

January 2014 Newsletter



Dear Parent/Carer,

A Message From The Head Teacher

The New Year always brings the realisation that some very important events are not too far away...whether it is the Senior Phase Prelims, S1 Electives and S3 Options, as well as the SQA Exams themselves. The pressure starts to build immediately with the senior school - many subjects have folios, projects and practical exams, which are completed well before the final exams. Departments will be taking steps to ensure all young people reach their potential. We will be contacting parents to ensure deadlines are met and work completed. Please encourage youngsters to keep trying. Sometimes, senior pupils say they want to drop subjects, as though this will make all the difference to their outcomes. This is not our policy, unless in the most extreme circumstances, such as extended periods of serious ill health. Research evidence shows that dropping a subject does not improve chances in other subjects, and Growth Mindset tells us that this is exactly the time when we have to keep working and keep trying!

Good News

The school was a very busy place before Christmas - a whole range of activities took place. Firstly, there was the Christmas Concert, where parents were entertained by the school choirs and the school orchestras. There was also a talent show, and two groups of youngsters visited the theatre in Glasgow to see a pantomime. More than 50 Vale of Leven Academy pupils and staff enjoyed a production of "Aladdin" at The King's Theatre. The trip was a real success, with everyone enjoying the show and soaking up the festive spirit. Of particular note was the fact that three independent groups of people, from the audience, the theatre, and the bus company, approached our staff to commend pupils on their excellent behaviour. This reflects really well on our school, our community and our young people. Well done to everyone who was involved! Senior pupils went to see 'It's a Wonderful Life' at the Glasgow Film Theatre, as part of their Higher Media course. Last but not least, we had the staff pantomime, Jack and the Beanstalk, in VOLA. Mr Keegan produced the whole extravaganza with the help of the staff, who made up the cast, as well as many others who helped with scenery, props and ticket sales. Young people from the school took the roles of stage crew, sound and lighting. A great time was had by all, and the performances were packed out! What all this proved was that we have many very talented pupils and staff, and when we all work together we can achieve great things!! All these activities have also raised money for charity too! We will shortly be buying a defibrillator for the school using the funds raised by a number of school groups. We also raised over £200 for 'Save the Children' and the School Fund, as a result of the 'Wear Your Christmas Jumper' day on the last week of term.

We have had a very busy start to the new term. The ski trip to France has returned already. A group of pupils and staff left on Saturday 25th January to go to Disneyland Paris on a Maths visit. They will be continuing their Maths studies, whilst they are away, but in the context of the Disneyland resort!

VoLA's Voice Have a Very Important Visitor!

The VoLA's Voice team recently organised an interview with actor Martin Compston. Martin has recently performed in programmes such as Silent Witness, The Great Train Robbery and Line of Duty. He has also starred in films such as Sweet Sixteen (where his acting career began, when he was still in school) and The Wee Man. Martin came into VoLA on Friday 17th January. Pupils interviewed him, to ask him what life is like as an actor. They asked questions, such as how he became an actor, his favourite role so far, famous people he has met, what he likes and doesn't like about being an actor, and also his plans for the future. VoLA's Voice captured all of this on camera and this will soon be uploaded to the VoLA's Voice - BBC School News Report link on the school website along with a write up of the interview. Stay tuned for more news stories!

National 5 Biology Classes Have a Visitor!

Mr Ian Craig recently came into the Academy to give a talk to all National 5 Biology classes on bees and bee keeping. The talk explained the reasons for the decline of honey bees. Our pupils are doing their National 5 Research Assignment for the SQA on this topic. Mr Craig received an MBE from the Queen last year for 'Lifetime Services to Bee Keeping' so he is well informed about this important environmental issue! Mrs Fitzpatrick of the English Department was also very interested in the talk, as she has been investigating bees as a topic with her IDL class!

New Teaching Methods - Reciprocal Teaching

Vale of Leven Academy pupils are experiencing yet more innovative teaching, to ensure they get the best possible educational experience and the greatest chance of success in their exams. In a joint project between the English department and Physical Education, Mr McPartlane and Mr Wright are piloting the use of reciprocal teaching pedagogies with National 5 pupils, in an effort to best equip youngsters with the strategies they need, when reading challenging texts. West Dunbartonshire Council already boast some of Scotland's best reading fluency rates, and it is hoped that this project will dovetail with the impressive work, that has already taken place, to improve understanding and evaluation skills. Representatives of the school will provide feedback on the progress of this project to the Scottish Government in the coming weeks.

Mrs Panelli Heads for NASA

The Vale of Leven Academy and Physics teacher, Mrs Fiona Panelli, have been selected to participate in an exciting project that aims to improve the teaching of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM). Mrs Panelli heads off to Houston Texas on the 2nd of February on a visit to NASA, joining teachers from Germany, Holland and France. Mrs Panelli will meet amazing people working in the space programme, including Scientists, Engineers and Astronauts, as well as experiencing the workings of NASA at the Johnson Space Center. She will also be attending a space exploration educators' conference and will bring back ideas and materials, which will enhance the teaching and learning for pupils in STEM subjects. The programme is a partnership between World Education, the International Education Business Partnership and is funded by the Verizon Foundation.

Vale of Leven Calendar App

At the end of last year, we launched the VOLA App. This 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 have now added 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, let us know!

Senior Phase - Prelims and Study Leave

As you will know, the Senior Phase Prelims will run from Monday 3rd to Tuesday 18th February inclusive. As an authority, WDC had agreed not to provide study leave for pupils. This was based on the belief that most youngsters will benefit from study support in school during the prelims rather than sitting at home. There was a reaction to this from a number of parents and pupils across the Local Authority area and a compromise was reached. All parents should have received a letter from Terry Lanagan last week outlining the new arrangements. If a parent feels they would prefer their son/daughter to study at home during the prelims, they can send in a letter to the school, asking for this arrangement. There will be no affect on attendance figures for that pupil and no affect on the Education Maintenance Allowance. However, I believe that for the vast majority of pupils, studying within the school will give them the best outcome in the forthcoming examinations. The school timetable will run as normal for those not involved in exams, and teachers will therefore be available to support their pupils throughout the exam diet.

Girls Into Physics Event

On Thursday 23rd January, Vale of Leven Academy hosted a 'Girls Into Physics' day for the West of Scotland. This event has only been held in the East Coast of Scotland until now. 127 girls from WDC schools, Jordanhill School, St. Ninian's High School (East Renfrewshire), and Park Mains High School attended the all day event. The girls were welcomed by keynote speaker Dr Kate Barrie from the University of Glasgow. The girls then attended workshops which varied from Medical Physics, designing propellers, to debating the chances of alien species in space! A favourite workshop provided by Heriot Watt University seemed to be the use of liquid nitrogen, which eventually provided all the participants with an ice cream cone!! In the final session, the girls had a live 'skype' session with rocket scientist Amber Gell from the NASA Space Centre. This was another very successful day for the Academy. Thanks go to Mrs F. Panelli and her team, who did all the organization for this prestigious event!!

Christmas Concert

The Christmas Concert, organized by the Music Department, took place on Monday 16th December. So often the youngsters involved in the Christmas Concert are overlooked when it comes to congratulations. So here are all the names! Well done everybody!!

Soloists - E.Ross (Tenor Horn), H.Proudlock (Vocalist), C.Harkins (Clarinet), E.Anton (French Horn)

Junior Vocalists - N.MacEachran, V.Robertson, D.McKay, E.McKenzie, H.Muirhead, E.Robertson, K.Rodden, C.Spark, C.Scullion, L.Shaw, L.Ritchie, L.Swarbrick and S.Smith.

Vocal Group - A.Campbell, G.Clark, I.Coyle, R.Douglas, A.Gallagher, M.Hamilton, S.Hodgson, E.Forrest, S.Sweeney, J.Cramb, K.Fraser, A.McLaughlin, A.Roddick, H.Wrethman O.Haggerty, S.Oliver, L.Evans, K.Hopkinson and H.Proudlock.

Wind band - A.Allan, E.Anton, L.Brown, R.Dow, C.Harkins, K.Larkin, L.Lavery, A.Lockhart, E.Priestley, A.Morrison, H.Manning, E.Nicol, L.Patrick, E.Ross, A.Smith, K.Thwaites, E.Walker, H.Proudlock, L.Bolton, A.Friel, B.McColl, A.Shaw, J.J.Cameron, C.Friel, A.McGrogan, L.Shaw, L.Cowen, K.Godwin, T.McKay, L.Smith, H.Hume, K.Oliver, B.Stern, S.Oliver and L.Walker.

Brass Ensemble - E.Anton, J.J.Cameron, C.Friel, L.Patrick, E.Ross, A.Friel, A.Morrison, A.McGrogan, A.Shaw, L.Shaw, E.Priestley, A.Smith, H.Manning and S.Oliver.

String Group - G.Clark, A.Fuller, H.Fuller, E.Thorpe, I.Coyle, M.Popescu, K.Thwaites, H.Fanning, T.Kinney-Nicol and K.Shaw.

Ukelele Orchestra - J.Brough, E.Forrest, A.Fuller, H.Fuller, J.Hamill, L.Harris, L.Hartley, Z.Kofi, B.McColl, T.McKay, N.McVey, F.Dunn, K.Murray, K.Oliver, S.Oliver, M.Popescu, A.Roddick, E.Ross, A.Smith, B.Stern, and K.Young.

Xylophone Trio - K.Johnstone, H.Park and L.Wilson.

Funk Band - S.Battison, S.McIntyre, G.Clark, J.Mercer, E.Priestley, K.Oliver and M.Lees.

A special thank you goes to Mrs Kean and her staff for all their hard work preparing the youngsters for the concert.

West Of Scotland Windband

Congratulation to Samantha Oliver (Trombone) and Lucy Bolton (Clarinet) who have been selected to join the West Of Scotland Wind Band. This is a great achievement! All your hard work has paid off!

Good Practice in the Academy

You may remember that I recently sent out the School's Standards and Quality Report. As part of our Self Evaluation procedures, each department in the school has to prepare a Standards and Quality Report each session. Enclosed is a document which collates all the good practice sections from these reports. I hope you will agree that it shows the amount of work going on within the school, to improve the education received by our young people. From Curriculum for Excellence BGE to Cross Curricular Projects, from Choice in the Technologies to the Language Challenge Event, the document shows our commitment to continuous improvement.

Vale of Leven Academy Pupils Chill Out in France.

Once again, earlier this month, a group of Vale of Leven Academy pupils spent a week skiing in the French Alps, in the picturesque mountain resort of Les Menuires. Pupils of all abilities undertook four hours of lessons every day in "ski school", trying out the slopes under the guidance of French instructors. Instructors and staff alike were impressed by standards of behaviour and attitude, with Mr. McPartlane commenting "The Vale of Leven Academy pupils on this trip were a credit to their school, their families and their teachers". Pupils were presented with well-earned certificates and medals by the instructors, as their holiday came to an end, agreeing that the trip had been a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and eager to sign up for next year's adventure!

Parent Council

The Parent Council are meeting on Thursday of this week at 7.00pm in the Head Teacher's office. We are always happy to welcome new members! Can we also recommend the Scottish Government's Parent Website 'Parentzone'? The address of the website is: www.parentzonescotland.gov.uk

Important Dates in The Spring Term

Thursday 30th January: Parent Council meeting 7.00pm

Monday 3rd February: Senior Phase Prelims begin

Friday 7th February: In-Service Day

Monday 10th - Tuesday 11th February inclusive: Spring Break

Wednesday 12th February: School Reopens at 8.50 am

Tuesday 18th February: Senior Phase Prelims end

Monday 17th February: S2 Parents' Evening 4.15 - 6.45pm

Wednesday 5th March: S3 Senior Phase Information Evening 7 pm

School Website

The school website is including more and more information for parents. This includes holiday information, as well as prelim and supported study timetables. The website address is: www.scottishschools.info/valeoflevenacademy

If you have any concerns/questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on the school number - 01389 777000 or through the School's E-mail address:

SchoolOffice.VOLA@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

Catriona M. Robertson

Enclosures

Good Practice Leaflet

S3 and S4 - National Parent Forum of Scotland information