



Westminster Tutors Newsletter

Summer 2016

Word from the Vice Principal

The stand out academic event last year was the college being awarded “Outstanding” in our Ofsted inspection. As further evidence of our success, the college also managed to outperform our local rivals in the crucial ‘Students achieving AAB and above at A level’ attainment stakes:

School / college	% of A level students achieving AAB
Westminster Tutors	29%
Chelsea Independent College	23%
Ashbourne Independent	20%
Duff Miller College	16%
DLD College London	14%
MPW	15%
David Game College	13%
Collingham	5%
Lansdowne College	3%

% of A level students achieving AAB or higher in at least 2 facilitating subjects

This was a testament to the hard work and dedication shown by both our teachers and students throughout the academic year. This year it would have been easy, without the threat of an inspection, to rest on our laurels but it has been extremely pleasing to see the efforts of yesteryear being replicated and in many ways exceeded this academic year so a big well done to everyone!

It is somewhat extraordinary that the college gets these results while maintaining the non-selective approach of the college. The excellence of the teachers and their dedication to both the college and their students is something to behold but for me there are three other elements that make the college such an enriching and unique place to study.

Firstly, by inspiring a collegiate atmosphere around Westminster Tutors, students’ learning is both supported and stimulated. Students are encouraged to voice their opinions in classes and around the college, making lessons and college life a lot more interactive than in other institutions.

Secondly, by tailoring our teaching to the students’ needs, students can get the maximum out of their stay at the college. However this is balanced (successfully in my mind) with treating the students as responsible adults, thereby allowing them to take responsibility for their learning.

And finally, but certainly not least, is the drive for excellence from the Senior Leadership Team, and the Principal, Virginia Maguire. It is difficult to balance the requirements of a school environment with the quirky individuals that come to the college but it is something that Westminster Tutors has managed to do over the past number of years and hopefully into the future too!

It has been my great pleasure to see this evolution first hand. Since I started working at Westminster Tutors back in 2008 (via a PhD and Director of Studies) it has been very clear that this college provides something distinctive from the other central London colleges. I know that if it weren’t for this warm and inviting atmosphere I would not have stayed for as long as I have. So this newsletter is a big thank you for all those involved this year with a view to making 2016-2017 even more fruitful than last year.

Other key event: Virginia’s Wedding

Of course the other key (non-academic) event of the year was the wedding of the Principal, Virginia Maguire, in April. As you can see, Virginia appeared to have a great time and we wish her all the best on her honeymoon and beyond!



Nick Dommett

A Level and GCSE Results – Adding Value

For the past three years, we have managed to maintain an average B grade for A levels, far exceeding the other independent sixth form colleges in central London. While we suffered a bit of a drop as compared to 2014 and 2013, it is significant that we actually increased the difference between ourselves and our nearest rivals.

Year-on-Year A Level Points Scores

	Westminster Tutors	Nearest 8 Competitors
2013	240.6	230.5
2014	244.9	224.3
2015	239	218.5

(C grade = 210 points, B grade = 240 points)

This slight drop also coincided with national trends in students achieving both A*-A and AAB. This has been attributed to the continued ramifications of losing the January exam window and the government's drive to increase standards (by making it harder to achieve the highest grades). This makes comparison with previous years somewhat problematic but what is evident is that Westminster Tutors continues to add value above and beyond those of our contemporaries.

Having said all that, it should also be noted that this year our GCSE results were some of the best yet, with students achieving an average 50.1 points per subject (where an A = 52 points and B = 46 points). This represents a whopping 10.5 points increase from the academic year 2013-2014, which is remarkable and we hope to aim for similarly excellent results this time round.

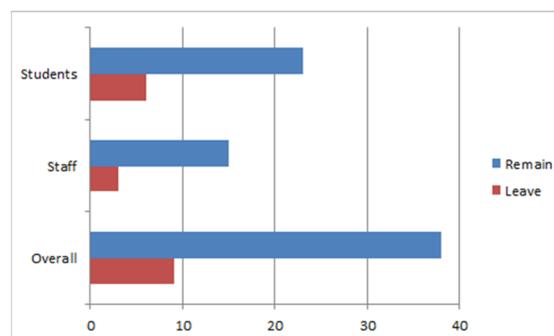
A level and GCSE Results 2016

A level results will be announced on **Thursday 18 August** with GCSE results on **Thursday 25 August**. On both days, students can either call in or collect them in person from 9am.

For A-level students, the UCAS website will go live in the morning and applicants can check their offers in Track. It can be a nerve-racking time but the college has an excellent record of helping students who are in need of last minute advice, especially if anything does go wrong. Maggie, Jason and Virginia will all be on hand to provide the results and help and even to celebrate!

Brexit

Of course the single most significant geopolitical event of the past year has been the result of the EU referendum. There had been lively debate in the students' common room before the vote with the college as a whole voting overwhelmingly to Remain in our mock referendum:



Westminster Tutors EU Referendum Results

Of course this was not replicated across the country. On one level, this means that the college's much vaunted predicative powers (see last year's mock election results as compared to the final general election results) have taken a hammering. We were closer to London as a whole (60-40 in favour of Remain) and Kensington and Chelsea in particular (69-31 in favour of Remain).

However on another level, this provoked, and continues to provoke, deep concern among a number of staff and students about the future. It has raised issues regarding a sense of belonging especially among students with dual EU-British nationality (disclaimer: my wife is German so this is a very personal concern for me too), and those staff worried about, amongst other things, the future of UK Arts and Science funding.

At the time of writing, however, an element of political and economic stability had been reclaimed with the appointment of Theresa May as Prime Minister. It is hoped that the situation of EU nationals within the UK will be clarified as soon as possible and a clear direction given to the country as to what a (hopefully positive and outward-looking) post-Brexit UK will look like.

Regardless of what happens on the national level, we continue to encourage our students to voice their often divergent political opinions in the college as it is this dynamic that makes Westminster Tutors such a vibrant place to study. The college will also be on hand to provide as much advice and support as is required to the students once guidance has been forthcoming from the government.

Theatre Trips

David Conceicao, A level student

Within a few weeks of arriving at Westminster Tutors, Virginia told us that there would be trips to see two different productions of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* over the course of the year.

The first was more casual, taking place in a small theatre above a pub just down the road from the college, with just two students and two tutors attending. Perhaps the most notable aspect of the production was the decision to use gender neutral casting, such that there was a roughly even mix of female and male actors. Virginia had managed to organise a drink with a few of the actors and the director after the play had finished, and he explained to us that this decision was based purely on the ethically problematic nature of the choosing to put on a play with almost exclusively male characters when the majority of young actors are actually female. Immy, the other student attending, pointed out that the interchangeability of gender matched and enhanced the more profound ambiguities intrinsic to the play. The curious, ethereal nature of Ariel, for example, and the shape-shifting figure of Caliban, seem to undermine commonly conceived notions of gender. Thus by transcending gender boundaries, the production assisted the audience in setting aside preconceptions and entering into the magical realm of Prospero's island in which all is not as it seems.



It was perhaps this magic, however, that seemed inhibited by the limited space and effects in this first production. It was fortunate, therefore, that we had a chance to see a different production at the Sam Wanamaker theatre at The Globe. Here, an elaborate display of candles, which were elevated and transported around the stage throughout the performance, captivated the audience. Moreover, the adaptation of the comic moments in the play

ensured that the light-hearted moments were still entertaining to a modern audience.



This style is typical of productions at The Globe, which attempt to re-create the kind of experience that would have existed for Shakespeare's own audience. There were about eight students attending this time, and in a post-play discussion at a coffee shop outside the merits of such a style were the cause of some debate. Some students argued that the adaptation of the play's comic moments was necessary in order to avoid interminable scenes in which the comic nuances highly relevant to an early 17th century audience are wholly lost on us in the 21st century. Certainly, it is true that a production of *The Tempest* with little light-hearted entertainment would be very far from the original Shakespeare intended and therefore some adaptation would offer us a more authentic experience. Other students, however, cautioned against the urge to attempt to recreate "authenticity" in Shakespeare's plays, since the aims and ideas we bring to the plays as a modern audience are undoubtedly different to those of Shakespeare's contemporary audiences. The depiction of Prospero, for example, in this second production, appeared archetypal of the way Prospero was depicted in the 17th century: regal, invested with wisdom, and in complete control. Whilst we might call this depiction "authentic", it undoubtedly neglects the differing perspectives on Prospero that have been articulated since the time of Shakespeare. It is perhaps more relevant, therefore, to in some way engage with that debate. The first production for example, depicted Prospero as a gentle, motherly figure; such a depiction, whilst certainly controversial, offered a new and interesting perspective on the play. Thus whilst the second production perhaps enticed us more easily into the atmosphere of the play, it did not offer any novel perspectives that are particularly necessary for a play whose continuing survival has rested upon the variety of differing interpretations it has experienced over time.

What is clear is that the opportunity to see the two productions assisted the study of the play for me and a few other students, as well as fuelling and encouraging discussion for all of us who attended.

‘How Gravitational Waves Changed Science and Why You Should Care’

Tom Hyatt, Physics tutor

On the 11th February 2016, I had a break between physics lessons and as usual opened my laptop to check that the world was still spinning. By chance, on this occasion one of the most remarkable scientific discoveries of our lifetimes was being announced live on the internet. As is possible in the cosy, spontaneous environment of Westminster Tutors I picked up the video feed and walked some ten feet to the room where colleague Tom Lees was teaching maths to our student, Alex. For once, the sums could wait.

“We have detected gravitational waves – we did it!” announced David Reitze, the executive director of LIGO (Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory). Goosebumps. Predicted some 100 years ago by Einstein’s theory of general relativity, gravitational waves are produced when objects with mass accelerate. The fabric of space and time is disturbed and the ripples from the acceleration spread at the speed of light, shifting surrounding matter in the process. This occurs continuously as we move through our everyday lives, but the waves produced are of such low energy that they are undetectable. Only when objects with incredible mass such as the densest stars and black holes undergo acceleration could we dream of detecting any disturbance, and even then we’d need the most sensitive scientific experiment ever created.

LIGO recycles old apparatus on a large scale. Mirrors are used to split and bounce a single beam of light down two perpendicular paths, only to have the split beams meet and interact at the end. If the side-to-side path and the up-and-down path are exactly the same length, then the split beams of light join back together as though nothing had occurred, two waves matching peak and trough exactly. If one path is longer than the other, and a peak of one wave meets a trough of another, then the light can cancel itself out (leaving shadow). A small difference in length can therefore be observed and measured.

At university, I used an interferometer once that was the size of a table top. LIGO by comparison has arms that are each 4 kilometres long, designed to observe a difference in length from a passing

gravitational wave of 10^{-18} metres, or less than one-thousandth the size of a proton. If we were to enlarge LIGO so that an arm could reach from earth all the way to Alpha Centauri, the closest star to us other than the sun, the resulting change in length would still *only be the thickness of a human hair*. And yet, on 14th September 2015, LIGO succeeded in detecting gravitational waves from the collision of two distant black holes, some 1.4 billion years ago.



The implications are huge. Since the Big Bang, the universe has been continually expanding, the galaxies within flying apart, overcoming the gravitational attraction of their masses which would, uncontested, pull them back together again. The ultimate fate of the universe, i.e. whether the expansion will continue forever or reverse into a Big Crunch, is down to how much total mass there is to fuel gravitational collapse. By counting stars, we can estimate the mass that’s out there and compare it to the observed expansion of the universe. What we’ve found is that there is a huge deficit in the mass we expect versus what we can observe. The hidden mass, so-called ‘Dark Matter’, amounts to 85% of the mass we should expect to find in the universe. Its nature is one of the foremost question marks in cosmology.

Whatever Dark Matter is, it isn’t emitting light. Effectively, we are blind to most of the universe. The confirmation of the existence of gravitational waves, however, gives us an entirely new way of observing. It is as though we were like bats, using sound alone to find our way, only for someone to turn the lights on. With LIGO as a proof of concept, the technology to detect and observe the universe using gravitational waves will receive further funding and evolve, allowing us to better see the unseen and perhaps solve some of the remaining major mysteries of the cosmos.

Closing the laptop, I still had time to grab a cup of tea before the afternoon’s physics lessons continued as normal. There was no shaking the excitement, however, of watching science change forever.

The Westminster Tutors Cup

This year, the tutors and students played for the prestigious Westminster Tutors Cup, deciding on netball being the chosen sport of battle. Here are the two (opposing) views of the game...

Sports challenge (Tutor's view)

Jason Poon, College Administrator

The end of 2015 was marked with the much-anticipated Westminster Tutors Staff vs Students netball match. Six students – Alex WK, Dan C, Dan H, David, Dom and Immy – took on seven tutors (rotating one in reserve, to give the older folk a chance to rest) – Joe, Nick, Petra, Stephen, Tom H, Tom L and myself – in what was to become, arguably, the most exciting sporting event of the year.

The tutors' team seemed very organised going into the match, with Nick taking charge, in comparison to the students who were fighting over who was to be captain. This top-notch organisation plus the physical prowess of Joe, Stephen and Tom L resulted in a dream first half for the tutors, scoring goal after goal against the hapless students. By half time, the tutors were up 7-0 and were feeling pretty confident.

However, during the second half, the dream slowly turned into a nightmare. Perhaps complacency set in, or it might have been tiredness, having spent all our energy in the first half (indeed, at one point, Stephen couldn't take any more and was forced to lie down next to the pitch). Whatever it was, the students took full advantage of this, kept their eyes on the prize and, in the words of Tom L, "went on to pull off one of the great sporting recoveries of our generation". Now it was the students' turn to score goal after goal, while the tutors could only look on in bewilderment.

At full time, the score stood at 7-7. Victory was there for the taking as we went into extra time, but it was not to be, as the students scored the winning goal and took the Westminster Tutors Cup from Nick's begrudging hands.



Sports challenge (Student's view)

Imogen Hequet, A level student



Both teams looking very rugged at the beginning

On the 16th of December, a gaggle of enthusiastic Westminster tutors and tutees set off to a game of high intensity Netball for the annual staff vs student match. Few had any idea of what was in store, mostly because the vast majority had little idea of the rules of the game. Frankly, as one of the few who had previously played netball, I too was not prepared for what followed, which turned out to be an exciting sort of netball mutation: a half-court game on a basketball court, semi-full contact with no umpire and flexible rules. The stakes were high, as the Westminster Tutors Cup had never previously been won by the students, and we were determined to make history and win it for the common room.



The winning goal...?

After much debate, we elected Dan H as our captain and he proved to be an excellent leader, probably doing about twice as much work as the rest of us. However, we got off to a bumpy start and at half time a staff victory seemed likely. With grit and determination we students turned it around in the eleventh hour to secure a clear student win with a score of 8-7 and much celebration ensued. It was a really exciting afternoon and I look forward to whatever game we play next year.

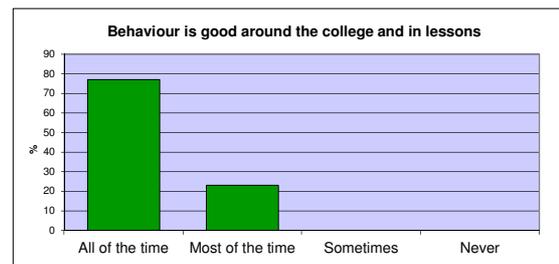
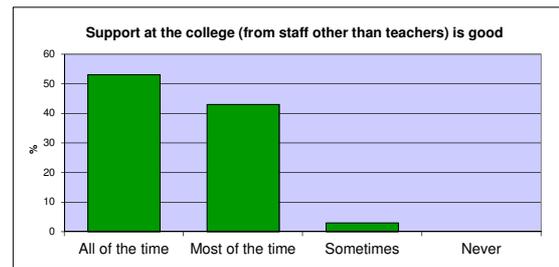
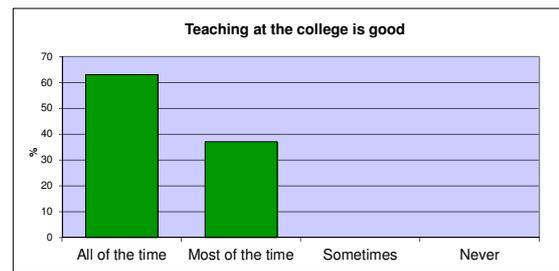
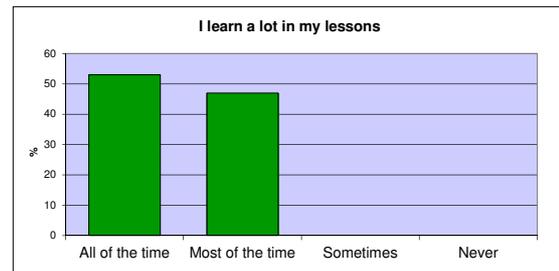
Scrutinising Teaching and Learning at Westminster Tutors

Every year, the college asks every student to complete a set of subject-specific evaluations, which cover every aspect of our teaching and the students' learning. It provides valuable feedback on our teaching which is then used to improve our teaching further. It also gives the students an opportunity to review their own learning.

Students are asked to rate their teaching and learning according to the scale, which form a parallel with the four Ofsted grades:

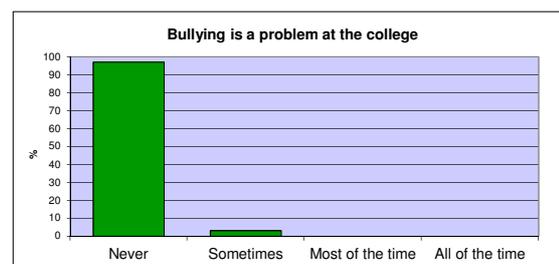
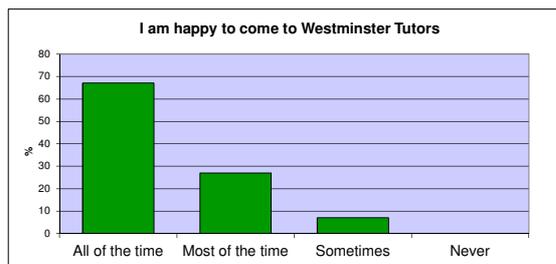
- 1 = excellent
- 2 = good
- 3 = adequate
- 4 = needs significant improvement

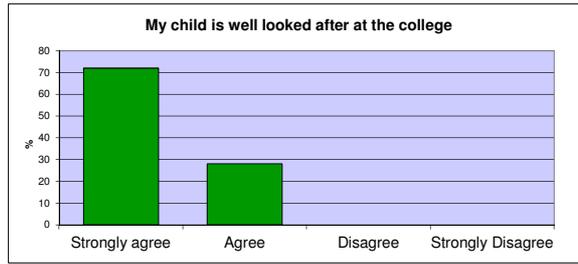
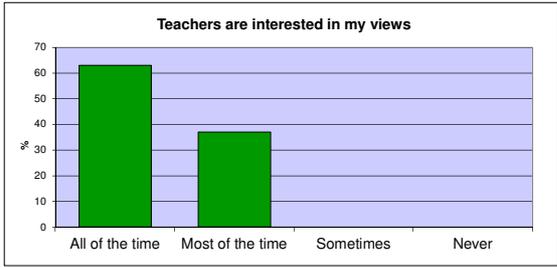
Student Subject-Specific Evaluations 2016	
Clarity of lesson objectives	1.2
Pace of teaching	1.2
How well resources aid learning	1.2
How well activities aid learning	1.3
Quality of teacher feedback	1.3
Opportunities to apply learning	1.2
Opportunities for discussion	1.4
Usefulness of homework	1.2
Overall evaluation of teaching	1.2
Overall evaluation of learning	1.3
Overall average of evaluations	1.3



Student Online Evaluations: 2016

In addition to the above, we also ask our students to complete annual evaluations based upon standard Ofsted questions. Similar to previous years, we have scored highly with the vast majority of responses in the 'all of the time' category. Of particular note, is the general happiness at coming to the college and with the standard of teaching.





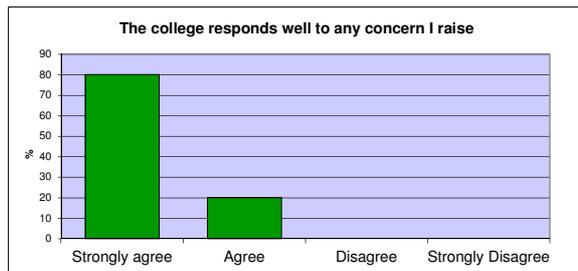
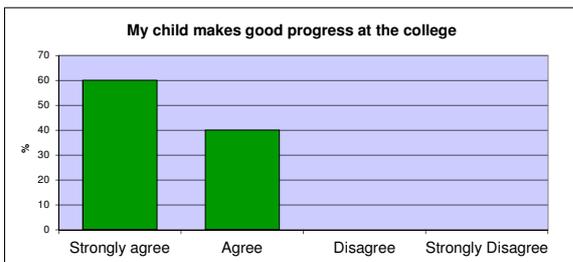
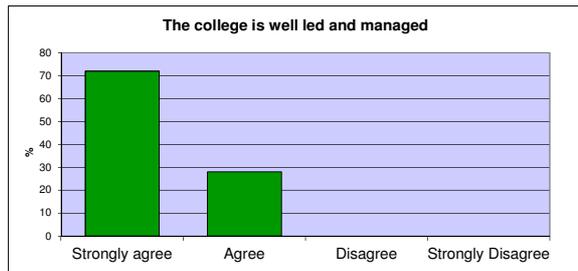
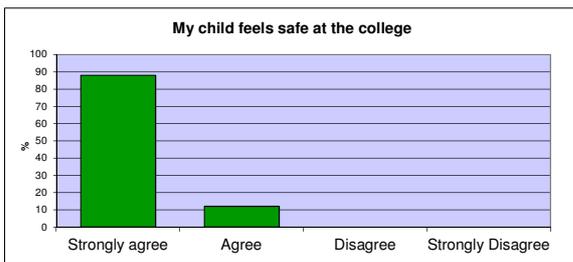
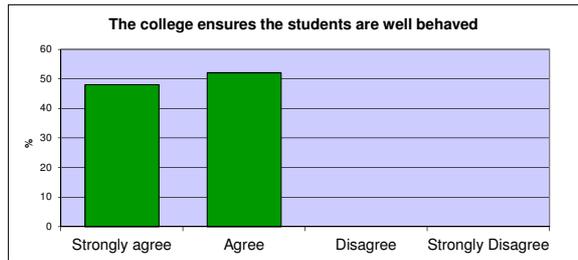
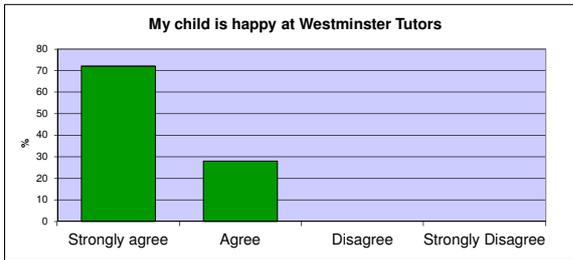
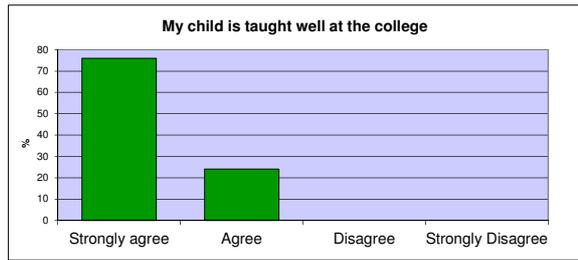
General comments:

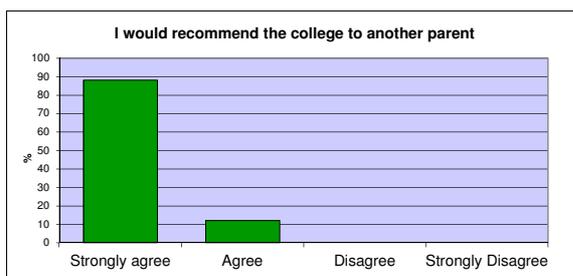
“An excellent college :)”

“Coming has really improved the standard of my work and helped me prepare for my exams”

Parent Online Evaluations: 2016

We also ask the parents to fill in an online survey as a further benchmark. These results correlate with the students in that the vast majority of students appear to be happy at Westminster Tutors and would highly recommend the college to others!





General comments:

“Excellent college with inspirational tutors!”

“The college is very understanding and seems to treat everyone as an individual case. The personal nature of the school is what I think would attract parents”

Teacher Feature: Tom Hyatt

In last year’s ‘Teacher Feature’ we told you about the extra-curricular exploits of Maths teacher Tom Lees, musical writer and piano player extraordinaire. Not wanting to play favourites, this year we feature one of our Physics teachers, Tom Hyatt, who – in fine Westminster Tutors tradition – also has a secret musical life outside college.

Tom obtained a Masters in Physics & Philosophy from Oxford University before joining us four years ago to fill students’ minds with quasars, quarks and everything in between. Mostly unbeknownst to them, however, he’s been also moonlighting as an up-and-coming singer/songwriter – swapping sums for strums in folk rooms and bars across the capital and beyond.



As well as collaborating in the classroom, Tom L. has also been known to join Tom H. on stage to add some extra piano weight behind the latter’s self-penned compositions. A recent live EP recording featuring both is in works, to be released over the summer before it’s back to business as usual in September!

Student Awards and Commendations 2016

Every year we ask the teachers who they think have excelled over the year. While primarily for academic excellence, awards can go for being vital parts of the student body as well as to those students who have gone above and beyond what we expected. The winners in no particular order were:



Dan Hillier –

Maths Champion 2015-2016. Noteworthy for his attempts to balance Maths and Physics.

Francesca Fitzgerald –

Commended for thinking beyond academic studies and making rich and wonderful connections.

Dominic Jones –

Fittest student in the college but also noted was his dedication and work ethic in his academic subjects.

Sam Chakraborty –

Politics Prize. Also worthy of special mention for his efforts in History.

Other special mentions:

Justin Wah –

Worked phenomenally hard throughout the year and perhaps showed the greatest change in work ethic from any of our students.

Nadia Gokcemen –

Excellent attitude and effort throughout the year in all her subjects.

Alex Walton-Keeffe –

Our longest serving student, entered the college in 2009, now leaving after completing his A Levels. His presence will be sorely missed.

Max Menual –

Another of our long-term students, leaving after being Head Boy twice for pastures new.

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