



Cokethorpe SCHOOL

From the Headmaster

Damian J Ettinger BA, MA, PGCE

May 2010

Dear Parents

As with all other School policies, our pastoral care responsibilities are constantly under review, and I am writing to let you know about some of our recent discussions in this regard and of some changes that I propose to make to the house system.

Currently each house has almost 100 pupils, whereas received wisdom is that the optimum size is probably something closer to 70. With that in mind, the Housemasters and I have been looking at ways to reduce the size of the houses and thereby ensure that the care of pupils is not in any way diluted. Another consideration has been to ensure the best possible care for the younger members of the Senior School. The boys and girls in Years 7 and 8 have different pastoral needs and educational goals from those of older pupils, and it is also thought that too wide a spread of ages can tend to dilute a Housemaster's effectiveness. I believe it is particularly essential that there is a high level of consistency in dealing with the concerns of those younger pupils.

With those thoughts in mind, from September 2010 the following changes to the pastoral care system will come into play.

- A new house will be created, called Lower House, to attend to the care of what are currently Years 7 and 8. The pastoral care team for this new house needs to be led by an experienced member of the pastoral staff and I am delighted that Mrs Pratley, currently Housemistress of Vanbrugh, has agreed to take on that role. There also will be a new Lower House tie which should be worn by all Lower House pupils from September.
- Pupils in Lower House will continue to have an affiliation to one of the six Senior Houses, not least for the purposes of inter-house activities and competitions, and these are the houses they will enter when they leave Lower House.
- In order to stress our identity as an Independent School we will take this opportunity to re-name our year groups. Pupils in Lower House will be in Lower First and Upper First. Current Year 9 will become Third Form, followed by Fourth Form, Fifth Form and, of course, Lower and Upper Sixth.

There are a number of other benefits that will arise from these changes. The Head of Lower House will be able to coordinate the transition of all pupils from the Junior School as well as assist in recruitment from local primary and junior schools. It also means that pupils coming as part of our 13+ entry will feel less like the 'new kids on the block' when they join the Senior Houses. One of the key roles of the senior Housemasters is to focus on target setting, not least in relation to public exams, as well as to lend support to the work of the Head of Sixth Form and her team of academic mentors. These changes will free up the Housemasters to focus more effectively on these key tasks.

What, you may be asking, has become of Second Form? Again in the spirit that independent schools should be able to indulge and celebrate that independence, I propose to create a Second Form that will last for two weeks! In future I would like Upper First pupils, at the end of the Summer term, to undertake some kind of ambitious project to mark their 'coming of age'. I have in mind something like a Snowdon Trek Challenge or undertaking the Hadrian's Wall Path walk from Tyne to Solway. The plan would be to publish a whole set of such challenges for the coming years and for each Upper First year group to know in advance which challenge they will prepare for and undertake. I will also try to persuade the 13+ Prep School Heads to allow our new 13+ intake to join in. It would be a good way of helping them all to bond before they arrive at the school more formally in September.

I appreciate there is quite a lot here for you to absorb, so I won't add any more details at this stage. The Housemasters and I are quite excited about these changes, confident that without losing any of the benefits of our house system, it will allow Housemasters to do their jobs even better, and will ensure the highest possible quality of care for our younger pupils. As always, I am confident that we can count on your support.

I am enclosing invitations to you all for Prize Giving, which this year takes place on Thursday and Friday 8 and 9 July (for the Junior and Senior Schools respectively). I look forward to seeing many of you there. This is an occasion when we say can 'good luck and thank you' to departing staff though, in recognition of their years of service to Cokethorpe, a more detailed tribute to them will appear in The Ocellus. I am sure that you would also welcome a little more information about those who will be joining us in September. I am delighted that we attracted some particularly strong applicants for the various posts, and that is reflected in the very high quality of the staff we have appointed, both in terms of their academic background and their wide experience. I am enclosing some details about each of them with this letter.

With every good wish.

Yours sincerely

www.cokethorpe.org.uk

Enclosed:

- Prize Giving Invitation (Senior School)
- Prize Giving Invitation (Junior School)
- CEW Confirmations (Years 7 to 10)
- OPRO Letter and Leaflet (Years 3 to 12)
- Interim Report (Junior School)
- Letter from Mrs Cook (Junior School)
- CPA Classic Car Rally Flyer (All)

Emailed to Parents:

- Grade Cards (Years 7 to 10)
- Letter regarding Public Examination results (Years 11 to 13)

Items on the Website:

- Cokethorpe Sixth Form Ball (Sixth Form)
- CEW Letter (Year 12)
- Year 8 Drama Production (with Ticket Reservation Form)
- Year 7 Drama Production (with Ticket Reservation Form)
- Inter-House Athletics (Years 7 to 12)
- Summer Activity Weeks (Years 1 to 10)
- Ski trip letter (Years 6 to 12)