



# THE DOWNS SCHOOL NEWS February 2010

*Learning together  
Learning for life*

**From the Head:**

*For all in our community we aim to develop the ability:-*

- *to live as independent, self developing and caring individuals*
- *to be successful and contributing members of a global society*
- *to challenge ourselves to achieve more than we believed we could*

In thirty years of teaching, I cannot recall a start of term such as the one we have had. The dreadful news of Mr Marcel Felimond's death in the middle of the Christmas holidays was very hard for all. He was a teacher in the prime of his life with everything ahead of him. We started the term, as many of you will know, with assemblies held in his remembrance. The students were thoughtful and respectful, wishing to pay tribute to a man whom they had known such a short time, but whom for many had made a remarkable impression.



On Thursday, January 21<sup>st</sup>, a celebration service was held for him in Compton Church, led by the Reverend Martin Cawte. Three of our students stood up and paid tribute to their tutor and teacher. They were Erin McDowell, Poppy Stronge and our head girl Pippy Wiseman. I was so proud of these students who had written and read their own tributes in a difficult situation; it was very moving.



The snow closure days have made life very taxing for all. I know parents understand how particularly difficult it is for us at The Downs as nearly all our students travel by bus and the roads are not easy. Everyone has been very patient and forbearing. I do have to thank some of our neighbouring schools, who very kindly took in some Downs examination candidates when the snow made it impossible for them to get to our school. On the worst snow day, out of 141 only 7 examinations failed to be sat. I think we have to thank all the many parents with 4by4s for much of that! I also wish to thank the site team, as well as her army of local parents and students who cleared the site on several occasions, enabling us to open. I also would like to thank Mrs Thomas, the Examinations Officer, and her team who had a military plan to enable her to get into school and run the examinations, come what may. We are now cracking on at a pace, making up the lost ground. Many students made good use of the facility on Moodle on which many teachers – particularly with examination groups – were setting work over the closure days.

### Young Citizen

You may have read recently about our Year 10 student, James Foster, who has recently been made a Young Citizen of the Year (2009) for West Berks. We are extremely proud of him. James has been a dedicated and enthusiastic member of the Peer Mentor Team at the Downs School for the last 2 years. James has helped support Year 7 transition students through their first year at secondary school. He has kept regular appointments with his mentee and made them feel confident and more relaxed in their new surroundings.

### School Musical

Work on our musical, 'We Will Rock You' is intensifying. This musical is a futuristic tale which tells the story of a corporation called Globalsoft, who send computer generated music to all of the people on the planet.

Instruments and expression are banned. A group of rebels discover lost music and bring down Globalsoft which enables everyone to be musically creative again.

All our musicals over the years have been resounding successes and are not to be missed. Be sure to buy your tickets from the finance office. Dates of the performances are 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> March 2010.

### Second Bus for After School Activities

We are trying to develop the potential for after school activities for more students. There is lots going on every day but we are aware that transport is often a difficulty. For a trial period in the summer term, between Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> April and Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> May, we will be running two late buses on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays at 5 o'clock. One bus will take the East Ilsley, Beedon, Chieveley, Leckhampstead, Brightwalton route and the other the Hampstead Norreys, Hermitage, Cold Ash, Newbury route. This should enable more students to *access after school sports clubs, revision sessions, dance, drama and music*. While we know this will not be the answer for all students, it will give us a start, and we can see how much demand there is. If you have a particular interest in using a bus, do let us know as it may be that we can divert the bus route. We also will be trialling the *Sundowners Club*. This will provide an opportunity for students to grab something to eat and drink before settling down to doing homework, working on computers or doing reading or research in the school library. Again, this is a facility that needs to be used if we are to continue with it.

### 4 into Cambridge

I hope you saw our article in the Newbury Weekly News celebrating the success of 4 of our students who have gained Cambridge places. They are Lizzie Blackmore, Amy McCarthy, Pippy Wiseman and Henrietta Fforde-Lutter. Lizzie intends to read English at Trinity Hall, Amy intends to read Sciences at Sydney Sussex College, Henrietta intends to read Veterinary Medicine at Emmanuel College and Pippy intends to read French and Italian at Girton.



## THE DOWNS SCHOOL EXAMINATION RESULTS

In response to parent feedback I am including the following information on the school's examination results. I have taken the time period from the summer before I started as headteacher.

### GCSE results over the past 4 years

The chart below (Fig i) shows the percentage of students who gained 5 GCSE's A\*- C (blue columns) as well and compares it with national results. This shows a very pleasing rising trend.

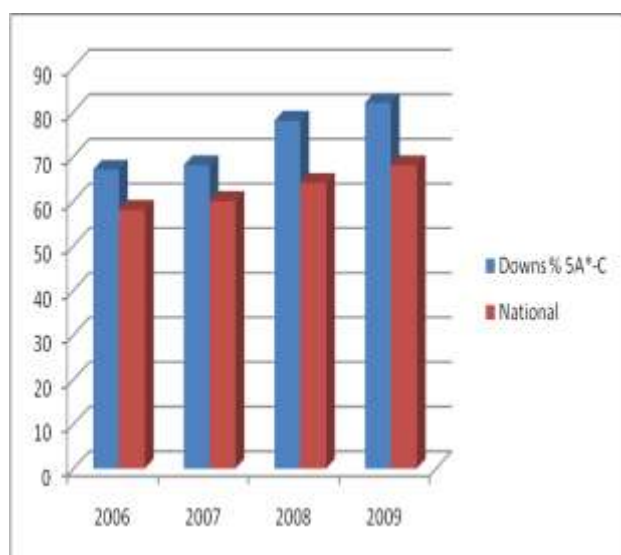


Fig i

The chart below (Fig ii) shows the percentage of students who gained 5 GCSEs A\*- C including English and Mathematics. Again these figures are compared with national results. This rising trend is even more pleasing than that shown in the chart above.

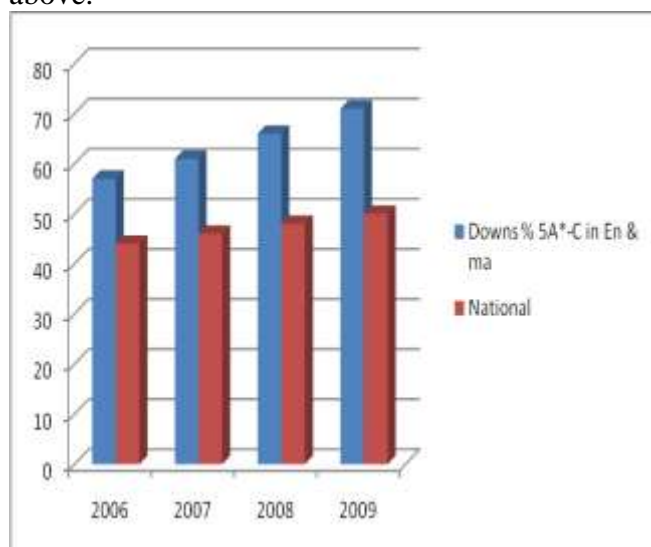


Fig ii

The chart below (Fig iii), shows the value which the school is adding to student performance using the Contextual Value Added figure (CVA). This is compared to the national average figure (in red). As you can see our value added has increased significantly over the past years.

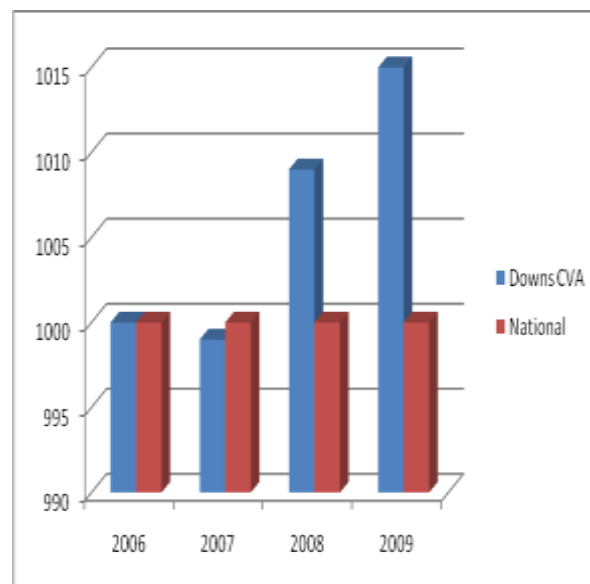


Fig iii

### A level results

The chart below shows the percentage of students gaining grades E and above (purple), grades C and above (green), grades B and above (red) and grade A (blue). It is clear that we continue to maintain the highest standards.

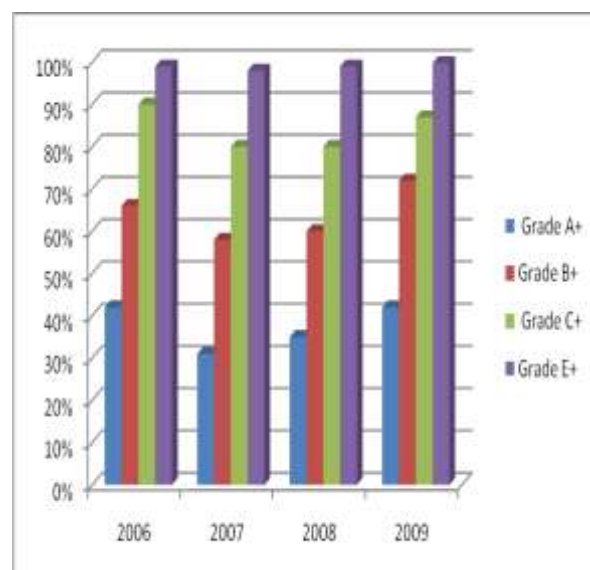


Fig iv

## SCHOOL – HOME COMMUNICATION REGARDING STUDENT PROGRESS

From parent feedback, I have the impression that not all parents are clear about how the school reporting system works. In general, there are 4 main points of communication throughout the year:

METHOD OF COMMUNICATION	DESCRIPTION
Progress Report – there are two of these in different terms	This is a report consisting of numbers and grades only. It gives a quick overview of standards of achievement, homework, attitude etc.
Full Report – there is one of these and it will come in a different term from the Progress Reports.	This report gives information as above but also includes written targets giving advice as to how students can improve.
Parents' Evening – one a year	This is an opportunity for parents to meet subject teachers and discuss their child's progress.

Some year groups also have extra opportunities. For example, **Year 7** has an opportunity to visit school during Open Mornings in September to meet me, the tutors and the Head of Year as well as meeting with tutors in Term 1. In **Years 10,11, 12** and **13** there are also mentoring days where students have one to one interviews with tutors and to which parents are encouraged to attend. There are also Introduction Evenings for parents in **Year 10, 11** and **12**.

Mrs Houldey

## FRIENDS OF THE DOWNS QUIZ NIGHT FRIDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> MARCH

Please email Theresa on [type.wright@lineone.net](mailto:type.wright@lineone.net) to book your table at this very popular event.

WE HAVE A GAS VALVE SET THAT CONTROLS THE FLOW FROM SIX BOTTLES OF LPG FOR SALE. ANYONE INTERESTED PLEASE EMAIL [badmans@westberks.org](mailto:badmans@westberks.org)

### LOST PROPERTY

Friday 5<sup>th</sup> February was lost property day when all un-named lost property was displayed in the conservatory (named and valuable lost property is always held on reception and these students are asked to come to collect their belongings). Any unclaimed lost property will be kept until half term by the Finance Office and then disposed of. It helps enormously if all property is clearly named. Lockers are always available from the finance office.

### SCHOOL PHOTOGRAPHS

We believe everyone received any delayed school photographs before Christmas. If you have not received your photos please call the school on 01635 270001

In future many communications with parents will be also sent out by email. In fact, this newsletter has been sent out by email (as well as this hardcopy) so please do let us know if you have not received it (please check your email messages) by emailing [lhill@westberks.org](mailto:lhill@westberks.org) from the address you wish us to use to communicate with you. Clearly include in your email the names and tutor groups of all your children here at The Downs School.

### Friends of the Downs AGM

Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February 7.30pm in Graham Taylor Building – all parents and carers very welcome! We are a friendly group and need some new members, so do come along.