



26th June 2009

Dear Parents,

This year I have decided to change the format of my end of year letter. As many of you will know we spent much of 2007/8 formulating a whole school development plan for teaching and learning. Many parents have asked me how we are progressing so I have selected those events/changes to life at St Julian's that have occurred during this academic year which directly relate to the principal issues we have set down as key to school development. These follow grouped under title and numbers 1-9. As always, none of what is described below could happen without the hard work and dedication of an intelligent, reflective and vibrant teaching community. As a member of the SMT I am mindful to of the help and good counsel I have enjoyed from my colleagues on that body, I would like to offer a particular thanks to Robert Bienkowski with whom I have greatly enjoyed working over the past three years. Bob is an educator of the greatest integrity and has contributed a great deal to making St Julian's what it is today.

The Development Plan 2009-11: a work in progress.

1. To devise a strategy for working together as a whole school.

Action:

Two successful insets completed on "gifted and talented" (whole school) and on "horizontal curriculum planning" between Portuguese and Secondary sections.

Two more inset days planned for academic year 2009-10: in response to PACT concerns it has been decided to limit the whole school inset to two days per year rather than three.

A whole school development committee meets once per half term to plan action towards the meeting of educational development objectives. This comprises of management teams of Primary, PS and the Development Directors (Secondary) chaired by SSP reporting directly to HM.

Induction between primary and secondary staff has continued throughout the academic year greatly enhancing our understanding of the work carried out in Year 5. The Mathematics Challenge involving Year 5/6 will take place in June and Year 5 will attend the Year 6 Shakespeare presentation at the end of term.

The Head of the Science faculty has been working closely with the Primary Science Coordinator to ensure continuity in the delivery of science through Years 4-6.

Cross curricular initiatives between History and Portuguese departments across the secondary and Portuguese sections.

Year 6 and Year 9 residential camps now includes an invitation for students from the Portuguese section of the school to join with the camp.

A regular meeting between Primary and Secondary support departments (SEN/EAL) is being instituted.

The process of working together as a school requires a cultural shift in educational thinking which is not guaranteed. In the short term it can appear to be much more efficient and certainly simpler to work as three sections, coping with specific sectional challenges as they occur. The fact is, however, that our students move up from the Primary to the Secondary section of the school and across from the Portuguese section for their pre IB year. This can only be handled smoothly if we communicate similar educational goals to them. We are all aware of a school mission statement and the aims we share as an institution, this is a document that speaks to the whole learning community, and it is not predicated on sectional concerns; it transcends them. While making allowances for swaths of business that are handled within the sections we must accept that the best of what we achieve is likely to be achieved through working together and that sometimes such efforts have to be actively encouraged. This is what the development plan for teaching and learning is designed to do; this is the cultural shift it is designed to encourage.

2. To focus on the development of a balanced and holistic education for our students

Action:

Extension of school day for IB diploma years comprising of 5 extra teaching periods passed by faculty, approved by governing body to begin in September 2009.*

Extension of school day for Years 10-11 passed by faculty and approved by governing body proposal to begin in September 2010, this date to be confirmed against a wider context in January 2010.

Note wording of our advertising for new teachers where we stress the importance of extra-curricular and pastoral contribution to the student. This has already proved effective for outdoor education, sports and theatre.

Terms and conditions for staff in the light of these new extensions to the timetable are under continual review and the Staff Association is kept informed of this process.

The extension to the school day has increased staffing costs as will the extension at Years 10-11 but the fact is that if St Julian's is going to meet the aims it sets itself we have to find a balance between the academic, the pastoral and the extra-curricular: Music, Theatre, Sports, MUN, and Prémio all ask more and more of our students as greater numbers get involved and we raise the standards we achieve in these areas. To take Prémio as an example: we have moved from the Sintra Hills to the mountains of Spain, to the Azores, and now we are looking seriously at a wilderness expedition in the Patagonian Andes for the Gold Award students. Such a growth in the challenge of what we do puts pressure on students and staff but we believe it is the right kind of pressure since it is about achieving excellence.

3. To achieve a positive and effective relationship between staff development and the development of the school

Action:

The professional development and appraisal procedures are now broadly consistent through the three sections. The Primary Section have incorporated the broad outlines of the secondary school procedure with some modifications to agree with their educational context, the Portuguese section has maintained its procedure with an agreement in spirit to connect professional development of teachers to whole school development plans. This is crucially important since we cannot develop the school unless we ensure that staff's professional needs and aspirations are discussed and met in so far as that is possible. We try, where possible, to ensure that the professional development of the teacher is directly connected to areas we need to develop within the school. We have an excellent staff at St Julian's but we also have a turnover of staff and the determination to ensure that standards are met and improved upon where necessary can only be achieved if teaching and learning is monitored and supported by a system designed to ensure that common aims and objectives are set and met year by year.

4. To ensure that time, space and professional expertise is devoted to the support and extension of students with special educational needs

Action:

Relocation of SEN department to an independent teaching unit in the former caretaker's house: move completed January 2009.

Appointment of a whole school coordinator for the Gifted and talented: Alison Mackay (June 2008). Alison has met with groups across the school, a whole school policy has been written and we are actively making provision for the gifted and talented in the coming year starting at Year 6 level in the secondary school.

Creation of a school services department comprising of EAL and SEN in the Primary School.

Relocation of Student Support Services Department in the Primary School

Appointment and training of SEN Mathematics support teacher Ms Kirsten Brown, in the secondary school .

The decision to adopt Further Pure Mathematics as a GCSE option and the adoption of Further Mathematics as an added Group 5 IB subject should be seen in the context of developing a curriculum for intellectually gifted students requiring extension in core areas.

The Primary initiative of combining EAL and SEN into a "support" department for their students may provide us with a good model for effective development in the secondary school where the two departments still function as separate entities. We continue to deal with students with radically different learning styles and needs and the school has been an active and sensitive agent in the support of students with special needs. As diagnostic tools grow more subtle this is an area we know will grow and parents should understand that the exponential growth of special needs education will continue to be a challenging area for us to deal with.

5. To make staff training in ICT systematic and ensure that all classrooms are equipped appropriately.

Action:

A. Purchase of a Clever Board for every classroom in the school.

B. Appointment of Daniel Mascherer to Secondary School ICT teaching position. Daniel has wide experience in adult education for IT systems.

C. Uploading of psychometric testing data to student data on Serco software to be completed by December 2009.

ICT Coordinators are always available to provide 'drop in' INSET

The ICT Director is developing the E-Learning site and created a school site with training information for staff

The ICT departments across the whole school realize that we have serious training issues in the use of SERCO software, in the use of Clever Boards and in the use of e learning. We are working to systematize this training for the academic year 2009-10. The processing and storage of information in the school is a serious issue requiring attention. Although as a whole school we are data rich (optional test results, KS results, reports, baseline testing with Yellis, Midyis and Allis, SEN screening, G & T) We are not satisfied with the present position where key information on a given student is not easily accessible across pastoral, administrative and curriculum areas. If we are to monitor academic progress effectively and ensure that this is monitored within a holistic context we need to replace our current data filing system with a more comprehensive use of Serco. This is a priority. A select group of staff led by the Heads of Administration and ICT are meeting with trainers from Serco this month.

6. To appoint a school counselor and work for the integration of different approaches to pastoral care into a whole school strategy for PSRE.

Action:

The Primary school "circle time" approach has developed and is now being extended to the playground. This is an example of good practice where children are obliged, through the structuring of the exercise to develop their ethical understanding of decisions and consequences through a structured forum facilitated by the class teacher.

Sharon Faulder (Mathematics Department) continues to work as part time councilor for the Diploma Year students. Sharon has worked on a one to one basis with many students this year who have been facing exam stress; she has also encountered a range of other issues which she has continued to deal with through the academic year. She will continue to work in this area.

Jan Abery (Head of Pastoral) has completed study units in the UK pertaining to her pastoral duties and her responsibilities as child protection officer

We have ongoing consultancy agreements with external psychologists with a view to targeting problematic students at different points in the school, present focus on Year 8 in secondary. The Portuguese section has similar arrangement.

There is a growing view that our PSRE programs need to be revised to ensure that our mission statement as a school is closely associated with these classes. There is a certain amount of material that needs to be covered for students at different stages of their development and we do that efficiently but we have to ensure that our aims and objectives as a school are more explicitly part of what we expect students to discuss and focus on in their PSRE classes from Year 6 to Year 11. Our students have a very keen sense of their entitlement but many have a rather vague notion of what their responsibility may be as students of the school. The identity of the school needs to be understood by its community and PSRE lessons can challenge students to achieve this understanding. Over this year I have dealt with far too many cases of bullying, racism, homophobia and petty theft for me to feel sanguine about how well we are confronting narrow mindedness, dishonesty and intolerance at our school as well as we could. It is a fact that there is bullying in every school, that theft will exist where students are so privileged as to be continually careless of their personal belongings, it is true that racism and homophobia are disgraceful by products of warped thinking in many societies but that does not give us the right to shrug our shoulders and move on to the next problem. As educators we have the responsibility, most especially, in an international environment, to challenge these behaviors and to demonstrate to our students how limited, petty and inhumane such prejudices are. PSRE is our primary theatre of operations in respect of these issues, but we as teachers need to accept that we are models for our students, and we must embody the values we propagate. We are fortunate in that we have an internationally minded staff which is aware of these values and issues. Now we need to critically review our PSRE programme to ensure that it not only reflects our philosophy as a school but also that it actively challenges our students to be more reflective citizens of the world.

7. To develop effective partnerships with the parent and student body with a view to making our school more inclusive.

Action:

This needs to become part of the school dialogue with PACT.

We feel we have improved communication with parents in the secondary school and need to be mindful that this is still not what it should be. The school website is now functioning in a more active manner but we are keenly aware that there is a lot to do in this area. Some subjects have seized the opportunity the new site has created for them, others still lag behind.

The Development Directors for the secondary school are meeting with PACT (two have already done so) to keep them informed about their area of responsibility.

8. To meet the linguistic challenges synonymous with our public identity as a British International school.

Action:

The addition of Spanish to the formal IB option block in Group 2; Spanish has been offered outside the formal timetable for some years but this granting of formal status to the option will allow it to be timetabled more coherently than hitherto where lessons happened at very difficult hours of the day, as “extras”.

The writing of a whole school Portuguese Departmental Handbook which allows the parent to see how the subject is linked both vertically and horizontally through the sections.

The appointment of a fourth Portuguese teacher in the Primary school to offer greater flexibility in the teaching of first and second language classes is an important step, since the teacher concerned will also deliver classes in the secondary school.

The English Department has invited a (suitably qualified) Year 4 teacher to take on one Year 7 English class.

The development of a Portuguese club for second language speakers in the Primary school (parental initiative)

Additional sets for French in Years 8 & 9.

9. To design an outdoor education program for the whole school

Action:

Complete review across the sections and updating of school risk assessment and trips policies.

Outdoor education is integral to the Foundation stage curriculum

Residential camps are now offered on an annual basis to all students from year 5 to Yr 9.

The school is delighted with the continuing success of Prémio program with increasing number of participants (including students from the Portuguese sections) and more challenging Silver and Gold Award expedition.

The Patagonian Wilderness expedition is planned but not confirmed for 2009-10.

The systemic resourcing of outdoor education at St Julian’s through annual budget allocation.

Conclusion:

It is now June 2009. This phase of School Development closes in July 2011. We have had an industrious year and have been grateful to the impetus the school accreditation gave to our development plans. It is always easier to develop when there is a ten year accreditation visit in the offing. The important initiatives we have taken in policies and procedures and in the allocation of resources have a way to go before they are woven into practice. Sometimes this can be achieved quickly, other initiatives, especially those that may challenge a prevailing residual culture require a shift in that culture if they are going to become part of the way the school acts and is. At times that is a difficult process for all of us. Risk taking and subversion of established modes of action can be intimidating and we need to move carefully where the education and welfare of our students is at stake, but if we want education to be exciting and ultimately fulfilling and successful, (whether your marker for success be the inculcation of happiness and fellow feeling or the attainment of high results- these do not need to be exclusive to one another) we have to understand that, far from being bland and predictable, we at St Julian's follow educational aims that can invigorate and inspire even the most forlorn cynic among us. Thankfully young people, the people we educate, may affect cynicism as an adolescent pose, but in essence they want to believe in ideals and it is part of our job to illuminate those for them.

***Appendix: the extension of the school day.**

The school day will be extended until 4 pm for the IB Diploma classes 12-13. This move allows us to add five periods per week to the formal teaching curriculum and will ensure that, in an increasingly busy school, students and teachers will get the time in the classroom they need to cover IB diploma courses at SL and HL. The rest of the secondary school will finish at 3.15. School will start earlier in the morning at 8.30, the Registration period will be shorter at 10 minutes. Those students from Years 6-11 who need to stay on the school premises, either to participate in extra-curricular activities or to wait for elder siblings will be registered and supervised in study classrooms until 4 pm. Obviously we will take steps to ensure that the 3.15 exit is as quiet and orderly as possible in order to minimize noise for those still in class. A further extension of the school day until 4.00 pm is planned for Year 10-11 in the secondary school starting in September 2010; these plans will be confirmed at the end of the winter term. It should be stressed that students in Years 6-11 will be taught the same number of periods per day (7) as hitherto with the same 2-break-3-lunch-2 breakdown. Lunch will be taken slightly earlier, at 12.45, in the secondary school.

Nick Connolly