

November Newsletter 2013



Dear Parent/Carer,

As always there are lots of good things happening in the Academy at the moment, with the focus squarely on teaching and learning. This happens in all sorts of ways, not just within the classroom. In the last few weeks we have had the 'Lab in a Lorry' in school, Geography fieldwork in the local area and Communication Base pupils doing Outdoor Learning too! Members of the Modern Languages senior French class attended a concert by French band Irie Révoltés' in Glasgow on Thursday 7th November. They thought it was going to be more on the classical side, but it turned out to be much more rock 'n' roll!!

S4/5/6 pupils have been working on a variety of career preparation projects whether it be UCAS (university) applications or visits to Careers Fairs. Some S456 pupils have been on work placements in a variety of types of employment. One of our S6 pupils, Lee McKay 6C1 attended a work placement with WDC Electricians last week. His employer's assessment report said: "Lee is well mannered, polite and the best boy I have ever had"! Well done! On top of all this, Supported Study is running very well - things are getting serious, with the SQA National Assessments ongoing for a lot of senior pupils at the moment.

Good News

We have had delivery of our new **Vale of Leven Academy Minibus**!! We have been discussing this venture for a number of years with the Parent Council. Last year they received a windfall from the Local Authority and this has given the boost in funds needed to run the minibus. The minibus was given to us by WDC (it was part of their school transport fleet). It has been serviced, taxed and is ready to go. We are delighted that this will give us greater flexibility in terms of visits and outdoor learning, whilst being of great use for our many sports teams. At present we spend considerable sums of money on transport, so this is really a 'Spend to Save'. The Parent Council has given us money to help with petrol, upkeep and training of staff drivers. Can I thank the Parent Council and also Pupil and Family Support Worker, Mr Willie Muldoon, who have worked tirelessly to bring about this exciting development.

Individual pupils continue to do very well at sport. Ross Cameron is still training with the Scottish Under-16 football team, and is being selected to represent Scotland! Former pupil Craig Booth is also on winning form in the boxing ring! Fund-raising has been continuing in the school, and as usual pupils, staff and parents have been very generous. The Halloween Disco raised over £800 for a defibrillator. This money has been supplemented by over £1250, which was raised by senior pupils at a recent charity night in the Alexandria Masonic Hall. All proceeds will go to fund the defibrillator, with the extra money going to Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland.

For over 14 years we have had continuous success running the annual CHAS Language Challenge. During their German lessons, S1 pupils learned 10 words in a foreign language over the course of one week. This was a sponsored event and pupils collected money to fundraise for Robin House in Balloch. The languages learned this year were Japanese, Italian and Spanish. Pupils have always raised fantastic amounts of money and the running total for 2013 is £630! Excellent work!

There have been other fund-raising events! The S6 Charities group are organising the annual Macmillan Cancer Care Coffee Morning which takes place on Friday, 29th November. S2 PE Pupils raised £100 to support their Ardlui Outdoor Education trip from their bake sale, and the Asdan class ran a coffee afternoon in the Communication Base to raise funds. We also managed to raise £720 in total for Children in Need on our very successful 'Wear a Onesie for Pudsey' day. The pupils, and some staff (!) all looked fabulous in their onesies!!

Vale of Leven Calendar App

On Tuesday, 26th November we launched the Vale of Leven Academy Calendar App. This is very useful for pupils, parents and staff! The app can be downloaded onto I-phones and android phones and also onto tablets. If you go into the App store you can do a search for Vale of Leven and the app will be displayed. It is free to download!! The app shows the calendar each month and allows you to see what is happening in the school on a particular day. There is also a news section which tells you about events or projects in the school, and when you download the app, you can agree to 'push notifications' which means information can be sent which will show on your phone each morning. You can also go into

settings and select only the subjects your child does, so that you don't receive irrelevant information. The main school calendar is on the system. We will shortly add the S4/5/6 Assessment Calendar and the Supported Study Calendar. We are just in the early stages of this development, and if you have any positive or negative feedback, please let us know! As we try to modernise the school systems, we are also looking at an on-line homework diary and the facilities for on-line payments to the school for the canteen and for school trips etc.

The REACH project

We have a number of projects running in VOLA to support young people towards higher aspirations in terms of successfully applying to university. The REACH project supports young people who would like to apply to Medicine, Dentistry, Vet Medicine and Law. Pupils are identified in S4, and supported through the exam phase. As a result some of our young people have gained places in these prestigious courses over the last few years. REACH tutors visit the school and work with the young people. On a recent visit, the school received praise from the lead REACH tutor, in relation to appropriately selecting the pupils for the project (with the required level of academic ability), monitoring pupil progress throughout, ensuring pupils select the correct subject choice for progression, and that they meet REACH assignment deadlines and attend all events. It is nice to hear that all our hard work is recognised by the university!!

Young Musicians at the Academy

West Dunbartonshire Concert Band performed on the 3rd November in Edinburgh at the National Concert Band Festival, where they achieved a Silver Award. Congratulations to the pupils who represented Vale of Leven Academy within that band.

The pupils are Emma Anton, Lucy Bolton, Tegan McKay, Kieran Oliver, Samantha Oliver, Euan Priestley, Hayley Proudlock and Liam Walker.

A large number of our young musicians will be contributing to the West Dunbartonshire Christmas Concert on Thursday, 5th December. Emma Anton, Lucy Bolton, Jodie Brough, Georgia Clark, Heather Fanning, Elizabeth Forrest, Corrine Friel, Angeline Friel, Amy Fuller, Hannah Fuller, Julia Hamill, Lauren Huntley, Megan Hutchison, Thomas Kinney-Nicol, Zubayda Kofi, Ben McColl, Tegan McKay, Natasha McVey, Karla Murray, Kieran Oliver, Samantha Oliver, Miruna Popescu, Euan Priestley, Hayley Proudlock, Ailsa Roddick, Emma Ross, Karen Shaw, Alexis Smith, Beth Stern, Emma Walker, Liam Walker, Rachel Wood and Kirsty Young will all perform at the Christmas Concert.

We are also holding our own Christmas Concert on the evening of Monday, 16th December when you will be able to enjoy all our brilliant musicians performing!! Tickets will be on sale soon.

Rotary Club Young Chef

Every year the Rotary Club organise a National Young Chef Competition for pupils between the ages of 12 and 17. This year our school took part along with Our Lady and St Patrick's High School. There were 5 contestants from our school who went to OLSP on the 6th of November to compete in the 1st round of the competition. They were Rhys McGowan S2, Callum Barbour S6, Caleb Jones S4, Dominic Donaldson S5 and Kaceylea Ledgerwood S4.

The pupils were asked to plan and prepare a 2 course meal for 2 people spending between £10 - £15. They had 1½ hours to complete their chosen dishes and present them. There were 3 professional chefs who were judging the competition. They watched the pupils prepare their dishes and then chose 1 winner and 2 runner ups. All 3 pupils received a plaque and the winner will go through to the next heat. All pupils got a certificate of achievement for taking part. Rhys McGowan S2 and Kaceylea Ledgerwood S4 were awarded 2nd and 3rd place, Rhys marginally missed out on 1st place. Callum Barbour S6 was given a special mention for his delicious soup. The chefs said it was one of the best soups they had ever tasted. All of the pupils who took part did a spectacular job. We hope to compete next year and get more pupils involved!

Cameron House Hotel Careers Day

Cameron House Hotel is holding a Careers Open Day on Tuesday, 17th December. S4/5/6 pupils who are interested in a career in the Hospitality Industry will be able to attend this event. The format for the day will include an introduction to Cameron House, presentations from Cameron House Employees (some of whom will be ex-pupils), and an exhibition of all departments in the Conference Room - where pupils will be free to mingle and spend time exploring their particular interests. Furthermore, during and after the event, there will be an opportunity for those looking for employment in the first 6 months of 2014 to have an initial screening interview for potential suitability. Pupils can

submit CVs on the day for consideration in the future. This is a great opportunity - Cameron House employ many local people, including some of our former pupils. They have supported the Academy by visiting us in the past and our pupils have always thoroughly enjoyed the event!!

Kuehne+Nagel Logistics Challenge

The Logistics Challenge is an inter-disciplinary learning activity, run jointly with one of our partners: the international logistics company, Kuehne+Nagel. Sixty-one S3 pupils will be involved on Monday, 2nd and Tuesday 3rd December. The project combines Maths, Art, IT, Environmental Studies and Presentation Skills, and introduces pupils to the concept of logistics. On the Tuesday, Kuehne+Nagel Ltd, will send 10 managers to mentor and judge the pupils as they work on the final stages of the challenge. We are delighted this year also to have support from pupils and staff in the Home Economics department who will be providing hospitality for our guests. The S3 pupils have already had a Launch led by Kuehne+Nagel staff, and have already been working on a logistics problem in Maths. The Challenge will build up to a climax next week, with the design of company identities, development of environmental policies, a further logistics challenge, and presentations to judges, with the winning company being declared on Tuesday afternoon, to win a "mystery prize"!

Golf Success for VOLA pupils

Three Vale of Leven Academy pupils have won a major County Award at the Stirling County Sports Awards. They were instrumental in winning the prestigious Junior Team of the Year 2013 Award. S4 pupils James Slevin and Caleb Jones, alongside S3 pupil David Hood made up half of Strathendrick Golf Club's Junior Team which reached the County Final of Stirling County's Ellis Shield Matchplay league. Having seen off the challenge of impressive teams such as Stirling, Falkirk and Dunblane, David Hood remained unbeaten and amassed the largest amount of impressive wins - as a result David was called up to the Stirling County team squad for their match against Lothian which also ended in an impressive win. Caleb Jones only dropped 1 point in all his matches, despite only recently been promoted to the team. James Slevin, who won the Turnberry Junior Open during the summer, played an important role in the team reaching the final of the competition. All these wins earned Strathendrick's Junior Team a nomination to the Stirling Sports Awards held at the Doubletree by Hilton Dunblane Hydro, which was being attended by a vast group of sporting celebrities and coaches. The Junior Team faced stiff opposition against another 6 clubs from a variety of sports such as rugby, lacrosse and football. Strathendrick Juniors won the event and were presented with their trophy by Commonwealth Gold Medallist and Olympic swimmer Robbie Renwick and Olympic Coach Graham Wardell. Well done boys!!

P4-7 Parents Open Night

On Wednesday, 13th November we held another very successful Parents' Open Evening. Over 200 people attended! On arrival parents and youngsters were treated to samples from the School Canteen to show the quality of the freshly prepared food we serve in VOLA. After a brief presentation in the hall, parents and youngsters visited classes across the school to see what we are doing. S1 and S2 pupils were working in departments, and all the visitors were encouraged to participate, whether it was the SFA School of Football pupils, the experiments in a Chemistry class or making prints in the Art and Design department. Instrumental soloists performed in the foyer, as parents enjoyed a coffee after their tours! The parental evaluations were very positive with all the parents agreeing it was an excellent evening. Thanks to all the staff and pupils who helped make this such a successful evening!

English Department/Library - Author visits.

Over the last few weeks two authors have visited the school to talk to pupils. Anne Donovan was in the school on 5th November to carry out a writer's workshop with S4-S6 pupils. The pupils involved reported that it was a very interesting and useful talk! Children's author, actor and stand up comedian Jonathan Meres visited the school on Thursday, 14th November. He delivered a fantastic, hilarious talk to sixty S1 pupils in the library. The pupils laughed until they cried for a solid hour and loved hearing him talk about his latest book. After the talk the S1 pupils waited behind in their droves for a signed bookmark and to ask him questions. The Booksfactor co-ordinator for West Dunbartonshire, Allan Gordon said he'd never seen so many pupils wait behind after an event. This was truly the most fabulous author visit we have had so far, and I'm sure the pupils would love to have him back in the future!

Duty Periods

In the Academy, the Senior Leadership Team have 'Duty Periods'. Senior Leaders go round classes, and this means that we are monitoring pupil behaviour and effort at all times. However it also means that we get to visit classes to see all the wonderful things going on! Whether it's watching the senior pupils in Art produce lamp shades made out of plastic spoons or plastic cups, or hearing a bit of 'Harry Potter' in English....or even doing a bit of tasting in the Home Economics classes, it is a great way to find out what's going on!

Senior Phase Prelims

In previous years we have always held S4 prelims in December. However due to the development of the Senior Phase this is not happening - the prelims for all S4/5/6 pupils will be held from the 3rd - 17th February 2014. There will be **no study leave** during these exams. Plans for these exams are already being made and we will issue the timetables and other necessary information in January! Parents will receive formal reports in December, and there will be Parents' Evenings in January for all senior pupils, so that you can meet staff and check progress. Please note, however, that there are unit assessments on an ongoing basis, between now and the May SQA exams. Young people must pass these unit assessments as well as the final exam if they are to achieve the full course award. This means that they are still **very important** assessments, even if they take place in class time! Please ensure that your children keep you in touch with these assessments, and that they understand the importance of passing. We are making the point in class and in assemblies, but your support can make all the difference! You will be notified by the school if we have major concerns about your child's performance in these the unit assessments.

Uniform

Can I ask for your continued support with uniform? Some pupils have stopped wearing their blazers, saying it is too cold or too wet. The blazers are lightweight, so that an outside jacket can be worn over the top. A hoodie could even be worn underneath! Also this month I have a plea regarding trousers. Black jeans/leggings are not allowed - neither are joggies. Pupils should only be wearing black skirts or tailored school trousers. I realise that as the bad weather comes in it can be difficult to keep clothes clean and dry, but please continue to support us.

Computer Games

When we ask our young people what they are doing at home over the course of an evening, they are not always studying! Indeed a straw poll by science teachers alerted us to the fact that many youngsters spend up to four hours in the evening playing computer games/talking on facebook etc. Some continue to play into the small hours. Research shows that young people find it difficult to sleep after playing computer games, because of the adrenaline levels produced, and the brain activity involved, therefore there is a double effect. They are not doing as much studying as they should, and are not getting enough sleep, therefore, come into school tired each day. This particularly affects boys in S3-6. The attainment of boys is presently lagging approximately ten percent below the girls. I know that many of the boys love computer games, but we need to ensure it is not costing them their qualifications. With Christmas coming up there will be lots of games purchased and played. Please try to control the times they play so that they are doing their schoolwork and are not so tired!! We are doing a research project on this particular issue, and will come back to you with further advice shortly! If any parent has still to return their questionnaire in the SAE., please do so asap.

Severe Weather Arrangements

As you will know the school has had to close a number of times over the last few years due to severe weather conditions. While we hope that we will not have any need to close the school, if weather conditions make it necessary, we will take the following steps:

- contact WDC education department - they will alert local radio stations and put information out through the WDC website
- ask pupils to contact parents directly before they leave the school
- send messages through the automated system and through the new app
- alert the bus companies
- ensure pupils do not leave the building unless contact has been made with a parent/emergency contact - senior managers will remain until all pupils have made the necessary contact

If the school closes, information will be provided through the media (particularly local radio stations and the WDC website) on the situation for the next day. Please be assured that pupil safety is our first concern at all times!!

Remembrance Day

A number of senior pupils represented the school at the local Remembrance Day Service at Christie Park Memorial. The School Captains laid a wreath and helped give out the orders of service. Given that some of our former pupils are now in the services, it certainly brings home the idea of remembrance. The school also held a two minute silence at 11.00am on Monday 11th November.

Parent Council

The Parent Council needs you! We are trying to increase the number of parents involved in the school. We realise that people have so many commitments these days, but any support you can give us would be gratefully received. Parent Council members will continue to attend Parents' Evenings, so please speak to them about your thoughts regarding parental involvement, or contact the school for more information.

All meetings are held in the School's Conference Room and start at 7.00pm

Can we also recommend the Scottish Government's Parent Website: Parentzone. The address of the website is: www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk

School Website

The school website is including more and more information for parents. We now include all newsletters and letters home so that you can check that you have all the information you will need. The website is: www.scottishschools.info/valeoflevenacademy

Important Dates

Thursday 12th December: Christmas Lunch in the school cafeteria

Monday 16th December: Christmas Concert

Tuesday 17th December: Talent show

Tuesday 17th December: English Department Panto visit

Thursday 19th December: Staff Pantomime

Thursday 19th December: Clydebank College In-Service Day

Friday 20th December: Staff Pantomime (repeat performance!)

Friday 20th December: Christmas Service

Friday 20th December: School closes for Christmas

Monday 6th January 2014: School Reopens at 8.50am.

Monday 13th January 2014: S5/6 Parents' Evening (4.15pm - 6.45pm)

Tuesday 14th January 2014: You Can Do Anything Careers Conference for S1

Tuesday 21st January 2014: S4 Parents' Evening (4.15pm - 6.45pm)

Monday 3rd - Monday 17th February 2014: S456 Prelims

If you have any concerns/questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on the school number - 01389 777000.

Yours sincerely

Catriona M. Robertson

Enclosure

National Parent Forum leaflet on Curriculum for Excellence