

NEWSLETTER

Sutton Park School



October 2007

Message From Mr Michael Moretta Head of School

This term seems to have absolutely flown by. I suppose it is no surprise when one considers the range and volume of activities that have filled these past nine weeks. In this newsletter I want to give you all a flavour of some of the most significant events that have taken place so far this term as well as passing on some important information regarding exams and reports. I also want to highlight some of the key dates that are rapidly approaching in the next half of the term. However, I would like to begin by giving you a detailed analysis of last year's leaving certificate results. Since this is the season of league tables I want to give you the kind of detail that is usually missing in the very raw data that is published in the newspapers.

Last Year's Leaving Certificate Results

I suppose a key performance indicator of good assessment and learning in any school is the Leaving Certificate results. As I explained in late August, I felt that our results this year were very impressive. I want to remind you of these before I begin a section on internal reports, assessment and examinations. The table that follows gives you a comparison of our headline figures with the national average.

Points	SPS	National
500+	18 %	9 %
400+	51 %	30 %
300+	80 %	55 %

As you can see [and as should be expected] we scored significantly higher than the national average in all three categories. Our average points score were 394, compared with a national average of 307. To achieve double the national average at 500+ points is extremely impressive, as is the fact that over 50% of the cohort gained 400+ points. Indeed, this kind of standard probably accounts for the fact that 30% of the 6th Year secured college places at Trinity this year.

The figure that will soon appear in the Sunday Times League Tables will be that 66.6% of our 6th Year students gained places in the major Irish Universities [last year the figure was 62%]. It should be remembered that this percentage does not include the destinations of International students. Clearly, were these students to be included, the figure would be significantly higher.

Much more impressive than the percentage of home based students gaining places in Irish Universities to my mind is the fact that of 289 papers that were sat this summer, 287 were passes, giving us a pass rate of 99%. As you know, we have a wide range of ability in the school and I am particularly proud that the staff and the students produced a pass rate that means **all** of our students had a sound pathway to further study and good employment options.

Inside this issue:

Message From
Head of School

Last Year's Leaving Cert
Results

Internal Assessments &
Examinations

Internal Examinations

The School Production

The All Ireland Hockey
Championships

Election of The Parent
Representative To The
Board of Management

50th Anniversary
Celebrations

Open Evening

Last Year's Leaving Certificate Results Con't..

Two other statistics are worth mentioning. I am sure many of you read about the relatively low number of students taking Maths at Higher Level in the Leaving Certificate nationally – only about 7,000 out of a possible 50,000 students. I am happy to report that the percentage taking Maths at this level in Sutton Park was 23%, against a national figure of 14%. All students taking maths at this level achieved a C or higher against a national figure of only 17%.

Furthermore, it is also sometimes mentioned that the international students hold back the learning of others; this does not seem to be the case at Sutton Park. Two of our international students gained 500+ points this year and all international students in the 6th Year passed all their papers. In my experience these students are extremely ambitious and require high points scores to matriculate and go onto third level courses all over the world.

Internal Assessments and Examinations

I begin with these figures because it is important to see the actual outcomes at the end of the school cycle. Whatever form your son or daughter is in at the moment, we are working towards giving all students in the school the opportunity to perform to their very best. I also believe that we need a positive internal assessment structures to enable every student to measure their progression and maximise their potential. I have, this year, changed the internal assessment structures in an attempt to create a positive learning platform. Instead of producing monthly or bi-monthly reports that focused largely on effort grades, I have asked the staff to provide you with a more considered assessment grade as well as the traditional effort mark. By this I mean giving a grade that reflects a complex combination of achievement – a kind of continuous assessment grade. The A – E grades on this interim report represent the assessment of a range of core skills covered this term.

At this stage of the year, you as parents, and your sons and daughters as students, want an accurate assessment of the standard they have attained in the first 9 weeks of the school year. You also require, I suspect, some guidance indicating areas for improvement and ways forward. There is little point at this stage of the year of issuing a definitive grade that attempts to capture the final “end of year grade”. We still have a great deal of time left and, in any case, the students are, for the most part, having to deal with new material or encountering new concepts. I know, for instance, that my English students are still learning how to write complex essays and how to shape their ideas. I want to assess their learning, but I also want to present them with ways to improve. In such circumstances then it is sometimes inappropriate to award the top marks. Therefore, if your daughter receives a B in this interim report, it does not mean that this grade will be her final grade. It is merely an indication of where they are at the moment.

We have Parent/Teacher meetings for all Year groups immediately after the mid term, and I feel it would be very useful if you bring the report along with you to discuss precise areas for development directly with the teachers. Let me remind you of the dates of these now:-

Tuesday, 6th November 2007 for 1st & 2nd Year. Meetings begin 2 - 5 pm

Wednesday, 14th November 2007 for 3rd & 4th Year. Meetings begin 2 - 5 pm

Wednesday, 23rd November 2007 for 5th & 6th Year. Meetings begin 2 - 5 pm

It is a truism that success in exams is often linked to good mentoring. As you know, we have Form Teachers and Academic Advisors assigned to every student in the school. I have asked these mentors to write a brief overview report, commenting on the entire range of subjects and highlighting areas for development. We can use this information to put together strategies for improvement in the second half of the term.

I hope you find this method of reporting constructive and informative. We all learn incrementally, and there is enough pressure in school without feeling that every mark needs to be an A or a B at this stage. We learn through pinpointing our mistakes as much as through our successes. If you have any significant concerns please do not hesitate to speak to me during the Parent/Teacher meetings or, if you would rather, give me a call and make a separate appointment.

I am afraid that I am unable to send out the 4th year Reports with this letter. We have had to customise our existing database in order to add the teacher amendments electronically. Unfortunately, we have had some difficulties with our 4th year database and I have been unable to address the problems before the mid term break. I apologise for the delay, but all 4th year reports will be sent out immediately when we return from the mid term break.

Internal Examinations

The Christmas exams take place during the week of December 10th - 14th. All students will receive revision topics for these exams after half term. These exams are designed to assess how much the students have learned and their ability to recall information under timed conditions. This year I have decided to shorten the actual exam period and, rather than extend the exams right up to the end of term, I have left the last week for exam evaluation. I think it really important that the teachers go through the papers while they are fresh and current. After Christmas, it is difficult to recall the papers and this feedback and evaluation process will, I am sure, prove to be a constructive use of the final days of the term.

I have also set aside Monday 7th January [our Staff day] as an examination retake session. I feel it important that students get the chance to resit papers either because they failed to prepare themselves sufficiently, or because they misunderstood key elements. Retaking a paper can shift a negative grade into a positive experience, where the student significantly improves, having learned from their errors.

A reminder about the Mock Exams. These take place from the 18th to the 29th February for the 3rd and 6th Years.

The School Production

Those of you lucky enough to attend one of the four sold out nights of High School will understand exactly what I mean when you read this section. I really have not seen a school production quite this professional for many years. The quality of the choreography, the standard of the singing and the acting and the sheer energy were all astounding. What impressed me particularly was the interaction between the different age groups. Large numbers of first, second and fifth years joined the fourth year in this performance. The mutual support and the self-evident joy of the experience will live long in their memories. I hope to be able to offer a drama/dance club to both the junior and secondary students in the new year, but in the meantime I am sure you will join me in thanking all the staff, parents and of course the cast. Particular thanks go to Mrs Howard, Mrs Stalley and Mr Jones; without their hard work and commitment a show of this quality would not have been possible.

The All Ireland Hockey Championships

On Wednesday 24th October Sutton Park School hosted the opening game of this prestigious tournament. I am very glad to report that we won the first match and had a very creditable set of performances throughout the rest of the tournament. One win, a draw and two defeats at this level represents an impressive achievement and the team spirit displayed by all was a joy to see. Hockey continues to develop at a great pace in the school. It should be remembered that we only entered this competition three years ago.

Hosting such important occasions are vital rites of passage and chart the enormous progress hockey has made at Sutton Park over the last ten years. This is in no small measure to the commitment and dedication of our games staff. I know exactly how much work went into organising this high profile event, but it has to be said that our staff constantly put in enormous hours to bring out the very best in both the girls and boys teams. Many thanks then to Mr Walsh, Mr Stewart, Mr Scully and Ms O'Neill for the considerable work they put in to running our teams. I would also, once again, like to thank Mr Jones who seems to straddle so many of the extra-curricular activities in the school.

What particularly gives me pleasure is to see so many boys and girls representing their school at competitive sport. Such levels of participation are not always possible in larger schools where competition for places is fierce and the opportunity to represent your school is confined to the very few. Here, a wide range of students get the chance to experience high level competitive hockey and [indeed basketball and badminton]. Such experiences lay the foundations for, hopefully, many other opportunities to play the sport throughout their lives.

Election of a Parent Representative to the Board of Management

I enclose a letter from our Chair of the Board of Management inviting parents to stand for this important position. One of the aspects of Sutton Park I think truly special is the willingness of the parent body to give selflessly of their time and the active partnership we have between parents and the staff. If you are interested in becoming involved in the management of the school this role will give you an opportunity to make a significant contribution.

50th Anniversary Celebrations

Once again I am sure you would all like to join me in thanking this hardworking committee under the Chair of Michelle Ridge-way for all their hard work in preparing the school for these important celebrations. There are still tickets available for all the events, but I have to warn you they are selling out quickly.

Open Evening

It was a real pleasure to see so many of you attend our Open Evening at the end of last half term. It was a very special occasion and I have to say there was a real buzz and sense of excitement around the school. I must pass on to you what so many outside visitors and prospective parents said to me during the evening. The students who helped man each exhibition and the guides were constantly praised for their maturity, manners and their confidence. Time after time I was told that the students were impressive, articulate and a real selling point for the school. Well done to all the students involved. The evening was a complete success and we certainly significantly raised the school's profile.

