



LAWRENCE SHERIFF SCHOOL
A National Teaching School
RUGBY

THE BEST OF THE WEEKLY WORD

A personal selection of favourite articles by Ian Nichol

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INTRODUCTION

October 2018 sees the twenty-first birthday of *The Weekly Word*, a bulletin produced by Lawrence Sheriff School for parents and students.

The first issue appeared on 10 October 1997. Paddy Wex was the editor, and the lead story (“First Word”) was written by the then headmaster, Dr Rex Pogson. The modest aim was to offer a brief summary of news items every Friday of each school week that would be read by students and parents alike. Dr Peter Kent, Rex’s successor and still the headteacher, will explain more of the background to the creation of *The Weekly Word* in the first article in this selection.

What follows here is my eclectic selection of sixty or so favourite pieces from *The Weekly Word*. I was influenced in making my choice by such factors as historical significance, nostalgia, poignancy and humour. Above all, I wanted to include articles that for me summed up the values and ethos of Lawrence Sheriff that have stood the test of time.

Inevitably, most of the articles here were written by Peter Kent, the author of far and away the largest number of First Words over the years. But a number of other voices also appear, from staff members to students to parents to governors. I hope that the overall selection gives a fair impression of the spirit of Lawrence Sheriff School as represented by over twenty years’ material from its weekly bulletin.

You will see from these pages that LSS has undergone enormous changes over that period. To give a simple example, the school is now an academy, expecting shortly to lead a multi-academy trust. In 1997, the concept of an academy was still three years away from being introduced into British education. Not only has the face of education been radically transformed, but, as Peter Kent will later note, Sheriff has always sought to stay one step ahead of national developments. We will have a section of articles on the school at the leading edge of education: to be honest, I could have filled a whole book with such material.

But, at a deeper level, the spirit of 1997 – and the civilised values that then characterised the school – are, happily, entirely unchanged in 2018. I have been continually struck by the fact that the tone and spirit of the original publication are thoroughly in line with the LSS of the present day. The *Weekly Words* of the 1997/98 academic year recorded outstanding performances by students in all aspects of the school’s life. There were highly successful overseas trips, for example; brilliant support was given to a wide range of charitable and volunteering activities; and the school orchestra delivered triumphant performances – all exactly as today.

The problems were the same, too. Parents were reminded about the issues of congestion and the risk of accidents when dropping off or collecting students. The need for the boys to be a bit more like the girls and not leave their exam revision until the very, very last moment (or sometimes even later than that) was fiercely stressed. Meanwhile, the government of the day was, as usual, dramatically interfering with the day-to-day nature of education in Britain.

The goodwill and generosity of parents were apparent from the start. Issue 11 of *The Weekly Word* included a desperate appeal for the gift of an old sofa for a sixth form drama production. Issue 12 included a desperate appeal for the donations to cease forthwith, three sofas having already been delivered to the school.

Great stress, then as now, was placed on the unchanging values of the school – not least hard work and high expectations, thoughtfulness and courtesy. All this, in turn, contributed to the overwhelming importance of having a happy school: as Rex Pogson was the first to note, “We do not want to take the fun out of being young!”

The Weekly Word has been fortunate in its editors. Two outstanding long-term teachers at the school, Paddy Wex and David Mayes, were at the helm for nearly twenty years between them, before Gillian Beardshaw took over in 2017. Over the years, the amount published each week has increased, and there have been technological developments such as a significantly heightened use of colour photography.

Sadly, one particular cutting-edge development did not survive the passage of time. Peter Kent’s photograph made its debut in the first *Weekly Word* of 2001, appearing above the First Word lead article. It continued to grace the publication for two and a half years, appearing for the last time in June 2003 (ominously, in the edition appearing on Friday the 13th of that month). I have been unable to determine what factor or combination of factors – whether it be the Atkins diet, slight hair thinning or just a barely noticeable fading of film star good looks – brought about its discontinuation. Suffice it to say that Peter’s photo has yet to return to *The Weekly Word* on a regular basis.

In this selection, I have retained, with minor exceptions and abridgements, the text of the original articles, subject only to occasional typographical changes. Any errors are entirely mine.

I hope you will agree that the “modest aim” of Rex Pogson, enthusiastically adopted by Peter Kent as his successor, has produced in *The Weekly Word* a publication that can give all of us who are connected with Lawrence Sheriff School great pride.

Ian Nichol, Governor

HOW THE WEEKLY WORD CAME ABOUT

Here Peter Kent tells the story of the creation of *The Weekly Word*.

16 June 2017

I remember it well. I had just been appointed deputy head of Lawrence Sheriff and was sitting in the head's office with the rest of the senior team trying to work out what to do about the problem of "communication". Dr Pogson, our then headteacher, commented that "What we need is a way to replicate the 'school gate' effect at primary school, where messages get passed on at the beginning and end of the school day."

I immediately looked at the floor (code for "don't ask me"). Fortunately, the light bulb moment came from Mr Wex, our then Assistant Head. "Why not produce a weekly news sheet?" he suggested. "That way everyone can get in the habit of looking there regularly for the information that they need."

And so, *The Weekly Word* was born, edited with great success first by Mr Wex and now by Mr Mayes. Why the history lesson? I think that this context shows how important *The Weekly Word* has become to the school. It is so important that if parents do not regularly check *The Weekly Word* they are likely to be unaware about a whole range of things happening within the school. There is no point just checking it "when there is something important" because, by definition, unless you read it every week, you will be unaware of what is happening.

All of us who are parents know that sending *The Weekly Word* by pupil messenger has its limitations. For this reason, we moved to an electronic version sent through an email link. I think that almost everyone in the school now receives *The Weekly Word* in this way, but if you are one of the small group who does not, please contact us so that we can add you to the list.

The Weekly Word is almost unique – I know of very few schools that go to such lengths on a weekly basis to keep parents and the wider school community up to date with what is happening. Since 1999, when I became headteacher, I calculate that my first word columns must have run to 180,000 words (and for any poor soul who has read all of them it must feel like it as well!) However, that is time well spent if it achieves our aim of a continuing dialogue between the school and those whom it serves.

Peter Kent

THE NITTY-GRITTY OF EXAM SUCCESS

Whether you like it or not, the key feature of the British education system is examinations. And Lawrence Sheriff School is famed for the splendid examination results of its students. The school's headteacher might reasonably be allowed to become a little smug and self-satisfied at such a state of affairs.

To his credit, Peter Kent has never taken this approach. For twenty years, he has consistently condemned the sheer quantity of exams that pupils are obliged to undertake at the expense of their wider well-being. Here, in a classic piece from the two-hundredth issue of *The Weekly Word* in 2002, he sets out his views.

29 November 2002

I believe that examinations represent the main problem facing the British educational system. I am not referring to the marks gained in examinations, or even the national trends at different levels. The problem is simply that young people are required to sit far too many exams.

When pupils reach the end of their primary career, they will already have undergone base line assessment and tests at the end of Key Stages One and Two. During their secondary career, students face further public examinations at the age of 14, 16, 17 and 18 (not to mention university finals which will normally take place at the age of 20 and 21). To be frank, the current situation is absurd. The Department for Education insists that continuous examinations are essential if standards are to be raised. That certainly represents one view. I must admit to having greater sympathy with the views of the Secondary Heads Association, which argues that the regime of continuous testing has only been put in place to provide data which politicians of all parties can use to demonstrate the supposed success of their policies.

I know it may sound a radical suggestion, but shouldn't children, at both primary and secondary level, have some space to actually enjoy their childhood?

Peter Kent

It is deeply depressing that Peter's conclusion (not perhaps an earth-shattering one), that children should be allowed to enjoy their childhood, continues to be ignored by governments of every political persuasion.

But life is as it is, and if our children have to take examinations, they would do well to pass them. So, unsurprisingly, the paths to exam triumph have been a constant theme of *The Weekly Word* over the years. Here Dr Pogson, the headmaster of the time, sets out his highly sensible recipe for success. He is writing in December 1997, in just the tenth issue of the publication, and inserts a lovely coda at the end about the behaviour of his boys.

19 December 1997

The start of the mock exams for Year 11 this week, to be followed immediately after New Year by those for Year 13, is an important time to recognise that revision, organisation, long-term planning and self-sacrifice are not natural processes for most human beings! It is therefore not surprising that many students, boys even more than girls according to national and local statistics, resist the need for all this work until the last safe moment – and sometimes even longer! At a season when instant gratification and self-indulgence are preached at every moment of the evening on TV, and in a culture where studiousness is not the "coolest" characteristic, Christmas revision asks a lot of our students. BUT THE COMPETITION AND NEED HAVE NEVER BEEN GREATER, so no excuses can be accepted.

The only way to establish a routine which goes against natural inclination is to be ruthless, constant, and obstinate about it, and work a “proper day” during the holidays. People who do that tend to win in the summer. Please will all Year 13 and 11 households build their Christmas, and the rest of this school year, round that need.

In the midst of all the inevitable difficulties of any term, it is pleasing to record that the boys have been given more compliments about courteous behaviour from the public than I ever remember. I know we should be able to take thoughtfulness for granted, but we all know that even in adult society we cannot, so this news is very welcome. No lapses and thoughtlessness are acceptable, but equally they cannot spoil the record of the many who do themselves, their parents and the school credit. A good note on which to go into Christmas.

Rex Pogson

In one of his first entries in *The Weekly Word* as headmaster, Peter Kent took up Rex Pogson’s theme of the importance of hard work, and in particular its application in a grammar school.

5 February 1999

Last week saw me gain my latest set of new experiences as a headmaster, spending three evenings reading through the reports for Year 9. Although reading 90 reports is not always the most entertaining way to complete an evening, it is certainly a very useful exercise. I found the process particularly helpful as a way to isolate the personal qualities which appear to lead to success in a school such as Lawrence Sheriff. There is no doubt that top of the list was a willingness to work hard. Whilst much can be achieved through natural ability and native wit, it is clear that once public examinations begin there is no substitute for a willingness to push oneself in order to achieve success.

I believe that as a grammar school one of the key values which we should pass on to our students is the importance of hard work. Further to this, the critical time to do this is during Years 7 – 8, when students have just joined us and can learn good habits which will carry them through the rest of their time in the school.

Peter Kent

Absence from school during term time can harm students’ prospects of success. You might think that this is blindingly self-evident, but some people apparently remain oblivious to the point. In the next article, Peter Kent writes a definitive piece on the issues involved with term-time holidays. It is regrettable that, even in today’s ever more competitive environment for jobs and careers, some parents still need a lot of persuading of these very plain truths.

3 November 2006

My perception is that there seem to be many more requests this year for students to take holidays during term time. I think this reflects a variety of factors working together. Holiday companies and airlines continue to offer a ludicrous pricing policy that effectively penalises the many families who do not take holidays during term time. Family members who are in particular professions (for example the NHS or agriculture) can sometimes find it extremely difficult to take leave during school holidays. Sometimes families also feel that holidays taken during term time can be justified on the basis that they offer exceptional opportunities and experiences.

It is certainly not for me to contradict any of the arguments above. However, I would like to remind everyone in the community of the positive reasons why students should not take time away from school:

1. School holidays, particularly summer holidays, offer ample opportunity to take a family holiday. It is very hard to justify a six-week absence that is then followed by a family holiday a matter of weeks later.
2. We must not delude ourselves. In almost every case, significant absence from school damages a student's progress. Only exceptional support from home can remedy this. It is completely unfair to take a child out of school for a week or more and then expect teachers and support staff to work to make up the ground that has been lost. The responsibility for doing this must lie with the family of the student. Hence, before applying for a lengthy absence, families must ask themselves if they are prepared to work with their child over a number of weeks to make up the ground that has been lost.
3. Term-time holidays often prove a distraction in the period before and after they are taken. Such absences have an unsettling effect on students which can further hinder their progress.

As discussed above, I fully accept that there can be exceptional circumstances that necessitate holidays during term time. However, they remain exactly that – exceptional and not the norm. I would therefore urge all parents to think very carefully before considering holidays during term time.

Peter Kent

As students come to the latter stages of their school careers, the stakes become much higher in terms of exam success or failure. In the next two articles, Peter Kent advises students on how to choose their subjects for the Sixth Form, and then – echoing what Rex Pogson had said all those years earlier in December 1997 – gives a blunt but powerful reminder of the importance of focus, discipline and sheer hard work in the crucial period leading up to examinations.

26 January 2018

Choices are always difficult. However, learning to make choices in an informed and thoughtful manner is one of the crucial skills for life that a good education should be passing on to pupils.

For this reason, I am anxious that we closely focus on the choices that our Year 11 students are currently making. I have asked all tutors to spend some time talking to their Year 11 students about the options that they are currently considering and the thought process that they should follow before making final decisions about courses for next year. I thought it would be helpful if I outlined some of the key considerations that I have asked my colleagues to explore.

Above all, it is essential that pupils choose Sixth Form subjects that they actually enjoy. Whilst that may sound like an incredibly obvious point, I never cease to be amazed by the number of students who choose a programme of study that includes at least one subject which they either do not like or in which they have achieved lower scores at GCSE. Reasons for doing this include “it might be useful in the future” and “others told me it would be a good subject to do.” Not surprisingly, starting on these dubious foundations often leads to problems later on. Of course, careers advice is essential, and it is often motivating to have a planned future direction to work towards.

However, my fundamental advice, oft repeated at options evenings, is “go where the joy is.” If you do not enjoy a particular subject or if something you have not chosen actually appeals more, then you need to reassess your choices.

Many years ago, when I took A-levels, I chose English Literature, Economics and Geography. I did not have a clear idea about career choices and had no particular plan for the future. However, I did know that I was fascinated by the three subjects and that I was relishing the chance to explore each of these areas in greater depth. Obviously, if there is a particular subject required for a specific career, then it is important to take that into account. However, I would say that enjoyment and interest should be first considerations in any set of option choices.

I am afraid that does not mean that we can give everyone a limitless set of options and rewrite the published set of option blocks – as mentioned above, making choices is a skill that one needs to develop as part of becoming an adult. However, it does mean that very careful thought is required to ensure that every student opts for the best possible combination of subjects which fit their individual talents and interests.

We have asked tutors to start the conversation about choices because they are the people who know each student best and so are able to explore the fit between individual interest, career plans and subject combinations. These conversations are not the end of the process, but rather the start.

Peter Kent

19 April 2013

I still have very happy memories of taking my A-Level in economics. Although I was always clear that I wanted to study English at university, the study of economics introduced me to a series of fascinating concepts that have proved very useful in later life. One of these was the notion of “opportunity cost”.

The idea behind “opportunity cost” is that, before a particular course of action is followed, it is important to consider its potential costs, not least the opportunities that may be denied to you as the result of the course of action that you have taken. As we move towards examination season for students in Years 11, 12 and 13, the ideas behind opportunity cost seem particularly relevant:

1. Consider the opportunity cost of part-time jobs.

There is excellent research which shows that spending more than a few hours per week on a part-time job can cost students at least a grade in their examination. A couple of hundred pounds earned now could go on to cost students thousands of pounds in the future if the part-time job leads to lower results and so reduces opportunities within employment or higher education. I would strongly advise students in all of these key year groups that part-time jobs should be stopped until examinations are completed.

2. Consider the opportunity cost of not working hard enough over the next few weeks.

I fear that it is a common characteristic to put things off until the last minute. Well, the last minute has now well and truly arrived and the amount of revision done over the coming weeks in the build-up to examinations will have a huge impact upon overall grades. It is worth remembering that hard work during this period will vastly increase the likelihood of being able to take on an enjoyable, interesting and fulfilling job in the coming years. High qualifications bring with them the chance to pursue your dreams. A few weeks of hard slog now will actually make a student's whole future more interesting and rewarding.

I wish all of our students well in what is inevitably a demanding period as they build up to examinations. Don't forget, the principles of "opportunity cost" will ensure that hard work now will produce rich dividends in the future.

Peter Kent

But how do you make all that hard work as productive as possible? Here, in a nicely complementary piece to Peter's article, is Di Halestrap, Head of Sixth Form, to tell us how.

29 April 2016

As thousands of young people prepare to sit exams this summer, students could benefit from the following ten-point guide issued by a curriculum and assessment specialist at the Association of School and College Leaders:

1. If you have not done so already, make sure you prepare an exam revision timetable. Plan short spells of revision, about 30 minutes to an hour at a time, as this is the most effective way to learn. Your concentration lapses after about an hour and you need to take a short break of about ten minutes.
2. When you prepare your revision timetable, make sure you plot in your school timetable, your exam dates, and the things you don't want to miss out on.
3. There are some good resources which will help you plan your timetable, such as phone apps like Class Timetable and Exam Countdown, and the Revision World website, which also has lots of other useful advice.
4. Build reward time into your timetable. For instance, a full day of revision could equal a trip to the cinema.
5. Don't spend ages making the timetable, or your revision notes, look pretty. Exam timetables are great as long as they don't become a revision avoidance technique.

6. Find somewhere quiet to revise – your bedroom, school, your gran’s house – and refuse to be interrupted and distracted. Turn your mobile phone off!
7. Don’t revise in front of the television, or while listening to the radio. Sit at a proper table or desk if you can. Bed isn’t a great place to revise as snoozing is far too tempting.
8. Always start by revising the most difficult topics while you are fresh, rather than using your best concentration on the more straightforward ones.
9. Do mix up how you approach revision by trying different techniques. Try some of these:
 - Make your own learning mind maps – either on paper or use something like iMindMap or Popplet apps.
 - Make flash cards. Write the facts on one side and some questions on the other and then test yourself. Try apps like Flashcards+ and StudyBlue.
 - Make your own revision notes, either on paper or using one of the many notes apps.
 - Make electronic or paper post-it notes for key things you keep forgetting and put them where you will see them – on your tablet, PC, mirror, phone etc.
 - Read your revision notes out loud. We remember more than twice as much when we read aloud compared to when we read silently.
 - Practise on past exam papers and revision tests. There are lots available on the web. Initially, do one section at a time – and progress to doing the entire paper against the clock.
 - Use revision guides.
 - Note down things you still don’t understand so that you can ask your teachers to talk you through them. Never be embarrassed to ask.
10. Stay in good health. Eat a balanced diet, exercise (it keeps your brain active) and get enough sleep. And finally, good luck!

Di Halestrap

I’ve focused heavily in my choice of the articles above on what it takes to gain exam success. In the next section, we will look more generally at what it takes to produce a happy and fulfilled student.

THE JOHN OSBORNE MASTERCLASS

In 2013, John Osborne, the school's former Head of Economics, wrote two brilliant articles for *The Weekly Word* on the approaches and attitudes that will create the best results for students. They are reproduced here in full. John's advice is both inspirational and full of common sense. He offers valuable lessons to parents, teachers and children – in fact, to all of us, at all stages of our lives.

18 May 2013

Using Talents

I'm thinking of giving George Osborne a call. I want to talk to him about Talents.

You remember the old parable of the Talents? A man of wealth gives his employees some Talents – in those days, valuable lumps of silver – and asks them to invest the money as well as they can.

The first two employees went away, traded and immediately doubled their money and were richly rewarded by their boss. Mr Osborne, take note! UK PLC needs the advice of any person who can immediately double their investment, and as Chancellor of the Exchequer you should seek their advice now!

The third man was timid, chose to bury his because he was afraid to lose it. Big mistake! He was called "lazy" and "worthless" and was dismissed. In the story he was "thrown into the outer darkness where there was wailing and gnashing of teeth". Sounds gruesome, just like the House of Commons on a bad day.

The interesting thing about a parable is that it involves several themes, so while the experts can address the financial implications of the story, I want to get on to safer ground and talk about talent in the modern sense.

Like the three employees in the story, we all have talents. But life's not fair, as we all know; some have many and some have fewer talents. At high school, I was one of the first male students to complete an "O" level in nutrition and cookery. I had a desire to be a talented chef. For a variety of reasons, that didn't happen, but I still remain convinced that I could have had Gordon Ramsay's job and income, without the swearing.

What seems to be important is what you do with what you have got. We are not equal in talent, but we can be equal in effort. When complimented on his talent for oratory, George Bernard Shaw responded: "I learnt to speak as other people learn to cycle or skate. I doggedly made a fool of myself until I got better at it."

Natalie Coleman's recent success in becoming the third woman to win MasterChef after beating Welshmen Larkin Cen and Dale Williams in the final reflects the virtues of sustained effort. The down-to-earth Londoner practiced her skills on her granddad, cooking his tea every night, and always ensured that she had practised her dishes before the televised event.

In my previous life in New Zealand there was a large sign outside a school on my way to work: "Use it or lose it!" Do exercise or run the risk of losing fitness; practise your singing or your voice will crack and quaver; make an effort to connect with others or you'll risk being lonely.

To live a rewarding life requires us to use the talents that we have been given or we will lose them, just like the timid employee. Conversely, if a person has a talent and exercises it, this person will progressively achieve greater success and is more likely to be blessed with happiness and fulfilment, like Natalie Coleman.

I'm a teacher writing to you as parents. We are in roles where we can strongly influence the direction of the young people we care for. At school we believe that students need to be nudged into action, into "giving things a go": sport, going places, leadership, music and more. We try consciously to create success for our students by helping them to find what they enjoy and have a talent for, then prodding and encouraging them to be as good as they can be. Creating success is much too important to be left to chance. Genuine encouragement of effort usually leads to even greater effort.

Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers*, about getting to the top of your game, is well worth reading for everyone involved in nurturing talent in the young. Don't just rely on "the accomplishment of natural growth", he urges us. Youngsters need to be constantly exposed by parents and teachers to a "constantly shifting set of experiences" where they will learn "teamwork and how to cope in highly structured settings... to interact comfortably with others and to speak up when they need to".

Parents and teachers can't leave it to each other to do this. Both need to create success for youngsters by helping them uncover their talent, by pushing them to work hard and then acknowledging and rewarding their achievements.

Oh, and I am having continuing success in my cooking... last week, tasty focaccia, this week, Chelsea buns...

John Osborne

2 October 2013

Mindset

It's all about mindset... Sometimes in class a student will say "I can't do this." I like to remind them that the word "can't" is "can" with "t" on the end. Invariably the student, with guidance, will have another go and then succeed. The mindset changes and the penny drops...

Would you consider that you have a "fixed" or "growth" mindset? Perhaps it is something which you haven't given much thought to. However, the mindset with which we approach our lives, especially our learning, has a significant influence on how we develop and where we find motivation.

Since the beginning of time, people have thought, acted and fared differently from each other. Experts have lined up to explain why some people are smarter and whether there was something that made them permanently different. Some claimed that there was a strong physical basis for these differences. Through the ages these alleged physical differences have included bumps on the skull (phrenology), the size and shape of the skull (craniology) and, today, genes. Other academics have pointed to the differences in people's backgrounds, experiences, training or ways of learning.

Who's right? Today most experts agree that it's not either/or. It's not nature or nurture, genes or environment. From conception onwards, there's a constant give and take between the two. Gilbert Gottlieb, an eminent neuroscientist, explains that not only do genes and the environment cooperate as we develop, but genes require input from the environment to work properly. At the same time, neuroscientists are learning that people have more capacity for life-long learning and brain development than they ever thought. We now know that each person has a unique genetic endowment. We may start with different temperaments and aptitudes, but it is clear that experience, training and personal effort take us the rest of the way. Robert Sternberg, a present-day authority on intelligence, tells us that the major factor determining whether people achieve expertise "is not some fixed prior ability, but purposeful engagement". In short, it's not always the people who start out the smartest who end up the smartest.

Carol Dweck – a world-renowned Stanford University psychologist – has written much about mindsets and how they influence human performance and motivation. She explains that individuals that possess a fixed mindset attribute their success to luck, talent or intelligence. They believe these are fixed traits and that talent alone creates success – without effort.

On the other hand, those who possess a growth mindset believe that hard work and perseverance will lead to success. Brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that are essential for great achievements. Virtually all great people have had these qualities.

Working with our students at Lawrence Sheriff, it quickly becomes clear how vital this differentiation is as they progress through their schooling. Youngsters commencing their secondary schooling in year 7 are like sponges as they soak up information; they have little fear of taking risks and give everything a go. Students at this level exhibit a wide range of developmental growth, demonstrating that no two children develop in the same way, and as they get older they start to compare themselves against their peers. It is at this stage in their learning that children become aware of differences in ability amongst their peer group, and their mindsets come into play.

Youngsters who have established a fixed mindset will have a perspective which causes an avoidance of challenge. They will tend to give up easily, believing that success comes from talent or luck. They think that making an effort will make them look dumb in front of their peers, they will resist listening to useful feedback and they will struggle to develop the cognitive skills required to try hard and continue to take risks. An example of this type of mindset is the stereotype that girls are not wired to succeed in maths and science, whereas boys are expected to do well. Of course, we know that this is not the case and that girls have as much potential in these areas as boys. However, this fixed mindset stereotype has the potential to limit the academic potential of our students.

Conversely, children who grow up believing that the key to success is in hard work develop a “growth” mindset and will view academic work completely differently. They will develop confidence and respond positively to the challenges of classroom work. They will seek out feedback on their performance to better themselves next time. These students will thrive on applying persistent effort and enjoy the success it brings.

At Lawrence Sheriff we constantly strive to support and encourage each student in their journey to become independent learners. Teachers work hard to support the growth mindset in all our students by giving specific written and oral feedback. We praise the process of a student’s work, reinforcing the effort required to become successful and thereby ensuring that students do not feel limited by what they perceive to be their talent or weakness.

I believe that we all have a duty to encourage our youngsters to embrace a growth mindset, especially as it has been proven how powerful this will be in strengthening their motivation and resilience. I would encourage all our parents to consider which mindset you encourage in your children. Do you reaffirm stereotypes and set expectations based on what school was like for you? Or do you encourage your children to succeed, believing that through hard work there is nothing that we cannot learn or do?

John Osborne

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

The richness of a school's life is not to be defined simply in terms of academic achievement. Here, writing in *The Weekly Word* over 20 years ago with a message that is perhaps even more relevant today, Rex Pogson explains why Sheriff's extra-curricular activities are so essential to its success.

11 May 1998

Outstanding news last week of the school orchestra's achievement in reaching a place in the "Music for Youth" festival in the Royal Festival Hall on London's South Bank on 25 June 1998. Musical groups from all over the country perform at regional venues during the early spring, and the best are chosen for a week of celebration in the RFH – a huge world-famous concert hall. This invitation to our orchestra is a well-deserved reward for a series of tremendous public performances, greeted at the last three concerts by long ovations, demanding encores. It's a great tribute to the work of Mr Jon Watson, all the other staff at LSS who assist, the peripatetic teachers and of course the student performers.

It's worth mentioning that there is a heated educational debate at the moment about the relative importance of the basic core skills (numeracy, literacy) and the broader, civilising targets, of which the arts form such a strong part. An orchestra, just like a successful sports team or theatre group, sums up all that is essential in these broader skills – individual talent harnessed to the group's discipline: a high level of skill: lots of teamwork: self-motivation: a sense of fun. A good summary of the LSS orchestra, and of many of our group activities. We must not think of these parts of the week as "extras" since they help to make us all who we really are.

Rex Pogson

Lawrence Sheriff School continues to have an outstanding reputation for its musical output. Here, Assistant Head Tony Bedgood shows us that the same high standards prevail as in Dr Pogson's day.

27 February 2015

Music hits the high notes at LSS

For many years the music department has made a huge contribution to life at Lawrence Sheriff, and this year is no exception. All students in Years 7 and 8 are taught timetabled lessons, and this is very much a hands-on experience. All of the boys, regardless of previous experience, have the opportunity to play a variety of instruments and even to try their hand at composing using the music department's set of Apple Mac computers. This approach seems to be making the subject more popular higher up the school, and this year we have the biggest ever GCSE Music set in Year 9 as well as both Music and Music Technology being offered as A-level subjects.

As an extracurricular activity, Music impacts throughout the school from Year 7 to Year 13. There are over 150 boys taking music lessons with the County Music Service, singing has just been introduced and a large variety of instruments are covered by the programme. This then feeds into the various musical groups which rehearse and perform under the direction of Mr Watson and Miss Kelsey in the music department. There is something for every musical taste, including the orchestra, string orchestra, jazz band, choir, wind group, guitar ensemble and electric guitar ensemble.

The music block and various other parts of the school are in almost constant use before, during and after school as our musicians make themselves ready to perform, and the results can take your breath away. Any of you who were fortunate enough to attend the Christmas concert or the school carol service or to listen to the music performed during the annual prize-giving would, I am sure, like myself marvel at the quality of these performances and the range of musical styles which the Lawrence Sheriff boys can deliver.

With half of the academic year complete, and much already achieved, there is still more to come from the Music department. We have the Easter concert and a special performance in London by the Jazz Band to entertain the delegates at the ASCL conference which Dr Kent is hosting in his role as this year's President. For many of the boys the highlight will be the Monty Python musical *Spamalot*, which will run in April. Rehearsals and the behind the scenes work are well under way, and it has the makings of a fine production. The musical year ends with a double-decker bus taking 66 students on a musical tour to Croatia which I am sure will be exciting and exhausting in equal measure. As somebody who only really gets to see and hear the finished product, I would like to say well done to the boys and Mr Watson and Miss Kelsey for all of their efforts in making music such a wonderful aspect of life at the school.

Tony Bedgood

Tony Bedgood was looking forward to the school's production of *Spamalot*. And it was indeed an outstanding performance. (It's a cliché to say it, but at one point I was laughing so much that I could barely breathe.) Here Gwen Temple, in her role of Acting Head while Peter Kent was on sabbatical leave, reviews the production.

8 May 2015

Spamalot

Last week saw four performances of the school production, *Spamalot*, three of which were sold out. The cast and the crew worked long and hard to make sure the final public performances were highly polished and impressive. Behind the scenes was a huge group of friends and staff who all helped the shows run smoothly. We are extremely grateful to Rugby Theatre for all their support, in particular Helen Dulcamara who was the Director/Producer, and to Mr Watson who was the Musical Director. There were so many people involved in this marvellous production that we are circulating the programme to pass on our congratulations and thanks to everyone who made *Spamalot* such a success and to show the huge range of people involved.

The laughter and applause during the performances showed how much people enjoyed the production, with audience members talking animatedly about many different scenes as they left. Some members of the audience wrote to the school to pass on their congratulations to everyone, including the following comments:

We came to watch the first night's (or should that be 'knight's'?) performance of Spamalot. It was absolutely brilliant. We had a fabulous evening and laughed so much. You should be very proud and good luck with the rest of the run. Kind regards.

We came to see Spamalot last night (despite not being involved in any way at all!) and it was truly superb. Please pass our congratulations on to all the cast, orchestra, crew and staff involved, and our continued best wishes for a successful run. Absolutely excellent! Thank you everyone.

Well done to all involved in such a spectacular event.

Gwen Temple

In Peter Kent, LSS has a headteacher who is a fanatical supporter of Liverpool Football Club. (Well, none of us is perfect.) So, it would be surprising if sport were not a major offering to the students at the school. That is indeed the case, as Peter confirms in the next article. He also makes the point – sadly too often forgotten – that the rich extra-curricular life of the school would be impossible without the dedication and commitment of staff members, going far beyond their contractual obligations to provide the students with such wonderful opportunities.

23 May 2003

Many readers of *The Weekly Word* will have seen the comments made by Sir Alex Ferguson about sport in schools. He criticised the lack of sport in schools, expressing considerable surprise at the limited sporting opportunities that had been offered to young apprentices joining Manchester United.

Since Liverpool supporters are not known for their friendliness towards the manager of Manchester United, I had better make sure that my response is suitably restrained! Whilst I deplore anyone who joins in with our national sport of “bashing” teachers and running down the achievements of schools, I must admit that there is an element of truth in what he says. Our current education system has become obsessed by tests, targets and more tests. Hence the broader curriculum, of which sport is a vital part, has become squeezed out in many schools. This is not the fault of the teachers, but rather of those who make national policy.

Sir Alex’s comments are also a reminder of how fortunate we are in Lawrence Sheriff. We have an excellent PE department who give up many hours of their own time in order to provide sporting opportunity for large numbers of students. We also have many staff who do not teach PE but who are willing to assist with games and the coaching of teams at the weekend. It would be a profound mistake to take this for granted or to think that this is the norm in other schools. The commitment of staff to extra-curricular sport is deeply impressive and an obvious strength of the school.

We as a school will continue to offer an education that serves the needs of the whole person, and not one that simply addresses the need to pass government-imposed tests.

Peter Kent

As a cricket fan, I simply can’t resist including the next article. Gary Sobers is a legendary figure in cricket, having been overwhelmingly voted In 2000 as one of the five *Wisden* Cricketers of the Century by a panel of experts. And he came to our school! Can you believe it?

28 June 2002

On Wednesday morning, the school was addressed by the man who, in many people’s eyes, is the greatest all-round cricketer ever: Sir Gary Sobers. Old men listened misty-eyed with recollection as the former West Indian Test captain recounted the lessons he had learned from legendary players such as Sir Learie Constantine and Sir Everton Weekes, and even the youngest boys paid rapt attention as he described the over from Glamorgan’s Malcolm Nash that he so famously despatched for six sixes in Swansea, more than twenty years before they were born.

As one colleague observed, it was impossible to think of another occasion when Lawrence Sheriff School has been graced by the presence of anyone so indisputably “great” as Sir Garfield Sobers. It was a privilege to attend and hear him speak, an experience never to be forgotten by anyone with a sense of cricketing history.

(The author of this piece was not named.)

The school's Enrichment programme is a celebrated part of its offering to students beyond pure examination tuition. I know from personal experience how much the boys appreciate it, and how much it attracts new pupils, and indeed new teachers, to the school. Here Gwen Temple, again in her Acting Head role, discusses one of the most popular elements of the programme, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

19 June 2015

I am sure that a lot of parents often ask their sons if anything interesting happened at school today. But would you be surprised if they said they had been developing their unicycle skills, dealing with a herd of cows, or watching a teacher fly through the air? Well, these can all be part of a "normal" school day for our Duke of Edinburgh students.

Several years ago, Mrs Twentyman started the Duke of Edinburgh programme as part of our Enrichment programme with a group of 14 intrepid students. Just a few years later, Mr Oggelsby and seven colleagues are running a huge programme with 28 Bronze Award students, 28 Silver and 14 Gold, plus five other students who are in the final stages of completing the programme. For those of you who may not be familiar with the scheme, it is run for students in Year 10 and above, and it involves a combination of skill development, volunteering and expedition work which takes them beyond the school curriculum and involves a significant commitment to a challenging workload.

The skill for development is chosen by the student and can be sporting, musical or another new activity – hence the possibility of students starting to learn unicycling, bell-ringing or another interesting skill. They also take part in volunteering programmes, such as working with younger pupils at sporting clubs, assisting with scout groups or working in charity shops.

The third activity, expedition work, is one for which a significant amount of planning is needed. Students have to identify a route, ensure they have the necessary equipment (including the basics like water for long hikes) and then undertake the expedition. Trips which have been held or are in the planning stages include the local Napton area, the Peak District, the Cotswolds, the Lake District, the Yorkshire Dales and Shropshire. For some reason, all of these different areas have one distinct thing in common – herds of cows. Whenever a group goes out on a trip, there is a high probability that at some point they will be faced with cows who are fascinated by groups of students carrying rucksacks. The boys have been advised how to deal with this issue to ensure an enjoyable trip, and always cope admirably. (They have also been advised about the difference between turning left and turning right when they reach a canal towpath, but apparently on one occasion it did take an hour heading in the wrong direction for one group to fully appreciate this advice!)

The students aiming for the Duke of Edinburgh qualification benefit enormously in terms of confidence, maturity and responsibility, and staff always find it a pleasure to see them develop during the programme. Other people also see the outcome – as one parent kindly wrote when they encountered some of the boys on an expedition, "They were all a true credit to the school, full of enthusiasm and very well-mannered. I'm honoured that my son shares the same company as these boys."

Regrettably, places on this highly over-subscribed Enrichment programme are limited because of the level of staff involvement required for each group; otherwise Mr Oggelsby would be keen to offer all students a place on the programme. Because of the popularity of the programme, names are drawn at random to allocate places and ensure fair opportunities for everyone, so if your son is interested do encourage him to put his name forward when he submits his Enrichment option choices. There is a cost associated with the programme, but no student should be deterred from selecting the Duke of Edinburgh programme because of this – the school is willing to offer financial support to enable students to take part in this exciting opportunity.

Finally, just in case you are wondering about that other intriguing event – flying teachers – it turns out there are more farm animals around the country. When Mr Oggelsby was sailing down a steep hill on his bicycle looking for two teachers who had gone missing (teachers, not students!), one particularly sneaky sheep decided to position itself in front of a pothole and then move aside at the last moment, sending Mr Oggelsby flying gracefully through the air into the nearest hedgerow. So, in future, when you ask your son if anything happened at school today, don't be surprised if he occasionally does have an interesting tale to share with you.

We are grateful to Mr Oggelsby and all the staff who help to make the taking of this award such an amazing experience.

Gwen Temple

The Weekly Word has frequently celebrated the overseas trips which the school has organised for its students. We end this section with a description from Issue No 4 in November 1997 of a visit to Germany led, among others, by the late Michael Denny. It starts with perhaps the most appalling pun ever to appear in the publication...

7 November 1997

“Pizza Meet You, Mein Freund”

Twenty-three members of year eleven and five year twelves spent the half-term holiday in Westphalia, Germany, accompanied by Miss Tonkinson, her fiancé and Messrs Heywood and Denny. According to Mr Denny, the party included some “champion eaters” who on the very first morning “discovered that the national dish of Germany – pizza – was readily available and proceeded to consume large portions of the same,” though they were a little less enthusiastic when confronted with “real German food – large quantities of sauerkraut”. However, though this dismayed many, it “delighted the staff, who tucked in with relish.”

The week's gourmandising was punctuated by visits to the castle and museum at Berg, where the guides' fractured English at times bore comparison with the German that some of the boys tried out on unsuspecting locals; a day of sporting activity that included ice-skating, swimming and a bowling game that resembled English long alley skittles, all of which “left at least one member of staff in a quite fragile state”; a day trip to Cologne, where “large amounts of energy were expended in climbing the spire of the cathedral and hunting in packs around the shops”; and a day in school at Lennep, where, despite the fact that the English boys were there to practise their German, “the Germans seized on the opportunity to practise their English,” relations eventually becoming so warm that “a proportion of the German students could hardly be dissuaded from getting on the bus to return to the youth hostel with our party.”

PREPARATION FOR THE WORLD OUTSIDE

As we have seen, a great school will do much more than simply help its students through their examinations. It has, for example, a duty to prepare them for the world of work they will encounter after leaving school. Sheriff's Work Experience programme is a key element of that preparation. Here Laura Kisby explains:

1 February 2008

As the Year 11 students are out of school for their week's Work Experience I am taking the opportunity to outline the benefits of, and need for, Work Experience at this stage in the boys' lives.

The Confederation of British Industry and the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development have both expressed concerns in recent years about the general quality of graduates and others entering employment. For example, Rebecca Clake of CIPD wrote in 2006: "Our research shows employers want more focus on communication, interpersonal skills and developing a work ethic. The education system might help... by seeking to introduce more oral-based tests and more work experience schemes. Such changes may benefit boys in particular, who are seen as having weaker communication skills..." Thus, with practice interviews and the week of Work Experience that are provided for our Year 11s, we are well on the way to ensuring that the boys are better prepared for their working life – even though that seems a long way away now.

In the light of the comments above, I hope that boys lower down the school, and parents, will see that "knowing what you want to do" in terms of career is not an essential starting point when organising Work Experience. Instead, consider where the skills outlined above can be gained. Taken from that standpoint, the possibilities are endless. Even if boys do have definite career aspirations, some lateral thinking can be fruitful. For example, the opportunities at this stage for placements in medicine are very limited, but the confidence needed to deal with patients later on can be gained in many areas other than a hospital. In that case, a situation where there is interaction with a wide range of people would be better than a small quiet office.

Meanwhile, I look forward to receiving many testimonials from the much-valued employers helping us at the moment, demonstrating that our lads have done themselves and the school proud whilst out on placement – which leads me to the final benefit of Work Experience: the part-time jobs, apprenticeships and university places offered to our students on the basis of such testimonials or from their own references to their time on placement in their applications or during interviews.

Laura Kisby

The Extended Project (EP) is another excellent means of preparing students for higher education and subsequent careers. I have been fortunate to see a number of the presentations given by the boys as the climax of their project work. The standard is uniformly high, and the life skills that the students demonstrate are exactly what future employers will be looking for. Next, Peter Kent sets out the thinking that underlies the EP.

16 September 2011

One new feature of this academic year is the much greater emphasis that the school is placing upon the Extended Project. All students in Years 7 and 8 will complete a level two Extended Project qualification, whilst students in Years 9 and 10 will have the chance to take the Extended Project at AS level.

What is the Extended Project? It provides students with the chance to submit a piece of research on a topic of their choice that they have a strong interest in. Students often submit a traditional dissertation, very similar to the research project that is completed within higher education. For this reason, universities place great value upon the EP and see it as a strong indicator of student aptitude when deciding whether or not to offer a university place.

The EP is also very flexible. Rather than submitting a traditional essay, students can instead enter something that they have built or designed. In this case their task is to describe the stages of the design process leading up to the completion of the “artefact”. The project may also take the form of a performance of a piece of music or drama. In these cases, the candidate is required to describe how they have refined and developed their performance over a period of time.

Students taking the EP also have the opportunity to explore a range of philosophical ideas and concepts that they can then make use of when analysing the topic that they have researched. Hence, whichever direction they take, they are introduced to a range of ideas that they can employ in their future studies.

Why do we see it as being so valuable? Well, three immediate answers come to mind:

1. It provides a chance for students to explore a topic that they are interested in, whilst developing vital skills that will be invaluable for GCSE and A-level study
2. It is seen by universities as a valuable preparation for higher education
3. The school has an excellent track record in delivering the EP. For some years Rev Scott and other colleagues have offered the EP to students in years 12 and 13, achieving some of the best results in the country. In 2011 35 students took the qualification, with a remarkable 88% gaining A*-B grades.

Having taught the Extended Project myself to students in Years 9, 10 and 11, I know how valuable and worthwhile the qualification is. As well as providing an excellent foundation for future research, it also develops a range of skills that are not fully addressed by any individual subject. Hence, the addition of the EP to our curriculum offers an exciting range of further opportunities to our students.

Peter Kent

The Extended Project is hugely useful in preparing our students for university. But undergraduate life is tougher these days, and the costs of university tuition have rocketed. So, is it even worth going to university any longer? In our final article in this section, Peter Kent gives a considered view, and concludes that – for most students, most of the time – it very definitely is.

11 February 2011

Given all of the negative publicity in the national media over recent months, parents and students would be forgiven for questioning the value of taking a university degree. The surge of students attempting to get into university this year is in part a reflection of concerns over future prospects once course fees rise to £6,000-£9,000 per annum.

I must admit to a personal interest in the topic, since my own son hopes to go to university in 2012 and so finds himself in the first group facing these increased fees. Like many families, we are thinking through the implications of fees trebling with relatively little warning. Inevitably this has led many people to question the value of going to university.

I must admit that as a nation it probably makes sense to question the arbitrary target of 50% of students going on to higher education. I suspect that this figure was devised because it sounded good, rather than in response to a convincing set of empirical data. Higher education does not represent the best progression route for everyone, and now is a sensible time to ensure that students are taking the courses that they are best suited to.

Having said this, I continue to firmly believe that students in our sixth form should very seriously consider going on to university. Their existing record of academic success and the excellent grounding provided by post-16 teaching at LSS make them ideally suited to a degree course. The question still arises: will it be worth it? Despite the increased costs, the answer has to be overwhelmingly “yes”. Over a lifetime, the increased earning potential that a degree confers far outweighs the impact of any student debt. Just as significantly, a degree provides much greater freedom and flexibility when making future career choices. My experience is that when students leave our sixth form without going on to university they often reassess this option once they experience the realities of trying to make a living without a degree. Three or four years of limited choice, and seeing people with degrees promoted above them, is often enough to make them see the advantages of higher education.

Hence my considered advice to students in our sixth form is that they should still aim to take a degree because of the freedom of choice it offers, the difference that it makes to their life chances and the way in which it boosts their potential future earnings. However, having said this, I think that courses should be carefully chosen with particular reference to the potential careers that they will lead on to.

Peter Kent

AN INSPECTOR CALLS

Every so often, Ofsted, the government's independent school inspection agency, turns up to examine standards at Lawrence Sheriff School. Their inspectors have, on every occasion, been deeply impressed. Here are two typical articles from *The Weekly Word*.

23 November 2007

At the time of *The Weekly Word* going to press, the full text of our Ofsted report has not yet been released. However, as an indication of how successful our inspection was, we are able to release our inspection grades and the accompanying letter that the Lead Inspector has written to students at the school. As you will see from the summary below, the school has been judged to be *outstanding in all 31 inspection categories*. In anyone's language, this is an exceptional achievement. **Peter Kent**

12 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Lawrence Sheriff School, Rugby, Warwickshire CV21 3AG

Thank you for your welcome when I visited your school last week. I would particularly like to thank those students who met with me and gave me their views about the school. I appreciated your openness and cooperation. This letter is to tell you of my findings. Many of you may like to read the full report, which will be sent to your parents or carers.

You go to an outstandingly successful school that enables you to attain exceptionally high standards and make excellent progress through the high quality of the teaching and the careful monitoring of your progress towards meeting very challenging targets. Your attitudes to school and to learning are exemplary and you work hard. The curriculum, with its wide range of courses and enrichment opportunities, meets your needs and aspirations very effectively and, together with the excellent care, guidance and support you receive, enables you to get the most out of what the school offers you. As a result, you are becoming confident, articulate and well-qualified young men, well prepared for your future lives and careers.

Relationships between you are strong and you say that you feel safe and valued. The current tutor system allows you to make an excellent contribution to supporting one another. Other opportunities enable you to contribute very effectively to the wider community.

The headteacher, with the strong support of his senior colleagues, leads and manages the school extremely well. They are making sure that there is an appropriate balance between challenging you to do your best and making sure that you are well cared for and supported. You should be proud of the contribution you are making to the school's success.

I consider that the school is doing all it can to be successful and I have not identified any specific area I think the school needs to focus on to improve further. I hope that you will all continue to strive for excellence in all that you do, both now and in the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Joan Greenfield, Lead Inspector

5 July 2013

I wonder what you were doing at 8.20 am last Thursday? It is often a time when many of us are having an early morning cup of coffee, perhaps starting to check emails or maybe reviewing the delights that the day ahead holds. Somewhat to my surprise, instead of doing any of this, I found myself talking to one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education.

Having not visited us for six years, Ofsted decided that they would come and review our arrangements for behaviour, safety and social, moral and spiritual education. Two senior members of Her Majesty's Inspectorate came to the school, one of whom is the Ofsted national lead for behaviour. As is common in this sort of inspection, the school has effectively no notice. (I do not think that ringing me ten minutes before they arrived really counts as notice!)

The lead HMI has already fed back her key conclusions which I have summarised below:

- **Arrangements for safeguarding within the school are of a very high standard.** The single central record which all schools have to maintain (to ensure that all adults who work within the environment have had a criminal record check) was described as "perfect" by one of our inspectors.
- **Behaviour was of an exceptionally high standard.** Inspectors were anxious to compliment all students on their attitudes to learning. For example, the lead HMI reported that in one lesson she observed students were asked to move into groups and did so "in the twinkling of an eye" with no fuss or noise. Behaviour in lessons and at break and lunchtime was uniformly excellent.
- **Inspectors were profoundly impressed by the ability of staff, students and governors to articulate the values and ethos of the school.** Amongst other areas, they complimented the school on the impact of enrichment and the inclusive values behind vertical tutoring. Inspectors supported the view of pupils and staff that vertical tutoring promoted a community ethos based upon the values of an extended family.
- **Inspectors were impressed by the way in which the school promoted an inclusive ethos** which emphasised the value of each individual within the LSS community. These inclusive values were seen as being expressed by the fact that there have been no permanent exclusions from the school for more than 25 years. Similarly, there have only been a handful of fixed term exclusions each year.
- **Bullying was not tolerated within the school.** Whilst constant vigilance is always required, any issues that arose were dealt with promptly and fairly. The school was encouraged to continue its work in helping students understand that what can be perceived as banter can in fact cause hurt or upset. Inspectors were impressed with the way in which assemblies and other pastoral forums were used to address these issues. In particular, they praised a research project led by Mr Hickling and the Student Council which sought to work with students to understand and address any negative behaviour.

- Whilst the inspector told us that there was nothing wrong with our written policies, **she complimented us on the sophistication and depth of our actual practice**. Her main suggestion for improvement was that we should try to write more about the quality of what we actually did on a daily basis to support our students.

Inspectors rightly complimented staff and governors on their commitment and professionalism. Equally, they praised the intelligence, perception and strong community values of our students. I strongly agree with both of these conclusions. Hence, I am delighted to report that what could have been a negative or intimidating experience turned into a ringing endorsement of the work of the school. It would be hard to think of a more positive way to move towards the end of the academic year.

Peter Kent

THE SOUL OF A SCHOOL

What are the values, the underlying philosophy and moral approach, that a school should adopt to make us proud of it? And how can they be put into practice?

In this section, Peter Kent and his colleagues address these issues over a series of articles, with the help of a happy parent and the chairman of the school's student council. In the process, we see several shining examples of the selflessness and generosity of spirit that the resulting ethos produces in the Sheriff community. Further commentary on my part would be superfluous.

3 December 1999

It is often assumed that headmasters who warn about the limitations of league tables are doing so because of the relatively weak performance of their school. Hence, I thought I would choose this week, when the school has received considerable local and national publicity as a result of excellent examination results, to express my own reservations about the league table culture that has grown up within education.

It is of course true that results matter tremendously. However, I cannot agree that they are the only things that contribute to a good school. What else matters? Well, how about ethos, an emphasis upon the school being a happy place, the quality of teaching, extra-curricular activities, high quality resources and an involvement with the local community? All of these qualities are very hard to measure, but they have a huge influence upon the "soul" of a school.

I strongly agree that every school should aim for high results, and we have just built into our new three-year development plan challenging targets for results at KS3, GCSE and A-Level. However, whilst doing this, it is also vital that we maintain the friendly and caring ethos that is such an important part of the school's character. Examination results are crucially important, but we must also protect the broader range of experiences that enrich pupils and often remain with them for the rest of their lives.

Peter Kent

4 April 2003

The Scottish Ethos network is an internationally known organisation that exists to promote strategies to develop a culture within schools. We were delighted that they included an article which I had written about our interview processes in a recent edition of their newsletter. The text of the article is included below:

"Since 2001, Lawrence Sheriff School has involved members of the school council in the interviewing of staff. Rather than ask interviewees to teach a sample lesson, a process which is often found to be rather artificial, staff are asked to spend half an hour being interviewed by four members of the school council. The four interviewers are elected by the council as a whole. Each council member asks two questions to the candidate, and there is an opportunity for the candidate to ask the students questions. The student questions are checked beforehand by the Deputy Head to ensure suitability and to avoid duplication. Questions have been challenging and thoughtful, for example: 'Why would I enjoy being in your lessons?'

The chair of the panel then feeds back to members of SMT before they interview the candidate (normally the Head, Deputy Head and a governor) before making a recommendation about who should be appointed.

Whilst students only make a recommendation to the final interviewing panel, to date their comments have been extremely accurate, and in almost every case their nominee has been the person finally appointed. Feedback from interviewees has been extremely positive, and many have commented that this stage of the interview process provides the clearest insight into the culture of the school. Over the past two years, students have taken part in the interviewing for nearly twenty different posts within the school.

This involvement of students has encouraged the school to involve them in a range of issues which student councils might not ordinarily be consulted on. Hence the council has prepared a paper on what makes a good lesson and has also advised the school's parents' association on how to improve their fundraising.

Overall, the involvement of students in staff interviews has taught us that students can be trusted to play a part in some of the most important decisions made within a school. We have found that, the more responsibility that is given to students, the better they respond.

Our project has led to interest from the local education authority and the DfES. However, perhaps the strongest supporters of the initiative have been the school's governors, who have been deeply impressed by the way in which student perspectives have enriched the appointment process."

Peter Kent

6 February 2004

Snowfall causes gridlock and school closure

Last Wednesday's snow may have been expected, but the gridlock on Rugby's streets – and on those of numerous other towns around the region – took almost everyone by surprise. A sudden burst of rain, accompanied by a dramatic fall in temperature, and then followed by a couple of inches of snow, resulted in ice-covered roads that were more than a match for a population no longer accustomed to dealing with conditions that, until about 20 years ago, featured more frequently in a typical British winter. Huge, almost stationary, queues formed within minutes of the snow starting to fall, and soon the problem was compounded by drivers who abandoned their vehicles, some of them having run out of petrol.

The impact of events at school was considerable. The first reaction of most of the boys was frenzied glee. Snowballers were everywhere, particularly on the "D" at the front of the school and by the bus stops, and battles raged for ages as students waited unavailingly for their buses home to arrive. A few boys, less keen on being soaked and frozen, almost immediately phoned home and then took refuge inside Big School. As the afternoon wore on and turned to evening, and the snowballers grew cold and tired, their numbers steadily increased until Big School contained up to 100 boys who by now wanted only to go home. Mr Kent, Mr Parker, Mrs Hipkins, Mrs Wright, Mr Johns and Mr Barnett kept them company as the hours dragged by, while Mrs Batchelor kept the school office open to enable anxious boys to phone home and to relay calls from parents who were on their way to collect their offspring but desperately delayed in the well-nigh impossible traffic. Guy Hutchinson, with a team of fellow students, maintained a supply of sandwiches and hot drinks to help keep hunger and chill at bay.

By 8 o'clock, the traffic had eased a little: increasingly, parents were able to make it into town to collect their children, and the numbers still sheltering in the school rapidly diminished. Yet it was a quarter to 10 before the headmaster was finally able to lock the school doors and go home himself, having patiently waited until he was sure that every student was safely on his way home.

The closure of the school the following day may have inconvenienced one or two people, but the benefits were great. Snow that you can play in properly is a rarity these days, and a number of members of staff with young children were able for the first time ever to go out and make snowmen with them, or to go tobogganing. Many Sheriff boys had never previously had the chance to spend a whole day enjoying the pleasures of a substantial snowfall. When they returned on Friday morning, although there was still snow on the ground, most of them had got the excitement out of their system, and their behaviour was much calmer. And anyone who had arrived home hours later than usual on Wednesday evening – one poor soul's journey took more than six hours – had all of Thursday in which to recover from their ordeal.

It was all really quite exciting while it lasted, but it was a relief to most people that the snow melted almost as quickly as it had arrived. School reopened on Friday, although much confusion was caused by the County Council website which suggested it was still closed. Local radio stations made it clear that we were open: please take note, and in future make sure you get your information about possible closures from local radio, not a website.

Finally, those staff who stayed at school on Wednesday evening to look after those boys who were unable to get home greatly appreciated the many phone calls and letters of thanks from grateful parents and students. Courtesies of this sort are characteristic of the relationships that exist within what we like to call the Sheriff "family" and make a great difference to us all. Thank you, in turn, for those messages.

Paddy Wex

23 April 2004

Some readers of *The Weekly Word* may have seen a recent report in the *Times Educational Supplement* entitled "Cuddly schools don't succeed." The report summarised research by the Hay Group which suggested that "successful" schools had a less "collegiate" atmosphere.

Instead, there was a focus on accountability, results and "service delivery". The report concludes with the memorable comment: "Warmth and humour are seen as a key characteristic of less successful schools."

To be frank, the research from Hay embodies just about everything in current educational philosophy that I dislike. There are serious questions to be asked about how they claim to have measured "success" in a school, and on what basis they have calculated how "cuddly" an institution is! More seriously, the idea that "warmth and humour" have no place in schools is one that has to be challenged. You may recall that within the details for the school's deputy headship I wrote that "a happy school is a successful school." I still strongly believe that this is the case.

The reality is that schools are not factories turning out a “product”. Instead, they are dynamic organisations seeking to prepare young people for adult life. Of course, results matter, but they are not the only measure of what a school seeks to achieve. As a school, we care about the examination results that our students achieve, but we also care deeply about what sorts of people they become and how we prepare them for the world outside Lawrence Sheriff.

The flawed nature of the Hay research is best demonstrated by a practical example. We are all very proud of the achievements of our U15 rugby team, who performed magnificently in reaching the final of the *Daily Mail* Vase at Twickenham. Their success was not based upon “accountability” or “service delivery”. Instead it derived from talent, enthusiasm, and a powerful focus upon teamwork. Their example reminds us that the genuine route to success lies in commitment, working together and in valuing every member of our community.

Peter Kent

11 June 2004

Other readers of *The Weekly Word* may share my fondness for the radio. I think that I could do quite well without the delights of television, but a world without radio (and particularly Radio 4) is almost unthinkable. Over recent weeks my car radio has been tuned almost exclusively to Radio 5, as I await the critical news about the person appointed to be the next manager of Liverpool.

However, whilst listening to Radio 5 recently, I was so shocked by one news story that I nearly crashed. (Apologies if you were driving behind me at the time!) A school in the West Country has banned the selling of home-made cakes at its summer fayre. Apparently, according to the local education authority, this is a necessary step “to prevent the danger of litigation arising from food poisoning”.

Although the story at first appears trivial and silly, I think it does demonstrate the absurd pressures that society sometimes places schools under. Of course, we want to ensure that health and safety are at the centre of all that happens within schools. However, do we really want to create such a litigious environment that you need legal aid before you can run a cake stall?

The reality is that no human activity is totally risk-free. It is important to assess risk in order to reduce it as far as possible. However, if we wish to take all element of risk out of schools, then relatively little will be left. It will certainly make it almost impossible to offer the extra-curricular trips and visits that add such richness to education, and which many of us remember fondly from our own school days.

I strongly feel that schools should continue to offer trips, take educational visits and even run cake stalls, whilst at the same time doing all that they reasonably can to eliminate and reduce risk whenever possible. Compared to other parts of society, schools are still very safe places, and it would be a terrible shame if a litigious culture took away opportunities from young people.

Peter Kent

1 July 2005

On Sunday we hold our annual school service and prize-giving for Years 7 and 8. I must admit that I see this as a particularly important event in the life of the school. I know that some people argue that it is a strange idea still to have a school service in the twenty-first century within a society that is fundamentally secular. However, I think that to suggest this is to miss the fundamental point of the service.

However much government might get excited about league tables, I strongly believe that in the end schools are all about values. In this sense the service is important, because it crystallises the values that the school represents. Firstly, it provides an opportunity to celebrate the beliefs that led to the founding of the school. Each year, a simple liturgy is read which gives thanks for Lawrence Sheriff and for the values of fairness, decency and generosity that he stood for. The liturgy also gives thanks for the school's links with parents, Old Laurentians and the wider community. Hence it serves as a reminder of the unique combination of stakeholders who make up the family of the school. Grammar schools sometimes see themselves as being committed to academic excellence and little else. One of the things that constantly inspires me about this school is that it has a much more holistic vision, caring about the academic and personal development of everyone within the Lawrence Sheriff family and also seeing itself as having a responsibility to its local community.

Hence, I would argue that the school service matters, because it provides a ceremony that allows us to articulate the values that are held so widely across the school. You certainly do not need to be religious in order to attend. You just need to be committed to the values of fairness, community and concern for the whole person which underpin all that the school does.

Peter Kent

10 September 2010

Welcome back to all readers of *The Weekly Word*. I normally spend my first few columns analysing results, but I thought that this year I would begin with something more important: the process of settling in and being happy in the school.

For most parents, their child's first days at secondary school are a worrying rite of passage, as they move from a small primary school to the larger, more intimidating scale of secondary school and face the daunting prospect of the challenges of the next seven years in a new environment. At the end of last term, I received the following letter from a Year 13 parent, and hope that by sharing it with you some of the concerns you may currently be feeling will be allayed.

"I write this letter of thanks as school term draws to a close and my son's second year of sixth form also ends. As with most families, we now anxiously await our son's A-Level results to see if he has achieved the required grades to ensure his acceptance to his chosen university.

Whatever his academic results, however, I would like to thank you, both personally and your excellent teaching staff. I have found the school to be first rate in terms of its teaching and of course its subsequent results and ratings, but there is a lot more to the school than just academia. The pastoral care and encouragement given to our son has helped him grow into a confident, happy and popular young man. He has the confidence to perform on stage both for drama and music, and the atmosphere engendered amongst the boys is positive and supportive – again, this stems from the attitude and efforts of your staff and is certainly to be commended.

Writing this takes me back to his far less than confident start as he stood at the gates on his first day – drawing deep breaths to steady his nerves. Indeed, being one of the youngest in his year as well as one of the smallest students is not easy for anyone, and he attracted the attentions of a bully within the first term. I was very concerned but felt that you dealt with the situation very quickly, efficiently and left us all with the confidence that his remaining years would be trouble free in this regard – and they were.

I also recall the nerves with which we faced the school outward bound trip – the first time many of the children had been away from home, and probably the first time they were involved in many of the outdoor activities included. My son was also very nervous as this came so early on in the school curriculum. My wife and I watched the coach pull away and fervently hoped he would cope. Incidentally, I remember attending the school meeting prior to the trip at which a member of staff read out a parent’s letter which was aimed at calming our parental fears. Like many parents, I am sure, we sat thinking, ‘Oh yes, that is okay for their son, but he couldn’t have been like ours!’

Needless to say, we were early for the coach return, having worried for the entire time he was away, and quickly over to see how he had coped. When I asked him how it had been he said – and I quote this verbatim – ‘It was great! I could have done with a couple more days though...’

The reason I make such a lengthy recollection is that if it is of any help to future parents, please feel free to show them this letter as it may also help to calm their fears – believe me we were worried parents of the first degree and, yes, our son was as nervous as theirs probably is today – honestly!

I believe that Lawrence Sheriff School, its teaching staff and the structure you have created have provided our son with many of the skills he will need to make good his career path as well as a happy and fulfilling future, and you have my deepest gratitude for all of your efforts with him. Thanks again!”

Peter Kent

16 December 2016

November

This November saw the school’s largest ever Movember campaign. Our priority throughout the month was to raise awareness of men’s health issues through a variety of avenues. Students were given Movember-themed daily notices which highlighted the work of the Movember foundation and educated the students about prostate cancer, testicular cancer and men’s mental health. Wasps Rugby club also played a massive role in our campaign and their community officer, Sam Verralls, and former England international rugby player, Paul Sackey, led a fascinating Movember assembly to years 8-13. Farah McRae who works for the Movember foundation also came into school to give an assembly to Tait and Wheeler to give a further insight into how their work improves the lives of men.

What has struck me the most about this particular Movember campaign is how willing a variety of staff have been to educate their students about men's health, and there have been PSHE (personal, social, health and economic education) sessions on Movember and Sixth Form psychology lessons based around some of the prevalent themes.

The other unexpected bonus with our campaign has been the fundraising. Whilst we have organised events such as the Movember rowing relays and the blue dress code and have sold Blue Day T-shirts and wristbands, we couldn't possibly have anticipated that we would raise nearly £2,000 throughout the month. At the time of writing, this meant that we had raised the third highest amount of money for Movember out of all the schools in the UK, which is a massive achievement.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff, students and parents for really getting behind our Movember campaign. It is a charity that our school really believes in and will continue to support in coming years so that our students have a better awareness of the health issues that affect them.

John Gaffin

16 December 2016

Student Council: Year in review

2016 has been an outstanding year for Student Council. We have been really busy all year with events ranging from cake sales and discos to running the Summer Fete and helping to raise money for Blue Day. To name a few recent events, over £1,500 was raised at the Halloween Disco, over £200 at a recent cake sale and around £300 during school events for Macmillan Cancer Support. We have worked at the Winter Fayre, Zeemon Fest and Pink Day, to name just a few. Throughout it all, Student Council members have been working diligently during the year, raising money and awareness for many great causes. This year's charity is the Bradby Club, and this is where the Student Council have been raising money since September. We have also been running interviews for prospective staff and producing *The Griffin*, our school-wide newspaper. The Bolt Hole has also been a big hit again this year, being run on the Big School balcony for our younger students.

Matt and I ran on the campaign promise to improve communication within Student Council and to the greater school community; I believe we have successfully done this through assemblies, notices and form representatives. We have visited forms to make sure that information has been communicated and posters for events circulated.

I have been very lucky to work with some amazing people and an outstanding team over the past year. I would like to say thank you to my Executive Board team for doing so well throughout the year, to all the staff who have helped out with Student Council events and all the members of Student Council who have made an incredibly meaningful and positive impact on our school. I would also like to thank all the people (students, parents and staff included) who have attended Student Council events to help raise money for charity. Finally, I would like to wish the newly elected Chair and Vice Chair of Student Council good luck for the upcoming year!

Thanks to everyone for making this year amazing. I'm proud of all of you!

Jayan Joshi, Chairman of Lawrence Sheriff School Student Council

12 May 2017

One of the major themes of education policy over recent years has been a focus upon combating deprivation. Recent research showed that students from higher income families were five times more likely to gain higher grades and progress on to university. In the light of this, central government has invested large sums in initiatives to “narrow the gap” between students from different income brackets. Despite a focus upon social mobility from successive governments, to date these initiatives have had a minimal impact.

One example of these attempts to narrow the gap has been the pupil premium. The premium is an additional sum of money given to schools for every student who is entitled to Free School Meals, awarded in order to provide additional opportunities for these students. Government research has highlighted that some students claim Free School Meals at primary school but then, for a variety of complex reasons, do not continue to claim when they progress on to secondary school. Hence the pupil premium is based upon FSM 6, i.e. any student who has received Free School Meals at any point in the last six years will still receive the premium.

How does this relate to LSS? We were one of the first grammar schools in the country to give priority in our admission criteria to students who are eligible for the pupil premium (even having an Act of Parliament passed to give us “power to innovate” in this way before we were an academy). In order to support this policy, governors invest additional sums to support disadvantaged students.

We strongly encourage all families who are entitled to Free School Meals to claim them. Any application for FSM is always treated in the strictest of confidence, and our cashless catering system means that no student receiving such support can be identified by their peers. As well as the support offered by the state, the governing body are very strongly committed to offering additional support as required with costs such as uniform, PE equipment and school trips. Hence applying for free school meals may well enable us to offer a much wider package of support to families, using the resources available to the governing body.

If any family would like to discuss this issue, I would urge them to contact me for a confidential discussion. We are determined that no student should miss out and will do all that we can to offer support.

Peter Kent

8 September 2017

Welcome back to all readers of *The Weekly Word*. I hope that you and your family had an enjoyable and restful summer. For those pupils and parents who are joining the school, I hope that you have a positive and successful time with us at Lawrence Sheriff.

I wanted to use my first column to emphasise some of the fundamental values that the school holds dear. We believe very strongly that the school should be a positive and inclusive environment. Whilst it is great to do well in league tables and the like, I continue to emphasise to successive generations of pupils that what really matters is that they are happy. Our aim is to help every student achieve all that they are capable of. Most of the time we succeed, but on the rare occasions that we do not, we will keep on trying throughout the time that the student is part of the school.

Pupils and staff at the school often tease me that I am obsessed with the word “community”. Well, if that is the case, it is not a bad word to keep focusing on. My emphasis on being happy does not mean that we never disagree, or that everything always goes right. But it does mean that, as a community, we do our best to work together to help everyone achieve all that they are capable of. We heard a lot during the summer break about accountability and examinations and league tables, but first and foremost schools have to be centred upon people.

Peter Kent

EDUCATION AT THE LEADING EDGE

In the modern political and economic environment, there is no such thing as a steady state of existence for a school. It either constantly moves forward, or it fails. Here Peter Kent explains this in the context of, well, Smarties tubes, to be honest. Obvious, when you think about it...

25 February 2005

Like me, you may have been gripped by the major news to emerge during the half-term holiday. I refer, of course, to the fact that Smarties tubes are to be abolished after nearly 70 years of existence. From this summer, Smarties are to be sold in new hexagonal packets which will no longer contain the distinctive push-on lid. As the parent of two primary-age children, I must confess to outrage at the news. If the Smarties tube was good enough for me, why not for them? And if the Smarties tube has survived for 70 years, why change it now?

This instinctive response to a change in sweet wrapping perhaps shows how difficult the process of change can be. So often, our first instinct is to find a reason why things should remain exactly as they are. "If it's not broken," as the saying goes, "why fix it?"

However, I believe that such an approach can be very dangerous. Organisations such as schools face two choices: going forward or going backwards. The temptation, particularly when experiencing a period of success, is to try to remain exactly the same. However, I believe this choice is an illusion, since a failure to embrace new ideas will always lead to an organisation going backwards, however well it is doing at the time.

For all of these reasons, this half-term will be focused upon the exploration of a series of new ideas. We will be continuing to explore options for shortening the time spent on KS3, allowing greater opportunities for enrichment and intellectual challenge at KS4. Linked to this, we also plan to explore new curricular structures, allowing students more opportunities to "personalise" their curriculum by taking courses when they feel ready to do so, rather than simply because they have reached a particular chronological point in their development. School structure will also come under the microscope, with issues such as the length and organisation of the lunch hour coming under review.

Change for change's sake is pointless. However, making use of fresh thinking to offer new and exciting opportunities to students is something that every school must try to do on a continual basis.

Peter Kent

A top-performing school needs the infrastructure to match. In the next article, a student tells us about the opening of Sheriff's Learning Resources Centre in 2008.

24 October 2008

A new resource comes online. The 2nd of October 2008 was a historic day in the life of Lawrence Sheriff School, for it was the official opening of the new Learning Resources Centre.

A building only goes so far being brick and cement; it's what people put into it that makes it. The opening couldn't have even happened without the hard front-line work of the builders, the design of the architects, the ingenuity of the governors, Dr Kent and Dr Kay, the support of the Parents' Association, but, most of all, the fantastic, eagle-eyed supervision of Mrs Hipkins. So, a very big thank-you goes to all of those people. But it wasn't just these people who attended the opening; the room was full of teachers, previous members of the school, the Mayor of Rugby and the press, to witness the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the school, and of course to get a slice of the LRC cake!

After the cake had been cut by the Chair of Governors, Mr Thomas, I found myself with the honour of delivering a tour to Parents' Association representative Mr Griffiths, former pupil Mr Duffy and previous Headmaster Mr Martindale. As I showed them around, I told them many of the following points:

The LRC is an extremely high-tech eco-building with a ground-sourced geothermic heat pump that circulates hot water, thus providing an economic heat source for the underfloor heating system, which explains the absence of radiators. It also sports solar panels, ceiling air conditioning, motion sensitive lights, all types of insulation and two long-campaigned-for water fountains, not to mention the projector that the Student Council vouched for in the main entrance. I informed them of the many roles of the LRC; that it functions as a Maths block, a study area for sixth formers, a library with fantastic views and lots of computers for study, and an extension of and a liaison between the ICT block and the LRC. (The walkway that bridges the space between them actually has around a centimetre gap, hence we don't have to pay extra tax!)

As the tour continued, I got a sense of nostalgia from Mr Martindale and Mr Duffy. It reminded me that the school is an entity, and it keeps on progressing and growing, changing from one generation to the next, and that what we contribute influences the school. What we do, whether it be academic or non-academic, is making history in its own little way.

Enjoy the new facilities and treat them well. After all, they were built for you and the many generations of Laurentians to follow!

Benedict Everitt 10 SMJG

Some of the most important developments in Lawrence Sheriff School's reputation for excellence in education have come from its status as a National Teaching School. Here Peter Kent explains more.

13 July 2012

I have written on several occasions about the school's newly acquired status as a National Teaching School. As we come towards the end of our first term in this role, I thought that readers of *The Weekly Word* might like to know more about some of the projects that we have become involved with.

Like teaching hospitals, the idea behind teaching schools is that they should be centres of excellence that take a leading part in training the profession. Hence, thanks to the hard work of Ms Temple and Mr Bedgood, we are now at the centre of a number of projects related to Initial Teacher Training (ITT). These projects include School Direct, a new scheme from the government which allows schools to recruit graduates directly before taking a central role in training them. We are also contributing to a new scheme, based at Warwick University, which retrains engineers to become teachers of mathematics and physics.

These new projects will not mean that lots of classes will be placed solely in the care of trainee teachers. However, they will mean that a number of observers come into classes to observe the excellent practice of my colleagues, a development which has to be beneficial for everyone concerned. I was recently told by an experienced Ofsted inspector that during his 19 years of evaluating schools he had never encountered such positive attitudes to learning as those displayed by our students. New entrants to teaching will benefit hugely from working with our students and seeing how my colleagues have fostered these positive attitudes.

Our professional development work is not confined to new entrants to the profession. You may have noticed that our website now has a section for the National Professional Qualification for Headship.

Prospective headteachers are expected to gain this qualification before they progress on to running a school of their own. (Frighteningly, I completed the qualification 13 years ago – how time flies!) In partnership with Warwick University, we have been granted one of only four licences in the West Midlands to deliver NPQH and a suite of courses that will follow aimed at middle and senior leaders within schools.

These new developments associated with National Teaching School status offer a wonderful opportunity to share the high standards in teaching, learning and leadership within Lawrence Sheriff and the broad group of schools that make up our Teaching School Alliance. It has to make sense that schools should now take responsibility for training teachers and ensuring high standards across the profession.

Peter Kent

No organisation can work at the leading edge unless its staff relations, management and training are of high quality. In that context, Assistant Head (now Deputy Head) Teresa Mpofu explains the significance of the school's Gold standard award from the well-regarded body, Investors in People.

14 November 2014

You may have noticed on the school letters sent home the emblem for Investors in People. Investors in People (IIP) was formed in 1991 to help UK organisations and their employees make the most of their abilities. Two decades later, they're a trusted advisor on people management, and their accreditation is proudly held by businesses of all sizes that meet the Investors in People standards. IIP make bold claims such as "we exist to help every individual, and every team, be the very best they can be" and "people can change the world, if they are given the support they need." Given such ambition, organisations have to work hard to achieve the core 39 standards; at present 16% of UK employers are accredited with the IIP standard. If the values, ethos and management within an organisation are strong enough, they can ask to be assessed at Bronze, Silver or Gold standard. To reach the Gold standard a further 126 standards need to be met – to reach this standard is quite some achievement. We have worked with our assessor Terry Jones for many years, and with his supportive yet challenging advice we reached the Gold standard in June 2011. In June of this year the school was preparing for a further assessment to see if we had maintained the Gold standard.

An IIP assessment is rigorous, with over half the members of staff involved in interviews where they are asked about a range of issues affecting the school: how the values and ethos are brought to life in the school community, how people are managed, the training they receive and the recognition they receive. The aim of the assessors is to try and understand what makes the school tick, if successes are sustainable and how the school can move forward. We are proud to say that we were once again credited with IIP Gold standard and achieved a rather impressive 170 standards. Some highlights of the report include:

"Lawrence Sheriff School continues to evolve its people strategies in line with its vision to offer the best education through a fully engaged and motivated workforce."

"Ofsted found that actual practice exceeds that articulated in the school's policies... This is embedded in the school's vision and values and translates the aim to be a caring and supportive environment that achieves the best from its staff and students."

As always, our challenge is to maintain this high standard!

Teresa Mpofu

The town of Rugby has evolved and grown on a huge scale in recent years. In the next article, Peter Kent explains how Lawrence Sheriff School has itself acted to accommodate that expansion, while also adjusting to the developments in education at a national level.

13 May 2016

Over recent weeks, there has been considerable media coverage of Multi-Academy Trusts and the government's policy on academies. I am pleased to say that much of this has no relevance to LSS. However, our governing body have taken the view that the school does need to engage with the new school structures that are emerging. The danger of burying your head in the sand is that you don't notice significant change until it is too late. Sheriff has always sought to stay one step ahead of what is happening at a national level, so that we can maximise the benefit to the whole school community.

For these reasons, in November of last year the school successfully applied to become an academy sponsor. We have no wish to empire-build or take over schools. However, for a large number of years we have offered help when it has been asked for. Some of you will remember that in my capacity as a National Leader of Education LSS has offered advice and practical support to a range of different schools, a role that we have recently developed further as a Teaching School. Hence, becoming an academy sponsor merely formalises what we were doing before the term was invented (and before academies were even thought of!)

One way we have tried to use this new status is to support the significant expansion of the town over the coming years. With new housing comes new schools and thus the opportunity to share the ethos and values that underpin the strength of LSS. If we sponsor a new school, it would not be either selective or single sex, but it would reflect the distinctive "way we do things around here" associated with Lawrence Sheriff.

As a first step in this process, we heard recently that our application to be the sponsor of the new primary school on the Rugby Gateway site had been successful. The primary will be part of a major new housing development in the area towards the M6 motorway.

The new school will have its own headteacher and governing body, but LSS will play a central role in appointing staff, establishing the ethos of the institution and overseeing its future direction. It will not be a designated feeder school, and students who attend will have the same chance to progress on to LSS as students at every other primary have. We are sharing values, not a short cut to Sheriff.

Why are we getting involved in this way? Principally because it is important that the development of education within the town is led by schools themselves – an idea that is central to the government's Education White Paper. Rugby is growing, and we have an important part to play in supporting this.

Taking on this role is also a crucial part of the founding principles that have guided the work of our governing body for more than a century. We have always aimed to share the benefits of attending LSS with as wide a group as possible. The school has now reached its physical capacity, and I have learnt the hard way that I cannot be in two places at once. However, sponsorship does give us the chance to help others and to share the significant strengths of Lawrence Sheriff more widely.

Peter Kent

At the end of 2016 came the long-awaited news: for the first time, Lawrence Sheriff School planned to admit girls into the Sixth Form. Here Peter Kent explains the background to the successful consultation period that followed.

16 December 2016

I want to begin by drawing to your attention that LSS and Rugby High School have each begun a consultation on making their Sixth Forms co-educational from 2018.

The intention is not to reduce the number of boys in our Sixth Form. We have actually increased what is called our “published admission number” so that we can admit the same number of boys whilst also giving some girls the chance to join us in the Sixth Form, just as RHS will give some boys the chance to do the same.

The extract below from our joint press release on the subject summarises why the two governing bodies have decided to take this step, and the way in which both schools are continuing their very close working relationship:

Headteachers Charlotte Marten and Peter Kent commented: “Having a co-educational element in each school’s sixth form will be part of the process of preparing students for adult life. We have decided to consult on these proposals following feedback from both students and parents. The two schools will continue to work together on a range of subjects, so we do not see this move as breaking our partnership, rather as a way of deepening it.”

And so, we finally reach the end of term. The Autumn term is always a long and demanding one, and it is no surprise that we all now feel ready for a rest. I hope that all readers have a peaceful and enjoyable Christmas holiday.

Peter Kent

A high-performing school will typically have its particular specialities – areas of teaching in which it clearly excels. LSS is no exception to this rule. I close this section with two typical articles on the specialist theme. They happily emphasise Sheriff’s determination that specialist activities should in no way harm the balanced general teaching of the syllabus as a whole – an achievement that sets it apart from so many other schools.

4 July 2003

This week brought the long-awaited news that the school had been successful in its bid to become a Mathematics and Computing College. I must admit that when I heard the news I let out the roar of delight that I normally reserve for the news that Liverpool have scored a goal. The Department of Education official at the other end of the telephone seemed rather bemused, but I think she got the message that we were pleased about becoming a specialist college!

The achievement of specialist status is thanks to a huge amount of hard work from Mr Barnett, Mrs Simmonds, Mrs Hipkins, Mrs Batchelor and the many colleagues who provided help and advice during the period of writing the bid. The school’s governing body has also provided energetic and committed support for the project. Like all worthwhile achievements, the status has been attained through a very effective team working closely together. My thanks to everyone concerned.

The school will become one of only a handful of Mathematics and Computing Colleges in the country. We will also become the first school to achieve such a status in Warwickshire. We will attend an induction event at the end of term, but the process of becoming a specialist college really begins next term. New staff will need to be appointed and a range of new equipment purchased. I expect us to move into a very exciting time for the school.

It is worth emphasising once again that specialist status will not affect the balanced curriculum that I wish every student to experience. Whilst we will seek to provide a whole range of opportunities in our specialist areas, I expect the status to provide additional opportunities and resources in every other subject as well. By improving our ICT resources and technical support, we hope to benefit every member of the school community.

Some readers may have seen the article in last week's *Times Educational Supplement* about the outstanding A-Level work that was taking place within our Design and Technology department. We are very fortunate to have excellent practice taking place across the school. I am convinced that the additional resources provided by our new status will allow that excellence to flourish and grow over the coming years.

Peter Kent

29 June 2007

Whilst becoming a specialist school has been an extremely positive experience for Lawrence Sheriff, there are certain dangers linked with this specialist identity. One of them is that the school becomes associated with excellence in a limited range of subjects. I remember that, when we became a Mathematics and Computing College in 2003, I was at great pains to point out that I still wanted the school to continue to excel in all parts of the curriculum. In this sense specialism should be a launch pad for all subjects, not just the two named in our designation.

A wonderful example of the all-round strength of subjects within the school came on Thursday evening. Mr Hickling designed a breath-taking exhibition, featuring work completed by art students in Years 11, 12 and 13. I lost count of the number of people who told me how profoundly impressed they were by the standard of the work produced. Whilst this is obviously a huge compliment to the talent and creativity of our students, it is also a recognition of the excellence of the creative arts teaching within the school. This applies both to timetabled teaching and also to enrichment activities such as photography that were also featured in the exhibition.

I must also mention the tremendous contribution of Billie Moseley, who worked tirelessly to arrange sponsorship for the evening and to oversee the many detailed arrangements that made the event such a success. Earlier this year, Billie stepped in to assist with the teaching of art and design at very short notice, and we owe her a huge debt of gratitude for all that she has done.

It was wonderful to see such a cross section of people at the exhibition. Visitors included parents, governors, old boys, members of the local community and former colleagues from the school. In this sense, the exhibition served as a wonderful expression of the school's view of itself as an extended family, drawing together a whole range of groups within the community of Rugby.

Someone whose judgement I respect told me that many of the pieces at the exhibition were of degree standard. Congratulations to all involved and particular thanks to Mr Hickling.

Peter Kent

A COMMITMENT TO GIVING

I have been enormously impressed by the charitable spirit – not to mention the students’ astonishingly professional fundraising skills! – that I have seen in action at Lawrence Sheriff School. Here are just two articles (I could have selected dozens) to give a flavour of that.

23 March 2007

I am pleased to say that the standard of assemblies at Lawrence Sheriff is very high and that they provide our students with considerable food for thought. During my twenty plus years of teaching I have probably heard well over a thousand assemblies. However, last week provided a moment that will remain in my memory perhaps longer than any other assembly that I have heard during my career.

The assembly was led by Rev John Parker, a member of the Rugby Team Ministry. He was talking about the fact that money does not buy happiness, and many people with large amounts of money can also be profoundly unhappy. He reminded the school that, in the end, the key to happiness lies in the relationships that we establish with other people, not the amount of possessions that we accrue. It was a message that all of us, regardless of religious belief, would probably be happy to endorse. To illustrate his point, John took £60 in cash and set fire to it. The gasp of surprise from all of us in the assembly (students and staff) had to be seen to be believed. The message was clear – money has its place, but it must not be put on a pedestal where it becomes the most important thing in life.

As well as being a fantastic lesson in life for all of us as individuals, Rev Parker’s assembly has a message for us as a school. It is very important that our efforts at fund-raising do not merely go into causes that directly benefit members of the school. One of the really positive effects of our new pastoral structure is that houses are now adopting specific charities and trying to raise funds for them. During this week Mr Langton has been helping us to focus upon the work of the Red Cross (he will be running in the London Marathon in order to support this excellent cause).

I know that a variety of events are planned (including an intriguing “Sheriff Idol” contest) in order to raise funds for house charities. Students also continue to raise funds for good causes through a variety of activities that they have organised themselves (I was most impressed that a recent sixth form event enabled us to send £100 to a school in Tanzania that we first contacted through World Challenge). I hope that we can maintain this positive momentum. Over the years we have done a lot for causes that benefit LSS students, and we now need to continue to refocus our efforts on a much wider set of causes outside the school community.

Peter Kent

1 April 2011

“Why has the government announced an increase in the overseas aid budget? Charity begins at home!” has been an issue raised in the national media in recent weeks. At LSS, we agree that charity begins at home (or in our case, school), but that is indeed simply the beginning of the work as our charitable activities then reach out to support local, national and international charities with their work.

Some of these charitable activities are long in the planning. The 2010 World Challenge trip to Nepal took two years to organise, and planning for Uganda in 2012 is already well under way. As part of the 2010 trip, the teams worked at Tarun Secondary School in Kathmandu on activities such as decorating classrooms and organising sporting activities. Even after the completion of the trip, the charitable work is continuing with the Student Council raising funds for, and organising an art exhibition by, The Mother and Children Art Foundation in Nepal to be held at the school in early April to support further fundraising for that organisation.

The Student Council chooses its annual charities each year, last year raising money for both the Kamla Foundation, a group which works in India with people on the margins of society, and local charity Myton Hospice.

At times of urgent need, the whole school community also reacts immediately to events such as the devastating earthquake in Haiti.

Ad hoc events take place throughout the year, with rowing for Sport Relief, busking for Age Concern and sixth formers wearing pink to support breast cancer charities in conjunction with Rugby High School being just some of the charitable activities taking place in the school over the past year.

Most recently, Josh Newman and his team of supporters raised an astonishing sum of over £1,000 for Heroes Week from 14-18 February 2011 in support of Help for Heroes and The Forces Children's Trust. A representative from the charities was invited to visit the school to give a presentation to Years 7-11 on their work – from providing sporting facilities for the rehabilitation of injured soldiers to supporting individuals and bereaved families at times of great need. Josh organised a variety of events to raise funds, including cake sales, wristband sales, movie lunchtimes and a Lower School disco. Five members of staff even volunteered to enter a competition, voted on by students donating money to support their preferred candidate, in which the “winner” would have their leg waxed in front of the student body – a highly painful experience, but one which does not remotely compare with the pain experienced by injured soldiers and bereaved families.

The Rhoades Medal is awarded by the Old Laurentian Society to the person who has contributed most to the school. This may be a contribution of academic performance, an achievement of national distinction or other very significant contribution to the life of the school. This year, the Old Laurentian Society has chosen to present Josh Newman with the Rhoades Medal to mark his outstanding contribution to the school through his charitable activities. The school is always proud that it aims to develop all our students beyond their exam results, and Josh has made a huge personal contribution to developing the whole school community, both staff and students, by educating them about the two charities, organising a wide range of activities, raising a significant charitable donation and developing a tremendous sense of community spirit within Lawrence Sheriff, making him a deserved winner of the Rhoades Medal. Congratulations, Josh.

Lawrence Sheriff School prides itself on being a successful and dynamic learning community, and our charitable activities confirm that the school sees itself as part of the local, national and international communities. Charity does begin at home but finishes wherever there is the greatest need.

Peter Kent

FAREWELLS

Nothing gives you a feel for the culture of an institution better than the ways in which it says farewell to those who are leaving it and they say farewell in return.

Here, Assistant Head Tony Bedgood says goodbye on behalf of the Sixth Form team to the students who are ending their school careers in the summer of 2015.

5 June 2015

Goodbye to Year 13

On Wednesday 20 May, the school officially said goodbye to our Year 13 students. The day started with some fun and games in the sports hall. It was the last chance for the boys to enjoy a game of Gregor ball; this is a sport unique to LSS, invented by our very own Mr Gregory. Representatives of the Old Laurentian Society then welcomed them as the latest members of the old boys' society and presented them with their OL ties. This was followed by a quiz and then a final assembly by the sixth form team which looked back over the time the students spent at the school. The boys then responded with their own presentation organised by the Head Boys and other members of the year group. It always conjures up mixed emotions for both the staff and the students. There is a general appreciation that after seven years of secondary education it is time to move on to something new, but at the same time, when the school has been a focal point of your life for such a long time, it is natural to look back, hopefully with affection, on your time at Lawrence Sheriff.

We have 155 students in Year 13 this year, and I have been talking with some of the boys over the last few weeks about what they will miss about the school. There were some common themes: for example, the sense of community (this is especially for Dr Kent), the £1 chips and the water machine in the sixth form centre. (It's tap water, boys!) There were also some more thoughtful contributions. One of our students wrote:

"Being at the school since Year 7, there have been lots of experiences I'll never forget, the Year 7 residential being one, lots of laughs with Mr Valentine on the bus before we even got there. *Sheriff's Got Talent* was a hilarious afternoon, particularly the performances of Billie and Mrs Poppa. House assemblies with Mr Gaffin and Mr Mayes were top, and I'll always remember the school being a professional but relaxed place, especially as I've passed through it and seen lots of changes happen. Fantastic place! I'll be very sad to leave this year as it's been such a big part of our lives for what seems like forever."

This year 150 of our students have applied to university through UCAS, and Mrs Halestrap and the rest of the sixth form team will be available on results day on the 13th of August to offer any help and guidance that is needed. Of the remainder of the year group, a couple are planning to return to take the Foundation Art course offered by the school, and the others are either taking college courses or entering employment. They have been a fantastic year group to work with, and the sixth form team would like to wish all of the students the very best with their results in the summer and life after Sheriff.

Tony Bedgood and the Sixth Form Team

We've just heard how one young student felt at the time when he came to leave the school. Now for a teacher's view – that of Paddy Wex, whose many achievements included being the originator and first editor of *The Weekly Word*, leaving the school in 2006 after 26 years of distinguished service.

21 July 2006

From the moment that Roger White, the outgoing Head of English, began to show me around in April 1980, I knew that Sheriff was just the place I was looking for. I'd been job-hunting for several months, been to a few interviews, hadn't been offered anything, but didn't really mind because none of the places I visited had really appealed to me.

Lawrence Sheriff School got to me at once, and I felt instantly comfortable. It had an interesting history; it was fighting to remain as a grammar school with little chance of taking the unfortunate course of going independent that my previous school had chosen; a number of its physical features charmed me, notably Big School, the Headmaster's House and the School Field; it was completely lacking in pretension; and the staff and boys alike were relaxed and friendly. There wasn't a shred of doubt in my mind: this was the job I really wanted. And, joy of joys, it seems I said the things that the interviewing panel wanted to hear, and I was appointed as the new Head of English, to start in September 1980.

With the exception of the School Field, the changes to which were unavoidable in a rapidly expanding school, the qualities that appealed to me then remain undiminished by time and I count myself immensely privileged to have been able to spend so many years in such a wonderful place, surrounded by so many friendly natures and brilliant minds in colleagues and students alike. Glad as I am to be retiring, I love the Sheriff "family" and I shall miss it a great deal.

Paddy Wex

A highlight of *The Weekly Word* over many years has been the heartfelt tributes paid by Peter Kent to departing members of staff, both teachers and support staff. Here he writes about the school's long-serving site manager, Joe Johns.

25 February 2010

One of the images that I most frequently used when I became headteacher in 1999 was of the school being an extended family. I must admit that I use the simile less often now because over the years it has been thrown back at me so often. I would regularly receive complaints suggesting that the "extended family" image was ludicrously inappropriate because of the way a student had been treated, a punishment they had received, a policy that had been implemented, etc. Amongst other misunderstandings, these complaints failed to understand what was meant by the image – that everyone in the school, regardless of their role, was valued and had an important part to play in the success of the organisation.

I was put in mind of the image once again when the staff met at the end of last half-term to say farewell to Mr Joe Johns after 31 years of service to the school as site manager. After we had presented Mr and Mrs Johns with a gift and wished them a long and very happy retirement, the whole school community gave Joe a standing ovation. It struck me that this was an extended family in action.

During my time at LSS (a rather unimpressive 13 years compared to Joe's 31), I have constantly been grateful to him for his willingness to go the extra mile. Whether he was getting up early to see if the site was safe to open because of snow, taking emergency phone messages from parents early in the morning or late in the evening, or offering solutions to problems before I even knew they existed – Joe played a crucial part in the life of the school. He cared deeply about Lawrence Sheriff and was motivated by this concern at all times.

The large number of current and former staff who attended Mr and Mrs Johns' farewell lunch told its own story. Many staff remembered the work that Joe had done on countless school productions, helping with the construction of sets and overcoming any problems that arose. Other groups such as the Parents' Association and the Old Laurentians contacted me to say how much they appreciated the huge amount that Joe had done over the years.

Perhaps the most striking tribute came from a member of Year 11. When I explained that we were holding a special lunch to mark Mr Johns' retirement, he said: "I'm sorry he's leaving – he's a good bloke." Year 11 speak for us all – we will all miss Mr and Mrs Johns and would like to pass on our thanks to them. Everyone in the extended family of Lawrence Sheriff owes them a huge debt of gratitude.

Peter Kent

Inevitably, some of the farewells in *The Weekly Word* will take on a more sombre note, marking the deaths of those who have been members of the school community. Next, we have a poignant tribute – or, rather, set of tributes – to a well-loved former teacher.

2 May 2008

Last week we heard the sad news of the death of former Lawrence Sheriff Deputy Head Gareth Redd. Gareth was a major figure in the history of the school, loved by staff and students alike. It would be true to say that much of what is best about Lawrence Sheriff School today finds its roots in the work of Gareth.

I first met Gareth when I came to the school to be interviewed for the post of Deputy Head. His personal warmth and enthusiasm for the school and its values made a huge impression upon me. I think that it was as a result of my interview with Gareth that I came to realise that Lawrence Sheriff was a unique school community that it would be a privilege to be a part of.

The tributes below from those who worked with Gareth provide some indication of how fondly he is remembered by his former colleagues. We all extend our deepest sympathy to his wife Ann (also a former colleague at the school) and other members of his family.

Gareth was one of the first people I met at LSS after Paddy Wex (Head of English and Media) and Rex Pogson (Headmaster). He was a gentleman and a real character; he made such an impact that, in one short term, I already knew that I wanted to return, if possible, after my temporary post ended. They don't make teachers like Gareth any more, sadly. Julie Hawley

Gareth was a wonderfully committed and enthusiastic teacher, but I have to confess that my abiding memory of him is erupting from his office like a Welsh dragon to remonstrate with any pupil who had the temerity to set foot upon the grass in the Whitehouse Quad. Gareth would address all pupils as 'boy' (or as 'babies' if in their first year here – not 'pc' but effective!) Gareth taught my three sons, they loved and respected him, and one went on to study Classics at university. As a family we send condolences and will miss him. Jacky Wright

No-one who knew Gareth could fail to be touched by this charismatic and great-hearted friend, colleague and teacher. He is an unforgettable part of LSS and I feel blessed to have known him. I'll remember him for his vast subject knowledge, the bacon butties he bought to de-stress me and the banter he gave the 'babies'. They loved him for it. Jenny Buckley

When I started as a part-timer in Gareth's last year as deputy head he was one of the colleagues who made me realise that LSS is different from other schools I had been in in the way everyone is treated with courtesy and friendship. Gareth was always a perfect gentleman, greeted me every day as if I had been here for ages and made me feel part of the team straight away. Sarah Gainsbury

Lawrence Sheriff has not been the same without him, we will remember him with great affection. Sue Hearn

Being interviewed by Gareth in 1995 was a real pleasure. Having had my ethics of working in a grammar school questioned in depth, we moved smoothly into a conversation about Wales and current sporting events of the season. His smile, warmth and outspoken character were very refreshing. However, I'm sure he had gained all the knowledge he wanted to know to form an opinion of the clientele present on the day. Fond memories, sadly missed. Paul Cooper

We have lost an unforgettable character who left an impression on all who knew him. A true gentleman, full of kindness. Ann Simmonds

Peter Kent

The positive effects that a single teacher can create were further demonstrated in a striking piece by David Howe, an Old Laurentian, long-serving governor and historian of the school. He is writing following news of the death of Alan Staveley, a former headmaster of the school, at the age of 99.

22 April 2016

My Best Teacher

Every week, editions of the *Times Educational Supplement* carry a feature called "My Best Teacher". A "celebrity" of today is asked to recall, describe and analyse a teacher who inspired him or her. This feature has run every week for many years. I doubt whether the *TES* is close to running out of subjects. The latest contributor is Danny Mills, former England full back and *Match of the Day* star, extolling the virtues of his erstwhile PE teacher Mr Nicklin.

I was reminded of these laudatory pieces when I learned recently of the death of Mr Alan Staveley, Head of LSS from 1958 to 1968. He arrived four terms before I left. His predecessor gave no sign around the school of recognising me, even though he had caned me six or seven times. Perhaps he found it easier to recognise me from the rear. Mr Staveley knew, or appeared to know, every boy by name within months of arriving. I shall never forget the moment in his second term when he approached me one morning in the Whitehouse Quad. On the previous evening he had seen the school play in which I played the small part of a landlord. He greeted me with characteristic bonhomie: "Ah. Mein Host. Morning, landlord. Well done." Only seven words, but I walked on grinning broadly, feeling taller.

In August 1959, when our A-level results came out, we stood around the board where the results were posted, sharing raucous congratulations as appropriate. I had done better than I expected. Mr Staveley approached:

"Well done, Howe," he boomed cheerfully. "So, what are you going to do with these results of yours?"

"I've got a place at Coventry College to do teacher training, sir."

"Training college? You cannot possibly go to training college with these results. You must go to university."

As far as I, my limited horizons and my bemused parents were concerned, he might as well have said Mars. I smiled politely but said nothing.

“Leave it with me. I'll see what I can do and get back to you.”

I mentally decided that he would soon forget all about it and I could go quietly off to college. How little even then I knew him. A few days later he contacted me:

“I've got you two offers. One at Leicester and one at Leeds. You can start at Leicester in October. If you want to go to Leeds, you'll have to get your Latin.”

The thought of another whole year at school just doing Latin which I might fail was untenable. I took Leicester. At least I knew how to hitchhike there. I thanked him very much – and prepared to embark on a life-changing course of action. Three weeks later I set off for Leicester with a suitcase, a bike – and a map.

If I ever doubted just how momentous was the decision I'd made – well, been pushed into – I realised when I sat down at once to write to the Principal of the City of Coventry Training College to explain that I would not after all be honouring them with my presence. I felt anxious and guilty, for the Coventry start of term was now just days away. I was sure I had cast a slight on the College's honour, not to mention administrative chaos and indignation. I posted my letter and received within three days a handwritten reply from their Principal in person, Miss J D Browne. I recall two sentences from her letter:

“Of course, you must take up the university offer. You did exactly the right thing, and we at Coventry wish you well.”

I read that literally with tears in my eyes. Such magnanimity confirmed in my apprehensive mind that what Mr Staveley had achieved for me was a major and potentially life-changing opportunity. And so it proved.

Mr Staveley was a Classics teacher who emphasised the importance of care and precision in one's choice of words. In his honour I must be clear. He was not my best teacher. His weekly RE lessons for which he often arrived late did not merit that tribute. But his determination and initiative without doubt changed my life for the better. One wonders just how much more good he dispensed in his ninety-nine-year-old life.

David Howe

There can be only one way to conclude a section on LSS farewells. Here we have the great Dennis Barnett, Assistant Head and doyen of long-serving staff members, saying goodbye to his teaching career – fortunately the school has been able to retain him as a governor – after dedicated service of over 43 years.

11 December 2015

From log tables and slide rules to calculators and computers

When I first started at LSS, Margaret Thatcher was the Secretary of State for Education and petrol was 35p a gallon. Little did I realise when I arrived at the start of the Michaelmas Term 1972 (what we now call the Autumn Term) that I would be staying for the next 130 terms. Hard to believe now, but when I was first appointed as an Assistant Master to teach Mathematics, when I went into the staffroom I was asked what a sixth-former was doing in there!

In my first year, as well as teaching Mathematics, I was in charge of the teaching of Statistics because this was then still fairly new to the school curriculum, and I was the only member of the department to have studied it previously. In those days as a probationary teacher I was not subject to the same degree of monitoring as today's new teachers are, and it was quite some time into my career until I was observed by a school inspector, as this was way before Ofsted. There was also not the same level of support in place as there is now, and apart from a quick hello and welcome from my Head of Department I was issued with a timetable, a list of my classes, a set of textbooks, an exam board syllabus and a piece of chalk with which to write on the blackboard – no smart-boards then.

As you would expect in the space of so long at the school, I have witnessed many changes. The school has grown from fewer than 600 to just over 900 students; the Sixth Form in particular has tripled in numbers. The teaching staff consisted of about 35 teachers of whom only four were women, whereas today we have close to 60 teachers consisting of approximately the same numbers of male and female teachers. Also, when I began teaching the full-time support staff consisted of a caretaker, school secretary, head cook and a couple of science technicians – there was no such thing as pastoral support as we now have it, and I cannot imagine how we would now cope without them. With increasing numbers of students, it was necessary to expand the capacity of the school buildings. Sadly, although we can no longer watch cricket matches on the school field or play tennis on the courts adjacent to Penrhos House, we now have nice new buildings allowing us to accommodate more students, giving more boys the unique opportunity of studying at LSS. The Technology Block, Griffin Centre, Sixth Form Centre and Learning Resources Centre have all been built since I started at the school.

Whilst at the school I have served under four Heads, and in different ways I owe them all a great deal for giving me the opportunity to progress through my career from probationary teacher to Assistant Head. John Foster appointed me, Geoff Martindale made me Head of Mathematics, Rex Pogson brought me on to the Senior Team with responsibility for introducing computers into the school and finally, but not least, Peter Kent made me an Assistant Head, allowing me to take the lead in so many aspects of school leadership from Specialist School to pastoral issues.

In my time at LSS it is difficult to even estimate how many boys I have taught, including some of their fathers when they were boys, but it has been a very special privilege to teach them all. It is also very gratifying when they contact you some time after they have left and let you know that what you taught them has helped them at university and beyond. In particular, some students tell me that they were inspired to take Mathematics to much higher levels, and I can number some ex-students who are now school and university teachers of Mathematics.

Obviously, I am about to start a new chapter in my life, but as I reflect on a long career I can honestly say that I have not regretted one day and am truly grateful that I have been able to spend my time in such a remarkable school.

Dennis Barnett

MAINTAINING OUR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

It is perhaps more difficult to maintain a high level of success for any length of time than to accomplish it in the first place. It is to the enormous credit of Sheriff's staff, students and parents that the school has done this, year upon year upon year. Here are three typical passages from *The Weekly Word* that show the scale of the achievement.

27 January 2012

I am delighted to report that for the third time in four years Lawrence Sheriff School is celebrating being top of the country in the government's performance tables. Figures compiled by the Press Association show that the school was ranked top in the country based upon total points score per student. 100% of students also achieved 5 or more GCSE passes including English and Mathematics.

Congratulations to everyone in the school. Outstanding staff, hardworking students and supportive parents and governors have combined to produce another set of results that everyone in the school community should be very proud of.

Peter Kent

12 February 2016

Were you ever a Blockhead? Speaking personally, I never was, but I quite understood why so many were. After all, with wonderful titles like *Hit Me with your Rhythm Stick*, who could resist the music of Ian Dury and the Blockheads? When I started at LSS, I remember one colleague in the English department leading an assembly which argued that their lyrics ran far ahead of most twentieth-century poetry.

The particular piece of Blockhead lyricism that I have in mind was relatively simple. When they released *Reasons to be Cheerful* in July 1979, they may not have realised that they were crystallising what would be my message to readers of *The Weekly Word* as we move into half-term in February 2016. Never mind – I suppose all really good songs contain an element of prophecy in them.

So, what are our reasons to be cheerful? Well, let me "hit you" with three of them:

- a. The Department for Education recently contacted us to let us know that the progress made by our students was in the top 4% in the country. Even more impressively, in English our progress was in the top 2% nationally (incredible for a boys' school) and in Maths and Science the top 3%. Hence my oft repeated point can be emphasised once more – at LSS the boys achieve remarkably high results, but also make incredibly strong progress.
- b. Other important indicators of the school's performance continue to be remarkably strong. In the performance tables published a few weeks ago, we were ranked 11th in the country on our overall results and joint fifth nationally on the percentage gaining the English Baccalaureate (achieving a C or above in English, mathematics, science, a language and a humanity).
- c. Even more important than the first two points, the school continues to be a harmonious community that places being happy as the major goal that it seeks to achieve for its pupils and staff.

I know that we could all provide a long list of “reasons *not* to be cheerful” and I am sure that we will return to them soon enough. However, as we move into a well-earned break, it is well worth indulging ourselves by dwelling on the positive. Our students are doing remarkably well, and we are all very proud of their achievements.

Peter Kent

6 January 2017

Happy New Year to all readers of *The Weekly Word*. I hope that you had an enjoyable and restful Christmas break.

I thought I would start the new term with a piece of good news. Towards the end of last term results were published, ranking most of the major economies in the world on the basis of their performance in tests in reading, mathematics and science. The testing is organised by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and is known by the shorthand title of “PISA”.

You perhaps won’t be completely surprised to hear that the UK performance in the PISA tests was reported in less than glowing terms by many newspapers. The summary in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* gave a pretty good flavour of the tone of reporting. Under the headline “PISA Tests 2016: Singapore Sweeps the Board”, the newspaper went on to report:

Singapore has swept the board in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s PISA global rankings of maths, science and reading skills among schoolchildren. Meanwhile, the UK and England saw their performances drop in science, maths and reading, according to the latest results from PISA released this morning.

However, not all English schools were eclipsed by their international competitors. You might be interested to hear that the LSS students were amongst those selected for the PISA tests (under regulations brought in a few years ago, schools in England have to agree to take part if chosen as part of the random sample). Whatever the results for England as a whole, our students actually came out above those in Singapore and indeed above those for every country that took the tests.

To be fair, the scores for other countries reflect a national average, whilst students from LSS are drawn from the top of the ability spectrum. However, our students (and those who teach them) are clearly performing well if they score so highly when compared with pupils of the same age on such a widely respected international system of testing.

Peter Kent

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

The articles in our next section speak for themselves. They demonstrate the vital importance to the school's success of teamwork and partnership. These qualities appear in a variety of guises, for example: departments within LSS working in cooperation; the support given by Lawrence Sheriff to other schools; the relationship with Brooke School, a Rugby school for pupils with special needs; and the contributions made by the Old Laurentian Society and the Parents' Association. As a student quoted in the first article suggests, what really matters in the success of the school is "a collaboration of different people and voices" – a simple point, yes, but also a profound one.

31 March 2006

Reproduced below is an edited version of an article published in last week's *Times Educational Supplement*:

"I can still remember the feeling of shock. After a year as headteacher, I had decided to interview a group of Sixth Formers about their impressions of life in school. I had reached my killer question: "Who is the person with the greatest influence upon the school?" The student thought for a moment and said: "There is no one person. Students respond to different teachers and to different people." Surely a rogue answer. Time to try the next volunteer. "It is probably too simplistic to just pick out one person. There are a variety of influences all working together." And so the punishment went on. Ten interviews with not a single student picking out the head as the main force behind the school's culture. Could it be that my students actually had a point? Rather than relying so heavily upon the headteacher, could schools actually be driven by what one Sixth Former called "a collaboration of different people and voices"?

A recent national initiative provided the opportunity to put this theory to the test. We volunteered to be one of a small group of pilot schools working with the National College for School Leadership to reduce the variation in results between different departments in the school. My first instinct was to take the lead in the project myself, working with departments to close the gap in results. And then I remembered those still all too painful Sixth Form interviews. Time to put their theories to the test.

Hence, we tried a different approach. The "hero" headteacher, wanting to ride to the rescue, was left nervously tethered in his office. Instead, departments were put in pairs based upon academic groupings (French and German, History and Geography) or upon the fact that they taught the same group of students (English and Science, PE and Art). We christened the project "departmental partnership" and asked each pairing to spend part of each training day sharing ideas and good practice that had been developed by the two departments.

I soon found that the pairings had a more profound impact than I had previously imagined. Teachers are the world's ultimate pragmatists, and, if one department has some ideas that have been shown to work, then the other department is likely to want to use them. Hence, I found that German very quickly latched onto French's use of a modular GCSE syllabus, that History rapidly adopted Geography's model for supervising coursework and that English and Science enthusiastically swapped ideas on how each department could use oral activities.

The impact of this departmental partnership upon results has been surprisingly quick. When we began the project two years ago, the gap between the A/* grades achieved by French and German was 46%. This summer the gap was closed to 12%, with a further reduction likely next year. Over the same period, PE reduced the gap between itself and Art from 47% to 2% whilst History wiped out a 16% gap between itself and Geography. More importantly, I have found that this process of working together has had a profound impact upon the culture of the school.

Why do so many people in positions of power argue that everything revolves around the headteacher? I would suggest that it is a way to conveniently simplify a much more complex process. If it is all down to the head, then it probably is possible to genuinely transform schools in a single year as Ruth Kelly has recently suggested. However, if the students are right, and schools are about “a collaboration of different people and voices”, then changing schools becomes a much more challenging, but also more rewarding, process.

Perhaps all of us, particularly our friends in the Department for Education, need the courage to listen a little more closely to the voice of students. If they tell us that for schools to improve we need less heroism and more partnership, fewer centralised targets and more collaboration, who are we to argue?”

Peter Kent

15 May 2009

Just over a week ago, I found out that the National College for School Leadership had designated Lawrence Sheriff a National Leader of Education and a National Support School. You may well be thinking that this sounds very impressive, but what does it actually mean?

Over recent years, an increasing emphasis has been placed upon something called system leadership. The idea behind this is that, rather than some schools succeeding and others struggling, all members of the education community should try to work together in order to assist and develop one another. As part of this process, schools support one another by sharing good practice, approaches to leadership and insights in a range of subject areas.

Lawrence Sheriff has been part of this process for some time through our links with the National College and through a Department for Education programme called Raising Achievement in Teaching and Learning. Through this programme, a number of schools have visited us over the past two years in order to share ideas on topics such as vertical tutoring, curriculum design, the reduction in variation between subjects and the use of educational data.

Such has been the success of our work in this area, it has now become our second specialism. We now have a mandate to work with an even broader range of schools in order to share our good practice, whilst also learning from them.

Our status as a National Support School reflects all that we have been doing in these areas over recent years. The support that we have given to Blue Coat School in Coventry, supporting the school during a difficult transitional year following the sudden death of their headteacher, provides one very tangible example of how we have already put into practice the values behind being a National Support School.

I must confess to having very little patience with those who suggest that there is nothing to be gained by offering such support. One of the best ways to move one's own school forward is through working alongside others in a range of different circumstances. It is often the case that a one-hour discussion with another senior or middle leader is more fruitful than a whole day course which explores some aspect of educational theory. The whole idea behind system leadership is that all participants gain from the experience and that, by working together, everyone plays a part in raising standards in all schools.

Peter Kent

23 November 2012

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the work that some of your staff and students have completed in partnership with Brooke School over the last half term.

Firstly, our joint science work on a Wednesday afternoon with some of your Year 12s has been phenomenal. The outcomes for our students, so far, have massively gone beyond the scientific aspect. A parent came to see me last week to explain how her son, who normally does not talk about school, spent the journey home last week talking about the work that he had done at Lawrence Sheriff. She said, "I normally can't get him to speak, but now the trick is to get him to shut up about his other school!" For our students the opportunity has achieved the essence of what I want for all our learners to achieve – that anything is possible. We have a new phrase at Brooke: "We believe we can do it." The aim is that our learners will know that, with the right support, they can achieve anything. When I see the students returning on a Wednesday afternoon from Lawrence Sheriff, I know that this belief is developing for them.

Secondly, can I mention four of your students for particular recognition:

- Rahul Pathak
- Sujahn Barhey
- Akshay Bhardwa
- Saroop Raja

On the 14th of October, these four young men spent the day of Sewa at Brooke School. During the day, they painted both the metalwork outside the school and one of the corridors in our secondary department. It would have been very easy for these four individuals to complete their act of religious service in a quick and satisfactory manner. However, there was nothing quick and satisfactory about their work – they completed the task with the greatest level of commitment, purpose and focus that I have ever known from a group of teenagers on a Sunday! When I spoke with my senior team on the following Tuesday, I explained how, not only had they done the work, but they had shown such skills as teamwork, respect, enthusiasm, commitment and drive. These students are an absolute credit to Lawrence Sheriff and a true reflection of what I expect a Lawrence Sheriff young man to be.

Brooke School is intensely proud of its links and partnership with Lawrence Sheriff and is looking forward to developing these more in the future. Thanks very much, Chris Pollitt.

Chris Pollitt, Headteacher of Brooke School

1 March 2013

You may have seen in the local press that on Monday of this week the school was presented with a minibus by the Old Laurentian Society. Mr Thomas, our chair of governors, received the minibus on behalf of the school, passing on sincere thanks to the society for this wonderful statement of their practical support.

Given the huge amount of sport played by the school in both winter and summer, the minibus will make a huge contribution to helping us with some of the challenges of getting teams to and from fixtures. I think it is a distinctive and important part of the identity of the school that so much sport is played, and I continue to be very grateful to my colleagues who give up so much of their time to give students at LSS such a wide range of opportunities.

However, there is no escaping the reality that providing such opportunities comes at a significant cost to the school. Disappointingly, for reasons best known to themselves, the local authority has decided to significantly cut our budget for the third successive year. Without the help of friends and supporters such as the Old Laurentian Society it would be difficult to continue to fund all of the sporting activities mentioned earlier.

I am sure that the minibus will not just help the sporting life of the school. Drama, music, Duke of Edinburgh and many other aspects of school life will hopefully benefit from the fresh opportunities that the minibus will provide. Making transport arrangements can be one of the biggest hurdles to overcome when organising a trip, so I hope that this new facility will make life a little easier for the many colleagues who kindly run these activities.

In the light of all this, the willingness of the Old Laurentians to go the literal and metaphorical extra mile in order to support the school is hugely appreciated.

Peter Kent

20 November 2015

I wanted to use this week's column to highlight the excellent work of the Parents' Association, and in particular to encourage everyone to support the Christmas Fayre on 5 December. I continue to deeply appreciate the hard work of parents who return year after year (even sometimes after their sons have left the school) in order to support Lawrence Sheriff. The Fayre also provides an opportunity for many students from the school, ranging from the Jazz Band to World Challenge participants, to showcase their skills and to raise funds for worthwhile causes.

In a period of financial caution and diminishing budgets, the money raised by the Fayre will make a real difference to the range of opportunities that we can offer to students within the school.

The event is a reminder once again of how much time and effort members of the PA put into supporting the school through a whole series of events. During my 16 years as headteacher, I have always felt huge admiration for the willingness of PA members to give up large amounts of their time and talents to raise funds for a variety of projects. Activities such as theatre groups, sporting activities and Enrichment have all been possible due to the additional funds that they can raise.

In our very busy twenty-first century world, it is becoming increasingly unusual for secondary schools to have such an active Parents' Association. The LSS PA is in the *Guinness Book of Records* as being the oldest PA in the country, having been in existence for over 100 years. Not only do we have the oldest PA in the country, we also have one of the most active and committed: the school remains very grateful for all that they do.

As the year unfolds, please continue to support the different events organised by the Parents' Association. All of us who are current or former parents at the school can be assured that, by supporting them, we are also directly providing additional educational opportunities for our children.

Peter Kent

SUCCESS ON THE WIDER STAGE

Our next selection of articles is, I happily admit, an opportunity for showing off, plain and simple. We will meet the Prime Minister, celebrate Peter Kent's time as President of the Association of School and College Leaders, and then go breakdancing with him at The International Convention of Principals. And why not? Lawrence Sheriff School deserves it all.

19 May 2006

Being headteacher of Lawrence Sheriff has presented me with lots of exciting and unexpected opportunities. The chance to be part of a visit to Brazil, writing for the *Times Educational Supplement* and the chance to develop projects with the National College for School Leadership have all been wonderful experiences arising from my role within the school. However, perhaps the most memorable experience of all was presented to me last Wednesday.

Very unexpectedly, I received an invitation to attend a reception at No 10 Downing Street. The invitation card stated that I was one of 150 headteachers who were being invited in order to mark the "contribution that your school has made to raising standards". The opportunity was obviously too good to miss, and so on Wednesday evening I somewhat nervously caught the 4.30pm train to London.

It perhaps says something about headteachers that, as we queued to be admitted to Downing Street (as might be expected security measures were rigorous and we had to pass three different checkpoints), the most common topic of conversation was uncertainty about what we had done to deserve the invitation. One colleague was adamant in suggesting that our names had been drawn out of a hat. However, as I spoke to the group it became clear that each school represented had either achieved unusually high academic standards or had demonstrated very strong levels of progress. I think our invitation was a recognition of our outstanding Ofsted report, our second successive citation as a particularly successful school and our remarkably high GCSE results last summer.

During the evening I was delighted to meet Heather Fielding, headteacher of Oakfield School which is one of our specialist partners. Several government regions had only one representative, so for a medium-sized town such as Rugby to have two headteachers at the reception was a real achievement.

Some key memories from the visit:

- The main staircase of No 10 is lined with pictures of former prime ministers. Walking up the staircase, one feels part of history in the making.
- The door to No 10 still bears the title "First Lord of the Treasury" (not sure what Mr Brown thinks about that).
- There is a huge garden at the back of No 10 which contains ducks, a nature reserve and a climbing frame for Leo.
- Despite a difficult Commons question time earlier in the day, Mr Blair was very welcoming. He gave a short, witty speech during which he suggested that "Prime ministers, headteachers and football managers all have something in common." (He was referring to the leadership of change, though a tendency to be blamed for everything that goes wrong also seemed to fit.)
- Both Mrs Fielding and I did manage to briefly shake Mr Blair's hand before he left. During his speech he told us that he was going on to see the French Prime Minister, "who is in even more trouble than I am". (For some reason that line got the biggest laugh of the evening.)

Peter Kent

10 June 2014

I sometimes find it frightening to think that I have worked at Lawrence Sheriff for just over 17 years. I often think to myself “Where did all that time go?” In lots of ways this sense of time passing quickly is very positive, since my experience is that it is only when you are happy and enjoying your job that the years fly past.

Like many of us, my career has not been a straight-line progression involving doing the same thing over a long period. Indeed, I suppose one reason behind my decision to stay so long (my 15 years of headship is apparently the second longest term in the history of the school) has been the variety and sense of adventure that the role has always provided.

When I came to the school as deputy headteacher in 1997, my role focused upon writing the timetable, planning the curriculum, working with subject leaders and acting as Head of Sixth Form. Some of those elements still stay with me in 2014, but other parts of my job have changed dramatically. A change may not always be as good as a rest, but it is certainly a highly effective way to continue to challenge oneself and to ensure that new ideas continue to come into the school.

With this principle in mind, I have frequently taken on additional roles alongside my core job of being headteacher. I am very fortunate that Mr Thomas and the rest of the governing body have always been supportive and encouraging when I have suggested exploring fresh challenges. From 2005-07 I worked part-time for the National College of School Leadership, helping to build their network across the West Midlands and establishing a range of partnerships that still remain today. From 2008-09 I had the honour of acting as Executive Headteacher at Blue Coat School in Coventry. It was a wonderful experience to work with staff, students, parents and governors at this first-class school, and I take continuing pride in the high-quality education that Blue Coat provides to its students.

In 2014 another opportunity has presented itself. A year ago, I was elected the Vice President of the Association of School and College Leaders, the 18,000 strong professional body for most of the secondary school leaders in the country. Following on from this, ASCL members have recently elected me their President for the period September 2014 to August 2015, a role that will involve me being seconded to ASCL for that period.

I must admit that, because of the strength of my feelings for LSS, I did consider turning down the opportunity. However, in the words of Chris Patten, “Life is not a rehearsal,” and the chance to be ASCL’s President during a general election year is both a once in a lifetime opportunity for me and a chance to further develop the remarkably talented team who work with me. During 2014-15 Ms Temple will be Acting Headteacher, with everyone else in the leadership team taking on significant further areas of responsibility. I will continue to be headteacher of LSS and will take an active part in deciding its strategic direction, but it would obviously not be practical or sensible for me to try to take a role in the day-to-day running of the school during that period.

You may wonder what happens at the end of my secondment to ASCL in August 2015. The answer is that I return to LSS, hopefully bringing with me a set of ideas and experiences that can further develop our work in the school. I am very fortunate to have been given so many different opportunities during my working life, but there is no doubt that the most fulfilling and rewarding of all these has been the continuing privilege of serving as headteacher of Lawrence Sheriff School.

Peter Kent

24 April 2015

On Friday 20 March, just before the Easter vacation, I attended as a guest of Dr Kent, our headteacher and the current president of ASCL, their national conference in London. This was supported by some 1,200 delegates, who are the leaders of the teaching profession. It was quite an extraordinary experience. It is certainly one which will be remembered for some time. I understand I am the first ever chair of governors to be present at such an occasion, so consider myself to be fortunate to have been invited and to experience something new.

So, what was really special about this hugely successful event? Firstly, it was seeing Dr Kent in a completely different setting. His outstanding speech to delegates on "Trust" must have been a daunting experience when followed by politicians, and it made me very proud of our school. His wise comments were well received, and I was immediately convinced that the decision of governors some time ago to permit our head to lead ASCL for a year was clearly the right one.

Secondly, the whole of the senior leadership team turned out in support. A class of Year 7 took part in an unrehearsed demonstration lesson with teachers from Lawrence Sheriff. It was a tremendous success, and the boys who all seemed to enjoy the occasion, including the lunch, were a credit to the school. The music which was played before the opening ceremony of the conference was led by Jon Watson and the talented team of LSS musicians. They did a first-class job and were very well received by delegates, but sitting in the front row with trumpets full blast was perhaps not such a good place to sit.

Thirdly, the head boys and senior prefects were outstanding ambassadors. Joshua Clark, Robert Sandercock, Morgan Hickman and Jordan Buck were impressive in ensuring a smooth operation for the whole conference. I managed to track them down at school in the following week to thank them for their commitment and support to our school but particularly to Dr Kent. What a team!

Finally, what of Dr Kent? On behalf of the school governors and the entire school community, I would like to express our thanks for his outstanding leadership of Lawrence Sheriff. He has done a terrific job as president of ASCL, a caring man with a commitment to a better education for all students. He has led an amazing organisation for a year. He has managed to create transformational change in his presidential year at ASCL for many school leaders in the country. He is an inspirational leader, and I very much look forward to his return in September. I would also like to thank our acting head, Gwen Temple, and the entire school staff, teaching and non-teaching, boys and parents for their support too. Thank you from a grateful chair of governors.

Anthony Thomas, Chair of Governors

28 April 2017

Over recent months, I have spent an increasing amount of time with a group called The International Convention of Principals. My links date from my time as President of the Association of School and College Leaders. I attended ICP's conference in Finland during the summer holiday of 2015 and was struck by how much I had in common with school leaders across the world. As my involvement with ASCL has lessened, I have taken the opportunity to join in video-conferences and other forums with members of ICP drawn from schools in countries as diverse as China, Australia and South Africa.

A recent conference of European school leaders reminded me once again that principals face similar challenges regardless of where they find themselves working. Amongst the topics we discussed were how to make the curriculum rich and varied for our pupils and how to ensure that students did not get bored during lessons. The need for high quality careers education and strategies for promoting higher education are also topics that generated considerable interest.

Some countries are inevitably more innovative than others. Delegates from Holland showed how a breakdancing group were giving motivational talks to students (and even, somewhat to our surprise, demonstrated some of their dance moves). Other countries show an unexpectedly broad educational philosophy. A delegate from a country ranked at the top of the international league tables discussed with me his disappointment that the English school system appeared to value examination results more highly than the education of the whole person.

The most important thing is coming together and learning from one another. No one country has a monopoly of wisdom or understanding in the fields of education and leadership. If we are serious about giving pupils the best possible set of opportunities, then the more we learn from other schools and leaders across the world, the better it is for everyone.

Peter Kent

HONOURING THE HISTORY OF THE SCHOOL

A successful school should make the most of its present and look to the future. An outstanding school should go beyond that and honour its past – the culture and traditions it has built up, the achievements and occasional sacrifices of its former staff and students. For us to achieve our own potential, we need to acknowledge, celebrate and learn from those who went before us.

Here, in two articles marking Remembrance Day, Peter Kent honours the history of the school in superb style.

18 November 2016

This year's assembly to commemorate Remembrance Day explored the impact of the First World War on those who remained at Lawrence Sheriff. The Headmaster, Dr Hart, was a former guardsman and chose to drill the school at least twice per week, having them march back and forth across the school field, in the same place where today's pupils were now standing. At first everything was very light-hearted, with the pupils sniggering as they deliberately tripped one another as they marched. On one occasion, the whole school marched to a local farm to pick turnips, causing much merriment as students threw vegetables at one another. The parade finished at 12.30 with prayers followed by an early lunch, and the boys must have thought it was a great way of missing a couple of lessons.

However, as time went on, news arrived of pupils who had gone to the front line – first casualties and then a whole string of deaths. Over the next four years, the parades became shorter and the prayers longer as the deaths of old boys were announced, and a black star was set against their names on the Roll of Honour. During the final roll call in 1918 Dr Hart, who until this point had maintained a rigid self-control, found himself overwhelmed by the loss of life and announced, "Gentlemen, I am unable to go on."

The school's war memorial in Big School displays the list of those who died serving their country and shows why Dr Hart could not go on. In 1914 the school roll was approaching 150 boys; the war memorial for the First World War commemorates 69 Old Laurentians.

It is not possible to imagine the impact that losing so many former pupils, equivalent to half of the school, would have on those who remained. As the school history records: "Some boys who left in 1917 and 1918 were men, soldiers, heroes, and a memory all in a few short months."

Dr Hart retired after the end of the war and soon emigrated to Canada, unable to come to terms with the pain of losing so many from the school. Whilst our school community would stand together one hundred years later to remember those who fell, the headmaster at that time was deeply affected by the deaths of so many of those he had taught that he would never be able to forget each one.

We will remember them.

Peter Kent

A year later, Peter took World War Two as his theme.

17 November 2017

As we have done now for some years, the school came together on the hard play space to mark Remembrance Day. Below is the text of the assembly that I led during that act of remembrance:

Having spoken last year about the impact of WW1, it seemed only appropriate to look at WW2 this year. Looking at the school history, one might be forgiven for thinking that the war largely passed the school by.

LSS headteacher Cordy Wheeler had a distinguished war record in WW1, where he had been a Lieutenant Colonel. Hence, when war began, he founded a Home Guard Unit based at the school and became Colonel in charge. The Art Room became the brigade's base.

Recruits were unused to handling live weapons and in the early days of the unit a rifle was accidentally discharged, sending a bullet through the ceiling. Colonel Wheeler was in the classroom above, observing an art lesson. He was just about to comment that the lesson was rather dull when a bullet passed through the floor, narrowly missing him before lodging itself in the ceiling.

Summer holidays were cancelled for the six years of the war. Boys instead spent their time putting up blackouts, digging air raid shelters and collecting the harvest for neighbouring farmers. Colonel Wheeler even wrote to the Ministry of Defence offering to turn Hart Field into a prisoner of war camp on the condition that the captured servicemen dug rugby pitches for the school.

It was perhaps only when Cordy Wheeler asked those who had joined up to write pieces for the school magazine that the reality of what was going on began to strike home.

I was particularly struck by one account from John Bourne, who wrote a piece for those still at the school which appeared in May 1941. His very well written article tells us that he is completing his training as a pilot on the Gold Coast in Africa and talks about the landscape and the friends that he has made, before going on to say: "There are definitely worse places than this but give me England any day. I am afraid that home and its surroundings are not appreciated nearly as much as they should be."

A year later, in October 1942, the school was told of his death, shot down over Holland, returning from a bombing raid. He is buried in a war grave in Brussels.

At the start of WW2, the school had 400 students. By the end of WW2, 52 students had died – one eighth of the school.

There is a verse in the Bible which was often read out at the start of a battle: "Never will I leave you, never forsake you."

We can say to the 52 from Lawrence Sheriff who died: we will never forsake you, never forget the sacrifice you made for our freedom.

As the bugle plays the Last Post and we observe a two-minute silence, we have a chance to renew that promise we have made to remember. Today, tomorrow, every day, we will never leave you, never forsake you, because you gave everything for us.

Peter Kent

Now for something with a lighter tone.

Peter Kent is not the only one to have talked about the school's history in *The Weekly Word*. David Howe has written numerous excellent articles on Lawrence Sheriff in its earlier days, focusing in fascinating detail on the everyday life of the school. Here is one of my favourites. It deals with a subject dear to every schoolboy's heart – food.

10 June 2014

Please Sir, I Want Some More

Most people would agree that at the heart of every school there should be excellent teaching and successful learning. But hungry boys would want to add important questions of their own. Those questions haven't changed over the decades. They are: When can I eat? What can I eat? Where can I eat? How much does it cost? Could I do better by going somewhere else?

Not that long ago, boys who lived near school had to go home for lunch (then called "dinner"). Dads came up the hill from the factories at the northern end of town for their dinner. Only if you lived in places like Clifton, Hillmorton or Dunchurch, or further afield, could you stay at school. I stayed only when my mother was in hospital, and I had to get special permission.

During World War Two, more boys were allowed to stay, because their dads were abroad and their mums out at work doing the jobs their dads had done. This led to a problem for the school governors: where to fit in all the extra diners now staying at school. They considered two options. One was to ask the headmistress of Rugby High School (then in Clifton Road) to take as many as possible. For some unrecorded reason this idea came to nothing. At one point the governors even considered using Big School. Another option was to buy and to build on waste land opposite the front of the school where Age UK ("Claremont") now is. But the owners of the land, the Co-op, refused to sell.

Finally, the governors arranged for 50 boys to do exactly what many sixth formers do today. They crossed the road to where Sainsbury's now stands. But Sainsbury's was not there then. In the vast space today occupied by Sainsbury's stood an institution called "The British Restaurant". These restaurants were a government idea. They gave local authorities powers to operate communal feeding centres whose job was to provide quick, cheap meals for the workers. At first, they were called "community kitchens" but Churchill did not like this name. It sounded too much like "communism". Thus, instead, was born "The British Restaurant". It had to follow strict controls: non-profit making, staffed by volunteers (e.g. the Women's Voluntary Service, the WVS), trestle tables, lino on floor, crockery and cutlery ideally donated, "Good, honest, plain food". A typical menu might be: brown Windsor soup, boiled cod, mashed potato and one or two vegetables, sponge and custard.

The maximum price was ten pence in old money (about 4p in today's money). Tea or coffee were extra. It was not unknown for food to be cooked or doled out by ladies who were smoking, thus adding the flavour of occasional falls of cigarette ash. After the war, the restaurant disappeared and eventually became an auction mart, known locally as "The Mart".

Still unable to buy the land across the road, the governors first rented rooms in Penrhos House for expanding numbers. Eventually, they were able to buy the whole house, and dinners moved to the ground floor there. Some boys pursuing various musical activities claim still on damp days to be able to smell boiled beef and Brussels sprouts.

Then (as now?) some boys resorted to illicit solutions. The fish and chip shop in Lower Hillmorton Road is exactly where it always was. Many streets en route to Hart Field had little shops – streets like Paradise Street, Caldecott Street and Slade Road for example. There (if you had enough coupons) you could buy sweets, chocolate or crisps.

It all seems so remote now. But seventy years ago, the answer for many seeking sustenance was just as it is today: out through the gate and across the road. That is one of history's lessons: some things change totally, but some change hardly at all. Must stop now. It's nearly dinnertime.

David Howe

THE HUMOUR OF THE WEEKLY WORD

As David Howe has just shown us, *The Weekly Word* has never been without its lighter side. Humour has played its part right from the outset. An early edition recorded the most unlikely excuse of the decade from an LSS boy for not handing in his homework: "Please, Sir, our cat dropped a dead mouse on my homework, and it bled all over my books." (The boy's mother verified this story as being entirely accurate.)

And this exchange was recorded from a Year 9 history lesson, on the subject of the First World War:

First student: "What was it like in the trenches when you weren't fighting?"

Teacher: "Well, there were long periods of boredom and routine, interspersed by moments of terror and devastation."

Second student (aside): "A bit like school, then."

So, there can be no better way to conclude this collection than with David Mayes, himself a long-term editor of *The Word*, setting out a key lesson learned from a distinguished teaching career.

23 October 2015

The Mayes Theory of Learning

Having taught for over 30 years now, 26 of them at Lawrence Sheriff, and always having been a teacher who reflects on his teaching, I have developed my own theory of learning.

All the knowledge that emanates from the teacher, the resources used or the activities undertaken in class, hovers unseen up to about 25 centimetres from the floor. It finds the trouser bottoms of the students and works its way up inside the trouser legs until it reaches the waist. At this point, if the student's shirt is untucked, then the student suffers learning leakage and some of those wonderful facts and skills are lost. If, however, the shirt is properly tucked in, then all the knowledge carries on under the shirt and up the torso until it reaches the neck where, unfortunately, it can go no further. It is only the mystical power of the tie, correctly worn with the top shirt button done up, that imbues the knowledge with the power to make it to the brain. If worn at "half-mast", or if the top button is left undone, then further disastrous learning leakage takes place. It goes without saying that trainers (shoes of shame) and white socks are knowledge repellent, so knowledge can never get to the trouser bottoms to start with.

The reader might find my theory somewhat fanciful and ask, what evidence do I have? I can only say that in my experience I have always found that those smartly turned out boys who wear their school uniform or sixth form suit with pride usually seem to get the best results.

David Mayes

I doubt whether David is unduly concerned that educational theory has yet to give him proper credit for his vital discovery. He, like the other members of the Lawrence Sheriff community mentioned in this selection of articles, can take great pride in a job well done at an exceptionally impressive school.