

Gracemount High School

Summer Newsletter

August 2006



Gracemount High School
Lasswade Road
Edinburgh
EH16 6TZ

Our Apologies –

Unfortunately an error resulted in a copy of our draft newsletter being sent to you last week instead of the final version. Please accept our apologies for this and we hope you enjoy reading our summer newsletter in its final version.



Dear Parent

Welcome to the new session at Gracemount High School and the first newsletter of the academic year. Further newsletters will be produced by the school on a termly basis.

Last session ended on a tremendous high for the school with our annual Celebration Evening. The event was attended by Council Leader Donald Anderson and Councillor Rev. Ewan Aitken, Executive Member for Children and Families.

In a letter of thanks to the school, Councillor Aitken states that:

'The Celebration Evening was a genuinely inspiring event. The band was outstanding, the soloists were similarly high quality but also the achievements of the young people were genuinely inspirational.'

This is high praise indeed from such an influential individual and the whole School community can take a collective 'pat on the back' from Councillor Aitken's comments.

There is no doubt that the exceptional progress that the school has made is being recognised by the authority and Gracemount High School is seen as a school which is going places.

Enclosed with this newsletter is a copy of 'How we are improving the school'. The document provides parents with a summary of the main School improvement plan initiatives for the coming session. The document also includes advice to parents on how they can help their youngsters to get the best out of the opportunities provided by the school.

Staffing News

A number of long serving staff are leaving Gracemount High School and to celebrate their service and contribution to the school community a retirement dinner has been arranged in the MacDonald Holyrood Hotel for the evening of the 25th of August 2006.

The staff retiring and leaving Gracemount High School are:

- Mr James Dorward – PT Biology
- Mr Sandy Stark – PT Chemistry
- Mrs Yvonne Filsell – PT History
- Mrs Morag Robertson – PT Support for Learning
- Mrs Christine Garvie – Bursar
- Mr Neil Stuart – Business Manager

The following new appointments will be joining the staff team in August:

- Mr Scott MacKenzie – Business Manager
- Ms Jenni Scott – Bursar
- Ms Gillian Morison – Biology
- Ms Kathryn Munro – Biology
- Ms Myra Kandemiri - Chemistry
- Ms Julie Barkham – History
- Ms Emma Webster – Computing
- Mr Robert Simpson – RME
- Mr Jonathon Else – Physical Education

From the beginning of the new session existing staff will take responsibility for new roles:

- Mr Sathia Chetty – PT Science
- Mr Chris Wylie } Joint PT Social Subjects
- Ms Heather Boag }

School Term Dates 2006/7

Staff resume		Monday 14 August 2006*
Staff only		Tuesday 15 August 2006*
Pupils resume		Wednesday 16 August 2006
Autumn holiday	Schools closed	Monday 18 September 2006
Staff resume		Tuesday 19 September 2006*
Pupils resume		Wednesday 20 September 2006
Mid-term	All break	Friday 13 October 2006
	Staff resume	Monday 23 October 2006*
	Pupils resume	Tuesday 24 October 2006
Term ends		Thursday 21 December 2006
All resume		Monday 8 January 2007
Mid-term	All break	Friday 9 February 2007
	All resume	Monday 19 February 2007
Term ends		Friday 30 March 2007
Good Friday		Friday 6 April 2007
Easter Monday		Monday 9 April 2007
Spring Holiday		Monday 16 April 2007
All resume		Tuesday 17 April 2007
May Day	Schools closed	Monday 7 May 2007
Victoria Day	Schools closed	Monday 21 May 2007
Staff resume		Tuesday 22 May 2007*
Pupils resume		Wednesday 23 May 2007
Term ends		Friday 29 June 2007

*The start date for school session 2006/2007 has been **provisionally** identified as 15 August 2007.

S4 Work Experience

S4 Work Experience will take place in the week beginning 25th September 2006.

Reduction in class size – English and Mathematics

In support of the overall strategy to raise level of numeracy and literacy the school has adopted a policy of reducing class size at all stages to an average of 20 pupils in Mathematics and English. The school has taken this action in response to the commitment from the Scottish Executive to reduce class size in S1 and S2 to an average of 20 in 2007 but introduced the policy a year early and extended the initiation to support the development of pupils in years S3, S4, S5 and S6.



Pupil Support Structure

Pupils are assigned to a guidance group or 'house' when they enrol at the school. The three houses are led by a Principal Teachers of Guidance or 'House Heads' are supported by a designated Depute Head Teacher.

Parents first point of contact should normally be the House Head who knows the pupil best and can advise on their progress. The three houses are:

LEWIS

House Head – Mrs L. Sinclair PTG
House SMT Link – Mrs M. Bissett DHT

SKYE

House Head – Mrs M. Cooke PTG
House SMT Link – Ms L. McOmish DHT

TIREE

House Head – Mrs L. Lowe PTG
House SMT Link – Mrs P. Walker DHT

School Uniform

I would like to acknowledge and thank parents for their continued support for school uniform. The introduction of school uniform has greatly enhanced the reputation of the school in the community, improved the confidence and self-esteem of our young people and above all looks great.

From the beginning of this session pupils will be required to wear black shoes as part of the uniform and trainer and leisure shoes will not be permitted.

Senior students and prefects have agreed to adopt and wear school blazers this session as a further development of the uniform policy.



Parental Support – School Bag

Parents often ask what they can do to support their child's education. One of the most straightforward forms of support is to ensure that your youngster carries a bag to school every day.

All of our students are issued with a pupil planner to help them organise their studies and containing their weekly timetable. The planner along with their pencil case and other basic equipment should always be stored in their school bag. Parents should encourage their youngster to check their planner each evening before coming to school to ensure that any homework is done and that books, jotter or kit for PE lessons are placed in the bag. This simple practice ensures that youngsters get the best out of their lessons and don't unnecessarily waste learning and teaching time.

The school can provide bags at a very reasonable price for pupils on request. In cases of hardship the school can provide bags to pupils free of charge. Further details can be provided on request from the school office.

Please support the school by making sure your youngster comes to school properly equipped with a school bag.

Appointment of Senior Prefects

Following interviews at the end of last session the following pupils have been appointed to senior prefect positions:

- Head Boy – Darren Ireland
- Head Girl – Jane Gregor
- Depute Head – Lynne Rough
- Depute Head – Jemma Cairney
- Senior Prefect – Kathryn Nye
- Senior Prefect – Sarah Ferguson
- Senior Prefect – Mark White

'Building Pathways to Success'



The school is committed to a policy of developing appropriate pathways for all pupils through the curriculum to promote success. Using the flexibility afforded to the school by the Scottish Executive's "Curriculum for Excellence" initiation the school is developing approaches under the heading of "Building Pathways to Success".

Two of the approaches are proving highly successful.

The first group of S3 pupils were presented for 'S' Grade a year early in English and French in 2006. Overall the results achieved by the pupils are as good as and in some cases better than their S4 contemporaries. The big advantage for these pupils is that they now have an extra year to prepare for the next level of study, Higher or Intermediate level 2, and they will have fewer subjects to prepare for next year when they sit the remainder of their 'S' Grade subjects.

The highly innovative JET Program has been an appropriate pathway for pupils who intend collaborative initiative between the school, Academy of Retail. The program enables S4 national qualification subjects including



developed at Gracemount High School to provide to leave at the end of S4. The program is a the South Edinburgh Partnership and Edinburgh pupils to continue to study 5 school based English and Maths, be released on a Monday

morning to study for a vocational qualification at the retail academy, and access a long term related work placement on Friday throughout the session. JET is one of the first programmes of its type in Scotland with 18 of our pupils involved and is attracting the attention of authorities from across the country.

Group Call

Keeping parents informed about their Pupils' attendance

The school uses a computerised messaging system called 'Group Call' to text parents if pupils are not in school. The system is also used to send out emergency information and reminders about school events.

Following morning registration, attendance is centrally collated and unexplained absences identified. By lunchtime the 'Group Call' system is then used to send a message to parents whose children's absence is unexplained.

For the system to be effective the school needs an up to date record of parents and carers mobile telephone numbers. I would appreciate if any aspects of your personal details have changed or change during the session that you inform the school office.

Second Year: Standard Testing

To help identify and confirm the potential of our second year pupils, the school introduced a testing system last session called MidYis. Unlike traditional tests there is no preparation or revision required for MidYis as the test measures potential not progress. The test results predict pupils' strengths and potential ability at Standard Grade in all subjects. I will contact parents in November to provide more information on this important initiative and an information evening will be held early in 2007 to share the outcome with parents.

School Board Elections

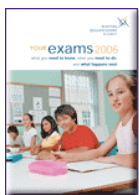
Elections to the School Board will be held in November 2006. There will be three parent vacancies to be filled this session due to serving members standing down as their youngsters have left school. I would encourage all parents to consider serving on this important and influential group. Nomination forms will be available from the school after 20 September. Parents will receive a letter confirming arrangements for nominations and election. Further details can be provided by contacting the school office.

PTA

The PTA would like to welcome any new members at a meeting on Tuesday 5th September at 7.00pm in the seminar room. This is an informal get together with a glass of wine and some nibbles. Should you wish more details then please contact Morag Clarke on 0131 621 0807

Pupil Family Holidays during Term Time

I fully appreciate that for work and financial reasons families find themselves having to consider making holiday arrangements during term time. Both the council and school policy advises that this is never a good idea as inevitably any absence from school effects pupil progress. Following this advice is particularly important for parents with children in the fourth and fifth years as examination success is crucial at this stage of youngsters' education. Please note the SQA examination diet begins early this year. Youngsters who miss an exam due to family holidays cannot be considered for 'Absentee Consideration'.



SQA Exams

The dates for the SQA exam diet for 2006/2007 are:

- Standard Grade (S3/4) – begins 30th April
- NQ (S5/6) – begins 10th May

School Policy: Interval and Lunchtime Arrangements

The school provides a safe and secure supervised environment for all pupils at morning interval and lunchtime. There are full catering facilities on site and pupils can eat and socialise in the main entrance hall.

School policy is that all pupils should remain on school grounds during morning interval.

The school recommends that all first and second year pupils remain in school grounds at lunchtime, unless going home to eat.

Increase in charges for School Meals Session 2006/2007



The City of Edinburgh Council has approved increased charges for school meals in the Revenue Budget 2006/2009.

The increase will be effective from the start of Term 1, August 2006.

The revised cost is listed below:

Current Price - £1.85
Proposed Price - £2.05
Effective from – 1st August 2006

Please note that there has been no increase in school meal charges for five years. The increase for secondary schools is slightly under the average rate of inflation over the last five years.

Gracemount High School



How are we improving to the school?

Session 2006-2007

1. What are we doing to improve results and promote achievement?

- Continue to develop the target setting strategy in S3-S6 which monitor and supports the progress of pupils.
- Develop a target setting data base to support the introduction of personal learning plans in S1 and S2.
- Continue to provide parents with regular information on the progress pupils are making and how they can realise their potential.
- Continue to develop our link with our associated primaries in Mathematics, English, Science, Modern Languages and Home Economics to ensure pupils progress fully on transfer to High School.
- Reduce class size at all stages in to an average of 20 pupils in English and Mathematics.
- Continue to develop the 'Gracemount After School Study Club', GASS, to provide review and revision support in all subjects.
- Continue to offer parent workshops providing focused information on supporting the educational development of pupils.

2. What are we doing to improve Learning & Teaching?

- Implement learning and teaching guidelines to promote consistent expectations across the school.
- Continue to promote the effective use of computers in learning and teaching in all departments.
- Implement a 'refresh' programme to replace all computers in the school with the most up to date equipment.
- Use the feedback from pupil questionnaires to improve the learning experience across the school.
- Continue to develop the range and levels of subjects offered to better meet the needs of pupils.
- Use curricular flexibility to build flexible 'Pathways to Success' which provide appropriate educational opportunities and support all our pupils to realise their full potential.

3. What are we doing to ensure that each child is supported effectively and treated fairly?

- Continue to develop the role of our pupil support team to effectively meet the needs of all our pupils.
- Introduce a revised system for promoting positive behaviour and recognising and rewarding the success of all our pupils.
- Implement new legislation for all pupils who have additional support needs and require learning support.
- Implement a new race equality to improve provision and support for pupils for whom English is an alternative language.

4. What are we doing to support each child to become a good citizen?

- Continue to provide pupils with opportunities to develop the physical environment of the school through working with the Ethos Committee.
- Continue to develop the role of the Pupil Council in terms of influencing the development of the school.
- Further involve senior pupils in the running of the school through membership of the School Board and Board of Representatives.
- Build on the successful three day activities programme, for first to third year, which involves pupils in enterprise activities, community service and fun activities.

5. What are we doing to prepare each child for life beyond school?

- Implement a 'Healthy Schools Policy' which promotes healthy eating, mental and physical health and an active lifestyle.

- Support our active school coordinator to further develop the available range of extra-curricular opportunities, including team sports and the performing arts.
- Continue to develop experiences for pupils to develop enterprise skills.

6. What can parents do to help improve the school?

- Contact the school if you have any concerns about your child's progress.
- Attend your child's parents' evening with teacher (Dates are shown below. All parents' evening are 4:30pm to 6:30 pm unless otherwise stated).
- Consider getting involved with the School Board or the Parent Teacher Association.
- Inform the school if you change your address or contact details.

S1 Open Evening	Thursday 16 th of November
S1 Parents' Meeting	Thursday 17 th of May
S2 Parents' Meeting	Monday 12 th of March
S3 Parents' Meeting	Monday 30 th of October
S4 Parents' Meeting	Tuesday 6 th of February
S5/6 Parents' Meeting	Wednesday 21 st of March

7. What can parents do to help their child get the best out of school?

- Make sure that your child is properly prepared for school each day
 - that they carry a school bag every day
 - that their pupil planner and pencil case, calculator etc. is in their bag
 - that they check their planner the night before school
 - that any homework for the following day is done
 - that books, jotters, resource, equipment and kit for classes the next day is in their school bag
- Encourage your child to get involved in the wider range of extra-curricular activities offered by the school.

Contacting the School:

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