



December 2024

Dear parent or guardian,

Michaelmas is always a varied and busy term with a wide range of activities, trips and sporting achievement. I want very much to take the opportunity to thank you and your children for all your help and support with so many areas of school life. In September it was a great pleasure to host Old Armachian Professor Nola Hewitt-Dundas on Speech Night to celebrate pupil success and inspire us with her story. We are delighted at the great success of the girls 1XI have had in the Stevenson's Cup (formerly the Super League) and excited about the season to come.

Community engagement

Over the last few weeks pupils have been engaged in a range of activities, sending cards to local residential settings, supporting local charities, playing at Rushmere and singing in local community carol services.

End of term celebrations

The final days of term are always fun filled but very busy. Year 12 pupils behaved in an exemplary fashion on their trip to Belfast as did pupils from other year groups on their cinema trips. Today's Talent Show is always an excellent way to end term with a wide range of acts to treat us. All of these activities require much more organisation than a regular teaching day and I would like to thank everyone who organised, participated or supervised these events.

Festival of Lessons & Carols

We were delighted to gather once again in St. Patrick's Cathedral for our Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. We are, as always, very grateful to the Dean and Chapter for making the arrangements for this service and to the music department for all their work to help make this such a meaningful service.

The Sound of Music

There is no doubt that performing in front of a live audience is character building. It was fantastic to see so many pupils involved in the play, on the stage, backstage and front of house. Hours of hard work were poured in to making this an unforgettable event for everyone involved and I want to thank all the staff – many of them unseen- you made it possible.

Home/ School Communication

We are constantly looking for the best ways to ensure that our pupils are safe and to work with families to supply information in a timely and accessible way. While the text home system is now well embedded and working smoothly some parents continue to experience difficulty with the SIMS app. Consequently, we believe that some parents may not be accessing pupil reports. The app is now the main vehicle for home school communications so please ensure that you have logged in, and if you experience any difficulty with it, get in touch.

As always, we would stress that parents and guardians do not have to wait for the official Parent Teacher Meeting to talk with staff. You will always be very welcome to attend school if you wish to speak face to face with a member of staff. Please ring ahead to make an appointment. Earlier this year we issued guidance about email communications and reasonable expectations regarding responses. If you wish to inform us about a safeguarding concern an appointment is **not** necessary.

Industrial action

As you will be aware from the news the 'teaching unions' have once again received a mandate for industrial action up to and including strike action in pursuance of a pay settlement for the year we are now in. We do not yet know how our school will be impacted by any industrial action but it may necessitate the rescheduling of some planned school activities next year. I appreciate this will create disruption for many families; however, we will prioritise face-to-face meetings to discuss pupil progress where possible and we will continue to try and do this in a way which minimises disruption to teaching time.

School uniform

Everyone who chooses to come to the Royal School is aware of its high standards before they start, and the school is known and respected in the community for those high standards. We want to avoid unnecessary confrontation with pupils over uniform and appearance which is why we value your cooperation in helping to maintain those standards. With regard to uniform and appearance the weather will be colder for the next few months, and we would encourage pupils to purchase a school pullover as hoodies and other tops are not permitted. Boys may not wear earrings at all, and girls may wear ONE stud in each ear lobe. Nail varnish should be neutral and gel nails are not permitted. Please help us to ensure that pupils are not displaying non regulation piercings. Further information about appearance, including information about hairstyles, is contained in the Parents' Handbook.

We never want a situation where pupils feel embarrassed or uncomfortable because of what they wear to school so please help us to ensure that our pupils, whatever their year group, present the right image of our school.

Some important forthcoming dates

Below is some important information about key dates over the next few weeks:

- **Thursday 18 December** – Year 13 Study preparation & Year 14 UCAS day.
- **Friday 20th December** – as is convention only specific groups of pupils will be required in school that day. If your child is not specifically requested to be in school on this date, then they can start their Christmas break after school on 19th December.
- **Friday 3rd January** – School Development Day. Only staff will be in school that day.
- **Sunday 5th January** – SU Celebrate service in St Mark's Parish Church. All members of the school community, past and present are welcome to attend this service.
- **Monday 6th January** - school starts back for all pupils. Boarders may return on Sunday 5th January from 6:30pm or earlier that day by prior arrangement with the head of boarding.
- **Thursday 16th January** – Open Night. All prefects will be involved.
- **Friday 17 January** – School Development Day. Only staff will be in school that day.
- **Monday 20th – Friday 24th January** – Year 13 & 14 Mock Examinations.
- **Monday 20th – Monday 27th January** - Internal Exams Years 8 - 11.
- **Monday 20th – Friday 31st January** – Year 12 Mock Examinations.
- **Monday 10th February** – School Development Day.
- **Tuesday 11th - Friday 14th February (inclusive)** – Half Term.

Access to school outside school hours

Staff will be on hand to supervise children in the school building from 8:20am each morning so we recommend that pupils don't enter the building before that time. For insurance purposes all day pupils, who are not participating in supervised activities after school, must leave the grounds by 3:30pm. Any pupil who has difficulty getting home should report to either of the vice principals or the headmaster.?

Lost Property

Please remind your sons and daughters to check Lost Property for any missing items before the end of term. Lost Property will be kept until the end of the first week of the next term after which, if unclaimed, it will be sent to charity. All Lost Property requests to Mr Cardwell please by the end of the first week back after Christmas.

Parking and vehicle use

Parking on the school site is very limited and is therefore restricted to staff and visitors only. Pupils are not permitted to park in the school grounds. To ensure the safety of everyone using the school site only pupils in the Preparatory Department may be dropped off or collected in the grounds. The exception to this is in cases where a pupil has mobility issues

which must be discussed as soon as possible with Mr Cardwell. The Armagh Observatory and Planetarium requests that pupils do not use their car park.

In the recent past we have received complaints from residents of nearby residential areas and the police about inconsiderate parking by pupils. We ask therefore that pupils who are fortunate enough to have access to a car are mindful of others and avoid parking in such a way that blocks driveways etc. We have advised the police that we cannot control pupil parking and they should enforce traffic regulations as they see fit.

Lunchtime

If you wish your child to purchase food in school, please ensure that the relevant parent pay account has credit. We regret that we cannot ordinarily provide food to pupils where there are no funds available in the account. Sixth Form may leave the school grounds at lunch time in line with conditions which have been explained to them; however, they may not travel by car at lunchtime.

And finally....

It takes a community to make a school successful and on behalf of the Governors and all our Staff I would like to thank you for your interest and support and pay tribute to your children whose contribution to school life is highly valued and to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

Yours faithfully



Graham Montgomery

Headmaster

