

Fife Education Authority

MADRAS COLLEGE, ST. ANDREWS

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D.D. GALLOWAY, Rector.

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April 1987

Dear Parent,

NEWSLETTER - EASTER 1987

As term began, we wondered, while we waited for the results of union ballots, if winter was really over. Certainly, there seemed to be signs, if not of spring, at least of a thaw in the winter of professional discontent. However, this time it was real winter that struck with quite unprecedented ferocity and with snowfalls that effectively closed the school for the second week of term.

These conditions create serious problems for the school, since very often we find ourselves trying to cope with a situation which is never entirely within our own control. Early closure depends not so much on any decision taken by the school, but on the bus operators' assessment of road conditions, which may vary quite considerably throughout the area, and on the approval of Fife House. On some occasions it would be safer and more sensible for children to stay at home rather than wait at bus stops in freezing conditions for transport which may not arrive or struggle into school merely to be sent home again almost immediately. If the snowfall takes place during the school day, it is usually not too difficult to get the children home early. On the other hand, trying to stop the buses before they set out in the morning is virtually impossible. Keeping parents informed in a rapidly changing situation is also a difficulty, but increasing use is being made of local radio and any information about travel difficulties or school closures is likely to be provided by the news services of Radio Forth and Radio Tay. I would just assure parents that, as far as school is concerned, the safety of the children is our overriding concern and I would take this opportunity to thank parents for their support and understanding during the various emergencies which the weather created at the start of term.

The dispute at long last came to a welcome end, but before the subject disappears from school newsletters, hopefully forever, it is perhaps worth pointing out that the situation is not yet all sweetness and light. It is important to remember that secondary school teachers did not vote for acceptance with the same wholehearted enthusiasm displayed by the rest of the profession. A great deal of negotiation still has to take place before there is final agreement on such matters as resources, staffing levels and the salary scales for Principal and Assistant Principal Teachers who, in many cases, came out of the deal rather less well than they were entitled to expect in view of their key role in the system.

Nevertheless the settlement meant a welcome resumption of various activities, and it is pleasant to be able to record them once more. Debating was one of the first in the field. The inter-house debating competition for the new trophy presented by the St. Andrews Rotary Club produced three excellent debates with Castle emerging as the winning team. Unfortunately the school did not recapture the same form in the subsequent inter-school debate, but with very limited time for practice they did their gallant best against the much stronger and more experienced teams fielded by Bell Baxter, the holders, and by Waid Academy, this year's winners. However, the emergence of a strong junior debating society provides plenty of hope for the future and plans are already being made to secure an improved performance in next year's competition.

Music was also quick to adopt a higher profile. Our pupils gained several successes in the Fife Festival in Dunfermline, most notably the Junior Choir which won the Saltire Society Award for Scots songs.

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The Choir now goes forward to the national competition in Stirling in June. The Spring Concert which delighted the audience with an impressive display of musical talent was the first opportunity since June 1985 to welcome parents to a major school event. The skill of the young players was rightly acclaimed, but the performance was also a tribute to the dedicated hard work of the music staff and the instrumental instructors. More recently the Wind Band gave a joint concert with the Tayport Instrumental Band in the Blyth Hall in Newport. The high standard of the playing and the bright and lively programme made this a most enjoyable evening, but it was also gratifying to have the school's music-making taking place outside St. Andrews in the wider community of its catchment area.

Links with industry continue to develop. Although the Challenge of Industry conference, already delayed from October and thrown into further confusion by the advent of an unexpected February holiday, took place later than we would have wished, it nevertheless gave S6 pupils some new insights and quite a lot of genuine enjoyment. The school has managed to support two business ventures organised and operated by senior pupils. With advice from Mrs. Mobeck of the Home Economics Department and from Mr. McKechnie of the local Rotary Club, the Mini Enterprise Scheme has manufactured and successfully sold various products. The last of these, a school magazine, is expected to be on sale shortly. The Young Enterprise Company 'Scribbles' has also had a successful trading year and we are grateful to the management of Guardbridge Papers for the help and advice they have given. These schemes provide the young executives with a great deal of useful business experience which will be of immense value to them in their future careers. A team of speakers from the Rotary Club of St. Andrews, whose constant support for the school is greatly appreciated, gave S4 Social Education classes much useful advice about job applications and interviews. A group of S3 Chemistry pupils visited the Mossmorran complex where they were entertained to tea and, according to reports, all had a grand time. No doubt their Chemistry benefited as well. At present links with industry are largely on an informal basis, but over the next two or three years all Fife schools will be drawn into the Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI), which is now being piloted in the Glenrothes schools, and for all pupils from S2-S5 an industrial/technological element will be part of the formal curriculum.

Because fixture lists cannot be recreated over-night, revival on the sporting side has been slower, but by no means insignificant. Cross-country lunchtime practices have attracted steady support and a number of the twenty two pupils who travelled to the Scottish Schools Cross-Country Championships at Irvine produced performances which show promise for the future. Football trials for various age levels have been held, five a side training has been taking place for several weeks and fixtures have been arranged with Auchterderran and Dunfermline High Schools. In rugby also the emphasis has been mainly on training and practices have been well attended. Certainly, for me, one of the earliest signs that the school was returning to normal was to look out of the Depute Rector's office window about five o'clock one evening and see a first year rugby practice under way. The first year team in fact was the only one to win out of the four teams which played Waid Academy and they also enjoyed an 'international' fixture against a team from Wickersley Comprehensive School in Rotherham. The tourists with a slightly larger, heavier and older squad played very well, but Madras displayed considerable spirit in holding them to a 24 - 0 defeat. The third year, however, redeemed their early failure against Waid with a convincing win over Kirkland. In all the team games at present it is a case of laying foundations once again, but sufficient has been accomplished in little more than six weeks to make staff and pupils look forward to next session with interest and enthusiasm.

Academically, Madras mathematicians continue to distinguish themselves. In the National Maths Exam Kevin Bryson, Caroline Cobb and Barry Shields of S6 and Stephen King and Neil Piggot of S5 all did sufficiently well to proceed to the next stage - the British Maths. Olympiad, while Kevin Bryson is to be congratulated on a particularly outstanding individual score. Nicola Starritt in S3 has just won the Scottish Mathematical Council's competition for the design of a mathematical T shirt.

One of the outstanding events of the term, which for S6 pupils will perhaps prove to be the most memorable of their school career, was the specially arranged and superbly organised end of term dance. It was a source of very great pleasure not only to take part but also to see so many pupils and staff enjoying themselves so thoroughly.

February/

February, as usual, took its toll in terms of staff absence and on several occasions the school reached the trigger point, that mysterious Regional calculation of the absence rate which allows an immediate increase in the amount of temporary help - if indeed that help can be found. We would be very glad indeed to hear from anyone with a secondary teaching qualification who would be willing to have their name added to our supply list even if they can not help for more than a few days at a time. The volume of help which we have already received from temporary staff is considerable and it is appropriate to acknowledge our indebtedness this year to Mrs. Geddes, Mrs. Stephens, Mr. Simpson, Mrs. Tait, Mrs. McGowan, Mrs. Burnett, Mrs. Paterson, Mrs. Lambie and Mrs. Broom without whose support we could not have coped. Within the last week we have had news of two staff changes. Mrs. Claire Easingwood, APT English has been appointed Principal Teacher of English at Kirkcaldy High School and Mrs. Linda Swankie of the Modern Languages department has been appointed Principal Teacher of Spanish at Dundee High School. We congratulate both on their well deserved promotion but greatly regret their forthcoming departure. Mrs. Christine Reid, who has given excellent service in the Maths department, is moving away from St. Andrews and while we wish her every future success and happiness, she too will be greatly missed. At the beginning of term we welcomed M. Jean Louis Chazal from Mereville in France who exchanged places for six weeks with Mr. Grove of the Modern Languages department. Miss Wiseman of the Biology department has gone to New Zealand on a year's exchange and we extend a very warm welcome to Mr. Alan Clark from Queen Charlotte College, Picton, New Zealand who has taken her place here. Mr. Graham Taylor who has for many years been in charge of the Print Room in the South Street building retires at the end of term. So impeccable was the work which flowed (that literally is the word) from his off-set litho and photo-copying machines that it came to be accepted as the norm. It was not only in school that he was regarded as an authority on all matters relating to reprographics. The high quality of his work was widely recognised throughout the Region and his views on new equipment, new methods and staff training were frequently sought. His expertise, his enthusiasm and his eye for detail will make him hard to replace. We wish him well in his retirement and thank him most sincerely for an outstanding contribution to the work of the school.

The Parent Teacher Association held three very successful meetings in the course of the term. At the first Mr. Willis Pickard, editor of the Times Educational Supplement, gave parents his assessment of the dispute. The speaker at the second meeting was Mrs. Joy Roulston, Drugs Project Officer of the Scottish Episcopal Church. Her interesting and informative talk contained much useful advice on the difficult subject of drugs and deserved a larger audience. The final meeting of the term involved a team of speakers from the staff who explained the role of the Guidance staff and the purpose of Social Education and attempted to answer the many questions put by parents. We welcome Mrs. Elisabeth Slater as the new president of the Association and take this opportunity to thank Mrs. Margaret Smith for all the work she has done as acting president during difficult times.

Lastly, in wishing everyone an enjoyable Easter break, may I just mention holidays in general. A number of parents have already let us know about holiday arrangements where business and other commitments make it impossible to fit family holidays into the normal pattern of school holidays. If this has to happen, then it is helpful for the school to have as much advance warning as possible. However, it is hoped that parents, especially those with children in S3-S5 where we try to use the month of June to lay the foundations for the next session's Certificate work, will do everything possible to avoid the interruption to studies which results from holidays cutting into the school year.

Yours sincerely,



RECTOR

HOLIDAY DATES/COMING EVENTS

Summer term begins - Monday, 20th April.

May Day - Monday, 4th May.

June - Monday, 1st June.

Summer - Friday, 3rd July - Tuesday, 18th August (inclusive),

S2 Parents' Night - Wednesday, 29th April.

S1 Parents' Night - Tuesday, 12th May.

School Sports - Thursday, 25th June.