

JWH/HRA/SOT 1

1 September 2009

Dear Parents

I wanted to take the opportunity to write to you in advance of the start of the new school year to cover a few points.

Start of Term Arrangements

Year 7 and Sixth form return on Friday 4 September; Years 8 – 11 return on Monday 7 September 2009.

Examination Results 2009

As reported in the local press, Westlands gained a set of excellent examination results this summer.

Once again, our A Level results were very good overall, with significantly more pupils gaining high grades than in previous years. It appears that a record number of pupils will have secured university places and we wish them success for their future studies.

We have come to expect success in our annual GCSE results. This year has proved to be another record year with 74% of pupils gaining 5 A*-C grades. This compares to 63% in 2008 and 54% in 2007.

Of particular note were the fantastic improvements we have seen in our science GCSEs this year where 57% of pupils achieved at least 2 good grades, with many gaining 4 good grades. I am full of admiration for the science department's efforts in raising the quality of teaching and learning in this core subject.

This remarkable trend of improvement is due to a combination of reasons. Firstly, we have worked hard over recent years to ensure that the courses we offer suit pupils' interests. Secondly, it tends to be the case that pupils perform best in the subjects they enjoy the most and, thirdly, the quality of teaching and learning continues to improve

as each year goes by. The percentage of pupils gaining 5 A*-C including English and maths was 38% which indicates excellent performance when prior attainment is taken into account.

One of the most impressive aspects of Westlands is the rock solid determination of the teaching and support staff to continuously improve the quality of education we provide. We will do all within our power to ensure that 2010 is another bumper year.

With all pupils due to return on Monday 7 September (Year 7 pupils start on 4 September) it is important to make clear some important expectations of pupils.

Holidays in Term Time

The school can only ensure your child's education if they attend school. It is a myth that parents have the right to ten days' holiday during term time. The law states that parents have the right to request this; however, approval from the school must be given. The Westlands School policy in this area is only to approve holidays in exceptional circumstances. Holidays for economic reasons or parental work reasons do not fit the definition of exceptional circumstances as applied by this school.

Any absence from school is harmful to your child's education. Children who fulfil their potential at school almost always have good attendance rates.

Uniform

From the start of term all pupils will be expected to wear their uniform properly, without fail. This now includes wearing the top button of the shirt done up, with the shirt tucked in. Ties must be worn navel length and suitable school shoes, not trainers, must be worn without fail.

Girls who choose to wear skirts to school must wear them at a decent length. Clearly, any girls who do not follow this rule can expect to be sent home to change and will be told in future they must wear trousers instead.

It is crucial that all parents and pupils understand that pupils without the correct uniform will not be allowed to attend classes and will be sent home until the correct uniform is worn. This rule is applied without exception and is completely non-negotiable.

Mobile Phones

These are great. They are a truly indispensable part of our daily life and I would really struggle without mine. But there is no place for them in the classroom, assemblies, examinations or any other formal school situation. Any mobile phones used inappropriately, or which ring at an inappropriate time, will be confiscated and only returned to the pupil's parent. Again, this is non-negotiable.

School Newsletters

From this academic year, we will only publish the school newsletter on the school website. Newsletters will be available at the end of terms 2, 4 and 6 (autumn, spring and summer). Whilst I recognise that some parents may prefer to have a hard copy of the newsletter, I do feel that now is the right time to move to providing this only in electronic form.

Swine Flu

At the end of last term there were lots of concerns regarding the possibility of cases of Swine Flu in the school community. The advice from the Health Protection Agency is that where a child in the school is suspected of having swine flu, or has flu-like symptoms, there is no reason to close the school early or to change the way it operates.

We will follow the guidance of the Health Protection Agency to the letter in this area. Further information is available on the HPA website www.hpa.org.uk. Please note the school will not, in any circumstances, pass out confidential information regarding individual pupils or members of staff.

Parents' Evenings

Below is the list of parents' evenings for the year. Please do whatever you can to ensure your attendance at these evening. We usually find that around 75% of parents attend these crucial evenings and I am grateful for the support of these parents. By not attending you are making the job of your child's teachers much harder and directly harming your child's chances of educational success. Please place these dates in your diary and we look forward to seeing you.

Date				Year	
Wednesday	23	September	2009	6 th Form	Parents' Information Evening
Thursday	19	November	2009	9	Parents' Evening
Thursday	3	December	2009	6 th Form	Parents' Evening
Tuesday	8	December	2009	7 and 10	Parents to meet Tutors
Monday	11	January	2010	9	Year 9 Options Parents' Evening
Thursday	21	January	2010	11	Parents' Evening
Monday	1	February	2010	8	Year 8 Options Parents' Evening
Thursday	4	February	2010	10	Parents' Evening
Thursday	25	March	2010	7	Parents' Evening
Thursday	17	June	2010	8	Parents' Evening

Key Dates for the New Academic Year

Please refer to the school calendar on our website www.westlands.kent.sch.uk for full details of these very important dates.

Finally, we have an exciting and, hopefully, successful year ahead of us. We are always grateful for the support of parents. Should you wish to contact me at any stage my email address is jwh@westlands.kent.sch.uk.

Yours sincerely

Mr J Whitcombe
Headteacher