

Senior Girls

Merchant Taylors' Schools
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**MERCHANT
TAYLORS'
SCHOOLS**

For Boys and Girls
aged 4 to 18 years

January 2019

Dear Parents

I would like to wish you all best wishes for the New Year and I hope, that you have all had some memorable time together with your families over the holidays. For some, it will have been a time of sadness as you remember the loss of a loved one, for others it will have been a period of merriment or a time requiring you to help your daughters to balance the need for downtime and recuperation with the need to undertake a modicum of revision. I am sure though, as you return to work or your daily routines, that many of you have been lulled into making at least one New Year's Resolution. Some people make resolutions to start doing things that will make them better, live more healthily or become more interesting people, like becoming a vegan, going to the gym twice a week, saving money, learning to play the ukulele or even doing all their homework on time. Some others do not make any New Year's Resolutions. Either they think they are perfect already, or they know that whatever resolutions they make, they will break them before the end of January. During my first assembly of the term I will encouraging the girls to make New Year's Resolutions that will not only benefit themselves, but the wider world and that they could do this through random acts of kindness. I hope throughout the remaining part of this academic year that some of these acts can be shared with the whole school community through the School's Headlines weekly bulletin.

The new Headmaster of the Boys' school and I have been looking at the importance of developing character in our children as part of the work we are undertaking to develop the Strategic Development Plan for our schools. This is proving to be very topical within the wider education arena. Dr. Anthony Wallersteiner, Headmaster of Stowe school stated in his recent article in *The Telegraph* that 'character virtues such as resilience and grit are being lost in the scramble for schools to achieve even higher metrics in public exams'. Whilst both of us are keen to ensure the educational standards within our schools are not compromised, we are both determined to ensure that all children passing through the Merchant Taylors' Schools are given the opportunity to have their character developed to enable them to leave our respective communities and face the challenges they will encounter with confidence and boldness. One of the best ways to achieve this is through the extra-curricular programme. There has been a noticeable increase in the uptake and resurgence of the clubs during the lunch break at school since the banning of mobile phones. Long may this continue! I am always delighted to support any pupil who has a desire to start a new initiative or club and look forward to hearing about the new ventures which some of the Sixth Form pupils have already proposed to kick start this term.

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I have certainly spent some of the Christmas holidays catching up with some light reading. I was given a copy of Michelle Obama's biography *Becoming* as a present. For those of you not familiar with it, the former First Lady's warmth and wit stand out in what is, an extraordinarily candid account of her life inside and outside the White House. *Becoming* is frequently funny, and includes many illustrations with which we can all empathise I am sure, like the time we may have all felt like a 'poppy seed in a bowl of rice' or recognised the need to give someone a consoling hug as she did when she met the Queen. It is though a good reminder to us all on how culture can have a huge impact on our lives and how we can make a difference to the lives of others. We are currently in the process of making an application to be recognised as a School with an international outlook with the British Council. Having spent the October half-term in China on the School trip to visit our partnership school in Shanghai, I very much hope that we can develop more links with other schools around the world to enable the girls to continue to develop their global perspective on the world. I will also be introducing a new Global perspectives course for Years 10 and 11 from September 2019.

Many of the girls will start the term by undertaking mock examinations. Some of them will have already realised that they have already left it too late to undertake the proper revision they should have done to ensure academic success; others will have made huge sacrifices to ensure that they do themselves justice. Whichever camp your daughter falls into or if your children are in the younger year groups, I would highly recommend that you think about acquiring a copy of the book *Learning How to Learn* by Barbara Oakley et al which attempts to inform teenagers how they can learn effectively without having to spend all their time studying. It is written for children and gives a very accessible account of their brains actually learn, accompanied by practical activities that they can put to use straight away. The book also explains why things such as practice and drill really do matter, and how in the long term they will make your daughter's life easier and save her the misery of last minute cramming and exam anxiety.

So as we look forward to 2019 with new beginnings for some and a myriad of exciting and wonderful events and activities already built into all of our calendars, I would like to close by echoing writer Susan Sontag who in her Commencement Address to the graduates of the leading US women's university, Wellesley College, referred to Spenser's *The Faerie Queen, Book III*. In this book the writer describes a place called the Castle of Busyrane, on 'whose outer gate is written *BE BOLD, and on the second gate, BE BOLD, BE BOLD, and on the inner iron door, BE NOT TOO BOLD.*' Neither Susan Sontag nor I give this as our advice rather, we would urge you to encourage your daughters to, 'be as imprudent as they dare, to *BE BOLD, BE BOLD, BE BOLD.*'

Kind regards

Claire Tao