



July 2011

South Wilts Grammar School for Girls

Governor Newsletter

Welcome to our newsletter—please read on!



Maths & Computing



Science

Dates to note:

Monday
19th September
Speech Day

Tuesday
13th December
Carol Service

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Did you know? All our articles will be uploaded and linked to the school website, so that you can refer back to them.

We have reached the end of another busy and successful year at South Wilts. We have now been an Academy for some seven months, and although there is still much lack of clarity, it is clear that the School will benefit financially. This should help cushion us from the inevitable cuts in future school budgets. Academy status should also allow us greater freedoms to deliver the best possible education for our girls.



Diane Atkins
Chair of Governors

Becoming an Academy has also meant changes to our membership of the South West Academic Trust (SWAT). By September, all members will have become Academies and we are looking into the different options available to enable us to continue as a Trust. At the recent Annual Meeting at Exeter University for Heads and Chairs of Governors, all were keen that SWAT should continue, as it has proven so helpful to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), teachers and students alike.

I could not write this newsletter without mentioning Mrs Stratton's forthcoming retirement. Her contribution to this school has simply been outstanding. As well as delivering continually improving academic results, she has overseen several major infrastructure improvements, including refurbishment of the older buildings, new Music and Sixth Form buildings, the new Learning and Resources Centre, and so on. All have made this school a far better place.

Mrs Stratton has also never missed an opportunity to secure more funding for the school, most recently securing capital projects funding from the DfE for roof work and toilet refurbishment. This has released our own earmarked funding for other school improvements projects in the future. During her time at South Wilts she has introduced Geology to the A level curriculum, a very successful move. Mrs Stratton has been particularly supportive of the Governing Body, which will miss her professionalism, experience and boundless energy. She has also built up a strong SLT, which she has led by example throughout. We now look forward to one of that SLT, Mrs Chilcott, taking over the reins in September. She will, of course, have the full support of the Governors during what will inevitably be a very challenging few years. We all wish Mrs Stratton a long and happy retirement.

Finally, good luck to those waiting for exam results, and for those who are moving on, we wish you all every success for the future.

Have a great Summer!



Report from the Committees:

Ed: *The following articles have been written by the chairs of our three committees, Resources, Curriculum & Admissions, and Personnel. It aims to provide their thoughts on responsibilities and achievements over the last few years. I hope you find it of interest.*

Resources Committee:

Welcome to a short article on the Resources Committee, which is best considered as having the remit for Finance, Premises and Environment. We work closely alongside the Personnel and the Curriculum Committees to provide a joined-up approach to strategic issues facing the school. Some of what we do in terms of financial decisions is relatively short-term or low level, such as agreeing the charges to be levied for letting out our buildings or canteen costs. Others, such as setting the annual budget involve figures running into several millions, which has great impact on staff and teaching. In terms of the environment, the regular review of “slips, trips and falls” usually generates interesting discussion, whilst the need to provide yet more IT equipment is almost a standing agenda item. Discussions about which building projects should proceed are subject to close scrutiny. A few of the figures the committee are confronted with are worth highlighting:

- Annual budget is approx £3.9m
- Electricity usage peaks in winter months at around 50,000 units per month.
- New boilers recently cost in excess of £110k.
- Cost of hiring the Hall is £65 per session.

Perhaps the most visible but least noticed part of the Committee’s work is associated with the dramatic build programme that the school has enjoyed recently. Much of the credit here must go to Mrs Stratton not only for her continual stream of innovative ideas but, along with our recently retired Bursar, Grace Hemmings, for unstinting activity to drive down costs, speed up procurement and manage delivery of the projects. The task of the Resources Committee is to balance the building programme within the bounds of financial possibility – and taking a right view on the associated risk. Even a cursory glance around the school and its enviable infrastructure will demonstrate what an ambitious build programme we have enjoyed over the past 5 years:

- 2006 – Music block new build, refurbish 4 labs and 1 prep room
- 2008 – Reception extension, dining room extension, kitchen refurbishment
- 2009 – Learning Resources Centre new build, refurbish 2 labs and 1 prep room
- 2010 – Refurbish Old Building, dining room extension, new boilers

We face significant challenges in managing year-on-year balancing of the budget, whilst continuing to support the requirements of the Personnel and Curriculum Committees in the face of reducing government funding and changing priorities from the Government. But without the benefits of substantial and separate government funding, it is our ability to regenerate the school’s infrastructure, and to keep up with the requirements of modern learning, that can truly set us apart from others.

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Mr Chris Child

Parent Governor

Mrs Helen Hollinghurst

Staff Governor

Mr John Raisbeck

Governor

Mr Edward Richards

Parent Governor

Mrs Helen Stewart

Governor

Mrs Frances Stratton

Headteacher

Mr Chris Whiteley -

Governor

Mrs Elizabeth Wrighton

Staff Governor

Mr John Youngs

Governor

Mrs Valerie Bryan

Clerk

Personnel Committee:

You will appreciate that much of the business of the Personnel Committee is, not surprisingly, 'personal' in nature! True, the committee continues to update a raft of policies and address pay and Terms of Service-related issues. The principle that the Headteacher and Governors follow at all times is that SWGS staff are treated as 'people', and not 'resources' - their well-being, aspirations and personal development needs are always at the forefront of our minds. This approach has successfully reduced the risk of minor niggling problems turning into crises, especially as terms of employment and pay policies have evolved over the years.

Forward planning, open discussion and careful consideration has led to solutions that are best for both the school, and the staff. The ultimate aim is to maintain a team of highly skilled, committed and content teaching and support staff; I am confident that we have achieved that aim over the last few years. SWGS staff are certainly committed, witness the long hours spent beyond the normal school day by many, especially as the pressure builds towards the end of each term, and doubly so at the end of the school year. The committee's 'duty of care' has even occasionally required us to have a quiet word with the SLT about both their own and others' work life balance!

Building such a dedicated top team in both public and private service is an art form requiring skill and patience, and our current SLT took on its current form as a result of some re-structuring a few years ago, along with some excellent appointments. One such appointment was Mrs Stratton, who as you know, has delivered huge improvements in her time at South Wilts. Although the appointment process is a challenge for selectors and candidates, it is worth noting that the students, who are always involved, usually favour the final, successful candidate. The business of the Personnel Committee is, of course, always made easier by the fact that SWGS continues to be fortunate in being able to attract such able people to join its staff.

Whilst we have had our moments on the personnel front it is highly commendable how, with all the change in public service that is swirling around, our staff continue to give our students the very best education and support.

Curriculum Committee:

Having been asked to write about the work of the Curriculum Committee and SLT during the 8 years of Mrs Stratton's headship it has been hard to condense down and not understate the beneficial changes to the curriculum during this time. The development and strengthening of 'personalised learning' (rather than a prescriptive, 'one size fits all' curriculum) has been just one of the many achievements of the SLT. An important role of the committee is regularly meeting Heads of Departments, discussing the issues they are facing, meeting other teachers in their department and observing lessons. Over the years we have been privileged to see an immense amount of enthusiastic and talented teaching. We have not only witnessed girls understanding and learning effectively, but heard about so many of them also developing a subsequent passion for their subject.

Alongside the work spent directly with curriculum matters the years have also brought a considerable increase in the requirement for the committee to endorse, review and revise policies, analyse reports and sign off returns to local and national government. It is hoped that academy status may relieve the committee of a layer or two of bureaucracy. This will allow time and focus on the maintenance of the high standards that have been achieved for pastoral care and welfare.

Mrs Stratton has exhorted all those at SWGS to strive to challenge the girls to the limits of their abilities in both curriculum and extra curricular activities. As members of Curriculum Committee, having played our part in upholding these principles, it has been challenging but, in equal measures, very rewarding.

The mantra for the Curriculum Committee continues to be 'onwards'. Michele Chilcott has attended, and has always played a major part in our meetings since her appointment as Assistant Head in 2004, and then as Deputy Head in 2006. Therefore we are confident in predicting a seamless transition of change of headship and we trust in Mrs Chilcott's considerable skills and ability to lead the school; we wish Mrs Chilcott a most enjoyable and highly successful time as Head of SWGS and, for Mrs Stratton, a very happy retirement.