Headteacher's Report to Parents and Carers

July 2019

CHIPPING NORTON SCHOOL

As my first year at Chipping Norton School draws to a close, it is a useful opportunity to summarise the work at our school over the past academic year.

Once I completed this I realised that it was a bit too long and for that I am sorry. Next year's will be much briefer but as my final major communication to parents and carers in my first year, the soundings I've taken are that families will welcome something that explores the wider development of our school.

Each section is presented in no particular order and readers are of course free to read as much or as little as they choose but there's an additional invitation to contact any member of the Leadership Team about any of the areas summarised below.

We are committed to being even better tomorrow than we are today and so we shall continue to listen to all voices in pursuit of what's best for the education of the young people at our great school.

Barry Doherty, Headteacher, July 2019

Teaching and Learning

I am pleased to be able to report that the vast majority of my time has been focused on the development of our teaching and learning. This is a great relief because so many headteachers can feel frustrated that *other business* interferes with the core business - but at CNS it does not.

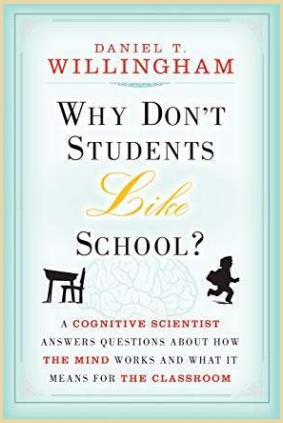
Alongside our River Learning Trust partners, we are very interested in recent education research and practices that are known, or proven to be, highly effective with young people. It has been a fascinating few years in education with *some* of the older 'sacred cows' of education now dismissed as myths. Whilst we have to be careful of throwing all 'unfashionable' activities out of the window that we know works, we are certainly in a place where we are becoming more confident about how to design and deliver a curriculum that is rich in knowledge.

Why the apparent obsession with being rich in knowledge? Well, it has little to do with us wanting your children to be jam-packed with facts and figures; it has much more to do with how we can become better thinkers. *See opposite.*

Research is now overwhelmingly clear that whilst our long term memory has infinite capacity, our working memory (or cognitive load) is limited and broadly similar for almost everyone. In order for us to avoid our working memory becoming overloaded and causing us to hit a brick learning wall, we all benefit from being able to effortlessly draw upon a secure memory bank of knowledge. This frees our thinking to focus on being creative, imaginative and problem solving.

And so, knowledge is just a means to an end and that end is a liberated mind that can generate incredible ideas.

We have been keen to be influenced by the very latest research and thinking about learning. A good example is Daniel T. Willingham's *Why Don't Students Like School?*



This is a clear insight into how the brain works and how we all learn. The key conclusions are that all thinking is very hard and that great teachers think carefully about the essential knowledge that is needed to effortlessly fuel a thought and how to design lessons that make thinking enjoyable and successful.

How schools ensure students' knowledge is successfully stored in their long term memory and can be easily accessed when necessary is something that the best schools in the country are exploring right now. We are therefore in the middle of a school improvement plan that seeks to develop and then embed new practices that help your children memorise and recall information with ease so that thoughts are broader and deeper. *Some* of these strategies include:

- The provision of **Knowledge Organisers that** capture the core / essential knowledge needed for each unit of work.
- **Regular and low stakes testing** of that key knowledge throughout a course, rather than just at the end - a more traditional approach.
- **Interleaved learning** – in other words, instead of seeing learning as something that resembles a straight road, learning ought to have a series of loops that briefly revisits prior learning, before further learning is embarked upon.
- **The creation of the Get Ahead Programme for Year 11 students**. Heads of Department, led by Mr Alan Trainer (Deputy Headteacher), devised monthly revision activities from January and closely monitored their completion. Gone are the days when this final part of examination preparation is left to chance and instead we 'own' revision at CNS, rather than expect or hope that it will happen.

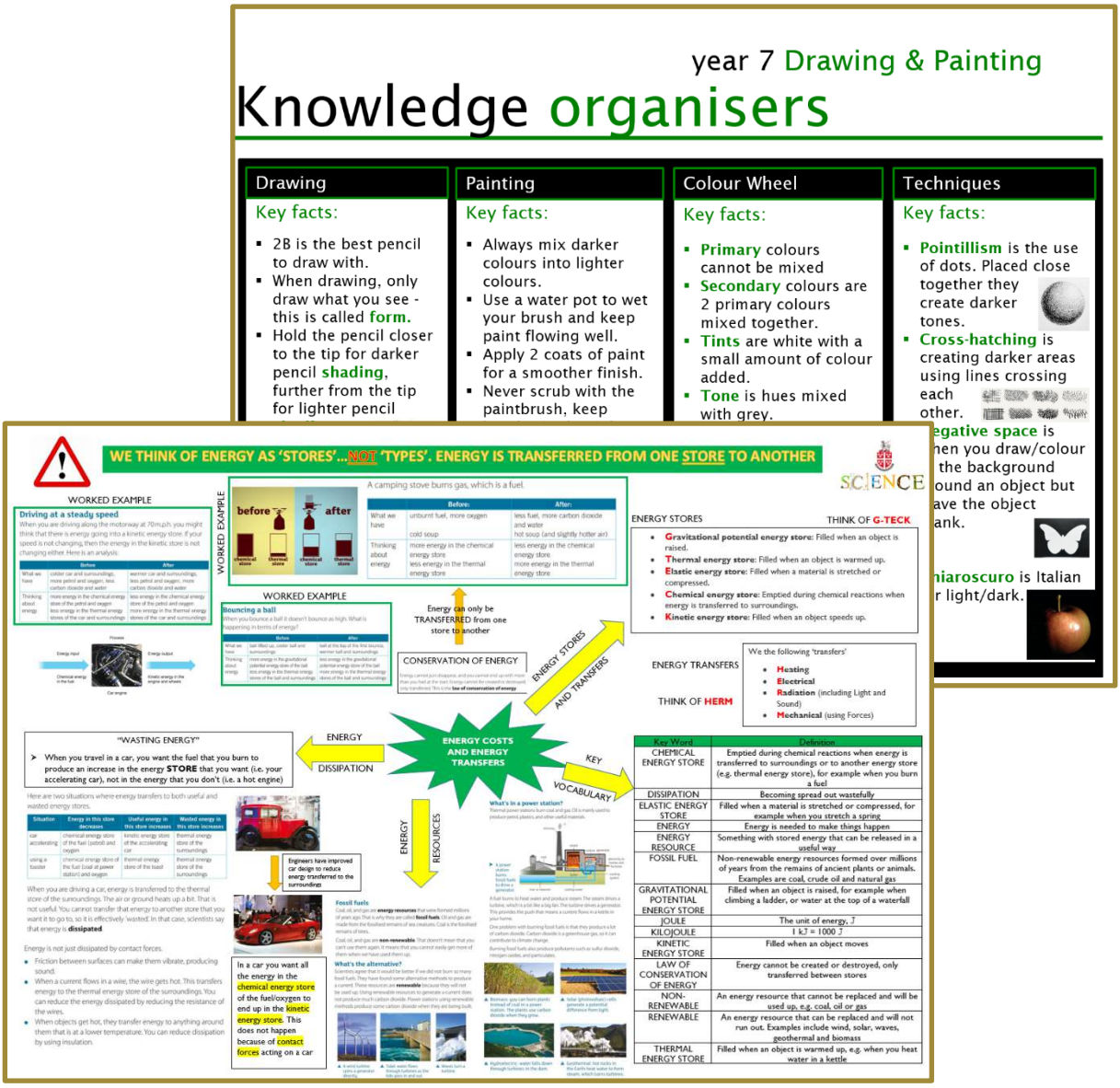
It is an exciting time to be in education. There is an air of liberation in terms of how we approach teaching and learning. This can feel a little threatening when things we have personally promoted or done in our classrooms has come under closer scrunity. In short we ask, “Am I sure that really works?”

Led by Mr Dan Gent, we have developed our own Standards for teaching and learning at CNS that is adopted by all our teachers. Mr Gent has led us with determination to declutter the past twenty years of fads and fashions in education. Along with our RLT partners, we have thought long and hard about the practices that make a real difference and the things our extremely busy teachers ought to focus on in the coming years.

This is why our teachers’ training and development, but also our quality assurance, will focus on four key standards: the **tasks** we design, the **explanations** we provide, the **models** of excellence we show and the **practice** we facilitate in our classrooms.

These and other approaches underline our commitment to enable all students to be the very best they can be by being the very best teachers we can be as well.

If you have any questions or seek further information on teaching and learning at CNS then please get in touch with Dan Gent, Assistant Headteacher *dgent@chipping-norton.oxon.sch.uk*.



Curriculum

You will be aware that there have been no changes to our curriculum design, nor are major changes planned given its current fitness for purpose. However, in Year 7 we shall be starting a major initiative for a small number of Year 7 students who will benefit from being taught and supported in their own class for the vast majority of their lessons; ahead of a transition into mainstream classes in Year 8. In order to achieve this we have appointed a Nurture Group Teacher (Mrs Street) and a Nurture Group LSA (Ms Hull), whilst creating a bespoke classroom designed to meet their academic, social and emotional needs – with the help of the PTA, St. Mary's Church and THRIVE.

Meanwhile, the GCSE options process works really well. We have retained a completely open options process and continue to avoid marshalling our students into an EBacc style curriculum (unless they wish to) so that our curriculum can genuinely claim to be broad and balanced through its equal promotion of, and access to, the Arts, Technology and Sports, in particular. Similarly, the subjects we offer at A-level are the right ones and remain popular amongst students.

It is not what we study, but how we study, that is the greater focus for us right now. Whilst the transformation of the curriculum to one that is knowledge-rich is currently focussed on KS3, we can see how this is already affecting how all teachers are approaching the way they teach and the way their students learn during their GCSE *and* A-levels years.

If you have any questions or seek further information on the curriculum then please get in touch with Alan Trainer, Deputy Headteacher: ***atrainer@chipping-norton.oxon.sch.uk***.

Tutoring and Pastoral Care

Mr Alexander was always the '7K' tutor at my own secondary school. He was the first tutor that my brother, two sisters and then I had as we got used to life in the big school. He was very strict, fiercely proud of his tutor group and, above all, could fill us with awe and wonder. We would hang on his every word. He taught us as much about right and wrong as he did about football and politics. It meant something special to be in his tutor group – we felt lucky. We felt we belonged.

Right now, actual contact between tutors and their tutees at CNS is quite limited. Ideally, a tutor ought to be your child's first port of call when there's a problem or if a crisis is emerging. Less dramatically, he or she ought to be someone your son or daughter can look up to, gather advice and be another trusted adult who contributes to the gradual formation of the unique character in each child. By ensuring each tutor can deliver the PSHE programme next year, we have begun strengthening that relationship. In October the "Meet The Tutor" evening that used to be for Year 7s only, will now be across all year groups. A chance to check-in at the start of term and to build that relationship with you and your children.

This year we have thought a lot about tutoring at CNS and worked hard to clarify what that means. This will allow us to ensure that the experience of being tutored at CNS is more consistent and, we hope, more powerful for all students next year. Everyone deserves a Mr Alexander.

If you have any questions or seek further information on character education or tutoring then please get in touch with Natalie Hancock, Deputy Headteacher ***nhancock@chipping-norton.oxon.sch.uk***.

Character

Back in December we organised the first Student Conference and the theme was 'building character'. From these discussions and debates we have been able to think more clearly about how we shall adapt our PSHE lessons, assemblies and tutorial programmes so that we talk more explicitly and positively about what it means to develop our character and the kinds of virtues we seek in students: **curiosity, compassion, creativity and courage**.

CURIOSITY

EVENLODE

COMPASSION

STOUR

CREATIVITY

GLYME

COURAGE

WINDRUSH

Shaping new cultures takes many years but in the first stages of our work we decided to ensure that *all* year groups must have a fortnightly PSHE lesson and that this lesson ought to be taken by Form Tutors. Very recently, we have also appointed Mrs Gray as our Head of PSHE in Years 10 to 13 and Ms Skill as our Head of PSHE in Years 7 to 9. They will coordinate the PSHE curriculum, which aims to secure each student's personal development and wellbeing, taking into account the latest requirements and guidelines from the Department for Education.

It was clear that whilst the House competitions at CNS have become largely centred on sports, the affection for the four Houses remains. In time we aim to develop those House competitions and involve all subjects and include a wider range of activities that will include fund raising.

It is somewhat rewarding to note that the Government and the Department for Education is now also extremely interested in how schools can promote strong character and resilience. Damian Hinds, Secretary of State for Education, wrote in late May of the importance of character and resilience in ensuring social mobility and identified 'five foundations' of strong character and resilience in schools:

- Sport;
- Creativity;
- Performance;
- Volunteering & Membership;
- World experience or entrepreneurship.

Whilst your sons' and daughters' GCSE and A-level grades matter, their engagement in the extra-curricular opportunities provided by the school or in the local community are sometimes even more important in helping them become their best self. So many people can trace back the moment that found their vocation or passion in life to a play, performance, visit, expedition or placement they stumbled upon at school. Sometimes, such turning points happen unexpectedly but we cannot rely on good luck for young people and that is why we continue to promote all of the above for your children.

If you have any questions or seek further information on character then please get in touch with Natalie Hancock, Deputy Headteacher ***nhancock@chipping-norton.oxon.sch.uk***.

Leadership & Management

As is the case in so many schools, Heads of Year are incredibly important people in the lives of many children. Often, they have an unenviable job as they try to balance high teaching commitments and the need to meet and work with families and children on a wide range of issues. This is why we have slightly reduced their teaching commitment and will continue to do so next year. But we have also added new personnel to their teams, in the form of Pastoral Support Workers for each year group – Mrs Natasha Davis-Batchelor and Mrs Michelle Hargrave - so that there is greater capacity to reach out and help those most in need. By employing a dedicated Family Support Worker, Mrs Claire Budd, we have also addressed the fact that sometimes a family needs someone to get out to parents and carers so that we can help deal with major issues that are causing distress or distraction within their family.

The life of a Head of Department is no less demanding. This particular role has undergone the most change in the past 10-20 years and represents one of the most challenging in the profession. The Leadership Team and I have been delighted to work with such a committed group of professionals and know they are the engine room of learning at our school. That desire to declutter the classroom starts with those Heads of Department who are regularly challenged to examine the progress of all students and design interventions to improve or even rescue the achievements of children. After each data collection there are a series of meetings that carefully look at how the students are getting along. Classes and individual children are discussed and then plans agreed to find ways to raise standards.

Ensuring those Heads of Department remain highly effective has also been a major focus for us this year. Mr Trainer has been exploring the key skills necessary for great leadership of departments at CNS. This ensures that our training and development for those individuals allows them to remain the school's experts in the design and delivery of the curriculum and assessment in their own department. In addition, strengthening how they use and interpret data, alongside helping them to develop their own skills to support and challenge members of their own team.
If you have any questions or seek further information on our pastoral system or the work of Heads of Year then please get in touch with Natalie Hancock, Deputy Headteacher: ***nhancock@chipping-norton.oxon.sch.uk***. For further information on the work of Heads of Department then please get in touch with Alan Trainer, Deputy Headteacher: ***atrainer@chipping-norton.oxon.sch.uk***.

Extra-curricular life

Because we know that lives can be enriched, sometimes transformed, by what they do *outside* of the classroom, CNS offers an unparalleled range of opportunities to take part in extra-curriculum activities.

Barely a week goes by before the next trip takes place and already this year we have had numerous Duke of Edinburgh expeditions or trips to awe inspiring places that included Venice, the Austrian Alps, the battlefields of Belgium and France or the Palace of Westminster. I cannot thank my colleagues enough for organising and leading these visits but I am also acutely aware of the additional pressure such visits create and therefore mindful of how we maintain or even extend what we do and offer. Next year there will be trips to Canada, Iceland, the Italian Alps, Rome and even Harry Potter World – all with financial support for families, if needed.

If you have any questions or seek further information on how your children might become more involved in the extra-curricular life of the school then please get in touch with Geraldine Thomas: ***gthomas@chipping-norton.oxon.sch.uk***.

Behaviour for Learning

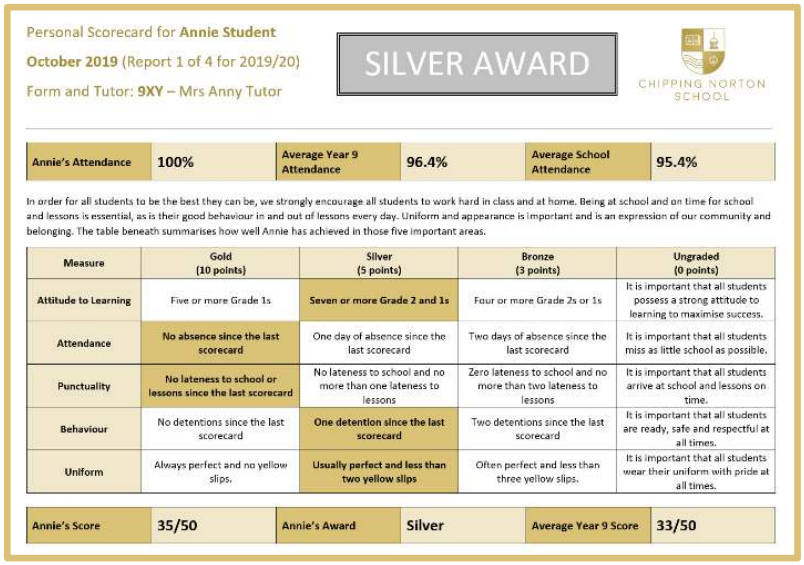
Teachers have an awful lot to do. Their own wellbeing and effectiveness improves when all students are really well behaved and focussed. Our updated Behaviour for Learning policy clarifies expectations across our community so that we can see and feel a truly exceptional culture of strong engagement, every day, in every classroom.

The underlying principle has been that children must be in lessons at all times. You may be aware that we brought internal isolation to an end and replaced it with 'Leadership Team Supervision' at break and lunchtime. This puts children back into lessons, prevents them falling behind and reminds us all that the removal of a child from just one of their 190 days of learning per year is a big problem. We are pleased to report that the type of incidents that used to lead to internal isolation has fallen through the floor, whilst fixed term exclusions (the old fashioned "suspensions") have also fallen hugely since we introduced those first steps towards further clarity and consistency. It is not pleasant to fixed term exclude a child but sometimes it is necessary to enforce boundaries that are not respected.

I shall not pretend behaviour at CNS is perfect, but it is very good and continues to improve because there is a growing acknowledgment amongst students that poor behaviour is not fair on anyone and that there is always a better way to solve a problem. Plus, children in crisis have even more exceptional people they can go to when they feel angry, frustrated or highly anxious.

Rewards and Recognition

A major feature of the new Behaviour for Learning Policy has been an emphasis on what we recognise and how we reward at CNS. This is a cultural shift that will take time but we have newly designed celebration assemblies towards the end of each term and in those assemblies our focus is on those students whose efforts, achievements, personal breakthroughs, community spirit or extra-curricular life highlights our newly established virtues: **curiosity, compassion, courage and creativity**.



Personal Scorecard for **Annie Student**

October 2019 (Report 1 of 4 for 2019/20)

Form and Tutor: **9XY** – Mrs Anny Tutor

SILVER AWARD

CHIPPING NORTON SCHOOL

Annie's Attendance	**100%**	**Average Year 9 Attendance**	**96.4%**	**Average School Attendance**	**95.4%**

In order for all students to be the best they can be, we strongly encourage all students to work hard in class and at home. Being at school and on time for school and lessons is essential, as is their good behaviour in and out of lessons every day. Uniform and appearance is important and is an expression of our community and belonging. The table beneath summarises how well Annie has achieved in those five important areas.

Measure	Gold (10 points)	Silver (5 points)	Bronze (3 points)	Ungraded (0 points)
Attitude to Learning	Five or more Grade 1s	**Seven or more Grade 2 and 1s**	Four or more Grade 2s or 1s	It is important that all students possess a strong attitude to learning to maximise success.
Attendance	**No absence since the last scorecard**	One day of absence since the last scorecard	Two days of absence since the last scorecard	It is important that all students miss as little school as possible.
Punctuality	**No lateness to school or lessons since the last scorecard**	No lateness to school and no more than one lateness to lessons	Zero lateness to school and no more than two lateness to lessons	It is important that all students arrive at school and lessons on time.
Behaviour	No detentions since the last scorecard	**One detention since the last scorecard**	Two detentions since the last scorecard	It is important that all students are ready, safe and respectful at all times.
Uniform	Always perfect and no yellow slips.	**Usually perfect and less than two yellow slips**	Often perfect and less than three yellow slips.	It is important that all students wear their uniform with pride at all times.

Annie's Score	**35/50**	**Annie's Award**	**Silver**	**Average Year 9 Score**	**33/50**

But we have avoided thinking in a bubble. Colleagues from other RLT schools worked with us for an inclusion peer review in February and this enabled us to sharpen our thinking and to continue to be informed by research and best practice, rather than best guesses. I look forward to making big strides in this area next year with revamped celebration assemblies and the introduction of Personal Scorecards that will add to the information parents and carers receive from the school. Those scorecards will examine your son or daughter's attitude to learning, attendance, punctuality, behaviour and uniform; leading to a bronze, silver or gold award. More on this next term.

If you have any questions or seek further information on behaviour or rewards then please get in touch with Natalie Hancock, Deputy Headteacher: ***nhancock@chipping-norton.oxon.sch.uk***

Appearance

I had not quite anticipated how much early work had to go into ensuring better clarity on our uniform and appearance expectations. After one or two early concessions we have then sought to update and clarify, whilst working more collegiately as staff, to be more consistent and therefore fairer in the eyes of children and families. We also have some way to go and I regularly receive letters or emails from parents and carers seeking a stricter or more consistent enforcement of rules – often seeking discreet help with their own child!

Of course, whether we wear tailored trousers or baggy jeans, the impact on actual GCSE grades is, at best, unclear. However, there is a bigger picture that can be overlooked and it relates to creating a learning environment that is uncluttered. Uncluttered from needless distractions that include who sits where, who is wearing what and what's the latest gossip in circulation. It's one of the reasons why those five lessons per day are so sacrosanct, when nothing but the learning matters and we have to be determined to maintain that complete focus at all times, every day.

Next Year?

We do not reinvent ourselves each year and therefore we shall continue to work on those themes, summarised above, over the life of our current three-year school improvement plan that takes us up to August 2021.

Our School Improvement priorities are focussed on four key areas: curriculum, assessment, supporting the development of middle leaders (i.e. Heads of Department and Heads of Year) and developing character education amongst our students.

We have begun another stage of the journey of this school but we have a distance to travel and we shall not ever become complacent when the stakes are so high for your children's future.

Communication

Too much, too little? Too few or too many?

I am very conscious that in my first year I have a responsibility to share as much information with parent and carers as possible. You will be aware that I wrote to families each week throughout autumn and then fortnightly since January. But we've added termly letters from Heads of Year and this is the first part of a plan to extend the number of voices you hear and the range of school related topics you learn about.

Thank you for getting this far (if you did…). I just wish to thank you all for your continued support and encouragement of all staff at this school. We do work really hard and try to do our best at all times because we know your children get one shot at being educated.

If there is anything else you would like to know about then just get in contact with me or my colleagues.

Have a lovely summer and thank you for welcoming me to your school and now, I hope, our school. It's been a pleasure and a privilege. I am now looking forward to a break and then getting back to working with my colleagues to continue the good work that has been taking place at this school for many years.