

Dear Parent,

Newsletter - Christmas 1987

The days and week since October have slipped away, unnoticed perhaps but by no means uneventful, and it is difficult to realise that Christmas is almost upon us.

Much steady work has been done by staff and pupils. The new Standard Grade courses have been further developed through in-service training days and the regular programme of staff meetings on Tuesday afternoons. Prelim exams have been sat and UCCA forms completed. The prospectus is undergoing its annual revision and the staffing, timetabling and course choices for next session are already beginning to take shape.

However, it is clear that schools will not be left to get on with the job in peace, since the politicians' interest in education remains undiminished. Discussion of the Forsyth proposals for School Boards dominated the early part of term. The comments submitted by the School Council and by the PTA show that parents locally, as nationally, favour more information and greater involvement, but are sceptical about the value and the practicality of total control. School Boards will undoubtedly come but unless the consultation process is a nonsense, the clearly expressed views of parents may lead to a toning down of more extreme parts of the proposals and produce a final outcome which is at least more realistic and possibly even beneficial. It has been gratifying and encouraging to receive so much support from parents on the fundamental professional issues raised by the Forsyth proposals. In the last fortnight a less publicised set of Government proposals on Curriculum and Assessment suggest that Scotland may not entirely escape the moves, which are already apparent in England, towards greater control of these aspects of education.

At a purely local level the proposals to reverse the traffic flow in St. Andrews will have implications for the school, since about half the school's total population are bus travellers. It is the 350 pupils in that category at South Street who are likely to be most directly affected by the proposed changes, since they would be forced to cross South Street to get to and from their buses. This apparently simple solution appears to be ruled out for reasons of safety. Certainly, personal experience over many years of the enormous problems of supervision created by the similar situation in Cupar, which is sometimes quoted as a parallel, make it easy to see why the Regional authorities do not view this idea with favour. Another possibility which has been mentioned is the removal of the College lawn, or part of it, to create a turning circle for the buses. If I may express a personal view which I believe many would share, any solution involving the lawn could only be detrimental to the amenity of the school and the town. The idea presently being canvassed is for the buses to use Queens Gardens and although this is perhaps better from the point of view of safety, there are other reasons why it too is far from ideal. It is to be hoped that a solution can be found which allows the new traffic plan to be implemented without detriment to the appearance of the school or the safety of its pupils.

The subject of buses leads me to express the concern which staff and parents share about the problems of behaviour on buses. One wonders what sort of group dynamic operates to make children, who as individuals are sensible and responsible, behave on the buses in a way that is often foolish and sometimes downright dangerous. It is effectively impossible for either parents or teachers to exercise any real control over situations which develop half-way between school and home. However, if we are told in time, there is usually some action that can be taken. I am thinking in particular of one recent incident on a bus which built up over several days, but was unfortunately not reported until actual harm had been caused. Parents sometimes hear about incidents which pupils are understandably reluctant to report at school. If you do happen to hear about nonsense on the bus which seems to be potentially dangerous, I would ask you to let us know straightaway so that we can at least try to identify the troublemakers and defuse the situation before it gets out of hand.

There is little staff news to record. As mentioned in the last newsletter, Mr. Reilly, Principal Teacher of Physics, who is retiring on health grounds, left us in September. Unfortunately, however, there has been a delay in the appointment of his successor, because the post had to be re-advertised. A shortage of applicants for posts at this level, which seem to be proving unattractive, is a difficulty which is being encountered nationwide. However, it is hoped that an appointment will be made early in the new term. Also in the Physics department Mrs. D. Lindsay is leaving for the private sector with our thanks for her contribution to the life and work of the school and our good wishes for the future. Mr. Alan Clark returns to New Zealand at the end of his year's exchange. He has made his mark as a teacher and gained the liking and respect of colleagues and pupils so that we are sorry to see him go, but hope that his departure is not the end of what has been a happy and successful association. We welcome Mrs. Broom who has joined the Learning Support Staff in a part time capacity. The Art department has been badly hit by the absence of its promoted staff. We are glad that Mr. Buchanan has now returned, but it is a matter of regret that it will probably be some time before Mr. Cuthbert is able to resume his duties. Moves towards the much heralded Community use of the school are proceeding, although more slowly than originally expected, but are likely to accelerate rapidly when an appointment is made to the recently advertised Head of Centre post. Many former pupils and members of staff were sad to learn of the death of Mr. William McKirdy. He came to the Burgh School in 1958 as Principal Teacher of Science. He moved to the Kilrymont Road Building when it opened where he served first of all as Depute Principal in the Science department. He subsequently took charge of the development of the Resources Centre where his work in establishing and equipping it has stood the test of time. He retired in 1975, a greatly respected teacher, remembered for his lively sense of humour and as a loyal and energetic colleague. We extend our deepest sympathy to Mrs McKirdy and her family.

Sporting activities continue to enjoy a slow but successful revival. A junior Cross-Country Club has been running regularly at Monday and Friday lunchtimes and is eager to welcome new members from the first three years. The girls now have four hockey teams playing Saturday morning matches. The Seniors and the 3rd Year Team took part in Midlands Schoolgirls' Annual Tournament. The Seniors finished third in their section, very creditably holding Strathallan, the tournament winners, to a 0-0 draw. The 3rd Year team came second in their section. Two of the senior players, Susan Morris and Kandy Mitchell have been selected to attend training sessions with the Scottish Schoolgirls Under-16 squad and we wish both girls well when the team is finally selected in February. Boys' hockey has started again. Out of the four matches played, the team has won 2, drawn 1 and lost 1. Neil Roberts, the top scorer, has been selected to train with the Scottish Under-16 squad and Bruce and Neil Rust are also to be congratulated on gaining places in the Midlands District Under-16 team. Rugby does not yet extend beyond 3rd Year, but all three junior teams have played four times since October. Some strong, open play by the 1st Year team has given them an unbeaten record and it was only a closely fought draw against Queen Anne High School which denied the 2nd Year team a similar success. The 3rd Year team has met stiff opposition and has done well to keep wins and losses evenly balanced. Football also has had its share of success. The Under-13 team has won all six of its games, scoring 46 goals for and only 3 against. The prolific scorers are Alan Morris, Steven Ferguson and Kevin Ross. The Under-14 team has won 3 and lost 3 of its six games. Dougal Anderson, with 14 goals is their top scorer. The Under-15's have won 3 out of 4 games, while the Under 18's have won both their games by the same margin of 5-1. Gary Thomson, Paul Martin and Graeme Cunningham travelled to Inverness with the Fife Schools' Under-15 squad for the Regional Cup match against North of Scotland. In another Regional Cup game against Aberdeen schools, Michael Gray, Craig Donaldson and Guy Devereux all played for the winning Fife Schools Under-18 team. The success of the school's footballers is perhaps underlined by what must be the fairly unique feat of a player from each of the three teams (U/13, U/14 and U/15) scoring a hat-trick in the course of one Saturday morning encounter with Bell Baxter. Two 4th Year pupils, Alan Brown and David Tennant, along with Edward Brex from 3rd Year were selected to represent Fife in the SSSA National Swimming Gala at Whitburn. All three gained medals. Alan Brown took the silver in Class 6 for the 25 metres back crawl, David Tennant took the bronze in Class 5 of the same event, while Edward Brex gained another bronze in Class 3 of the 25 metres breast stroke.

Success has not been confined to the sports field. In the first round of the inter-schools Chemistry Quiz, the Madras team defeated Lawside Academy. The first round of the United Nations Association Public Speaking Competition was won for Madras by Camillo Fracassini, Anna Poole and Morag Ross whose impressive performance overcame the strong challenge of Dundee High School. On a more individual level, Margaret Sinclair of 6th Year showed her command of logical thinking by gaining 2nd Prize in a Glasgow University Philosophy Department quiz. Jamie Quinault, also of 6th Year, has gained an English Speaking Union Scholarship which will take him to school in the United States for the second half of this session. He is to be congratulated on a considerable achievement, since the awards are highly competitive and come fairly rarely to Scotland and the state sector. The activities of the other clubs and societies, and indeed of the subject departments, are almost too numerous to mention. Pupils from the Modern Studies department have met Menzies Campbell who spoke to them on strictly non-party lines about the way Parliament works. Another group learned from the Regional Emergency Planning Officer that his work covered every conceivable situation from heavy snowfall to nuclear fall-out. When the BBC's Scottish Question Time was recently broadcast from St Andrews, keen-sighted viewers might just have detected the four pupils and the one teacher from Madras who were invited to form part of the audience, although they were not lucky enough to have the opportunity to put any of the questions to the panel. Preparations for taking a party of pupils from the department to Russia in July are well advanced and the first edition of a lively news and information sheet about the visit has appeared, appropriately entitled 'Not Pravda'. The first edition of a new school magazine 'The Madras Monitor' has appeared and the second edition is competing with this newsletter for print-room time. The aim is very much a pupils' magazine, representing the interests of the whole school, while retaining some of the informality of its predecessor 'Acta' without its exclusiveness.

The English Department have also been active in literary and theatrical ventures. The authoress Joan Lingard spoke to a large group of 3rd Year pupils about the writer's craft. The Byre Theatre Schools Company acted out the main scenes from 'Macbeth' for the 4th Year and took part in the lively discussion session which followed. 'Too Much Punch For Judy', a play about the tragic consequences of drinking and driving, had a powerful effect on the 120 5th Year pupils whose timetable allowed them to see the Touchstone Theatre in Education Group's treatment of this important theme. The department also ranged far and near on a series of theatre visits. Some were purely for entertainment - 'Diary of Adrian Mole' (Perth), 'Educating Rita' (Kirkcaldy) and 'Mary Queen of Scots had her head chopped off' (Students Union, St Andrews). Others by being directly related to texts studied in school followed the old classical rule that in literature usefulness should be mixed with pleasure - 'A Doll's House' (Edinburgh) 'All My Sons' (Perth), 'Merchant of Venice' (Edinburgh).

Space does not permit more than a mention of one of the school's most unusual societies, The Madraths Club. It is organised by the Maths Department and its membership of 45 (with a waiting list!) is at present restricted to 1st Year pupils. It is hoped that a fuller account of its fascinating range of activities can be given in a later newsletter.

Although the school has been represented by pupils from both buildings at the Armistice and St Andrews Day Services, the Music Department are the school's real ambassadors to the local community. They provided the band and trumpeters for the Armistice Service at the St Andrews War Memorial and at Moonzie Old Kirk, near Cupar, but it is over the Christmas season that they come into their own. The Senior Choir is carol singing in aid of Oxfam. The Wind Band played at a recent morning service in St Leonards Church and Madras pupils are giving a concert for the same church's Caring Group. Our musicians are also providing musical entertainment for the Old Folk's Annual Treat in the Student's Union and playing at the Rotary Club's service to dedicate the Christmas Tree at Holy Trinity. All this in addition to the vast amount of work for the school's own highly successful Carol Concert represents a considerable achievement.

As usual, the PTA has been active. An extra and very well attended meeting was organised to discuss the PTA's response to the Government's proposals on School Boards. The theme of the regular November meeting was extra-curricular activities and pupils provided an interesting and entertaining evening with lively accounts of the various trips, excursions, courses, conferences and business ventures in which they had taken part. From 13th - 16th January the Drama Club are presenting 'The Comedy of Errors' in the Byre Theatre. On Friday, 15th the PTA are reviving the traditional Dessert Party to be held after the performance. For those who are attending the Dessert Party (cost £1), tickets for the performance are offered at the specially reduced rate of £1.50 (OAP's and pupils £1). Please note the date for your diary and book early.

1st and 2nd Year pupils have already enjoyed their Christmas parties. Similar events for the other years take place this week, culminating in the 5th/6th Year Dance this Thursday. It is pleasant to have parties in the calendar again and to have senior pupils not only organising their own dance but also being actively involved in helping to make the other parties go with a swing. While the holidays will no doubt come as a welcome relief to those who have attended a whole series of parties, the good effects of the intermingling of staff and pupils in these social activities extend far beyond the festive season.

To staff, parents and pupils I extend my warm good wishes for a happy Christmas and a good New Year.

Yours sincerely,



Rector

Christmas Holidays

School Closes - Friday, 18th December 1987
School Starts - Tuesday, 5th January 1988

Easter Holidays

School Closes - Friday, 25th March 1988
School Starts - Monday, 11th April 1988

Mid-Term Holidays

- Friday 12th, Monday 15th, Tuesday 16th February 1988

In-Service Day

- Friday, 4th March 1988

Parents' Nights

S5/6 - Tuesday, 26th January 1988
S2 - Monday, 8th February 1988
S4 - Thursday, 18th February 1988
S1 - Wednesday, 9th March 1988