

THE OLD WOLVERNIAN

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What is the true meaning of Christmas? Sharing hope, good cheer, love, understanding, goodwill, putting others before yourself, or togetherness?

Whilst we all recognise that Christmas is a special time of the year, it is a surprisingly difficult term to define. In December (and likely weeks before, if you listened to any media or happened to be shopping in the 'festive' aisle of your local supermarket), the Christmas spirit seems omnipresent. What does Christmas mean to you? A quick Internet search identifies some 'helpful' prompts - perhaps the start of the Christmas spirit is marked by eating the first chocolate on the advent calendar, singing the first carol or watching 'that TV advert' for a well-known department store or the one for a popular soft drink brand.

Psychologists have attempted to measure the Christmas spirit (I am guessing that because to somehow bottle this rather wonderful 'drink' would be a tonic worth its weight in reindeer!) One such academic study, in the Journal of Happiness Studies, reported more happiness when family and religious experiences were especially notable, and lower well-being occurred when spending and receiving gifts predominated. This is somewhat reassuring when considered within the globalised world in which we live and seems focused on a transactional relationship with Christmas.

Bottling the Christmas spirit in any school should take little imagination or effort. Children so wonderfully see all that is associated with this time of the year, that the spirit of Christmas appears so easily in their faces and with their magical smiles. Working in a school that teaches children from 3 months to 19 years, it is easy to see this excitement and be carried through a busy December to the end of term and Christmas break. (Don't believe that 'teenagers' have 'moved on' from Christmas - they are almost as excited as those many years younger!)

Welcome

For me, Christmas is about sharing and the spirit of togetherness. It's about the Christmas nativity and performances, watched by family and always so much enjoyed by the pupils. It's about shared spirituality and worship at church. It's about giving to charity and celebrating others. It's about sharing good food and Christmas crackers. And it's about family and friends, near and far. After all, any 'good bottle' is best shared with the company of those you love.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas.



Mr L. Collins Headteacher

On a chilly late November evening, parents braved the weather to listen to school staff present on school changes and development. All schools are dynamic - in so far as, adaptations are made each day to best meet the needs of the pupils - however, the best schools plan for changes that are yet to happen.

Independent schools face the greatest challenges in at least a generation. In 1974 Labour returned to power and enacted the Direct Grant Grammar Schools (Cessation of Grant) Regulations 1975 that required schools to choose whether to become LEA-maintained comprehensive schools or independent schools without a grant. This, combined with recession, led to a sector wide shakeup of independent schools. Independent schools recovered and, together with economic growth, pupil numbers in the independent sector grew. There are similarities today with that of half a century ago.

Independent school pupil numbers, until this academic year, have largely grown annually. In relative terms, the economic recession of 2007/08 and the COVID-19 pandemic 2020/21, were 'blips' rather than an indication of longer-term decline. Today, indications are that there will be significant changes to the independent school sector. In anticipation of the introduction of VAT on tuition fees in January 2025, the Independent Schools Council (ISC) recorded private school pupil numbers falling by 1.7% year-on-year in September 2024, the equivalent of 10,540 fewer students. The ISC, which represents 1,400 independent schools, calculated that educating these 10,000 additional pupils in the state system would cost the Department for Education £92.8m.

Other challenges include fewer children of primary school age nationally, and particularly regionally, and increased business costs (national minimum wage and National Insurance).

The school has been planning for the introduction of VAT for the last 18 months. Recent, and somewhat less expected, business changes have also been modelled and included in our business plan. The aim remains to absorb as much of these increased costs as possible whilst continuing to support school growth and development.

Details of our staggered approach to increased tuition costs have been shared directly with parents. There remains a commitment to not apply an inflationary increase to fees for the new academic year (2025-26).

At its core, school development is about building on the current offer, rather than changing the culture or feel of the school. For example, our maximum class size will remain at twenty and our sixth form offer will continue to operate on a tutorial basis.

Refurbishment



Refurbishment of the Fellows classroom block will begin in the new calendar year.

This will include additional tutorial spaces for the sixth form to support growth in this area of the school. Fellows will largely match the appearance of Douglas (housing our KS2 'hub') and include a relationship with the adjacent pond and nature site.

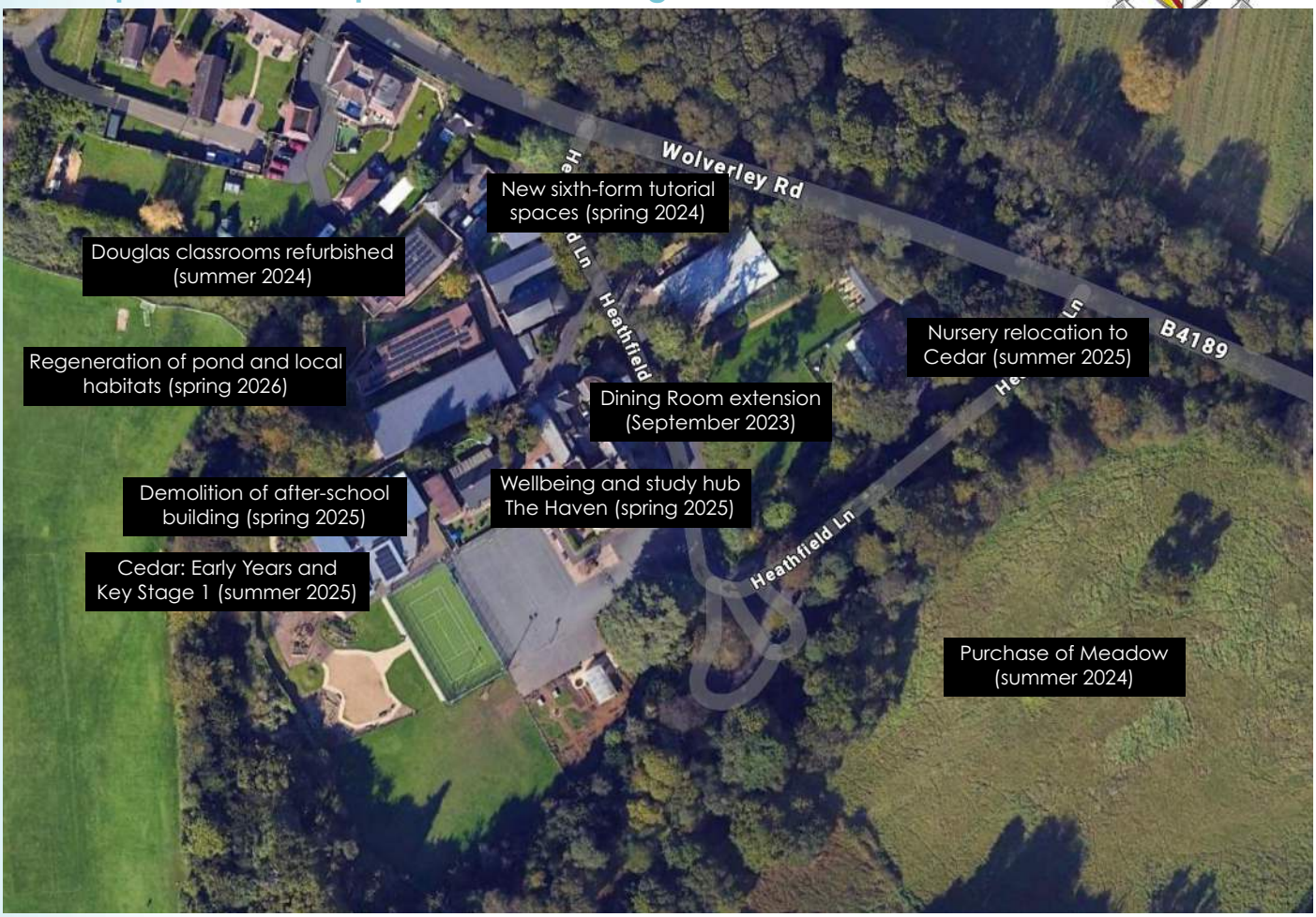
To allow work to commence on Fellows, two or three classrooms will move to the main house in the spaces currently occupied by the Haven, our wellbeing and intervention space. The Haven in turn will move to the now vacant Preschool building and aside from internal works, new outside social spaces will be created for the whole school. Finally, the Nursery will move to better and larger accommodation in Cedar for September 2025.

Aside from the modern spaces, significant investments will be made to furniture and play equipment across all the Early Years groups. This will support increased growth in this key area of the school. Early discussions are taking place, and we expect Mrs Swain on her return to work in the New Year to be heavily involved in this planning. Discussions will also take place with parents when there are firmer plans to share.

The school wants the best for every child at the school. These changes support this aim.

The map on the next page will show you our current and proposed development plans.

Development Plans September 2023 - August 2026



School Communications

Furlong
Versatile School Management Software

SchoolBase by Furlong

Some of you may be aware that I am an inspector for ISI (Independent Schools Inspectorate). Aside from the unique professional development that this affords, it provides opportunities to reflect and benchmark our school to others. One area of the parent questionnaire that typically prompts most discussion, are questions pertaining to the sharing of information with parents. In short, parents always seem to want more information about their child(ren). It might be concerning pupil progress, after school activities or reporting cycles.

From January, we will be sharing our new management information system - SchoolBase. This term has been used to manage the transition from Engage to Schoolbase including data migration and staff training. Further details, including accessing Schoolbase, will be shared shortly. In the meantime, Engage will remain.

Schoolbase allows increased flexibility and customisation compared to our current systems. For example, letters from school may be managed within the Parent App.

Assessment data, including the results of standardised assessments, has previously been held by the school to inform teacher judgements and curriculum planning. This will now be available to you on school reports and will, for example, support conversations around pupil progress and value added.

At Heathfield Knoll School, we believe that learning extends far beyond the classroom. Having recently been shortlisted for the School Travel Awards 'My Best School Trip' award in London, we are looking ahead to out next life changing trip!

Our carefully curated school trips offer unique opportunities to enrich our students' lives, challenge them in areas that will help them grow, and prepare them for the future. Our trips provide immersive enriching experiences that spark curiosity and foster a lifelong love of learning. From sleeping on The HMS Belfast to The National Space Centre, we expose our students to diverse experiences, ideas, and perspectives.

Kip in a Ship, Sleeping on the HMS Belfast, London.





Year 3 & 4 residential, French Chapman Centre, Bewdley.



Connect and Sixth Form Trip to The Dice Box, Worcester.



Senior School trip to Iceland.



Our trips are also crucial in preparing our young people for their lives ahead. Giving them essential life skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, and independence. Whether it is visiting careers fairs in Birmingham or working as part of a team on one of our Duke of Edinburgh expeditions. By navigating new environments and working collaboratively with peers, our students develop the confidence and resilience needed to succeed in the future.

Duke of Edinburgh 2023.





As we move into 2025, we are excited for our remaining residentials this academic year: The Junior 'Sleep in Space' trip to the National Space Centre, The French language trip to Northern France, numerous Duke of Edinburgh expeditions and our first Art Tour to the Peak District.