

jep/dck

10 January 2008

Dear Parents

Welcome Back

It is a particular pleasure for me to welcome you back to the start of term as I begin my new role as Headmaster at Portsmouth Grammar School.

During my sabbatical in the autumn, I visited a variety of schools across the UK as well as taking the opportunity to visit schools in Canada and the United States. It was an enriching experience, allowing me to see different approaches to teaching and learning as well as to begin forging links with IB World Schools as we look forward to the launch of the International Baccalaureate in 2009.

But my time away also served to illustrate what an outstanding school PGS is and that it has every reason to flourish still further in the years ahead.

I look forward to building on the three-way relationship of family, pupil and school, upon which so much of our young people's success depends; and to ensuring that, as standards in academic and extracurricular achievement continue to rise, we succeed in retaining that sense of community which makes for happy and motivated pupils.

Staff

There has been overwhelming evidence of community spirit at PGS in response to the sad news of Mrs Lesley Spofforth's death, announced in the middle of the Christmas holiday. Current and former pupils, members of staff and parents have shown tremendous support both for the family and school's services of thanksgivings to celebrate Mrs Spofforth's contribution to the life of PGS. It has been a poignant but heartening start to the new year.

I am pleased to welcome three new members of staff to the Senior School this term. Miss Jennifer Dunne provides maternity cover in Chemistry and Mrs Janet Kensall teaches part-time in Mathematics. Our new Director in Residence, Mr Jeremy Taylor, the founding director of the National Youth Music Theatre, has an exciting programme from the start. As well as the Year 9/10 Play *Oliver Twist*, he is directing a combined Junior and Senior School production of Britten's oratorio *Noyes Fludde*, which features the actor Robert Hardy as God and one of Britain's most distinguished baritones, Stephen Varcoe, as Noah. The production runs from Wednesday 5-Friday 7 March and promises to be a dramatic spectacle in St Thomas's Cathedral as we approach the Easter period.

Open Door

At 08.20 am every day, except Thursdays, I have an Open Door when pupils are able to come and see me without appointment. This can be used either to have Recognitions signed or simply for pupils to come and have a chat.

Oxbridge News

Last year the Sutton Trust produced a league table showing the top 100 schools in the country for achieving places at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge over the last ten years. PGS was the only school in the area to feature.

We are still awaiting final news of this year's candidates, but as I write no fewer than 16 pupils have been successful in receiving offers, which is already double the number of places won in 2006. My congratulations to them all.

Sport

The U14 girls represent Hampshire in the Southern Regional Championships on Thursday 10 January at Surbiton Hockey Club. The U19 Netball team are also in the regional finals on Saturday 19 January at High Wycombe. We wish them the best of luck in these competitions.

Website and E-mail Communications

Please may I remind you that the school will be communicating with parents of pupils in the Senior School exclusively by e-mail from February onwards. There will continue to be mailings in hard form at the end of each half term, though a simultaneous e-mail will indicate the contents of this mailing. Please ensure that you have given us your most recent contact details, remembering that we are happy to email you at more than one address if you prefer.

The school website, www.pgs.org.uk, will continue to provide latest news and information of forthcoming events, as well as archive copies of all newsletters for your convenience.

Adolescence Evening

Year 8 parents are invited to attend a presentation about Adolescence on Monday 4 February 2008 in the David Russell Theatre. Expert child psychologist, Dr Jon Bigg, will join our school doctor, Dr Andrew Scott-Brown, and members of the teaching staff in a series of presentations on issues associated with teenage years. I recommend the evening wholeheartedly. Please contact Mrs Christine Giles (Senior Teacher) at c.giles@pgs.org.uk to confirm your attendance, and to suggest topics you would like to be included in the course of the evening.

Dickens Birthday and Ides of March Lectures

We have two major lectures this term to celebrate Dickens' birthday and the Ides of March. On Saturday 9 February Professor John Bowen, from the University of York, will be speaking on 'Dickens and the Devil' at 7.30 pm in the John Pounds Memorial Church. The poet Mr Craig Raine, from New College Oxford, will be talking about Christopher Logue (OP) and his extraordinary translation of Homer's *Iliad* at 7.30 pm on Friday 14 March in the Rotunda. Parents and pupils are most welcome to these events.

IB & A Level

We are at an exciting stage for the future development of our Sixth Form following our commitment to provide the International Baccalaureate alongside A Level from 2009.

On Tuesday 4 March at 7.30 pm in the David Russell Theatre we will be holding the first Information Evening about the International Baccalaureate. Guest speakers include George Walker, the former Director-General of the IBO. This event will be followed by a taster day for everyone in Year 10 – the first cohort to have the opportunity to study IB in the Sixth Form at PGS – when pupils will experience Theory of Knowledge, a core aspect of the diploma programme.

This year also marks the introduction of new specifications in A Level for first examination in 2010. In essence, the changes are the introduction of the A* grade with weighting on performance in the second half of the A Level course; the reduction from six to four modules in most subjects; and increased emphasis on a synoptic approach to study.

Following discussion by Heads of Department and Senior Teachers, there is a strong feeling that we should encourage our A Level pupils, in the light of these changes, to study four subjects to A Level whilst remaining flexible about their option to complete a fourth subject at AS only.

We have also come to the view that it will be significantly beneficial to our pupils to sit their AS modules in January of the U6, rather than in the June of the L6, as at present. This will allow much greater teaching time in the first year of the Sixth Form and enable pupils to develop the synoptic approach required to achieve the A* grade.

I will be writing to Year 11 parents separately to explain this development in greater detail and look forward to the opportunity of discussing it at the Sixth Form Subject Forum on Monday 28 January.

On behalf of all the staff, I wish you and your family a happy and fulfilling New Year.

Yours sincerely