

With Easter rapidly approaching we are beginning to wonder where this term has gone. The Spring Term is always perceived as that 'solid' term of the year but this year it has also been one of our busiest and rewarding. I am pleased to be able to confirm:-

- Notification that last year's Activemark award for Physical Education provision at St James the Great has been re-awarded as an Activemark Gold award in the latest award round. My thanks to Mrs Berkeley-Agyepong for all her hard work in this area and for her work on the submission gaining this highly prized recognition.
- Recent press coverage for the school in recognition of our very successful Ofsted report.
- The visit to the school by boy band, Phixx – greatly enjoyed by the children. Thanks to Bridie and Alan Willis from the Conor Academy of Irish Dancing for organising this.
- Recognition of the strong music provision at the school. Very notably the performance by our Sound Start programme children at The Barbican for the launch of the Government's music strategy. It was good to see at this performance such a large number of filmed sound bites from our children and an interview piece with Mrs Murphy. This was followed by two slots on BBC's breakfast time which saw a large number of children performing – recorders, steel pans, flute, violins and cellos. Well done to all the children not least for getting into school for 7.40 am at such short notice. Special thanks are due to Mrs Bell for all her work in this area and Mrs Forward/Mrs Day (recorders) and Miss Hughes (Steel Pans). And to all the staff who helped on the morning of our television debut.
- Infant and Junior Music Festival appearances.
- Visit by Saviour Pirotta (author).

STILL TO COME

- A slot on Radio 3 (Vox Pop programme) for groups of our children later this month.
- Infant and Junior Dance Festival appearances.

Also this term:-

- Section 23 Inspection (RE). The first day of this inspection will take place on Tuesday 30th March with a second day after Easter. The RE questionnaire will be issued tomorrow. Please return your copy as soon as possible.

Next term:-

- The school is being assessed by the Cabinet office for the possible award of a Charter Mark, which if given will see us as the first Croydon school to receive this award and one of only 300 schools nationally to be currently so recognised.

On a less optimistic note:-

- School budget issues remain a serious concern within Croydon in particular. At the recent lobbying of the Council I was able to express school worries on Radio London as President of the Croydon Headteachers Association. Any pressure parents can bring to bear on their local councillors on this issue will be appreciated. I will also keep parents updated. It seems likely that we will in the next academic year be looking to a Gift Aid scheme to support school income in order to maintain what we see as appropriate levels of provision for our children.

It is pleasing to note in all of the above the real “buzz” of activity around our school which is recognised by all the visitors we receive.

PLAYGROUND SURFACE – INFANT AND NURSERY

Good news has been received from the DfES approving a major project over the Easter break to resurface and extend this hard play area. This is a project costing some £28,000 of which we have to find 10%. The Governors, however, have maintained this project as a high priority and it will be pleasing to see it realised.

SOLAR PANEL

Also good news that grant monies have been secured for the installation of a solar panel to the school roof (£10,000) of which we will have to fund approximately £1,500. It is anticipated that this will assist with our electricity costs and may result in further installations at a later date. Again it is hoped this work will be carried out at Easter subject to planning approval.

JUNIOR TRIM TRAIL EQUIPMENT

The local authority planning department recently examined this facility and have granted it planning approval. We are, however, looking to change the surface to this equipment to provide even better safety for children using the equipment about which some concerns were raised at the Governor/Parent AGM.

LENTEN REFLECTIONS

Our Lenten reflections in the Oratory on Thursday and Friday mornings have been well attended by between 12-15 people. Please feel free to join in at anytime during Lent – you will be very welcome.

PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP A MENTAL HEALTH RESIDENTIAL UNIT IN GREEN LANE

This proposal has generated a lot of debate which I hope was helped by the information and letter circulated to parents. I have received from one parent a letter that, in my view, puts forward a very balanced opinion in regard to the proposal. I feel it may be helpful to parents in reaching a view on this matter and am happy to reproduce an extract of the letter which reads as follows:-

“I am aware of someone who suffers from a serious mental illness and lives in a home similar to the one planned, which is incidentally built in Purley very near to two schools. He has never committed any crime. With the care this person has received he has avoided relapses of his illness where treatment involves being admitted to psychiatric hospital. He is now able to live a relatively normal life and is accepted as part of the local community and also as part of the Parish in which he lives.

I want my children to learn and grow up in an environment where everyone is accepted, as God created everyone. I know these values are supported at St James the Great so I was surprised that a significant number of parents seem to be against this home being built, but it seems they have been frightened into making their decision and have temporarily forgotten that main focus of our religion is to love our neighbour as ourselves as Jesus taught us.”

Parents may also be interested to note that St Andrew’s School in Streatham and St Mary’s School in Croydon have had such units in even closer proximity to their schools for some time now with no incidents or difficulties. My colleague Headteachers from the four other schools close to this development are hoping to meet the Director of the Health Service Trust in the near future in order to clarify issues in relation to this development and I will keep you informed accordingly.

APPOINTMENTS

Parents may have experienced difficulty in making appointments to see me recently. My apologies for this but Headteacher, LEA and diocesan commitments this year have made me less available. These commitments are short term and in the meantime please feel free to approach my Deputy, Mrs Vassallo, in cases of urgency or see Mrs Marchant to organise appointments with myself.

CROYDON SCHOOLS HOME ENERGY SURVEY

Following a recent assembly presented to the children on energy conservation, I have attached a home energy survey. As your child may have informed you every family who returns one of these survey forms will receive a free energy saving light bulb, value approximately £7. Forms should be returned to school by the end of March.

CURRENT SCHOOL PROMOTIONS

Tescos Vouchers are being collected once again. All vouchers welcome.

We are continuing to collect Nestle Box Tops vouchers, Kingsmill Bread ‘Kits for Clubs’ tokens, Persil stars, toner cartridges and old mobile phones.

ATTENDANCE MATTERS

You will have noted from our Ofsted report that your children’s high level of attendance was complimented and we would congratulate the children for this achievement. We would, however, ask that parents ensure when an absence does occur that confirmation of the reason is either provided by telephone, letter or through use of the absence slips available in the school reception area.

CONTACT DETAILS

We will be issuing data checking sheets later in the year as the last check was carried out in November 2002. In the meantime please ensure that we have up to date contact information as recent attempts to contact families has shown that a number of people have changed phone numbers etc.

SCHOOL UNIFORM

A significant amount of time is currently being given to the tracing of lost uniform items. This is made much easier when items of uniform are clearly named. Parents may wish to consider putting two labels on larger items, such as coats, i.e. one very visible and one discreet label in case the former becomes detached. Thank you for your co-operation in regard to this matter.

CHILDMINDER VACANCIES – Ofsted registered, 0-8 years, full or part time. Pick ups from St James the Great School. Please call Lucia on 020 8771 6942.

BILL READ MEMORIAL MATCH – ST JAMES VS. ST JOSEPH’S JUNIORS

This annual memorial match was played last Saturday with a particularly nail biting first half. I am pleased to confirm that we have broken the year by year switch and have retained the trophy for the first time for a second year; the result being 3-0. Well done to the teams.