



# Newsletter – June 2014

## *Message from Michael Moretta, Head of School*

### **Introduction**

Schools are very strange places this time of year. The exams have all been completed, the teachers' rooms are empty and all the children have departed for the long summer break. The timetable, room schedule and templates for the new academic year are finalised and everything is eerily quiet. I always find that this is a time of reflection as well as providing a little breathing space for forward planning. I want to share a few of these thoughts with you before I depart for the summer.

### **Exams**

The exam season this year appears to have passed smoothly. Even though our centre appeared to suffer no major traumas, I was, once again, struck by the sheer intensity of the Leaving Certificate. Many students had an extremely busy first 8 days – some even completing all their exams by 11 June.

I am sure you would wish all the students who sat external exams the very best of luck. I will be back in school for the results on Wednesday 13 August. This is another stressful day for all concerned and, of course, a life changing moment of truth. I will give an overview of these results in the first newsletter of the academic year.

### **COIS/NEAS 5 – Year Visit**

Although we are still awaiting the written report from our International accreditors, I am delighted to give you a flavour of their view of the School's progress from their oral feedback.

The visiting team consisted of two very experienced Head Teachers who both had considerable knowledge of how international schools operate and the accreditation process. They commended the quality and detail of the School's report and the form of their response will be written comments and a rating "Completed or In Progress" against our comments in the original document.

The two visitors had read all the documentation very carefully prior to arrival. They had absorbed the historical 2009 Report, our 5 Year Report and they read everything we gave them closely including the Strategic Plan and a range of policy documents. Indeed, much of the visit involved validating and approving the evidence we supplied to prove our recommendations in 2009 had indeed been completed.

The School was measured against new standards outlined in the excellent document produced by COIS/NEASC and called "Journey to Excellence".

The next formal visit will be in 5 years-time and will be much more all-encompassing, including a questionnaire to all parents, compiling folders of supporting evidence and the arrival of a 6-7 person team. This will take place in 2019.

The Team observed considerable improvements in the following areas:

- Clear and strong leadership and effective teams observed throughout
- Guiding statements were clearly adhered to and followed
- Internationalism was articulated and understood by all stakeholders
- Positive and enabling culture observed in the school. Staff articulate and had been given a voice in the School
- Board fulfilled responsibilities constructively and positively
- Comprehensive handbooks describing the school's operating systems and procedures
- Effective pastoral system: Student centred culture observed throughout the school.
- Supportive parents, students and improved communication from 2009
- Astute management of finances in difficult times without impairing the quality of provision
- Curriculum developments especially the introduction of formative assessment models.
- ICT developments were exciting and the ICT Plan and vision, clear and positive
- School's report validated as accurate by the visitors.

I would like to thank everyone who helped us during the 4 day visit. A feature of the school both inspectors insisted on repeating was the vibrant, friendly community spirit that characterises Sutton Park. That ethos is entirely down to your children and the manner that you have raised them. It is also a reflection of your high standards and expectations.

### **The New Timetable**

Every year in constructing the timetable, we try to refresh and review our provision. I like to innovate and try out new ideas as well as build on previous initiatives. This year has been no different. I would like to highlight the following curriculum changes in the Secondary School.

- 2014-15 will see the introduction of the new Junior Certificate in English. Assessment will involve an element of portfolio work and a requirement for students to read more widely. The First Years will begin experiencing this new course on arrival at the end of August and I am sure you will be delighted with the changes.
- In view of the importance of Maths, I have allocated an extra period – now 6 lessons per week – to Maths on the new timetable in 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Years. Confidence and success in Maths is, as you know, extremely important. Indeed, with the extra points tariff in 6<sup>th</sup> Year now well established, it is vital we prepare as many students as possible to sit the Higher paper and to perform to the best of their ability.

### **Transition Year**

I have added some new models in the programme and maintained some of the more successful ones from last year. New programmes include:

- A practical cookery course
- An Editorial Committee to promote and produce student publications and the Year Book

- A Mandarin module – we have a very keen Mandarin group who have studied the language for the last 3 years and they are anxious to continue their studies.
- Mr Timmins is introducing an Engineering module.

I also intend to totally revamp the Careers elements of the course and in particular, the preparation for the Work Experience component in March 2015. The new Friends of Sutton Park association provides the school with a pretty extensive pool of potential employers. I have spoken to Jonathan Law, a past student, about mobilising this resource and we both feel we can establish a wide-ranging database of possible work placements. I then envisage a process involving submitting CVs, letters of application and interviews before each placement. This process will provide important interview practice for all our students as well as work placements that provide real opportunities for meaningful work experience. I will be writing to you again at the start of the term to see if you, as parents, can add to our pool of potential employers. It will, I am sure, prove to be a very positive initiative.

### **School Officials and Opportunities for Student Involvement in Sutton Park**

During our interviews for the new Head Boy and Head Girl and other school officials, I was struck by the quality of the applications and the seriousness of the application and interview process. Myself, a member of the Board of Governors and Ms Kiernan, Head of 6<sup>th</sup> Years, conducted the interviews and we were all terribly impressed with the candidates. One theme that emerged was the way the Student Council had been opened out to the whole Secondary School community by Josh Tobin and Emily Slater, last year's Head Boy and Head Girl. Our students clearly want to get actively involved in the school. In recognition of this, a representative of the Senior Management Team will sit on each Student Council meeting so that the lines of communication between students and staff can be tightened.

For your information, the new School Officials are:

Head Boy:	Ronan Conlon Dooley
Head Girl:	Sophie Gorman
Deputy Head Boy:	Sean Gallagher
Deputy Head Girl:	Ellen Martin

### **Extra-Curricular Programme**

Next term we will maintain our full extra-curricular programme. You may be interested to read the report produced by the extra-curricular coordinator, Ms Heffernan, to the Board of Management. This report is submitted and gives a very thorough analysis of what has been successful and what has not, as well as graphic analysis of attendance. Before you make your choices next term, it may well be worth taking a few minutes to read the report. The report can be read on "Parent Info – Extra Curricular Programme".

### **Uniform Rules**

I have sent you all an email regarding uniform rules. The text is reproduced below. I will remind all parents again in August so that you can purchase the correct uniform.

Dear Parents

As you are no doubt aware towards the end of last term, we began to tighten up the enforcement of

our uniform regulations. We have, probably, the most relaxed and accommodating uniform regimes on the island of Ireland and yet I have seen the regulations being increasingly re-interpreted and, to be frank, some students are pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable. I would like, therefore, to state our rules unequivocally:

Students are expected to wear a black or navy jacket.

The BOM considered this first rule and added the black jacket with a view to allowing students to purchase a jacket they can wear outside school hours.

Regular blue jeans with no rips. No leggings or jeggings.

The school jumper/hoodie must be worn on the outside at all times. It must have the school logo. Any polo shirt must have the school logo on it.

Shoes must be black or brown and be all the one colour. Laces must be dark in colour. Boots may be worn with jeans on the outside and "Dubes" remain as legitimate school uniform.

With the exception of First Year, no sports gear may be worn into school, even on days of PE.

I am emailing this to you now in order that you have plenty of time to consider and absorb these rules before the new term starts. I will reiterate these rules in the weeks before we start term. I am anxious that we have a set of rules universally adhered to and applied equitably throughout 1st to 5th Year students from the very first day of school.

I would like to thank you in advance for your support.

### **Conclusion**

I am about to depart for Jersey where I will be seeing my new granddaughter Sienna Jane Moretta. Can I thank you for all your kind wishes and advice. It is wonderful being a Grandfather for the first time and your kindness is much appreciated. Soon I will be back in the world of nappies, sleepless nights and pram pushing, for a few short weeks at least.

I trust you all have a wonderful break and I look forward to seeing you again in August.

Michael Moretta  
Head of School