

WHERE'S YOUR ABSENCE NOTE?



Last month saw the retirement of yet another of the Dyce Academy 'originals'. This time it was the turn of Margaret whose association with the school goes back to the summer of 1980, when the school opened. Margaret has worked in our school office since then - it was likely to be her voice you would hear first when you telephoned school, and pupils will know that when Margaret asked for a note to explain an absence there would be no mercy shown until the note was produced.

Margaret has many fond memories of her days in the school office, and the thousands of pupils she has seen go through the school in her fifteen years here - the many 'interesting' notes received from pupils, the times she went up to Asda only to meet there pupils who were supposedly ill and off school, the male pupil who phoned up pretending to be his mother offering an excuse for absence, who

was led on by the disbelieving Margaret "Oh yes? Is that right?"

There have been many changes in the office since the early days, not least the progression from manual typewriters to electric machines, to the mysteries of the word processor, and Margaret has done battle with each in turn, winning most of the time.

Margaret is looking forward to days which are not ruled by the school bell, and has many plans - she is determined to keep busy, attending keep fit classes, walking etc.

Margaret gained a standing in the eyes of everyone in school for her friendly and helpful attitude and will be greatly missed by both staff and, I'm sure, many pupils. We all join in wishing her well for the future.

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION PROJECT

Evaluation : a word you cannot avoid today if you have anything to do with schools. Teachers evaluate pupils, pupils are expected to evaluate their own work and that of their peers, teachers evaluate themselves and each other, and HM Inspectors evaluate schools. Successful educational development depends on sound evaluation. Some of us at Dyce Academy have been exploring self-evaluation in more detail. Teachers in the Drama and Home Economics Departments have been taking part in a self-evaluation project in the hope that the learning experience of pupils in these departments might be more closely monitored and in turn improved.

Some time ago, the staff at Dyce Academy agreed a list of 14 classroom aims and staff have at some time completed self evaluation checklists based on these aims for a range of lessons. Members of the Drama and Home Economics Departments decided to take this self evaluation exercise further. The first step was for individual members of these departments to record some lessons. A video camera was positioned on a tripod in the corner of the room so as to give maximum coverage of the teaching area and a radio microphone was used to record good quality sound. This enabled teachers to subsequently reflect on lessons and complete the checklist more objectively.

The next stage involved adding an observer to the process. During the lesson another member of the same department sat in and observed the lesson being taught from start to finish. The observer completed a copy of the classroom aims checklist. As soon as possible afterwards, the teacher and observer discussed their individual responses on the self evaluation checklist. This allowed the teacher to compare his/her perceptions with those of an observer familiar with the context of the lesson. Also, as a result of this process, recurring problems in the use of the checklist were identified and suggestions made for improvement. A record of the lesson also existed in the shape of the video recording, to which teacher and observer could refer, if necessary.

Through a gradual process of familiarisation and confidence building, the point was reached where

the two departments felt ready to embark on a cross-department observation exercise to find out whether the checklist could be used in the same lesson by a teacher and an observer from different subject specialisms. This proved a very interesting phase of the project providing unique opportunities to become a little more familiar with the work of another department as well as observing and discussing their approach to learning and teaching.

As a result of the progress to this point and the reporting of that progress to the Academy's Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group, the original list of fourteen classroom aims on the checklist was tightened up in order to simplify its use for individuals or pairs of teachers.

The final stage of the project was then begun. In conjunction with the Monitoring and Evaluation Group, a pupil questionnaire, based on the new self evaluation checklist, was devised, the aim being to find out if pupil perceptions of their learning experience was the same as that of their teacher. Individual members of the M and E Group (covering a range of departments) trialled the questionnaire. After a few minor changes/improvements Christine Blackhall, Head of Home Economics, and Laurence Young, Head of Drama, then repeated the cross-department observation exercise - each completing the self evaluation checklist and this time asking the members of the class to fill in the pupil questionnaire.

In the vast majority of cases pupil perceptions of the lesson were generally the same or more favourable than those of the teacher and/or the observer. In fact throughout every stage of the project it has often been the case that the teacher has been the most critical about his/her own lesson. It could be argued that this is good self evaluation and is most likely to lead to an improved learning experience for the pupils.

Christine and Laurence learned one very important lesson during this part of the project. Despite the

fact that the purpose/objectives of the lessons had been very obvious to both the teacher and the observer, pupil responses to this question indicated that the pupils were less clear. Many pupils, in fact, had totally misinterpreted the main reason(s) for carrying out particular activities, having very narrow and personalised views of their purpose within a topic/course. The experience has certainly made both Christine and Laurence consider carefully how better to explain the wider objectives of a lesson to pupils.

So what were the main conclusions reached? The revised self evaluation checklist is now more suitable for individual teachers to reflect on pupil experiences in their classrooms. Video recordings of lessons are an appropriate additional tool for individual self evaluation. The pupil questionnaire can provide valuable feedback, to individual teachers, on pupils' perceptions of a lesson. The

checklist and questionnaire together can give an appropriate focus for discussion of a lesson with an observer. Gradually building a relationship of confidentiality and trust with a member of another department can assist in self evaluation in an unthreatening way.

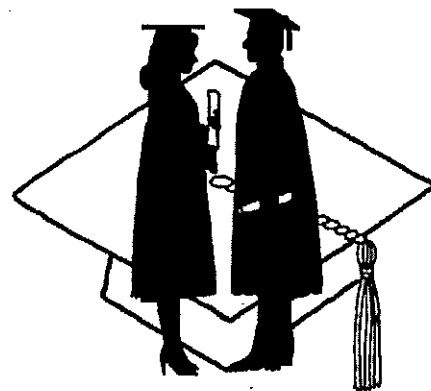
And where do we go from here? Well, the revised classroom aims/self evaluation checklist will be presented to staff for discussion, Christine and Laurence have made suggestions on how to improve the pupil questionnaire to make it more user friendly and two further departments - Social Subjects and English - have volunteered to become involved in the project.

We are confident that this project is quite unique and that our programme of self evaluation can only benefit our pupils both in the short term and in the long term.

CONGRATULATIONS

..... go to former pupil Andrew MacCormack, who recently graduated B.Eng. (Hons) from ³Edinburgh University. Andrew is now working in Bristol as a design engineer.

We are always happy to print news of former pupils in our pages - information should be sent to the Editor, Update, at the school.



SKYDIVING



Skydiving is an international sport enjoyed by many thousands of people world-wide. In Britain the sport is governed by the British Parachuting Association and is strictly controlled to make it as safe as possible.

There are three different ways to make your first jump. A static line jump is where the parachute is attached to the plane by a cord which opens the parachute as you leave the aircraft. A tandem jump involves freefalling from 12000 feet strapped to the front of an instructor who opens a shared parachute. The third method is Accelerated Freefall where the trainee exits the plane at 12000 feet with two experienced skydivers to instruct and control them throughout the freefall until the parachute is deployed at 5000 feet.

You then progress through various levels until you are competent to jump and complete formations with others.

I have been involved in the sport for nine years and have completed over 110 jumps. I now enjoy linking up with other people in freefall.

The freefall lasts up to one minute, depending on the height the aircraft climbs to. You are then under your parachute for about three minutes. With modern RAM-Air 'square' parachutes you can achieve speeds of up to 35 mph.

Despite parachuting being looked upon as a dangerous sport, my main parachute has failed to open only once. On this occasion I landed safely on my reserve parachute.

SHEENA McCASKIE

OXFAM'S BIG FAST

Over 100 pupils (and several staff) are going to try being hungry for ONE day on Friday 17 November. Through sponsorship, hopefully, a substantial amount of money can be raised to give to Oxfam.

It may seem a small gesture but it shows that Dyce Academy pupils care about the scandal of world poverty. The fast will also encourage everyone to think about why people are poor and what we can do about it.

Some facts :

800 million people in the world go hungry.

£1.50 will buy a hoe for a refugee in Mozambique.

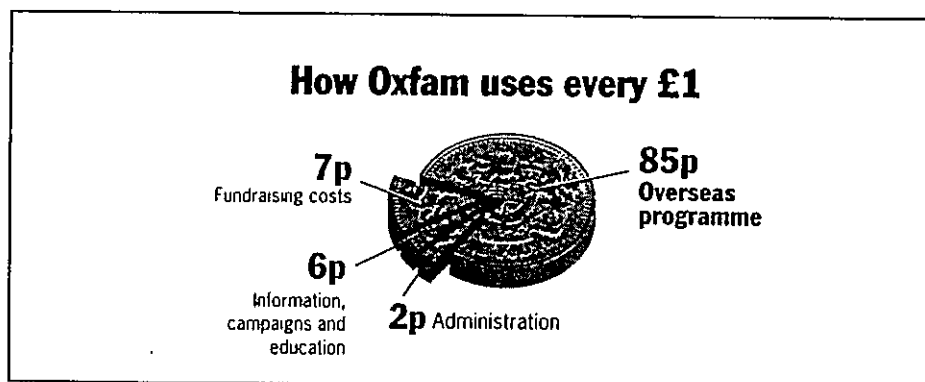
£1.66 will buy 6 syringes for child immunisation in India.

£2 will pay for 2 months schooling for a child in Bangladesh.

£5 will buy 2 bags of cement to line a well in Ethiopia.

£7.50 will buy a 30kg sack of rice in Cambodia.

£10 will support an Oxfam-trained volunteer health worker for 12 weeks



Please make sure you support the volunteers as generously as possible.

'THE ALL-ELECTRIC ROADSHOW'

As part of Techfest, His Majesty's Theatre staged a production of 'The All-Electric Roadshow' and it was attended by all third year Physics pupils.

The central character - almost a one-man band - is Michael Faraday, and whenever the theme song recurred the audience had to wave their right arms and shout 'Faraday' as loudly as they could: the volume was impressive.

Faraday is probably the most significant figure in the story of electricity; without his transformer the modern world of electrical power, communications and entertainment would not exist. I'm not sure that the three teams racing to complete piles of foam bricks (which had to be thrown to and fro across the stage) left any impression of what a transformer might be, but it was a much enjoyed moment: Dyce had two members of the winning team.

On stage also were Gilbert, trying to show magnetism and static electricity to a sceptical Queen Elizabeth; Franklin, nearly electrocuted as lightning struck his kite. Galvani, who made frogs' legs jump (those on stage were made of green plastic, I'm glad to say); Volta, and the first battery; Edison, and the first light bulb; and of course Sir Humphrey Davy, who, as the Director of the Royal Institution, gave Faraday his chance. His first job was basically washing up after Humphrey Davy's experiments, but he rose to head the Institution himself.

All the characters were in appropriate period dress - though I doubt if Sir Humphrey Davy actually wore a hat in the laboratory.

F MACRAE

MATHS ENTERPRISING DAY - THE SCOTTISH FINALS

After a worrying week - one team member off school for two days, another sent home ill the day before the competition - Friday 27 October arrived and we were all ready at 8.15 am to depart for Dundee. Unfortunately, our bus, organised by Huntly, did not arrive until 8.50. By the time we reached the Northern College, losing our way in Dundee, we were twenty minutes late. The four team members made a valiant attempt at their poster in the twenty minutes remaining of the contest.

Next came the team and speed contests followed by lunch. In the afternoon the teams were rearranged and Dyce realised that as they were in the bottom half of the hall they were not in the lead, but they still tried their best in a head-to-head competition and ran as fast as they could in the relay contest. A good day was had by all, although next time we'll hire a faster bus and a driver who knows where he's going!



HALLOWEEN DANCE

³¹ Where could you have recently found, assembled in one place, Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, the Blues Brothers, the Phantom of the Opera, gangsters, witches, a monk, a policeman, a French maid, cowboys, a Viking, an Australian bushman, Andy Pandy, hippies, Aberdeen Football Club, a nurse, a chef, The Halloween Bogeyman and Beethoven?

All these characters were lovingly recreated at the Dyce Academy Music Group's Halloween Fancy Dress Supper and Disco Evening, at the Airport Sports and Social Club on Saturday 28th October, held in aid of the group's trip to Canada in 1996.

Just before the concert got under way, Miss Smith pronounced Pamela Shand and Mrs Duncan joint winners of the music quiz, each scoring a magnificent total of 49 out of 50 correct answers. An anonymous entry, although humorous in parts,

was notable for gaining zero points and for presaging Miss Smith's fancy dress costume.

Once again, in his now familiar and thoroughly professional manner, Mr Young acted as compere for the evening. It began with S4 pupil Alan Scott's bagpipe solo, delighting everyone with the rousing 'Scotland the Brave', the swinging strathspey 'Mac Alrish' and the reel 'Wee Totem Fog'.

As if by magic, the atmosphere of Manhattan High School for the Performing Arts was vividly brought to life by the orchestra and choir's rendition of the theme song to Alan Parker's popular film, Fame.

By popular demand, the choir and orchestra played 'He Could Tell' and 'Emmanuelle' from 'Holy Boy' by David Palmer. 'Call of Nature' was another show fondly remembered by Andrew

McDonald's heartfelt singing of 'Why Me?' and the orchestra's passionate playing of 'Realise.' The last piece to be played from a show was the beautiful song 'I Dreamed a Dream' from 'Les Miserables'.

The concert ended with the orchestra and choir treating the audience to some unabashed 1960's nostalgia by performing the Beach Boys classics, 'California Girls', 'God Only Knows', 'Don't Worry Baby', and 'Fun Fun Fun'.

As usual the now redoubtable duo of Bill Gibson on the microphone and Miss Smith with the raffle prizes almost completed a very successful evening. However the evening couldn't end

without some traditional games such as apple dunking, which proved a little tricky for some of the more outlandishly attired persons.

Special thanks were conveyed to Sandra and Bill Gibson for making the evening possible, to the parents' committee for organising the event and to the audience for making it a very happy and lively reality.

More good music is in store in the near future with the performance of 'Holy Boy' on 27th November in the Dyce Church Hall in aid of Children's Cancer Research. The last show of the year will be the musical 'Rats', at Dyce Academy on the evenings of 12th, 13th and 14th December.

Andrew Trybalski

COURT REPORT (BASKETBALL) - OCTOBER 1995

The main excitement so far this season has been generated off court in our efforts to raise sufficient funds for a new strip. Thanks to the success of a car boot sale held at the end of September which raised £160 and the contributions of team players through the launch of a 'bond' scheme, a new black and gold strip will shortly be arriving. We hope to have a photograph in the next issue of Update.

Hopefully, the new kits will spur the teams into winning efforts as our results so far this season have been somewhat mixed. We are involved in three ongoing tournaments this year. A series of S1 Festivals has been arranged where the emphasis is firmly upon participation rather than winning. A small squad of nine plays is making rapid progress in developing skills in a sport where they had little or no previous experience.

Our S2/3 team has played in two tournaments both at Dyce where they have improved from the first to the second. In the first tournament, they played just the one full length game due to the withdrawal of another school. The game against Ellon which did go ahead was disappointing in that, even in the opposition's opinion, Dyce should not have lost. The lessons learnt were to take your chances and not to give away the ball so easily.

Our third set of tournaments has been for S4/5/6 pupils. We have been affected through the loss of a couple of key players who decided not to stay on at school and this leaves us with a young squad. Nevertheless they came out of their first tournament with a victory and a defeat against Bridge of Don and Oldmachar respectively. Similarly, they won one and lost one in the recent tournament against Banff and the American School.

On top of all this we have also entered a team in the Scottish Under 15 Cup. We have three matches in the qualifying section. In our first we travelled to Inverness Royal Academy and were comprehensively beaten by an excellent team. The winning margin was exaggerated by easy misses and loss of possession. In the next Update you will read of our November matches at home to Robert Gordon's College and Portree High.

May I take this opportunity to thank Kellie Johnstone, Elaine Marr (S4) and Suzanne Clark (S6) for helping with scoring in fixtures so far this season and to point out that Basketball in Dyce Academy is open to all pupils to participate at any time so they can come along to practices on Tuesday lunchtimes (S1/2/3 only) or Thursday after school (all years).

T FERGUSON