



The Federation of the Ramsgate Grammar Schools

CHATHAM HOUSE GRAMMAR & CLARENDON HOUSE GRAMMAR



NEWSLETTER MAY 2009

End of an era, start of an era

What is the Federation all about? By September 2012, we hope, the two schools, Chatham House and Clarendon House, will be co-located on the Chatham House site in largely new buildings. The Plan is for the new Federation to develop as two parallel 11-16 grammar schools, each recruiting 3 forms of entry, and feeding in to a joint Sixth Form. Although demographic trends (falling rolls), raising the leaving age and historic post-16 recruitment & retention rates will impact on how and when the numbers going through the co-located schools settle down, the aim is that within 5 years or so the Federation will stabilise at around 1400 students, Years 7-13.

Is it an amalgamation? A merger? A take-over of the girls' school by the boys' school? No. It will be a partnership of equals, sharing facilities and pooling resources in ways which will enhance opportunities & widen choice, and which raises standards for all students. Working side by side and together the Federation schools will retain their distinctive names, badges and compatible traditions yet develop a new shared ethos based on old shared values. Parents in both schools will recognise and share these values:- the pursuit of excellence in all its forms, the highest standards of behaviour and achievement, a positive, orderly learning environment, and a full programme of extracurricular and enrichment activities. Through the closest collaboration, this new federated entity will be greater than the sum of its parts – for example offering all students a greater choice of subjects at GCSE and in the Sixth Form than either is able to do separately, maximising the scope for personalised learning. Teams of teachers from both schools working together to identify and spread expertise and best practice in the classroom; organising joint productions, shows, concerts and showcase events of every kind. To enable the smoothest of transitions to co-location, over the next 2 years the main thrust of school policy will be to actively promote convergence. Finding ways to bring the schools together, staff and students working more closely together, developing compatible shared systems, staging joint events, and so on. The two Parents/Friends Associations have agreed to coordinate their activities and plan more joint fundraisers, with a view to formal affiliation as one new group when the two schools co-locate.

Management arrangements. As Executive Headteacher I have overall leadership responsibility for both schools, working with the Federation Governing Body, and a Federation Leadership Group of senior staff. There will be Heads of School for the two school sites, senior colleagues with the experience to oversee the daily operational management of each partner school. In the first instance, the Acting Head of School at Chatham House will be Mr Williamson, and Mrs Bennett will continue to oversee Clarendon House until her retirement at the end of the summer term. The Sixth Forms will operate as one from September 2010 however a great deal of detailed planning needs to be done in advance, so a new Head of the Federal Sixth Form will be appointed this term. The Federation Leadership Group, consisting of the senior management teams of both schools, meets weekly.

Your schools ~ have your say! Although I have inherited existing separate school development plans and post-Ofsted Action Plans, this term the Leadership Group will be working on a new Federation Development Plan (FDP) to present to governors. This will establish our priorities as a partnership for the next academic year, and set some shared targets for the period leading up to co-location. I invite students and parents to consider what they would like to see in that plan: what do **you** think we can be doing to promote convergence over the next 2-3 years? If you have specific suggestions about how the schools could work more closely together please pass them on in writing (email or a good old fashioned letter will be fine), or you are most welcome to discuss them with me in person. Of course there will be questions – the schools are embarked on perhaps the biggest change in their history, and for some this is a leap of faith. Against the background of major national developments - the raising of the school leaving age and new accreditations : Diplomas, Baccalaureates – we have a unique opportunity to bring in some new approaches ourselves: more personalised learning, a higher profile for Gifted & Talented initiatives, a two year Key Stage 3, students studying advanced courses at Key Stage 4, Year 11 treated as Sixth Formers, and so on. A major aspect of my role in the first year will be to explain and to reassure anyone who has concerns, that everyone in the federal partnership is committed to providing the best possible education for their children. The leadership team will be putting the FDP together just after the half-term break so if you would like to contribute the ‘deadline’ will be Monday 1st June.



The New Headteacher

Through a series of assemblies during the first two weeks of term I have introduced myself to all the students in both schools, and outlined some of the exciting changes in prospect. Inevitably it is going to take some time to meet all parents of students in both schools so perhaps in the meantime this pen-portrait will fill in some of the gaps and provide some clues as to the next stage of the schools’ development.

David Smart, age 54, lifelong Liverpool fan! Born in the North-West, brought up and educated in a comprehensive in the Bristol area, where my three younger sisters and their families still live. At school my ambition was to be a journalist, a lawyer, or a future Liverpool manager, (or all three). Life, however, had other plans and after spending 4 years at university in Wales, I somehow stumbled into a career teaching History. Mysteriously the call from Anfield never came, so 30 years later I am still working in education, with just the school newsletters, admissions appeals hearings, and an addiction to Match of the Day, as reminders of the road not taken. During that time I have worked in schools of every conceivable type – single-sex and mixed, comprehensive and selective, across all corners of the kingdom, from Somerset to Sussex, and Devon to Cumbria. A personal highlight was a stretch as Deputy Head at Barton Court in the mid/late’ 90s, so I am very happy to be living in Canterbury again – rediscovering the enduring appeal of the Café Des Amis, and enjoying its marvellous system of traffic management.

My previous post was as Headteacher of Queen Elizabeth’s High School (QEHS) in Gainsborough, a large mixed grammar school serving the north-west corner of Lincolnshire. Having achieved specialist status in Languages and Music, part-way through a modernisation programme and recently graded “outstanding” by Ofsted, it was a tough decision to leave QEHS. However I was attracted by the post in Ramsgate for a mix of professional and personal reasons. Leading the Federation through co-location offers the chance to conclude my career by helping to create something unique and special. And on a personal note by returning to the south-east, I am reunited with a support network of long-standing friends, and live in a part of the country which has always felt the most like “home territory”.

It is a privilege to be given this responsibility at the Federation schools, and I am very aware of the legacy of my predecessors. We have two *very good* schools – due in no small measure to the commitment and hard work of Jane Bennett and John Mathews, champions for selective education in Ramsgate, and the belief that Chatham and Clarendon should have a future in the heart of the community they serve.

Every Headteacher has their own idiosyncratic approach. I hope, if you asked them, that the staff in my last school considered me supportive, the parents found me approachable and responsive, and the students would say I am firm but fair, friendly, and a strong advocate for their interests. This is my fourth headship and certain core values go where I go - here are some random early clues to the approach I will bring in no particular order ...

**** Appearance matters.** I think students should accept responsibility for their school community, respect and support its ethos – which includes wearing school uniform, and wearing it properly. So, for example, from September 2010 the new Federal Sixth Form will have a common dress code, be that a uniform or business/office dress – “anything goes” is going!

**** Doing the business.** Nowadays schools are expected to play a wider role in the life of their local community, however our core business is still learning and teaching. We have to get the basics right, and challenge/stretch our students so that they leave here with the best possible exam grades, enabled to go as far as their interests and talents can take them.

**** Accentuate the positive.** Recognising and rewarding success is a vital motivator and something we should be doing as often as possible: there will be even more celebrations of student achievement, formal and informal

**** Putting education first.** In order to achieve their full potential students should be at school in term time, not on a beach, or on the ski-slopes – Glastonbury will still be there year after year, but students only get one crack at their GCSEs & A Levels (see separate article on term time absence!!!). We will offer plenty of opportunities for enrichment through the school: the extra-curricular life of the school is as valuable as the central mission of learning & teaching - as far as possible school should be enjoyable! An outstanding school is characterised by a vibrant programme of Sport and the Arts, with high levels of student participation and achievement.

**** Givers not takers.** In an outstanding school the students are committed to, and benefit from getting involved; for students to take without putting something back weakens the school and diminishes the individual. The House system is a force for good, it promotes positive relationships between students, helps them to grow as confident autonomous learners and potential leaders. It should be the basic unit of pastoral organisation, creating cohesive ‘small school families of students’ within what is going to be a large institution. If we are serious about developing future citizens then students need to be given both responsibility and the chance to exercise a positive influence in their own school.

**** Best Behaviour.** An orderly atmosphere in classrooms is not negotiable – every student’s right to learn depends on the teacher’s right to teach. Above all students must feel safe & happy at school, and aggressive misconduct in school will not be tolerated. There is a difference between students falling out with each other and bullying – and unfortunately every school has an element of both. We will respond appropriately – with an attempt at conflict resolution for disagreements, and exclusion for proven cases of bullying.

**** No school is an island!** The government is keen that education promotes social mobility, and grammar schools are expected to play their part. Whatever our students’ background and circumstances, they all deserve the best opportunities and the highest levels of support and

encouragement we can provide. We will also work closely with other schools to ensure that the curriculum we offer meets the needs of a significant section of the local community

**** Communication, the Home-School Partnership.** At the risk of being thought a dinosaur I must admit to preferring dialogue to e-mail! If a parent (or student) has a query or issue raise it with my colleagues and please give them a chance to deal with it. If, however, that doesn't work for you, don't reach for the keyboard and rattle off a trenchant email to the governors, your MP, Ed Balls or the newspapers. Please give me a call, let's meet and work it out - invariably the problem can be amicably resolved.

BSF at Chatham House ~ A 'Hogwarts' for the 21st Century?



Building Schools for the Future (BSF). Not just another government acronym, but the very apt description of what is planned for here: 21st century facilities within an historic and characterful façade for both schools. I have already had a number of meetings with the Kent BSF team and the new architects ACP who are very keen to translate the vision into tangible plans.

The buildings will be designed to support the basic concept: Chatham House & Clarendon House as equal partners. The staff and students from both schools will share the specialist facilities – one set of science rooms, one technology suite, one Sports Hall and Fitness Centre, one Arts suite and so on. One dining zone, open all day and incorporating something akin to an “Internet Café”. Chatham and Clarendon students sharing the buildings without contrived segregation (no ‘Berlin Wall’ dividing the sectors!) yet with various degrees of integration. In practice this won't be so very different from what students are already used to: completely mixed teaching in the joint Sixth Form, some mixed teaching at GCSE where it makes sense to support widest choice of subjects, and then single-sex teaching at Key Stage 3.

At this initial stage the plan is to retain the historic listed main building, yet transform the interior. To add on ultra-modern specialist and general teaching in a major new build constructed in a style which complements the old and looks right in the unique setting. To provide new, bigger and better indoor and all-weather sports facilities will maximise the potential of a relatively confined site where we want to preserve as much of the green spaces as possible. To provide attractive fit for purpose social areas within a secure, compact campus. To give the new joint Federal Sixth Form of 500+ students a proper base, plenty of well-equipped study space and sense of identity.



Work on the £25 million scheme could start as early as next summer, be completed & open for business by Sept 2012. Inevitably there will be significant disruption during the 18 months-2 years whilst construction takes place, and it will be safer, cheaper and completed more quickly if Chatham House students can be accommodated elsewhere. No decisions have been taken, but we will be working with KCC to identify the best possible relocation solutions – perhaps using surplus school buildings elsewhere in Thanet, if the space and the availability match our needs. Thereafter Chatham and Clarendon students will move in to their new permanent shared home and enjoy the learning environment they all deserve.

The (“Swine Flu”) Virus ~ Keep Calm and Carry On

As many readers will be aware the World Health Organisation recently decided that as the (“swine flu”) virus was affecting significant numbers of people in Mexico and smaller numbers in other countries we are now in Phase 5 i.e.:- the W.H.O. considers a global pandemic to be imminent.



However, at the time of going to press, there have been very few cases in the UK. The Federation Schools will follow the appropriate government guidelines and procedures, as they are issued by the DCSF and KCC:-

“At this stage all schools should operate as normal; this advice would continue to apply if the W.H.O. were to increase its pandemic threat level to 6. The government is continuing to monitor the situation closely and any decision to advise all schools to close would be taken by the government and communicated through local authorities. So for clarity:-

*** Remain open and carry on as normal. ** Encourage good hygiene ** Encourage parents to call NHS Direct if their children show any symptoms. “(DCSF Guidance, 5th May 2009).*

So we are relaying the obvious commonsense precautions – all students should follow the infection control advice from the NHS (“catch it, bin it and kill it”) with regard to using tissues and washing hands. Their other piece of advice is that if anyone who has returned from Mexico or other parts of North America in the last seven days experiences flu like symptoms, they should stay at home and contact their GP straight away.

There will be a national advertising campaign in the near future and you will be able to keep up with developments through broadcast news programmes, newspapers and the internet. Therefore, at present, it will be ‘business as usual’ and if there are any changes which will affect the way the schools operate, we will let you know as soon as we know.

Term time Holidays & Authorised Absences: A Polite Request

This is a perennial problem for all schools and parents, and one where I am looking for agreement on a reasonable pragmatic approach which the majority of parents can support. Do we have a problem here in the Federation schools? To put it in perspective in the first week in post I received 8 requests for term time holiday absence totalling 26 days of absence. If that is typical & extrapolated across a whole school year then it suggests we could have a problem.

Occasional short-term absence for, say, medical treatment, is not an issue and is automatically approved. In the same spirit of reasonableness I have no difficulty with approving occasional very short (1 or 2 day) absences as a ‘one-off’ if a commonsense reason is given and we have no particular concerns about that individual’s school work and progress. However I am not happy at students routinely taking a week or more out of school for a family holiday. There are 13 weeks of official school holidays; students only get one chance at their education and the Federation schools can only do our job of educating the students to the highest standard if they are here for the 190 days of term time.

The legal position, recently re-asserted by a DCSF circular to schools in 2008, is that there is no automatic right or ‘entitlement’ for parents to take students out of school for a holiday during term time. Some parents may be under the (mistaken) impression they do have an allocation or quota of up to 10 days which can be taken whenever they choose. Sorry, but in fact that isn’t the case. In the drive to ensure maximum attendance and raise standards, schools have been instructed to actively discourage term time holidays, and headteachers have even been given powers to impose fines for unauthorised absence. All term time absence can

only be authorised by the headteacher in “exceptional circumstances”. That holidays booked in term time are cheaper is not considered a valid reason nor an “exceptional circumstance”. Valid reasons would include situations where an employer is effectively dictating the timing by fixing employees holiday dates which fall in term time, or where there are unforeseen circumstances, such as a bereavement, which obviously qualify on compassionate grounds.

Whatever custom or interpretation of the rules applied in the past, from the start of the next academic year the spirit of the regulations will be followed in the Federation Grammar Schools. I really do want to avoid getting into an acrimonious dispute with parents or take some kind of punitive line. Parents are reminded of the rule that they should not book a holiday which falls in term time without first checking with the school whether it can be regarded as an authorised absence. I know that you have chosen to send your sons and daughters to our schools because you recognise and value the importance of education; in this fundamental respect, as in many other ways, I hope that you will be able to support our efforts to provide the best for your children.

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