
Principal's Newsletter

26 April 2019

Dear Parents,

We have returned to some extraordinary transformations on our campus.

The first is related to our three new members of staff.

Ms Ireson is a new cover supervisor recruited to ensure we have a top team providing cover for any absent teacher. She is an experienced PE teacher and has previously provided PE cover at Liverpool College.

Ms Murphy joins us as a Learning Support Assistant in the Primary Phase from Dovedale Primary School.

Ms Worrall replaces Ms Robbin as a biology teacher. She joins us from Wade Deacon High School where she has served as a Teaching Lead Practitioner for seven years focused on improving teaching and learning across the school.

In addition, there is now a new pastoral team for Butler's House in the secondary phase. Mr Bartlett is now the Head of Butler's and he will be assisted by Mr Muscatelli.

There are also physical transformations.

The AstroTurf is stripped off, and a new carpet is being meticulously laid. Pupils have more questions about the new surface than almost any other campus development imaginable. They stare through the soon to be replaced fencing and fantasize about an endless five a side lunchtime game. A few more weeks and the gates will open.

The place now referred to as the secret garden was another pleasant surprise upon our return. A parent has donated the materials and labour to transform the ragged dump behind the biology laboratory into an oasis of contemplation and tranquillity, suitable for further development through the Gardening Club and a retreat from the hustle and bustle as well as a laboratory for ecological investigations.

The educational significance of the completion of our forest school may be even bigger if it is possible. A grove near the Pre Prep has been completely transformed and will now be available for the implementation of both an outdoor education and forest school programme. When completed, every primary year group will be able to develop outdoor skills, as well as undertaking ecological investigations and environmental conservation. It was an amazing experience to visit the place with the irrepressible Ms Shackell, whose certification as a forest school trainer has been funded by the PTA and who will direct the activities of the addition to our arsenal. I wanted to start the campfire and begin the roasting of marshmallows while singing the classic campfire ditties of my youth, but we have to wait just a little longer. This bucolic grove of learning, the name of which will be the subject of a competition among pupils, will hopefully be able to be used by other schools also. Our thanks to all the parents, staff and pupils who have worked on creating this facility.

Congratulations to Sam D (Y11 School) who is combining preparation for his GCSEs with participation in handball at Great Britain level. Sam is traveling around Europe this spring and summer representing our country at U18 handball, despite the fact that he is only 16.

It is always impressive to see the focused attention of Year 6 pupils in the SATs exams. I passed by the mocks recently and peered in to observe intent clutching of pencils, and frowning of the brows. It was as if the mental energy could not be contained in the examination hall. Of course, the Labour Party have indicated that they will ban these exams when and if they assume office. In listening to the reasons the party gave for this decision, one would think that the banning of SATs should be seen in the same light as the banning of other cruelties, like corporal punishment. One spokesperson expressed relief at her own policy as she was a mother and she did not want her children to go through it. Doubtless the SATs are stressful for pupils, but that stress is mostly created by the anxiety of schools about the results not by the tests themselves. It also seems likely that when the as yet unspecified testing regime which would replace SATs is finally installed, doubtless after the usual flurry of errors and confusion which seem to accompany the introduction of anything new in education, we will find that the new tests are as stressful as the old. The anxiety pupils feel is related to the anxiety of their teachers and their parents. SATs were never intended to be, like GCSE, some sort of final examination or qualification. Indeed their main purpose seems to be to measure school rather than pupil performance. Much as it pleases some to constantly tinker with the assessment systems in schools, we have never had a consistent assessment framework for the 14 year period that a pupil is actually in school, making it all historically incomparable and somewhat useless. The great benefit of the Westminster obsession with Brexit has been the paucity of new initiatives and the relative peace in educational circles, long may this state of impotence continue.

The Music Department is holding its annual **Springtime Soiree** on Thursday 16 May at 7.00pm at Mossley Hill Church. Tickets (£8 full, £5 concessions) will be on sale from the Upper and Prep School offices from Monday. Please note the change of venue for this year.

Tonight we will celebrate the sporting achievement of secondary phase pupils at a gala event in the MV Hall. The summer term is also peak DofE season and another practice expedition is hitting the hills this weekend. We had a successful Year 8 parents' evening although we want to perfect some scheduling issues and make the experience even smoother in the future. Next week it is Year 7's turn.

Tickets are available for the play *Iphigenia in Aulis*, a Euripidean tragedy about a young woman ritually sacrificed so the Greeks could make war on Troy. Her situation certainly puts the stresses and strains of the beginning of our term in perspective. The performance, which involves pupils from Y9-12, takes place on Friday 3 May at 7pm in the Mossley Vale Theatre. Get your tickets, priced at £5, from the school office in advance, or on the night.

May I wish you and yours a happy and restful weekend.

Yours sincerely,

Mr H van Mourik Broekman
Principal