

Dear Parents

The **grade 8 camps** seem to have been a great success and the idea to move them to the start of the year (as opposed to the last week) was inspired (thank you Mr Kruger). All the staff who went along were positive about what had been achieved and, after 3 days with the boys, they now have a very good idea of the different characters involved. This will enable a more rapid response to the pastoral needs of individuals – and, indeed, some has been happening already. In addition the boys have got to know each other better and new friendships have been made between boys from different schools. I think it was particularly helpful for those boys who come from schools other than Bishops or WPPS. My thanks to Mark Hanley for helping put the whole thing together.

“Relaxed alertness” is a term used by the husband and wife authors Caine and Caine. They maintain that this is the state which results in optimal learning as it enables the brain to make the connections required to form memory. It is characterised by low threat and high expectations. Obviously it is the role of a teacher to seek to create this environment in the classroom and one does this through a variety of strategies which include good classroom discipline, laughter, interesting content and delivery and, importantly, as consistent an optimistic and hopeful outlook for each student as possible (no matter how limited they are and how poor their last result). However, it is also important as parents that we understand how much stress and emotional distress negatively impact on our son’s ability to learn. “I sat and learnt for an hour but still cannot remember anything.” is the sort of statement we hear a teachers now and then. Sometimes, of course, it is exaggeration. However when a boy is in a poor space emotionally then this is can be accurate. The emotions are thought to prevent the brain from making the right connections to get the information into the required part of the cerebrum efficiently. This is important to remember if our sons are going through difficult times. It is unlikely their academic situation will improve until their emotional state has done and, in fact, we can simply exacerbate the academic problems by making his academic performance an area of conflict. On a practical level we (certainly as dayboy parents) can help by encouraging our sons to get enough sleep and making sure they eat healthily. And, of course, we play a big part in managing relationships in the home and need to keep this focus a priority despite other things clamouring for our attention. It is a number of things which add up to a state of “relaxed alertness”.

If you have not had an email from your **son’s tutor**, you should get something soon. The idea is simply to help keep channels of communication open so feel free to click “reply”, even if it is just to say hello.

At the end of the first Thursday of term there were 12 **blazers** left in the various science labs - many without names in them. I wonder how many were left around the whole school and how many boys claimed their blazers were stolen? We will be having a “names” check soon on blazers. Please ensure your son has his name in his blazer.

Ash Wednesday this week and the start of lent. Maybe we need to give up something which uses electricity this year. No homework was one suggestion.....

Yours sincerely

Peter Westwood