St John Fisher News

4 October 2013 No. 194

Dear Parents

This summer we saw a significant rise in GCSE results for our school and we have all celebrated this improvement. Many factors contributed to this, including continual improvements in the quality of teaching, our intervention and support strategies, and of course the students' hard work and dedication. Another strategy that we used for some students in some subjects was 'early entry'; that is, allowing students to take an examination in November and then take it again in June with a view to obtaining a higher grade. All headteachers know that this is a successful strategy if used carefully and one that students find very motivating. For example, we know that we have students studying A level Maths this year who are only doing so because they achieved a C in November and went on to achieve a B at higher level in June.

We were dismayed to hear on Sunday that the Education Secretary had announced in a national newspaper that this strategy is "cheating" and not in students' best interests. He is determined to put a stop to it and announced that with immediate effect only the first grade a student achieves in a subject will be counted in performance tables for schools.

Headteachers, including myself, are stunned by the way this announcement was leaked, the language that has been used, and the potential effect on students. It affects students in the current Year 11 who have been preparing for exams in Maths and English immediately after half term. My first thought is that we cannot allow them to take these exams now as we would potentially find ourselves dropping down the performance tables next year. However, we will not make a decision in haste and I will be discussing the situation with my senior teams and our governors over the next few days; we will brief students in a special assembly on Tuesday morning.

There are very many benefits to 'early entry' and I can give many examples of where students have benefited from it but I will not list these here. The headteachers of the Peterborough Secondary Schools met on Tuesday morning to discuss the situation and how we could respond. We are all writing to parents to alert them to what is happening and have requested an urgent meeting with the local MPs. If you are concerned about the effect on your child please do contact your MP.

There is constant change in education and we are frequently having to respond at short notice to political decisions, but I feel that this is the worst decision I have yet had to deal with as a headteacher, mainly because it means we will probably have to put aside our usual policy of doing what is best for each individual student and instead do what we can to maintain our place in the performance tables.

It remains the policy of the Department for Education to not communicate with schools and this is why we heard of this decision via the Sunday papers. The timing is extremely poor as our students had only just completed mock exams last week in preparation for these GCSEs and had been revising hard. These same students learned over the summer that the Speaking and Listening part of their GCSE English, which they had completed, will now not count towards their final exam. Only last week we paid the £6500 bill for the exam fees and we will be exploring ways of recouping this money.

I am including this letter in this week's newsletter so that all parents are aware of the situation. We will continue to do what is best for our students and endeavour to ensure that they are successful but sometimes we are frustrated in this by decisions such as this one.

Sean Hayes

Celebration of Achievement

We had a truly superb evening on Tuesday celebrating our students' achievements over the last year. Bishop Alan was our guest of honour on his first visit to Peterborough and he was very impressed by the students and the school. He told the students the story of Margaret Hassan, the Catholic Irish aid worker who married a Muslim and lived in Iraq doing charity work. She had a vision and did a lot of good for the people of Iraq before her tragic death in 2004. I would urge those who don't know her story to find it on the Internet. Bishop Alan told the students present that none of them is different and that they too can have a vision: he urged them to discover their vision for their own lives and to respond with generosity when their call comes. We were recently given a beautiful picture of Pope Francis which Bishop Alan blessed during the evening and this is now hanging outside our chapel.

Celebration of Catholic Education

Last week I attended another celebration, this one of Catholic Education. This event was for the five dioceses of the Westminster province and started with Mass in Westminster Cathedral, celebrated by the archbishop. It was an excellent opportunity for headteachers of Catholic schools in these dioceses to come together. The day was led by Professor Eamonn Conway of Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, who inspired us with some thought-provoking observations of the role of Catholic schools.

Open Evening

Our annual Open Evening for students in Year 6 who are choosing a school for next September is on Tuesday 8 October. Parents with children in Years 5 and 6, and the children of course, are invited to attend. The evening will start at 7pm. The school will also be open to parents on Wednesday 9 and Thursday 10 October at 9.00 for tours of the school.
Please note that students will be dismissed at 2pm on Tuesday.

Peterborough Regional College

The Open Evening for PRC takes place on Monday of next week, 7 October. Students in Year 11 will especially want to take note of this and will need to attend if they are considering applying to the college for next year. We have a Year 11 assembly scheduled for Tuesday morning next week but realised too late that this Open Evening is happening on Monday. Further details are on the PRC website.

Careers Drop-In Sessions

Our Careers Adviser, Matt Webb, will be available for drop-in sessions every Monday and Tuesday lunchtime, between 1.30 and 2.00 pm.
These sessions are for any student who would like careers advice and will take place in the meeting room opposite Student Services.

New PCSO

Hello, my name is PCSO Jane Gibson and I have replaced Luke Kennedy as the new safer schools officer here at St John Fisher. I am looking forward to working alongside the staff and students to help provide a safer school environment and to maintain the high standards of schooling that St John Fisher offers. My main duties will focus on child protection and any student behavioural incidents that may arise. I will be working very closely with the Student Support Officers to ensure that we robustly but fairly deal with the daily issues that happen within school. This will include parental support via home visits and regular patrols of the surrounding residential areas.
Part of my job is to protect property within the school and ensure students are educated about staying safe on the roads. With this in mind, I would like to recommend that all students keep valuables at home, especially mobile phones. I would also recommend that D locks are used to secure cycles on school property and cycle helmets are worn at all times for road safety purposes. I would like to mention that there is a dedicated crossing facility at the school gates and teacher supervision. This is to ensure road safety and protect students from potential traffic accidents. Please could all students use the crossing in the correct manner.
If you have any queries or concerns please feel free to approach me. My working hours are 8am until 4pm, Monday to Friday. I look forward to meeting you all.

Jane Gibson, PCSO

Literacy Corner

Word list for spelling test w/c 7 October

Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4
1. tint	1. scratching
2. tone	2. angular
3. bold	3. etched
4. brilliant	4. printed
5. complimentary	5. dusty
6. primary	6. energetic
7. secondary	7. aggressive
8. vibrant	8. passive
9. luminous	9. curved
10. umber	10. texture
11. ochre	11. opaque
12. crimson	12. translucent
13. indigo	13. highlight
14. muted	14. artificial
15. etching	15. contrast
16. cutter	16. blended
17. stylus	17. range
18. block	18. tonal
19. register	19. rotund
20. photograph	20. classic

Word of the Week

Emanate: to flow out, issue or proceed, as from a source or origin