

Our Ref: MLG/ADL/Parent Letter/February 2009

Dear Parents/Guardians

Headteacher's letter to parents, February 2009

I hope that you and your family are very well, that those who were able to take time off during half-term feel somewhat refreshed and that you are enjoying the first signs of spring. A busy and important period of the school year is now under way.

Achievements and standards

Many parents will have seen figures published in 'The News' in January, describing the achievements of schools in Portsmouth, Hampshire and West Sussex in 2008. I am really pleased to report that the students who left last summer (and the staff who taught them) had some of the best results in the area when measured as the proportion who achieved at least 5 A*-C grades including English and Maths (the government's 'gold-standard'). However, the school's performance when measured by 'value-added' (the amount of progress students make during their time with us) was less impressive.

I need to emphasise two things. Firstly, an improvement in 'value-added' is our most important priority – our entire School Improvement Plan is focused on it and a wide range of strategies is either in place or under development to achieve it. We are far from complacent; everyone at the school is aware of the need to improve. I cannot promise an immediate solution (some of the issues involved are complex), but I can assure you that we are working hard to resolve them.

Secondly, individual students have not been significantly disadvantaged. Scores of young people left Crofton School last summer happy and successful, with highly impressive GCSE grades and places on the courses and training schemes that they had chosen. We can confidently say that Crofton remains an excellent place to come to school, while acknowledging that we can and must do even better.

Supporting our students

We are very grateful indeed for the fantastic support that we receive from the parents of our students. We know that we are fortunate – a partnership between home and school is an absolutely essential ingredient of effective education.

We understand that the responsibility for making the improvements described above rests very largely with staff and students. However, parents have a vital part to play.

Perhaps surprisingly, overall attendance levels at our school are not as high as they are at some of our neighbours. Ensuring that students come to school regularly (and that holidays are not taken in term-time) makes a real difference to students' progress and their eventual attainment – we would like to see all of our students achieve 100% attendance (and we become very worried when attendance falls below 95% without a clear reason).

Many parents take a close interest in their children's studies. Regularly discussing what students are doing in lessons (even if they are reluctant to tell you!) and encouraging them to spend substantial time doing their homework (at least 1 to 2 hours each week night, depending on their age) both really help; attendance at parents' evenings and early contact when there appears to be a problem are also vital.

If you have any questions or are at all concerned about your son/daughter's progress please do contact their subject teacher or tutor in the first instance. We really are keen to work closely with you.

Children returning to school after injury

We have received advice from the local authority to the effect that students returning to school after a significant injury (and especially those who will be using crutches or who may have a cast) may need to be protected via a formal risk assessment. We will not complete such an assessment in every case but will always want to consider doing so – if your son or daughter is returning to school and may require special arrangements, do please let us know by contacting their Head of Year before they come back.

Bingo Night

As you should already have heard, our friends in the Crofton School Association (CSA) are organising a Bingo Night on Friday 13 March. I hope that you will consider coming along - we really want everyone to feel welcome at the school and to feel part of our community. There are more details (and a reply slip) on our website (www.croftonschool.co.uk) We need to confirm final numbers by 5 March 2009.

I am really grateful for the support of those kind parents who contribute to the work of the school by supporting the CSA. They are the lovely volunteers who serve refreshments at school events; they are also the noble souls who help raise vital extra funds for us by organising events like the bingo. They are always looking for new helpers and can be contacted via csa@crofton.hants.sch.uk. This is a great way to meet other parents and to get to know the school and its staff better.

Iceland visit

Our intrepid geography teachers have organised a school visit to Iceland. The trip will take place from Thursday 22 to Sunday 25 October 2009 and participants will get the chance to experience the extraordinary scenery and culture of this unique country. As I write, there are 4 places available – students of all ages are welcome. Please contact Mrs Evans for more information (either by telephone or via school@crofton.hants.sch.uk).

The Paris Marathon

The preparations of 'Team Crofton' are well under way, with participants now regularly running more than 25 miles a week as they get ready for the big day (5 April 2009). A useless Achilles tendon is currently restricting my own schedule, but Mr Anderson, Miss Burr, Mr Hillier, Miss Noble and Mr O'Dowda are absolutely on course.

As you know, we have selected the same charities the students chose for Charities Week. We would like to raise very large additional sums for:

- MacMillan Cancer (a well-known national charity which supports both research work and individual cancer sufferers)
- Chernobyl Support (a local group who invite children from Ukraine to come to England for a break)
- Playpumps (an international charity working to provide clean water to families in Africa)

I am sure that you will agree that these are very worthy causes. We will be asking students to consider sponsoring us but we would also be very grateful for any donations you and the rest of the family might care to make! Please make cheques payable to 'Crofton School' and send them to the finance office in an envelope marked 'Paris Marathon'.

A Summer Holiday Opportunity

We have received some publicity material from the Youth Hostels Association (YHA). They are running a series of summer holiday activities: their YHA Do It 4 Real Summer Camps. You can choose from a variety of activities at locations across the country. There are fully inclusive residential camps, for young people aged 10-19 yrs. Subsidised places are available, costing £49 - £299. For more details go to: www.doit4real.co.uk
<<http://www.doit4real.co.uk>>

Crofton Community Centre

Nicky Rayner, the manager of the Crofton Community Centre, has written to me to ask that I reassure all users and potential users of the centre that it will remain open for business throughout its refurbishment programme

Canteen prices

We are advised by HC3S, our contract caterers, that the price of a main meal in the school canteen will increase from £1.90 to £2 from 20 April 2009. They tell us that they are paying more for supplies and that the increase is unavoidable.

If you would like information about claiming free school meals, do please get in touch – Mrs Curtis, our Bursar, is best placed to provide information.

Snow closure

I would like to apologise once again for the school closure on 4 February 2009. We were determined to remain open if we could; weather conditions close to the school did not appear to be too bad. However, by 08.15 it had become clear that substantial numbers of staff would not be able to reach the school and also that the supply teacher agencies would not be able to provide enough replacements. As such, we could not guarantee adequate supervision and were forced into a late closure decision, the worst of all possible outcomes. I am sorry for any inconvenience that resulted – let us hope that we do not have weather like that for a few more years!

Spring Term

5 January – 3 April 2009

Summer Term

21 April – 22 July 2009

Half-term

25 – 29 May 2009

Yours faithfully

Matthew Leeming
Headteacher