



**Leadership Team:**

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Dear Parents and Carers

I ought to start by praising the generosity of students again last week as they raised over £600 for Comic Relief. We continue to emphasise the importance of compassion but also the positive impact that giving has on our own wellbeing.

***What's it like to be a student at CNS?***

You will be aware that we are very actively seeking opportunities to talk to students about their lives at CNS. We want to know how happy, safe, challenged and supported they feel so that we can be that ever-improving school.

Just after Easter we shall resume the third phase of our 'sixth sense surveys' – speaking to one sixth of our student body about their lives in and out of school. Meanwhile, yesterday, the leadership team met with a different group of students from across all age ranges. We wanted to find out what it was like to be a learner at CNS and to investigate the progress felt by students in terms of our determination to provide the very best learning experiences.

I share this with you because it is important that parents and carers are reassured that we are committed to both listening and acting on feedback. These processes help us share findings with colleagues, return to our key teaching and learning principles, and seek greater consistency and 'excellence as standard' across the school.

For me at least, the comments from the students I chatted with were incredibly helpful. In particular, they spoke about students being really well behaved because there was a general understanding that time could not be wasted anymore as a result of schools being closed and so forth. Furthermore, they spoke with great clarity on the value of teachers being passionate about their subject and ensuring that lessons were relevant to *their* world and *their* future. They acknowledged our focus on recall and memory, strong oracy activities, and the need to become better readers so that their reliance on adults diminished over time. They valued models and the way that we scaffold great responses.

Collectively, the leadership team felt strongly that we have an incredibly cohesive student body who share a commitment to learn and a desire to enjoy school and to be really successful.

***Absence Updates***

I am sure your children have spoken to you about the relatively high number of staff absences that we have absorbed in recent weeks. COVID rates amongst students and staff appear to have peaked but we must assume that this will rumble on for some time yet. You will be aware that we have avoided sending year groups home and remain confident that we will be able to avoid this occurring at CNS. At times, we have amalgamated groups into the new dining room and the students have been truly superb: cooperative, engaged and cheerful.

Overall attendance at CNS remains much lower than in recent years and this is true of all schools across the country. Whilst COVID enforced absences are unavoidable (for students and staff), we need to share a collective determination and effort to minimise all other absences. This is why we shall try to reinvigorate our push for great attendance in the summer term and challenge all of us to seek 100% attendance in that final term. There is no value in being critical of those who are absent, but we must celebrate those who achieve high attendance because we know that a single absence can disrupt the learning journey. It is much like missing an episode or two



of our favourite drama, and then hoping to carry on watching the remainder of the season without fully catching up on the story we have missed.

### **'Study Leave'**

So much has changed in education over the past 20-30 years - not least 'study leave'. Mr Trainer will be in touch with students and families of year 11 and 13 students very shortly. He will set out our plans for how timetabled lessons will *gradually* come to an end. There are no abrupt 'final days' anymore in any school, and instead a more gradual movement toward fewer 'normal lessons' as exams start to build up. We know that students benefit from highly structured revision and support and that they are much more likely to be successful if we carefully manage their gradual shift from normal lessons to examinations.

- The first big GCSE examination is at 9am on Monday 16 May (philosophy & ethics), with other examinations rapidly building up after that day and straddling the half term.
- The first big A level examination is AS level mathematics on Thursday 19 May.

Having children in both year 11 and 13, I have dreaded for many years the months that lie ahead... I understand the rollercoaster of emotions and the way that energy levels, organisation, or a single unexpected test result, can pivot hope to despair and back again. My top tips are as follows:

- Endless patience;
- Have a constantly updated revision plan that includes equals amounts of study, rest and time with friends;
- Endless patience;
- Authorise lighter housework duties (it's not worth trying to get them to clean the kitchen till late June);
- Endless patience;
- Keep the final life and career goals in mind;
- Endless patience;
- Remember there is a ten-week summer holiday in which to watch the whole of Netflix;
- Endless patience;
- Discreetly vent your frustration with fellow adults or via a newsletter to families (not them)...;
- Just smile and wave!

Have a wonderful but slightly shortened weekend!

Yours faithfully



Barry Doherty  
Headteacher