



Primary Transition meetings

These meetings are proving to be an absolute pleasure! Over the last week, Miss O’Riordan and I have visited pupils at Berkhamstead Preparatory School, Lakeside Primary School, St Mark’s C of E Junior School, The Richard Pate School and Shurdington C of E Primary. With Leckhampton C of E Primary, Naunton Park Primary School and Birdlip Primary School all booked in next week and many more after half term.

The children have been fantastic, asking sensible questions, eager to tell us about their interests and what they are looking forward to when they join the school in September. We are delighted that they are so enthusiastic about our uniform and our House system. The topic of food is always something of keen interest to the children, it usually takes no more than a couple of minutes before this topic comes up, and we have really enjoyed telling them all about what is on offer at the tuck shop and pavilion. They have also shown huge enthusiasm to get involved in our extra-curricular clubs and all aspects of enrichment!

In our school values we make clear that everyone associated with the school will:

- Strive for excellence and encourage resilience
- Participate, work together, and contribute positively to the community
- Expand our horizons

It is evident that our future pupils are capable of living these values to the full! Their eagerness to participate, their ambition and their curiosity have been genuinely contagious. We cannot wait to open our doors to them in September.

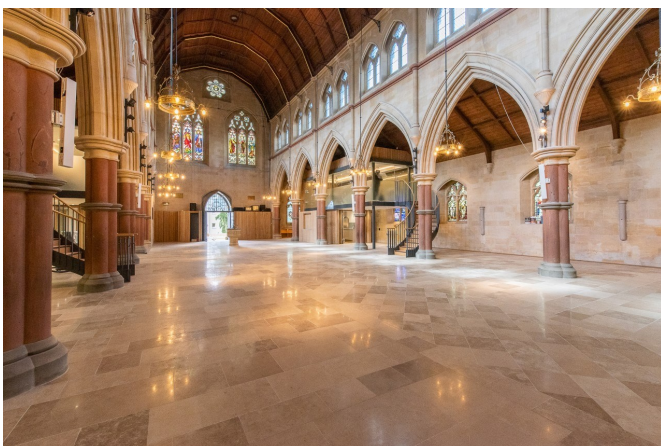
I would like to thank the Primary colleagues who have given us so much of their time, they will clearly miss the pupils very much.

Our Local Community

I have been very touched by the warm reception I have received from members of the Local Community who are eager to work with the school. We genuinely aspire to be ‘*a flagship school at the heart of its community*’ and I am keen to bring real meaning to our school value of ‘*contributing positively to the community*’ by developing strong links with local community groups.

I have been offered a particularly warm welcome from our local Church leaders. Prior to our Ofsted inspection, I was fortunate enough to visit Reverend Gary Grady at St Peter’s Church in Leckhampton. Reverend Grady is Team Vicar in the South Cheltenham Team with responsibility for St. Peter’s Leckhampton and The Church in Warden Hill since 2016. He is also the Area Dean for Cheltenham and Diocesan Link Officer for the Diocese of Dornakal in South India. I was treated to a wonderful tour of the church, sharing the secrets of its incredible History and we were able to talk about opportunities for us to work together in the future, including how pupils might get involved with his work in Southern India.

Equally, Nick Davies at St. Philip’s and St James’ has offered us this wonderfully refurbished church as a venue for our Christmas Celebration in December. Nick is Team Rector of the South Cheltenham team and a past Area Dean of Cheltenham. I know that Christmas is a long way off, but I am sure that this will be a highlight of the school calendar and we hope all our families will join us at this wonderful location right at the heart of our community, just off the Bath Road:





Ofsted Pre-registration Inspection

On Tuesday this week, we experienced our Pre-Registration Ofsted Inspection by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI). I will be writing to all families in a separate letter next week with a little more detail about the inspection, but I am delighted to report that the Inspection went very well indeed.

Introducing our Musical Director for 2021-22 – Miss Amber Smith

Over the last few weeks I have been busy mapping out our Social, Moral, Spiritual and Cultural (SMSC) provision. High Quality SMSC lies at the very heart of all exceptional schools and it is my intention that our SMSC curriculum will allow us to develop well-rounded individuals, with the right balance of character attributes and experiences to set them up for the future. SMSC development covers many, many areas but one important aspect relates to providing high quality education and experiences of The Arts.



I am therefore particularly pleased to announce the appointment of a Musical Director to The High School Leckhampton for 2021-22. This role will be undertaken by Miss Amber Smith who will lead our School Choir, our Christmas Celebration and, of course our much-anticipated School Production.

Some of our families may already know Miss Smith as she was born and educated in Cheltenham (and the Leckhampton area in particular). She is currently working in the area as a freelance choir director and music teacher, and she is the founder and Musical Director of Cheltenham Children's Choir. Miss Smith was proud to be a finalist for 'The Francesca Hanley Inspiration Award' at the Music and Drama Education Awards in 2021, sponsored by the ISM, Musicians Union and Classic FM, nominated by the parents of her Children's Choir. When I asked Miss Smith to describe her motivation for working in musical education she said 'I am a passionate, dedicated and community-spirited individual who enjoys singing, performing, the theatre and walks in the sunshine (or wellies!). I enjoy putting creativity, music and joy at the heart of everything I do.'

I hope that I can introduce Miss Smith to parents at our Transition Talk at **6pm on 7th July**. I am absolutely delighted that she has joined the team.

Two schools, one site

In the last newsletter I shared some information about our plans for operating two schools on the site at Balcarras. I am so glad that, from the feedback I have had, parents and pupils found this helpful and reassuring. In this edition I thought you might want to hear a little more about two aspects that have come up during our transition visits: homework and our extra-curricular provision.

Homework

Some pupils have told us that they are a little worried about the amount of homework they might have in Year 7. This is often of concern to pupils when they move to secondary school. There is no question that our teachers will place real value on homework, in the sense that it can provide a range of valuable life skills such as discipline, organisation and preparation. It is also important in pupils' educational development - as good quality homework tasks will provide an additional opportunity to re-visit and revise content, to practise and develop new skills, to carry out research and to consolidate understanding. We do however understand the importance of striking an effective balance between home learning and not placing unrealistic or unnecessary demands on pupils' time. Our pupils, and indeed their families, will often lead very busy lives so we will set homework that is valuable and worthwhile.

Your child will not be set homework for the first two weeks of term, as they find their way around the school, meet their teachers, and make new friends. We are expecting them to feel very tired as they become accustomed to all the new routines and expectations. They will then be issued with a homework timetable which will tell them which subjects to expect on which days. We will try to ensure that there are no more than 2 subjects on one day and their teachers will give them clear instructions about how to complete the work and importantly how long to spend on it. The pupils will record all homework in a pupil planner, but it will also be set on our VLE (Virtual Learning Environment). Our VLE is called Firefly and all pupils will be shown how to access it in the first two weeks of term. All parents will also receive log in details, and you can check what homework has been set.





Whilst there will be a step up from Primary school in the amount of homework you can expect for your child, I think that you will find the school has a sensible, measured approach that is motivated by the intention of supporting your child to make excellent progress with their learning. Should you ever have any questions about homework we would always invite you to contact us at school

Extra-curricular clubs

This is another key area of interest cropping up in our transition conversations. Miss O’Riordan and I are so impressed by the pupils’ apparent eagerness to develop their current interests and try new things.

There will be several clubs on offer for the pupils and they will receive a full list with dates and timings in September. Most clubs will start after 2 weeks of the pupils being at the school, so they have had time to decide what to join and meet the teachers. These clubs will largely take place at lunchtime and afterschool, so many pupils will have a very busy and stimulating day. If a club takes place after the school day, then parents will need to arrange to collect their child at the appropriate time. As a parent myself I know what a juggle this can be, but after a few weeks I hope the pupils will have made a few friends and parents can share the pickup duty! This will, of course, all get much easier when we are at Farm Lane when most of our pupils will walk and cycle to school.

Pupils can expect to join a variety of sports clubs (some offered seasonally) that will include netball, hockey, football, rugby, tennis, badminton, athletics and cricket. These will be Year 7 clubs and will be open to pupils from Balcarras and The High School Leckhampton. In sports where there are competitive fixtures, such as netball and football, The High School Leckhampton will be fielding its own teams and no doubt we will develop a healthy competition with Balcarras!

There will also be a host of musical clubs to join. If pupils are having private music tuition, we will strongly encourage them to join the relevant music group, such as wind, brass, or jazz groups. As mentioned earlier, The High School Leckhampton will have its very own choir, run by Miss Smith and we would like as many of our pupils to attend as possible!

There will also be subject clubs, such as model-making in History. Pupils will have the opportunity to support the Librarian with her work (and help select books for our school at Farm Lane). In the next newsletter I am hoping to share with you further details about private LAMDA lessons and Public Speaking Club that will be offered during the school day. This represents another, hugely beneficial activity for the pupils to get involved in – as they may, one day, be leading Downing Street Briefings!

I am hopeful that whatever your child’s interest or ability there will be at least one club that they want to get involved in. I am expecting most of our pupils to be involved in several clubs each week. It is a brilliant way to make new friends and really live the school values.

Reminders:

Gloucestershire County Council will be writing to families next week with details of which **bus** stop they have allocated to your child and information about the bus pass.

Parent Governor Election—the count is on Tuesday 25th May. We will update the website with the outcome as soon as possible after the count and when all those standing have been informed of the result.

Transition ‘Taster’ Day for Pupils – All pupils are invited to attend our Taster day at the Balcarras site on **7th of July 2021** and there will be a talk for parents on the same evening at **6pm** where you can meet the Tutors. A letter will go home just prior to this date with details confirming the arrangements and information about which House/Tutor Group your child is in.

The next **PTFA** meeting is **Friday 11th June 10-11am** in Balcarras School Hall. Please email us if you are thinking of attending.

With warm wishes,

Helen Wood

Headteacher

