



October 2016

Dear Parents and Carers

Another half term has flown by and I am sure everyone is looking forward to a break to recharge the batteries.

One hour of fame: this weekend has seen the screening of the (much-awaited!) BBC2 Documentary "The school that got Teens Reading". The level of interest in the programme was amazing with a whole page feature in the Radio Times and with the programme chosen by several of the Sunday and weekly papers as their choice for the day. I thought the young people were a real credit to the school, thoughtful, honest and articulate and the BBC portrayal of the school was sensitive and accurate. An hour of fame for Ripley! I have been asked by many people why Ripley was chosen as the school to be featured; over a year ago the BBC approached the National Literacy Trust and asked them to nominate 20 schools who were particularly successful in promoting reading. The 20 were then reduced to 10, then 5, then 3 and small trailers were made of the three before we were selected. The BBC wanted to go to a school that had done everything possible so that they, the BBC, could then try some innovative strategies to persuade even the most reluctant readers.

Duke of Edinburgh Award: We now have a long queue forming for the Palace! Over 40 of our sixth formers are waiting to receive their Gold awards from the Duke of Edinburgh. Twenty students met the Duke this month, we are becoming quite regular guests at the ceremonies! I have just signed the permission slips for another 11 expeditions next summer term and the introductory event for year 10 is being held at the beginning of November, so the award continues to thrive at Ripley. It is a wonderful and often life changing achievement to finish the Gold award at the same time as completing A level study and every young person doing so is to be applauded.

Harvest: thank you for supporting our harvest collection for The Olive Branch through your generous harvest gifts. Sam will be taking the gifts to The Olive Branch this week where I know they will be greatly appreciated. Our next big event is the bonfire evening on November 11th – do get your tickets for that.

Spirituality Day: October saw our first Spirituality Day of the year. The focus for year 8 was 'Poverty and Homelessness', and the year group spent the day learning about and responding to this issue in a variety of ways. We started the day in forms making paper bags out of old newspapers which then had to be sold to our sweatshop owner for just a few pounds to buy our family food for the week. The experience gave great insight into the lives of some of the world's poorest people, but was probably more enjoyable than it would be in real life. Pupils then heard from various people who work with the poor and the homeless. Talks were given by the Olive Branch, Christ Church night shelter, about our school charity the Funzi and Bodo Trust, and finally about a recent school trip to the townships of Bloemfontein.

This was at times a difficult and almost uncomfortable topic to deal with, however the day ended very positively as the pupils reflected on what the Bible calls us to do in the face of poverty and the young people came up with some fantastic examples of action they can take.

Building works: the heating project continues, as does the security project. The heating is now fully back on in the main school and the engineers will now be moving to the Ashton block to continue the upgrading. Our new barrier and visitors' car park have made a big difference, we are just waiting



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for the barrier at the back to be fitted along with the security fencing. Work on the premises never seems to come to an end! We are currently turning our minds to some issues with the tower and the roof!

University applications: this is the season of UCAS references and both staff and students have been working hard to get their university applications sent off. Students are already achieving offers; it seems to really pay off to get the forms early on in the window.

Transition: our Year 6 -7 transition project has been a real success again this year. Year 7 pupils have had an exciting two days focusing on the issues raised in Michael Morpurgo's "An Eagle in the Snow" which was given to them to read over the summer holidays.

Subject workshops were held in English, Drama, Geography, Art, Food Technology, History, RE and Science, with pupils practising morse code, learning about the Blitz in Coventry through song and film, and reliving the experience of being in an Air Raid Shelter in Drama. Visitors to school ran a Wicked Workshop solid experience with pupils experiencing aspects of life as a soldier in WW2 and a Performance poet provided an opportunity to listen to poems as well as write a poem inspired by the novel.

The two days ended with a VE day tea party – all students took part in singing "It's a long way to Tipperary" and "Pack up your troubles" accompanied by our Jazz Band. This week all year 7 will be visiting the Imperial War Museum North at Salford Quays.

Our transition project is aimed not only at inspiring pupils to read but also at giving all our year 7 a common experience and helping them to feel part of the year group as they work with each other.

Half term: do encourage your children to pick up a book during the half term; I have a stack of books at home which I can't wait to start. As our BBC presenters repeated many times, reading will make all the difference! It opens up new worlds for young minds and give pupils the words and structures to express their thoughts – and it's also one of the great joys of life!

I hope you will have a restful break!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "E. Nicholls".

Principal