



Monday 29 June 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

Welcome back to a new school week. I hope your weekend was restful and that you managed to enjoy those patches of summer weather between the various showers and downfalls. You may recall that I used last week's letter to look ahead to some of the planning that is already underway for September. I also indicated that Mr Gent, Assistant Headteacher, will share this letter to examine how teaching and learning has developed at CNS in recent times and what we should look forward to in the future. Please see the end of my letter for this information.

Year 10s and 12s

The first of five core days for our Year 10s is underway in the Main Hall today. Meanwhile, Year 12s will also be joining us in the afternoons for psychology, today, followed by English language and literature, sociology and finally, mathematics and further mathematics on Friday. If your son or daughter is in Years 10 or 12 please look out for a reminder notice from either Mr Robinson or Mrs De Bruyn each evening.

Refunds for Trips and Visits - Update

Since Mrs Thomas wrote to you in May, regarding refunds for the German Exchange, Normandy trip, the Sports tour and other visits, claims have been submitted to the insurance company and we are now awaiting the funds. It does seem to be a slow process but we are checking regularly with the insurance company. Please be assured that Mrs Thomas continues to work on your behalf to secure the money and she will be in touch as soon as the money is received and the Finance Office will then process the refunds to parents. We are grateful for your continued patience.

Transition Update

Transition has been a particular challenge this year but has also seen some very creative responses. For example, last Thursday night we did a live broadcast from school at 7pm and will now follow this up with an opportunity for families to walk around our school site on Saturday 4th and Saturday 11th July. Seeing the physical layout of our site is clearly an important opportunity to help many young people feel less anxious about the move to 'big school'. Whilst the occasion will be socially distant, it will nonetheless help make those important connections ahead of September. If you have a son or daughter who is joining us in September, please look out for a letter from Mrs Faulkner tomorrow.

Additional Letter Tomorrow

Please look out for a letter from Paul James, CEO of the River Learning Trust, which will be circulated across all schools in the Trust.

Continued...

And finally...

Thank you for the continued support and encouragement from you as parents and carers. We are continually struck by how much this whole episode has put pressure on us all and whilst none of us can claim to have come close to perfection, we have not done badly and will come through this stronger.

Please read on to Mr Gent's comments on teaching and learning.

Yours faithfully



Barry Doherty

Headteacher

TEACHING AND LEARNING UPDATE FROM MR GENT, ASSISTANT HEADTEACHER

What is distinctive about teaching and learning at CNS?

When we talk about teaching and learning, we refer to the acronym TEMP – the high-quality Tasks, precise Explanations, Models of excellence and dedicated Practice that underpin the mastery of the subjects we teach. Most teachers will agree that it is an exciting time to be involved in the profession, not least because of the growing consensus that surrounds knowledge-rich teaching.

As we draw closer to a full reopening of the school, it has been heartening to read much that endorses our TEMPlate (sorry!) for great teaching and learning. Government guidance highlights the urgency with which teachers should 'declutter' lessons and sharpen their focus upon what has been proven to make the biggest difference to students' progress. We believe that our four standards for teaching and learning have been doing this for the last two years.

What does this look like in the classroom?

1. Our tasks are designed to help students to think deeply about knowledge so that it is stored in the long term memory:
 - ✓ We organise essential knowledge and teach this first.
 - ✓ We reinforce this essential knowledge through low-stakes quizzing and high-value tasks.
2. Our teachers are encouraged to 'own' their expertise and communicate this with clarity, passion and precision so that students can share in our fascination for our subjects:
 - ✓ We signpost periods of direct instruction.
 - ✓ We use lean language and take great care not to over-load students with too many new words or concepts introduced at once.
3. We 'model the kitchen sink' so that there is no hesitancy when we say "off you go":
 - ✓ We show students not only how to complete a task but how to complete a task really well.
 - ✓ We share examples that are both secure and excellent and so ensure access for all.

4. We create the right conditions for all students to engage in the skilful application of their knowledge:
 - ✓ We insist on strong silence during periods of sustained independent work.
 - ✓ We ensure students experience success by providing scaffolds and supports that lighten the load.

Where are you in this knowledge-rich journey?

The national drive towards knowledge-rich teaching, accompanied by a highly persuasive body of evidence means that is an exciting time to be a teacher. At CNS, we have learnt what makes the biggest difference and are striving to achieve the vision described above. A phrase like 'organise the essential knowledge' might be described as deceptively simple – teams of teachers need to work together to prioritise what is important, organise this so that it is accessible and design tasks that best serve the memorisation of this knowledge.

Similarly, creating models that are both secure and excellent for every lesson *should* take time – this is the most meaningful way in which teachers can render mark schemes meaningful. As an English teacher, I know how hard it can be to write model essays that ensure both access and challenge. I also know that it is one of the most worthwhile ways in which I can spend my time and so am motivated to do so. Our way of teaching is ambitious and delivering real and sustainable change takes time.

Two weeks before the lockdown, I spoke to all staff about how we were sharpening the urgency of our messages related to teaching and learning. We talked about raising the TEMPerature and our intention to increase the frequency with which we have low-stakes conversations with one another about improving our lessons. Therefore, we will begin in September where we left off in March – with a sharp insistence on seeing our standards in action. We are close to realising the best version of our school and the experience of this academic year has only sharpened that desire.

What has remote learning taught the school?

In previous letters, I have written as much about the limitations of remote teaching as I have about the brilliance of the technology that allows us to continue educating our students. Show My Homework has allowed us to continue to provide our lessons and whilst we have learnt that there is no compensation for the experience of the classroom, education would have been so much poorer without the technological advancements we have come to rely upon. It has been very exciting to learn with colleagues how to provide live lessons for our Y10 and Y12 students.

Similarly, having to record explanations has really sharpened our minds on the best way in which to communicate complex ideas with clarity and precision (and have them saved and available for students to 'watch again' on the Google Drive). The teachers at CNS will be returning to school with an increased awareness of how technology might enhance what we do *and*, perhaps more importantly, an even better understanding of what makes for high quality explanation.

What role will technology play in the future?

A popular myth about education in the information age was that the internet would somehow render teachers redundant. The idea that a Google search might somehow supplant teacher expertise has fortunately been thoroughly debunked. Therefore, my attitude to technology might be viewed as healthily cautious; I recognise how it might equip and enable teachers but am wary of something that can easily distract. I therefore anticipate our finding more efficiencies through technology, efficiencies that might allow teachers to devote more of their time to preparing high TEMPerature lessons, whilst at the same time allowing students even easier access to those lessons.

If you wish to get in touch then please email me on dgent@chippingnortonschool.org.