

James Gillespie's High School



Newsletter

Message from the Head Teacher

May 2007

We are into SQA exam time with the 4th years fully engaged and our seniors about to go on exam leave. Please be kind to your young examinees. They will need lots of support and nourishment. However, they will need some direction so this is also a time to ensure they understand that short term pain will lead to long term gain. Good luck to all of you, parents and students.

We have had a busy time since the last Newsletter with many of our young people being involved in prestigious events. We attended our first Model U.N. at Watson's at the end of march. Chris Brannigan, Elena Soper, Sulaiman Bah, Karoline Komolafi and Habiba Islam

were superb representatives and impressed everyone with their contributions. A number of S3—S6 Modern Studies students also took part in a video conference with students in Kuwait and Boston. For an hour the students exchanged views on every issue from politics and religion to music and TV programmes. It was a fantastic opportunity to challenge common misconceptions about our own culture and the views and beliefs held by young people at home and abroad. We were also chosen to launch the "Witness" Exhibition at the City Chambers, which will travel nationwide to commemorate the Bicentenary of the Abolition of Slavery.

Sandy Wood, Alice Kinghorn-Gray, Simon Morrell, Rowan Cusak and our Drama Teacher Marcia Rose performed to great acclaim. We were chosen because of our reputation in combating racism, inequality and injustice. So you can see we remain a busy, innovative, purposeful school.



Mr. A. Wallace

Alternative Timetable

Traditionally, the school has run an alternative Timetable in the last week of term. This has been a rich mixture of foreign excursions, residential excursions in this country and daily activities in and out of school. It has grown substantially from its original concept and we feel it is time to review the principals of the alternative timetable and its value to the school community. This will be done at the start of Term.

Therefore last week of term will have a different pattern as outlined below.

During this week the first year residential will proceed at Lochgoilhead as will the Basket ball and dance trip to Barcelona. The focus of the last week for second, third and fourth Year will be Eco awareness on Monday and Tuesday which will involve reflection on the film "An Inconvenient Truth" and learning and teaching activities linked to climate change and what individuals can do. The balance of the week will be departmentally based with activities linked to enterprise education opportunities for all. Our senior pupils will partake in Eco focus on Monday with our S6 contributing to the greening of the school on Tuesday with the South Africa citizenship sponsored walk on Wednesday. Our S5 will partake in an eco day on Monday followed by induction work on Learning and Teaching, health, enterprise and citizenship on Tuesday and Wednesday with a department focus on enterprise on Thursday. All students will be involved in the final school assembly on Friday.

This should be a stimulating and educational week to be enjoyed by and full attendance and commitment by all our young people is essential.

S. Westerman, DHT

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Special points of interest:

- ◆ **Important information about Parent Councils and how you can become involved in the life of the school (page 2).**
- ◆ SQA exams are now under way and we wish all of our students the very best of luck.

Health-promoting School

James Gillespie's is now officially a Health Promoting School having achieved stage one. This was on the strength of six key tar-



gets including awareness raising, increasing the level of sporting activity for our students, healthy eating, safe water, piloting healthy vending, eco school development, creating opportunities to improve the health and welfare of staff and friends of the neighbourhood initiatives. We are now in the process of consulting with the school community to determine our targets for stage 2. To date both Teachers and most pupils have completed questionnaires which are in the process of analysis. At the start of the new session the parent forum will be consulted by the newly established parent council so that the views and opinions of parents can inform our choices of targets for stage 2.

S. Westerman, DHT

JGHS Parent Forum

Involving and representing Parents in the JGHS

School Boards will no longer exist from August 2007. The law has changed in Scotland, and the new Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 requires local authorities to support the establishment of new Parent bodies in each of their schools. The city of Edinburgh Council has established a website to provide more information: www.edinburghparents.org.

All parents/carers in the school are now automatically members of the James Gillespie's High School Parent Forum. This Forum needs to decide on what representative structure the Parent Council will take.

A number of parents and carers attended the open meeting in March in school to discuss the proposals for a new Parent Council and a Parent Forum.

The open meeting discussed how the new structure might work, relating to both the existing school community activities such as the PTA, and in terms of taking over the functions of the School Board. The importance of good communication was stressed, both between parent representatives and groups, with the wider body of parents, and between the School itself and families. Everyone agreed that improvements are required.

Other topics raised at the initial meeting in March included: funding and practical support for a new Parent Council; contact with feeder primaries; Curriculum; non-resident parent issues (communications); Healthy eating; childcare and other supports to encourage participation in meetings; a role for specific year (S1 – S6) parent representatives; support for continuation of JGHS School Board practice which includes pupil representatives and teacher representatives; support for continued parent representative involvement in appointment of head teacher.

A Working Party of parent volunteers was set up, and has had two meetings. We have considered points raised in March, and we have explored some ideas around accountability of representatives whilst also involving as many parents/carers as possible. There is scope for sub groups and co-option of other members of the school community too, to help maximise the range of issues that can be taken up by a group within the school community. The activities carried out by the PTA are valued and it is envisaged that these activities will continue under the new Parent Forum and Council, which allows any issue to be taken up by a group within the school community. The Parent Forum will need to meet at least once a year, but preferably more often, and we are suggesting that the Parent Council meet regularly.

The Working Party is currently drafting a constitution for this new body, for consultation with the Edinburgh City Council and all JGHS parents/carers. If a new Parent Council is to be operational for the return to school in August, a constitution will need to be agreed before the school breaks at the end of June.

This is your Forum and your Parent Council – it will make a difference to the life of the School, and we hope that you will get involved in whatever way you can.

What would you like to see in this new parent Council? How would you like to see parents involved in the school? How can the School improve in its approach to parental involvement?

Copies of the draft constitution and a short briefing will be available from the School Office and from the website <http://council.jghs.org.uk>. Please submit all comments (general, or specific to the draft constitution) to: JGHS Parent Council Working Party, via the School Office or by email to: council@jghs.org.uk.

Thanks.

The volunteer parents who currently make up the Parent Forum Working Group are:

James Carter, Su Clark, John Connelly, Judith Crichton, Carol Farrell, John Forsyth, Naomi Garriock, Nigel Goddard, Ann Henderson, MaryAnn Hunwick, Robert Inder, Mark Kinghorn, Miesbeth Knottenbelt, Alpana Mair, Simon Pia, George Russell, Vivienne Swan, Fin Wycherley.

There will be at least one more meeting before the full Parent Forum meeting is convened again later in June. If you would like to get involved, do please get in touch.

Powerpod

During National Science and Engineering week in March we were lucky enough to have a visit from the powerpod. The powerpod is a portable educational tool to show the use of sustainable energy. The trailer demonstrates solar electric and solar thermal power, and the alternative of wind generation. Devised and carried out by an Edinburgh Woodcraft Folk group, the powerpod is an excellent example of a peer-education project that has worked with young people throughout the whole process.

This was set up in the schools grounds and groups of pupils from the secondary and primary had the opportunity to visit the pod and have hands on demonstrations from some of our pupils in S4,5 and 6.

It was very popular and a great opportunity for us all to learn more about renewable sources of energy.

A. Lyall (Physics Department)



JGHS Buildings Campaign – Good News, More to Do

As you probably know, the School Board has been running a campaign to improve the state of our buildings to provide a better teaching and learning environment. The good news is that this campaign has yielded significant positive results to date, described below. The challenging news is that the problems are much, much worse than we had thought and greater parental involvement is needed to address these challenges.

We are calling a meeting for parents interested in finding out more and/or helping out with the campaign, at 7 p.m. Wednesday 16th May in the School Hall. We need people with all types of skills and energies to get involved. More information about the campaign appears on our website:

<http://board.jghs.org.uk>

When we began this campaign almost two years ago, we thought we were looking at significant repairs being needed, perhaps £2.5-£5M. A deputation to the City Council in January 2006 got us noticed and eventually achieve an increase in the JGHS repair budget for 2005/06 from £100,000 to £500,000. This might sound like a lot, but in fact all it paid for was a new heating system for the Warrender block. It became apparent in 2006 that the Council had no strategic plan to address the building needs for schools such as Gillespie's (£250k/year would take 20 years to reach £5M).

We soon realised that a dual track is needed. We needed to press for immediate problems (such as dreadful toilet facilities) to be dealt with now. And, perhaps more importantly, we needed to get the message across to the Council that a strategic plan going beyond sticking plasters is needed. We pressed hard for a comprehensive survey of the school buildings with a view to what is needed to bring JGHS estate into the 21st century. This was repeatedly promised and *not* delivered.

In late 2006 there were some changes at the City Council in senior staff and in the leadership of Children and Families, which has responsibility for schools. The new Councillor in charge of this department, Andrew Burns, listened to our issues and in January 2007 placed JGHS on the list of schools to be refurbished or rebuilt in a bid to the Scottish Executive for funds, which is currently being developed and which will be submitted in the next few months. This was great news: for the first time, it appeared the Council had a long-term strategy!

In March 2007 the long-awaited comprehensive survey was delivered. We were staggered to find out that it listed £10M (!) would be needed just to repair the current buildings, without even addressing overcrowding or new facilities needed such as a bigger library. In a report to the council in mid-March, it was stated that the buildings at JGHS are **“increasingly unfit for purpose”!** (The same report recommended £1M in immediate health and safety issues be addressed; this has just been approved by the Council and will occur this summer). The report recommended that instead of £10M in repairs, the High School, and perhaps the Primary School, be comprehensively refurbished or rebuilt at a cost of £25M or more to deliver new school buildings on the current site with a lifespan

of at least 30 years. We are excited that such a vision for the future is finally in play. However, it is very far from a done deal, and all of the possible futures raise some difficult issues. Hence the need for a wider parent group to get involved, push things forward, and consult with other parents.

The current status of the campaign is that we expect to meet with Council officials in May to review the bid to the Scottish Executive, which is the only possible source for the level of funding needed. It is absolutely critical that this bid be as large as possible. It is a one-time chance to get the funding we need, and if too small a sum is requested and allocated, then we will be in a fight with other schools for the crumbs. So we need to keep the pressure on the Council to develop an adequate bid, and then over the summer and in the autumn we need to pressure our MSPs to work with the Scottish Executive to allocate the funds requested.

In developing this campaign we have tried to involve parents at the feeder primaries, and will extend this to nurseries and pre-school groups in the catchment area. We now need people with specific skills, contacts and experience: to evaluate the survey, the bid to the Executive and the like; to help get the message across to our elected representatives; to further develop the media campaign; to network with the primary school and nursery school parents (e.g. are you a parent at a feeder primary?); to help communicate with the wider parent body.

Please come along to the meeting on 16th May to find out more and/or to get involved. Even if you can't come, and even if you can, it would be very helpful if you could register on the website so that we

can let you know by email as things develop: <http://board.jghs.org.uk/register.html>

If and when funds are allocated to refurbish or rebuild JGHS, there will be many issues that parents will want to get involved with, including managing an onsite rebuild to minimize negative impact on learning; facilities desirable in a new school; community use of the school; security; and others that have come up and will come up. If you are interested in any of these issues, now would be a good time to register interest and/or get involved.

Geography Students in Fife

29 boys and girls took part in the successful Geography Residential Revision session from the 23rd to 25th of March. This is an annual event organised by the Geography department at the national Scouting Activity Centre, Fordell Firs in Fife. The main aim is to reinforce students' enquiry skills in the run-up to their exams. As well as group study there was “hands –on” field work in Inverkeithing and a wide range of recreation: climbing, archery and caving run by the centre staff and card games and cooking led by the students. For those pupils not up to boiling their own noodles there was the thrill of a real West Fife chippy run!

Thank you to all those who came along – past experience shows us that they will all benefit from the extra effort they made.

Mr. C. Stewart, Geography Department

James Gillespie's High School

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JGHS Diary

Tuesday, 1st May 2007
Monday, 7th May 2007
Tuesday, 8th May 2007
Thursday, 10th May 2007
Friday, 11th May 2007
Wednesday, 16th May 2007
Thursday, 17th May 2007
Monday, 21st May 2007
Tuesday, 22nd May 2007
Wednesday, 23rd May 2007
Thursday, 24th May 2007
Tuesday, 29th May 2007
Wednesday, 30th May 2007
Friday, 1st June 2007
Thursday, 7th June 2007
Tuesday, 12th June 2007
Thursday, 14th June 2007
Monday, 18th June 2007
19th to 21st June 2007
Friday, 29th June 2007
Wednesday, 15th August 2007

Start of SQA Exams
Public Holiday—School Closed
Staff and pupils resume
Start of S5/S6 exam leave
S1 Pupil Reports issued
Public Meeting—State of Buildings (19:00hr)
S1 Parents' Evening (Non-practical subjects)
Public Holiday
Staff In-service Day
Pupils resume
S1 Parents' Evening (Practical subjects)
School Board and PTA meetings
S3 Pupil Reports issued
New timetable starts
S3 Parents' Evening
School Board and PTA meetings
Rock Night
P7 Parents' Evening
P7 visit
End of Term, School breaks for summer
Pupils resume after summer holidays

Sports & News Round-up

Rotary District 1020 Young Musician of the Year 2007

A huge congratulations to Takuji Usui in S2 who beat very stiff opposition to come 3rd overall in this competition.

This competition featured finalists as far afield as Dumfries, Ayrshire and Falkirk and the West.

This is a remarkable feat for a student so young, as other competitors were several years older than Takuji and some were undergoing specialist music education (St. Mary's school, City of Edinburgh Music School etc.)

Takuji is an extremely talented young pianist and violinist, and we are certain that he has a very illustrious career ahead of him in years to come.

Rock Night

Thursday 14th June

This fantastic concert which features all the talent of James Gillespie's young rock bands takes place on Thursday 14th June at 7.00pm in the school hall.

The bands will experience professional sound and lighting and it is a great evening's entertainment!

Tickets are priced at £5 and will be available on the night at the door.

Listening Revision

Standard Grade and Higher
The following are very useful websites for any student sitting the above exams:

www.same.org.uk/newlisteningrevision

www.ltscotland.org.uk/learnlisteningonline

Mobile Phones.

As I mentioned in an earlier edition we would like to think that we have your up to date mobile phone numbers so that we can ensure a back up in case of an emergency.

HOWEVER we would prefer it if your child did not bring their mobile phone to school at all.

We should be able to cover any emergency contacting during the school day. Otherwise what is the point of us ascertaining from you such numbers.

I would be interested in hearing from you, explaining what valid reasons there are for children to have their phones on in school. If they are in they are on.

I know far too many uses that they are put to which do not constitute an emer-

gency need and all too often do the exact opposite, distract.

A Merriman, DHT

Parents' Evenings

Please note that the S1 and S3 parents evenings (dates above) will start at the earlier time of 17:00hr.

Summer Kings Camps

@ James Gillespie's

As the UK's leading sports and activity camps provider, Kings Camps are all about giving children a great time during their school holidays; in a safe, healthy and positive environment.

Camp is running this summer from 2nd July- 27th July 2007, from 8.15am-5.45pm.

Please call the Kings Camps Membership team on 08700 429 329 now for availability and prices!! Alternatively you can visit the web-

Childcare issues during the holidays?
You've been allocated a 15% discount with King's Camps, the UK's leading sports and activity camps provider. Camps run from 8.15am to 5.45pm, Easter & Summer.
only £3/hr
Come and enjoy the UK's best quality summer activity camps. Call us on 08700 429 329

