



19 December 2025

Dear Parents / Carers

As the Autumn term draws to a close, and before we all head into the Christmas break, I'd like to take this opportunity to reflect on just some of the many, positive highlights from the term and offer my thanks to members of our school community who continue to provide exceptional opportunities for our school and students.

I often remark that my Christmas countdown starts with the Carol Concert, where staff, parents, families, governors and other friends come together to enjoy (and sing-a-long to) some favourite Christmas tunes. This year was no different with the orchestra and choir, under the direction of our brilliant music department, treating us to a range of festive ensemble and solo pieces. In his 'pause for thought', Rev Stuart spoke of his wish that we would all find the courage to be like his 'favourite angel' in a recent nativity play, sometimes dancing the wrong steps but not caring and joining in with enthusiasm.

It was wonderful to also share this festive music and sense of community spirit with our guests at the senior citizens' concert this week. They certainly embraced the challenge of joining in with joyful singing and festive conversation. As ever, 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. My heartfelt thanks go to all those who make this event so special year on year.

At Ashlyns, alongside work in lessons, we also place a great deal of importance on the experiential element of school life, whether through clubs, competitions, shows or trips. Our music and drama students have entertained friends and family through the Autumn Chill concert and the Christmas Drama production. These events add so much to school life and I hope that the value of performing and working with new friends will stay with them for years to come.

This term has also seen a raft of trips on offer from the Peak District to Iceland, as well as a range of museum and theatre visits. Many students also gained fantastic careers insight on trips to Silverstone and Cisco's Head Office. Alongside these career based visits, our Autumn term programme also included mock interviews for every Year 10 student. The feedback from the 30 professionals who conducted the interviews was superb, commenting: "*What a privilege to meet such a diverse range of talented students – whether academically or through their extracurricular activities, all had something to bring to the interview.*" Of course, our thanks and gratitude also goes to the professionals who helped to facilitate these.

Similarly, students and parents at our Presentation Evening were delighted to hear from our speaker, ex-student Jake Williamson, who reminded us that strength lies in our diversity and that every student should embrace their own path with confidence and ambition.

We continue to be hugely proud of our student leaders who serve as outstanding role models. Our new Year 10 Prefects have made a fantastic impression, and have taken on the role of Character Session Leaders for KS3. Year 9 students have keenly promoted our Character and Community Leadership programme with their regular visits to Ashlyns Care Home.

Our series of end-of-year Awards Assemblies finished this week and it is heartwarming to see the inclusivity and pride that students show for their peers as they are rewarded for progress, effort, character and community contribution. These assemblies (and many other festive events) take place in the Chapel which has been decorated so beautifully by the ASA - they certainly work their magic at this time of year, supporting the Carol Concert, delivering the festive Craft Fair and supporting the Festival of Light and the Rotary Santa's Sleigh. All of these fundraising drives support our students and bring so much to the wider community.

I would like to say 'Thank you' to our dedicated staff, volunteers and Governors who provide such opportunity and encouragement, supporting our students to have such a well-rounded experience.

And of course, our focus on academic work continues. Year 11 and 13 students have worked diligently towards their trial exams over the last few weeks. They will receive their results in the new year to support their final preparations for the real exams in May and June. To this end, they can afford to have some time over Christmas to rest and recharge ready for intensive examination preparation from January onwards.

Finally, as we head into the Christmas break, please remember that should students need any wellbeing support over the holidays, they can access a range of resources and support via the relevant tiles on the school website or RUnify.

Whatever your plans this festive period, I hope you find the time to be like Rev Stuart's favourite angel and enjoy the break with enthusiasm and joy.

The spring term starts at the normal time on Monday 05 January 2026 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 'James Shapland'. The signature is stylized with a large initial 'J' and 'S'.

James Shapland
Headteacher