



13 January 2010

To Parents of the HLC Group of Schools

Dear Parent

As I write, Christmas is over, a new calendar year has begun and we are battling with the effects of the most severe winter since, I am told, 1947 or 1962-3. Whatever, it's certainly cold, and I am very grateful to everyone – colleague, pupil and parent - who is struggling man/womanfully to keep the show on the road!

The time seems to have flown by since the new school year began and it is hard to believe that it is over four months since I wrote my first letter to parents.

The final weeks of the term were very special and busy for all of us with parties, nativities, Christmas Shows and Carol Services on top of our normal routines. It was splendid to see so many parents supporting the children and, as always, we were pleased to see you. Our delightful Chapel looked at its best with a beautifully decorated Christmas Tree.

***Departures and arrivals***

Sadly, we said goodbye to a number of staff in December, most notably Mrs Amanda Hickling who left College after 29 years of service to take up the post of Head of Boarding at Queen Mary's School, Thirsk. Amanda has had significant pastoral responsibility here and has been an able and dedicated teacher. She is a credit to the profession and we wish her well for the future.

Our thanks also go to Mr Stephen Johnson who taught Physics here for one term, and to Mrs Leona Heimfeld who worked in the Drama and Classics Departments on a voluntary basis.

With departures come arrivals and we are delighted to welcome three members of staff to College. Miss Joanne Cuthbert is the new Head of Support for Learning, Miss Bethyn Barrass is covering Mrs Helen Stansfield's maternity cover in the PE Department and Miss Pamela Jones is the new Assistant Housemistress in Lincoln. Mrs Jackie Davison will be Acting Head of Lower School during Mrs Stansfield's absence and Miss Catherine Blake is Acting Head of Lancaster House.

Miss Cuthbert, a Food Technology teacher by training, and with a lot of experience of supporting pupils both pastorally and with their learning in the international and girls' schools sectors, will be a significant addition to the strength of the staff. Bethyn Barrass likewise has experience of the international and girls' schools sectors and is a serious lacrosse player and coach. Both Miss Cuthbert and Miss Barrass have

worked in boarding and 2-18 schools. Miss Jones already teaches swimming at the School and, as a former pupil of Queenswood School, has personal experience of boarding. Mrs Davison is already known to you through her work as a German and French teacher and as an Upper Five Tutor. We would also like to welcome Irene Finnie back to Highfield to teach French.

I should also inform you that Mrs Carole Cameron has been appointed to the post of Deputy Head at Queen Margaret's School, York and will be leaving us in July 2010. As you know, Carole has served the School well, both in the secondary and preparatory age groups over a number of years. Her appointment provides us with an opportunity to reconsider the managerial structure of the School and we will plan to do this in the near future. I shall, of course, keep all our parents fully informed about the process.

Some parents may be aware that our Bursar, Mr Jeremy Gibson, has been absent due to illness since the beginning of December. In the interim period, the Bursary staff and myself are dealing with any bursarial issues. If there is a matter of importance, please in the first instance contact the Assistant Bursar, Mrs Jennie Horner.

### ***Academic issues***

I am delighted to be able to inform you that four girls in the Upper Sixth have been offered places at Oxford and Cambridge, and one other is in the pool for Cambridge selection. Emilie Lambert has secured an offer to read Physics at Wadham College, Oxford; Joanna Demaree-Cotton a place at Somerville College, Oxford to read Psychology, Philosophy and Physiology; Charlotte Callinan a place at Murray Edwards College (formerly New Hall College), Cambridge and Amanda Lee a place at Newnham College, Cambridge to study Mathematics. Saudah Zulkfli has been placed in the pool at Cambridge for Engineering. This is an excellent achievement for the girls, their families, their teachers and the School. I should also append a brief note of commiseration with those girls who had Oxbridge interviews but who were not offered places. In these times, gaining an interview is no longer a formality so they will have gained from the experience and be aware that they have achieved much in being considered for a place at Oxbridge. Moreover, they are amongst the many girls in the Upper Sixth who are being made offers from a significant number of the other Russell Group universities and Durham. (The Russell Group, which includes Oxbridge, Imperial, LSE and UCL and sixteen other universities, is generally regarded as Britain's higher education elite, although Durham is not actually a member of the group.) All this indicates the strength of HLC as an academic school.

We have received exciting news about two of our former pupils recently. Laura Winwood, who left HLC in July 2006 has become the President of Oxford Union, and Lucy Smith, last year's Head Girl, has been awarded a Vice Chancellor's Scholarship at Durham University. Whilst talking about achievement, I should also at this stage mention that my newsletter last term omitted in error Victoria Martin's name as an outstanding performer at GCSE in August 2009. Victoria, along with Lucy Welch, Molly Powderley, Sophie Stott, Eleanor Pick and Alice Bainbridge, attained 51 A\*s and 17 As between them! Our results last Summer have now been acknowledged by [www.best-schools.co.uk](http://www.best-schools.co.uk) and this week the School received a certificate putting us in

the top 50 Independent Girls' Boarding Schools in the country for academic attainment.

Academically, this is a very important term for Prep 6, Upper 5 and Upper 6 pupils and I sense that everyone is determined to achieve the best they can in the Entrance Examination, mocks and forthcoming public examinations. We have a very healthy interest at 11+ and I know the Upper 5 and Upper 6 can see the need to work hard to be fully prepared for the next few, critical months. It is worth noting that the Spring Term, especially the second half term, is very short and this means we will have to keep a close eye on time management. However, the first half of the Summer Term is a little longer than usual so this helps balance things out for our external examination candidates.

The mock examinations started on Monday, 11 January and some of the Upper 6 have some external examinations too. During the course of the term there will also be internal A2 assessments for Upper 6 pupils. All coursework assignments have to be completed before we break up for Easter on 24 March. The run-up to public examinations is a challenging and exciting time. The potential rewards for GCSE and A level candidates are great. Results gained at GCSE have significant bearing on prospects when applying to university, particularly when applying to Oxbridge and Russell Group universities. Results at A level really matter as courses at top institutions are highly competitive. We trust that everyone will set to in good heart, and we know that parents will do everything they can to encourage their daughter to work hard, just as we will.

This is also a busy term for decision making too. Prep 6 boys will be visiting prospective secondary schools. The Upper 4 and Upper 5 will be making their choices for GCSE and A level options respectively. The Upper 4 Options Evening for parents and pupils is on 28 January and in the next few weeks I will be interviewing all Upper 5 girls about their aspirations for Sixth Form at HLC and beyond.

Parents' meetings at HLC to discuss academic progress and targets for improvement are held this half term:

- Upper 5 and Upper 6                      30 January
- Lower 5 and Lower 6                      12 February
- Upper 4                                        5 March

Parents' meetings in Highfield this term are:

- Reception, Prep 1 and Prep 2            1 March and 3 March
- Prep 3 and Prep 4                          4 March and 8 March
- Prep 5 and Prep 6                          15 March and 17 March

### ***A gripe***

I am afraid I must re-state our views about pupils missing school to go on holiday. As you will know, the School, as any school would, disapproves of children being taken out of class to fit in with parental holidays. As a boarding school, our holidays are long and for the vast majority of people it ought to be possible to accommodate their

own family holidays within them. It is always our aim to end terms on high notes with important whole School events and their success depends on the participation of all pupils. Moreover, unnecessary absence can affect academic progress and subtly affect a child's attitude to education.

### ***Wider life***

There is, of course, more to education than academic results and it was wonderful to see all the pupils participating in a wide range of activities and opportunities last term across the whole school.

Our first musical soirée was an excellent occasion which was very well attended by parents and friends. It showed the exciting range of musical talent we have at HLC. Some of our girls are quite outstanding musicians and we are looking at ways of allowing them to perform more frequently and in a wider variety of contexts than has been the case formerly. The event owes much to the leadership of our new Director of Music, Mrs Kate Morgan.

During the Autumn Term Highfield celebrated 10 happy and successful years with a birthday party in September and a most enjoyable open morning in November, coupled with the Duchy Exhibition.

Particular successes in sports last term were achieved by teams and individuals alike. Sarah Milne in Upper 6 continues to compete successfully with the England Badminton Squad and Brie Grierson in Lower 4 has been selected for the U19 National Netball Talent Squad – at the age of 12! Sixth formers Hannah Lowther and Fabienne Johnson have both been selected for the National Centre of Excellence for Lacrosse and the U14 Netball team have had a very good term indeed. They were runners-up in the Harrogate and District Tournament. This qualified them for the County Tournament which they won – this was a fantastic achievement and is only the second time we have reached this stage. They now go to the Regional Round on Saturday, 30 January and if they finish in the top two, they qualify for the National finals.

None of these opportunities would be possible without the support and dedication of my colleagues throughout the School and I am very grateful to them for all their efforts.

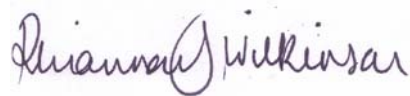
I thoroughly enjoyed my first term at HLC and have enormously appreciated the support and warmth of the parents, pupils, colleagues and wider community. I am delighted that a number of parents have personally visited the School to talk with me. I am committed to the vision of our school being the best of its kind in the area, offering opportunities for academic and extra-curricular excellence and personal and social growth. I think that we have made a promising start on our journey to be one of the country's leading educational establishments. First of all, as one staff we have been working on clarifying our identity and planning for the future. We have explored and identified our shared values. Now we are in the process of outlining a strategic plan for the future which will be ratified by the Governors in due course. The Strategic Plan will act as a guide to what we will be trying to do over the next few years.

I hope that some improvements are already visible. I would like to think that we have already improved the quality of communication between School and home. We have obtained much favourable publicity about the College in the last few months, enabling us to spread the word about our qualities. For too long we have tended to hide our light under a bushel. Most importantly, we have started to offer a wider range of activities for our boarders, essential for ensuring that boarding remains a vibrant part of our community. Boarding is obviously important in itself for our boarders, but the fact that the School is home to them for much of the year adds a dimension to the nature of the School for our day girls which day schools lack. We remain committed to academic excellence and our Oxbridge results, amongst our best ever in an increasingly competitive environment, reveal the School's academic strength. There is, of course, much still to do, but, as I have said, I am sure that we are now on the road to where we want to go.

As I mentioned in my last newsletter, to keep up to date with all the HLC news and events, you may like to subscribe to 'The School Report' via the links on our website - [www.hlc.org.uk](http://www.hlc.org.uk).

With very best wishes for a happy, healthy and successful 2010.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Rhiannon Wilkinson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

Mrs Rhiannon Wilkinson  
Headmistress