



**Leadership Team:**

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Dear Parents and Carers

***Get Well Soon!***

I must begin by expressing my hope that those students who have picked up so many bugs feel much better very soon. I am sure you are aware that there has been a very high level of student absence this week, with a great number reporting sore throats, head colds, high temperatures and coughing. This causes parents and carers a great deal of stress and anxiety when there has been so much talk and discussion in the media in recent days. As I type this to you, I clutch my own hundredth tissue of the day, and look across at two of my children with red eyes and runny noses. I am certainly not an expert on these things, but it appears that we are working our way through a backlog of bugs from the past few years.

***We'll Get Through This...***

Attendance has gradually picked up through the week and we hope that we have peaked with these seasonal bugs. We have also received confirmation that several other students have scarlet fever. As you would expect, we have updated our risks assessment and stepped up common surface and hand sanitising routines. We just need to look out for one another and look forward to the rest that is fast approaching.

***Matilda – The Musical***

I think we are in an age where we overuse superlatives. Amazing, fabulous, unforgettable, incredible, stunning, wonderful and brilliant are words that we all use and hear very frequently. The trouble is that when you encounter something that is, well, amazing, one finds it next to impossible to convey anything that does it justice. Which is my way of mentioning that last week's production was very, very special indeed. I have written to the entire cast and crew to express my personal thanks and praise and have emphasised that the whole production relied on the contribution of every single student involved. In fact, it was the scale of the production and its ambition that led so many of us to describe it as a genuine 'West End' show. Nevertheless, I will return to some of the individuals involved in the production next week, along with many other students across the school who have inspired the staff at CNS in 2022. We plan to celebrate them in our special celebration assemblies on Monday 19 December, but I also wish to share some of those stories with you as well, next week.

I wish to publicly thank the *Matilda* production team of Mrs Du Crôs, Miss Miles, Mr Franklin, Mr Brown and Mr Stromanis. It has been their vision, energy, determination that has enabled students' talent to shine so brightly.

***Peer Review – Wednesday 7 December***

Being a member of the River Learning Trust ensures that CNS can never be a lonely planet, soothingly reassuring ourselves that our job is done. Being in the RLT means the opposite is true and we visit one another's schools to ensure we learn from one another's best practice and put ourselves in a position to be both supported and challenged to be an even better school. On Wednesday, we welcomed five teachers and senior leaders from other schools to visit lessons, look at students' work, meet with subject leaders and talk to your children. The team confirmed the great number of strengths at our school but also helped us pinpoint our immediate priorities. Their report will be shared with my colleagues and the governing body, including parent governors, so that we can set our own New Year resolutions. The team were so impressed with your children. They remarked on their impeccable behaviour, their friendliness and their confidence with adults. But also, the engaging nature of the teaching, the warmth of colleagues, and also how much smarter and modern the school and its facilities has become in recent years.



## *Last Week's Letter*

You may recall in my letter to you last week that I also paid tribute to the behaviour of the vast majority of our students and touched on the additional capacity that gives staff to focus fully on learning and progress. I also indicated my intention to return to the topic of social media and the negative impact it is having on some students.

## *Social Media*

When I wrote to you last week, I was unaware of the Channel 4 drama that was televised last night. [\*I Am Ruth\*](#), starring Kate Winslet, is a feature length drama about a teenager and the impact of social media on her mental health and relationships. It is something we may consider using with our older students within their personal development programme. Kate Winslet talked about the drama in [an interview with Laura Kuenssberg](#) last Sunday (and Woman's Hour today) and provided a useful insight into the plot and themes. She spoke of how parents often feel powerless over their children's use of social media.

The timing of this drama is poignant. In conversations with colleagues last week, concern was expressed about what appears to be a rise in students feeling hurt and frightened by the effects of social media.

My colleagues are seeing patterns of social media misuse amongst students, especially students in years 8 and 9 (but not exclusively so). This has resulted in some children being humiliated, harassed, bullied, frightened or angry. Very often we learn of social media misuse from parents and carers very late at night or first thing in the morning. Often, something turns out to have been quietly bubbling for days and then bursts-out in unexpected ways. Understandably, parents and carers can demand that we punish wrongdoers and make students stop their misuse. As you would expect, we do not ignore behaviour outside school that affects children in school.

Perhaps the most worrying observation is that a great many students are messaging very, very late at night. Or they use obscene language and offensive terms that are almost impossible to imagine they might use at all. When we investigate we see evidence and chat histories are hidden, messages deleted, or identities fabricated. Investigations could swallow up entire days and weeks of endless investigations if we allowed that to happen.

Schools must not ignore this social media problem because it is evidently damaging children's mental health and self-esteem. It leads to some children being unable to concentrate on learning at school and in a small number of cases, some children appear trapped in repeated cycles of comments, replies and all-consuming drama. It can provoke self-doubt, anxiety, sadness or compulsive habits to check messages, or even become quite obsessed about what others might be saying.

Next week, some of my colleagues will be writing to all families and will offer advice that we hope all parents and carers will find both helpful and realistic. We know we cannot lock up their smartphones or turn back time to the 'good old days'. On the other hand, we are the adults, the parents, and the carers, and so it is up to us to decide if the things we give to them are bringing them joy or misery. These are not simple matters with easy solutions. [Yesterday's Woman's Hour episode](#) rather effectively summed up the choices and the dilemmas we face.

We shall be revising our personal development programmes to refresh the advice we give to students of different ages. We shall also be asking more of parents and carers, suggesting both proactive and reactive measures to protect from harm, or further harm. We shall not ignore the effects of social media misuse on your children, but we all need to be determined and united on how we treat the causes as well as the symptoms of that misuse.

The business of bringing up children is a joyful and fraught quest and I am fully aware that my letter to you this week illustrates this very clearly, but with a deep commitment to get it right for every child.

Yours faithfully



Barry Doherty, Headteacher