoughts about the school.





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Survey Completed: July 2012.

281 respondents (approximately 40% of families)

Statement		% Strongly Agree	% Agree	% Disagree
1.	My child feels safe at school.	50	46	4
2.	The school makes sure my child is well looked after.	47	47	6
3.	The school keeps me well informed.	46	47	7
4.	My child is making good progress at school.	57	42	1
5.	My child is taught well at this school.	54	44	3
6.	The school helps me to support my child's learning.	36	54	10
7.	The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle.	32	59	10
8.	The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future.	43	54	3
9.	The school meets my child's particular needs.	42	52	6
10.	There is a good standard of behaviour at this school.	28	60	12
11.	The school responds well to my concerns.	40	52	8
12.	The school helps my child to develop skills in reading, writing and mathematics.	51	48	2
13.	My child's lessons are not disrupted by bad behaviour.	17	49	34
14.	The school deals with any case of bullying effectively.	33	57	10
15.	The school is led and managed effectively.	42	54	4
16.	I would recommend this school to another parent.	50	43	7
		<b>About right</b>	<b>Too difficult</b>	<b>Too easy</b>
17.	Overall, the level of work my son / daughter does at Colmers is...	96	1	3

## Parent Power:

Our School Improvement Plan identifies 'Parental Engagement' as one of our core priorities. This goal is led by Mr Boardman (Assistant Headteacher) who has been developing a range of strategies to encourage and give confidence to parents to become more involved in the life of the school and their children's education. These include:

**Parent action groups:** This includes a three year plan to enable parents to be more involved and will be launched by a fish and chips night on 8th March, initially open to Year 7 parents to gauge the level of interest.

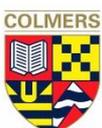
**In house parent support programmes:** We are devising courses for parents to accommodate the range of needs we face as parents as our kids become older, more challenging and more complex.

**Staff development:** Mr Boardman is developing ways to ensure we, as staff, get better at communicating and working with you to give you the confidence and the desire to become more actively involved.

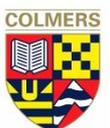
**Parents' Evenings:** We continue to trial different approaches in our search for the perfect evening. This may well be a Holy Grail since parents themselves have such different views and expectations about those events.

**Involving more parents:** We want to reach out to parents through their preferred means of communication. These include the introduction of our new praise postcards, extending our advertising of school concerts and showcases, inviting parents to our library launch or Presentation Evening or developing our Twitter feed.

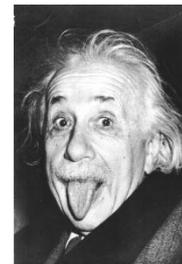
There is much to do in this area and we hope all parents will consider working directly with us in developing these genuine partnerships with parents and carers. If you are interested in some or all of these initiatives, then please do get in contact with **Mr Boardman** through all communication means – including email: [cboardman@colmers.bham.sch.uk](mailto:cboardman@colmers.bham.sch.uk).



ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE BY BELONGING TOGETHER & CHALLENGING MIND-SETS



## CHALLENGING MIND-SETS



I'd like to return to the meaning of the word, "mind-set".

There is no doubt that the most successful people avoid having a "fixed mind-set". Ordinarily, we often label this kind of thinking as *stubborn*, *obstinate* or even *blinkered*. They are all fairly negative words and perhaps a little unfair. Sometimes, being stubborn, resolute and determined is a good thing – I think Winston Churchill often displayed these qualities and was a pretty successful chap.

The trick is working out when to be stubborn (perhaps on matters of principle) and when to adapt or develop a "growth mind-set". If we want to truly improve then we need to have a "growth mind-set" if we are going to let the learning truly change the way we think and act – otherwise the learning will wash over us and have no impact at all. What we call *passive learning*.

When children watch television discussions and debates they will see very smart individuals put all their energy into stubbornly defending their point of view. This is a useful skill and difficult to master - but it is a poor lesson for young people. It may give them the wrong impression that being a successful adult is all about forming a view and defending that view to the bitter end. I wonder if we have come to admire stubborn thinkers above the freer thinkers who are more willing to keep an open mind or a growth mind-set? Imagine the controversy if Mr Cameron answered a question from Jeremy Paxman with the answer, "**I am not sure. That's a good question. I'd like some time to go home and think about that one...**" Would he even be permitted to say that in our society? Why would we criticise a Prime Minister who answered a question in that way?

Albert Einstein, often regarded as one of the most intelligent people to have ever lived, once said, "**It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer.**" He also said, "**Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.**" Homer Simpson, on the other hand, advises... "**Kids, you tried your best and you failed miserably. The lesson is, never try.**"

At Colmers we seek all pupils (and staff) to have a "growth mind-set" because we know that it will massively improve their self-confidence their self-esteem and their personal success. Below are a series of questions that may help you think about mind-sets and also discuss these ideas with your children and family...

### Part 1: Beliefs About My Intelligence

**Fixed:** I believe my intelligence and ability is fixed from birth. Like a rock, there is little I can do about it!

**Growth:** I believe my intelligence and ability and grow. Like a plant it can be nurtured.

### Part 2: My Attitude To Learning

**Fixed:** Challenges should be avoided. When I get stuck it proves I am not clever at this task.

**Growth:** Challenges help me learn. Challenges give me a chance to get better at something.

### Part 3: My Response To A Challenge

**Fixed:** Challenges make me feel inferior or even stupid. I have learned to avoid them to avoid unhappiness.

**Growth:** Challenges make me feel determined. I have learned to battle away with challenges until I overcome them.

### Part 4: When I Apply Myself And Work Hard

**Fixed:** I am motivated when I am sure I can do it and there is no chance of failure.

**Growth:** I am motivated when I get a chance to learn something new that will challenge me.

### Part 5: My Motto Is...

**Fixed:** (i) Either you are good at something or you are not. (ii) Don't try – then you can't be disappointed.

**Growth:** (i) No pain, no gain. (ii) Real success only comes with effort.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY...

- Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> February – PEG Day.
- Friday 15<sup>th</sup> February – Normal school day.
- **Monday 18<sup>th</sup> to Friday 22 February – Spring Half Term.**
- Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> March – PEG Day.
- Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> March – final day of the Spring Term.

