

12 August 2011

Dear parents,

We hope very much that you will be able to join us with your son/daughter at the **S5 Parents' Communication Evening** mentioned in this coming term's calendar: it is at 6.00 pm on **Monday 29 August** in the New Prep School Hall. This event is intended to help ensure that S5 get the most out of the coming year, securing the maximum success and maximum enjoyment of learning, with the minimum stress. The evening will include tips for success from the current S6 and from staff, a guide to what is important this year and how the year works, and an opportunity to ask any questions you may wish and to talk individually with tutors and representatives from departments. If you yourselves are unable to attend, I really do hope your son/daughter can do so. This is an important year for them, requiring a shift of gear for a good many, and we wish to give them all the support and benefit of experience we can.

**The key point is that it is essential that our children work hard right from the start of the year. It is certainly our expectation at this important stage that from the start of term everyone should be doing at least two and a half to three hours' work every weekday night**, with about five hours done over the weekend. Many children work extremely hard in S5 and it is not uncommon for them to be doing three hours' or more homework and revision every night - indeed three and a half or more is not unusual. This is admirable and it brings rewards in the summer. There is considerable evidence that diligence and perseverance pay: for example, one candidate raised CDD Prelim grades to AAB and another BCC to AAA. However, the goal from the start of the year must be to produce the best possible performance in the Prelims in January/February and in other exercises during the year, so that candidates have potential appeal material of a high quality under their belt should we need it. Waiting to see how you do in the Prelims and then starting to really work is usually leaving it much too late.

I am delighted that the effort of many S4s was rewarded by their gaining good results this summer - with a lengthy list of children getting top grades across the board. This gives a good platform on which to build achievement in S5. However, I am certain that really hard work will enable more in this year to achieve good grades, so I hope passionately that they will go flat out for success in the all-important S5 right from the start of the year. Only by doing that will everyone see just how well they can do when they give themselves the chance. They should remember that we are here to help them in whatever way we can, but only they can put in the three hours a night at the desk appropriate to S5.

Many children worked extremely hard for Highers in S5 last year and I am delighted that they did so superbly, achieving not only our best-ever pass rate but also a remarkable 60.4% A rate, which is easily our highest ever. Several S5s gained 6 grade As and a great many achieved 5 As.

In S6 at Advanced Higher we again had our best-ever pass rate and our highest-ever A grade rate. Two young people clocked up a record-breaking 11 Advanced Highers between them, all at A grade: congratulations Jason Long and Alice Ahn!

We are pleased that so many children make good use of all the revision sessions, clinics and opportunities for help that we offer in S5. These are important. However, they are no substitute for the substantial amount of revision that needs to be done by every student right through the year. The best thing of all that our young people can do is to put in the three hours of focused work a night at home.

We also recommend four or five hours a day over the Easter holidays. Revision should, of course, be active, with children repeatedly testing themselves, writing answers to questions and then checking back with their notes or textbooks to fill in any points missed or correct any slips.

Should it be the case that on a particular night all set homework has been done, there is nothing better than **revision**. A quick look through notes, followed by putting them aside and jotting down the key points and key details and then checking that back against the original can do much to commit things to the medium or long-term memory. If things are revisited on, say, three occasions they tend to stay in the memory, for learning has become a habit. In short, there is always useful study that children can do to help themselves and there is no such thing as having no work.

It is also valuable to endeavour to ensure that children are not over-tired as key exams approach. Parties running into the early hours or nights on the town can take their toll several days later on concentration in class, at the desk at home or in examinations. Much as children should enjoy life, they will also enjoy being able to celebrate good results in the summer and look back in real satisfaction saying that they tried their very best. We can ask no more than that.

In short, a bit of deferred gratification should enable children to achieve their full potential and open doors for them later in life. I hope that they will enjoy the very real satisfaction of giving their all and consequently making significant progress and seeing their marks rise. If they work to their fullest capacity, I am certain that they will be very glad they did so when they look back later.

If there is anything more you would like in the way of information or guidance, Mr Evans would be very happy to endeavour to supply it for you. Study skills are thoroughly covered in PSE and exam-preparation sessions, but there are books available for loan in our library too. It is crucial for children to develop their capacity to act as independent learners, and success at university and in life, as well as in SQA examinations, can be enhanced by a well-developed ability to work without direct supervision.

You are most welcome to attend this year's **Dallachy lecture** at 7.00 pm on Thursday 8 September in the Cargill Hall. The speaker will be actress Blythe Duff, who is particularly known for her work in *Taggart*.

With every good wish for what I hope will be a very happy year,

Yours sincerely,

Peter Brodie

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