St John Fisher News

25 January 2013 No. 168

Education Sunday

This weekend the church acknowledges the work of our schools with Education Sunday, giving us the opportunity to celebrate their achievements and to pray for all those who work in them, students and staff. We remain fortunate that we have a Catholic education service that is supported and funded by the state but events over the last couple of years have noticeably reduced that support, despite reassurances from the government. We are seeing remaining school transport being removed as local authority cuts take effect and this is already affecting the students that are able to attend our school. Although cutting school transport is not a direct instruction from central government the effect is the same, even though they are trying to blame local authorities.

The second and more concerning area of threat recently has been in the downgrading of Religious Education. This first happened when the notion of an 'English Baccalaureate' was raised by the government. That is, the suggestion that schools be measured by how many students pass a certain combination of exams. The government refuses to recognise RE as a valid exam for this measure and so we have not sought to encourage students to restrict themselves to this combination of subjects. This year's performance tables will highlight the effect of this decision but we continue to believe it is right.

The current proposals for new exams to replace GCSE from 2017 (that is, for our current Year 7 students) also suggest that RE is no longer a mainstream subject as it is not one that will be included in those offered in the new style exams. This is a further downgrading of what is the core subject in our Catholic schools. Although there seems to be universal opposition to the proposed new exams from the profession, higher and private education, and from businesses, it would still be valuable for parents to write to your MP about the omission of RE from both the performance tables and from the new exam proposals.

Education is not just about exam results, as so many parents often say when talking about how they choose a school for their children. We are proud of the experience that our students have while they are with us, that of the gospel values of caring for one's neighbour, accommodating other cultures and faiths, and doing good for others. It is not a surprise that good behaviour and excellent relationships between students and staff follow from this: perhaps we do not celebrate these aspects as often as we should.

Our students were singing at Sunday Mass at Sacred Heart school last weekend and Miss O'Connor will be talking about Catholic Education for Education Sunday at St Oswald's this weekend.

Snow Closure

Unfortunately we were not able to clear the school site on Monday morning to make it safe enough to open the school. We need to take the decision by 7.00am in order to let everyone know and by that stage we were already starting to hear from staff that could not get to school and that other schools would not be opening. We had been monitoring the situation since 5.30 and our contractors had not arrived to start clearing the site. I hope that the message got through to everyone in the usual way. If you did not receive a message directly perhaps we do not have correct details: please check with reception. This was the first time that we have been able to let people know via Twitter so I hope that those of you who follow us received the tweet.

There were exams so we ensured that these went ahead – my thanks to the staff who came into school to run them.

Year 9 Options Evening

This evening will now be this coming Tuesday. Students have had the assembly to introduce the process but we felt the weather was poor enough this week to deter parents from attending. Please do make a point of coming next week as this is a very important decision point for your child.

YEAR 9 OPTIONS EVENING

Tuesday 29 January

Starting at 7pm in the main hall

I hope that the weather starts to improve now and that the worst is over.

School Performance Tables 2012

Yesterday the government published the annual performance tables. At the time of writing I do not know what the media will make of these, especially as the debacle over English GCSE last year has affected the tables. The outcome of the judicial review is still awaited but the government has said that even if it goes in favour of the students, they will not change the tables. Neither do the tables include the results of the retakes that students passed in November.

For this reason the tables are less reliable than in previous years and comparison with previous years will not be possible. Our headline figure of 34% of students achieving five or more passes at C or above, including English and Maths, is exactly as we had expected it to be. This was above the target of 30% that the governors set two years ago but below the 'floor target' that the government announced subsequently. This figure still represents a good outcome for that cohort of students, partly as they were weaker on entry to the school than other year groups. The figure would of course have been higher had it not been for the decision to raise the pass mark for English.

Among the results there are always successes to celebrate but I am especially pleased this year with the English results, despite the national problems. For the first time our students made 'expected progress' that was above the average nationally and this is a significant improvement. This measure includes the progress of all students and not just whether or not they achieve a grade C. I must congratulate Mr Sargeant and the English Faculty on this dramatic improvement and hope that it continues in future years.

There is further good news in the tables for us in terms of Sixth Form results and our attendance data so I am pleased that this has also been acknowledged.

The current Year 11 are on track to exceed their GCSE target of 41% and if they do, this will be another record year for the school. The governors recently set a target of 42% for Year 10 and will be monitoring their progress carefully over the next eighteen months.

What these tables never show is the individual success stories that we know make all the difference to those students. The fact that we did not have any students last year who left without a place to do further education, start training or go into employment is a very powerful statement of the support that we give to each student. We have just finished interviewing all of our current Year 11 to ensure that no one is without a place for September. They are the last year group that has the option of leaving school at 16 as the government starts to implement the raising of the leaving age, with the current Year 10 having to continue in education or training until 17.

Sean Hayes

Red Day

Red Day is upon us! Wednesday 6 February will see Beverley House hosting a number of events around school with the aim of raising money for our chosen charities. Our charities are the Peterborough Special Care Baby Unit and EducAid.

Red Day will see activities such as games rooms at lunchtime where students can play the Wii or challenge their friends at fifa. As well as selling sweets and treats, we also hope to raise money by selling essential stationery to students during registration.

All Beverley students can wear one item of red clothing to school on this day, with a small donation of £1. Bring your spare change and treat yourself to something red next Wednesday! *Mr J Hayes*

Changes to Stagecoach Timetables

Local bus operator Stagecoach has announced changes to its Peterborough bus routes from 10 February. A number of our students use the Citi 4 service which currently runs from Bay 11 in Queensgate Bus Station to Welland. From 10 February this service will run from Bay 16 to Parnwell, stopping, as it does now, in Saxon Road. These buses currently run every 10 minutes but from 10 February will run every 20 minutes. If you use Stagecoach buses to travel to school, please make sure you are aware of the new schedule when we return after half term.

Further details are available from the Stagecoach website www.stagecoachbus.com and a copy of the new timetables is available at school reception.

Mr Berry

Stop Press

200 text messages sent out Monday morning to say that the school was closed came back as undelivered. This means that we have 200 incorrect phone numbers on our system. If you did not receive a message please let reception have your correct details as a matter of urgency.

House Update	House Points	Attendance %
Beverley	6375	92.6%
Cambridge	5875	93.8%
Rochester	7375	92.3%
Westminster	9300	93.9%

UNO Tournament
28 January – 1 February
in the Library
Prizes to be won
Please see Miss Oldman to sign up

@sjfpeterborough