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Shrewsbury School

The Schools
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Dear Parents and Guardians,

With Christmas, snow and the first few cases of 'flu behind us, it is wonderful to be able to cry 'Happy New Year!' to you all. 2018 looks to be an exciting year of change, transition and enormous opportunity.

At my first whole-school assembly of term, I was able to refer to correspondence that was unearthed during the course of the Christmas holidays. I found a package of my school reports from Rossall in 1978, together with other bits of school administration that had obviously been squirreled away by my parents for future reference. Amongst the small pile of documents was the fasti, the school calendar for the Lent term 1978. I found it fascinating to read through the documents and reflect on forty years of rapid change. The first thing that struck me was the directness of the school reports. No sugar coating back in 1978. Indeed, the style could best be summarised as 'pithy acerbism' *'Turner has a tendency to laziness, which will not serve him well'...* *'If he could improve his grammatical detail, he might make a half-decent historian'*, and the report that finally sounded the death knell of my musical career on the French horn, *'A lack of meaningful practice has held back what little talent may have been lurking beneath the surface.'* Over the last forty years educational fashions and expectations have obviously changed. Now, we are told at any good teacher training establishment, every negative should be presented as a positive, everything possible should be done to develop fragile confidence and you should never, ever state that an individual does not have talent or potential, even though the facts might suggest otherwise.

Of even more extreme contrast was a comparison of the Rossall School calendar with today's Shrewsbury School fasti. Back in the day, the calendar was one fold-out piece of card, many days throughout the term showed that nothing of significance happened, other than 'routine'. Most of the school activities revolved around sport, with little attention to academic extension, music, art, drama, etc. Even a casual comparison must accept the obvious that over the course of forty years school life has become infinitely more complicated, with the diverse range of choices and opportunities available to pupils increasing exponentially. No wonder that balancing pressure and stress is emerging as the new 'key skill' for today's students.

Already, a theme for 2018 seems to be emerging, which could perhaps be summarised as 'less is more'. As Elizabeth and I start to plan to reduce our entire stock of material possessions to a small container, to be ferried 5,000 miles around the world, it is a strangely liberating experience to have to jettison the accumulated clutter that has been the result of living in very large headmasters' houses for over twenty-five years. We are told by the style gurus that 'reductive design' and minimalism are set to re-assert themselves against a backdrop of frenetic busyness and increasing complexity. For us here, at The Schools, paring away the excess and identifying what is really important seems to be a good quest for our last six months.

Over that period of time, we have two significant anniversaries to look forward to. On 6th February, we will be celebrating the passing of the Representation of the People's Act. This transformative Act of Parliament, extending suffrage to women over thirty, for the first time, has marked a century of rapid progress in the march towards equality. For my part, observing our growing band of talented girls asserting their authority with rising confidence has been one of the most rewarding aspects of the last few years.

In the Summer term, we will be celebrating the 200th anniversary of the arrival, as a pupil at Shrewsbury School, of the young Charles Darwin. Once again, this significant anniversary will allow us to applaud those aspects of a Shrewsbury education that encourage individual thinking and intellectual curiosity. As a celebration of all things Darwinian, we hope to be able to welcome a member of the Darwin family as our Guest of Honour at Speech Day.

At the beginning of term assembly, I presented to the school two significant changes which we will be working through over the next few months. Partly as a response to David Attenborough's moving 'Blue Planet' series, we have been mobilised into doing our bit to try and reduce our plastic footprint. Horrifying statistics show that last year Salopians contributed to a mountain of 33,000, or more, plastic bottles. An initiative, moved through the School Council, has led to every Salopian being issued with a re-fillable plastic water bottle. It will be an individual's responsibility to ensure that they bring the full water bottle to every occasion when they may require fluid.

We are also re-asserting, at the beginning of this calendar year, the fairly dramatic change to our Mobile Phone Policy, which was instigated at the beginning of last term. Members of the school are not permitted to use their 'phones in public places around the school during normal working hours. Whilst there will be plenty of time to check one's social media status in private and at other times, we believe that the school day should be a time when we are prepared to interact as a community on an individual basis. We will see how we get on!

Lastly, but by no means least, I should like to draw your attention to the Shrewsbury School Parents' Association Ball, which will be taking place at the end of term, on the evening of Friday 23rd March. This year's theme is 'The Enchanted Forest' and, if previous events are anything to go by, it promises to be a wonderful occasion. Tickets cost £70 per head and can be obtained from the School Receptionist, Dawn Dunn (dldunn@shrewsbury.org.uk). I would encourage you to book early to avoid disappointment, as tickets tend to go very quickly!

For now, very best wishes to you for 2018.

Yours sincerely,

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