

## Head's Blog – Lent 2010

### Monday 29th March

Without fail each year Young Enterprise provides an opportunity for pupils in S10 and S12 to cultivate entrepreneurial and team skills which have a lasting impact upon them. Mrs Matthews and the external volunteer business advisers provide them with support but they learn business lessons through hard personal experience. For the last three years funding for independent schools has not been available and we have had to seek private sponsorship. For 2010-11 there is a possibility of central funding being withdrawn for maintained schools as well which would bring an end to the hugely popular competition. Whatever the outcome we have shown that we are able to survive and thrive and we will, if necessary, replace Young Enterprise with an alternative. In the meantime last week's Area competition at Corby resulted in our pupils winning 5 of the 9 prizes on offer and "Evolution" with their honey bees and "Driftwood" with their garden signs winning through to the County Finals next term. The "Study Buddy Boards" of "Spitfire" rightly won the Best Product and "Eclipse" won the best Presentation for their door stoppers. Our S10 teams were competing against pupils two years their senior and their maturity was to their great credit. What was equally appreciated was the incredible support in some remote part of a Corby industrial estate from Wellingborough parents, advisers, sponsors, governors and staff.

A comment was made to me on Saturday by a visitor observing the mass of young OWs playing sport against School sides about the fact that they had never seen that level of former pupil attendance and obvious enjoyment at any of their previous schools. The Summer OW Gathering on Open Day is the next opportunity for us as a School to show our appreciation of our OW links and for them to show their on-going commitment to the School. Having myself barely survived a bruising physical encounter on the soccer field against an OW side whose legs were considerably younger than those of the staff, I then later in the weekend also witnessed the support which is such a feature of Wellingborough life, at Gresham's School in Holt for their annual Hockey Festival. At least 20 parents and a number of OWs made the 2-hour journey to see the U13 girls' indoor and outdoor teams proving to be the strongest in this prestigious event. My trip meant that I missed the joint School and Wellingborough Singers Easter Concert but I have also received highly supportive comment about the quality of the choral pieces and the accompaniment as well.

There is a temptation to shy away from the challenges of Drug and Alcohol education, however, last week's series of presentations confronted the Alcohol issue head-on. Dr. Aric Sigman addressed all of our pupils from the Prep School Year 8s through to the 18 year-olds in S13 before holding a final session for parents. The feedback was universal firstly in its acceptance that this is what we should be educating youngsters and parents about and also that this should be followed up with a continuing programme on the other challenges facing teenagers and parents. My own oft-repeated concern about the impact upon academic performance of the party culture was highlighted by Dr. Sigman in his explanations of the negative neurological impact of both alcohol and drugs upon a human brain which continues to grow and develop until at least the age of 24 : "alcohol is poisonous to nerve cells" was a phrase which resonated and I recommend reference to his work "The Spoilt Generation" for a controversial read on parenting. The assembly which I presented on so-called "Legal Highs" and in particular Mephedrone, a drug which has attracted much media attention recently, has prompted a number of comments in response about the pressures upon our own young people. I respectfully urge parents to be both vigilant and strong in their approach.

The 2008-9 Wellingburian will be distributed this week for the final time in its present format before we adopt a slightly different production for 2009-10 and this is one which will, one hopes, be more easily put together and be ready for publication in the early Autumn.

Current and past pupils regularly talk of trips, tours and expeditions and prior notice is being given for two suggested major School trips in summer 2012 to Bolivia and also to Malaysia, Singapore and Sri Lanka with introductory presentations being given in the first week of May.

The final four days of the Lent Term throw up mad panic from all quarters : pupils rushing to meet coursework deadlines and planning their Easter revision, teachers completing admin tasks and revision material, Rock, Pop and Blues Concert preparation, Easter services preparation, General Knowledge finals, School Prefect selection decisions: it all makes for an emotional mix of highs and lows before a well-earned break. We are, as an experiment, providing 6th formers with a supervised study facility in the Study Centre for the first time during the vacation on Wednesday, Thursday, 7th 8th April and Tuesday and Wednesday, 13th 14th April.

### **Monday 22nd March**

One of life's great privileges as a schoolmaster is meeting up with former pupils and reminiscing about happy times. Graham Garrett, James Hasler, Mike Askham and I certainly enjoyed this pleasure last Friday evening. Accepting that not everyone enjoys their schooldays and no one enjoys every minute of every day of their schooling a convivial social setting is an ideal opportunity to meet old acquaintances. The backdrop of an artistically floodlit Twickenham stadium was the venue for the OW London gathering chosen by this year's OW President Peter Abey. He was supported by his family - the sizeable Warwick and Bigley clans - and we were entertained by Harvey Thorneycroft's recollections of the early days of Mike Askham's housemastering career. I was able to explain the discovery in recent days not only of the 1933 Daily Telegraph reported last week but of a glamour magazine from the mid 1950s and one of the guests thought that he might have hidden it behind the wall panel where it was discovered! This Saturday we again meet up with OWs (not all of whom are young and slim) for football, hockey, netball and cross country matches including the main attraction of a staff -v- OW football match starting at 11:00 and probably finishing after 10 minutes each way!

Whilst speaking with a number of parents and 6th formers recently we have been discussing the fact that some of our pupils find it difficult to study/revise in their home environment for one reason or another. As a result we are putting into place plans to open the Study Centre for any pupils who wish to study in silence on certain days for Revision purposes over Easter.

It has been suggested to me that the interminable roadworks which are plaguing London and Irthlingborough Roads are our fault and are actually creating a new "Wellingborough School sliproad"; I can confirm that this is another example of an urban myth and we are informed that this work (is it cabling of some description?) will mean further inconvenience and frustration until at least April 21st.

And briefly this week : as evidence of our increasing commitment to promoting a sustainable School environment "Half Energy Day" has proven to be well supported. In response to calls for an opportunity to hold more Communion Services we are continuing our Lent commitment on Tuesdays at 1:35pm in Chapel with a welcome for pupils, staff, parents and visitors alike. This Tuesday also sees the ever-popular General Knowledge Quiz. The 43 pupils taking part in this year's Young Enterprise programme take their Exam this week and on Thursday it is their Area Finals in Corby. We wish them all good fortune.

## Monday 15th March

The skips in the Quad outside of Fryer's House have been filled over the last two weeks with a multitude of masonry and rubble as the modernizing project, due to be completed in June, gets underway. The aim is to improve considerably the environment by infilling two inner courtyards to create an open-plan house area. The first phase has uncovered amongst other features a 1933 Daily Telegraph back page (Spurs were top of the First Division), a well which has been capped but probably contains naughty boys of yesteryear and a reinforced concrete roof of an air-raid shelter.

As I have written recently the Duke of Edinburgh season has begun and it is fascinating to listen to reports from practice weekends where some struggle with stamina issues, others with map-reading whilst yet more find it difficult to remain even-tempered when faced by adversity and a lack of home comforts. The vast majority of participants for Silver and Gold have, however, borne the slings and arrows rather well. We have entered the next phase of interviews for prefectship and it was suggested to me today that all potential prefects should be asked to undertake this sort of adventure training exercise as a test for their suitability.

The Spring Concert at The Castle was an enormous credit to so many youngsters in both the Prep and Senior Schools and their music teachers. The audience was treated to a memorable mix of ages, styles and genres; soloists and ensembles alike held our attention and we look forward to further entertainment in next week's Rock, Pop and Blues Concert. The links to the images on the news pages of the website are worth following.

This coming week is packed with prefect interviews, interviews for the HR post, the final Parents' Evening for many as the Year 13 have an update on progress towards their A level exams, the political debate on Wednesday with local representatives of each of the three main political parties, preparation for the forthcoming Lent Term Governors' Meeting and this Friday's OW Dinner at Twickenham (let us hope that the evening is less turgid than an England rugby performance!).

## Monday 8th March

To mark World Book Day we organized a 12-Hour reading of Dickens' *Hard Times* in its entirety in the Dining Hall starting at 8 a.m. with the Headmaster uttering Mr Gradgrind's immortal words "Now, what I want is facts" and then failing by a mere 15 seconds to hit the 8 p.m. completion deadline! Both Mr Hargreaves and Mr Gamble deserve huge praise for their contributions as do the large number of pupils and staff who read throughout the day. The marathon drew attention to the beauty of reading literature aloud and what was interesting was that a number of pupils who had not initially volunteered warmed to the idea when they saw the enjoyment to be derived.

A similar sense of stimulus appeared to be in evidence on Friday evening with the OW-School debate and the visit of James Browne and Richard Saynor (supported by OWs Alistair Evans, Tom McGoldrick, and Tom Harris in the audience) who verbally jostled with pupils whilst Mrs Clark maintained her watching brief in the Chair. The benefits to those who debated and those in the sizeable audience were manifest.

The West Side Story rehearsals have got off to a positive and energetic start and parents are planning fundraising events to support what will undoubtedly be a great experience in November. The "Wellingborough School's Got Talent" Evening on Friday 26th March is a date for the diary.

I would respectfully ask for parents' co-operation in two areas, firstly in our on-going focus on pupils' appearance and secondly in the courtesy of informing us in sufficient notice about a lack of availability for commitments whether they are sporting or otherwise; in our minds there is no reason whatsoever for young men to arrive at School unshaven or with unkempt hair or for young women to be dressed inappropriately. Equally we all have to alter our plans at short notice on occasions but so often we receive notice of withdrawal from a planned activity

with less than 48 hours' warning. We look forward to parental support in these areas now and especially as the weather improves and pupils traditionally develop a greater tendency to push the boundaries!

Tuesday's S11 Parents Evening will be the last time before the summer's GCSE examinations that we have the cohort's parents and pupils together and, along with an assessment of the recent Trial examinations, we will be looking ahead to advice on the exam preparation itself and then beyond to those heady post-examination days when these young people will return for the "Headstart" academic week as new sixth formers in their pristine "business" suits!

The showcasing of musicians of all ages from across the School at The Spring Concert at The Castle is one of the musical calendar events of the year and Wednesday's programme will include a number of our successful performers from last week's Wellingborough Rotary Music Festival and some who will be re-appearing at The Castle the following evening.

The second annual "Swish" Evening as part of the Macmillan Cancer Support fundraising campaign takes place this Thursday and one hopes that there is as much successful "swishing" as there was last year when bargain designer clothes were much in evidence.

It is the time of the year for DofE expedition practices and speaking of adventure we are hoping to give an airing to the Cripps' boys' Sahara Presentation which chronicles their unforgettable five-day trek to the Atlas Mountains undertaken during February Half Term. Meanwhile the coming week also sees a planning meeting for the forthcoming cross-curricular study Trip to Paris at Easter.

### **Monday 1st March**

We enter March with the nights becoming lighter and Summer Public Examinations appearing ever nearer. It is also the time, with Budget deliberations consuming many management hours to reassess much of what we do and why we do it as well as the cost of meeting requests for expenditure in 2010-11.

In the first part of this week I am away inspecting a London school in this, the first term, of the revised ISI Inspection format. Although the process for an inspector is arduous in the sense of it being intensive work over three days it does present a fascinating insight into other schools and also provides a unique opportunity to learn lessons which will prove helpful for Wellingborough when we are next inspected in 2012. Whilst the School will undoubtedly operate better in my absence I will be returning to a Business Planning day with my Senior Leadership Team, a Foundation Meeting assessing the progress which Martin Minshall is making in developing relationships with our OW community in particular and indeed hosting a number of OWs for dinner on Friday after they have been in the audience for the OW-School Debate "This House believes that parents should be able to physically discipline their children"? Never let it be said that Wellingborough School shies away from contentious issues!

Last week's HMC meeting also provided an opportunity to compare notes with fellow Heads, and as ever, be reminded that one's problems are often replicated elsewhere. UCAS offers for 2010 entry, sportsmanship before, during and after School fixtures, the new A\* at A level, relative merits of GCSE, IGCSE, modular approaches, Pre-U and IB, the susceptibility of our students to alcohol and drug pressures were topics all debated long and hard.

My Friday was rounded off last week by an invitation for Ruth and I from the Army Section of the CCF to judge an exercise where 3 groups had to plan a journey from Wellingborough to Cape Town on a limited budget. It was a pleasure to see young cadets engaged with a meaningful challenging team activity and yet further evidence that CCF is not simply a diet of marching and rifle-craft.

I look forward to World Book Day readings on Thursday, Rotary Music Festival performances and Spring Concert rehearsals, a multitude of sports fixtures : one can never be bored in this School!

And finally ..... congratulations to Rob and Caroline Smith on the birth of their son, Oliver.

## Monday 22nd February

One of the many areas in which we have to pass a professional judgement is that of our GCSE and A level Modules Policy. At our most recent Parents Evening a small number of parents were vocal in their opposition to our decision to abandon science modules in S10. Whether one agrees with what we decide or not parents should be assured that when we are making decision on pupils' education these are thought-out and follow consultation within School. Last summer we felt that pupils' general education was undermined by allowing modules to intrude into year 10 as well as years 11, 12 and 13. At the same time we decided for similar reasons to abandon January modules in S12. The counter argument that it helps pupils if their exams are spread out is a valid one but we felt that this was outweighed by the importance of having a year without external examinations; whenever they are held they will inevitably compromise other aspects of life including, as we found last summer, other academic subjects. As ever we will continue to review as we also maintain a watching brief over IGCSE, Pre-U and IB as GCSE and A level alternatives.

The press, perhaps as part of their pre-election campaign mischief (and arguably scaremongering), has been awash recently with stories of "anti-independent school bias" : "University bias hits private straight-A students" (Telegraph, 13<sup>th</sup> February). Within the HMC organization there has been a good deal of research and this year it is fact that there are fewer places, more applicants and new hurdles over which to leap but I do not think that universities, in general, are discriminating against pupils from independent schools; we ourselves have some fine young people with a string of A\* at GCSE, As at AS and predicted As at A2 who have received a series of rejections from leading universities but this has been the case in the past in oversubscribed and highly selective courses. For those who are on the receiving end, however, there is quite understandably a sense of injustice.

The Cripps adventurers led by Messrs Hargreaves and Houghton returned with tales of camaraderie and resilience in the face of extreme weather conditions and fatigue yet furnished with memories of a unique experience in the Sahara. As parents we sometimes struggle to afford what appears to be a never-ending stream of requests for school trips but one hopes that the financial pain is, as in this instance, undoubtedly worth it – the Facebook photographs seem to suggest that! Typically teenagers' talk of course switches to the next trip such as future adventures in China and other fascinating destinations. At the same time the skiers braved the Austrian slopes, and a lengthy coach journey and they returned tired and bruised but having skied well and attracted praise for their behaviour too.

Speaking of praise for simple things a mother rang in last week to say how impressed she was when she witnessed a 6<sup>th</sup> form pupil's politeness whilst she was waiting in a queue of traffic and had not realized that her car door was open and the gallant young man who held open the Dining Hall door for a Pre-Prep mother with two screaming children this afternoon deserved his pat on the back!

Much time is currently being expended upon budget planning for the coming year. In fact we have a slightly unusual situation currently because we are changing our financial year to match the academic year ie rather than from April-March it will, from September 2010 run from September – August.

I would also draw readers' attention to the advert for "Human Resources Advisor" which, it is hoped, will attract someone with suitable HR experience but who is interested specifically in working here at School.

## Monday 8th February

By the time of writing my next Blog lucky pupils will have partaken in CCF adventures at Yardley Hastings, skied in Austria and trekked in the Atlas Mountains and GCSE Trial examinations will be around the corner for our S11 pupils.

The good works currently being carried out by our pupils for community rather than personal selfish gain were the focus of Sunday's Civic Service. Work with All Saints' and Croyland Primary Schools, the Isebrook Hospital and Wellingborough Youth Forum was eloquently explained by a significant number of 6th form pupils to a congregation of the great and the good including the Mayor, members of the Borough Council and local M.P. Peter Bone.

The Art Exhibition opening was deemed unanimously to have been a worthy vehicle to showcase work of the highest quality from across the School and we can all be rightly proud of the artistic guidance which our youngsters receive. I also witnessed some of the 31 pianists at the evening Concert last week but it unfortunately clashed with the GCSE Drama Moderation during which the two pieces scored well with the examiner; particular attention was drawn to "Through Their Eyes" which was a moving, dramatic representation of the experience of 9/11 and, following on from last week's Prep School Musical, provided yet further evidence of the enviable drama talent in School.

This week we will see and hear the House Music Competition due to be judged, I am delighted to say, by Stephen Ostler, Director of Music here 1968-94 as well as Charity Day on Friday in support of our chosen School charities Maruva Trust in Zimbabwe and the Claire Rowland Fund. At last Thursday's House Evensong Paul Carbury, Director of the Samantha Dickson Brain Tumour Trust provided an insight into how our fundraising is used.

Next Half Term we are due to have one of our regular Information Evenings (this time on teenage alcohol use). Whilst on the topic of teenage behaviour it is always worth restating our position on Cannabis as parents often ask about the School's stance : as a Class B drug it is illegal. Evidence of "possession" here in School or "dealing" in School would lead to automatic permanent exclusion. In conversation with Headmasters at our regular local, regional and national meetings one is repeatedly made aware of the useage amongst teenagers at parties of cannabis and it is undeniable that some of our pupils use the drug at gatherings in private homes. We will continue to publicise the effects of the drug and the potential adverse effect not only on behaviour and concentration in general but on academic performance.

It gives me enormous pleasure to announce the appointment for September 2010 of Mrs Susan Barnhurst as the replacement for Mrs Sarah Clark in the role of Second Deputy with specific responsibility for the Academic life of the Senior School. We wish Susan well in this new role and Sarah good fortune as she takes on the headship at Queen's School, Chester.

Scholarship results were publicized at the weekend with the inevitable mix of disappointment and elation. In the general climate of focus on Means-Tested Bursary support we want to continue with Scholarships even though they may not carry the financial weight of previous arrangements. One adaptation made this year is that the "Awards" as opposed to Scholarships will carry with them a requirement for a written request to be made to me for funding and that request must be related to that subject area; if it is for an academic subject this could be for equipment or reading resource material, a course or a trip directly related to the award area. Obviously the same applies in Art, Sport and Drama. The aim is so that a student sees a direct tangible benefit rather than a small amount of money being discounted from the School fee as previously.

We have received widespread praise for the new DVDs which have appeared on the website and for the recent article appearing in the Business Times.

The Governors have paid two separate visits in the last few days as part of their on-going policy to learn more about life across the whole School : on Wednesday they observed Senior School lessons and met staff informally and on Saturday they spent the morning inspecting the Houses; the purpose of both visits was to provide them with background understanding to enable them to make informed judgements at both committee and full governor level.

Please can I draw your attention to the **'Wellingborough School's Got Talent'** evening, raising funds for West Side Story. This will take place on, Friday 26th March and we are looking for talented performers of any age to take part but if you don't wish to perform, we would really appreciate your support in the audience. Tickets are available from Senior School Reception.

Although there will be much over which to enthuse this week my highlight will probably be the 30 minutes which I spent this afternoon reading a novel about a very peculiar Headmaster to Mr Popplewell's Year 3 Pre-Prep class; there are some things in life, being in a classroom with children is one, of which one never tires and then to be rewarded with a holiday at the end of the week!

### **Monday 1st February**

For those who enjoy seeing young people having genuine fun on stage the Prep School production of Bugsy Malone was a delight and the way in which the Prep School Hall was transformed into an authentic-looking "Speakeasy" with many of the audience (including Headmasters and Governors) in 1920s garb, added even more to an excellent production; the cast, Lucy Leakey and her production and technical team deserve praise indeed.

This week has a typically hectic feel to it already with Pianists' Concert, GCSE Drama moderation, Public Speaking, House Evensong, The Art Exhibition Preview, UCAS Information Evening, Prep and Pre-Prep Open Mornings, two Governors' visits and the Civic Service in addition to the usual frenetic daily life which consumes us.

One of the appealing features of Wellingborough School life is that there is always something new with which to contend : Elaine O'Sullivan and her team ran our very own "Bushtucker Trial" in the Dining Hall to mark Australia Day and the "winners" were rewarded with Coffee Shop tokens. Speaking of the latter we have had a number of enquiries from other schools regarding the Costa Coffee facility and also our use of Coffee Shop tokens to reward 6th formers for good academic work; our good name is certainly acknowledged in a wider field.

Although our football results, especially at 1st XI level, are only slowly improving we have had too many draws and losses for our liking but the girls' U14 and U15 Netball and boys' U17 Cross-country teams were our standard bearers this week again. We were delighted to see the appearance of fencing below the Sports Hall as part of the continuing attempts to improve pedestrian safety and look forward to this work being completed as quickly as possible especially as the project involves improved lighting at the lower end of the car park.

I am regularly asked by prospective parents about our approach to new bus routes. Last week I visited, for a schools' promotional evening, Beachborough Prep School near Brackley which is at the extreme edge of our catchment area. Numerous parents from the Towcester area indicated that they would seriously consider us if we provided a bus or minibus option. We regularly review our provision and the other location on which we seek feedback for our planning is Thrapston.

On Friday evening it was a genuine pleasure to take up an invitation to share dinner and a glass of red wine with four impressive young Old Wellingburians at the East India Club in central London. Tom McGoldrick, Tom Harris, Alastair Evans and Richard Saynor spoke not only of their new challenging careers but also their fond memories from their schooldays and the bonds which ensure they continue to stay in touch. These young people are the lifeblood of the OW community of the future and this networking opportunity is undoubtedly one of the hidden values of an education enjoyed by Wellingburians.

### **Monday 25th January**

One of the most enviable aspects of teaching is when one has the opportunity to spend time with young people away from the demands of examination pressures; on Sunday cycling 40km with the Duke of Edinburgh Gold Award teams through the Northamptonshire countryside was one of those experiences. Mr and Mrs Hurdman and Mr Ramsden are doing a wonderful job in encouraging these worthy youngsters ahead of their practice expedition to Ely and Cambridge at Easter and the real thing in North Yorkshire in July. The weekend also saw the school awash with young people on Saturday : final rehearsals for Buggy Malone despite power cuts in the Prep School Hall, Netball, Football and Cross Country matches occupied all of the sports facilities and members of the RFU executive from Twickenham including the Chief Executive Francis Baron visited the EMRU offices to speak about local community rugby and to inspect our School facilities. Another visitor who left impressed was the Commercial Manager of Rugby School who came to see for himself our dining service and facilities as we are rightly building a reputation throughout the country as an example of good practice and success.

The Young Enterprise year is building momentum and 27 pupils took their stands to the Milton Keynes Fair on Sunday to compete against 69 schools; again our Year 10 pupils competed against 6<sup>th</sup> formers but "Spitfire" with their study "buddy boards", "Eclipse" with their "wedggy doorstops", "Driftwood" with their garden signs and "Evolution" with their honey bee products all impressed the judges and won two prizes between them.

We are currently in the midst of Scholarship and Award interviews following Assessments and we would hope to have final decisions released in the early part of next week. As ever one is acutely aware of the fact that there are many more young people of quality than there are funds available for awards and accolades but we attempt to be scrupulous and judge with integrity throughout the process. We will provide, however, written feedback to all of those who made applications. Once this process is completed then Bursary applications will be considered.

We are also making plans for a number of Information opportunities for parents including next Tuesday's UCAS Evening. Planning is in hand for the opening of next week's Art Exhibition at The Castle, two imminent House Evensongs, a drop-in Coffee Shop session for parents of 6<sup>th</sup> formers and two visits by the Governors to the Senior School; one of these is in response to my invitation to assess the state of the Houses, the other is part of their on-going commitment to witness a working day in all three parts of the School during which they arrive at 8 a.m. and leave in the afternoon.

## **Monday 18th January**

Whilst Year 8 pupils were braving the cerebral elements in the 13+ Scholarship examinations on Saturday a number of other pupils were battling the compulsory mud, rain, wind and hills of Abington Park in the County Schools' Cross Country Championships. Guy Marshman followed his 2<sup>nd</sup> place the previous week in the U17 Clubs' race with a stunning performance to obliterate the opposition to become County Champion. Notable performances came from Matt Fellows, Chris Palfreeman, Rory Bowe, Peter Holley, Harry White, Nick Cowen and Jemma Vaughan.

Final auditions for November's production of West Side Story brought the inevitable mix of jubilation and dejection as the outcomes were published today. Congratulations to Conner Brown, Alice Gividen, Rory Bowe, Jack Kirby, Oli Blantern, Helen Gent and Anastasia Adams in their lead roles and commiserations to those who came close and remember that "there are no minor roles only minor actors". The auditioning panel headed by Chris Martin-Sims relate tales of excellent dance, song and dramatic performances which fill them with great glee for the coming months' rehearsals. The Prep School's imminent production of Bugsy Malone is also throwing up promising performances but it is a pleasure to add that a number of Senior School pupils are voluntarily helping with backstage and technical aspects : Holly Price, Lottie Fordyce, Josh McMillan and Mark Crooks.

Friday evening's CCF presentation to parents was successful despite its new timing of 5.45 and Lt Col. Steve Bruce's thought-provoking promotion of the virtues of the Royal Marines Section and the challenge laid down to the girls was a highlight.

Tomorrow evening's Education Committee meeting will be focusing on our on-going business planning and the prickly topic of ICT investment. Readers with experience in the business world know that as well as being costly both hardware and software so quickly become outdated so we have to ensure that we make our educational decisions on well-informed grounds. The concept of developing a Virtual Learning Environment with its focus on remote access to Teaching and Learning Resources in particular is at the forefront of our current research and we will be keeping parents informed of our findings and decisions.

## **Monday 11th January**

This last week appears to have been dominated by weather considerations. The News section of the website has a detailed explanation of the factors taken into consideration when making decisions as well as the mechanisms for doing so. I am delighted to have received further positive feedback regarding the use of ClarionCall and one wonders what we did before it existed? Despite wholesale sporting cancellations we managed to complete the scheduled 11+ and 16+ Scholarship assessments on Saturday morning, we continued with the Year 8 "Bugsy Malone" rehearsals which prompted further positive feedback ahead of 28/29<sup>th</sup> January and the eagerly-awaited first round of auditions for November's "West Side Story" revealed both anticipated and unexpected singing and dancing talent – particularly, I am delighted to report, amongst the boys!

On Wednesday of this week I am due to update my training as a member of the Independent Schools' Inspectorate. A new regime has begun in the independent sector which provides for only five days' notice ahead of an Inspection and these occur now every three years. The actual visit by the full Inspection team lasts a day less. The noises we hear are that there is an even greater focus on regulatory compliance matters so I will be especially interested to establish if this is at the expense of teaching and learning.

Tomorrow is a WSSPA (Senior School parents' association) meeting where I will be passing on and listening to ideas on aspects of School life with Caroline Anstee's Committee. The frank exchange of views always makes for a lively and rewarding evening. Thanks will also be expressed to the Committee for the bequest which has paid for new gym equipment which in turn has resulted in an increasingly heavy use of the area on the Sports Hall balcony by large numbers of pupils.

One of the victims of last week's weather was the CCF Presentation to parents and this has been re-scheduled for this coming Friday but at the earlier time of 5.45 p.m. The Year 9 pupils themselves will have, by then, have been provided with a taster of what is in store for them during their 18 months' compulsory service in their initial choice of section.

Finally I have been asked to mention that on 11th March there will be a repeat of the hugely successful "Swish" evening held last year in aid of Macmillan Cancer so those well-dressed females out there who are clearing out wardrobes as part of the New Year cleansing process might consider storing designer outfits in order to make them available for that evening (further details will follow!).

### **Monday 4th January**

The return to a working day was a struggle for many of us who had been used to waking up naturally rather than with the artificial aid of an alarm clock. It was even harder for those of us who braved snow and freezing mud on Cannock Chase on Saturday for what was billed as a "Mountainbike adventure" - thanks boys!

An in-service training day sometimes is greeted with disdain by teachers but despite the sub-zero temperatures coupled with temperamental Victorian heating systems, there was much about which to be positive. Today's lunch replaced the usual end of Michaelmas term Christmas party which Ruth and I, as an appreciation of all that teaching and support staff do, traditionally host with the Common Room Committees. Inevitably Elaine, her chefs and team did us proud. We were joined by two special guests : Nicola Willis, an ex pupil who was Head Girl in the early 1990s and her father. Nicola is a founding member and force behind "Africaid", (an Aids Education Charity in Zimbabwe) and for which the School has raised considerable funds over a number of years. Speaking of charity work it is worth noting that the Cripps' boys recently raised a staggering £3,500 for the Alzheimer's charity through their bag-packing at Waitrose on the weekend immediately before Christmas.

Amongst other things today we debated our future direction in ICT development and saw an excellent presentation by Peter Lowe focusing on the use of technology in Geography, the feasibility of the IGCSE, Learning styles, the downside of Facebook, academic co-ordination between Prep and Senior Schools.

We were met by new large wrought iron gates at the entrance to the School; these have been funded by the OW club, pedestrian gates are due to be put on either side of the vehicle access gates and this process will be repeated for the exit on the Prep School Drive.

We have been informed that the Governors' decision on the London Road Access is to go straight to Appeal as a result of the refusal on the original application. The Appeal process should start in late March/ early April. The Inspectorate is required to make a decision no later than seven weeks after the initial Hearing.

Today two colleagues joined us in the Prep School: Ollie Figgis who will be teaching French and Spanish during Caroline Smith's maternity leave and Simon Wintle who becomes Director of Sport and a member of the Leadership Team. Two internal changes similarly take effect from today : Claire Gavin will become temporarily Tigers' Club President in the Prep School and Chris Allen will be taking on greater responsibility and involvement within the Learning Support Department. Following Richard Dempster's resignation at the end of last term due to ongoing health issues, Hugh Williams, who has worked here before, will be joining the DT department working with Senior and Prep School pupils for the foreseeable future.

The use of the website has increased significantly and It has been hugely successful since its re-launch. Consequently shortly we will be recruiting a website administrator to release the huge current pressure on those who update the website on a regular basis.

I would like to applaud all of those who battled the elements on the final day of last term and justified the efforts to keep the School open and hold meaningful activities. The use of the School Chapel rather than the intended All Saints' Church by the Senior and Prep Schools was successful and I would like to draw particular attention to the excellent singing without the accompaniment of the organ by the marginally understrength Chapel Choir. Equally we were able to enjoy House and End of Term Assemblies. With adverse weather predicted this week it is worth reminding people of the need to consult the website because Mr Mitchell and I try if at all possible to make and communicate decisions before 7 a.m. Because we have such a huge catchment area covering at least 5 counties we always urge you to make your own decision on the basis of your local conditions but of course we know that we will never please everybody!

This week as well as trying to predict and defeat the weather we look forward to the annual CCF Presentation Evening to the Year 9s on Friday, the start of the Scholarship assessment season on Saturday, and the first auditions for November's eagerly-awaited production of "West Side Story" on Sunday.