



CATERHAM SCHOOL

Study Buddies at Caterham School by Mr Kim Wells, Director of Learning and Teaching

By learning you will teach; by teaching you will understand. **Latin Proverb**

At a highly successful academic school in the top 40 for both A level results and for Value-Added, convention dictates that it is all about getting outstanding exam results. I disagree. For me, the development of independent learning skills is even more important. Isn't our priority as educators to equip our students with the transferable skills to cope with a professional life that will almost certainly involve many different jobs or even career paths? Isn't it preparing them for a world in which there is far too much information to process properly, and change is a constant? In short - what's the point of getting outstanding exam results only to founder at university because all our pupils have known in the classroom is spoon-feeding?

A key part of our drive to make our students metacognitive and confident learners has been to train and treat them as teachers themselves. Caterham's 'study buddy' scheme was set up in 2009 with 28 Sixth Form students taking part, each one paired with a student from the First to Fifth Years. Numbers have grown dramatically over the years with two thirds of Sixth Form students taking part and nearly 400 students now participating.

The Sixth Form students are all volunteers who submit a formal application, and are then trained in coaching and mentoring skills. This is distinct from traditional "teaching" when an older student might act as the fount of all knowledge and readily offer up the right answer to their younger buddy. Instead we encourage our Sixth Form buddies to draw answers out of their younger charges, to help them find the solutions, and to build their self-confidence in diagnosing and resolving any difficulties they may have.

The students meet formally once every week in the Sixth Form Centre (considered quite a privilege among the younger students) for 20 minutes to discuss everything from how to memorise vocabulary to managing long-term projects. Many buddies are providing stretch and challenge, with younger students trying A level Maths problems or learning a third Modern Language. The bond between them tends to go further than twenty minutes a week, with many buddies meeting informally outside of the prescribed mentoring times. Now that the scheme is established, younger students are now aspiring to be buddies themselves when they hit the Sixth Form – last year all 34 Fifth Year pupils involved in the scheme wanted to put something back and became buddies at the start of their Lower Sixth Year.

Georgia (Upper Sixth) finds it satisfying to play the role of teacher, coach and mentor. "I think it's rewarding, knowing that you have established a friendship and, more importantly, the scheme has broken down barriers between Sixth Form students and younger pupils, helping maintain the school's strong sense of community."

In 2011 this scheme won Caterham School the Education Initiative of the Year at the Independent Schools Awards.

To teach is to learn twice over. **Joseph Joubert**

