

NEWSLETTER

Sutton Park School



December 2008

Message from Michael Moretta, Head of School

I will begin this Newsletter by offering, on behalf of the entire school community, our heartfelt condolences to Georgia May Lillis and her family at this difficult and distressing time. All our thoughts and prayers are with them. The events of the last week have sent shock waves through the entire community and indeed throughout the peninsula.

I know from conversations with the students, the staff and many of the parents that in such painful circumstances we need to draw strength from each other. Throughout the last week Georgia's close friends and her teachers have illustrated the truth of this statement.

The school has been subdued and quiet, but I have seen so much love and comfort being offered in such a short time that even in the heart of such darkness the special qualities that make Sutton Park such a humane and warm environment have been re-affirmed. We, as a community, made it clear that, as far as is possible, we would make the school as stable and safe as possible by maintaining a sense of order and normality.

Exam week took place as normal, although I would respectfully suggest that this year you should look at exam results and missed papers with sympathy and understanding. We will end the term with our Carol Concert in Howth as normal, and Georgia's friends have suggested we dedicate the service to Celine Cawley's memory. She always attended and loved the music and especially the beautiful singing of the choir.

In the spirit of keeping things normal, please forgive me if I stick to the original structure I had planned for the newsletter.

Staffing Issues

We say goodbye to Ms Willeke Lawlor who is emigrating to Australia in the New Year with her family. Willeke joined our staff as a PE Assistant Teacher and as a supervisor of the Study Hall last year and very quickly has become a valued and respected member of our community. We wish her every success in the future and I am sure she will continue to make an enormous contribution to education in the new world.

Next term we also welcome back Jennifer Campbell who returns to work in the Modern Languages Department after her maternity leave. Jennifer will rejoin many of her classes on her return, but I am happy to say that Ms Kingston who has taken on her workload during her maternity leave will remain on the staff.

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New Reports

You will by this time have received the new computer driven reports and will either be seething with annoyance or impressed by the clarity and sharpness of the new format. I understand the school of thought that derides all technology that produces dull uniformity of reporting, but I would ask you to consider two things before rushing to judgement.

This is our first attempt at computerising the reports and we will be able to refine the statements and add more detail with time. Indeed Form Teachers and AAs still produce written statements on this new format. Secondly, typed text looks smaller and the comments are actually as long as handwritten reports – it is just that they are easier on the eye and certainly easier to read. All the comments were chosen by the teachers and not from a pre-packaged pool of words. I welcome your comments next term and we, as a staff will review the final products when we return.

Refurbishment of The Science Labs Phase 2

On December 11th we began the second phase of refurbishing our science labs. Last summer we completely rebuilt the old physics lab and transformed it into a new Biology Lab. This week we completed the refurbishment of the Chemistry Lab. It looks bright, modern and has a new purpose built chemical storage unit for hazardous chemicals. In the summer we will complete the final phase by refurbishing the third lab – it will become the new Physics lab. In the summer we will also develop the L-Shaped block of classrooms in the Orchard. That will complete the medium term development strategy we embarked on last summer. I will write about future plans in my next Newsletters.

Grease The Musical

“Grease” was a great success. The 5 performances last week really did showcase the enormous range of talent we have in the school. If anything, the shows were better than last years and the professionalism and tightness of the choreography was commented on by everyone I spoke to at the end of the performances. We are lucky to have someone as talented and enthusiastic in charge of our Music Department. Fionnuala sets the bar extraordinarily high and yet always seems to surpass herself with yet another triumph. There are too many people to thank here, but I have taken the liberty of passing on your thanks to all concerned.

Concern Trip To Brussels

Just after the Mid –Term two of our students were selected by Concern to represent this organisation at the EU in Brussels. Ann-Marie O’Driscoll and Louise Moore [both in the 6th Year] were chosen because of their expertise in debating and their reward was to be part of a team lobbying MEPs over their commitments for Third World Aid. The experience, they tell me was absolutely amazing and they saw at first hand the complex and mysterious ways in which decisions do and indeed sometimes do not get made in modern politics. The representative from Concern who organised the visit was so impressed with their performance he personally rang me to express the highest praise for the way both girls conducted themselves. He mentioned their maturity, intelligence and confidence. I must say that when I get lobbying by our 6th Years I also find myself persuaded and inevitably capitulate. Well done

Substance Abuse Policy

As a continuation of our efforts to support you as parents and provide a healthy and safe environment in school I would like to revisit our Substance Abuse Policy. In the same way that we looked again at our Anti-Bullying Policy, I would like to review our original policy in this area. We have not looked at it for 8 years and I do think the issues are too important to ignore. Furthermore we have many new families who are unfamiliar with our stance on these issues. I have massive concerns about some elements of the drinking culture for example and I am sure many of you would welcome some framework we can all operate within. I enclose therefore the existing policy with this newsletter. Jenny Ryan will make arrangements for a Parents Information Evening next year and we will try to get some guest speakers into the school.

Anti-Bullying Week

I sent every family a copy of our revised policy, along with the Child Protection Guidelines set down by the Department of Education. A varied week of activities included a series of seminars organised by a guest speaker from TCD and an Assembly involving all students from Grade 3 to 6th Year in the Secondary School. Most interesting and informative from my point of view was the meeting of parents that took place on the evening of Monday 10th. This information evening was co-ordinated by the head of the Cool Schools Programme – a government sponsored anti-bullying programme being piloted in Dublin. It was clear that many of our parents had concerns about bullying and although the discussion was entirely constructive and productive, it was equally clear that we cannot afford to be complacent on this issue or pretend that we have not had problems in the past. I am pleased that we now have a clear set of agreed procedures that unite all divisions of the school under a common policy. This policy demands intervention by the school at very early levels. Indeed, by communicating to all our families we will be, quite rightly, forced to deal with any incident that arises and record what actions have been agreed.

I would also like to say that it was heartening to see both Chairs of the Governors and the Board of Management in attendance. Mr Quinn and Mr Scott attendance made it clear to everyone that we, as a school, are determined to treat bullying very seriously. I am sure you will all join me in thanking Jenny Ryan for all her hard work in arranging this important week.

Sport

Another super year is taking place within the Sutton Park sports arena. The Senior Girls Hockey Team has just completed a successful tour to London, defeating both Harronians School and Ashford Hockey Club. The Girl's Senior 2 Team are heading their league table whilst all the other teams are competing strongly in their respective competitions.

The Senior Boys maintained their top 10 position in the All Ireland Championships held in Limerick this year. Currently the U13 Boys are on top of their league, while the other boys' teams are working hard and competing at a high standard.

Badminton once again this year is exceedingly popular and successful. No less than 9 teams are currently competing within the Dublin and Leinster Leagues. At present all our teams are progressing very well.

The winter athletics season has started with Cross Country Events taking place and we have had strong representation in all events at this early stage of the calendar.

For such a small school we offer a wide and varied range of sports for all our students.

General Housekeeping Points

I want to make two points that I hope you will not think are impertinent or arrogant. This first concerns parking and driving. This term a number of parents have expressed concern about the way some cars are parked in the morning. We have placed cones on some of the spaces that are most abused, but could I ask you to be aware of fellow drivers in the morning. I have never worked in a school where parental parking habits have not been a source of ire and irritation, often expressed by other parents. I do not think Sutton Park is that bad in this regard, but I have witnessed parents come to blows on occasions so please obey the yellow lines and boxes. While I am on this point I have also received phone calls about the speed of some of the driving on Strand Road and, surprisingly, the offenders were not our students. Many mothers with prams and some students walk along this terribly narrow road and it is very dangerous. Finally, it has come to my attention that some students sometimes drive to school alone on a Provisional Licence. I will certainly not condone such irresponsible behaviour, even if a student tells me that he has parental consent to do so. The consequences following an accident when insurance is completely invalidated does not bear thinking about.

The other point of housekeeping I want to make concerns parents seeing teachers without making an appointment. We have a very open school and I certainly do not want to change the vibrant and lively interaction that takes place in the main foyer and entrance hall every day. That said, sometimes you will want to speak to a teacher or indeed myself. Can I suggest that you make a mutually convenient appointment if you have an issue with the school. The matter is more likely to be resolved if time is made available and everyone has time to think and reflect on the issue. It will certainly be much more productive than wandering around the school searching for someone who could be on their way to class and simply does not have the time to talk to you.

PTA Dates & Upcoming Dates from the Calendar for this Half Term

In response to many of you I have included all the important events in the first half of the Easter term in hard copy form. You will also be pleased to note that the PTA are resurrecting the PTA calendar. It will be sent home via the younger children and placed on the main notice board. The web-site calendar will still be the central source of information, but these changes should give you plenty of warning of Parent / Teacher Meetings in particular.

Parent Teacher Meetings

Parent Teacher Meetings for 1st & 4th Year Seniors will be held on Monday 12th January 2009 from 2-5pm.

Please note that some of the staff take up all 54 students and the queues for English, Geography, Art, Music and Technical Graphics are going to be very long. Can I suggest that you avoid these subjects unless you have a particular problem or make a separate appointment to see the teachers.

Dates for Young Scientist Competition

The 2009 Young Scientist Competition at the RDS will be held from 6th - 10th January 2009.

January Return Dates

All students return from the Christmas Holidays on Thursday 8th January 2009.

Mid Term

Mid Term break is from Monday 16th to Friday 20th February 2009.

ECIS

ECIS Visit 9th March – 13th March. We have decided to make Friday 13th a Half Day in order to allow the ECIS team to feed back to the entire staff. I hope this does not cause you too much inconvenience, but it really is the only way we can think of to manage the feedback session.

The day before term starts we have a Staff Day and I have arranged for the self-study committees to meet during this time. I want to thank in advance all parents who volunteered to attend. I will keep you up to date about ECIS in future newsletters.

Conclusion

I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year on behalf of all the Staff at Sutton Park School.

Intermediate School



Message from Liam Burns, Intermediate School Principal

As the end of the Autumn Term rapidly approaches I would like to take a few moments to reflect on some of the highlights of this first term.

Belfast Visitors

We recently welcomed children and teachers from Belfast to Sutton Park, where we hosted four football matches mainly comprising our grade 4 and 5 boys and girls. Some of our Grade 6 children, who were not involved in our previous matches, also had the opportunity to represent the school on this occasion.

While the winning of games is not always of great importance our children were thrilled to have been victorious in both matches involving the girls and the boys can hold their heads high having won the Grade 5 match and drawn the Grade 4 game. I was particularly pleased that we had so many children taking part in their first ever football match and I would hope that this will encourage them further to seek opportunities to get involved in similar activities outside of school. Well done to all and a big thank you to the many parents who came along to support our children.

Wednesday Clubs

Our Wednesday Clubs programme has been very well received this year. Favourite activities appear to be cooking, taekwondo, gaelic football, basketball and, as ever, computers. Children will have an opportunity to change their clubs in term two, so hopefully everyone will enjoy a wide range of experiences through our clubs provision. Our club arrangements have also removed the need to close Intermediate School for staff meetings and I am pleased to report that this will continue to be the case going forward.

Homework Club

Our homework club is one of our outstanding successes this year. It is incredibly well attended and of great benefit to the children involved. They work with a great degree of independence and benefit from a quiet learning environment. While I assist the children in some instances the work they produce is generally their own and I would ask you check your child's work for accuracy and presentation before signing their journal each evening.

If your child has not been availing of the Homework Club please be assured that they are most welcome at any time. Simply make a note in their journals if you would like them to stay on any given day. The Homework Club runs from 3.30 -4.45 Monday to Thursday. If you collect your child from the Club I would ask that, during these winter nights, they are collected at reception. If your child normally meets you at the school entrance please advise them that, in the event of you running late, they should return immediately to the reception area where they can wait until your arrival.

Curriculum Development and Pupil Assessment

It has been my pleasure to work with a most professional, dedicated team of teachers this year. The work they do in the classroom is the visible part of their contribution and they do a wonderful job in creating a warm, supportive learning environment for our children. However they have done an extraordinary amount of work behind the scenes in terms of curriculum development where they have totally redrafted our Maths programme and are now preparing to do the same to our English and Science programmes in terms two and three. We are also working on drafting an assessment policy and pupil profiles, the details of which shall be made available in a meeting early in the third term. The teachers have also been most receptive to initiatives intended to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom and I thank them for their outstanding work and support in this first term.

Anti Bullying Week

During this time our new Anti- Bullying Policy was launched and this issue was addressed in all classes throughout the school. I am confident that, through continued monitoring and implementation of our policy we can ensure that Sutton Park remains a place where all are respected and included fully in the life of the school.

School Outings

The children have enjoyed a couple of trips this month and I would firstly like to congratulate them on their wonderful behaviour on both occasions. It is always satisfying to receive compliments from others and both at the ice skating and at the Helix pantomime our children were commended for the manner in which they conducted themselves. Well done everybody!

The ice skating in Dundalk was a great success and our children felt it was a marked improvement on the previous venue. We had our usual quota of bumps and bruises but thankfully all returned safely and in one piece.

Similarly, the Helix production of Sleeping Beauty was very popular and a welcome distraction from our own pantomime preparations. "Panto Pandemonium" took to the stage on Friday 19th December and I am sure you will agree it was a great success. It was nice to see all Intermediate School children on stage taking part in our play.

Baldoyle Hospital Collection

On Thursday 18th December four children from Grade 6 accompanied me to Baldoyle Hospital where we handed over 7 CD players and 3 portable photo printers for use in their classrooms. These items were requested by the staff in the school and, through your outstanding generosity, we were able to provide many more items than they had anticipated. On behalf of the Baldoyle Hospital community I extend a massive "Thank you" for your kindness.

Staffing

Ms O'Brien our Grade 5 teacher goes on maternity leave at the end of this current term and we wish her the best of luck and thank her for her great work with her class. I am delighted to report that we have appointed a new teacher who will teach the class from January until the end of the current academic year. Her name is Miss Gilleran and she originally hails from Roscommon. She attained her Post Graduate Certificate in Primary Education in England and is in her second year of teaching in London. We look forward to her joining our staff in the new year.

Dates for Spring Term

Thursday 8th January School reopens (Full day)

Friday 13th February - North Dublin Arts Festival

Monday – Friday 16th – 20th February Mid-Term break

Finally, may I take this opportunity to wish you all a happy and peaceful Christmas and thank you for all of your support this year.

Liam Burns

INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Junior School



Message from Geraldine McGuire, Junior School Principal

We returned from the half term break to celebrate the European Day of Healthy Eating with the children engaging in three workshops; Sensory Testing, Ricotta cheese making and Healthy Lunch Box Preparation. The tutors from The Kitchen in the Castle, the new cookery school based in Howth Castle were the tutors in the classroom. The children had a very enjoyable learning experience and I would like to thank Hazel, Christina and Edwina, the tutors.

Anti-Bullying Week

During the week beginning Monday, November 10th, all classes in the Junior School spent some time each day working around the theme of 'Anti-Bullying'. We stressed the positive aspects of friendship and emphasised the need to tell someone if they are being bullied. All teachers used drama, poetry and prose to teach the children that bullying is never acceptable. At the Friday assembly the classes recited poems and sang songs they had learned during the week and many spoke of their understanding of the term, 'Bullying' and the importance of friendship.

Book Fair

The Book Fair organised by the librarians, Valerie and Trina was a great success and I would like to thank those of you who donated books to the library, they will be much appreciated.

The children of two classes entered a competition to design a bookcover. I am delighted that between the two classes they managed to produce eight prize winners; Chiara O'Mahony, Chloe Burdon and Thea Edwards from Grade 1, Naoise Tobin, Taylor Gripenrog, Eve Woodham-Greene, Emily Holmes and Eline de Vries from Grade 3. Congratulations to each of them.

Curriculum Enrichment Programme

The Curriculum Enrichment Programme introduced this year which takes place on a Wednesday afternoon has proven to be a huge success. In the last half term we have visited museums, been visited by the lifeboatmen of Howth and enjoyed ice-skating in Drogheda. The cookery classes continued and I do hope that you are seeing the evidence of the acquired skills in your homes. There are more exciting events planned for next term and I hope to have the calendar of events on the school web site before the end of this term. I would like to thank all parents who have helped us on our excursions and I must thank especially all those involved in organising the cookery classes. The 'lifeboat' cake made by Mrs Economos raised €155 for the RNLI.

Your generosity continues. We have given € 715 to the Chimteka Children's Support, an organisation which we have supported for the last few years and which gives direct help to the children of Chimteka in Malawi. We collected €155 for the RNLI. With your help the children of Junior Infants, Senior Infants and Grade 1 have donated 60 beautifully wrapped children's Christmas presents for the St Vincent de Paul Society and the children of Grades 2 & 3 have provided the L'Arche community of Baldoyle with a DVD player, a micro-wave and a selection of board games.

Conclusion

The term ended with a wonderful Christmas Concert. Junior and Senior Infants presented Robin's Christmas Singalong, Grade 1 presented Cinderfella and the pupils of Grades 2 & 3 presented Pinocchio.

I would like to take this opportunity to praise the teachers for the great work done over the course of the term.

I would like to thank all parents for your ongoing support in all our endeavours, in and out of school.

On behalf of all the teaching staff I would like to wish you a very Happy Christmas.

Geraldine McGuire
JUNIOR SCHOOL PRINCIPAL



**Merry Christmas and a
Happy & Peaceful New Year
From the Staff of Sutton Park School**