

September 2009

To all parents in the Foundation

Dear Parents,

By the time you receive this letter, your child will have been into school and exchanged summer holiday pleasures for term-time routines and the excitements of a new school year. I am writing to all parents in the Highgate School Foundation with some news, dates and information, some of it of relevance to all parents; all of it, I hope, of interest. First, I wish to extend a warm welcome to you all, particularly to parents new to Highgate. I expect that the early nervous days (for the pupils, but also for parents!) are giving way to confidence and enjoyment. Please know that we like to hear from you if you are concerned or unsure about any aspect of school life: your child's happiness is your and our first priority.

Examination results

A few words about the recent round of public examinations: the 2009 leavers did the school and themselves proud, securing 89.3% A and B grades. They improved significantly on the school's A grade record, with 70% of the 485 entries graded A. On the day of the results, 90% of applicants to university had their first or insurance choice of university place and, by the close of play, this figure had improved: despite this being a tough year for university admissions, all leavers have got in to good universities of their choice, including 23 leavers who held conditional places at Oxford or Cambridge. At GCSE, this was another excellent year, with 81.5% of entries being graded A or A*. Details of these, including the breakdown by subjects and leavers' destinations, will be posted shortly on the school website. It was great to see how happy (and relieved!) the exam candidates were on results days and to share in their delight. Thank you for all you did to support them as they prepared for the examinations.

If you are intrigued or concerned by the debate about standards at A level, you could do worse than read the excellent and perceptive article written by the Chairman of the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC), Andrew Grant; I have enclosed a copy for your interest.

Building works

The summer holidays were, as usual, a busy spell for building works to improve the School's facilities: the scaffolding which enveloped Central Hall has gone revealing a first-class restoration of that core building, bringing it back to its former glory while significantly upgrading the classrooms (IT provision, heating and lighting). Work in Dyne House to provide a new recital room and practice rooms and to refurbish the auditorium continues, but the opening date has had to be put back to January 2010. The Sixth Form Common Room has been refurbished and a

second, nearby Common Room has been created. The Pre-Prep now benefits from an extended play area in the Field House playground and preparatory works for a covered play area for the nursery children have been carried out.

Charity Commission report

The Charity Commission, which is tasked by Government to regulate charities, published its report on several test charities, including five schools. We have been working to ensure that we, as a charity, meet what is called informally the 'public benefit test' at the heart of the Commission's regulatory work. Governors have established a Charity Committee which oversees the work of Mr Wilne as Director of the Charity and Dr Lewis as Community Partnerships Director. I would just like to reassure parents that we are 'on the case' and working confidently so that Highgate fulfils its statutory obligations in this area.

Inspection

Highgate was last inspected in 2005 and the report was published in February 2006. A new inspection regime begins in September and, reading the new rubric carefully, we deduce that, as one of the first schools to be inspected under 'Cycle 2', we will be among the first to be inspected under 'Cycle 3'. The School will receive five days' notice of an inspection which would last two to three days and will concentrate on ensuring that we meet our statutory obligations, of which there are (quite properly) a number. Once the School is notified about an inspection, parents will receive a questionnaire about the school, so I am just warning you to expect this. The School does not see parents' returns which go directly to the Reporting Inspector; analysis of responses is provided for the school. All parents will receive a copy of any inspection report.

In preparing the ground for the new inspection framework, the Independent Schools' Inspectorate (ISI) has asked us to ensure that policies are made available (via the website) to parents. It has been our practice to provide digests in the form of notes for parents but we are following ISI guidelines in putting – unabridged – all relevant policies on the website for your information and perusal. We have now gathered together these and have made them available for you via a link on the School's website. If you wish, you can contact us and we will provide you with a paper version of any or all of the policies. I have listed the information that will be on the website below and I hope that you will not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries about any of these documents.

- Admissions policy
- Complaints procedure
- Curriculum policy
- Drugs policy
- Special Educational Needs policy
- Safeguarding and Welfare of Children policy
- Behaviour policy
- Anti-bullying policy
- Personal, Social and Health Education scheme of work
- ICT Acceptable Use policy
- Educational Visits Policy

We are also required to provide (ie send) information relating to the school's ethos and aims: I am taking this opportunity to enclose our statement which has been reviewed and amended in recent months to take account of developments since its publication in 2005. It is also a requirement to inform you of the name and contact address for the Chairman of Governors which I have pleasure in bringing to your attention:

John Mills CBE, MA, BLitt
c/o The Secretary to the Foundation and Clerk to the Governors
Highgate School, 70 North Road, London N6 4AY.

Correspondence is forwarded (unopened) to the Chairman by the Secretary.

Foundation Sponsored Walk – 21st October 2009

Our third Foundation sponsored walk takes place on Hampstead Heath (or Senior Field for those with very young legs) on Wednesday 21 October, the eve of half-term. You will receive details about the arrangements from Mrs Jauncey who is co-ordinating the day's activities. We are hoping to raise £40,000 for the Great Lakes High School in Kirima, South West Uganda. The money which your children helped raise two years ago enabled the first buildings to be erected; last year's activities allowed a number of children to be sponsored for a year's schooling but, as anyone who followed Mrs Challender's blog this year during her stints teaching in Kirima will know, the project is far from finished and the pupils desperately need our help. I was able to witness this for myself during a two-week spell in Kirima to visit the school and to unveil a dedication stone. An account of my trip will appear soon in *The Cholmeleian* and on the website, but I can assure parents that a really determined fund-raising effort will make a significant, life-changing (and in some cases, a life-saving) difference. Do support your children in their fund-raising ready for the day's walk.

As has been our custom recently, we will be donating the costs of lunches on that day to the Great Lakes High School project so that there will be no lunch on the day of the walk.

Dr Hamlet Mbabzi, the Founding Director of CHIFCOD, the charity which supports six schools, including the Great Lakes High School, will be spending two weeks in England raising the profile of his charity's and his schools' work. This will culminate in a conference which is being hosted in the Mills Centre on the weekend of 26th and 27th September; you will hear further details shortly or may view them on the CHIFCOD website, www.volunteeruganda.org. I will be holding a reception for Dr Mbabazi on Tuesday 22nd September to which I should like to invite any parent who would be willing, in principle, to offer on-line academic supervisions or teaching for students at the Great Lakes College in teacher training (education), agriculture and business or tourism, the principal curriculum areas of this tertiary college. You can read more about the college on the Volunteer Uganda website which summarises the curriculum objectives as follows:

Education, where trained nursery and primary teachers move on to start nursery and primary schools

Agriculture, marketing, business and finance, where graduates will identify marketable products and establish producer groups and value addition facilities for successful market penetration

Tourism, where graduates will form businesses to establish camp sites and offer services as tour providers and guides for the growing tourist population who are visiting Uganda to watch birds, primates and other flora and fauna

Anyone interested (first come, first served!) should contact my secretary on the email address above. Opportunities to volunteer can extend to visiting the College (at one's own expense) in order to work on site with students, too.

Swine 'Flu

According to the DCSF, the latest scientific advice to the Government is that individual school closures are now of limited benefit in stopping the spread of the swine 'flu virus. Although the majority of cases in the country thus far have been relatively mild it is still important that adults or children with 'flu-like symptoms should seek medical advice and remain at home until they are free of those symptoms. We would also appreciate your support in reminding all children that good hygiene measures, such as hand-washing and catching sneezes and coughs in a disposal handkerchief, are vital in limiting the spread of the 'flu virus.

Database of contact details

Mr Lindsay, Principal Deputy Head, asks me to pass on his thanks to all those parents who have returned the pro-forma to update the contact details held by the School. In an emergency, it is important that we have accurate and up-to-date details for you, including your mobile 'phone number and preferred email address, and I urge you to contact the relevant School Office with your reply slip as soon as possible if you have not already done so.

School Counsellor

We are pleased to welcome Mrs Alison Cante, who joins our pastoral team this term as a part-time School Counsellor. Mrs Cante is a child and adolescent psychotherapist who trained at the Tavistock Clinic, London, where she subsequently worked for many years. She is a member of the Tavistock Society of Psychotherapists and is registered with the British Psychoanalytic Council. An experienced school counsellor, she also works in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service at the Royal Free Hospital and in private practice. We will continue to operate our tried and tested pastoral structures, which include referral to staff, in particular to the Chaplain in the Senior School, for help with emotional problems and Mrs Cante's appointment strengthens our provision in this area. Our expectation will be that pupils will be referred through the Chaplain; it is, of course, possible that pupils in the Senior School will see either the Chaplain or Mrs Cante without parents' knowledge. If you have any queries, please contact Mr Lindsay or the Chaplain.

Staff

Please find enclosed a list of the new Senior School teaching staff. You will notice from the Arrangements Diary that Mr Gocoldas has taken over Southgate House from Mrs Heindl who becomes Assistant to the Director of Studies; Mr Murphy, who becomes Assistant Director of Music, passes the Queensgate baton to Mr Doyle; Dr Atkinson is standing in for Ms Walker as Housemaster of Heathgate during Ms Walker's maternity leave. Dr Kramer is now Head of Year 8, Mr Thomson is Director of Design Technology (leaving Mr Aston to concentrate on his

Assistant Head duties) and Dr Edwards is extending his sixth form pastoral responsibilities to include academic work under Mr Fotheringham's auspices. Dr Welch returns full-time to take up a role as Head of Science and Dr Weston succeeds her as Head of Biology while continuing as Housemaster of Midgate. Mrs Sursok becomes Coordinator of Girls' Games in succession to Mrs Rodgers who will be concentrating on her role as Head of PE in the Junior School.

Curriculum

We continue to develop the curriculum and you will be hearing shortly from Mr Fotheringham about our new enrichment programme, the Knowledge Curriculum. September sees the introduction of Mandarin which will be taught to all pupils in Year 8 on a rolling programme; there will be lunch-time and after-school Mandarin clubs open to any pupil; details of these will be published and the Head of Modern Languages, Mr Le Berre, will be ensuring that these opportunities are exploited. Our intention is to provide pupils with an introduction to and a taste of Mandarin language and culture; in linguistic terms, a very basic (but useful!) survival kit. We will review pupils' progress and use their experiences to inform future plans.

Dates

I would like to give you advance warning of a couple of dates which are of significance for the Foundation and will have an impact on some pupils: first, it is the Senior School Open Day on **Saturday 3rd October** and this will involve many pupils as guides (most of Year 8 and many pupils from the Sixth Form) and activities (all ages – we will expect pupils invited to be involved to attend), and your forbearance on this busy day for prospective pupils and their parents is appreciated; secondly, a reminder that the Senior School closes on **Thursday 14th January** for the 11+ entrance tests.

The dates for the Summer term are confirmed: term begins on **Wednesday 21st April** and ends on **Friday 2nd July**. Half-term is from **Saturday 29th May** to **Sunday 6th June** inclusive. The Leavers' Ball, for Year 13 and their parents, will take place on **Saturday 3rd July**.

Welcome Evenings

There are three Welcome Evenings for parents this term:

- Wednesday 16th September (Year 12)
- Monday 21st September (Year 9)
- Thursday 24th September (Year 7)

These all take place in Big School at 7.00 pm, and parents are warmly invited to attend. These events are primarily social occasions, providing an opportunity to meet other parents and to chat to members of the Senior Team and to pastoral staff. Representatives of the Parents' Association will also attend to talk about activities already planned for the year and how you can become involved. More formal Parents' Consultation Evenings will follow later in the academic year.

Chapel Services

Many families enjoy our annual Carol Services at which our Chapel and School Choirs sing. Fewer families may know that we have a long tradition of holding Sunday-evening chapel

services throughout the year to which parents, pupils and friends across the Foundation are welcome. These take the form of a service of anthems, contemplative music, readings and prayer, last under an hour and start at 6 pm. The Chaplain encloses details of this term's services with this mailing and I do encourage anyone looking for a moment's peace at the end of a busy weekend or in search of good choral music to join us one Sunday this term.

AS Choices

The Director of Studies, Mr Fotheringham, will be contacting parents of all pupils in Year 11 about AS choices at the end of this month. A booklet detailing the available AS courses will follow in due course; the information evening will be on **Wednesday 4th November**.

Admissions

We hold a number of Open Mornings (11+ and 13+) and Evenings (16+) for admission to the Senior School during the Michaelmas Term. On **Thursday 17th September** and **Thursday 8th October** (4.45 pm) there are Open Evenings for prospective sixth formers (girls and boys) and the assessment day takes place on **Saturday 7th November**. Please contact the Admissions Coordinator for details or to book a place at any of these events.

A few thoughts

In the Senior School assembly on Monday, I outlined the calendar of events and activities for this term: *Knowledge Curriculum Days*, *Sweeney Todd (the musical)*, *Uganda Conference*, *Sponsored Walk*, *European Days of Languages*, *National Poetry Week*, *Music Competition Week* – to say nothing of the regular sporting fixtures, weekly society meetings and termly concerts.

I suggested that the Highgate pupil does well not *despite* the extras, but *because of* them: they learn in different ways and they learn different things about themselves and others; they manage their time better so as to fit in more; they have more to talk about and become more interesting to others as a result.

Those of you familiar with Highgate will recognise this message, but I know it bears repeating in a world of league tables, inspections and public accountability. My thanks in advice for all you do to ensure that your children work hard, get involved and look for ways of serving others as well as themselves.

With warmest good wishes for the new term,

Yours sincerely,

A S Pettitt
Head Master