

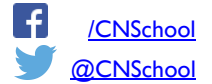


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Dear Parents and Carers

Start of Term – Back to Business as Usual

I hope everyone had a restful and rejuvenating half term holiday. We are now looking forward to the coming eight weeks as we do everything we can to ensure we do not waste a minute of the precious time in school – particularly students in Year 11 and Year 13 who are now reaching a critical point with rehearsals starting next week for our Year 11 students. Good luck to them all.

Regular Letters to Students – Starting This Week

Unless your son or daughter happens to be one of the Year 9 History students in my class, they will struggle to properly find out who I am and what I am for some time. This is why I have decided, starting this week, that I will be writing to students every month. My letter will be sent to them in the same way it is sent to you and therefore I invite you to look at my letters to your children. I am hoping they offer a broader insight into what matters most and how we are all dedicated to the education of the whole child, not just those high grades. Over a longer period I hope to introduce your children to the basics of the world’s most significant philosophers and encourage them to discuss moral and ethical dilemmas in a way that broadens their mind and challenges them to think about the world in which they live. Plus the one they will enjoy or endure – depending on how determined they are to be the captains of their own ship.

There is nothing more important than... reading

It is a sad observation for many parents and carers up and down the country that their children appear to be reading less in their teens than in their primary school years. We can all remember those days when our children came back from primary school with their book bag and we sat down with them to either listen to them read, or read some pages together. By the time our children reach secondary school something changes and in many homes the development of reading skills is sometimes assumed to have been accomplished or that the need for further reading skills is less important than other things taking place at school.



There is no doubt that the acquisition of vocabulary and language is even more important in a child's very early years. [Research has shown](#) that children from a more advantaged background are significantly more likely to develop twice as much vocabulary before they get to secondary school.

Having an extensive vocabulary really does matter. The more words we know the easier our comprehension of the written and spoken word becomes. The less words we know, the harder it is for our brain to comprehend the question, the text or the problem we have been set by a teacher or in an examination.

Last year, the [PiXL](#) organisation for schools carried out some research on a single GCSE Physics paper. They found that an average 15 or 16 year old would need approximately 40% of the available time to read and comprehend the questions, let alone put pen to paper. This helps explain why the most accomplished readers with the widest vocabulary have more time to put their pen on the paper and secure the best possible mark. Sadly, it is also why the least confident readers use more than 40% of the available time to comprehend the questions and are most likely to run out of time or feel completely overwhelmed.

Unless our children engage in a regular reading programme that they embrace and value, they risk stalling their reading age and comprehension speed. For some students, outlining how reading helps them be more successful in their examinations is a valuable way to secure their renewed enthusiasm. For others, it's more complex and resembles the way that we all know that exercise and salads are good for us but too often reject them in favour of less healthy lifestyle options.

Being a history teacher I often turn my mind to two things at this point: slavery and the [Soweto riots](#) of 1976. In both, the ruling elite were terrified that the subjugated human beings would discover education and language. They knew the truth that words become ideas and ideas becomes actions and actions lead to change. This is why every despot has feared the same truth; that language and therefore learning sets us all free to live the life we want and not the one we are given.

The Seven Best Books From My Secondary School Years

Y7: *The Silver Sword* by Ian Serraillier

Y8: *Watership Down* by Richard Adams

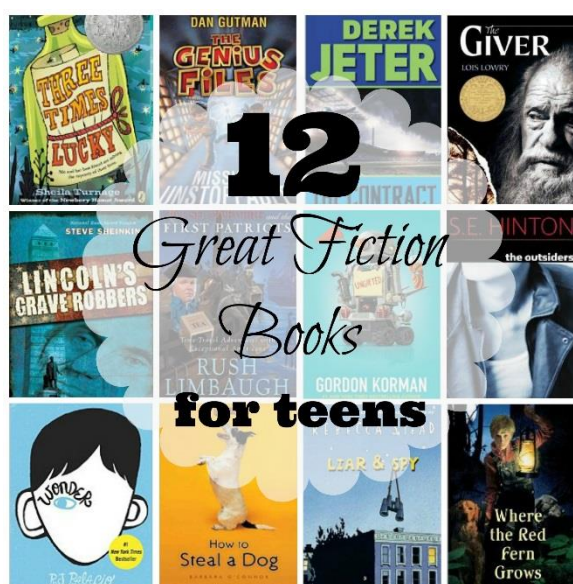
Y9: *The Hobbit* by JRR Tolkien

Y10: *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

Y11: *Animal Farm* and *1984* by George Orwell

Y12: *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë

Y13: *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas



There is a great deal of advice out there from [The Book Trust](#), the [National Literacy Trust](#) and many [newspapers](#) that can help schools and families maintain, sustain and inflame teenagers' love of reading for its own sake and for lifelong success, happiness and wellbeing.

Being the Best School We Can Be

In recent weeks I have tried to set out the core themes of how we shall seek to improve as a school. Our endeavours are of course not contained within those four areas and no letter of any reasonable length could adequately summarise all of the individual actions undertaken by my colleagues, or those within their teams, that have and will continue to raise standards at this school. One of the biggest challenges of all is deciding what we don't need to do so that we leave space for the things that we must do.

Beneath everything we do must be an unrelenting commitment to the very highest standards and expectations. There can be no room for half-heartedness and half measures. If we do it, we must do it really well, paying attention to details and being fussy with all of the things that matter.

All too often schools accept a gap between some students and other students. We can fall into a trap that comes to accept or simply gets used to some children dressing differently, missing more days of school, speaking to adults or one another incorrectly, being a few minutes late to everything, carelessly presenting their work, not completing homework, not giving 100% in their lessons, not reading any books for pleasure, not joining clubs at school, never seeking to play for a school team, never appearing in a school performance or never attending a revision booster.

Labelling such behaviours or choices is pointless or indeed stigmatising those students who display some or all of these characteristics. At CNS we have to regard these as symptoms of an underlying lack of ambition, expectation or aspiration. Whilst we have to be unrelenting in our demand for all students to be their best self, we also need to get to the very heart of why some students are more engaged than others – seeking to rekindle the fire within and not beneath.

Creating a school that expects and demands high expectations in all things of all students is a continuous quest and one that we shall be emphasising at all times.

Yours sincerely



Barry Doherty,
Headteacher

Our Four Core Priorities:

1. Re-design our **KS3 curriculum**.
2. Re-design the use of **assessment** for, of and as learning.
3. Invest in the **leadership** at CNS.
4. Create a distinctive ethos around students' **character education** and contribution to their community.