



NEWSLETTER 16th December 2007

End of Term 1

Dear Parents,

It's been a busy term for everyone and I'm sure that we're all looking forward to a good holiday.

In this newsletter I summarise some of the main activities and key areas of development that have impacted positively on the education of your children this term.

Progress and Standards of Attainment – Our pupils have all been set progress and attainment targets based upon their prior levels of attainment and what is known of their capacity to improve. Their targets include Early Learning Goals in the Foundation Stage, National Curriculum levels in Years 1 to 9, and GCSE grades in Years 10 & 11 and A Level grades in Years 12 & 13. Additionally, our teachers and managers all have performance objectives that are related to our pupils' targets. Consequently, everyone has been working hard this term in order to make good progress towards their respective objectives.

As a result of self evaluation combined with recommendations from an advisor and inspector, our teachers and assistants in the Foundation Stage have made very good progress towards introducing more child led learning strategies than were previously being used. This should lead to our Nursery and Reception children learning more effectively both now and later in their education. It should also enable them to make substantial progress towards their Early Learning Goals.

As a consequence of an analysis of pupils' performance data in the Primary School, internationally renowned primary writing guru Ros Wilson was invited at the beginning of the term to train primary teachers in specific techniques for improving children's writing. The two main strategies known as VCOP (in which children focus on using high quality Vocabulary, Connectives, Openings and Punctuation) and Big Talking & Writing, are having a positive impact upon standards of writing in Years 1 to 6.

Following an analysis of the English GCSE grades of our students who don't speak English as their first language, our Senior School's English teachers have successfully begun teaching IGCSE English as a Second Language (ESL) examination course. This matches the needs of our ESL students more closely than the previous GCSE course, which was mainly for native English speakers. The new course should also enable our ESL students to make better progress and reach higher standards of attainment, not only in English, but in their other subjects too.

In response to significant curriculum changes to the teaching of GCSE science, our Senior School's science teachers have been successfully delivering the second year of the new GCSE

course. This will dovetail into restructured A Level science courses that will be introduced in England and into our school in September 2008.

Health, Safety & Security – Earlier this term our school nurse, Mrs Cath Healey, completed basic health checks on students in the Senior School and issued reports to their parents. Similar checks will be conducted on our pupils in the Primary School next term.

At the beginning of term the menu in our healthy tuck shop was improved. It now includes five different types of salads that are sold in small or large sizes. Croissants and pizza's will be removed from our tuck shop menu with effect from 5th January 2008 in order to improve the nutritional quality of the food that we sell to our children. Masafi mineral water dispensers were delivered recently in order to help encourage our children to drink water. The vending machines should be operational by the beginning of next term.

New playground shading and the introduction of a BSM wide brimmed hat, coupled with our 'No Hat No Play' policy, has helped to reduce children's exposure to the sun. However, more Senior School students need to bring wide brimmed hats to school and need to understand the importance of wearing them and the potential consequences of not doing so. We shall work on this next term, when I'll be requesting the full support of parents.

Our newly leveled steps have lowered the incidence of tripping accidents.

During our fire drill, held at the beginning of this term, we moved all children, staff and visitors (about 1,000 people) to the safety of our sheltered assembly point and accounted for them all within 7 minutes. Most were clear of the buildings within 4 minutes. We practise this every term.

Following an evaluation of our internal evacuation practice on the 21st November we refined our procedures. This enabled us to efficiently evacuate all children to their homes on 26th November whilst successfully handling simulated but realistic challenges presented to us by the British Army's Loan Service. I will be writing to all parents in January with the results of our critical evaluation and a list of improvements.

Sports and Outdoor Education – As a result of swim coach Mr David Rogers joining the school, standards of swimming (which were already good) have improved significantly in lessons and competitions. All of our competitive swimmers have improved their personal best times (PBs) considerably.

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An impressive 111 new school records have been set this term. Most recently some of our boys competed successfully against members of the Oman Swimming Association's national developmental squad.

Over the past few years Deputy Director of Physical Education, Mr Andy Taylor, has coached and developed an Under 19 girls' soccer team. This term the team won the Unity Cup by beating Dubai College in the final of the Gulf wide tournament. Our team is undefeated and is probably the best in the Gulf.

Gymnastics and dance specialist, Miss Julia Papworth, has continued to raise our pupils' standards in gymnastics and dance throughout this term. However, despite her best efforts, she will not be able to improve as many of our pupils as she would like because she needs the assistance of at least two suitably qualified and experienced coaches for three hours every Monday afternoon. Therefore, if you know anyone who is capable of coaching gymnastics or has a strong background, please email Miss Papworth at admin@britishschoolmuscat.com.

Director of Physical Education, Mr Tim Fenton, assisted by other members of staff, successfully taught 56 students to pass their Bronze and Silver Duke of Edinburgh International Award this term. Part of the assessment included having to successfully complete a challenging outdoor expedition.

Art – Under the leadership of Head of Art & Design, Mrs Rachel Connor, preparations are underway for Artefacts 2008; an exhibition of students' art that will be staged next May in the Omani Society for Fine Arts. Our students are currently designing and crafting their pieces and their GCSE and A Level examination entries, which will also be exhibited.

Drama – As a result of successfully developing drama over the past few years, Head of Drama, Mrs Jilly Witcomb has raised standards of performance considerably. Consequently, in November our GCSE and A Level students produced some exceptionally strong examination performances. We are expecting some students to achieve outstanding grades for their performances.

Moramjadbck⁴, the company formed and run by students, has launched its schedule of auditions in preparation for rehearsals during next term. Watch out for the performances that will take place from 6:00pm – 8:30pm on the 30th and 31st March.

Environmental Education – Mrs Tamsin Turner, Mrs Deborah Duggan and Mrs Kate Penry have enthusiastically led and managed improvements to environmental education. We have reduced our use of paper, we reuse what we can and recycle paper and plastic bottles. All children and staff are involved in this process, which has been actively supported by the Environment Society of Oman and Mr Dominic Myers, Chairman of the Board of Governors. Please note that parents

can now throw plastic bottles into our blue recycling unit in our visitors' car park.

Participation in The Community – There have been several occasions during this term when our pupils have been able to participate in the community and make a contribution to others.

Our children in Years 3 to 6 were involved in a project in which students from Sultan Qaboos University were invited into school every week in order to develop intercultural awareness. It culminated in Omani Day, which was a very enjoyable experience for our pupils and the Omani students.

In November, Sixth Former and Deputy Head Boy Richard Newell, raised OMR 2,752 for the National Association of Cancer Awareness by organising Band Bash; an evening during which young musicians from a range of international schools in Muscat entertained crowds in Qurum Park.

Last Saturday evening our Primary music teacher Miss Sue Proctor, led and managed our carol concert in which over 500 pupils participated by either singing, acting, reading or playing a musical instrument. Approximately 550 people joined us and sang traditional Christmas Carols.

Last Monday evening, as a result of Head of Sixth Form Mrs Nadia Megnin's encouragement, our Sixth Form Fund Raising Committee chaired by Richard Newell, raised several thousand rials for the Diabetic Society and the National Association of Cancer Awareness by staging a colourful and musical outdoor charity fashion show in association with main sponsor Citroen. Over 500 people attended and helped to support the event.

Last Tuesday evening our Head of Music, Mr Teiron Jones, successfully produced and directed Sing Christmas at The Intercontinental Hotel, Muscat. It was an entertaining evening during which our pupils performed alongside members of the community.

Throughout this term our Primary French Teacher, Mrs Rosie Kolster, has successfully prepared the school's Junior Choir to entertain members of our community at our carol concert and during road show appearances at The Intercontinental Hotel, Muscat, the British Embassy and The Grand Hyatt Hotel. The choir was accompanied by Mr Terry Megnin on piano and Mrs Suzie Gladwin on flute.

School Improvement Strategies – At the beginning of September we launched our new performance management policy and set of procedures for teachers and managers. Everyone has been set objectives in five key areas: i) school improvement planning; ii) pupils' progress; iii) pupils' standards of attainment; iv) pupils' personal development and well-being; and v) the quality of teaching. Training in lesson observation techniques and the grading of lessons against Ofsted criteria has also been provided in order to help standardise our judgements.

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The British School - Muscat

Our senior leadership team has begun a rigorous self evaluation of our school. This will lead to a complete revision of our development plans by the end of the academic year. (During the next two terms I will also be engaging parents in this process.)

The Head of School Improvement from Buckinghamshire's Local Education Authority, Mrs Val Osbaldaston, has been appointed as our School Improvement Partner (SIP). It is anticipated that her advice, coupled with our access to Buckinghamshire's resources, will enable us to make significant improvements to our provision. (Buckinghamshire is the highest performing Local Education Authority in England.) Val is based in England and acts as our educational consultant.

Board of Governors – Our Board has met twice this term and the following report has been produced by Mrs Julie Towler who was elected onto our Board by parents earlier in the term.

'Hello – I am Julie Towler, and I am the Parent Representative on the BSM Board of Governors. I was elected by the parents and then approved as a Governor at the Annual General Meeting on 28th October, and I thought it would be good to set the scene and let you know what I have been doing since then.

Structure - The Board comprises the President of the school, His Excellency the British Ambassador, Dr Noel Guckian, representatives from the Subscribing Companies, the BSM Principal and Bursar, two BSM Teacher Representatives and a Parent Representative.

Board Meetings - Following the AGM, there was a Board meeting on 28th October. The school is continuing to follow its existing Strategic Plan and Five Year School Improvement Plan, which will be completely revised by the end of the academic year. There will be an Ofsted inspection in spring 2009 and the school is preparing for this with the help of professional advisors from the UK. The Board also approved the school's new Child Protection Policy, which sets out the framework to ensure that the school fulfils its duty of care towards its children. The policy is on the school's website www.britishschoolmuscat.com.

The Bursar's report confirmed a healthy financial picture for the school, and highlighted a number of improvements made to the school's premises such as increasing the number of car parking spaces in the top car park and the installation of a shaded area by the tuck shop, donated by the PTA. In response to the rising costs of property rentals in Muscat, the Board approved increases to staff accommodation allowances.

The second Board meeting of the academic year was held last week, on 2nd December. I questioned the number of "by invitation only" activities included in the after school activity programme, and this will be reviewed. We also discussed the results of the Parental Survey, and one of the action points agreed was that a parental focus group will be formed next term

to look at areas where the response was not as positive as the school had hoped. I shall be working on this after Christmas.

Committees - Much of the detailed work by the Governors is carried out by a series of Committees, and I shall be participating in four of these:

- Premises
- Curriculum
- Health, Safety and Security
- School Improvement

The School Improvement Committee has begun looking at the school's self evaluation – an important tool to evaluate the school's strengths and weaknesses and improve the quality of its development planning. The other committees will begin meeting next term.

Updates - I hope that you found this brief summary interesting. I intend to write to you at least once per term, but in the meantime if you have any questions, please contact me through the school's office.

Communication and Website – We are now able to communicate more effectively and efficiently by email with our parents. Please remember that all letters of a general nature can also be found on our website.

Our website will be closed down for a few evenings during the beginning of the Christmas holiday in order to redesign and upgrade it. Therefore, please accept my apologies for any inconvenience that this may cause.

Academic Calendar 2008/09 – I have attached the Academic Calendar for 2008/09 as page 4 of this newsletter. I will send you a hard copy on 5th January when everyone is back in school (some people are already on holiday). Please note that the week beginning Saturday 13th December 2008 will be trips and activities week for the Senior School.

School Closure – Please remember that we will **close at 12:00pm on Monday 17th December** and will re-open on Saturday 5th January. We look forward to seeing you all then after an enjoyable, restful and relaxing holiday.

In the meantime, I wish you all a merry Christmas, happy New Year and Eid Mubarak.

Sincerely,

Steve Howland,
Principal.

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The British School-Muscat Academic Calendar 2008 – 2009

<p>SEPTEMBER 2008</p> <table border="1"> <tr><td>Sat</td><td>23</td><td>30</td><td>6</td><td>13</td><td>20</td><td>27</td></tr> <tr><td>Sun</td><td>24</td><td>31</td><td>7</td><td>14</td><td>21</td><td>28</td></tr> <tr><td>Mon</td><td>25</td><td>1</td><td>8</td><td>15</td><td>22</td><td>29</td></tr> <tr><td>Tue</td><td>26</td><td>2</td><td>9</td><td>16</td><td>23</td><td>30</td></tr> <tr><td>Wed</td><td>27</td><td>3</td><td>10</td><td>17</td><td>24</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Thu</td><td>28</td><td>4</td><td>11</td><td>18</td><td>25</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Fri</td><td>29</td><td>5</td><td>12</td><td>19</td><td>26</td><td></td></tr> </table> <p style="text-align: right;">19</p>	Sat	23	30	6	13	20	27	Sun	24	31	7	14	21	28	Mon	25	1	8	15	22	29	Tue	26	2	9	16	23	30	Wed	27	3	10	17	24		Thu	28	4	11	18	25		Fri	29	5	12	19	26		<p>OCTOBER 2008</p> <table border="1"> <tr><td>Sat</td><td>4</td><td>11</td><td>18</td><td>25</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Sun</td><td>5</td><td>12</td><td>19</td><td>26</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Mon</td><td>6</td><td>13</td><td>20</td><td>27</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Tue</td><td>7</td><td>14</td><td>21</td><td>28</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Wed</td><td>1</td><td>8</td><td>15</td><td>22</td><td>29</td></tr> <tr><td>Thu</td><td>2</td><td>9</td><td>16</td><td>23</td><td>30</td></tr> <tr><td>Fri</td><td>3*</td><td>10</td><td>17</td><td>24</td><td>31</td></tr> </table> <p style="text-align: right;">16</p>	Sat	4	11	18	25		Sun	5	12	19	26		Mon	6	13	20	27		Tue	7	14	21	28		Wed	1	8	15	22	29	Thu	2	9	16	23	30	Fri	3*	10	17	24	31
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Key

Weekends
 School Holidays
 Staff Days (No Pupils)

Beginning of Term

First Day of Term 1 6th September
 First Day of Term 2 4th January
 First Day of Term 3 19th April

End of Term (12pm Closures)

Last Day of Term 1 17th December
 Last Day of Term 2 1st April
 Last Day of Term 3 1st July

Staff Days (No Pupils)

30th & 31st August
 1st, 2nd & 3rd September
 3rd January
 18th April

Holidays (Inclusive Dates)

2nd – 10th October Half Term
 3rd October* Eid Al Fitr
 26th November* National Day
 8th – 12th December* Eid Al Adha
 18th December – 3rd Jan Winter Break
 28th December* New Year's Day
 11th – 14th February Half Term
 8th March* Prophet's Birthday
 2nd – 18th April Spring Break
 27th May Half Term

*These dates may change according to Omani Private Sector holiday announcements.

Student Days Per Term

Student days per month are shown in the box at the bottom right hand corner of each month.

First Term	66
Second Term	61
Third Term	53
Total	180

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Staff Days are for staff training and general preparation. Students do not attend on Staff Days.