

3 April 2009

Dear parents

We were all saddened at the death of our Registrar, Mrs Caroline McMillan, on 21st February. Two Thanksgiving Services have celebrated the life of this wonderful lady who had a smile for everyone and enormous energy for her many interests including drama and editing the Suttonian as well as being the Akela of a cub scout pack. We will miss her enormously.

This Spring term always seems so short and pressurised for older students with many coursework tasks to be completed and final exams beginning to loom. Over 200 AS and A2 modules were taken in January and where these were retakes many received much better marks this time. Eleven students have offers for places at Oxford and Cambridge universities in a wide range of subjects. Simon Heller has reached the last 26 of the Chemistry National Olympiad.

There have been lots of successes for students in competitions at local and national level this term. One highlight was to win the South East regional final of the ESU National Public Speaking Competition, the first time we have done this. Mubarak Waseem, one of our team of three from year 11, also won the best personality award at the same event. One of our groups (again year 11) won the best film award in a Sutton competition to discourage binge drinking and another won the best animation category. Dominic Brown is the runner-up in the Times Law student of the year (winning £1000)– in competition against undergraduates and trainee barristers. Joe Austin won the ifs Young Business Writer of the Year Award and we also have a team in the final of the Student Investors of the Year, with awards to be presented on the same occasion as Joe gets his prize. David Rowlands (8Gr) has just won first prize in a photographic competition run by Friends of the Earth. Billy Wyatt (8Gr) was joint first in the final of Sutton Masterchef. Our year 10 team won the STIXX Engineering competition. I am encouraging boys in years 8 and 9 to enter an essay competition about a leading woman scientist, mathematician or engineer, another chance for an honour and an excellent prize.

This holiday sees the transition between our main winter and summer sports. The football season saw the 1st XI winning the District Cup, and our year 7 and 11 teams were runners up. All teams have had a busy season with the best record according to our unofficial 'What's the Story' table being the 3rd XI for the second season running. Six matches against the Old Suttonians this week show the fantastic loyalty former students have towards the school and their favourite game. Rugby too has been a regular feature of sports activity at Northey on a Saturday morning. Representative honours have been won by Edward Saywell in cross country and Andrew Norman in swimming for Surrey. Six medals including three golds were won by our swimmers at the Surrey Individual Championships. The school was re-awarded its Sportsmark.

Up 'N' Under was a very enjoyable production, with all the actors being students not taking A-level drama. The Spring concert was another excellent night for a sell-out audience. We have some very talented boys in the school in so many fields.

We have taken part in The Big Tidy Up project this week, and our boys collected 62.5kg of rubbish from Manor Park in one session using two volunteers from each class. As regular users of the park ourselves it is good to be able to contribute to keeping it smart looking and to encourage our own boys to work hard at not adding to the litter problem when they use the park. As part of another community project, Mr Mundy and his team of volunteers have just released the latest batch of trout into the River Wandle.

Several trips happen at Easter with the annual ski trip always a popular feature. The CCF have their regular trip to the Pennines and a new addition this year is the group visiting a Bulgarian orphanage to help with maintenance and in activities with the residents. Congratulations to this group of students, led by Mr Beaumont and Miss Hankin, for raising over £10,000 to spend on the project.

The DCSF has just renewed our science and mathematics specialist status following our 'outstanding' Ofsted report. A recent evening of public lessons was well attended and included plenty of exciting demonstrations as well as hands-on experimental work for visitors. Next term we are planning a special Gala Day with an international theme for the whole school and for parents and friends on 15th July – put the date in your diary now!

Amongst all this good news there is still the need to press for high standards from boys in all things. It starts with personal morality and I am not pleased to have uncovered this week a spate of thefts from a local store, which has resulted in a number of temporary exclusions and some very upset young men from years 8 and 9 (and their parents), most scared at the impact of these crimes on their futures. The rest of the school should learn from this unhappy experience and make sure they keep high standards of integrity and honesty and don't allow fellow pupils to go down these routes unchallenged. I also use the opportunity of a general letter home to ask that standards of dress are improved next term. Hair cuts for a good number of boys are needed and some sixth form students need reminding about the requirement to be clean shaven. I don't want to be too prescriptive about hair but it is not acceptable for hair to be covering eyes and while cleanliness is more important than length the general standard of boys' appearance is not as neat as it should be. In the main school hair should be clear of the jacket collar. Some sixth formers have been wearing casual jackets or sweaters rather than proper jackets and they should be setting a high standard for the rest of the school. Many shoes rarely see polish. Let's smarten up!

We are changing our ancient card system in the canteen and there will be a meeting very early next term to tell you about the biometric / card system that is being purchased to speed up service and make it easier for you to pay and control your sons' canteen purchases. Some people have reservations about the principle of biometrics and you will be invited to hear how the system works and to decide for yourself which of the two alternatives to opt for for your son. I anticipate a lively debate with senior staff on both sides of the fence.

Term starts again on Monday 20th April, with school examinations for year 10 immediately on our return and examinations featuring heavily from then until the end of June. Boys facing public examinations in particular should be building up the pressure in their revision and preparation, using this Easter break to make a strong start to this process. Watch out for our new extended projects for the lower sixth form in the last month of the term.

I wish you all a good holiday and a Happy Easter.

Yours faithfully,

G D Ironside
Headmaster