Message from the Head

We have had a typically turbo-charged start to the Michaelmas term. It has been wonderful to welcome our New Veseyans at Year 7 and Lower Sixth as well as new staff. Students and staff alike have made a very positive start to their BVGS journey. We wish them and their families a life-long warm and happy association with Bishop Vesey’s Grammar School.

This new academic year began in earnest in the middle of August with an outstanding set of public examination results. There are always a lot of factors that lead to examination success. However, we play our part in building on the impressive array of talent that comes through our doors.

Our leavers, our alumni, tell us that we make a difference to their lives. Everyone has a different story but the nurturing of individuals every day collectively leads to a bigger picture. 15 students going off to Oxbridge doesn’t happen by accident. The great progress our students make, from already very high starting points, is not random. Putting it numerically you can see the impact of all this. Academically, we are consistently one of the leading state schools nationally.

A distinctive feature of our School is that we open doors for students right from the start of their school career. We offer students the chance to do things, which other schools don’t offer. Our new Year 7 all have a taster year studying Mandarin Chinese and some of them, through the prestigious Mandarin Excellence Programme, will go on to study Mandarin GCSE and benefit from subsidised trips to China. An amazing opportunity.

Additionally, all Year 7 benefit from the musical life of the school: being part of the amazing Year 7 choir, singing at the Christmas concert, and learning to make a meaningful (!) sound out of a wind instrument. Our breath-taking wider extra-curricular offer enables students, if they wish, to experience drama, public speaking, debating, or new sports like rowing, rugby and hockey.

Above all our school is special because we are a family (albeit quite a large one – as was evident as we assembled for our Whole-School photograph at the start of October). We care about the well-being and rights of everyone in this family and we have excellent staff and student leadership (Officers, Mentors, and Prefects) to support it. The fiercely contested House system of competitions -so far this year we have had House Spelling Bee, House Geography and House Table Tennis- bring the Vesey family together. Our students will remember this. Old Veseyans always seem so proud of ‘their’ House, even 50 years after leaving the School!

I hope you enjoy this colour newsletter, which seeks to reflect on the summer and early autumn of 2018 as well as the inspiration and excellence we strive to offer our Vesey family every day.

Happy reading!

Dominic Robson
Headteacher
October 2018

A summer to remember: GCSE Results

It was very pleasing to see such a great set of GCSE results achieved by Year 11 this summer. This was the first year of tougher new 9-1 examinations being sat in all subjects except Business Studies and Design Technology.

Over 70% of the grades were awarded at 7 or better and nearly half of the grades attained were at the top new grades of 8 (A*) and 9 (A**). The average student Attainment 8 score also increased two points from 72 (2017) to over 74. In plain English, that means our ‘average’ BVGS GCSE student attained the equivalent of four grade 8s and six grade 7s.

Most encouragingly, the initial signs are that our students have again attained outstanding progress scores.

As usual, there were many exceptional student performances with ten students attaining straight top grades: Haaris Butt (three 9s, six 8s and an A*), Johnathan Cartwright (seven 9s, two 8s and an A*), Aiden Hill (five 9s, four 8s and an A*), George Hounslow (six 9s and four 8s), Matthew Hurley (one 9, nine 8s), Amardeep Khangura (eight 9s, an 8 and an A*), Sebastian Smith (nine 9s and an 8), Louis Steer (eight 9s and an 8), Ben Wall (two 9s and eight 8s) and James Ward (nine 9s and an 8).

In total, there were fifteen students attaining an impressive five or more grade 9s: Sebastian Smith (9), James Ward (9), Amardeep Khangura (8), Louis Steer (8), Alexander Bailey (7), Johnathan Cartwright (7), John Kamel (7), Harrison Casey (6), George Hounslow (6), Mursaleen Asif (5), Isaac Bosman (5), Matthew Burrows (5), Aiden Hill (5), Luke O’Brien (5) and Finlay Port (5). Sebastian, James, Isaac, Matthew and Luke also attained the highest grade in the challenging FSMQ Additional Mathematics examination.

Additionally, seven other students attained nine grade 8s or better: Ibrahim Aliwi, Raul Athwall, Joseph Bardsley, Anas Fasih, Jamie Moore, Jai Rukar and Omar Takruri. Overall, 49% of students attained five grade 8s or better.

I am so pleased that the School has sought to keep a strong sense of balance and community over the last five years. So many of our Year 11, who have been very well led by Head of Year, Mr Alex Davis, Mr Russell Bowen, Deputy Head i/c Key Stage 4, Mrs Heather Hodkinson, K54 Learning Mentor, and the rest of the staff, have engaged with the extra-curricular life of the school. They have particularly excelled in sport (this year group have been national hockey finalists as well as national rugby quarter finalists) and music, and have been fantastic ambassadors for their school and country on trips here at home and abroad.

Most importantly, this Year 11 cohort have developed superbly as young men, at the same time as producing outstanding examination results. We are very proud of them all and we wish them the very best with their next step in education and training.
Students, parents and staff are celebrating ‘A’ level results at Bishop Vesey’s Grammar School with 83% of entries being graded at A*-B, and a 100% pass rate.

The Upper Sixth performed very well, with our student leaders, School Captains, William Hennessy and Sophie Lloyd, leading from the front and attaining top grades to win places at Medical School. A school record has been set with fifteen students gaining places at Oxbridge with top marks, including: Phoebe Abbott (Law, Queen’s College, Cambridge), Oliver Bardsley (Veterinary Science, Magdalene College, Cambridge), Benjamin Clay (Medicine, Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge), Emily Coleman (History, Pembroke College, Cambridge), James Cutting (French and German, Worcester College, Oxford), Tom Edwards (Mathematics, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge), Charlotte Frazer-Morris (Biochemistry, Hertford College, Oxford), Louis Kill-Brown (Modern Languages, New College, Oxford), Will Kirby (Arabic and Spanish, Pembroke, Cambridge), Daniel Leyva (Law, Wadham, Oxford), Sheamol Obeda (Engineering, King’s College, Cambridge), Charles Pottinger (Earth Sciences, University College, Oxford), Juliette Thomas (Spanish and Portuguese, Jesus College, Cambridge), Caleb Woodall (Pembroke College, Cambridge) and Nickeal Sidhu (Natural Sciences, Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge). Nickeal has also been awarded a prestigious bursary by the OCR examination board of £3,000 per annum for his outstanding academic performance.

There were also eleven students in total, who attained a stunning three or more A* grades including Jacob Carpenter *** (Mathematics, Bristol) Sehj Kaur *** (Law, King’s College, London) and Daniel McCrae, one of 4 students attaining an impressive 4 * grades, (Physics, Durham University).

This year group has risen to the challenge of the new undeniably tougher linear ‘A’ levels. They have been a fabulous cohort of young people to work with, both inside and outside of the classroom. They have certainly made the most of all the opportunities the ‘Vesey Experience’ provides. From cultural trips to China and sporting experiences in South America, to outstanding performances on the stage, at the concert hall and on the sports fields, as well as raising money for charity, mentoring disadvantaged youngsters or launching weather balloons into Near Space, the Class of 2018 have excelled. I am very proud of them all. A big thank you to all members of staff, especially our excellent Sixth Form Team of Mr Goodwin, Miss Egan, Dr Reilly, Mr Nowek and Mrs Evetts for their unstinting hard work and generous commitment to offering an outstanding, inspirational and well-rounded experience to our students.
Two teams of Year 9 boys travelled to Norway for their World Challenge expedition in July. Team 1 accompanied by Miss Langham and Mr Everett and Team 2 by Miss Field and Mr Davis. The expeditions were expertly led by Simon and Hawthorn, experienced leaders with an abundance of military experience. They were challenged throughout the expedition, which included a gruelling nine hour canoe journey totalling 19km! This was an amazing experience for them amongst spectacular scenery. The boys tackled all the challenges they faced with independence, courage and impressive resilience and leadership skills. Activities included a three day trek, two days of canoeing on the Otra River, wild camping, white water rafting and stand up paddle boarding. They also took part in a tree top obstacle course on the final day, before enjoying a meal together as a team to reflect on the overall experience. They took control of their own budget, cooked for themselves (and their leaders!) and all threw themselves into the experience, learning a huge amount in the process.

"A fantastic experience where we discovered skills and traits not only in ourselves, but in those around us too." Leon Yamin-Ali

"While it might seem like a long time to make the money for the trip, and you might lose motivation, when you’re in another country at the top of a mountain looking at beautiful views, you realise it was all worth it. It is hard, as the name suggests, but even though it is a challenge, it’s the most fun challenge I’ve ever been on. When you’re having a laugh with your mates while canoeing along a calm river, you forget how hard it is and just end up having fun, plus you end up coming back a lot closer with your friends" Caelum Girn

Year 7 residential

Year 7 enjoyed their residential to Whitemoor Lakes in the Summer Term. They enjoyed canoeing, raft building, higher ropes, various team-building activities and celebrating rate English success with the round ball!
Mr Whiting in Argentina, Summer 2018

Mr Whiting travelled to Cardenal Newman Colegio in Buenos Aires, Argentina last summer. His aim was to discover how students, parents and staff value PE, learn how it is taught and to build links between our schools that may offer opportunities to students and staff from both schools in the future.

Colegio Cardenal Newman was founded in 1948 and moved to its current site in 1971. A boys only school, students are expected to complete seven IGCSE exams (Cambridge University) in year 10 and receive an International Baccalaureate diploma in their last year at school. The college is located in the area of San Isidro, a district of Buenos Aires province.

During his time there Mr Whiting spent a large amount of time coaching the u15’s at rugby and in addition taught rowing to the older boys at Buenos Aires Rowing Club. He was also asked to help teach English Literature, analysing characters in Michael Morpurgo’s Twist of Gold, as well as some History and Geography where the subject was ‘analysing Mesopotamia’.

The culture of Cardenal Newman is similar to that of Bishop Vesey’s and the school supports charities to help those less fortunate. Mr Whiting undertook some charity work at a nearby primary school in a very poor part of Buenos Aires where he dug out old trees, planted new ones, painted, decorated and generally helped to improve the school environment. Assisted by students from Christian Brothers’ schools in Peru, Bolivia and Uruguay they were able to make a real difference to the primary school and the children who attend it. The students from Peru and Bolivia were by no means wealthy themselves, but they clearly valued their education and were keen that others should not be denied the opportunity.

Bali Rai Returns

We were delighted to welcome our friend Bali Rai back to BVGS. He gave a very powerful talk to the students about his amazing books and the importance of connecting with the real world.

Jesse Glynn Poetry Workshop

It was a pleasure to have Jesse Glynn working with us on 14 September. Well done to all the students involved.
Old Veseyan News

The Last Day

When I left BVGS in 1977, the Sixth Form Leavers’ Ball hadn’t been invented. You sat your final A Level paper and that was it ... you walked out of the school and you’d left. My last exam was in British History 1815-1914. I remember sitting in the gym and finding the exam paper very straightforward. I later learned that I had been awarded the highest marks of any JMB candidate on both History papers that year. I had been well-taught, but had also worked very hard, devouring one book after another.

The exam over, most of us headed off to the pub - The Boldmere. We sipped a well-earned pint and watched the test match on a small tv. In fact this wasn’t my last day at BVGS. Those of us who were planning to become school teachers were told we had to remain until the last day of term. I cannot remember the reason we were given, but I didn’t mind. I spent my final weeks at BVGS in the stock room of the History Department, re-organising the shelving of books at the behest of NTM. I took my transistor in each day to listen to the cricket. One day the door opened and the Headman R J Harvey appeared. I expected to be reprimanded for being in possession of a transistor in school, but he merely enquired what the score was. I remain unconvinced that catching up on the England batting collapse was the intended purpose of his visit!

On the very last day of term, I made sure I found each of the masters who had taught me in the Sixth Form, shook their hands and expressed my thanks. "And thank you", the charismatic English master Roy ‘Dickie’ Lycett cheerfully replied. When I had had a free lesson last thing on a Monday, I had often - quite against the rules - made an early escape through the tiled corridor of the Sixth Form entrance. On this final journey down the corridor, the sun came flooding in as I pulled open that heavy door. I walked down the garden path to the main gate, turned left and, without looking back, walked down Lichfield Road. It was over, but something else was beginning.

Stephen Roberts (1970-77)

Old Veseyan is a Big, Big Star!

The 1970s were the heyday of progressive rock - affectionately known to its devotees as ‘prog’. This musical style involved much noodling on guitars and keyboards over tracks that invariably featured mystifying lyrics and clocked in at up to twenty minutes. The leading exponents of this ambitious musical genre were Yes, Genesis, Emerson, Lake and Palmer and Pink Floyd. During my time as a pupil at BVGS there were many hushed, reverent conversations in the corridors about the merits of ‘Tales from Topographic Oceans’ by Yes (which sprawled over four sides) and ‘Dark Side of the Moon’ by Pink Floyd (a concept album about madness, man). We daubed our rucksacks with the names of our favourite bands (which could be washed out - by our mums, of course - and replaced when we ‘got into’ a new act). Each morning a BVGS pupil arrived with his decorated rucksack on his back and invariably carrying an album in a plastic bag, often from a cool record shop called Cyclops in the city centre. What pleasure I took in introducing the Sixth Form Common Room to Barclay James Harvest’s ‘Octoberon’. With all its intricacies and portentousness, ‘prog’ has a special attraction to the grammar school boy and it is perhaps not surprising that an Old Veseyan is now a leading exponent of the genre. His much vaunted band is called Big BigTrain.

Big Big Train were formed in Bournemouth in 1990 and the main man is Greg Spawton, who plays bass, guitars and keyboards and writes many of their songs. Spawton was a pupil at BVGS between 1976 and 1983. His older brother Nigel - now an architect - was in the year below me. The two brothers in fact lived only a few doors away from me. I have to confess that, if Greg was cooking up interesting new ‘prog’ sounds in his bedroom, I didn’t hear them wafting out of the window. Neither did I ever see him walking down the road with his nose in the obligatory text for ‘prog’ rockers, The Lord of the Rings. Still it happened ... an OV is now a rock star.

Big Big Train’s series of albums - the first was released in 1994 - has won them acclaim and awards and a fan base that ensures their live shows are sell outs. Their influences are very evident in their music - Peter Gabriel-era Genesis especially, but also Jethro Tull and Caravan. However, the band has built on these influences, creating a sort of symphonic folk-prog sound. After leaving BVGS, Spawton read archaeology at the University of Reading and his lyrics - musical stories, really - reflect his deep interest in the English past. Where to start with Big Big Train? Well, You Tube is the obvious place. They do like a bit of a jig and the song ‘Folklore’ is pretty much irresistible. Then treat yourself to a copy of ‘English Electric’. Like all good prog albums it’s a double - and, like all good prog albums, it has some truly beautiful moments.

Stephen Roberts (1970-77)

Do you, our Old Veseyans, have any reflections you would like to share about your time at BVGS? Please get in touch with Brian Davies, Development Director (b.davies@bishopveseys.bham.sch.uk)
Parents' Association events

Bishop Vesey’s Grammar School Parents Association invites you to their annual Year 7 and Lower Sixth new parents welcome evening. This is a light-hearted, friendly and fun evening and is a great opportunity to meet other parents in an informal and relaxed atmosphere. Places are limited and this event always sells quickly so please book your places as soon as possible.

New Parents' Welcome Curry Night
Thursday 18 October 7:00pm for 7:30pm start
Bhujon, Mere Green, Sutton Coldfield
£15 per head (bring your own drinks, option to buy at restaurant)

To request a place please email Caroline Moore at carolinejmoore25@gmail.com and confirmation will be sent by return. Please include the following information:

- How many tickets you would like @£15 each
- Your name
- Your email address
- Your son/daughter’s form
- Your telephone number
- Cash payment on arrival on the evening

Parents' Association 50/50 Club

Each year, as part of our fund raising activities we run a ‘50/50 Club’. This prize draw is run on a 50/50 basis with half of the proceeds being returned a prize and the other half going to the Parents Association and ultimately to the school.

The subscription for the year from the autumn term is £12 for which your number will be enteredin 12 prize draws (1 per month). We hope that you will be able to support this as we lose members every year when their children leave the school in the sixth form. The 50/50 club is entirely dependent on parents/carers, staff and governors supporting it each year.

We know you receive many requests for money but with the prize draw you have every chance of winning back your subscription and more besides whilst supporting the school. (Children under the age of 18 cannot become members of the Club.)
House Cup 2017-18

The House points final score for last year is as follows:

- 1st White 294
- 2nd Red 293
- 3rd Gold 278
- 4th Blue 239

Lower School Standings (Year 7&8)

- 1st Red 100
- 2nd Gold 98
- 3rd White 96
- 4th Purple 79
- 5th Blue 64

A surprise as to how close it actually came down to in the end. With a strong start to the year from Red leading after Christmas, it was down to the debate that pulled it back for White and a strong performance at Sports Day helped them retain their position. With a win for Red at house hockey it was imperative White put in a good performance at sports day and that they did, obtaining 6 more points than Red pushing them ahead. It was all down to who was better on the day!

House Spelling Bee 2018-19

One of the fiercest fought House Spelling Bee kicked off the House competition for this academic year. Well done to James Horn (U6) who led all House Spelling Bee assemblies.

House Standings after Spelling Bee and House Geography: Blue 27 Gold and Red 21 Purple and White 18. House Table Tennis this week- 2 competitors needed from every House. Merits are included in standings at half term.

House Table Tennis 2018-19

The Sports Hall has been alive to the sounds of table tennis. There have been some impressive skills on display. Well done to Red House for a comprehensive victory in Year 7 for example.

Merits matter!

Obviously all Veseyans want to gain as many merits as possible for their hard work. This year’s House competition recognises that. For every 100 merits attained for a House, points are accrued for the House competition.