

Cheltenham College: Half Term Letter from the Head

16 October 2020

Dear Parents

We have been so pleased to have almost all our pupils back in person. I have been hugely impressed with the way that every year group has adapted to the very different routines and practices this term. I still get a very cheery hello from all the pupils I walk past on my way to my office, even when we are all wearing face coverings; the beautiful music still goes on through my door to Big C, the classrooms are buzzing, and the sports pitches and courts are busy and purposeful during every sport afternoon. The video highlights that will accompany the newsletter coming to you later today show how, during an unusual half term, we have managed to continue so much of what makes life at College special.

I enjoyed a visit to the Fourth Form CCF Field day this Wednesday, which included cooking army rations (delicious!) over a campfire, naval knot tying, first aid practice and armed battle planning across the Prep playing fields, to name but a few. I am just grateful that none of the Fourth Form actually had to sleep under the tents they put up around the Prep school lake during that rather rainy night!

We have continued to feel a great sense of purpose in the classroom, and staff have been so impressed too in the work that was obviously covered whilst remote learning was in place last term. The Upper Sixth and Fifth Form have shown dedication in getting through exams to assess their progress and our first UCAS forms for the early applicants have been despatched safely. We continue to review the remote programme we are still offering, and pupils have been sent a questionnaire to give feedback this week on that.

Whilst things have had to be done differently, it has been wonderful to have participation in live music again. We did, I know, enjoy all the recordings we produced in our spare rooms, with headphones and fancy dress (did I enjoy that?) but filming yourself singing in isolation is certainly not a patch on the real thing despite Mr McKee's excellent editing skills. Our choirs and ensembles are continuing, organised into year groups. This has actually had the added benefit of more solo and leadership opportunities for members of the Third and Fourth Forms who might otherwise have had to wait for a chance to do this. Regular lunchtime concerts and choral evensongs continue at the usual times and are now also available on live video feeds from the Music Department and Chapel YouTube channels.

In the second half of term, we will be having House Singing with a difference. There will be a Christmas flavour this year, with Heads of Houses choosing Christmas songs out of a hat and each house producing video performances for release in the last week of term. There will also be a 'mash-up' video of 'We Wish You a Merry Christmas' featuring members of the Upper Sixth from all Houses, providing festive and hopefully very funny musical celebrations at the end of term.

In Drama, this half term we have had five separate groups of pupils from Third Form to Lower Sixth working on radio plays in a new and exciting project which allows them to focus on and develop vocal skills. Alongside this our Upper Sixth Scholars have begun work on the Scholars' Play, which we remain optimistic will be performed with a socially distanced audience in the Cheltenham Playhouse in February.

At the end of the next half term, we are going to hold our first ever House Drama Festival. We hope this will involve two separate competitions. Upper Sixth Prefects from each House will film a comic Christmas sketch. There will then be live performances in Big C by Lower College pupils from each House, which will be judged by a panel, with group and individual awards.

Although we haven't been able to play sports fixtures this term and we are sad to miss many aspects of competitive sport, our new situation has offered many positive outcomes, particularly in terms of

variety. Each Tuesday, pupils have engaged in an athletic development programme focusing on building physical and mental health, injury prevention, strength, agility and robustness. The combination of winter and summer sports on offer has also been well received. Fortunately, the weather has been very fair, and this has enabled pupils to enjoy the major sports of Rugby and girls' Hockey, whilst also having the option to participate in Cricket, Tennis, Athletics, Squash, Basketball and Badminton on site. Our Shooting, Polo, Golf and girls' fitness and well-being sessions have all flourished, and we have seen a large uptake respectively in the Rowing and Rackets programmes. I am very proud of the pupils' engagement and positive attitude shown under such testing circumstances and look to an equally active second half of term.

Last night, as I made my way home in the semi-darkness, as the evenings have suddenly started drawing in, I came out onto the quad to find a sea of individually carved pumpkins, all lit up with a candle inside. The Houses had clearly got into the spirit of Halloween and it was such a lovely sight to greet pupils coming out of supper. It was a lovely reminder of the normal events of the Autumn Term that can still bring a smile.

Finally, whilst I have tried to keep this letter Covid-free, please find attached a separate document of answers to 'frequently asked questions'. We continue to be as flexible as we can with our plans for this and next term, and we will give you as much notice as possible if we need to make changes.

I hope our Cheltonians have a well-deserved rest over half term, whether they are at home with you, with guardians or host families or whether they are staying for some fun and activities here with us in Westal. We do ask however, especially with the more senior pupils, that they are very careful with any social events they attend. The consequences of this, as we know, can be very far-reaching indeed and we are left with no choice in how to act if we find ourselves with positive cases in school.

We are looking forward to all that the second half of term brings, and despite the fact that COVID-19 remains a significant issue that we must take seriously, please be reassured that we remain confident that our plans are working well. We have learned a huge amount this term and we are all benefitting from being back in a normal school routine. We certainly want that to continue.

With best wishes

Nicola Huggett
Head
Cheltenham College