

Fife Education Authority

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Dear Parent,

Newsletter - Autumn 1988

The first newsletter of the session indicates that school is already eight weeks away from its starting point in August and I am glad to say that it is not just the Indian Summer of fine weather which has made it such a good start. At the beginning the attention of staff and senior pupils is immediately focused on the results. Once again the school's usual high standards of performance were maintained. At 'O' Grade 74.1% of those presented gained passes in Bands 1-3 and at Higher Grade the equivalent figure for A - C passes was 76.6%, with a good proportion of these in the top grade in each case. Certificate of Sixth Year Studies results, where pupils have a much greater responsibility for their own learning, were also extremely creditable. However, one unexpected feature of the results has only recently emerged. The prize given by the Royal Society of Chemistry to the candidate who gained the highest marks in Scotland for Higher Chemistry has been awarded to Helen McGill. Two of the awards given by the Institute of Physics to the eight pupils from Scottish schools who scored top marks in Higher Physics come to Madras College. The winners are Stephen Vysny and Joanna Gascoigne. They and Helen are to be congratulated on an outstanding achievement which brings credit to them and to their teachers. At the other end of the age range, but in its own way no less meritorious, is the National Bible Society prize won by William Froude, Lorraine McGilly and Susan McLean for a project on Eric Liddell, the Olympic athlete. At the time of the competition they were in First Year and it was very much a team effort, since it depended on the help of the whole class. The prize, a cassette recorder, was handed over at the Glasgow Garden Festival.

The publication of the HMI Report at the beginning of September put an end to many months of strain and speculation. Although the Inspectors are perhaps no longer the awesome figures they once were in the days when they could make or break professional reputations, an HMI visit and the subsequent fallout created by their report still has an impact which it is difficult for those not directly involved to appreciate. It was, therefore, a considerable relief to find that the report was generally favourable and although various criticisms and suggestions were made, many of these were, as the Inspectors recognised, about points which were already being tackled by the school. Since the report certainly provides reassurance for anyone who was doubtful about the quality of the education being provided in Madras College, it is unfortunate that the full flavour of the report was not conveyed by the coverage in the local press which tended merely to highlight the already wellknown difficulties over the Library. Any parents who wish to read the full text for themselves are very welcome to do so, since there is a plentiful supply of copies available on request from the offices in both buildings. However, for those who do not want so much detail, some extracts, which are naturally my own rather biased selection, are attached as an appendix.

Even/

Even at this early stage, planning for next session has already begun. The main thrust of this at the moment is concerned with the preparations for entering the Government's Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative, as one of the ten schools which will be involved from August, 1989 in the second phase of the Regional programme for the introduction of TVEI. This will put a compulsory technological element into the courses of all S3/S4 pupils and will mean some timetable readjustments, although it is hoped to achieve this without restricting subject choices. Pupils will still be able to choose SCE subjects from seven columns as at present, (although Standard Grade will have replaced Ordinary Grade in most cases) and even the extra TVEI column will offer certification by means of SCOTVEC modules. The trend in pupil numbers is always of interest at this time of year. The roll continues to drop slowly. The present total is 1539 which makes the school slightly larger than expected, mainly because of an increase in the number returning to S5/6. The largest year group is S3 with 345 pupils. At the opposite ends of the school there are 277 pupils in S1 and 137 in S6. The school is fortunate in being fully staffed in all departments, but with the official staff complement of 110.8 there is little leeway to meet the demands made by absence and in-service training and even in the short space of 8 weeks we are indebted to the supply staff who are already filling the gaps.

For one reason or another the three Social Subjects departments have all lost their Principal Teachers in the course of the term, albeit temporarily. Mr. Keegans has been seconded to act as National Development Officer for Modern Studies. His duties in school are being undertaken by Mr. Barclay. Mr. Scott, the other Assistant Principal, assumes responsibility for Geography in the absence of Dr. Soulsby, to whom we send our good wishes for a rapid improvement in her health. By attending the Olympic Games in Seoul as one of the British hockey umpires, Miss Robertson has perhaps been making history instead of just teaching it. With both the existing A.P.Ts managing departments, their duties have also had to be covered by acting posts which have been very capably filled by Mrs. Barclay and Mrs. Dixon. In one way, this upward mobility, which is nowadays all too rare in the teaching profession, is a good thing, since it provides a welcome opportunity for several younger members of staff to gain valuable experience and prove their undoubted worth. Newcomers, whom we welcome to the school, are Mr. Kay who joins the Technical Department and Miss Carol Farr from Philadelphia U.S.A. who is on a year's exchange with Mrs. Anderson of the Home Economics Department. As usual, the Modern Languages Department has the benefit of two foreign assistants. Fraulein Ramirez joins Mile. Andrieu who stays with us for a second year. However, the greatest change and the greatest loss is the recently announced appointment of Mr. Lochhead as Principal Teacher of Mathematics at Bell Baxter High School. We congratulate him on this thoroughly well deserved promotion and gratefully acknowledge the immense contribution he has made not only to the teaching of his subject, especially in the development of the new Standard Grade courses, but also to the life of the school through his involvement in Debating and through his fondness for all things Scottish, which has made school Burns Suppers such uniquely memorable occasions.

Activities

Music is still in the process of tuning up, although the department provided pipers for the Lawhead Primary School's Summer Fayre and more recently gave a successful concert in the Town Hall for the Townswomens' Guild. This is merely the start of an ambitious and varied programme of musical events in school and in the community which, it is hoped, will culminate in a visit to Norway by the senior choir at the end of May.

On/

On the sporting side the fixture lists for hockey, rugby and football are fuller than they have been for some time and it is good to see pitches at Station Park and Kilrymont Road in regular use on Saturday mornings once again. However, it is too early in the season to make any significant comment on results. Several of our hockey players have distinguished themselves by being selected for Midlands District squads. At over-16 ,places have been gained by Kandy Mitchell and Susan Morris, while under-16 places go to Hilary Blair, Fiona Cameron, Sally Mitchell and Anne Rutherford.

Several footballers have attended Regional trials with Paul Martin and Gary Thomson both enjoying some success in representative games at the under-16 level. In swimming,Edward Brex represents Fife in the breast stroke and the front crawl at the Scottish Schools National Gala in November. In golf, the Senior Boys' Team Philip Lawrie, Steven Simpson, Ian Landsburgh and Mark Brown won the Golf Foundations Regional Team Championship and qualify for the British national finals at Barassie in March. The team will shortly be taking part in the Fife Schools' Team and Individual Championships at Crail. The school's own golf competitions have now completed all their various phases and results are - Senior Boys' stroke play - Ian Landsburgh, match play - Ian Landsburgh; runners-up - Philip Lawrie and Steven Simpson - Intermediate Boys'stroke play - Michael Anderson; runner up Ross Ciesla; match play - Ross Ciesla; runner up Fraser Dowie. Junior Boys' stroke play - David Crichton; match play - Ross Duncan; runner up in both events -Kevin Liddle. In the girls' events the Senior Championship was won by Elizabeth Brown and the Junior by Emily Thomson. Dates for Athletics have been awarded to Neil Greig, Lynne Alexander, Kandy Mitchell, Jackie Paul, Jonathan Gall. Although the junior cross-country club has been in training since the start of session, the season is just beginning with the first big event, the Fife Schools Road Relay, taking place at the end of this month. The outings of the Hill Walking Club have been well attended and members have enjoyed days in Glen Doll, Glen Lyon and Glenshee and on Ben More. The winter will be spent on indoor training and preparations for this summer's expedition to the Alps. As far as other trips abroad are concerned, the Modern Studies visit to Russia succeeded in overcoming the difficulties which beset it and provided all who took part with a memorable and enjoyable experience. Next to leave these shores are 31 pupils and 5 staff from the History department who will spend the October week visiting First World War Battlefields. Future trips to Norway and the Alps have already been mentioned and at least two others are in the planning stage. Further details will emerge in due course. Madras pupils are very lucky indeed in having these opportunities available to them and in having teachers who are prepared to give up time and effort to make them possible.

Parent Teacher's Association

The year's programme began with interesting and worthwhile evening in the Home Economics Department in which pupils from S2, S3 and S5 not only demonstrated their culinary skills but also some of the new approaches to the teaching of the subject. While the meeting was well attended, the number of parents present was still relatively small, considering the size of the school and the increasing emphasis on parental involvement. It would be welcome to see even more parents taking an active part in P.T.A. activities. The subject of the next meeting on Monday, 7th November is Madras on the Move when pupils will use films, slides and other displays to illustrate their experiences on foreign trips and other visits.

Dates/

Dates of holidays and forthcoming events are given below. Please note that pupils do not attend school on 1st and 2nd November which are In-Service Training days for staff. I wish all staff, pupils and parents a pleasant autumn break.

Yours sincerely,



Rector

Forthcoming Events

School Holidays

The school re-opens for pupils on Monday, 24th October, 1988

Christmas Holiday Thursday, 22nd December, 1988 to Friday,
6th January, 1989

(all dates inclusive)

In-Service Days Tuesday, 1st November and Wednesday 2nd November, 1988

PTA Meeting Monday, 7th November, 1988

S2 Examinations Thursday, 3rd November to Wednesday, 9th November, 1988

S4/5/6 Prelim. Examinations Monday, 14th November to Friday, 2nd December, 1988

Christmas Concert Monday, 19th December, 1988

Extracts from HMI Report

The Inspection - The inspection covered the work of all departments together with the arrangements made for pupils with learning difficulties and special educational needs, and for pupil care and guidance. In addition, other aspects which were inspected included the organisation and management of the school, its accommodation, resources and library.

Accommodation - The buildings were clean, tidy and free from litter, reflecting a good standard of maintenance by the Authority and janitorial staff and a highly developed sense of responsibility and care by the pupils and teaching staff.

There were difficulties attendant upon the school being housed on two separated sites which were so far apart, especially as it was necessary to split S3 and S4, stages at which continuity of teaching was highly desirable. The school had coped with the consequent problems and to a very great extent had ensured effective use of the facilities at its disposal.

Resources Overall the provision of textbooks, stationery, teaching materials and equipment was good. In a number of departments staff had supplemented nationally and commercially produced teaching materials by the production of a range of course units and resources of their own devising.

Community Links An important link was that forged by the school's music department which regularly undertook an extensive programme of extra-curricular activity and involvement in community life. Concerts had raised funds for charity, had provided entertainment at social functions and the choirs and instrumentalists had contributed to religious services in the town and beyond.

Aims - The school's prospectus contained a very detailed statement of aims based upon three principles, the school as a place for learning, the school as a caring environment and the school as an integral part of the community. The school was striving to put its aims into practice through its high expectations of its pupils, through developing and providing courses which catered for all levels of ability, through responding through its guidance system to the needs of individual pupils and through encouraging its pupils to take an interest in and work in the community. The general demeanour and learning achievements of the pupils attested to the school's success in meeting these laudable aims.

S1 and S2 - The majority of subject courses in S1 and S2 were well planned and reflected current curricular developments and practices. A higher than average number of teachers from the school had been involved in various national subject committees and curriculum development groups in recent years, and the experiences so gained had been of distinct advantage in the development of courses in S1 and S2.

S3 & 4 - The planning of courses at this stage was generally good and the majority of subject departments had devoted considerable effort to drawing up schemes of work. Levels of attainment among the pupils in many of the courses leading to SCE presentation were high and were reflected in the very commendable results in the examinations at Ordinary Grade. In the courses which did not lead to external certification there was also good work.

S5 & 6 - Courses in S5 & S6 attracted many able pupils and their work in many departments was of high quality. These generally high levels of pupil attainment were frequently matched by careful and well organised teaching.

In the majority of subjects offered at Higher Grade the proportion of the year group being presented for the examination was more than one and half times the national average. Pass rates of those presented were very high and the proportion of passes in the top band in several subjects, compared very favourable with that in schools which have a selective intake.

Well planned courses had been devised to lead to the Certificate of Sixth Year Studies and most of the major departments presented candidates. In most courses the close guidance of the Higher courses had been relaxed and pupils were encouraged to express their opinions and justify their points of view. They were able to talk with confidence and knowledge about what they were doing. The school encouraged these pupils to work hard and to develop responsible attitudes to study; they, in their turn, impressed by their self confidence and their degree of preparedness for tertiary education.

Learning Support - Overall, the school is commended for the beginnings made in learning support. The positive attitudes, sound calibre and commitment of the learning support staff will provide a good foundation for the further development of provision.

Department of Special Education - In both primary and secondary classes, the standards of work were satisfactory and the relationships between staff and pupils were open and friendly.

Guidance - A review of guidance some three years previously and the progress already made in establishing a new system had gone a long way towards achieving the aims of the school as a caring environment. A well coordinated system of management led by the Depute Rector ensured effective communication.

Social Education - There was a well planned programme for pupils in S3 and S4 in which the careers officer played a significant part. There was, however, no programme of social education for S5 pupils and although the programme of activities for S6 contained a number of interesting features it seemed too heavily biased towards preparation for university education. There was a need, already recognised by the school, to develop a properly structured programme of careers and social education from S3 to S6. In doing so the bias towards university entrance should be countered by more attention to advice on the entry to further education colleges, commerce and industry. Attention should also be paid to the timing and extension of work experience opportunities and the further development of the commendable involvement in projects such as Challenge for Industry and the Young Enterprise Programme.

Pupils - This was a well disciplined school where pupils were open and communicative and where senior pupils enjoyed a mature relationship with their teachers. Sixth Year pupils in the South Street building were given the opportunity to play a part in the running of the school through membership of a number of committees concerned with matters such as the library and the organisation of social and fund raising events. Senior pupils showed by their courtesy and maturity that they had much to contribute and the school should consider how they might be more fully and responsibly involved in the life of the school and in the community. In the Kilrymont Road building, third year "prefects" played an important part in making contact with first year pupils, in running the tuckshop and in supervising behaviour generally.

Informal Curriculum - The school maintained an extensive programme of activities designed to appeal to a wide range of interests. In order to make it possible for pupils with travel commitments to take part in the programme, several of the clubs and societies met during lunch breaks. Musical, outdoor and sports activities comprised a substantial part of the programme which included drama, chess, bridge, adventure games, debating, computing and crafts. The physical education department made a very significant contribution to the informal curriculum through fielding a large number of teams each weekend in a variety of sports and running an extensive programme of inter-house activities. The music department was responsible for a thriving school orchestra, junior and senior choir groups, various instrumental ensembles and senior and junior choirs. There was also an active mathematics club. Pupils contributed to a monthly newspaper which was edited and produced by sixth formers.

Management of the school - A notable feature of management and policy making in this school was the effort made to ensure that there was the fullest possible participation of teaching staff in the process. Considerable effort had been made to effect close links between the school's two sites, ensuring that all members of teaching staff had experience of working with a full range of year groups. The educational advantages were obvious, although it involved a high volume of staff travel and a complex system of timetabling. The evidence of the inspection was that the timetabling system devised by the school was operating with some success and considerably reduced the problems of the split site.

The majority of subject departments in the school were well managed in relation to the planning and organisation of courses and the deployment of resources. Good use was made, overall, of the time set aside for departmental meetings to enable staff to deal with matters related to the teaching of their subject. Many of the principal teachers and assistant principal teachers were very effective in monitoring the work carried out in their departments and in ensuring the implementation of subject policies. Commendation was due to the school for several managerial and curricular changes which had recently been made.

The pupils of Madras College impressed by their openness and willingness to communicate; the staff by their loyalty and commitment.