

Dear Parents

I spent a week on the Epic (with the grade 10's) last term and it was interesting to see how different characters coped (or didn't) with the different tasks. I think it is one of the more exciting things Bishops has done for its boys in its long history. From a pastoral point of view I could see that boys were learning a great deal about themselves (not always flattering but worth knowing never-the-less), about their peers (ditto) and about relating with others in circumstances not of their choosing and with peers not necessarily of their choosing. At 16 years of age many boys have a lot of "stuff" going on inside them and for some the sixteen days away from their usual comforts and distractions was quite a challenge. The boys owe a great deal to Mr Hanley and his team of organisers for giving them something which many will value all their lives. It was a huge undertaking for the organisers who did this on top of all their normal duties.

I wonder what this year holds for you as a parent. The teenage years are often a time of rapid change and this can sometimes catch us by surprise as our children rather suddenly become more independent and try to distance themselves from us. Of course, this independence is an emotional and relational thing, not a financial nor legal one. They cannot be truly independent which can lead some of them to behave in odd ways in which they try and proclaim to us their independence; "You might be in charge here but you cannot make me be friendly or open or even civil!". This can be extremely irritating and wearying and even make us pretty angry at times – especially as we know how dependent they really are and how much we do for them. We do, of course, need to let them become more independent (indeed, we need to encourage it) but we will continue to be controlling to a degree and it sometimes takes courage, patience and a good sense of humour to keep up the boundaries on their independence which need to be maintained. Whilst Housemastering I was always aware how some boys sailed through the teenage years giving their parents hardly any trouble at all, whereas others were draining in the extreme. The reasons for this difference were sometimes obvious, but often not and I hoped that, one day, the boy would bless his parents (or parent) in ways which would make it all seem wonderfully worthwhile to them. If you are entering the year with a boy who is proving rather difficult to like (even though you love him dearly), hang in there and try not to compromise too much. There are no easy answers but we do have support at the school if you become overly concerned about him or how you are coping with him. If you enter the year with a son who you really like and love, enjoy him but don't pat yourself on the back too soon....nor be too quick to judge others (which was the theme of Fr Coomers talk this morning).

I started last year writing about the need to be sensible about the size and control (especially around alcohol) at 18th birthday parties. We seemed to have a better year (I only got one negative report.). Indeed one parent, who had had three sons through the school, assured me it had been better. All previous pastoral letters are on the Bishops website under Pastoral, if you want to check on any of them.

I hope your son has a good year and that you enjoy watching him progress.

Yours sincerely  
Peter Westwood  
(Deputy Headmaster Pastoral)