



Horsmonden Primary School

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Mr Malcolm E. Hayes

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Dear Parents,

Thank you for your time this week in attending **parent consultations**. The value of such activity comes not only through the face-to-face conversations about your children, but in the sociable time spent in the hall either side of appointments. We hope that you found your appointment useful in giving you feedback on progress and achievement so far this year as well as an indication of how we will be developing your child's capabilities and learning during the coming few months.

Have you booked your child in for next Wednesday's **Sportscamp** with Premier Sports. From 09:00 through to 15:30, children can enrol in either football or Mini-Olympics. If your child wants to come along and didn't get a leaflet last week, there are a few spares in the office. You get a £3.50 discount for booking online, so don't miss out on the chance.

Apologies from Pamela Watkins regarding the confusion over **Strictly Ballroom Dancing** this week. Accompanying this newsletter is a flier from Pamela about a street-dancing opportunity. In my advancing years I can tell you that there is little point in asking me for an explanation of what this involves, but I gather that the young and trendy among you will know. The new class will be on Tuesday afternoons after school in the hall.

As we break for the mid-term holiday, it's good to have some **big philosophical thoughts** on why we do what we do. Several different factors have highlighted our particular approach to learning and it's so important to constantly remind ourselves of what we actually do believe in. I'd like to start with the phrase at the bottom of the headed paper, which has been there for several years. Whilst listening to some stunning examples of children's writing in upper juniors, I was challenged about the use of the word 'bigger' as along with 'nice' it is banned from use in their books. Pupil pressure has therefore, quite rightly, caused the change in the statement at the bottom to use the word 'greater', which reflects more accurately what we really believe about this philosophy.

There's more! The Children's Society published its report this week, *A Good Childhood: Searching for Values in a Competitive Age*, which carried some criticism of the relentless focus on a testing and league table culture, and its impact on in particular on more 'vulnerable' children. Whilst one may argue as to a definition of vulnerability in children, the point has been made that this narrowness of vision is one of the causes of disaffection in schools and that a more holistic view of children's needs is what is required to broaden success.

This leads me to the next piece of the jigsaw. A couple of you telephoned in on Tuesday to let us know we'd got our own Special Mention on BBC Radio Kent, where the school's ability to instil a sense of self-confidence in our children was trumpeted as something that makes us stand out from the crowd. Moreover, the point was made that self-confidence is one of the most important attributes children can leave school with, particularly when the entire world economy seems to be piling on the challenge for daily lives across the globe. Our continuing aim is to enable your child to achieve their academic potential alongside a strong sense of self-confidence in preparing them for the tests of life rather than a life of tests.

Which leads me on... and on... Professor Tim Birkhead, in the Times Educational Supplement last week, wrote that "*new undergraduates seem to expect to be told what to do at every stage. It is almost as though the spoon-feeding-and-teaching-to-the-test culture at school has drained them of independent thinking*". Our emphasis on Successful Intelligence means that we're not only looking at

maximising children's academic potential, but we're looking at how they can use it more creatively, practically and effectively. That's where the focus is so much bigger...sorry, greater than the next test and that's an important part of developing children's self-confidence to have a go rather than sit back and wait for the next instruction.

Is all this just waffle in a feeble effort to pad out the final newsletter before the mid-term holiday? Not at all. Underpinning the sense of fun and some of the more ridiculous activities in the school (and newsletters) lies a very deep philosophy about how children learn best and it's something we need to be very protective of. There's a real shortage of deep-rooted belief in the process of learning and an overwhelming focus by our masters on outcomes. For most of you, this is your nearest school; what gave you confidence that you were living in the right place for your children's education? Think back to most significant factors in making you choose Horsmonden? Was it league tables or Ofsted reports? Was it more about what you heard from others about the school and its ethos.

I know from the many comments you have made during consultations and from emails you have sent over the last few months that there is a great awareness and appreciation for the values, ethos and activities of this school. We don't get every interaction right, but we hope that this week you have seen and heard for yourselves evidence of how much your child's success matters to us and that they are enjoying the journey. Let's value it, celebrate it and protect it.

All of that is, of course, my view. What do you think? In a few weeks time we'll be sending home our annual parent and children's questionnaire to get your views on a whole range of activities within the school. This gives an important opportunity for you to put into print what you would like us to work on during the coming months and years, but just as important is the opportunity to write about the things we do that you really value and want us to hold on to firmly. You don't have to wait for that, though and I'm happy to receive your emails at any time on anything related to the work of the school.

Well, that's got that off my chest! All that remains for me to do is to wish you all an enjoyable mid-term break and I look forward to seeing you bright and breezy on Monday 23rd February.

Yours sincerely,

Malcolm E. Hayes
Headmaster

