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Shrewsbury School

The Schools
Shrewsbury
SY3 7BA

December 2011

Dear Parents,

I am delighted to have this opportunity to write at the conclusion to what will be seen, in many respects, to have been an historic term in the centuries-old evolution of Shrewsbury School.

It now seems almost a 'geological epoch' away, but it was only a few months ago that the school opened for the new academic year by launching our thirteenth house, Emma Darwin Hall. As I mentioned in my end of term assembly, it is a great tribute to Mrs Kait Weston and her pioneering girls that Emma Darwin Hall has already established such strong roots and proved to be an outstanding success. The start of term also saw the arrival of a record number of new boys, which meant that our total school roll rose to an all-time high of just under 750 pupils. As the term has progressed, it is very apparent that the vast majority of our almost 200 new pupils have settled in extremely well. This is, in my view, a great testament to the strength of the house system at Shrewsbury.

The confidence engendered by this strong position emboldened the Governors at their strategy meeting, held in London on 15th September, to unanimously endorse a new development plan, or '2020 Vision'. The main features of this plan are:

1. A raft of measures to 'reinforce and enhance' the school's academic reputation and to ensure that all Salopians are encouraged to meet their full potential.
2. The decision to move to full co-education at all levels, with effect from September 2014. This decision was regarded as almost inevitable, given the success of co-education at Sixth Form level and the positive contribution which the girls have demonstrated over the years since their arrival in 2008.
3. A significant programme of capital investment, aimed at improving our stock of facilities and infrastructure to ensure that we remain genuinely competitive against the other leading boarding schools in the county. Over the next eight years – the lifetime of our development plan, it is proposed to commit approximately £16 million of investment to:
 - A new academic teaching block and state-of-the-art Communications and Design & Technology facilities. This should ensure a cascade effect, which will benefit all other faculties within the school.
 - A new sports hall, extension and refurbishment of our indoor facilities and artificial surfaces.
 - An expansion and refurbishment of the Ashton Theatre.
 - A refurbished Learning Resource facility, possibly within the context of the Moser Library.

Whilst the funding of some of these projects will need to come from a major capital appeal, it is exciting to begin to plan for the future.

Academic Rigour

Whilst, no doubt, many of your sons and daughters will have returned exhausted after their exertions this term, I am afraid that there is no rest for the wicked! Many of our boys and girls will be facing public examinations early in January, together with the entire Fifth Form, who will be sitting mock exams immediately on return to school next term. It will be important, therefore, that, as well as re-charging batteries and catching up on sleep, a certain amount of background revision is completed to ensure that each candidate returns in a fit state to demonstrate their real potential.

I should also mention that the GCSE grades needed for Sixth Form entry have been the subject of considerable debate at many levels, including by the Governors themselves. I confirm that the school will be maintaining the requirement for five B grades as the qualification for transfer from the Fifth Form into the Sixth Form. This is significantly below some of our leading competitors and regarded by many as a minimum qualification for any pupil to be able to stand a realistic chance of A level success. We feel that, in the interests of transparency and within the aim of wishing to be fair to all candidates, it is appropriate that this policy is stated clearly at this stage.

Oxbridge

I should like to take this opportunity to wish our 43 Oxbridge candidates every success with their interviews.

Town Leave

Over the course of the last few weeks of term, the Housemasters' Committee and other groups have discussed the school's approach to 'Town Leave'. My own view is that access to Shrewsbury town is a major advantage that we enjoy as a school. Compared to many schools in rural or isolated settings, the ability to access the services of the town, which is attractive, close and relatively safe, is a significant advantage. That said, I believe that our rules are 'overly generous' at present. It is apparent that some 'minimalist' Salopians may take advantage of rules that are meant to be generous and flexible, on the assumption that they are not abused. As we reach conclusions about whether to amend our 'Town Leave' rules or not, I shall value the thoughts and opinions of any parents who wish to offer them. I should be grateful if you would email comments to townleave@shrewsbury.org.uk.

Parents' Meetings 2012

The Third Form parents' meeting at the beginning of the Summer term, on Monday 16th April, will be preceded by a talk on elements of e-safety. There will also be a talk before the Fourth Form parents' meeting on Monday 7th May, given by a representative of the local police force.

Parents are encouraged to attend the talk prior to both the Third and Fourth Form parents' meetings. The talk will commence at 6.00 p.m. and will be held in the Ashton Theatre. Their sons will attend a separate talk beginning at 7.00 p.m.

The programme of parent/teacher consultations for the Lent and Summer terms is as follows:

UPPER SIXTH

Monday 30th January (End of Coach Weekend) 7.00 p.m. Kingsland Hall
Pupils accompany their parents to this meeting. Purpose: A Level prospects.

LOWER SIXTH

Saturday 11th February (Beginning of Exeat)
Parents with Headmaster and Head of Careers 10.00 a.m. Ashton Theatre
Parents with teachers and pupils 11.00 a.m. Kingsland Hall
Purpose: To discuss progress and Further Education.

FIFTH FORM

Sunday 11th March (End of Coach Weekend) 7.00 p.m. Kingsland Hall
Boys accompany their parents to this meeting. Purpose: To discuss progress to GCSE and AS Level choices.

THIRD FORM

Monday 16th April (Beginning of Term)
Talk to parents 6.00 p.m. Ashton Theatre
Parents with teachers 7.00 p.m. **(venue to be confirmed)**
Boys are not present at this meeting. Purpose: To meet the teachers, general progress and choices for GCSE.

FOURTH FORM

Monday 7th May (End of Coach Weekend)
Talk to parents 6.00 p.m. Ashton Theatre
Parents with teachers 7.00 p.m. Kingsland Hall
Boys are not present at this meeting. Purpose: General progress.

Carol Services and the Chapel Choir

As many of you know, the last week or two of term is normally associated with a hectic programme of concerts and Chapel services. The Michaelmas term is particularly frenetic with three Carol Services. I should just like to pay public tribute to our Director of Chapel Music, Mr Alex Mason, together with our Chapel Choir, who have worked exceptionally hard to hone their skills and increase their repertoire of music. I hope those of you who were fortunate enough to gain tickets for the Carol Services felt that the contribution of the Choir was as uplifting as it was impressive.

Boat House

At the end of term assembly, I was delighted to be able to announce that the long-awaited development of the Boat House has now actually started. We are most grateful to generous benefactors within the Old Salopian community for providing a considerable portion of the £750,000 that will be required to extend, refurbish and enhance our Boat House facilities at the river. This project is being launched at the perfect time as, on the back of recent recruiting initiatives, the number of rowers – both boys and girls, stands at an all-time high. Judging by some notable successes in the early ‘Head of the River’ races of the season, it is fair to assume that Shrewsbury crews will be realistic contenders for silverware in a number of the leading national competitions. After a period of construction over the spring and early summer, we very much look forward to formally opening the Boat House with due pomp and ceremony – perhaps by an Olympic medal winner, on the second Saturday of term, in September. (More details to be announced in due course.)

The Grove

Many of you will have heard, further to the announcement about our move to full co-education, that, at their meeting held on 26th November, the Governors decided that The Grove will convert to accommodate girls with effect from September 2014. The impact of this decision on existing members of The Grove community has, as I am sure you will all understand, been considerable. We are now involved in a detailed process of consultation with individual year-group parents, the latest round of which are scheduled for Monday 9th January. At these consultations, we will be exploring ways of minimising the negative impacts of disruption and putting in place the very best arrangements to ensure that current Grove boys are well catered for, either within their existing house or quickly assimilated into a new boarding house. During my consultations with them, the Grove boys themselves have been very dignified in their response to this news. I look forward to working with all members of the Grove community to establish the very best way forward in the circumstances during the course of 2012.

Shrewsbury International School, Bangkok

You may recall that in my last newsletter I mentioned that Shrewsbury International School, although not directly inundated, was greatly affected by the flood crisis which has occurred in Thailand over the course of the last few months. I am sure you will be relieved to know that flood waters have now receded and that the school operation has returned to normal. I shall be seeking an alternative date to visit Shrewsbury International School as soon as practicable during the course of 2012.

Senior Leadership Team

Over the course of the last few months, I have been preparing and appointing a Senior Leadership Team to take over in September 2012 on the retirements of Mr Peter Fanning (Senior Master) and Mr Robin Case (Registrar), and the move of Mr Chris Conway (Head of Careers and Director of Staff Training) to pioneer the school’s new ‘Learning for Life’ Faculty and to assist the Old Salopians in developing their ‘Career Network’.

I am delighted to announce the appointments of Mr Paul Vicars as Deputy Head Pastoral and Mrs Sara Hankin as Deputy Head Staffing (Academic). We will be appointing a Director of Admissions early in 2012.

Website News and Electronic Communication

On an almost daily basis the website is updated with a constant stream of news regarding the achievements of our pupils and the school as a whole. There are also details of important dates, some of which have been recently confirmed, not least Speech Day - the final day of the Summer term 2012, which is now Saturday 7th July. I do not wish to duplicate this process, but would urge you all to check the website regularly for information about what is going on at ‘The Schools’.

Similarly, more and more we are reliant on our weekly e-bulletins to convey important information, announcements and plans. Please ensure that you have access to these bulletins to remain in touch with what is going on. If you do not have access to computer facilities, please let us know so that we can make arrangements for 'hard' copies to be sent to you via traditional mail, which is both slow and expensive.

As always, this letter comes with very best wishes to all Salopian families for Christmas and the New Year.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MKS', with a horizontal line underneath it.