



20 December 2024

Dear Parents/Carers

As this (long and often rainy) Autumn term draws to a close, and before we head into the Christmas break, I'd like to say a heartfelt 'Thank you' to all staff, governors and volunteers who continue to offer such a range of opportunities and support for our whole community.

Our friends at Coram charity speak of working to create 'a society that cares.' At Ashlyns, we not only share a history with Coram, but also this key principle based on kindness and empathy. Nowhere was this more evident than earlier this week when our musicians and senior students hosted the senior citizens' Christmas tea party. Along with joyful singing, convivial conversation and a stellar raffle, the importance of connection was evident. I was so proud of our students who showed such respect and warmth towards our guests. It really is a pleasure for us - as well as for those attending.

If we all look back, we know that 'making memories' is a key part of school life and these stay with us long after we have left. For us at Ashlyns, the experiential side of school life is every bit as important as time spent in lessons. This term, our extensive programme of trips has included: a slightly damp Peak District trip for Year 7, a trip to Girona, a visit to the Natural History museum for Year 8 as part of Extended Learning Day, a trip to Cologne's famous Christmas Markets and, to get into the Christmas spirit, a trip to see Elf the Musical. These opportunities just wouldn't be possible without staff giving up their time, so I'd like to thank them once again for their efforts in helping your children make memories.

Inviting inspirational role models to talk about their journeys is central to our ambition to help each student become the best version of themselves. This year, we welcomed Dr Nighat Arif to our annual Presentation Evening to recognise the successes of past and present students and to share her passion and insight as a medical educator and advocate. Dr Arif also spoke eloquently about the importance of building character, and we have been so impressed with our Year 11 Prefect Team who have been busy leading character sessions for the rest of the school. The Year 10 cohort are in training and ready to pick up the baton and are investing such care and commitment to this project.

The final week of term also marks our Awards Assemblies, which celebrate students' ongoing work, making sure they know we value their commitment to learning. I'd also like to congratulate our Year 11 and 13 students, who have been working hard for their trial exams. They will receive their results in the new year to support their final preparations for the real exams in May and June.

The strength of support from volunteers is also evident in the work of our excellent ASA. We know that strong facilities support the range of activities we can offer and I'd like to, once again, thank the ASA for their time and commitment to fund raising and, in turn, enriching students' educational experience. The ASA contributes so much to the festivities at this time of year - the Chapel decorations were stunning at our candlelit Carol Concert (more of that in a minute) and the ever-popular Craft Fair was a hive of festive activity and extremely well attended.

Returning to the Christmas countdown, we couldn't have an end of Autumn term letter without noting the amazing Carol Concert. For many of us, the prelude to Christmas starts with this event. Once again, we were treated to stunning performances by the orchestra and choir. In his 'pause for thought' Rev Stuart Owen spoke of the need to recognise the brightness of acts of kindness and determination to make things better. He likened our individual acts to lights on a Christmas tree which, when strung together provide a cumulative light and beauty. Each year, I am amazed by, and grateful to, our music department for developing and nurturing such amazing musicians. This year, I'd like to take a moment to say a special thank you to Mr Hutchinson, who was leading his 25th Carol Concert at Ashlyns. What an achievement! I am sure you would all like to join me in thanking him for continuing to bring his own special 'brightness' to music at Ashlyns.

The end of term is often a time to bid farewell to colleagues moving on to new challenges and opportunities; this term we say farewell to Mrs Cronin (Equalities Coordinator), Mrs Lea (Inclusion Teacher) and Miss Lowde (Teaching Assistant). We wish them every happiness in the future.

Please remember that should students need any wellbeing support over the Christmas period, they can access a range of resources and support via the 'Quick Links' tab (left hand side of the screen) on the homepage of the website by selecting Student Wellbeing.

I'll finish with a quote from Maya Angelou, noted for her key observations on life, who once offered this advice:

I've learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way they handle these three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights.

So, whatever your plans this festive period, I wish you good weather, hassle free journeys and, if like me, you have yet to put up your decorations – a tangle free experience (whether accompanied or not by the strains of Wham's 'Last Christmas', which is, remarkably, 40 years old this year!).

The spring term starts on Monday 06 January (along with our new mobile phone arrangements) but, for now, on behalf of all of us at Ashlyns, I would like to thank you for your continued support and wish you a very happy and peaceful Christmas.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shapland', with a stylized flourish at the end.

James Shapland
Headteacher