

Friday 12 November 2021

Dear everyone

An almost daily routine is the ruinously expensive food trip to M&S to find sustenance after a long day, but the joy of the up-escalator from the lower reaches of New Change as the eye is drawn to the dome of the Cathedral takes some beating. Lit of an evening its splendour is awe inspiring.

Remember the first time you saw the Acropolis, or Capitol Hill, or the great pyramids in Giza? The view of Venice as you buzz across the water and St Mark's comes into view, the treasury in Petra seen on horse back as you emerge through the cut rock into startling sunshine? The Borobudur in Java. Human structures built to inspire, and we're a part of that. Right here, at St Paul's Cathedral School. When you bring your child on Monday, look up. There is no parallel with any other school in London and it is easy to forget because of its familiarity. Yet I know from children and parents that once they have moved on, they miss it deeply, they miss the intimacy of knowing that extraordinary and transformative place to which we have ready access.

We can also go on about the amazing new play spaces in the school, the world class music making, the opportunities that abound, and yes, we're just as academically robust as the hothouse schools. But at the last, it is our sense of community that really matters: our collective responsibility to each other to thrive. A community that, when the time comes at 11 or 13, your child is part of for life. And that time goes so quickly. Enjoy every moment while you can – childhood is fleeting.

It is an anxious time for parents with children further up the school as you look ahead to the next place of learning. Take heart. As one wise parent said to me this week, schools and children find each other. And they do.

With regard to the ISEB pre-tests coming up, we will be providing additional snacks and refreshments for children who are sitting these exams so that they are well fed and watered and in the best frame of mind for their next sessions. You might also find this link useful.

[https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/articles/food\\_exam\\_performance](https://www.bbc.co.uk/food/articles/food_exam_performance)

Can you believe it, we're looking ahead to our Reception intake for September 2022. It is a blessing to be in a position to offer more places now that we are two form entry in Reception. I am really looking forward to meeting children and their parents on Saturday 20 November. It is always an enjoyable day drinking tea and chatting to everyone. Some parents are well versed in what happens, while others are nervous and unsure as they start to think about their child emerging into the world. I've no doubt you will remember that feeling acutely.

And then on Thursday 13 January 2022 we meet children wanting to join us in Year 3 (7+). Please do encourage your friends to get in touch for 7+. You will know already that what we have here has a special quality about it. Sing out, and spread the word.

On Thursday and Friday this week the school welcomed guests from the USA. Our partners, St Paul's Cathedral Trust in America, exists to foster the already strong Anglo-American bonds that support both Cathedral and School. A special event was held in the Cathedral on Thursday evening, attended by our patrons and friends the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester. A contingent of that gathering then visited the school on Friday morning, much admiring both the school development and the vibrancy and energy of your children.

This Saturday is the Lord Mayor's Show, and the Remembrance Service on Sunday when we remember those who lost their lives in war. It is always a most moving service and do come if you are able.

In other business, one parent raised a question about the identification of children in the Circular.

You may have noticed that in the Circular we either have a picture, or a name of a child, but never a picture together with a name. This is deliberate and is part of our safeguarding protocols.

If your child has suddenly taken an interest in Garden Gnomes, blame me. In Monday's assembly we had a conversation about Garden Gnomes – I had taken a photograph of the most glorious collection I had seen recently in someone's garden and this prompted an idea to investigate them.

Garden Gnomes have an interesting history, are surprisingly controversial, and can also bring a great deal of joy. From the French Liberation Front for Gnomes, to Gnoming (roaming gnomes), we also laughed a lot.

And then after the assembly I felt unsettled. Might Garden Gnomes cause offence? By the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century certainly Garden Gnomes became strongly associated with class, and have more recently been culturally appropriated as ironic kitsch among the middle classes. It is now possible to buy oversized bright block-colour resin gnomes (not cheap, either!).

Looked at through a number of cultural lenses the origin of gnomes and what they represent, like many mythical constructs, might not always sit comfortably today. Alexander Pope's poem *The Rape of the Lock* has it that gnomes are creatures which were once prudish women, descended onto earth to fight with the spirits of vacuous and vain women transformed into sylphs. You don't need a literature degree to read these characters as sexist literary devices, even if set out as parody.

Are Gnomes part of a servant class? How close are they to Dobby, the house-elf from the Harry Potter franchise, a distinctly oppressed character whose free will had been diminished, and freed by an old sock?

Here's Mary J Blige...from the sound track from *Sherlock Gnomes*. Yes, that's right, you read that correctly. Great dance number. Crank up the volume.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KDumNHRidM>

PS. Independent Schools Show in Battersea this weekend. <https://schoolsshow.co.uk/>

Very best wishes

Simon