

Headmaster's Newsletter 2010

Dear Parents,

This has been a very exciting first term. New parents will know that I am very fond of Blessed John Henry Newman's observation that: *'In a higher place it is otherwise, but here below, to live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often.'* That thought has inspired my headship of St. Anthony's. So too has the legacy I inherited from Chris McGovern's inspirational nurturing of children, and the guiding spirit of Tim Patton. I said to Sarah Anderson (Tim's niece) that, occasionally, I imagine Tim looking down on this new Headmaster, *in his suit and tie*, and wondering about the future. Tim's obituaries, which now grace Junior House and Senior House noticeboards, spoke of a *'generosity that knew no bounds'* and of *'a man who valued the individuality and creativity of each pupil; moreover, of a headmaster inspired by a strong faith that each child had a spiritual core which needed to be nurtured and cherished.'* I hope that, if Tim is looking down on the school from a 'higher place', that he sees that the community of St. Anthony's is still trying to live up to his ideals; though hairstyles and clothing fashions change, there are some immutable truths which transcend such things and which ought to be the inner core driving a school.

Pope Benedict's inspirational addresses formed an extraordinary backdrop to the start of the new academic year. I joined a number of pupils and parents at the Hyde Park Mass. It was an occasion of joy and solemnity. I have never been in a crowd of eight-five thousand people before; I had certainly never experienced the humility and silence as they knelt at the Benediction. I was struck by Lord Patten's question when being grilled by a somewhat iconic cynical journalist: 'It is not a question of agreeing or disagreeing with me, tell me, when do you last remember hundreds of thousands of people in this country responding to the *call to seriousness* and profound reflection on human values?' The silence that followed his question spoke volumes. I told my RE set that the only equivalent I could remember was the first Band Aid, where, just for a while, there seemed to be a sense of a community fired by something above the raw materialistic values pervading the country. Pope Benedict made a plea in his Twickenham address, *'to have the courage to place our deepest hopes in God alone, not in money or career, in worldly success, or in our relationships with others, but in God. Only he can satisfy the deepest needs of our hearts.'* He made that plea within a visit characterised by an inspiring sense of respectful dialogue with other faith leaders, *and* the secular academic community. I was touched by the warmth of Rabbi Sacks' reply and that of Archbishop Rowan Williams. Lord Patten noted, again, I think very pertinently, that the example of *intellectual courtesy* displayed so movingly between faith leaders, who undoubtedly have painful differences, put the cynicism and contempt of many liberal commentators to shame. I do believe that the tradition of spirituality and mutual respect, seen at the best moments of the Papal visit, is found at St. Anthony's.

In my initial meetings with parents and pupils, I was repeatedly asked what I was intending to do, what would I change and most importantly, what my policy would be on the *'Golden Toffee'*. Like all sensible new Heads, I was eloquently evasive. On the question of toffees, nobody had mentioned them to me and I could not find the school policy on toffees. At South Hampstead, I was fond of giving out mini-*Crunchies*. Naturally, in the new spirit of educational sanity, these had to be *risk-assessed* and benchmarked against the school's *Healthy Eating Policy*. I should, therefore, firstly reassure everyone that the Golden Toffee is still awarded and has been risk assessed.

Perhaps the most significant change to the school this term has been the introduction of a new ICT structure: there is a new administration e-mail system, enhanced database and Promethean boards and computers in every room in the Junior and Senior House; these add wonderful new possibilities for teaching and learning. There are also two completely new computer suites. Our governors have been very supportive in upgrading not only equipment, but also classrooms. 7M, 7S, and 6A's rooms have been refurbished; the Art Room and 8M's room have been refurbished and re-furnished. We have an ongoing programme for enhancing the decor of the school.

The most significant change I can announce, having been here for a term, is that, after careful discussion with governors and interested parties, we have decided to offer a **Reception Class from September 2011**. Naturally, the logistics of such a move required careful forethought. It is our belief that it responds to a need expressed over several years.

We say goodbye to a number of colleagues this term. Michael is returning to Australia to marry his fiancée Renee. He has been a tremendous inspiration to the pupils and a loyal colleague; we wish them both well. Tim will become Form Teacher for 7M. (I will assume the role of RE co-ordinator.) We have been fortunate to secure Joseph Jones to teach Michael's timetable. Joseph graduated with First Class Honours at Durham University in *Philosophy and Theology*. He has been shadowing Michael's lessons and team-teaching with me, so as to ensure a smooth transition. I have asked Joseph to run a philosophy club and he is keen to help with debating. We sadly also say goodbye to Veronica and Lucy. Veronica has served the school loyally for five years; she is a gifted teacher and will be much missed. We wish her well for her return to Australia. Jessica Moncrieff will take over 3V; she is both a talented teacher and violinist. She has been shadowing Veronica and getting to know her form. Lucy is also returning to Australia; she has kindly agreed to work with her replacement Amanda Cecala for the first two weeks of the Easter term. (We will say a full farewell in the next newsletter.)

As you will be aware, we have just been inspected; we will receive the report in early January; thank you to the very significant number of parents who responded to the questionnaire. Thank you too, pupils and staff for your amazing work throughout a busy and productive term. Forgive me if I close by commenting on a few things that particularly stood out in my first term. Firstly, the beautiful and composed way pupils and staff read at the Masses and Carol Service. I want to thank Mary, Michael, and Mgr. Rowland for all their work behind the scenes. Will anyone who was there forget Crispin's reading of *The Journey of the Magi*? I find the work of the Charity Committee inspiring; they toil unceasingly and unostentatiously to raise money for those in need. They act as a kind of pilot light for the school. Maggie Fergussons' talk and the moving introduction by Kerry, a client of the Cardinal Hume Centre, will also linger in the memory. Not only was the topic intrinsically powerful, but Maggie's graceful and subtle delivery touched both our literary and moral sensibilities. And then there was GAW! Rarely does mythology turn out to be reality. The two GAWs have been so delightful. I loved the atmosphere and the fact that pupils both succeeded and bombed within an atmosphere of good humour but also daring. The Junior House plays were equally uplifting: each year produced something delightful, and also daring, but without any sense of worry. I have had a wonderful time. Very best wishes for Christmas!