



Newsletter – December 2014

Message from Michael Moretta, Head of School

Introduction

It has been some time since I last wrote a full newsletter. I have made a strict undertaking that I will write to you all much more regularly in 2015. This newsletter therefore should be seen as the fulfilment of a pledge. As ever, there is much to celebrate and look forward to in the new calendar year. I want to take this opportunity to acquaint you with some of the coming initiatives and programmes that we intend to introduce in the coming months.

Carol Concert and Christmas Celebrations

Firstly, I want to look back at this year's Carol Concert. Sutton Park at this time of year is a very vibrant, festive and magical place. Our Reception is filled to overflowing with the fruits of your boundless generosity. The Vincent de Paul collection filled to capacity three of our offices over the last two weeks. We have been told that the items you gave created 90 hampers that were distributed by our students on 18 December to 90 needy families.

Children dressed in colourful costumes pass my office sweetly signing their learned lines but no event to my mind captures the festive spirit better than Ms Howard's annual Christmas Concert in The Church of the Assumption in Howth. Once again, she has fashioned a choir of new faces peopled with 1st Years. The standard was by common consent, spectacularly high, as were the performances by our elite musicians. The highlight for me was JJ McNamara on the piano selflessly and humbly accompanying Chris Ellis during their piece towards the end of the evening. It is rare to see such an absence of ego in two exceptional musicians. Christopher, by the way, is not only entering the final phase of the Leaving Certificate, he is also applying for a place at the prestigious Paris Conservatoire. I am sure you will join me in wishing him every success in this endeavour. Many thanks to all of you who attended. It was a splendid evening.

Reports and Exams

This is also the season of exams and reports. I read all the reports and I am pleased to say that so many of our students, especially those in exam classes, are working really hard to attain ambitious goals in the forthcoming external exams. One of the pleasures of my role is to evaluate targets and goals with the 6th Years. This year, 3 of our students are compiling portfolios for submission to the NCAD. Another 3 students have applied to Cambridge University to read Law, Computer Science and Engineering respectively – such courses are fiercely competitive and require predicted grades of 6 A's and a strenuous admissions selection process to be even considered a candidate. Another student is applying to West Point in the United States. It is heartening to see such ambition and drive in the school. Indeed, this year, I have noticed a trend of students either applying to European Business/Psychology and Management courses as well as courses in Ireland that have a year or more working abroad. We are shaping young people with a global vision. Let us hope 2015 brings them much success.

As a side note to this gradual process of globalisation, I want to mention a forthcoming trip to Beijing by some of our Transition Year students.

Some of you will recall that in 2010 we introduced Mandarin classes, organised by the Confucius Institute. Our 4th Year contains 8 students who, for each of the 4 years, sat the UCD exams, followed the language course and in the process forged an excellent working relationship with Ji Rong, their long-standing teacher. On St Stephen's Day, the group begin a 10 day visit to China with all expenses paid – bar the flights – by the Chinese government. The programme is called rather unattractively “Mandarin Boot Camp” but the schedule of visits is absolutely amazing and for those students lucky enough to have been invited, a once in a lifetime opportunity. I have asked them to write a diary of their experiences that will go into our Yearbook.

Back to the exams. For the exam classes, it is essential to complete the heaving loading of revision during the holiday periods. You could do worse than mention Mr Walsh's 12 days of Christmas motto if your son or daughter is in either 3rd or 6th Year. Of the 17 holiday days, 12 should be given over to intense study. And remember, the students are currently spending an 8 hour day (at least) engaged in purposeful work at school. They should be spending at least 6 hours per day working for their chosen study days if they are to realise their ambitions.

Numeracy Strategy

I want to thank you wholeheartedly for taking the time to complete the Numeracy Questionnaire. The number of respondents was truly staggering. In the Senior School 257 students completed the questionnaire and 109 Primary pupils from Grade 1 to Grade 6 completed their version. What is truly impressive is the number of you parents who participated. 149 Senior School families and 50 Primary School parents took the time to complete this survey. 199 families out of a total of 307 families on our mailing list is a quite extraordinary participation rate I am told.

The data is currently being evaluated and analysed by our external consultants. The outcomes will inform our School Improvement Plan for Numeracy. My staff will devote a session on analysing the results during our Training Day on 5 January. I will communicate the results to you all early in the New Year.

ICT Developments

Another item on the agenda for our Training Day is the Tablet initiative.

We have employed the services of Wriggle, a company who specialise in the educational implementation of new technology in schools. Their presentation is entitled “Inspiration” and we hope it will lay the seed-bed of creative ideas for the classroom use of this new technology. The Company Itonic is currently completing the building of the infrastructure that will enable every learning space in the school to access WiFi. Bringing high speed broadband and portable technology into the classroom will revolutionalise elements of the curriculum. It is a journey I want to share with you and in the coming year.

The Table Committee will organise Parent Information Evenings to enable you to participate in this revelation. The PTA's fundraising activities is also making excellent progress and I want to thank Jules, Helen and the new dynamic PTA Committee for all their hard work so far in this academic year. There will be many more events scheduled for 2015 so please keep an eye on the website.

Website Changes

The Finance Committee have, and will continue, to invest heavily in our ICT infrastructure. The pace of change in technology is, as you know, truly staggering. Recent analysis of the hits on our website indicate that 43% of users accessing the pages are doing so from tablets and hand-held devices. When the website was set up, it was not configured to cater for such a method of access. The result: We now need to reconfigure and redesign our web pages. A small Committee chaired by Mr Stewart Bourke of our Board of Management is working with our provider Go2Web on the process. The new website will, it is hoped, be live in Spring 2015. It will be shorter – the current site has too many pages – and completely updated. I will keep you informed as the year progresses.

BT Young Scientist Competition

The first week in January heralds the BT Young Scientist Exhibition and Competition in the RDS. Ms Catherine Tattersall and her Science Department have been working intensely with the terrific students who voluntarily take part in our Young Scientists Clubs. This year, the number of submissions for exhibition has risen exponentially. 2,007 projects were received by the Young Scientist Committee at the RDS and there are only 500 chosen for exhibition. I am delighted to report that 5 of our projects have been chosen – a massive achievement for such a small school. I will let you know of their progress in the next newsletter. All 1st Years will visit the RDS on Friday 9 January. It is worth mentioning that the Grade 6 students will also be having a project exhibited as part of the BT Young Primary Scientist Exhibition. In this way, the Science Department ensure continuity and progression. Please wish all the students every success in the coming weeks.

Mental Health Awareness Week – Monday 23 February to Friday 27 February 2015

There are so many positive aspects about growing up in the 21st Century, it is easy to forget the enormous pressures on young people. In my career, I have seen a massive increase in rates of depression, stress and anxiety among teenagers. We can speculate whether that is a consequence of greater awareness and openness, social networking and the media, or a symptom of the collapse of the elements of the social fabric that used to bind communities together. Whatever the cause, wellness, well-being and developing good mental health has become, rightly, an important part of the education culture of many schools.

In the last week of February, we wish to launch an inaugural Mental Health Awareness Week. Chaired by Yvonne Butler, a past Chair of the PTA and lady who, during her term of office, very successfully introduced a series of talks to parents on well-being issues, we are currently devising an extensive programme of talks, workshops and events.

During the week, we intend to have a Mental Health Survey, a Walk into the Light and end with a “Feel Good Friday Assembly” and evaluation of the week.

The workshops we have in mind will seek to explore issues as diverse and important as Coping with Exam Stress, Mindfulness, Social Skills and Social Media and the Teenage Brain.

All Year Groups in the Secondary School will have the opportunity to get involved and we will have significant student input in the planning of the week.

We have formed an Implementation Committee who will meet for the first time on 5 January 2015. If you are interested in joining or wish to suggest ideas for a speaker/workshop, could I invite you to contact Jenny Ryan at jenny.ryan@sps.ie

This initiative I am sure you will agree is both important and timely. It will I am sure become part of our school calendar in the coming years.

BOM Election

In the New Year, you will have the opportunity to elect a parent representative to the BOM. You will all have received an email outlining this process. Our constitution is designed to ensure that the BOM is continually reviewed and revitalised so that it remains representative of all stakeholders and a dynamic policy-making body. The Board contains Trustee representatives, staff and parent representatives, can co-opt students in its policy-making and of course the Head of School and the Head of the Junior & Intermediate School.

Elections will take place in January and I invite you all to follow the process enthusiastically. I personally value the contribution of the BOM to my decision-making. They are an invaluable support and have **always** the best interests of students in their minds when they meet.

Parking

If anyone is in doubt about the importance of having a robust and strong BOM, then their decision to introduce new parking arrangements on our site on 1 December 2014 should be considered.

I want to thank all of you parents for your consideration and calm acceptance for what I know has been a momentous change in culture.

Sports News

Hockey

Congratulations to Keith O'Hare, 6th Year who was Vice Captain of the Leinster Hockey team who won the Interprovincial Championships in Dublin at the end of November. They defeated Ulster in the last match to take the honours. Congratulations also to Mr. Beattie (Assistant Coach) and Mr. Walsh (Manager).

Seniors had a successful All-Ireland campaign. In spite of losing their first match against hosts Ashton, they fought back to defeat Friends & Campbell College. Unfortunately they just finished 1 point off qualification for the semi-finals. The results placed them 6th overall in Ireland. In the league they have had 2 wins and a loss with games against Wesley and Sandford Park to play. U.12 Boys are undefeated in their first three games in an U.13 league.

U.13's are undefeated in 4 games in their league.

Minors have finished their league campaign with a tally of 6 wins, a draw and a loss. They are awaiting other results to see where they finish

Our 1st Year, Minor & Junior Girls teams are competing well in the Leinster League. They will be hoping to progress to the knock-out stages in the New Year.

Golf

Huge congratulations to AJ Mc Cabe, 3rd Year who has been selected for the Irish U.15 Golf Team. He will represent Ireland in an international in Wales in the New Year.

Volleyball

Our U.16 Volleyball team have made it through to the All-Ireland Quarter Final. The team comprising 3rd & 4th Year Girls are undefeated this season. The team captained by Sophie Hunter are hoping to make it all the way to All –Irelands.

Our 1st Year & 2nd Year Spikeball teams topped their pools in their first blitz hosted by Mercy Coolock. The girls will be looking to progress to Regional & National Finals after Christmas.

Badminton

Our U.19 Girls Badminton Team; Stevie Pitt Lennon (capt), Amy Reynolds, Vicky Chen & Ruth Mullen have qualified through to the semi-final of Leinster Div 2 vs Wesley College. This semi will take place early in the New Year.

Our U.16 team: Caroline O'Reilly (capt), Kim O'Hare, Heather Murphy and Naoise Tobin are on course to progress to the Div 1 semi-final. If they win their last match against Mount Sackville, they will secure their place.

Our U.14 Team; Alessia Osborne, Deeksha Majumdar, Ellie Forrester & Lucia Serra have only played one game against Skerries CC which they won 6-0.

Athletics

Congrats to Tyler Zortman who completed the Dublin City Marathon in October. He was in the top Junior finishers.

Conclusion

It only leaves for me to wish you a very happy Christmas and a prosperous and fruitful New Year. The School is flourishing and continues to develop, year on year, and this process of renewal and regeneration is in no small measure to the support we receive from parents.

On behalf of the staff, the Board of Governors and the Board of Management, have a restful break and see you again on Tuesday 6 January 2015.

Michael Moretta
Head of School