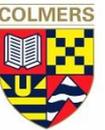


HEADTEACHER'S HALF-TERMLY NEWSLETTER



March 2013

Dear Parents and Carers,

On behalf of the staff and Governors at Colmers we wish all pupils and families a lovely Easter holiday and rest and look forward to seeing everyone back safely for the first day of the *summer* term on Monday 15th April 2013.

Following some important notices this edition of my newsletter is designed to give families an overview of where we are as a school and the direction of travel in the coming years. In particular, there is a focus on the new Pupil Premium and what this will mean for all pupils at Colmers.



Abominable Weather

There are few amongst us who can recall heavy snow falling so late in the year. Nevertheless, we have coped pretty well and ensured disruption to learning has been kept to a minimum. The introduction of a slightly later start on a snow affected day appears to have been very successful to enable all staff to get in safely and ensure the site is clear for the arrival of pupils. In the future we shall adopt this approach to ensure we can keep the school open whenever possible. I also wish to thank parents and carers for their continued support on such days. Appropriate footwear and outdoor coats remain an issue for some of our pupils who sometimes arrive completely unprepared (and numb) in such weather. Please remember that we can discreetly support any family with the purchase of school clothing; please contact your child's HoLA or any other member of staff.

Year 8 Parents' Evening

The twice postponed Year 8 parents' evening will now take place on Tuesday 11th June. Apologies again to families for this delayed evening. There are, however, many advantages in having a parents' evening so late in an academic year. On this afternoon we shall be introducing an exciting offer to make parents' evenings that little bit easier and more enjoyable for families – by offering a free family meal that showcases the wonderful food in our canteen. More details to follow next term.

Breakfast Club

Our two week trial for all pupils was inevitably met with great enthusiasm by our pupils and came at a particularly cold time in the term. Currently, we are exploring whether or not to resume this offer for all or part of the school year and welcome written comments from parents and carers to help inform our decision making. If you feel strongly about our trial and wish it to continue then please ask your son or daughter to collect an 'Even Better If' postcard from one of the reception desks or write into the school with your thoughts.

Farewell...

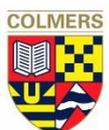
This Easter we say goodbye to colleagues who will be greatly missed by their classes. Mr Hunt will become Head of Geography in a Solihull school, whilst Miss Clayton is relocating to Merseyside. We wish them well and feel sure they will continue to thrive in the next stage of their careers. In addition, we also bid farewell to one of our longest serving Teaching Assistants, Mrs James.

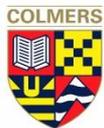
Vision 2020 – please see our website for more information on our 2020 Vision Statement



It is often remarked that time in education passes more quickly than in any other profession given the very busy nature of the school day. Personally, this is certainly true as I reflect on the fact that I have been here at Colmers for two years yet it feels like just a few weeks ago when I first arrived at this great school.

In the first few months of my headship I invested much of my time in finding out as much about the school as possible. Not just looking at data and Ofsted reports, but meeting people and talking about their hopes, their fears and their dreams. These conversations developed into a vision and mission statement for the school and, perhaps most importantly of all, a three year School Improvement Plan.





HEADTEACHER'S HALF-TERMLY NEWSLETTER



The School's Mission Statement, entitled Vision 2020, sets out the expectations, hopes and ambitions for the pupils at Colmers School. It attempts to confront the fact that our children are entering a rapidly changing world where new skills, attitudes and aptitudes will be required for personal and professional success. The Mission Statement also establishes a new motto for the school, something that Colmers has not had since it first opened in September 1946. The motto was designed to be as simple as ABC: Achieving Excellence by Belonging Together and Challenging Mind-sets. This motto is used as a guide and a tool to direct and steer everything we do to ensure that we are all working together in the same direction. From signage and newsletters, to policies and praise postcards, those words are becoming an ingrained part of the culture and ethos at this school.

How great are we? How great can we be?

In the last three years Colmers pupils have been extremely successful in their examinations and we have been proud of successive increases in the proportion and numbers of pupils leaving here with five or more good GCSEs including English and Maths. This has been achieved at a time when many other schools have seen reductions and struggled to maintain the highest standards. In 2007 and 2010 this school was judged to be outstanding by Ofsted – and rightfully so!

The coalition government and Ofsted have significantly increased their expectations of schools and therefore your sons and daughters. I have written to you before about an increased emphasis on the proportion of pupils making three or four levels of progress during their time at secondary school – regardless of whether they achieve a grade C or not.

In some circles, schools have criticised these changes and felt that the government and Ofsted have moved the goalposts so that we are not sure where to shoot or how to score. At Colmers we reject this view and **we embrace the significantly raised expectations placed on schools and therefore pupils**. Ultimately, changes in education are designed to benefit your children and enable them to enter the world of work with greater confidence and freedoms. We know we have room for improvement and our School Improvement Plan carefully sets out all the areas we believe can and should be improved.

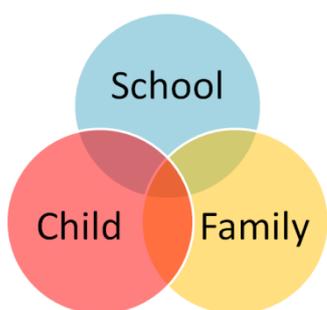
Plans for Improvement – please see our website for more information on our School Improvement Plan

Right now we are exactly half way through our current School Improvement Plan (SIP). Most schools design a three or five year plan so they can avoid constant chopping and changing and instead establish big goals and ambitions for the school over a longer period. Our School Improvement Plan spans from September 2011 to August 2014 and is divided into fourteen sections under three headings: (A) Achieving Excellence, (B) Belonging Together and (C) Challenging Mind-sets.

In addition, every subject at Colmers designs its own Department Improvement Plan (DIP). These are very closely linked to our School Improvement Plan and again identify the big goals and ambitions for that subject over three years. Pastoral and Associate Staff teams also design their own Team Improvement Plan (TIP) so that we are all working together to achieve the same goals and ambitions. Education is filled with acronyms but most great schools will be very familiar with SIPs, DIPs and TIPs!

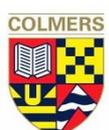
Hard work ahead...

Perhaps this sounds like a lot of hard work? Yes, it is – lots of hard work and probably never an end in sight for those of us employed in education. That is the nature of education and we welcome the fact that education must shift and change at least as rapidly as the world we now inhabit. That hard work is, however, a shared responsibility. You can guarantee that the staff at Colmers will continue to give their heart and soul to this school. Whilst it is often not possible to work any harder, it is possible to work smarter and differently – focussing on new challenges and new skills.



Pupils will need to work much harder as well. Not just smarter, but harder. Sometimes I fear that pupils rely too heavily on their teachers (and parents) and do not realise how much more successful they could be if they moved up from third or fourth gear.

Parents are also part of this equation as well – and perhaps as you read this you may not feel comfortable with me reminding you of that particular dimension? There is no doubt at all that the support, encouragement and involvement of parents has an enormous influence and impact on the success of a child. So, if the school is to be even better and reach new heights, we rely on one another for those improvements. Each must play their part and each must share the feeling of success or disappointment when a pupil falls short of their potential.



ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE BY BELONGING TOGETHER & CHALLENGING MIND-SETS





ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE – THE PUPIL PREMIUM PART 1

In my last newsletter I wrote about the Pupil Premium – an additional grant to schools that equates to £900 for every pupil who is either receiving free school meals or has received free school meals in the last six years. Bearing in mind that approximately one third of all Colmers pupils receive free school meals and almost half have done so in the last six years, this funding will add approximately 8% to our budget each year and can therefore make a big difference and ensure we can achieve our School Improvement Plan goals.

Pupil Premium is designed to ‘close the gap’ between the most and least wealthy in our society. Politicians refer to the need for greater ‘social mobility’ and by this they simply mean that our circumstances at birth should not determine our chances in life. There are some worrying statistics that remind us that there is still an unacceptable gap between the life chances of children in this country.

Did you know?

Children in the United Kingdom on Free School Meals are...

- Three times more likely to be permanently excluded
- Significantly more likely to experience poor quality teaching
- Three times more likely to have unauthorised absence
- Twice as likely to have a Statement of Special education Needs
- Less likely to follow an appropriate curriculum
- More likely to have problems with literacy and numeracy
- More likely to be placed in classes by their behaviour than by their ability

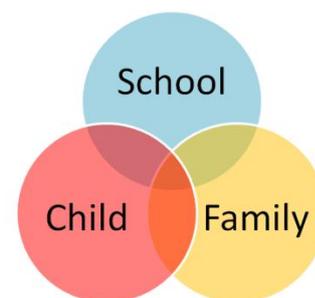
Also...

- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less than half as likely to enter higher education as other children
- The reading skills of the highest performing pupils from poor backgrounds are, on average, about two years behind the highest performing pupils from privileged backgrounds
- One third of all MPs, more than half of all senior medical consultants and journalists and over 70% of High Court judges went to public schools – although only 7% of the total population do so.

So, what are we going to do about it?

This situation will never change unless three groups in every school do something about it...

1. **Schools** have to get even better and ensure that great teaching, learning and behaviour is in place across the school.
2. **Parents and carers** have to look at themselves and consider if the way their child is being brought up is enhancing or hindering their child’s life chances – for better or worse.
3. **Pupils** have to step up to the challenge and develop a determination and strength to overcome any disadvantage and achieve their potential. But this is so much more difficult if they are not supported by aspirant parents and great teachers.



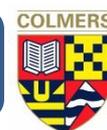
So, if our pupils are to **Achieve Excellence** the only way to do this is to ensure that everyone in those bubbles, above, **Belong** and **work Together** and that we **Challenge** each other’s **Mind-sets**. Nice words, but what does that mean in practice?

BELONGING TOGETHER – THE PUPIL PREMIUM PART 2

The Pupil Premium is going to provide a significant benefit for pupils at Colmers School in the years to come. The funding has already led to us being able to reduce class sizes, provide new interventions for vulnerable or at risk pupils or simply overcome barriers that our most disadvantaged pupils face on a daily basis.

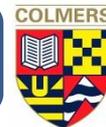
But, there is so much more than we can and must do...

Overleaf is a summary of the things we are and should be doing to close this gap and ensure our children enjoy everything that everyone else’s children expect or look forward to in their lives.





HEADTEACHER'S HALF-TERMLY NEWSLETTER



What is Colmers School doing to close the gap?

- ✓ Constantly seeking new ways to improve the quality of teaching and learning
- ✓ Updating and reviewing our assessment for learning policy so that every opportunity to help pupils understand where they are and how to move forward are not lost. One to one interventions are in place when we believe a child is falling behind and is not catching up quickly enough
- ✓ Our target setting policy has shifted towards more personalised targets based on making expected or better progress. Whereas a grade C might have been okay in the past, a grade B, A or A* is now expected
- ✓ Completely reshaping our curriculum to remove the tiers and allow every child to move between groups
- ✓ We have expanded our pastoral support team to support vulnerable and at risk pupils, whether that relates to punctuality, attendance, social and emotional health or difficulties at home
- ✓ Behaviour expectations have risen and, also, exclusions at home are now rare and that most poor behaviours result in isolation at school (in our Remove Room) rather than at home. From April 2013, pupils at risk of disengagement or exclusion have access to our new school within a school – known as the Renaissance Centre
- ✓ We are opening a sixth form to encourage pupils to have greater aspirations to enter university; many pupils will be the first in their family to achieve this goal

What must Colmers pupils do to close the gap?

- ✓ Get out of bed, eat a decent breakfast and make it into school on time with the right equipment
- ✓ Complete all homework or coursework on time and to the best of their ability
- ✓ Always have a book 'on the go' – regular reading for pleasure is the most basic need for everyone's growing brain.
- ✓ Behave and actively participate in every lesson – not just sitting there but getting involved
- ✓ Trust their teachers' faith and belief in them to achieve their potential

What could Colmers parents and carers do to close the gap?

- ✓ Ensure children have at least nine hours uninterrupted sleep
- ✓ Ensure bedrooms are free of the distractions that damage a child's developing brain and mean it never truly rests: mobile phones, televisions, FaceBook updates, MSN pings and so forth
- ✓ Create a structured space and time for their children to sit down and read and study.
- ✓ Work with the school to overcome a child's problems – whether they are related to their punctuality, attendance, uniform, behaviour or their academic progress
- ✓ Contact someone at Colmers if they need anything to achieve these needs – whether that's advice, equipment, uniform or sometimes just a bit of encouragement and help

CHALLENGING MIND-SETS – THE PUPIL PREMIUM PART 3

One of the areas we want to develop fastest and furthest will be in relation to supporting all parents and carers facing difficulties in their lives or with their children. Family life does not always resemble *The Waltons* or even *The Simpsons* and parents can easily feel at a complete loss when facing what can feel like a mountain of problems at home that in the end affect their children's behaviour and progress.



The way we think and the power of our brain's intelligence is not fixed or made of stone. If we are to 'close all the gaps' at Colmers we have to push one another to challenge our minds and accept that everything from our outlook and intelligence to our life chances and potential are not set in stone – they can be grown, they are elastic – if we work together to make it happen. As adults, to think anything less is to let children down.



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY...

- Monday 15th April – first day of the Summer Term
- Wednesday PEG Days: 15 May and 12 June and 16 July. Note – there is no PEG Day in April.
- Tuesday 11th June – Year 8 Parents' Evening
- Monday 27th to Friday 31st May – Whitsun Half Term
- Friday 19th July (2pm) – final day of the Summer Term

