



16th December 2011

Dear Parents,

More spontaneous and diversely digital forms of communication have long since overtaken the sanctity and novelty of the traditional Headmaster's end of term letter. However, whilst I can't tempt you with anything new and novel, you would, nonetheless, reasonably expect me to trumpet a selection of the triumphs of a splendid Michaelmas term, re-endorse the key administrative notices, and offer some pointers for the term to come. In all this I shall endeavour not to fail you.

What of the triumphs? We are working very hard to develop Music in our school and I am indebted to my excellent Director of Music, Anne Turner, and her team for their expert example, and the high standards to which they aspire. A large number of our children have come into school this week for their grade board music exams and I know that they approached this latest challenge with confidence. Fingers crossed, and well done to all those who worked so hard for their exams. There are some notable musical celebrations in next term's calendar and I hope you will come and share them with us.

Of course, Music is synonymous with Christmas in prep schools, and ours has been resonating gloriously to the festive chime of carols and choirs in recent days. Oliver Champness (a chorister of the Chapel Royal at Hampton Court, no less) joined our school in Nursery at the age of 3, and his musical talents were evident then. He is one of a terrific group of Year 8 children who began their Feltonfleet careers with us ten years ago, an observation which I reflected on wistfully during this year's Nativity at the pre-prep. It wasn't difficult to see the next generation of Year 8 stars emerging throughout this year's brilliant Calvi Christmas production. Oliver and Natalie Riley are our wonderful Head Choristers this year. At both of our carol services at St Andrews (when the quality of the choirs and the clarity of the brave and impressive readers was quite exceptional, I thought), during the carols which graced a splendid grandparents coffee morning, and in between all that, an up tempo School Prefects panto, they have provided a continuous lead of the highest order. Oliver and Natalie are two of over thirty young people in a distinguished Year 8 who are preparing for senior school scholarships in 2012. They mirror *The Feltonfleet Way* in the manner of their daily lives with us; their courage, example and ambition are admirable and commendable and I wish the entire year group every good fortune for exciting and rewarding times in 2012.

Rarely a day goes by when I don't cast a glance around every nook and cranny of our school wondering why my own rather humble education wasn't littered with anything like the degree of broad and enriching co-curricular opportunity which is the mark of a Feltonfleet

education. On the basis that all of us will dance at some point or another in our lifetimes, but in my case rather ineptly, it is deeply moving that so many of our children have taken a keen and active involvement in many of the dance teaching options which we offer. Many have tackled their RAD exams this term, and all have passed successfully. Very well done to everyone concerned, notably their excellent guide and mentor, Miss Georgina. Bravo, too, to the Sheridan children. Joe, in Year 4, took his dance and stage craft talents to Woking Theatre earlier this term, playing the part of *Tiny Tim* in support of Tommy Steel in the professional production of *Scrooge*. And many congratulations to his sister Sophie (Year 7) who has auditioned successfully for the London Children's Ballet, a colossal achievement.

If music passed me by somewhat in those dryer days of my own 1960's black and white education, then I can't really recall much fun or creativity in an art room either. How different it is today. Those of you whose children are in the main school may well have heard the excited babble from your young of some enthralling hours spent in our art room this term. Little wonder because it has been an enlivening place to be and, inspired by Carol Message, the art work which the children are generating and which is finding its way to every area of the school is quite superb. From the Henry Moore inspired sculptures on display in the Old Library to beautifully presented scenes framed within the dining hall, and much else besides, there is a vast amount emerging for us to admire and enjoy. I am sure that Year 4 will find renewed inspiration from their visit to the Watts Gallery next term, and Year 5 to the National Portrait Gallery a week later. Lucky children, is what I say.

"Lucky us" was the reaction of all those of us who were the fortunate beneficiaries of a stunning and enterprising production of that most uplifting and messiest of productions, *Bugsy Malone*. A splendidly confident cast of Year 7 children had worked tirelessly in the days beforehand, steered and inspired by the calmest and most organised Directors of Drama I have known in nearly thirty years of teaching, Mel Beyer. She harnessed a willing and eager supporting team behind the scenes, and coaxed some wonderful individual performances from the children. Every child had their moment, and some were especially prominent. But I would like to showcase the terrific efforts of Alexander Knutsen who played Bugsy. Well done to him and to everyone who contributed so positively. I am truly grateful. I am certain we shall hear more of this talented and enthusiastic year group in the future.

I played a lot of sport at school, but not as much as Feltonfleet children do! Our real success, of course, is that every child has a team to play for on a regular basis. This is as it should be, and commendable it is, too. But unusually for a co-educational prep school of our size we provide an extraordinary range of activities. Thanks to an excellent coaching structure (which we are always looking to improve and develop) our teams perform at a high level in every sport. Seven of our rugby teams ended the term undefeated, including the senior 1st, 2nd and 3rd XV's, a remarkable record. Of 68 matches played across the school so far this season only 12 have been lost. The captain of the 1st XV, Adam Causer, has been selected for the Harlequins Junior Elite Player Development programme. Congratulations to him.

Our girls have played some excellent netball, and girls' hockey is developing powerfully, in part because of the growing influence of Richard Alexander, our resident GB hockey player and coach. Deborah Vine is working a miracle with our swimmers at every level, and recent victories have given swimming a further boost. Eight of our children have qualified for the regional Biathlon finals, and their strength in the pool was a significant factor. Do look out

for the new Swimming Academy for competitive swimmers which Colin Boxer has added to our excellent sports academy provision. You may have also noted in the recent newsletter that we are sweeping the board in prep school shooting, and the national division one .22 championship now include both of our senior shooting teams. I can't close here without thanking and congratulating Matt Rochford (Director of PE and Games) and Amanda Wright (Head of Girls Games) for their leadership and enthusiasm in making all this sporting ambition and success possible.

Rarely an assembly passes by when I don't remind the children that busy people are successful people, and that's what they need to be. Moreover, they need to extend their interest and involvement in every area of school life and go beyond the areas which are relatively easy to shine in because those opportunities are regularly and readily provided for them. Years 3 and 4 aren't the only year groups to have embraced this mantra. However, they do warrant our warm applause for committing to a sponsored read. In the process they have raised the staggering sum of £2559 to support of Gatoto School in Kenya. This incredible effort will provide 500 children at Gatoto with solar powered lamps to enable them to do their school work at home in the evenings. Outstanding. Thank you for helping us with this.

I have written on many occasions of how Sue and I strive to emphasise the community which is at the heart of our school, and which connects us all in so many different ways. Feltonfleet has evolved uniquely over the past decade as a day school with a powerful boarding ethos, and boarding, of course, remains steadfastly as the heartbeat of our community. The strength of the family ethos which makes it so was overwhelmingly apparent in the final week of the term – a hilarious evening of family games modelled around The Generation Game (at which I did very badly) and the best boarders Christmas party I can remember. To cap it all I walked away with a large tin of *Heroes*, my reward for being very patient during a riotous game known locally as the "present grab". It is astonishing how many children across the school have experienced boarding this term, and loved it, and this looks set to continue. You almost certainly know this but if you and your child would like to be amongst them, do please come and talk to Peter Harnden (peter.harnden@feltonfleet.co.uk)

Amidst all this endeavour and busyness an outsider could easily be mistaken for assuming little if anything was happening in the classrooms. Nothing could be further from the truth and in all sorts of ways this has been an excellent term in classrooms across the school. I was very pleased indeed with the general positivity of recent reports, and there are very few children who need to raise their game in January. Where this is the case the necessary meetings and target setting sessions have taken place. For the bright and eager youngsters in Year 6, and for some in Year 7, there is the claustrophobic spectre of 11 and 12+ pre-tests awaiting them in January. You know my feelings about these iniquitous and irrational intrusions into the lives of our young and enthusiastic learners. Unavoidably we have embraced the challenge, but we have maintained the broad rhythm and variety of school life essential for these young people as well. The children are working hard (and so are their teachers, and their parents!) but it will be important that they keep things ticking over during the holiday. The same is true of our Year 8 CE candidates, of course, and for all of our "examinees" an understanding that next term they need to hit the ground running from day one is non-negotiable!

We have said our farewells to some departing colleagues. Richard Beach, the Director of ICT, has joined his family in Nottinghamshire and begins a new teaching post in January; Mrs Sue Small (SENco) is relocating to Nairobi with her husband; Sarah Barford (Nursery Practitioner) moves onto pastures new; Mrs Kate Morrison (Year 1) is going on maternity leave; and our GAPS, Lauren, Kate, Drew and Ross, are now safely reunited with their families in Sydney. Our warm thanks and best wishes to them all. In the spirit of *The Feltonfleet Way*, I know that you will help Sue and I make the following new colleagues very welcome when they join us in January - Mrs Melinda Hobson (SENco); Michael Spice (ICT for two terms); Paul Sumner (Network Manager); Miss Georgina Wale (Year 1 maternity); Mrs Natalie Herbert (Nursery Practitioner); and our new GAPS, Matthew Allen, Tom Crawford, Ellen Swinsburg, and Emma Allsopp.

Administration! The eagle eyed amongst you will have noted that Spring Term calendar is on the web site already. If you haven't found it, the calendar link is;

<http://www.feltonfleet.co.uk/information/Resources/Spring%2012%20External%20Calendar.pdf>

I want to flag up here once again several important events/dates which I hope you will support if at all possible. Invitations and details will follow from my office in the New Year;

Tuesday 24th January from 7.00-8.00pm – An evening for parents with Martin Collier Esq, Headmaster, St John's School, Leatherhead (*Memorial Hall and PAC*)

Monday 6th February – 7.00-8.00pm - Drinks with Alastair Morrison – Parents of children in Years 5, 6, and 7 (*Bourne Hall*)

Tuesday 7th February – 7.30-8.30pm – Drinks with Alastair Morrison – Parents of Calvi and Years 3 and 4 children (*Bourne Hall*)

Wednesday 7th March – 6.00-8.30pm – Senior Schools Fair (*Bourne Hall*)

If next term looks especially busy and exciting, then the Summer Term 2012 will take things to another level. Shelley Guest, my excellent Deputy Head, is chairing a committee of colleagues which is generating a programme of events to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, and the 2012 Olympics. More of all this in due course. Prize Day takes place on June 30th when I am delighted our guest of honour and prize giver will be David Tait MBE. David, who will be known to some of you as a current Feltonfleet parent, has scaled Everest five times. In the process has raised vast sums for the NSPCC, a charity of which he is a Trustee. David has an amazing and inspirational story to tell. Falling close to the end of the school year, Prize Day is attended by all pupils in Years 5-8 and their parents. Separate days of celebration and activity are being held once again for Calvi (Tuesday 26th June), and the Junior Department (Thursday 28th June). Again, details will follow but I would ask that you ring fence those dates in your diaries now and support us fully on the day in question.

In the hope that this letter will resurface once the excitements of Christmas and New Year have abated, but preferably before your children return for the new term, I promised you a few notable pointers and I would ask for your support with the following, please;

Uniform – complete uniform lists for boys and girls at every level of the school are on the web site. Please kindly ensure that your child is fully equipped, and that each item of clothing is name labelled. Renewed pleas that;

- Boys must wear our uniform sock
- Jewellery is not permitted
- School shoes must be of the black polishable kind (and polished!)
- School fleeces can be worn during the school day (and strongly advisable in the colder weather), but not to and fro school instead of a blazer. In the main school blazers must be worn at the beginning and end of each school day

Hair – heightened and renewed pleas that;

- Boys should return with their hair smart, tidy and off the collar!
- Girls should wear their hair tied back

Pupil absence – we have a clear and well documented practice and routine for notifying the school of your child's absence through illness; that dental treatment should take place whenever possible in holiday time; and that requests for absence to go on holiday in term time are not at all well received! The holidays are long enough!

Saturday fixtures – a superfluous reminder that any Feltonfleet pupil selected for a Saturday fixture is required to fulfil that commitment. “No shows” have a very negative impact on many others, not least the team and my colleagues who coach them. I would ask for your full support on this, please.

A word, too, about communications. As many of you are aware, we strive to get our communications spot on. If there should ever be an occasion when you have felt this isn't the case, you must make me aware. Perhaps I can add to this my oft made plea that if there is anything at all which is bothering you, or your child, and perhaps the normal lines of communication haven't resolved things positively, do get in touch with me. Above all, please let me/us know if there is anything at all which is concerning you, and don't assume we know of the problem. In my experience we can move rapidly to resolve an anxiety successfully if you work with us openly and constructively, and frustration and uncertainty are no longer the twin monkeys!

A fantastic term in so many respects ended with a final assembly festooned with celebration and commendation. I was delighted to present Headmaster's Colours to five young people in Year 8 who in their own, individual and invariably modest and discrete ways have demonstrated special qualities this term. Well done to Connor Crompton, Isaac Rogers, Tom Tweedie-Smith, Louisa Watkins, and Vicky Morgan. And, as I said at the same assembly, my considerable thanks to four really excellent senior pupils - my Heads of School, Tom and Maddie, and their deputies, Felix and Natalie. Their leadership and support of this Headmaster and his staff has been exemplary.

The start of the academic year saw the launch of our school wide commitment to a new way of framing a Feltonfleet education, the 3PL's – Positive Learning, Living and Leading – seen through the lens of our four school values of Responsibility, Respect, Honesty and Happiness. We have worked relentlessly to establish the culture and way of being which goes with all this, and the net result in a term is that Feltonfleet is a flourishing community. The reasons for this are clear enough to me. I am reminded of Pope Roncalli who was asked, "How many people work in the Vatican?" and he replied "Oh, about half!" The Feltonfleet community (all of it) works incredibly hard all the time – pupils, staff and parents, and my thanks again for the tireless efforts of the *Friends of Feltonfleet* again this year. But let me round things off by underlining the extraordinary commitment and energy of my staff this term. They are an inspirational team, and a privilege to lead. I salute every single one of them.

One of my most important tasks in 2012 is to appoint a successor to Sue Ward as Assistant Head (Lower School). The plan is in place, and I will be advertising the post in the national press as term commences. I am certain that we shall attract an excellent field of candidates. Until then a good rest awaits us all.

Sue and I wish you all a very happy Christmas, and a safe and successful New Year. Thanks, as ever, for your support in 2011. We fully intend that 2012 will be even more memorable and successful for the community.

With best wishes

Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John', written in a cursive style.