



23 October 2008

Dear Parents and Staff

As we get close to the midterm break I thought it would be a good idea to update you on some of the major events of the first term and how, as Chairman of the Board of Governors, I see the school performing. This is just a brief communication covering a few areas that I hope will be of interest to you.

### **Performance of the school**

Once again the results of the upper school's end of year exam results were good. The University places that students in the upper sixth hoped to be offered were mostly obtained which is very encouraging considering the quality of the Universities that the students had applied to. Results at all other key stages were equally good and I am sure that when the final analysis is available the school will maintain its very high position in the league of independent schools against which the school measures itself. Despite some end of term worries, number of students is very healthy at over 760 students with some entrance interviews currently underway for students to join in the second term and waiting lists for several year groups. The new teachers have settled in well and in most cases are performing in line with expectations. Fine tuning in some departments is necessary and this will be completed in the next two weeks or so. All in all a good start to the academic year.

### **New school Principal**

We have excellent news on the selection of the school's new Principal. After an extremely detailed selection process starting with around twenty candidates, five candidates were invited to Milan over the weekend of September 13/14 to be interviewed by the Board and to meet the heads of school. They also visited the school on September 12 and 15. The final choice was between two strong candidates, both British and products of the British educational system and both currently heads of private schools. After extensive debate among the interviewing panel, given the quality of both of the final two candidates, the winning candidate was Mr. Robert S. Dillow. Mr Dillow is currently the headmaster of St George's College, Buenos Aires which is a private coeducational English school of some 820 pupils, which like the SJHS caters for pupils from 3 to 18 years of age, follows the British curriculum and has already implemented the IB program for its sixth form.

Mr Dillow has a very impressive academic profile having gained an Honors degree in languages at Cambridge during the 1980's and a Masters degree, once again at Cambridge, in 2002. His professional background started with a spell in the UK Diplomatic Service from 1985 through 1992 and he went into a career in education on leaving the Service. Thereafter followed rapid advancement through the UK educational system arriving at the level of Principal of a UK coeducational school of 1250 pupils in 2002.

I am pleased to inform you that Mr. Dillow will be starting at school on December 1 (one month earlier than the deadline the Board had set itself for having a new principal on board). His wife and children will join him subsequently and all three sons will join the school in January 2009. Once Mr.

Dillow is firmly established the Board will arrange an introductory cocktail in order that Parents will have a chance to meet him and welcome him to our school.

During this interim period the school has been most capably managed jointly by the heads of lower and upper school; Miss Dean and Mr Wright. I am delighted to report that they have done an excellent job in implementing necessary changes to the day to day management of the school and the recommendations that the Board upheld from the inspection report we received in the Spring of this year. I think it is fair to say that they have also created a harmonious and positive working atmosphere among staff and have met the challenges thrown at them with skill and insight which will be essential in forming part of the management team that Mr. Dillow has in mind for the school going forward. On behalf of the Board and the Parents I want to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Wright and Miss Dean for all they have done over the last few months and for the support they will undoubtedly provide to the new Principal going forward.

### **The new facility**

I am also very pleased to announce that we have started to negotiate the legal terms of an agreement with the Comune di Segrate. This community will be providing free of charge some 2.5/3.0 hectares of land in a location very close to the existing school facilities. We will use the land to create a world class purpose-built new school which will be instrumental in the Board's strategy of providing a world class English language school in the Milan area.

The initiative has been driven by the generosity of one of our parents, Mr Vittorio Farina, without whose input and support this project would not have been possible, and I personally would like to thank Mr. Farina publicly for his help and generosity to date. Of course, the fact that we are now negotiating legal terms with the Comune di Segrate does not mean that we will eventually obtain, on either a long term concession or indeed the ownership of this land, but I am pleased to say all parties are convinced that the school will be successful in obtaining this land in the short term and the Board will provide updates as the negotiations progress.

Of course obtaining the land is only part of the process. We then have to build the school and this will involve finding the finance to do so. In this respect the Board will be providing detailed plans of the project as it progresses and will be soliciting funds towards the cost of construction from those parents and Alumni who can afford to contribute, as well as from the wider business community which we feel will benefit from the educational standards achieved by the school's pupils. We are already receiving financial support from certain quarters, such as from the US Consulate (the newly constructed guard house), and I would hope that additional support can be obtained from parents, past parents and alumni going forward to help the school to build its new facility without having to make substantial recourse to external financing. Once details of the project have been finalized the Board will provide details of how you can provide support.

### **Governance**

You may remember that the Inspection report recommended a review of the structure of the Board of Governors to ensure the proper range of skills and experience of its members. Although the Board is not currently proposing to make any changes in the short term, an ongoing debate around this topic is underway at the Board level. Given that any changes to Governance will require to be approved by a majority of the members of the Association the Board would welcome comment on this topic from the Parent body. If any members of the Association have any views or ideas they would like to have considered by the Board then please provide us with your input which will be taken into consideration as our thinking develops.

## **Unpaid fees**

Unfortunately I need to close this letter on a less than happy note. Over the last year to eighteen months there has been an increasing tendency for parents to stop paying school fees by the due date. As all of you are aware the school's finances do not allow it to finance unpaid fees especially considering that teaching costs, which are paid on a monthly basis, amount to some 80% of fees. As a result unpaid fees lead to critical cash flow issues. I feel that I must therefore underline that all fees must be paid no later than their due date since to go beyond this deadline could lead to the very unhappy circumstance of parents being told to keep their children away from school until all arrears are fully paid. Both the Board and the school want to avoid taking these measures if at all possible but this is a fee paying school and it can only function if all fees are paid on time. For those parents who have temporary financial difficulties payment plans can, and will, be agreed but any agreements made will need to be honored or sanctions will be applied.

The midterm holiday is coming up and I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of our pupils and staff an enjoyable break to allow them to recharge their batteries for the very hectic period in the school leading up to the Christmas holiday.

Yours faithfully

James R. Noble

Chairman of the Board of the Sir James Henderson School.