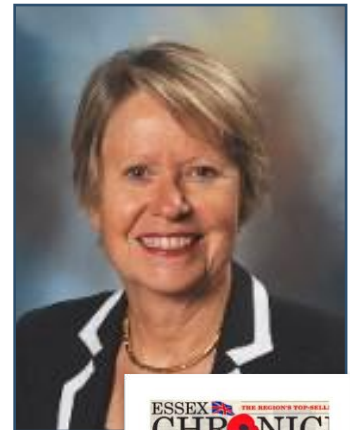


# Mrs Nicole Chapman, Headteacher 2007-2019

Mrs Chapman came to CCHS in April 2007 after five years as the Headteacher of Gravesend Grammar School for Girls and a variety of posts in schools including Frances Bardsley School and The Coopers' Company and Coborn School. She started her teaching career in Dagenham in the early 1970s and brought to CCHS a huge amount of experience and the confidence borne of years of responding to the increasing challenges of state education in this country.

Born and educated in France, Mrs Chapman brought to CCHS a commitment based on her own experience of the French education system that every student should have access to the broadest possible education. She also brought to the school a much-needed sense of direction and purpose; this had been allowed to lapse a little in the interregnum between Mrs Curtis' retirement on health grounds and Mrs Chapman's appointment almost two years later. Immediately keen to get the measure of her new school, she set about interviewing every member of staff in her first months in post and also made sure to see every member of both Year 11 and 13. Out of these interviews and the work of both governors and the leadership team came a new statement of the school vision as 'developing the leaders of tomorrow' and the three aims of the pursuit of excellence, the fulfilment of individual potential and of commitment to the local and global community. It was therefore natural that CCHS made a considerable commitment to exploring and then offering the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme as an alternative to A levels. Whilst funding pressures as austerity made its mark in education meant that the school could not afford to deliver the IB after 2017, both students and staff benefitted from the enrichment of the curriculum which it represented.



*22nd January 2008 – Mrs Chapman pictured during the opening of the new Music Centre (left).*

*Mrs Chapman pictured on Commemoration Day in April 2010 (right).*



## Mrs Nicole Chapman, continued...

The early years of Mrs Chapman's headship also saw considerable rationalisation of the curriculum for Years 7 to 9 and the end of some initiatives which had not proved their worth. The teaching staff much appreciated her clear judgement about what was a good idea worth pursuing and what was an ephemeral trend that offered little to this school beyond some low-level bandwagon riding. Whilst encouraging staff to be innovative and reflective in their practice, Mrs Chapman was always able to reassure staff that traditional and established patterns of teaching and academic rigour had much to commend them. At a time when some educationalists increasingly question the role of knowledge in the curriculum (one visitor to CCHS recently arguing that 'there is no point in teaching knowledge now we have Google'), Mrs Chapman's commitment to good sense and high standards in the classroom meant that staff continued to feel confident in their practice and that their judgements were respected.

Mrs Chapman was committed throughout her headship to the highest standards of behaviour and dress from her students. A new uniform was introduced with purple kilts that were less susceptible to the 'thousand natural shocks' often inflicted on the previous two uniforms and a number of students found a need to reflect seriously about the standards of behaviour expected in



*Mrs Chapman – Year 10 Celebrations, July 2019*

a school. A dress code and then a uniform code were also introduced for sixth form students. However, whilst Mrs Chapman's high standards could make for some uncomfortable discussions on occasion for a very few students, parents and staff, her commitment to the welfare of all in the school was very real. Indeed, in reaction to the increasing pressures under which teenagers exist, her headship saw a wholesale revision of the school's pastoral system and the development of a team of Year Leaders. Certainly, this has done much for the quality of both pastoral support and safeguarding in a period when the demands made in both areas are increasingly serious.

On her very first visit to CCHS after her appointment Mrs Chapman entered through the old dining room entrance for the Christmas Concert in December 2006. Some readers may remember the old room 34 (for many years the haunt of Mr Zambellas) which sat outside this entrance. On that occasion Mrs Chapman and her husband Kevin resolved that, as Lenin might have said 'something must be done' about the rash of demountable classrooms which then disfigured the site. It is testimony both to Mrs Chapman's personal drive and vision as well as to the quality of successive business managers that she appointed (Mrs Mary Cherry, Mrs Susan Hoefling and now Mrs Melissa Mulgrew) that under her headship CCHS was able to raise nearly £10 million to rebuild and extend the dining room entrance, to build the Dame Margaret Anstee Centre for Languages and to provide new classrooms, a new sixth form common room and new study spaces. At the time of writing, we have seen the demolition of Bancroft and are eagerly anticipating the start of work on its replacement and on the new Sports Hall, as well as the rebuilding of the Gym to accommodate the new school library. Alongside these developments Mrs Chapman continued to ensure that the site staff were able to do much to improve the look of the older parts of the school. Once the new buildings are completed in 2021 CCHS will have facilities appropriate to its work in the twenty-first century. To achieve this against a background of austerity and swingeing budget cuts is no small achievement. Some readers who remember CCHS as a much smaller school may regret that increasing the school's intake has been the way to unlock a good deal of this funding. However, we are confident both that giving more girls the opportunity to experience CCHS is the right thing to do and that the values and systems of the school are so strong that the increase in numbers will be well handled and a positive experience for all.

## Mrs Nicole Chapman, continued...

Mrs Chapman's steadfast commitment both to supporting all events in school and to representing the school at a national level must also be recorded. There was scarcely a school event in her headship at which she was not present and students and staff much appreciated her supportive presence. She also ensured that the voice of CCHS was heard in Whitehall and Westminster and on national bodies such as the Association of State Girls' Schools and the Grammar School Heads' Association. This renewed commitment to lobbying and discussing national issues was of huge benefit to the school and ensures that it continues to be at the forefront of national and international discussions.

At a time when education is experiencing a recruitment crisis and staff turnover continues to be a concern in all schools, Mrs Chapman's energies were much directed to recruiting the very best staff for her school and to supporting teaching and non-teaching staff as they developed their skills and their careers.

Mrs Chapman retired at the end of August 2019 after 46 years in education. A significant majority of her staff were not even born when she started as a teacher and yet her energy and enthusiasm did not fade one bit as retirement approached. Indeed, she was heard to wonder if perhaps she shouldn't have stayed another year or so to 'see the new buildings in'. However, her husband Kevin had retired some years earlier and she was in many ways keen to move on to the next phase in her life, spending more time at her home in Provence and taking longer holidays than the schedule of a headteacher allows. CCHS said farewell to her with two special assemblies and a formal reception attended by staff and local dignitaries. At this she was presented with framed copies of a poem especially written by Jessica Steadman (Year 12), a pen and ink drawing of the school by Jessica Shaw (Year 12) and a piece of music composed by Caroline Penn (CCHS 2011 to 2018). A ballet to this music was choreographed and danced by Scarlett Mann (CCHS 2011 to 2018) and Molly Ramidge (Year 8) and other music was performed by senior students.



*Mrs Chapman pictured here during the formal reception that was held in her honour in Summer 2019.*





# Mrs Nicole Chapman, continued...

Mrs Chapman wrote in her farewell letter to parents that:

*'As I complete my final term at CCHS I wish to place on record that the past 12 years have been some of the most enjoyable in my 46-year career in education.*

*I have greatly enjoyed working with and for such wonderful students whose intellectual interest and energy are second to none. It has been incredibly gratifying to watch them develop into young women who have fledged with confidence and the determination to find their place in the world. I hope they remember to make a difference and to remain true to what their school has taught them.*

*I have been fortunate in leading a team of dedicated teaching and support staff who have supported me in maintaining the high standards we demand of ourselves and our students. I am proud to have guided the careers of so many, always prepared to give their students great opportunities within and beyond the classroom...*

*...Finally, I wish to thank parents who have unfailingly supported the School in our tripartite partnership. Your daughters are amazing, not only are they focused on achieving their best, but they are also supportive of each other and are acquiring the characteristics which will help them live happy and fulfilling lives. It has been a privilege to guide them and I have every confidence in the team to continue what we have started. I have appreciated the many messages and gifts I have received from you, and your daughters, thank you'.*

Mrs Chapman's commitment, judgement and energy have been pivotal in everything that CCHS is today. We wish her a long and happy retirement.



*Mrs Chapman pictured above with her Executive Assistant, Mrs Bates and some of our Sixth Form students at the ASGS conference in London in March 2019.*