

BOT Assembly
Michaelmas Term 2011

Welcome to the start of the new Michaelmas Term and the new school year 2011-12. Students in the newly-created year groups (the Lower Sixth, Year 9 and Year 7) have already enjoyed successful induction days, and I've been delighted to meet a number of you already. I know every year those new to Sevenoaks are welcomed extremely warmly by our existing students, and I hope you will settle in very quickly to a wonderful few years here.

I'd like to welcome in particular, and congratulate, our new school captains, **Aisha Bennett** and **Sebastian Teodorescu**. I know you will rise to the responsibility and be a pleasure to work with. I congratulate our new captains of sport, **Bernard Lee**, badminton, **Anna Surrey**, basketball, **Gualtiero Uslenghi**, cross-country, **Lily Elliott**, hockey, **Emily Elliott**, netball, **Sam Sheppard**, rugby, **Robert Laurensen**, sailing, **Serena Yuen** and **Victoria Redman**, shooting, **Matthew Hitchens**, squash, and **Daniel Adeline** and **Caroline Gloyne**, swimming. We've got an exciting season of fixtures ahead, for which these roles require real commitment, talent and effort; I'm grateful to all of you for taking them on.

We welcome a number of new teachers to school today, and extend a warm welcome to **Mr John Sprague**, our new Director of IB and Head of Theory of Knowledge. Mr Sprague was educated in California and at Harvard, taught for some years at King's College School, Wimbledon, and most recently at Leysin American School in Switzerland, where he was Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. **Mr Nigel Haworth** continues as IB Diploma Co-ordinator. I'm really delighted we have such a powerful partnership leading the IB at Sevenoaks. You can be proud to be part of what must be considered probably the world's top IB school – in terms of our 33 years' experience teaching the IB, the sheer size of our Sixth Form, which each year sees through over 200 full Diploma students to what you will hear more about later, these quite outstanding academic results.

We welcome a new Head of History, **Mr Gareth Parker-Jones**, a new Head of Spanish, **Mr Manuel Capelo**, and a new Head of German, **Miss Julia Sassen**. We welcome two new teachers to the English department: **Mr James Hughes**, who will assist Mrs Henshaw in her leadership of the English faculty, and **Dr Stephen Burley**. In Classics, we welcome **Mr Thomas Corcoran**; in Modern Languages, **Ms Laura Hardwick** and **Miss Alannah Russell**, teaching French. We welcome **Mr Alex Patton** to the Geography department, and **Mr Sean Reid** to History. In Mathematics we welcome **Mr Daniel Whiffin** and **Mr Guy Howden**, in Physics, **Dr Helen Roff**, and in Design Technology, **Miss Nathalie Atkinson**. **Mrs Kathryn Ashwell** will be Assistant Head of Instrumental and Vocal Studies in the Music department. We welcome **Mr Mark White** as temporary Head of Art, covering Mr Thomas's absence for the first part of this term. **Mrs Penny Hargreaves** takes on a new role as Head of PSD.

We welcome a number of Languages assistants: **Monsieur Laurent Fremont** and **Mr Pierre Le Yeuch**, **Mademoiselle Fiona Le Nestour**, and **Miss Stephanie Becker**, and additional coaches in the sports department: **Miss Charlotte Pearson** and **Mr Damien Reilly**, and in sailing, **Miss Georgie Corlett**. In Music, we welcome two gap students, **Mr Sam Liu** and **Mr Jonathan Hope**.

I hope all of you will be very happy at Sevenoaks, and I know our students will do their best to make you feel at home quickly.

There has been some significant work on the campus over the summer. I think you will be pleased to see the new café – Costa – which has opened at the back of the Aisher Hall, next to the Higher Education department. The café has yet to be named, and its opening times and availability for students' use will be publicised to you shortly. Temple House has been renovated, and is now the new home of the Development Office and the Centre for Innovation. A refurbished Physics lab will be ready for your use soon.

The school's masterplan has been updated over recent months, and work is now underway to improve space for your outdoor recreation as well as parking and traffic flow through the campus. Our proposed developments are still dependent on receiving planning permission, but I hope very much over the next two or three years you will see significant improvement in these important areas.

You will be proud to learn The Space, the performing arts centre which opened just over a year ago, came very close to being shortlisted for the UK's most prestigious architectural award, the Stirling Prize. We were somewhere at the top of what is called the mid-list, the 24 best buildings in the UK and abroad.

It's a pleasure every year to congratulate all those students who achieved outstanding examination results. Two hundred and eight Upper Sixth students took the Diploma, and between them, achieved an average of over 39.9 points – our highest ever. Sixteen students achieved the top score of 45 points, and a further 22 achieved 44 points. More than half of our students achieved 40 points or above, and no student achieved below 30 points. The world average stands at just over 29 points.

I am delighted that virtually every student has gone on to his or her university destination of choice – around 91%. Most popular are Cambridge and Oxford, Durham, the London colleges – LSE, UCL, Kings – and leading North American universities.

Congratulations to last year's Year 11 students, who achieved outstanding GCSE and IGCSE results – over 82% of your results were A* or A, and over half – 51.6% - A*. Sixteen students achieved 10 or more straight A*s. It's a pleasure to welcome such motivated and able students into our new Lower Sixth so well qualified to start the IB Diploma Programme.

Congratulations to **Catherine Xu**, in the Upper Sixth, who came top in a recent UK Mathematical Olympiad, and to six former Sevenoaks students currently at Oxford and Cambridge. In the recent Varsity sailing competition, the Oxford and Cambridge teams both consisted predominantly of former Sevenoaks students. Three Old Sennockians, **John Platts-Mills**, **Jonathan Turnbull** and **Georgia Trapp**, of the University of Oxford, were victorious over three Cambridge Old Sennockians: **Sarah Hughes**, **Felix Danczak** and **Peter Bunch**. Well done to all for participating. Our shooting teams competed very successfully at Bisley, winning the Ashburton Challenge Trophy and scoring high in a number of the different competitions.

There were many successful trips in the holidays –

Sixty Year 7 pupils participated in the annual trip to Greece early in the holiday, and enjoyed alternate days on the beach and on study trips to the ancient sites of Epidaurus and Corinth.

Over 80 Year 10 IGCSE Geography students joined the six-day expedition to Iceland, which included walks on the crater of the volcano Eldfell, and ice walking on the black glacier Solheimajokull. There was snorkelling and study of the magnificent erosional and depositional land forms of Iceland. Students came away fully appreciating that nature is truly the major controlling force. Real geographical awe and wonder!

Sixteen students visited China in a cross-curricular study trip involving Geography and Mandarin. Students participated in a Chinese summer camp in Beijing, visited the major sites (the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, and the Olympic stadium), and then went on to Shanghai. All our students earned a certificate for the Chinese they learnt.

Thirty-two members of the Chamber Choir and the Sennocke Consort went on tour in Spain. The choirs, including students from Year 8 to the Upper Sixth, performed a repertoire of sacred music, including Buxtehude's *Cantate Domino*, to an audience of several hundred in the Benedictine abbey of Santa Maria de Montserrat in Catalonia. Our choirs were also invited to sing for Mass at Barcelona Cathedral. The singing was brilliant, and our students received standing ovations on many occasions.

The Biology department ran an expedition to Madagascar for 27 Lower Sixth students, who collected ecological data in the southern spiny forest, which will now be used by UNESCO. Students saw at first hand species of lemurs, iguanas, chameleons, and the hugely rare radiator tortoise. They joined a project to re-educate local people about sustainable fishing, and students got involved in the life of the local community, raising money to rebuild and equip a classroom in the village school.

The annual Promo summer trip to Mumbai was also memorable for its service. Students visited several charities, including a school for the blind, a children's hospital, a care home

for the old and for abandoned HIV children. Our students taught for four days at different schools, and raised over £3,500 for them.

The South Africa hockey tour was a great success. Thirty of our students trained in Stellenbosch, and then played a total of seven festival matches, the A team finishing eighth out of 24, the highest placed English team (that's ahead of Millfield, Uppingham and Dauntsey's), and our B team was the only second team in the tournament. Students visited Table Mountain, Cape Point, penguins at Boulders Bay, Robben Island, Cango caves, and whale watched in Hermanus. And they supported the people of Fistantekraal township, raising nearly £2000 for them.

I have already heard from all your teachers how much they enjoyed taking you on these trips, and what fantastic enthusiasm and engagement you demonstrate on them. This spirit of adventure, and curiosity about the world, together with the very high standards you set in all aspects of school life, are what make Sevenoaks a special place.

Towards the end of last year I received a very nice letter from a parent, which I think articulates perfectly these characteristics, and I will read you an extract now:

I find it hard to express why the school touches such a deep chord within me but I shall try. It is definitely not the social caché (although I would be lying if I said that I did not feel proud that my child attends Sevenoaks), nor the academic achievements (fantastic though they are). It is the stimulating intellectual environment, the 'everything else' which the school offers and most importantly to me, the novel and exciting ways in which the teachers communicate their subjects to the children. Teachers are not gearing their lessons purely to an exam syllabus but are showing the pupils endless lines of enquiry and possibilities. The link up with the International Space Station was an inspirational example of this. I want my children to feel stimulated and interested in the world around them. Sevenoaks School imparts that same sense of adventure... I also greatly respect the weight which Sevenoaks places on community service and charity – the students are always reminded of their great privilege and good fortune, not in a way that makes them guilty, but in a way which encourages them to ask what they can do to improve the lives of those less fortunate than themselves. I know that in their future careers, many of your pupils will be in a position to do immense good in the world and the seeds of that philanthropy will have been sown at school.

On Tuesday, at our beginning of term staff meeting, we had a wide-ranging and inspiring discussion about how to develop our service activities at school, and how we can work with you to sow those seeds of philanthropy, the love for your fellow man that means you want to do good in the world. As a Sevenoaks student, you are certainly in a position to do just that.

Looking ahead to the next year, the coming term and weeks ahead, there will be plenty of new experiences for all: in lessons, in sport, in the arts, and in service. I know you will make the most of those opportunities.

At the beginning of every school year I like to remind you that Sevenoaks School is your school, and I welcome your views and contributions to its current and future development. I always attend school council meetings when invited, and I will always make myself available for students if there are issues you want to discuss direct with me. My office is at the top of the stairs in Claridge House on the left. If the door is open you can pop your head round it and see if I am there, if it is closed you can always make an appointment with my PA, Mrs Marie Thomas, or send me an email. I hope you will take this opportunity if there are things you would like to talk about.

And now, all that remains is for me to wish you a very happy and successful Michaelmas Term, and indeed school year.

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