



THE DOWNS SCHOOL

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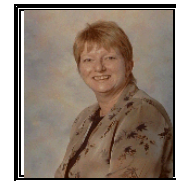
May 2011

Dear Parents and Carers

None of us can believe what exceptional weather we have been having. The PE department has been in their element. It has been a short and disrupted half term with all the bank holidays but I know everyone has done their best to ensure all have been well prepared for the summer examinations.

Jan Bentham

It is with great sadness that I have to tell you all about the death of Mrs Jan Bentham on 1st May. Mrs Bentham was a languages teacher, primary languages co-ordinator and head of year 7 at The Downs for many years, leaving in 2008 to go and teach in Thailand. Mrs Bentham was suffering from a tumour and knew that she had only months to live. In spite of this, she continued to be positive and cheerful for her family and friends. Her bravery was typical of the resilient and resourceful woman we had known for so long, who always knew how to get the best out of life. Her motto was 'Carpe diem' – seize the moment.



Head Boy, Girl and Deputy Head Boy, Girl

Mr Hartley and I spent a very enjoyable morning at the beginning of May interviewing for the posts of head and deputy students in the sixth form. The 12 students who were interviewed had first to go through a very rigorous written application process with references given by the staff. We were looking for leadership experience and potential; communication skills; being an effective role model; an awareness of the larger concerns of the school and community and a positive academic record. The standard was excellent and Mr Hartley and I had a very difficult job coming to a conclusion. However, we are entirely happy with the final decision which was:



Nicola Barrie
Head Girl



Jeff Vinall
Head Boy



Molly Geach
Deputy Head Girl

Nathan Crosby
Deputy Head Boy
(awaiting photograph)

Once year 12 have returned from their examination leave, we will be looking at other leadership posts within the sixth form.

Homework diary Communication

Some parents have expressed surprise when they have heard that their children may have missed homework or had a detention in school. I would like to remind everyone that staff record items such as this in student handbooks. When signing the handbook, it is worth checking for this and for positive feedback (housepoints) as well. Please let school know if information is not getting to you in this way (via your child's tutor).

Uniform in September

I would like to draw your attention again to the skirt model which we are requiring in September for all girls. It is navy with a vent. For ease, we recommend the model Trutex navy skirt: Code No GS3V-NVY or Banner black skirt: Code No: 3590. We are tightening up on this part of the uniform because of the liberties very many girls are taking with the style and type of skirt they are wearing. In cases of financial hardship, please contact the school.

Library Sofa



We are thrilled to have been able to afford a sofa for the library with funds donated by The Friends. It has transformed the 'reading for pleasure' section of the library. We would like to thank all those parents who have supported The Friends' efforts in raising money for the students' benefit. It is a pleasure to offer a relaxed seating area which has been in constant use since delivery.

Developments on the Site

Footpath

We have been getting on with the construction of the re-routed public footpath. It is now running around the perimeter of the upper school field. Once we have completed hedging for the neighbours affected by the re-routing, we will need to get West Berks to check that all is in good order before the old footpath can be closed off and the new one established. We will be very pleased when this is done, not least because some of our brand new picnic tables, set out for students to enjoy their sandwiches at lunchtime, were so badly vandalised over the May Bank Holiday weekend that they are irreparable. We have now had to put them into safe storage until the site is secure.

Canopy

A large canopy has been erected over the newly paved courtyard in front of the Tribe Building, to provide shade in summer and shelter from the weather in winter. This area will be exclusively for year 7 students in their first term, then after Christmas, all students will use it. This improvement has been in response to work done by the Student Council.



Poly Tunnels

Over the Easter holiday a polytunnel has been erected for students studying BTEC Countryside and the Environment to grow their summer vegetables. It is all very exciting.

50th birthday

At the end of the Easter Term, The Downs held a birthday party to celebrate its 50th. The school was full of the sound of old friends meeting up again, sometimes after years. Pupils from 50 years ago were united with their teachers – it was quite moving to see the mutual respect and affection still held after all this time. Music was provided by Pete Allen and Storm Disco (all ex-students). The 50th anniversary community mural in the hall was officially unveiled by one of the first students in the school and the youngest student here now. Everyone was able to admire the first of the mosaic



artworks which will soon be seen around the school. Thanks went to Mrs Dipple for all the hours of support and encouragement she has given in this project. Former students could see their names written in the school's original admission books. It was a momentous occasion. Thanks go to The Friends who provided refreshments to hundreds of people during the evening.

School Priorities for this Year and Progress

The school priorities for this year are listed below.

YEAR Sept 2010

Further develop reflective learning in order to embed learning culture within the school (using coaching and observational technology)

- **AFL (review of learning)**
- **Personal Learning and Thinking Skills**

Teachers have been working in groups of three, observing each other teach and providing coaching sessions before and after each lesson. Each teacher has chosen an appropriate focus for them based broadly on the priorities listed above. Teachers' logs show that this opportunity for reflection and mutual support has been highly valuable and has brought about improvements in their teaching.

Communicate student voice impact; students used in recruitment process; students as leaders in teaching and learning- *Student Council has been revamped with each year group having its own year council feeding into a more efficient, smaller decision-making whole school council led by head boy and girl. Meetings have been increased to every three weeks. The Student Council noticeboard informs students about issues and progress. Year reps have fed back achievements in assemblies.*

Develop strategy for parents to help their children in their learning – *the November parents' letter commented on work done in this area. Now we are looking to improve the Moodle virtual learning environment and information held on it in order to support parents' involvement. I would be pleased if any parents who are interested in providing a feedback group would let me know via Mrs Murphy.*

Departments develop intervention strategies - to include in-class differentiation

Monitoring classroom drop-ins have shown that nearly all lessons provide differentiated outcomes for pupils at different levels of ability and learning. Teachers are now working to ensure that their planning shows how all students will reach the appropriate outcome.

Develop Information Advice and Guidance, Careers and Work Related Learning Opportunities and raise aspiration for all – BTEC Countryside and environment

introduced in year 7; Applied Learning co-ordinator appointed; year13 Work Experience introduced; all years have a mentoring day with tutor input.

Use coaching and induction to develop expectation – *a more structured induction programme for teaching and non-teaching staff has been developed. All teaching staff have been trained in coaching techniques (and see first priority relating to reflective learning).*

Implement code of conduct for staff – *discussed with staff and agreed.*

Develop Shadow leadership team – *Extended Leadership team meets twice a term*

Widen self-evaluation responsibilities to include associate staff – *6 associate staff departments have evaluated their work and identified strengths areas for improvement.*

Undertake audit of workload and systems – *associate staff have undertaken ‘day in the life of...’*

Improve tiers of communication and consultation – *the newsletter is more detailed; the pupil bulletin now goes home electronically; electronic communication with parents has improved; reporting to parents occurs every term as well as the annual parents’ meeting; each year has a mentoring opportunity for students to meet with their tutors, and parents may attend; the TV information screens help students and staff know what is going on; the staff bulletin is more informative including agendas for meetings and outcomes from Senior Team Meetings. Head’s Breakfast has been established for both staff and students allowing a chance to share views with the head. Half-termly lunches have taken place with the sixth form senior team and the head to communicate concerns and ideas.*

Develop projects which link British schools with us. Publicise work on international links.

Further develop internationalism in all subject areas – *the school has achieved international school status*

Introduce Countryside and the Environment BTEC – *all year 7s are working on this course.*

Introduce community cohesion day in ‘Who do we think we are week?’ – *the school ran a ‘Who do you think we are week’ involving assemblies; a flag quiz (various countries); international foods in the canteen; tutors undertook tutor activities about famous British immigrants; departments undertook international lessons (eg maths did Chinese puzzles; handball in PE; international greetings in various languages).*

Develop strategy to communicate values and responsiveness to feedback

Introduce digital TV communication – *see ‘Communication’ above.*

50 year celebrations – *a range of activities have taken place including the mural, the mosaics, the birthday cake following the sponsored walk and the party on April 1st. The website has an archive of interesting material relating to the school’s history.*

Develop strategy for site as learning environment (3 year) – *a consultation document is available on the Parent Site.*

Wolf Report and Vocational Learning

Parents may be interested in reading the government response to the Wolf Report on Vocational Learning which can be found at www.education.gov.uk. One of the changes which is likely to affect our youngsters is the removal of the requirement for all young people to undertake a work experience placement in year 10 and 11.

Curriculum and Subject Trips

French Exchange

37 students and 4 staff went for the annual exchange to Moutiers in France. The trip was jam-packed with activities, from snow shoeing and skiing, to the Beaufort cheese factory, walks through Gorges du Fier and shopping in the city of Grenoble. The students were also able to spend time in lessons at the French school. The students' behaviour was exemplary throughout and everyone had a great time, as well as greatly improving their French.

Iceland

The Geography department recently led a combined Sixth Form and Year 11 trip to Iceland. The country certainly lived up to its name providing plenty of ice, snow, wind, rain and sunshine throughout five days of great adventure. The students visited Iceland's famous Blue Lagoon, gazed at numerous incredible waterfalls such as Skogafoss and had the opportunity to stand on Solheimajokull, the black glacier flowing from the Myrdalsjokull ice cap. Two of the main highlights of the week were visiting Thingvellir (the constructive boundary between the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates) and visiting Eyjafjallajokull (the volcano that brought Europe to a standstill last April), although the latter was rather camera shy and shrouded in cloud. All in all everyone thoroughly enjoyed the Iceland experience, even the delicate puffin and shark steaks sampled by some brave souls. The department looks forward to running the same trip next year for all Year 11-13 Geographers.

Arts News



Year 7 took part in the 'Lets get it right' community Art competition asking young people to create Artwork that represented the positive things young people do. All students in year 7 and some students in other years chose to. They producing a range of two dimensional and three dimensional pieces. The work was exhibited at the Arlington Arts Centre and an open invitation awards ceremony took place. We were delighted by the standard of work produced by our students. Alex was awarded first place senior; Maise, second place juniors and Abby third place. The three students won a total of £300 for the school with all winnings being used to buy trophies for key stage three Art awards.

Sport News

Max, a year 8 student, beat the UK's U13 number one player in badminton, he was selected to play for England in Belgium. This tournament took place during the Easter holidays. In addition, the Year 7 & 11 football teams qualified for the semi-final play-offs of the district football leagues. Both lost to Kennet in their respective matches but did well to get through to this stage. Cricket practices have started and the first games are going ahead during the week beginning 16 May. The Year 9 squad are current district champions so will have to work extremely hard to retain their crown. Girls' cricket has started with the input

from a Berkshire Development coach (Tom Russell). The club is aimed at Y7 and 8 girls with a view to encouraging as many as possible to join West Ilsley CC. The England Cricket captain, Charlotte Edwards is to come in one day to offer her advice to the girls.

Student Updates

Our students in Year 13 have secured some excellent offers from universities this year. Some of the more noteworthy include Katy with an offer from Oxford to read French, Rebecca with a place at Bristol to read Medicine, Hope has an offer to read Veterinary Science at the Royal Veterinary College, Tom has an offer from Bristol to read Physics whilst Ollie has an offer from Leeds to read the same subject, Anna, Georgia and Lottie all have offers from Exeter to read English, Geography and Psychology respectively. There are many many more and we wish them all the best of luck for their examinations over the next few weeks and our thoughts will be with them on results day in August.

Staff Vacancies

From September:

Temporary Teacher of English to cover maternity leave for 1 term.

Learning Supervisor

Teaching Assistant

If you are interested in the above vacancies please contact Mrs I Waite.

May I wish you an enjoyable Whitsun Bank Holiday.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Houldey

Mrs V. Houldey
Headteacher