

# HEADTEACHER'S HALF-TERMLY NEWSLETTER



May 2013

Dear Parents and Carers,

It is incredible to think that we approach the final half term of another academic year and that the thrust of the Year 11 examinations are already upon us! I wish to take this opportunity to wish all Year 11s good luck and enormous success in their examinations. With the longest summer holiday they will ever have following the examinations, the key message has to be that the coming weeks are the most important long term investment a young person can have and therefore every moment of extra revision and effort now will reap benefits for decades to come. Families have already received details of the examination timetable and the plethora of booster revision sessions and activities that continue to be offered – even during half term!

## Recent Ofsted Inspection

I hope that all families received a copy of the Ofsted Inspection Report on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> May. Copies can be accessed through our school website and also through the Ofsted website as well. As promised, this edition of my newsletter is largely devoted to the report but I wish to take this opportunity to invite parents and carers to meet with myself and members of both the Governing Body and the Senior Leadership Team, in June, to a forum to explore the report and the subsequent action plan in more detail. If you are interested in joining us then please contact my PA, Ms Shortland, to express your interest.

## The 2013 Youth Excellence Awards

On Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> May, at *The Factory* in Longbridge, children from all over the region attended the annual Youth Excellence Awards. Hosted and attended by all of the region's schools and the local police force, the audience listened to remarkable stories of young people's creativity, ingenuity, courage and leadership. Colmers was deeply proud to learn that some of our own youngsters were nominated and then awarded for their achievements. Daniel Mangan (who left us last year and is now in Year 12) won the Youth Challenge Award. Abi Bartholomew, Ellie Bartholomew and Nathan Philpott were also nominated for a Special Recognition Award. Meanwhile, Charlotte Handley, Annalise Cowan and Safiya Gordon won the prestigious Team of the Year Award for our stunning in-school *Colmers News Channel* (CNC). We are proud of our winners and how they represent the very best at Colmers!



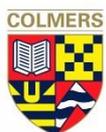
## New School Prefects – including Head Girl & Head Boy

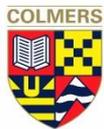


Each year, at this time, we offer current Year 10s the opportunity to apply to become a Year 11 Prefect. Following this, I am pleased to report that eighty Year 10s were successfully selected to become Prefects next year. Of these, 39 expressed a desire to be considered to become one of just eight Senior Prefects with additional responsibilities. A special congratulation, therefore, goes to the following students who were chosen to become Senior Prefects: Jason Bowman, Harvey Caveney-Appleby, Jade Clark, Kieran Haynes, Cerian Frost, Siobhan McCorry, Matthew Tresigne and Baldeep Sohal. In addition, I wish to formally announce that from these eight Senior Prefects, two were chosen to become our Head Girl and Head Boy throughout 2013/14. This *new* honour went to Jade Clark and Kieran Haynes; two superb examples of young people today!

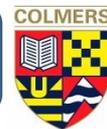
## Staff INSET Day – Friday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2013

You will be aware that Friday 15<sup>th</sup> February was originally assigned to be a staff INSET Day, but all pupils and staff were required to attend school as normal owing to the lost days to snow earlier this year. Consequently, Friday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2013 will be an INSET Day and will mean that all pupils (but not staff!) will remain at home that day. If this presents any child-care difficulties for families we are able to provide you with an opportunity for your child to work at school under the supervision of a member of staff throughout the day. Please speak to your child's relevant Head of Learning and Achievement if this might help you.





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## Cashless Catering

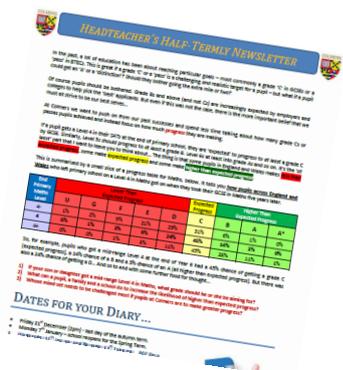
In September, we are seriously considering installing new tills and systems that will remove the use of cash in the school dining hall. Instead of paying for food and drinks at each till, pupils will establish their identity through either a swipe card or fingerprint and have the appropriate amount debited from their personal account. Pupils' accounts would be "re-valued" or credited via our web site or, much more simply, using the "re-val" machines that would also be installed. A "re-val machine" looks like a typical car park machine with pupils able to establish his or her identity and then add coins or cash to the machine to credit their personal account. This may sound whizzy and futuristic but we are in the process of looking at other schools who have introduced this system and we also look forward to members of the Student Council visiting such schools to see for themselves. Please speak to either myself or Mr Boardman if you have any questions or thoughts on this potential development. A final decision on this will be made in late June and I shall provide fuller details on this in my final newsletter of the academic year.

## ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE

Further to my letter to families on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> May regarding the recent Ofsted Inspection, I wish to take this opportunity to set out the school's initial responses to that report. The two days showcased and highlighted why so many of us are so proud to work at or be associated with the school. The students were fantastic and all of the staff, including the superb associate staff, got on with a couple of very long and demanding days without the slightest hiccup – even when the entire local area was hit by that power cut during period five on day one!

In some respects it is sad that the recent Inspection judged the school as good overall, following inspections in 2007 and 2010 that judged the school to be outstanding. We will all be aware that in 2007, 43% of all children gained five GCSEs that including English and Maths. Last summer, we achieved our highest ever figure of 59% and are as certain as schools can be in these times of breaking through the 60% barrier this summer with our current Year 11s. If Ofsted Inspections were based on this measure alone then all would be simple, straightforward and unchanging.

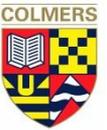
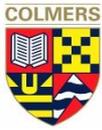
However, things have changed and in many ways those changes have hurt Colmers more than others. The first major change is the increased emphasis on how many levels of progress our pupils make. Expressed simply, schools are not just measured on how many students get a grade C or above, but whether each grade they got represented good or better progress. For example, if a pair of twins got a grade C in GCSE Maths and English then what matters is their starting points. The twin that got Levels 4s in Year 6 would be deemed to have achieved on target, whereas the twin who got Level 5s would be deemed to be underachieving. I believe there is nothing to complain about in this new approach and in fact it emphasises the importance of each individual making the progress expected of him or her – no longer aiming for a grade C, but whatever grade represents good progress or better. For more information on this issue please refer back to page 4 of my December 2012 newsletter.



The second major change is the removal of an old measure called 'Contextual Value Added' (CVA). In the past, Colmers scored very highly on this measure - which took into account the social, economic and educational background of each child. It was designed to recognise that some children in some schools had a steeper hill to climb than others. For all sorts of reasons this CVA measure was abandoned and new methods of calculating pupil achievement were introduced. In this new calculation, courses that once were highly valued by the Department for Education have now been removed from their list of approved subjects. This means that whilst our various BTEC courses remain valuable courses for these students, they are not counted when it comes to calculating the school's achievements each summer. Nevertheless, we continue with these courses because, in the words of the Inspection Team, our students enjoy the courses most appropriate for them. In other words, we put the needs of your sons and daughters before any selfish needs to chase league tables and external approval.

Therefore the reason we were not judged to be outstanding with respect to achievement was because more pupils need to get the very top grades (A\* and A). Too many are currently getting grade Bs and Cs and this has to rise in the years ahead. Furthermore, we need to move more quickly towards a reporting system for parents that places a greater emphasis on rates of progress above working at levels and grades. As I have said or written on numerous occasions, it does not really matter what your child is working at – what matters is whether or not what your child is working at represents good progress or not.





## BELONGING TOGETHER

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I shall remember many things from those two Inspection Days, but two things stand out above all others.

Firstly, what the Inspection Team and the report said about our students - your sons and daughters. They all agreed that they did not recall a single incident of even low level poor behaviour in their two days. They described the children as considerate, tolerant, good natured, happy and safe. They also remarked on the warmth of their relationships with staff as well. This was based on hours of lesson observations, watching children move around the school and lots of interviews with individual or small groups of children.

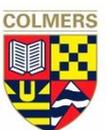
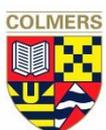
You might ask, therefore, why we did not get an outstanding judgment for behaviour. This is really quite simple and closely relates to the attendance of your sons and daughters. For many years we have struggled to maintain high levels of attendance at Colmers and whilst the report recognised that the school "works tirelessly" to improve attendance, we will need to work even closer with families and particular students to improve further. I do not wish this issue to be considered the responsibility of a few students and their families; it is a common issue across the school amongst many families. Comparatively few students have 100% attendance each term at Colmers and many students are off for two or three days when ill, as opposed to one or two days. Too many students have orthodontist or other appointments during the school day. Many students feel proud of their 95% attendance rate which may sound good but in fact represents a day off every four weeks – something we know that in the workplace would be unacceptable. Obviously, there are some pupils whose attendance is more problematic and damaging for their education. Solving this problem and restoring our outstanding judgment for behaviour will therefore rely on all students and their families playing their part and adopting a new mind-set when it comes to absence and missing the 'odd day' or more of school.

Secondly, the other significant memory of these inspection days centres on what was said about the quality of teaching across the school. Inspectors observed 37 lessons and found that 86% of those lessons were good or better. In fact, one third of lessons were judged to be outstanding. I was not surprised in the slightest that there was not a single lesson judged to be inadequate. Their assessment of the quality of teaching was identical to our own. Teachers across the UK are starkly aware of the significantly raised expectations placed on teachers in recent years and therefore it was particularly encouraging to have this outcome during an inspection. I was pleased to have been observed myself, by the Lead Inspector, during my History lesson with the wonderful 8H. The Inspection and final report enables us to continue with our existing emphasis on very high levels of consistency in every classroom and amongst every teacher, including myself. This consistency relates to the quality of the teaching, the pace and engagement of the learning and the quality of the assessment to enable each child to make progress - week in, week out.

It is fair and logical that the judgment on the quality of teaching should mirror the judgment on achievement overall. Over time teaching at Colmers has to continue to shift from being about the traditional *sage on the stage* to the *guide on the side* who nurtures and nudges great students to become great independent learners. Nevertheless, I have to be honest and say that great teaching and marking can only get a child so far and that the final hurdle is one that a child must face alone and relates to his or her desire and will to be the best they can be...

To win the game you have to be on the field of play! In other words, a child's success is dependent upon them being in school and not losing out on their learning. From September we shall be introducing a Period 6 (3.15pm to 4.15pm) for targeted pupils. Once your son or daughter reaches a third day of absence in a school year, he or she will be required to catch up their lost learning during Period 6 when they return. For example, if your child is absent on a Friday then he or she will be supervised to catch up during Period 6 during the following week. This will ensure that absence cannot lead to academic failure or underperformance and that some students may think twice about having a day off when they really ought to get into school and shrug off that sniffle or achy joint! We all know that when we miss a day of work we don't return to find someone has done the work for us!

One of the ways we have already begun to develop is the emphasis on Higher Order Writing & Thinking Skills (HOWTS). I have planned a special on HOWTS in my final newsletter of the academic year (pub. 17<sup>th</sup> July 2013) but, for now, this relates to the need to develop students' thinking beyond the simple (describing and recalling) to the higher and more complex (analysing and evaluating). The former deliver grade Ds and Cs, the latter delivers As and A\*s...



## CHALLENGING MIND-SETS

As I write this newsletter to you today, in the relative calm of a sunny weekend in May, I have noticed the news report of some headteachers agreeing to a vote of no confidence in the current Education Secretary, Mr Michael Gove. It would be unwise and indeed irrelevant for me to comment on this particular story; however you will not have been able to escape a growing awareness that there is a great deal of reported unrest and unhappiness within education right now.



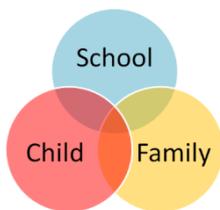
The Future

I can only offer my own personal opinion. I think that this country faces some enormous challenges. In the short term, the government has less money to spend and expects more for every pound spent from the public purse. In the long term, this country's economic future rests on a significantly better qualified workforce able to compete in the high-tech industries of the future. Those of us involved in education must recognise that we are at the heart of these challenges and these solutions. For this reason there has never been a more exciting time to be in education, nor a better opportunity to achieve so much for the young people whom we are privileged to educate.

The temptation with anything challenging is to find excuses and pretend that all is perfectly well! Our recent Ofsted Report is a golden opportunity; it can act as another springboard for this school and take us all into the next phase of this school's journey towards a world class school.

I can guarantee all parents and carers that my colleagues and I will do everything we can to continue providing your children with a first class education; one they deserve and one they need. But our efforts and our commitments alone will not be enough. In many respects my colleagues and I cannot work any longer or harder, although we can work differently and adapt what we do.

It is ironic that when I was observed during the inspection, 8H were learning about slavery and were considering why slaves were prevented from being educated. 8H clearly understood that the first step towards freedom and lifelong liberty was, and is, education. Without a great education, a young person's life will be less free, less exciting and less fulfilling. The stakes are high but the rewards are immense.



The secret of our future success lies with you and your children. You will know from your very first Open Evening at Colmers, when your children were in Year 6, that we have always emphasised the partnership between school, child and home. This school, your children, are the sum of its parts: Child + Family + School = Success. Restoring our outstanding judgment in 2016 will rest on the shoulders of the many and not the few.

Some of us must work smarter. Some of us must work harder.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY...

- Monday 27<sup>th</sup> to Friday 31<sup>st</sup> May – Whitsun Half Term
- Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> June – Year 8 Parents' Evening
- Remaining PEG Days: Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> June and Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> July.
- Friday 21<sup>st</sup> June – INSET Day
- Friday 19<sup>th</sup> July (2pm) – final day of the Summer Term

