

17th June 2010

Dear Parents,

DEVELOPMENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 2010

As you would expect, I have had a most interesting and enjoyable time getting to know the School during this, my first, year as Head. In 2006, the School impressed me enough to want to lead it and I am more certain than ever that Gateways is a remarkable and special community.

Our ethos, aims and vision underpin all that we do. You will recall that, in the autumn term, we sought your views and comments on a number of school matters by means of a questionnaire and we are grateful for your detailed responses; we also consulted at this time with governors, staff and pupils. The ISI inspection team, visiting in December, aided this process of school review and evaluation by providing insightful feedback and clear recommended actions. I am now pleased to inform you of the advancements that we will introduce in September to ensure that we continue to provide an educational experience of the highest calibre for all our pupils and students.

ACADEMIC CURRICULUM.

In response to the main inspection recommendation, we will operate a two week timetable throughout the school, consisting of weeks 1 and 2 as indicated in the calendar and pupil planner. There will be six lessons per day, with each lesson of the duration of 55 minutes. Our aims are to increase pupil-teacher contact time, to develop further a wider variety of teaching and learning strategies and to implement a timetable that allows greater flexibility to support the day to day life of a busy school. Reduced movement around school for fewer lessons will ensure that our time during the school day is focussed on learning. In High School, lessons will be evenly distributed through the day with two before morning break, two between morning break and lunch and two in the afternoon. The day will begin at 8.40am with registration; the first lesson will begin at 8.50am; assembly will follow the first two lessons, and will be just before morning break. School will finish, as now, with registration at 3.50pm and departure at 4.00pm.

The two week timetable is also being adopted in Preparatory School, although this will have a minimal effect on the children's routine. The school day will begin at 8.40am with registration, and will also be divided into six lessons per day. The Prep day will finish at the existing time of 3.50pm; Reception, Lower 1 and Transition will continue to finish at 3.15pm and Pre-Reception class will finish at 3.00pm. The sessions in the Gatehouse Nursery will operate the same as now.

To strengthen the breadth and balance of our curriculum, Thinking Skills and Personal Finance are to be introduced for Middle School pupils (U3, L4 and U4). A Performing Arts course will be timetabled fortnightly to allow the Drama and Music departments to work collaboratively throughout the year. 'Stepping Up' days are to be introduced into the Middle School curriculum to provide the opportunity for the three year groups to work and learn together, focussing on cross-curricular themes such as 'Solutions for the Planet' and Globalisation.

Our Upper 4 pupils will continue to commence their study of the IGCSE courses in Science and Mathematics. Currently, all senior pupils are required to study a non-examinable course in both ICT and Religious Studies and are not entered for a formal qualification from this course of study. From September, it would be our hope that all pupils will achieve, at least, a short course GCSE qualification in both ICT and Religious Studies by commencing this study in the Upper 4 year, with most girls achieving a full GCSE qualification in both subjects .

In the Sixth Form, we aim to ensure that our students are positioned strongly, both academically and personally, so that they may progress smoothly into their chosen life and work beyond our gates. We are, therefore, developing further our provision in anticipation of the increased competition for university entrance and the world of work. Sport and Exercise will be offered as an integral part of the core curriculum for all. In Lower 6th, all students will be offered the opportunity to extend their AS subject learning (and increase their UCAS points) by choosing to study courses in either AS Citizenship or AS Critical Thinking. The successful enrichment programme will continue to run throughout the Sixth Form. Following the highly successful pilot of the Extended Project Qualification in 2010, the tutored skills unit will now be integrated into the core curriculum and students will have the option to qualify (and gain even more UCAS points) by entering for the examination at the end of the course in the Upper Sixth year. We are proud of our recent approval and accreditation as an appropriate centre to offer the AQA Baccalaureate; this will be piloted in 2010-2011 and then, following review, it is planned to extend this opportunity to students in 2011-2012, giving them the opportunity to maximise their UCAS point score.

At the other end of the age spectrum, in the Preparatory School, Games and PE afternoons are being introduced for Upper 1 to Lower 3, with fixtures taking place during this time. Learning in the Transition and Lower 1 classes will continue to be supported by one of our experienced Classroom Assistants. The Upper 1 class will continue to be taught in two separate ability sets for both English and Mathematics. The PSHE course will include 'Learning to Learn' themes to aid the development of pupils' independent learning. ICT will be timetabled as a distinct lesson and it will continue to be implemented as a teaching and learning tool to support all areas of the curriculum.

In September, Mrs Bartle will be referred to as Head of Early Years, with the Upper Reception class renamed as Reception and the current Lower Reception classes renamed as Pre-Reception class. 'Exploratory Learning' and 'Investigative Experiences' will form the basis of all learning activities. During the summer break, the entrance into the Watson building will be adapted for use by Reception and Transition class pupils and their parents, providing a much needed second entrance and exit for Littlegates. The spacious foyer area will accommodate the newly expanded Early Years Library and quiet learning space.

ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

We are planning to report more regularly to parents, informing on your daughter's target grades, attainment and effort at half termly intervals. There will continue to be an annual academic report to parents, although as this will have a formative rather than summative purpose, it will be issued mid- year. We will also introduce review and target setting days for students and pupils to meet with their form tutor for an extended personal dialogue and we aim to involve pupils more in the assessment, monitoring and evaluation of their learning and progress. The majority of our Parent Consultation evenings will continue to take place in the spring term of the academic year, although

as always, we would wish you to contact us at any time if you wish to discuss an academic matter. At the end of the academic year, following examinations, we will report examination performance to you, accompanied by a pastoral letter from your daughter's Form Tutor. The current grading system is under review at Academic Committee, with the aim of implementing a simplified system that links more closely to GCSE and A Level examination grading. The Higher Education application process will involve a final interview/meeting between the applicant and myself prior to the submission to UCAS of their application. In the Prep School, we have completed the first year of a new assessment and reporting schedule; we welcome your feedback on this.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITY

As a whole school, we will also be striving for accreditation to recognise our work as a 'Healthy School', a 'Thinking School' and an 'International School' by achieving national award status. We will also continue to uphold proudly our Eco – School award, not least through the successful development and expansion of our Green Gateways Breakfast Club.

Our varied and broad extra-curricular programme will be expanded even further to include the 'Cambodia 2012' expedition...an amazing experience for the 38 girls who have applied to participate. Language learning will be extended by offering a beginner's course in Mandarin and senior girls will have the opportunity of adding to their GCSE qualifications by studying Latin in the 'twilight' hours of the school day.

UNIFORM

We want the appearance of our pupils to reflect their high calibre and a sense of pride so have planned some refinements for introduction in September:-

- Sixth Form students will be required to wear tailored suits with collared blouses and appropriate footwear. Suits may be either trouser or skirt suits but the shortest length of skirt must be just above the knee, please.
- A new skirt is being introduced for pupils entering High School in Upper 3, representing a gradual phasing out of the current skirt. The new skirt will also be phased into the Prep. School but to be worn with red jumpers, reducing the cost of uniform on transfer from Prep to High School.
- A new High School summer blouse has been requested and selected by the School Council.
- The wearing of ties, with winter uniform, shall continue as voted by the School Council.
- High School pupils will be permitted to wear a plain black coat to and from school in winter.
- An optional underarmour garment is to be added to the High School PE kit.
- There will be a new, modern fleece-lined waterproof coat in Prep. School to replace the grey duffle coat. This will be phased in as duffle coats are outgrown.
- There will also be a new pinafore, in the Gateways black and red material, for girls in Early Years, Transition and Lower 1, that will also be phased in as new pinafores need to be purchased.

PASTORAL CARE

On the pastoral front, the role of the form tutor is to expand to place the tutor at the heart of our effective care. The new structure of the day and new assembly rota will provide increased opportunities for the form tutor to meet with his/her form group. In addition to daily registration,

there will be two separate sessions per week when they are scheduled to meet; these 'form times', together with a 55 minute PSHE lesson per week, will ensure the excellent provision of care continues; the form tutor will know all aspects of their pupils' character, ambitions, strengths, weaknesses and extracurricular programmes. Mrs Burton, as Deputy Head, will continue to lead the pastoral system throughout the High School, supported by Mr Davison as Pastoral Head of Sixth Form, Mrs Holmes as Pastoral Head of Upper School (Fifth Form) and Mrs Woods as Pastoral Head of Middle School (U3, L4 and U4). In the Prep, Littlegates and the Gatehouse nursery, the Class teacher and Early Years staff know your child well and are your contacts; we would encourage you to talk with them either at the start or end of a school day to ensure that 'molehills' don't become 'mountains'.

Mrs Hetmanski, a trained counsellor who currently works with the Samaritans organisation, will act as a 'Confidential Listener', strengthening the pastoral system further.

The current thriving House spirit and system will be strengthened further by weekly House meetings; Houses will be sub-divided into smaller mixed age working groups to promote interaction and integration between the years and all charity fundraising and Community Outreach will be channelled through the House system. Our House Leaders will be Miss Fox for Beningbrough, Dr Newton for Harewood and Ms Ashurst for Newby. Mrs Foster will be responsible for the effective co-ordination, organisation and leadership of the House system, liaising with Mrs Wilcox, Head of Prep. School

SCHOOL PREMISES

We are, indeed, blessed to have a well presented, clean and tidy school in a beautiful location. To enhance our facilities further, Littlegates will expand its learning space into the Watson building foyer, thereby providing two entrances, a library and quiet learning area. It would be good to install signage to identify this key department, and the Prep School, within the school campus. Classroom W4 will be the Technology (textiles) teaching base. The former External Relations office will be equipped and furnished to provide additional study space and ICT to support an enlarged Sixth Form. The current Information Exchange will also be designated as ICT study support for the sole use of the Sixth Form students, with the existing study room in Schofield converted into another ICT teaching classroom for High School. A new school reception area will be developed in the Dower House. In addition, there is a need to undertake routine painting of windows, doors, gable ends etc to maintain the excellent presentation of the School. The EYFS outdoor area has been improved to provide a splendid child-friendly garden, with wonderful animal carvings and a gold mine! The Prep School Park has also been enhanced by the addition of musical instruments and an 'Alice in Wonderland' style story corner. With the generous support of funding from FOG, we are purchasing a school minibus, enabling us to provide transport for school events and activities.

STAFFING

The end of an academic year is a time of mixed emotions, not least because we bid a fond farewell to some members of our community; our Upper Sixth students 'graduate' from Gateways and progress to all the excitement of university life...we wish them well. Some teaching staff will also be moving on to 'pastures new' and they leave with my very grateful thanks for all that they have given so generously to our school and pupils. It was the author, D H Lawrence, who referred to teaching as 'the noblest of professions'; my colleagues at Gateways testify to this. I am personally

appreciative of the support and kindness that I have received as the new Head. We look forward to extending this warm welcome to new colleagues who will be joining us in September; Mrs Alison McKeefry and Mr Marcus Dalrymple have been successfully appointed to teach English Literature and English Language, and Mr Philip Walker to teach Business Studies and Economics. I am confident that they are going to love working at Gateways!

LEADERSHIP

All teaching members of the Leadership Group will undertake an enhanced teaching responsibility. Mrs Burton, as Deputy Head, will continue to lead the Pastoral system, act as the link teacher for the School Council, co-ordinate and lead the Professional Review and Development system and be responsible for the smooth and effective day to day organisation of the whole school. Mrs McDermott, as Assistant Head, will have an academic focus, leading the development and implementation of the curriculum and assessment and develop further the high quality of teaching and learning throughout the High School. Mrs Wilcox, as Head of Prep School, shall be responsible for the day to day running of both Prep School and Early Years, assisted by Mrs Bartle as Head of Early Years and Mrs Brown as Director of Studies, and will have whole school responsibility for the leadership of the Professional Development of all staff. Ms Rachel Thornton joins the Governing body, bringing her expertise in marketing and PR to benefit our school.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Throughout all of this, we will continue to value highly our partnership with you. It is only by school and home working closely and supportively together that your daughters and sons can achieve their potential. We welcome your involvement in school life and are delighted to offer some new opportunities for you, for example, Open Mornings every Friday; Reception parents will be able to sign up to observe Reception lessons until 10.30am one day each week. May I also take this opportunity to encourage you to join our mixed voice choir of staff, parents and friends 'Schola Portas'?

I look forward to the excitement that, inevitably, the next academic year will bring. The dedication and commitment of the Leadership Group and all staff is second to none; the students, pupils and children are an absolute pleasure to work with. I am both privileged and honoured to lead this outstanding school; I assure you of my unstinting commitment to your child's educational experience and to providing pupils with the very best....they deserve nothing less!

Yours sincerely

Mrs Y Wilkinson
Headmistress