



# THE DOWNS NEWS

## MAY 2009

### From the Head:

The atmosphere at school is extremely busy and fairly intense but not frantic I am pleased to say. After half-term, for those students not involved in public examinations, we have an exciting week with 3 days of cross curricular projects. The first (Monday 8<sup>th</sup> June) has personal development as its focus, with work on careers (**Year 7**); sexual health and relationships (**Year 8**); health education (**Year 9**), and problem solving and team building (**Year 10**). On the Thursday and Friday of that week we are re-running our cross curricular days from last year. **Year 7** are involved in a History day and then Mathematics, PE and MFL (Olympics); **Year 8** are focussing on Geography, ICT and Japanese and for the second day RE and Art; **Year 9** will be undertaking a Science and DT day followed by Performing Arts, and **Year 10** will be involved in Work-Related Learning and Enterprise.

A point of information relating to the timetable is that, from September, we will timetable personal development lessons (PDP) on Wednesday afternoons. This will avoid the current situation where lessons are knocked out in rotation as the PDP lesson moves across the week, over the year. It will also ensure that the PDP lesson has a higher profile with its own slot.

You may be aware that the new curriculum guidelines from the DCSF have changed the curriculum in **Years 7-9** to encourage more skill development (Personal Learning and Thinking Skills). We are fully behind this move and to further this have had training sessions during our INSET days on independent learning with a leading consultant



in this field, Graham Powell. Graham trained a group of our teachers to survey learning in **Years 7 and 10**. This is a fascinating topic and our future work will hinge on these three main elements of learning: how to help students become more

- ▶ engaged and interested, prepared to have a go and make mistakes
- ▶ able to work well with other people
- ▶ able to look back over what they have learned and think strategically about how they are learning

In my assemblies at the end of April, I shared this with students.

Some parents and carers will be aware that there are significant on-going changes to the curriculum; the examination specifications; the use of ICT, and to our understanding and practice of the pedagogy of teaching itself. This is why the INSET days we have are so essential and so useful.

## Flu

Parents and carers should know that hygiene measures in school are very good. We are following all advice re availability of hot water, soap and advising everyone about hygiene.

If the unexpected does happen and your child does become ill, we need to be confident that we have up to date contact details for you. If your details have changed can you please make sure you have informed the school, so we can get in touch easily. If your child is unwell at home please keep them there and contact your doctor or NHS Direct. Please follow general government advice in the press and on television In the unlikely event of a school closure, we will use the usual procedures – local media and the school website. Buses will also be notified. As with the snow days, we intend to post work on the school Moodle site. Currently, we are checking which students are unable to access Moodle at home so that we can look at contingency arrangements for them.

## Trips and visits

There have been a number of instances where deadlines stated for payments or paperwork have not been observed by students. Please note that dates are set for a reason and that failure to submit payment or details by given dates might jeopardise a child's place on a trip. It also causes inconvenience and extra work for the staff involved in planning and organising the trip.

## Year 11 Leavers

If you are unsure what to do with old blazers, ties or skirts we would be very pleased to have them for spare uniform in the school. Contact Student Support Centre.

## New Staff

We welcome Ms E Macaskill as PA to the Deputy Head for Learning and Mrs Brennan-Scott has joined us as a Teaching Assistant.

## Uniform Reminder

- From September, the following uniform changes will apply
- Fitted blouses may be worn (but should not show below jumpers)
- Black or navy tights will be worn instead of flesh-coloured
- **The colour of the blazer (black or navy) must match the colour of skirt or trousers.**

## Bag2school:

- £300 was raised from the last collection, many thanks to those who donated.
- Next date for collection of old clothes, shoes, fabrics **Friday October 3<sup>rd</sup>**

## FOD's 70's Disco 4<sup>th</sup> July 2009

Tickets from: Theresa Wright, 01235 765995  
[type.wright@lineone.net](mailto:type.wright@lineone.net)

## Sixth Form News

Exam and revision classes proliferate at the moment as the examinations are around the corner and will have started by the time you receive this. Recently, the **Year 13** Drama class put on a thought-provoking and riveting production of 'Clandestine' which they created and directed themselves, based on the Jersey Children's Home scandal.

In terms of enrichment activities, students have been involved in the Danish Exchange; this is a connection that has now been going between Horsens Statsskole and The Downs for a number of years. Physics students have been to Thorpe Park with the intention of experiencing and observing applications of physics in the real world. They assure me it was not for fun. For those interested in higher education, we undertook the **Year 12** visit to the Higher Education Conference at Reading University on 23<sup>rd</sup> March. 95 students took part who were able to hear talks on different degree areas and meet representatives from over 120 different higher education establishments.

We are very proud of Jamie Edwards who ran the London Marathon and raised £1500 for diabetes research. Well done Jamie!

**Return dates for Year 12: Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> June until 23<sup>rd</sup> July – no holidays in this time please!**

Our future numbers look very promising for the sixth form in September.

## Student Leaders

One of the school's priorities this year has been to develop students as leaders within the school. To achieve this, an exciting new initiative has been implemented where the Head Boy and Head Girl have trained a group of Key Stage 4 students as researchers. The training was observed by the school improvement advisor for West Berks LA, who was impressed by the high quality discussion and mature debate within the group. During the training students chose to focus on the current rewards systems and they are now busily researching students' perception of the system and how it can be improved.

### Extended Schools – The Dominoes Partnership

You will remember from the last newsletter that we have just appointed Lisa Bennett as an Extended Schools Manager for the Downland Villages Partnership. With her arrival we are re-launching our extended schools initiative as The Dominoes Partnership. To celebrate this we are having a Family Fun Activity Day on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2009 at The Downs School, Compton. The Dominoes Partnership have planned a number of fun activities for children (5+) and their families, to enjoy together: including Arts & Crafts, Cheerleading, Circus School and more. The Dominoes Partnership will be sending you a flyer soon detailing all the activities that will be available on the day, we look forward to welcoming you to our Family Fun Activity Day 27<sup>th</sup> June 2009.

### Food Technology – A Plea

A special plea from the Technology department to make sure students bring in the ingredients needed for their practical lessons as it is becoming an increasing problem for them when pupils continually turn up for lessons without the necessary ingredients. This causes supervision problems and the pupils are losing out on the learning experience provided and required under the government initiatives that all KS3 pupils should be experiencing this skill for life. It is now mandatory. Sanctions are now being imposed with both lunchtime and after school detentions for persistent lack of preparation. Please refer to the letter dated November 2008 that gives the details for the above.

## Activities

It is the aim of the school not only to encourage your child with their academic studies, but also develop their social skills, self esteem and physical fitness as well as to enable them to experience environments outside their normal day-to-day lives.

**Sixth Formers** took part in the Holocaust Educational Trust's "Lessons from Auschwitz" programme which included a visit to the concentration camp site in Poland. Others entered a national Go-Karting competition achieving the regional finals. Year 12 went to a Higher Education conference in Reading as part of the process of making choices about their future career paths.

Our **Year 7** Geography students took part in their first field trip to Compton and Years 10 and 11 GCSE and B-Tec Drama students had a trip to London to see a brilliant production of "Woman in Black" whilst Year 11 GCSE PE visited "The Body Exhibition" at the O2 Arena in London.

Over the Easter break, a group of **Year 8** students visited Austria on the school ski trip with plenty of sun and snow. Our **Years 10, 9** and some **Year 8** students visited Cyprus on the PE sports tour also had a great time playing matches against a variety of schools and being very impressed by the size of the Olympic swimming pool. Our thanks to staff who gave up their Easter break to make these trips happen.

Plans and preparation for the India 2010 Expedition continue with staff having attended weekend training in Wales with Adventure Works.

During May and June, there will be a Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award Training Expedition to Hungerford and a group of **Year 10** GCSE Business Studies students will be visiting Barclays Bank in Newbury as part of the "Barclays Business Challenge" where students will gain real life experience of a financial institution. **Year 10** Geography students will have a field trip to Rushall Farm whilst others will take part in The Army Schools Challenge Event. Our **Year 7** students will be visiting Hampton Court as part of the programme of activities arranged for the cross curricular days.

Preparation is underway for the launch of a Visual and Performing Arts Tour to New York in April 2010.

## Specialist School

Our early submission for a second specialism in Science and Mathematics has now moved onto a formal application. If we are successful, this status will be conferred on the school in September.

Last term The Downs hosted the annual "Languages@work" conference for all the West Berkshire Year 12 linguists at Newbury Rugby Club. This involves a unique partnership between the local business community, schools and higher education. Students commented on how useful languages really are in the workplace.

In July, The Downs will host "European Day" when Year 8 students from all over West Berkshire come to the school to take part in language activities and hear from people in the business community speaking about their experience of languages.

In March, 30 students went on the French Exchange. Our French partner school arrived on 8th May until 17th May. Thanks go to the technology and science staff who hosted special lessons for our French guests.

In April Mrs Caddick Adams showed her work in our feeder primary schools at the West Berkshire "Showcasing excellence" exhibition at Ufton Nervet. She has visited all our federation schools for support and training, with the result that many students are coming up to The Downs with enhanced language skills. She is even beginning to teach some other subjects through the medium of French.

In July, 25 students will visit our German partner school with Mrs Salmons and Miss Forster and will learn much about day to day living in Germany. Later in July The Downs will host the German students here.

Links are developing throughout the world as the school hosted Mr Prem Khadka a headteacher from Nepal who came on a study visit to start a curriculum project. Mrs Frankum will visit Nepal in October. Each department is looking at how further to integrate "internationalism" into their every day work.

## Art Department

The Art Department will be running a photography competition from 22<sup>nd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> June. All students, parents and staff are invited to enter photographs in any or all of the following categories: Portraits, Landscapes, Buildings, Friends and Family, Animals, Flowers and Plants.

The rules are – maximum size of photograph is A4. Maximum of 2 entries per person in each category. Photographer's name, tutor group and category must be clearly labelled on the reverse of each photograph. Please hand entries in to the Art Department at lunchtime before 26<sup>th</sup> June. The judgement will take place the following week and entries returned by 21<sup>st</sup> July.