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Dear WES Parents and Carers

Welcome to our October edition of the WESPA newsletter. Read on for the latest news, how to get the most out of life at WES, dates for the

diary and more. If you'd like to contribute, please don't hesitate to get in touch by emailing williamellispa@gmail.com.

Team WESPA

For all previous issues, please visit sites.google.com/view/williamellispa/news

Spotlight

There is a rich history of music at William Ellis School. Past students include Stranglers frontman & co-writer of 'Golden Brown' Hugh Cornwall, Madness bassist Mark Bedford, guitarist & Fairport Convention co-founder Richard Thompson and Radiohead producer Nigel Godrich.

And there is no shortage of talent in the school today – many of you will have seen Alec Imamovic's stunning rendition of the Mozart Piano Concerto No 20 in D major with Camden Youth Orchestra at LSO St Luke's in April. And it's always wonderful to see our homegrown bands leading the way at the WESPA Awards, school events and out and about in Camden. Today William Ellis School is the centre of music for the LaSWAP schools.

With so much going on, we thought it would be a good moment to hear from WES Head of Music (and accomplished harpist) **Oliver Singleton**. With the help of A-Level and Music Tech legend Matt Hansom, Ollie has been the driving force behind the many amazing musical groups available at WES – he's even set up a choir for us parents! Al Mobbs caught up with Ollie to find out a little more...



WES rappers opening the Camden Schools Festival at the Royal Albert Hall in April

Who are you and what do you do at WES?

My name is Oliver Singleton and I'm the Head of Music at William Ellis. My job is to plan for excellent teaching and learning in the Music Department as well as coordinate performances

and make sure practice spaces and musical equipment is available for all our students.

What fun things have happened recently or are coming up for the department?

We have enjoyed some

really exciting concerts recently including our trip to perform at the Royal Albert Hall with the choir.

We are also looking forward to our upcoming performance platform concert and the Winter Entertainment Event.

This year we have

welcomed visitors to our department such as Tom Piggot-Smith, a very successful violinist and composer who has recorded for many film soundtracks, and who came to meet our A-Level students. We hope in the

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near future to welcome a concert pianist who will speak with our GCSE students about working as a performer and interpreting musical pieces in performance.

What is the best way for our boys to get involved in music at school?

There are lots of ways for pupils to be involved with music at William Ellis. They have the option to learn an instrument in one-to-one instrument lessons – pupils can sign up for this using the online form on the Music section of our website. We also have numerous ensembles:

Big Band – Wednesday, 3:15pm-4pm in Room 48.

String Group – Wednesday, 3:15pm-3:50pm in MS1.

Brass Band – Thursday, 8:20-8:50am in MS1.

Choir – Thursday lunchtime Room 48.

Rap Club – Thursday, 3:15-4:15pm in MS1.

We are also hoping to set up a guitar group in the near future. There is also the option for pupils to form bands with their



WES Head of Music Oliver Singleton (right) with visiting violinist and composer Tom Pigott Smith

friends and practise in our practice spaces outside of lesson times.

Tell us something fun we might not know about you!

I am an excellent knitter! And also I can speak backwards pretty well.

Lastly, tell us more about the parents choir – how

do people get involved?

It takes place every Tuesday evening at WES from 6.30-8pm and is open to all WES parents, carers, staff and friends – it's really fun and friendly and you don't need to be able to read music or have any prior experience to join.

'A highlight of last term

was singing with the WES boys' choir at Lauderdale House – I think we all felt proud to be part of it! It's always lots of fun and a great way to get to know other parents' – Alice, WES parent and choir member.

Thank you Ollie! – it's great to hear about what is going on. And knitting too! Maybe we can persuade fellow knitters, Russell Crowe, Ryan Gosling or Tom Dayley to come and do a joint masterclass for the students. Judging by the racket my son and his friends are making on Saturday afternoons, it's looking good for bands and we can't wait for the Winter Entertainment later this term. The money made at last year's Winter Entertainment bought the music department a new drum kit and bass guitar so it is definitely a great event to support.

■ **The choir is run by WESPA Trustee and general all-round-amazing person Alex. Please email williamellispa@gmail.com if you'd like to join.**

WESPA Trustees election – Nov 21st

At our next AGM on 21st November 2023, all Trustees will stand down and, if they wish, put themselves forward for re-election.

This year, Galit, Alex and Al will stand again and we welcome new parents who would like to join the Committee.

Trustees are the volunteers

who lead charities (in our case WESPA) and decide how they are run. You may have heard them called board members or the board.

Trusteeship is a great way of contributing to causes you care about and developing strategic and leadership skills at the same time.

It is a very rewarding and important role that helps our school and our boys.

WESPA is in great shape and growing fast so if you have ideas and energy to share, it is a great time to consider it.

If you are interested or would like to find out more, please email williamellispa@gmail.com

The Inside Track

In every edition of the newsletter we ask a student to lift the lid on life at WES. In this edition we catch up with **Tom** in Year 13 to chat about his years at school, tips for getting the most out of your time at WES and his plans for life beyond the school.

You are just starting your 7th year at William Ellis School and have known the school and probably many of the teachers and staff for a long time now. What have been some of the highlights and most memorable times for you over the years?

I can't believe I have been at William Ellis for almost seven years! A lot has happened in my time here. Some of my best bits have been the school trip to Disneyland Paris in Year 8; taking part in the Shakespeare Schools Festival and playing the Last Post as a soloist at the Hampstead Remembrance Service. And of course, the FINAL lunchtime football match in Year 11 will be remembered for a lifetime.

Camden is a little different at 6th Form with quite a choice of schools across the

borough and of course LaSWAP. Why did you choose LaSWAP?

For me, it wasn't a difficult decision. I enjoyed being at WES and had good relationships with the teachers, and so I wanted to go into the sixth form at WES. There was a huge range of courses available, and I was able to choose the A Levels I wanted to study. The support network at WES doesn't stop at the end of Year 11, it continues right through sixth form too.

William Ellis founded our school on the idea of preparing students for the world and to be useful in society. I'm really interested in this aspect of school. How do you feel WES has helped you prepare for life after school?

The five 'R's, Responsible, Respectful, Resourceful, Resilient and Reflective,

prepare you for anything and everything. In the sixth form, there are a lot of opportunities to talk to careers advisors to discuss the next steps whether it is going to university or applying for apprenticeships or something else. I am part of the Career Ready programme which involves having monthly meetings with a mentor from a business, master-classes on improving your personal skills and a possible summer internship. I did a four-week paid internship at British Land. It was a brilliant opportunity to learn about real life work, develop my skills, network with people in the company and earn some money. I would really recommend it.

What do you hope to do when you leave WES?

I have recently gone to

several university open days which have been really interesting and have given me an insight into university life and living away from home. I hope to study an economics and finance degree which will lead onto a career in the financial sector.

Knowing what you know now, if you could go back in time and give yourself some big brotherly advice, what would it be?

My advice would be: enjoy school, the time goes really quickly. It is important not to worry about making mistakes, because you can learn from every experience, good or bad. Get involved in things, there's something for everyone and you'll make good friends. And finally, always have two pens in case one runs out and make the most of lunchtime football.

New Year 7s at the annual WES Summer School



School News – Out and About ...

Many parents will already know **Madeleine Holt** from the excellent initiative Meet the Parents which she set up some years ago. (www.meettheparents.info). There is however much more to Madeleine – the former BBC reporter has won awards for her work in education and Al Mobbs wanted to find out more about her and her thoughts on education, community and in particular Camden schools.

You have just finished this year's Meet the Parents events. These were incredibly important for my family when choosing our secondary school and it has been such a pleasure to join the panels with my son this year. For those who don't know about Meet the Parents, could you explain how it came about and what you do?

Meet the Parents came about because I was frustrated at seeing lots of families at my children's old primary school, Yerbury in Islington, assume that the local comprehensives were not up to much.

They were basing this on old rumours and gossip and were then embarking on several years of tutoring for various admissions exams for comprehensives further away with scholarships, and grammars and private schools.

While this was going on – and at times causing a lot of divisiveness between students – I was talking to families who had committed to the local secondaries and they were broadly happy with them. I also knew that all the research suggests that children from advantaged socio-economic groups do well whatever school they go to, so why not just go to the schools up the road and have lots of friends in the neighbouring streets



and make our community stronger?

So I thought there was a gap in terms of telling primary school parents about the most up-to-date experience of our nearest comprehensives. Initially I brought just the parents from these schools into Yerbury to answer any questions that the primary school families might have – hence the title, Meet the Parents. But it soon became clear that the students were gold dust because they can't help telling it how it is.

I started the whole thing voluntarily, but after my first season Camden got wind of it and approached me to roll it out as a service across key schools. Thus MTP became a social enterprise and has now been running

in Camden for ten years.

I am pleased to say that over time attitudes towards the local schools have changed a lot at Yerbury, where it all began. Most students now go local, and I think it's a trend that will only increase because of the cost of living crisis and an awareness that top universities want to decrease the number of students from private schools.

We are seeing a real shift in attitudes across Camden too, and I hope in time this will lead to more cohesive communities.

Camden has a wonderful array of state secondary schools. The LaSWAP consortium for example is such a great initiative. What do you think makes Camden such a special

borough?

Lots of things make Camden really special. It has managed to hang on to its reputation for being very supportive of schools, so it manages to attract very keen young staff and retain staff far more successfully than other areas. Camden was also a pioneer in creating a partnership between schools, Camden Learning, to share best practice and push up the quality of education across the board.

On top of this, all but one of its secondaries and most of its primaries are still community schools, meaning that they are directly accountable to the local authority. As a parent, you can stand for election

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as a governor and make a difference to the strategic direction of a school – something that is sadly not the case in many areas of London and beyond.

As for LaSWAP, it's a quaint fact that it was dreamt up on the back of an envelope back in the 80s, and remains the biggest sixth form consortium in London. My two eldest children went there and have fond memories of it. They talk about the warm relationships between staff and students and the way their school days were mingled with long, sunny spells on the Heath.

How do you think as parents we can best work together to support the education of our children in Camden?

That's a very interesting question. I think there are lots of ways of doing that. Firstly, parents can act collectively to get behind schools that need more support from families from all walks of life.

We have seen this over the years with Acland Burghley in the 90s, and Parliament Hill more recently, and now we are seeing it again I think with William Ellis. This is what really changes the culture of a school, particularly when parents with time and energy make this kind of commitment. It then starts to genuinely reflect the local community and becomes the glue that holds everyone together.

Secondly, parents can

put themselves forward as governors, and influence the direction of a school.

Thirdly, I think there is scope for parents to act in a much more grassroots and activist way. They could campaign, for example, for a more innovative approach to education. I think once parents see alternative methods and how much more enriching they can

stake exams can make secondaries fearful of being too experimental. Then there's our punitive inspection system and the ridiculous workload for staff, meaning schools often don't have the bandwidth to think about new approaches.

But I am a pragmatic optimist: I think the depressingly high level of persistent absence

“ There is scope for parents to act in a much more grassroots and activist way. They could campaign, for example, for a more innovative approach to education ”

be for their children, then they will ask for something a whole lot more sophisticated than the current model which relies so much on memorising and regurgitating facts to the detriment of broader life skills.

It has been very interesting to watch documentaries you have made for schools, in particular XP comprehensive in Doncaster. If it was up to you, what would you bring to the schools in Camden?

I am bound to say that I think there is scope for much more innovation in Camden's secondaries. There are lots of thought-provoking ideas in Camden's primaries, but the stranglehold of high

nationally will in the end force change from policymakers, and free up schools to come up with local solutions that work for all their students. I am currently making a series of short films on schools all over England that are finding the space within the system to do things differently, something that I admire hugely.

And finally, as a former governor and parent of children in schools in Camden including one who is now teaching at Acland Burghley, I think your position is pretty clear. However what advice would you give parents and students when making their secondary school choices and why?

I would suggest that parents don't look at too many schools, or you can become befuddled by choice. I would (obviously!) say stay local, try to get a sense of the ethos of a school – for example does it care about all students or is it focused on high-achievers? Does it encourage self-regulation from students or impose lots of rules? – and then figure out how these values equate to your own values.

Once you know what you treasure, it will make it so much easier to decide which school is best for your child. Finally, the more you can decide together the better. I don't think that forcing a child to go to a particular school usually works out in the long term.

Thank you Madeleine. It's so interesting to hear your thoughts and to hear your positive outlook – pragmatic optimism is a good fit for Camden. I would urge any parents considering secondary schools to check out Meet the Parents. And if you are already at one of the secondary schools, representing your school on a panel is both rewarding and illuminating.

■ Madeleine's film on XP school is well worth a watch and can be seen here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwrtCFGGUaE>

Some of her short films are here:

<https://bigeducation.org/he-next-big-10-schools/>

Parent consultation on uniform

When it comes to the student uniform, the number one concern of parents is comfort, particularly in hot weather.

This was one of the key findings of the WESPA-led parent consultation held at the end of last term. The consultation was launched to support the advocacy of year 10 student councillor, Hugo Keane, for a more environmentally sustainable uniform. It had an excellent response, and we would like to thank all parents who participated.

The consultation found

a slight, but clear, majority in favour of keeping a school uniform, but with the addition of shorts for the summer. Parents supported making it more environmentally friendly, and ensuring it is free of harmful chemical dyes and finishes. There were a wealth of views expressed on the role of a school uniform, and on the William Ellis uniform in particular. The full report, with our recommendations, is available here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/u/0/d/169wMSZV2qTuBLqM8OYO6RiVUTQT5CueHoH3Kh2bSg>

No/mobilebasic

WESPA is following up with the school on introducing a summer option and finding out what chemicals are in the uniform. It will also be running a student consultation. WESPA has given away lots of second-hand uniforms, and compiled this list of where to get more eco-friendly versions of trousers and shirts:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ktzy512KSOQCZEGt-u4upXu_UKzgOaYwkM4VafYo7ic/edit#gid=0

WESPA continues to accept clean William Ellis

blazers, ties and PE kit for our giveaways (no trousers, shirts or sweaters please).

Did you know?

Making the blue blazer, PE t-shirt and shorts for the year 7 class melts 3 cubic metres of Arctic ice every year? Learn more about the environmental impact of the school uniform in Hugo Keane's analysis:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/11xI02nk7UE8-KHWIv414ilFNDwHiZZrN/view>

Student-led activism

Does your child have an idea for making William Ellis more green? Let us know. WESPA supports students to lead change.

Our new Eco Group is growing - top issues

There is always so much going on with WESPA but one area that is really firing on all cylinders at the moment is our new Eco Group – our thanks go to Co-chairs Alex M. and Judeen and Year 8 parent Jane in particular for kickstarting it.

Issues at the top of the agenda include the environmental impact of our uniform, how to make the most of our outside spaces and how to support

local issues like the Nocado campaign in Tufnell Park. The WESPA Eco Group is growing fast – if you'd like to get involved, please email

williamellispa@gmail.com.

Here is an update from co-chairs Alex M, Judeen and Jane:

Project Green Space

Big plans are brewing for the school's outdoor space. The WESPA Eco Group has been working with Growing

Green, a local grassroots organisation taking action to rewild schools and to develop our green spaces. There are proposals for a wildlife pond located in front of the school reception area, offering a quiet space for teachers and environmental education opportunities for the boys.

Colourful wild flower beds along the entrance drive, ivy walls and more planting schemes in the quad are also part of the plan, as well as adding extra habitat opportunities like log

piles and wildlife corridors around the school to connect William Ellis, the Heath, Parliament Hill and the surrounding neighbourhood.

More plants within the school grounds will improve air quality, offset the rise in expected future temperature, capture carbon, and increase native biodiversity, all of which will improve the school's sustainability, and student and staff well-being.

■ Stay tuned for more news on how YOU can get involved!

What is WESPA?

WESPA is a charity (no. 1158812), run by parents, carers and friends of William Ellis School.

WESPA is open to all in our school community, and is a fun way to get involved in school life.

- We help raise extra funding for the school, to provide resources for the boys.
- We run social events for parents and children, to help facilitate the growth of our school community.

- We encourage as many people as we can to get involved, to create stronger bonds and ties between home and school.

■ If you haven't been to a WESPA meeting yet, if you think it's not for you, or you're just not sure how you can help, you can always email williamellispa@gmail.com to find out more about us and how you can get involved.

Dates for the Diary

Parent Social – 18th
October, 7-10pm, Lion & Unicorn, 42-44 Gaisford St, London NW5 2ED

Drams for Drums Whisky Tasting Fundraiser –
November tbc

WESPA AGM and

General Meeting –
November 21st, 6.30pm, WES Library. All welcome!

Winter Entertainment Evening, WES –
December 6th

WESPA Choir –
Tuesdays at WES, 6.30-8pm

Fun run

Year 7 on the starting line

What a great turn-out and a huge well done to all the boys of years 7, 8 and 9 for running to raise money for the school.



Thank you very much to Mirzeta for running everything on the day, to all the parents who helped out, everybody who came to watch and to our esteemed head of PE Josh

Levitt for organising the run.

It's a great thing to do and a great way for the boys to take an active role in raising money for their school.

Together we have

raised over £2500!

Combined with money left over from the run last year, we have reached our target of £4K and this will enable the PE Department to refit the gym.

6 ways to support WESPA

■ COME AND JOIN IN! –

It is always great to meet up with fellow parents and carers and meet new ones too.

■ SHARE YOUR IDEAS –

WESPA is run by parents for our boys and each other. All thoughts and ideas are very welcome.

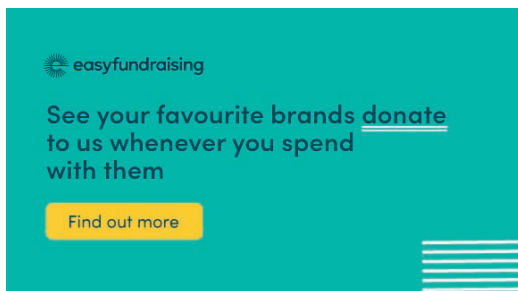
Just email williamellispa@gmail.com

■ VOLUNTEER –

The WES community is huge and diverse. Whether lending a hand at an event, joining a working weekend at The Mill, offering your professional skills to a school project, or covering one of the central WESPA roles, every contribution benefits our community and is hugely appreciated.

■ RUN A FUNDRAISER –

If you have any previous experience or want to



team up with a fellow parent and create something new, this is a great way to raise funds for the school.

■ **DONATE** – Donations to WESPA are very welcome. You can donate using the fundraising platform GIVEY at <https://www.givey.com/williamellispa-schoolparentsassociation>. If your son has outgrown his uniform please consider donating these items to our regular uniform sales. Good condition uniform can be dropped at the

school office.

■ SHOP THROUGH

EasyFundraising – If you haven't signed up yet, it's easy and completely FREE! 7,400 brands will donate to us when you use EasyFundraising to do your everyday online shopping – at no extra cost to you! Sign up here: https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/williamellispa/?invite=1KH7PM%26referral-campaign=c2s%26utm_campaign=admin-trigger%26utm_content=srt

WESPA

William Ellis School Parents Association