



11 June 2009

Dear Parents and Staff

Last year at this time I wrote to you at a time when the school was going through a turbulent period in terms of its management and many of you were very worried about what was happening. Today, one year ahead, I am very happy to say that on the management front the Board feels that the situation is under control and is being well managed by the school's management team headed by our new Principal, Robert Dillow. I feel that the school has made a lot of progress over the last year and as the school year draws to close I thought it appropriate to give you an update on what has been happening over the last few months and particularly from the start of 2009 since Mr. Dillow joined us and the downturn in the global economic climate began to have its effect on Italy. This report is not intended to be exhaustive and may not cover all of the areas that may be of interest to you and if is the case I would encourage you to let myself and the Principal have your questions and he or I will attempt to deal with them.

Last year the Board set a strategy for the school which stated simply was to provide a world class education for our children. Although there are still some areas that need to be improved progress in many areas has been good and although there are still several areas where improvements can and will be made going forward the current trend is encouraging.

School Management and procedures

The school's management structure has been revised to better meet the needs of a school which has a nursery, junior school, senior school and a sixth form . We are working to improve communication and planning within the school and with the wider parent community. We are pleased with progress to date but aware that more remains to be done. The school has been very grateful for the comments and ideas for improvements offered by parents and will wish to continue this dialogue in the coming year.

Changes have also been made to the school's procedures which have led to improvements in the monitoring of the quality of teaching and the performance of our children as well as improving the health and safety and administrative and budgetary areas. Agreements have also been made with third parties, such as with Feltrinelli which will mean that the schools books will now be stocked by them which will mean that we will be able to cut costs substantially in this area. Other agreements with third parties are currently being negotiated and once final agreements have been reached on these initiatives parents will be informed via the normal communication channels.

Strategy review

Since the arrival of Mr. Dillow the management team have been conducting a strategy review for the school going forward. The current timetable foresees that a strategy paper will be prepared for discussion with the Board to enable a final strategy document to be approved by the Board in time for its implementation in the first months of new the school year starting in September 2009. Once approved details of the school's strategy going forward will be provided to the parent body.

As part of this strategy Mr. Dillow has already been working in improving our contacts with our peer group of Independent UK and European schools that we measure ourselves against and in this area we already have some early wins. In fact we were recently informed that our school has been elected to the HMC (the Headmasters and Headmistresses Conference) which has as its members the top 280 British schools. This is a development will allow the school to be at the forefront of best practices in teaching and school management and will provide a very useful window for the SJHS to be immediately informed of what is happening within our peer group. A second interesting development is that our school has recently been approved as a training school for new graduates of Christchurch, Canterbury University which is a teacher training college in the UK. This will provide us with up to date knowledge of best teaching practices as they are developed and will also provide us with an opportunity to identify potential high flying young teachers before they join the job market.

Staff matters

I am pleased to report that the staff situation has stabilized with only 4 teachers leaving the school at the end of this academic year. The positions that have become vacant as a result have been advertised with an overwhelming response from potential candidates, for example 85 applicants for the position of Head of the 6th form and 67 for the year 6 replacement. This has allowed Mr. Dillow to hire what he considers to be excellent replacements and the level of response is a reflection on the reputation of the school. My overall impression is that the atmosphere within the teaching body is much improved with more transparency in dealings between the management group and the teachers and their representatives. Steps have been taken to increase the quality and the frequency of providing relevant information to staff and this has had a very positive impact.

The new facility

Unfortunately a year has passed and we still do not have a definitive long term solution to our facility problem. The global financial crisis, and the resultant slow down in almost all of the Global economies, has caused the Board to proceed cautiously in its search for a solution. This does not mean that we have stopped looking for a suitable solution, in fact throughout the last year the Board has considered several possibilities and are currently in discussion with third parties with respect to two distinct sites for development. Fortunately with the arrival of new Board members we now have excellent contacts with the Comune di Milano and we are currently discussing with them the possibility of an expansion of our current facility plus an extension of our rental period. We are hopeful that both will be approved in the short term which will remove the need to find an alternative solution with some urgency and will allow us to take time to find a solution which will guarantee the long term security of the school.

The IB program and academic results

The introduction of the IB Diploma programme in Y12 has been both challenging and rewarding. We are generally pleased with the progress made and delighted with the development of the programme during the first year. Students have responded well to the demands of the programme and I congratulate them on their swift adaptation to the new challenges they have encountered. It is clear that the various aspects of the programme (Extended Essay, CAS, ToK etc) which are additional to the six subject choices are proving to be an excellent preparation for study at higher education level. It has also become clear to us that this wider range requires greater investment in the personal support of each student. With this in mind we will be expanding the Sixth Form management team next year under our new Head of Sixth Form to provide the support needed for success. Mr. Dillow will provide more details of these changes before the end of term.

Congratulations are also due to the teaching staff who have continued to provide our Y13 students with high quality lessons in the A2 curriculum while introducing the Diploma programme in Y12. We have every confidence that students in both year groups will excel in their final examinations as usual.

Financial position

I am pleased to report that the school's financial position continues to improve with an expected cash balance at the end of the current fiscal year of some €3.5 million. Cost control has been tightened and as explained above the school is exploring areas in which non essential activities such as the ordering and sale of textbooks and the management of uniforms can be outsourced which will lead to savings in the administration area and will reduced to almost zero the risk of losses on unsold books and uniforms. One major worry over the last 6 months or so was whether or not the school numbers would drop substantially due to the global crisis. It is true that we have lost several students due to parents being repatriated or because the financial burden of school fees was not sustainable in the current climate. However, I am very pleased to inform you that, although we have probably lost slightly more students than we would do in a normal economic business cycle, numbers of students expected for the new academic year will be in line if not above those at the start of last year with all leavers having been replaced and with many classes now full and not able to accept any additional students. This will mean that our cash balance will continue to increase throughout the next academic year which will serve the school well when we eventually find a new facility.

The summer holidays are almost upon us and I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of our students and teachers an enjoyable summer break and to wish our leavers from year 13 all the very best as they move on to higher education in some of the best educational institutions that the world can offer. To all other leavers, students and staff, I wish you every success for the future.

Yours Faithfully

James R. Noble

Chairman of the Board of the Sir James Henderson School