



HEADMASTER'S REPORT ON THE SCHOOL YEAR 2001-2

Published at Prizegiving, 23 September 2002

Another *Pictorial Record* is published today. It is perhaps Miss Barrett's best yet, but even so struggles to reflect the quality and quantity of this year's achievements. These words are designed to accompany those pictures.

Nationally, the past year has been dominated by a new exam, A2, by targets, and by tables. Locally, we have tried to respond to these while not allowing them to deflect from our broader philosophy: that exams are only one part of preparing pupils for life; that extra curricular activity has a full place in school life, whose formative importance should never be neglected; and that a child is a human being not an examination unit. '*What we want to see,*' remarked George Bernard Shaw, '*is the child in pursuit of knowledge, not knowledge in pursuit of the child.*'

Last September the Nursery opened. The Chairman has already paid tribute to Mrs Newell and her staff, and to their philosophy, which places human and personal development at the forefront of the process of learning -- exactly as Shaw suggested. Huge transformations were wrought last summer holidays in the fabric of our Junior School: Mrs Foster has more than ensured that human developments have kept pace with the bricks and mortar.

In the Senior School many improvements have taken place in Houses, especially the enterprising Latter. In what other day school House would the walls colour co-ordinate so splendidly with the Head of House's waistcoats (though his red automobile has yet to follow suit). We are determined to ensure that best tutorial practice is given the widest possible circulation, partly as a consequence of Handbooks introduced by the new Senior Teacher Pastoral, Mr Tim Waters. As the national focus of the coming year looks likely to remain centred on debate about A Levels, we will ensure that no corners are cut in our pastoral provision and indeed that every effort is made to improve it yet further.

There is, I am delighted to say, no doubt that the school's coherence of approach to pastoral, extra curricular, and academic matters is appreciated by parents and pupils alike. 'We would like to express our gratitude for everything that PGS has done for our son,' two parents wrote in a recent email:

We are delighted with his A Level results, but above all we are delighted with the enormous change that we have seen in him. He is now a more confident and much happier young man. He has made so many friends and has so many happy memories of his time with you. Thank you all from the bottom of our hearts. Two years at PGS made all the difference.

Another communication from parents who felt they had recognised something distinctive about PGS developed the same theme.

We are pleased our two children managed to achieve high grades and still find time to pursue many and varied extra curricular activities. At a time when there seems to be a national obsession with exam results, the school should be particularly commended on taking the broader view and recognising that the true value of an education lies in nurturing a positive sense of self, building character and developing independence.

No one, of course, expects us to neglect the pursuit of the highest academic standards attainable by our pupils and it is therefore excellent to be able to report on what has probably been the school's most successful academic year yet. We were comfortably in *The Times*'s top ten independent co-educational day schools at GCSE, and in the top ten of the *Financial Times* at A Level. The AB% at A Level was a record at 75%. Thirty seven pupils gained straight As and over 90% got into their first choice university. The A*-B GCSE percentage of 94.6% was also a record. Caroline Balfour, Joanna Brigg, Lavanya Raman and Rachel Wigmore gained all A*s. Thirty three pupils gained all A or A*.

There were some exceptional individual achievements. Sunil Manohar gained 7 As at A Level to add to his 11 GCSE A*s. Twelve year old Zachary Smith passed GCSE Maths with an A*, gaining the highest mark of any PGS candidate. This will surprise few, for he was partly taught by Sunil. George Hunter, who could not take some exams because of treatment for cancer, nonetheless joined all the rest of his year group in gaining at least seven GCSEs. The Exam Boards again awarded several Prizes for outstanding achievement to PGS pupils: Caroline Balfour (Music and Drama), Peter Coulthard (Biology and Geography), Robert Clarke (Biology), and Stephanie Forrest (Drama). In the British Biology Olympiad, an *annus mirabilis* for our Biology Department was crowned when PGS was nominated top school, with Hannah Slee winning a Gold Medal. So much for the gender agenda of the tabloid press and the outdatedly sexist suggestion of so called educational experts who suggest that girls get distracted in a co-educational environment and set their aspirations too low.

In extra curricular terms, it has also been an exceptional year. In May, I was visited by a representative of the Royal Navy who wished to praise the work of our CCF and thank the school for the outstanding candidates we had sent over the past three years to the Admiralty Interview Board. Not only had we had more successful candidates

than any other school but we had also had the top candidate in one of these years. Over the summer, Commander Tony Savage handed over command of the contingent to Captain Sue Sheldrick, who will be the first female officer commanding. The CCF is a remarkable institution for the relationships and skills it encourages in pupils. We thank Commander Savage for all he has done.

The CCF is only a small part of the school's extra curricular programme. In the Ten Tors Challenge, all six Year 10 pupils finished the 35 mile course, all six Year 11 and 12 pupils completed the 45 mile course, and four out of six Year 13 pupils completed the 55 mile course. In the Duke of Edinburgh Award last year, under the guidance of the ever-modest Dr Wright, thirty pupils gained Bronze Awards, twenty Silver, and six Gold. Mrs Spencer described the Girls Games Tours to the Caribbean as the best she had experienced. The Boys Rugby Tour to South Africa was a suitably genial swan song for Mr Shepherd, who alas leaves us for Millfield. Our hugely experienced Head of Hockey Mr John Law, who has much experience as a national coach, regained full health and reinvigorated Hockey. There is now a nonpareil of a fixture list, with Millfield, Kingston Grammar School and St George's Weybridge newly added, and the 1st XI did Mr Law and Mr Hawkswell proud with some exhibitions of high technical skill. The U14 team reached the final of the Hampshire Cup and were invited to play in the Junior European Indoor Invitational Tournament in Vienna.

The first visit to PGS by the daughter of our most distinguished former pupil, Wally Hammond, one of the greatest cricketers ever, was a fitting prelude to an excellent season. One PGS team remained unbeaten for the second season running. This was the Staff XI and their influence was palpable. The U12 and U15 teams won the Hampshire Cup: the U14s lost narrowly last Tuesday in their Final.

Much of this speaks volumes for the pioneering work of the first Director of Sport in the coeducational era, Mr Neil Blewett, and for his successor, Mr James King. In Athletics, school teams won six of the eight District Athletics Championships. Two Rounders teams remained unbeaten, and the U15 Boys Tennis team reached the 5th Round of the National Schools Tennis Championships at Eton. For the third year in succession the school won the Hampshire Sailing Cup. In all, eight PGS pupils were national representatives this year: Sophie Anderson, Joanna Brigg, Hannah Diamond, Tom Smedley and Rachel Wigmore (sailing) Amy Pennington (Orienteering) and Adam Wright (Tennis), with swimmer Nathan Hayes having the additional honour of captaining the British Youth Team on their visit to Edmonton, Canada.

The Chamber Choir, under their new Director Mr James Henderson, has been heard on many occasions on BBC Radios 2 and 4. There has been an extensive collaborative programme with the London Mozart Players. The Orchestra joined with the Chamber Choir under the LMP's Associate Conductor Nicolae Moldoveanu in a memorable performance of Fauré's *Requiem* at our Remembrance Day concert in the cathedral. With the orchestra's recommendation came the school's first Associate Composer, Cecilia McDowell. Ms McDowell's *Ave Maris Stella* was premiered on Remembrance Day and she subsequently composed *See, A Son is Born* for the choir to sing on Radio 4 and at our Founder's Day Service. In the summer the LMP's Guest Conductor Sir James Galway arrived in Portsmouth with a part full suitcase. He summoned a baton from the Royal Marines and a courier to collect his music, but

nonetheless honoured his commitment to entertain our best flautists in his dressing room and show them some tricks of the virtuoso's trade. At least three Junior School parents wept visibly as the London Mozart Players allowed members of our string scheme to play with them at a special children's concert. The event was generously sponsored by Nestlé, and would have melted even a refrigerated chocolate bar to the core.

A panoply of other cultural activity -- a memorable visit from Artist in Residence David Odwar, a superb performance of *Habeas Corpus* at the Theatre Royal, visits from speakers ranging from OP poet Christopher Logue to Edexcel's Chief Examiner (a man under pressure, that) -- culminated in the major artistic event of the year, the *Portsmouth Festivities*. Their theme was Fifty Glorious Years and they fell in the week of Her Majesty the Queen's Jubilee visit. There were talks from the ITN Royal Correspondent, the Keeper of the Queen's Pictures, the Governor of her favourite residence, and -- a diversion, this, for those of more republican persuasion -- *An Audience with Tony Benn* at the King's Theatre. Ms Christine Derry conjured into her Red Gallery works by many of the UK's leading ceramists; Mrs Sarah Quail spirited from the Tate Gallery the sketches and watercolours made by JMW Turner on his visits to Portsmouth to observe previous Royal visits. There were fringe events galore, one of them even graced by The Queen and Prince Philip. The sun shone (exceedingly); Guy Snowball presented his award winning portrait to the Queen (charmingly); the crowd, led by Lord Lieutenant's cadet Dominic Thornton Flowers, cheered (lustily); the Red Arrows flew past (deafeningly); the Swing Band played on (magnificently); the BBC wanted to know what PGS pupils thought of it all, and words were whispered (far too secretly) between Mr Henderson and the Duke. None present will forget. The crowds were back, many of them, three nights later, for a *Last Night of the Proms* with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra beside HMS Victory. The wind blew (exceedingly), the rain rained (horizontally) the orchestra played on (just about), and though conditions were more suited for *King Lear* than *Rule Britannia*, we waved our flags and sang, and none of us there will be likely to forget that *Festivities* experience either.

These were the largest *Festivities* yet, and without doubt the most ambitious. We are delighted that they were so widely sponsored and that the City Council has expressed an interest in playing a larger role in future years. At a time when Mr Blair's Think Tanks are said to have been turning their minds to whether independent schools should retain their charitable status, the *Festivities* present a timely reminder of just how fully private schools operate to public benefit.

We say farewell to Mrs Jan Cresswell, Miss Ruth Duthie, Mrs Jean Edwards, Mr Gerry Neenon, Ms Aneela Qureshi, Mr Jon Shepherd, Mr Andrew West and our many superb GAP Year Students, too numerous for them to be individually named, and too diversely talented for my prose to be able to do them justice. Mrs Gudrun Moran retires early for family reasons; Mr Raymond Bratt retires after thirty four years of distinguished service, including over twenty two years as Head of Modern Languages. Mr Bratt has also been Assistant Chaplain, in which capacity he has undertaken many deeds of personal kindness, experienced by many but known about by few. We warmly thank these staff for all they have contributed.

All these achievements leave many people to thank: the teaching staff, the non-teaching staff, and especially the Bursar. I should like to add personal thanks to all members of the Senior Team, and especially to the long-suffering Second Master; to my PA and Secretary; to the Chaplain; and to the energetic and charismatic Mrs Foster. I can also tell parents that although few parents know the inner working of the Governing Body all can be assured that a better Governing Body could barely be imagined. I should like to express in addition this year my particular personal gratitude to the Chairman and Vice Chairman.

The last page of the *Pictorial Record* shows a retirement photo of Mr Bratt, taken in front of a new wallhanging commissioned from the distinguished artist Betty Myerscough. The wallhanging, a millennium commission celebrating especially the acquisition of Cambridge House in that year, commemorates the history of our site and of our school. This half-term's exhibition by our excellent archivist Mrs Catherine Smith gives a full guide to its conception and completion: I do hope that you will visit it.

PGS is Portsmouth's oldest school, and we seek to live up to the pride of our heritage, to bring the best of modern practice to the most revered of time-honoured traditions.

The academic year 2001-2, for the reasons given above and for many others, which there has been neither time nor space to describe, is one of which the school can be proud. It is a pleasure and privilege to be able to congratulate and thank all those who played their part in it.