

Down High School

Newsletter

Issue 1 :: March 2010



WELCOME TO THE FIRST DOWN HIGH SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

We hope that you enjoy reading our inaugural Down High School Newsletter. We feel that it is important for pupils, parents and guardians to be kept up to date about what goes on in the school throughout the year. As you can see, our pupils have been enjoying success in a range of activities and these achievements say much about what makes our school so special. You can read a full account of the school year in our magazine, the *Dunumian*, which will be published in June.

FLOREAT DUNUM!

W. P. Logan

Mr Paul Logan (Headteacher)

DOWN HIGH CROSS-COUNTRY GIRLS ON A GOOD RUN



Miss Heaney with the Intermediate Girls Cross Country Team:
Lucy Geddes, Elaine Burch, Clare Brown.
(Aine McCann missing from photo.)



Elaine Burch and Aine McCann who came First and Third respectively in their age categories at the Irish Cross-Country championships

The Girls Intermediate Cross-Country team has set the standard for what they hope will be another successful season by winning the district championships and qualifying for the Ulster finals.

The team, consisting of Aine McCann, Elaine Burch, Lucy Geddes and Clare Brown, combined to produce a stunning display that marks the first step in the quest to emulate last year's achievement when the team came 4th in the All-Ireland competition. Aine and Elaine had earlier excelled at the Irish Cross Country Championships held in Kilbeggan in County Westmeath. Aine achieved a superb third place in the Under-18 category, competing over three kilometres against girls who were older and more experienced at this age level. Elaine won the gold medal in the Under-16 event, confirming her status as one of the most talented up and coming athletes on the island.



CALAMITY JANE



Bronwyn Young as Calamity Jane, with members of the cast in the background

In November the school's Assembly Hall reverberated to the sound of live musical theatre as the Fain and Webster musical *Calamity Jane* began a four-night run in front of enthusiastic capacity audiences. The return of dramatic productions to Down High School is most welcome and the appetite had been well and truly whetted by the performances of Willy Russell's *Our Day Out* the previous June. Auditions for *Calamity Jane* began before the summer and the leading roles were snapped up by pupils from Years 11 to 14. A full chorus and dance troupe added to the spectacle and the efforts of those on stage were supported by a superb crew, (led by Mr Ousby), who managed the set changes seamlessly, allowing the performances to flow in a manner that completely eclipsed the traditional impression that one has of a 'school show'. The role of Calamity was taken by Year 14 student Bronwyn Young, an experienced singer and performer who has spent recent years acquiring Grade Eight standards

with the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts (LAMDA) and in Musical Theatre. As the eponymous tom-boy heroine, Bronwyn showed the full range of her acting and singing talents, endearing herself to the audience with her high-energy performances. Bronwyn was joined by Anna Rea, another Year 14 student who is no stranger to the stage, having performed a number of leading roles in local theatre groups, such as the St Patrick's Choral Society. Anna was interviewed by Year 11 Journalism pupil Cory Danks and she told him that she hopes to study musical theatre in London. "I have been performing since I was seven years old", says Anna. "Last year I had the opportunity to travel around Ireland with the Premier Music Company, performing *High School Musical*." Anna played the role of Katie Brown (the personal maid of the famous actress Adelaide Adams), who is brought to Deadwood by Calamity in the mistaken belief that she is in fact Miss Adams. Despite being discovered as a fraud, Katie's

charm, singing and personality endear her to the people of Deadwood.

Robbie Dagher's portrayal of the dark, heroic Wild Bill Hickok, was a revelation. Previous performances had been confined to the sports field, but Robbie took to the stage superbly and played the role with both humour and a hitherto undiscovered fine singing voice. Matthew Stewart who, like Robbie is in Year 13, played the dashing young cavalry lieutenant Danny Gilmartin. Interviewed by Journalism pupil Andrew Phair,



Anna Rea as Katie Brown with Kerrie Stevenson (Adelaide Adams)



Matthew said that he really enjoyed the experience and that the show was great fun, despite all the hard work and hours of practice. Louis Patterson's portrayal of Henry Miller, the hapless manager of Deadwood's gin palace "The Golden Garter", was a comedic masterclass and he was ably assisted by Connor Carson who played Francis Fryer, the professional entertainer, booked by Millie to perform at the "Garter" in the mistaken belief that he was a woman. After much hilarity, Francis Fryer settles into the Deadwood way of life and ends up marrying Millie's niece Susan, played by Year 13 student Caroline Brown. The role of Adelaide Adams was shared between Kerrie Stevenson (Year 13), a well known singer and musician in her own right, and Zoe McCleery from Year 11, who is establishing herself as an actress of considerable potential.

The orchestra included a number of Down High musicians and was expertly led by Dr Manus O'Boyle whose hard work with the cast was much appreciated. The show was directed by Head of Drama Mr O'Hara and Miss Mills. Their hard work and dedication were critical in the production of such an outstanding show, which deserved its four standing ovations and left audiences eagerly anticipating next year's offering.

Perhaps the most encouraging aspect of the performance of *Calamity Jane* was that it was a whole-school affair, with ninety pupils involved, ranging from newly-arrived Year 8 boys and girls to the older students, many of whom are preparing to depart for university education. The array of talent on display in the show would indicate that the future of theatre in Down High School is in very good hands.



John Donnan and Stuart Orr

JOHN AND STUART ACHIEVE RUGBY SUCCESS

In John Donnan and Stuart Orr, Down High can boast two Ulster Schools' rugby representatives at under-18 level. Both Year 13 boys were capped in inter-provincial matches and John was also selected to play against the Lancashire Under-18s in September. The two forwards have made substantial progress in recent times and this accolade comes as no surprise to seasoned observers of schools' rugby. John spent time in Biarritz during the summer as part of his development as a highly regarded second row forward, and has now progressed to training with the full Irish Schools' under-18 squad.



NEW INCENTIVE FOR DOWN HIGH CRICKETERS

With the cricket season fast approaching, the school can feel quite excited about its prospects over the next few years with some very talented players emerging. The new Under-14 and Under-15 squads in particular look to be well equipped to perform strongly in their respective competitions this year. Perhaps the incentive of receiving a new cricket bat will inspire players to emulate Fergus Sandford's example from last season. His unbeaten 102 against Belfast High School in June led to a new scheme, whereby a pupil scoring one hundred runs at any level of school cricket will receive a top quality bat. Fergus (pictured here with Under-13 coach Mr Simpson) was the first centurion to benefit. Mr Logan has declared that he would not mind if such high scores become more commonplace. "If it brings us success on the cricket pitch it will be worthwhile – money well spent."



Fergus Sandford - centurion, with Mr Simpson.



Kerrie Stevenson: Rotary Winner

KERRIE WINS LEADERSHIP AWARD

Year 13 student Kerrie Stevenson has just returned from a prestigious international Youth Leadership Development Competition run by Rotary International. The scheme aims to develop the leadership potential that exists amongst young people throughout Ireland and Kerrie emerged from a series of interviews during which she convinced the assessors of her leadership capabilities. Kerrie thoroughly enjoyed her experience and relished the conference debates which focused on a range of topical issues. "I really enjoyed the trip to Strasbourg and especially my visit to the European Parliament Building. I am really grateful for the support and encouragement given to me by the Comber branch of Rotary International", she said.



YEAR 9 PUPILS "LEARN ROUGH" TO RAISE FUNDS FOR VICTIMS OF THE HAITI EARTHQUAKE

Year 9 pupils amassed much-needed funds for the relief effort in Haiti by taking part in a novel awareness-raising exercise, whereby they ate and were taught outdoors under make-shift shelters that the students themselves constructed. The plan was the brainchild of the Year 9 class representatives on the School Council along with the Head of Year, Mr Gray. All the money collected is being sent to Christian Aid for distribution to the stricken area to help ameliorate some of the effects of the terrible earthquake. The pupils were particularly shocked by the television pictures showing the harsh reality for those struggling in the midst of food and water shortages and poor sanitation. "We were all numbed by the devastation that has engulfed this already impoverished country," explained Mr Gray. "We have raised a modest sum of



money when compared to what is really needed by the people of Haiti, but I hope that our actions will increase awareness of the conditions facing hundreds of thousands of Haitians today."

PUPILS RAISE MONEY FOR HAITI RELIEF



The recent earthquake in Haiti and the humanitarian relief efforts prompted staff and pupils into action. Geography teacher Mrs Smyth and Head of History/Politics, Mrs Wood organised a collection amongst the student body, raising £785 in the space of fifteen minutes. Mrs Smyth paid tribute to the fundraising effort and hoped that this gesture would, in some small way, help to provide some relief for those caught up in the dreadful ordeal. "The television pictures and harrowing newspaper accounts were shocking and I think we all felt so powerless in the face of such a tragedy. Our contribution to the relief effort is small but heartfelt and I hope that this and other donations will assist emergency workers and aid organisations in their efforts." The picture shows pupils from 8L and 13M – the classes which spearheaded the collection.

DOWN HIGH ASSOCIATION

The annual Down High Association "Festival in the Park" will take place from 2.00pm on Saturday 24 April 2010 in the Castle Ward estate. As usual, a host of fun activities will be available for people of all ages. It promises to be a great family day out.



TABLE TENNIS SUCCESS FOR JUNIOR GIRLS



Table-Tennis stars Laura Finn (left) and Erin Thompson with Miss Heaney

Down High School pupils enjoyed success in the recent Ulster Individual Championships, held at the Valley Leisure Centre in Newtownabbey.

Laura Finn is pictured with the Under-12 cup, winning the competition to complete a fine year for the Year 8 pupil, who has scooped a number of awards in both Belfast and Dublin. Also pictured is Erin Thompson, a Year 9 pupil, who won the bronze medal in the Under-13 category.

SISTERS EXCEL IN SWIMMING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Amy Dornan and her sister Ruth have been creating something of a splash in recent times. In the Ulster Grammar Schools' swimming championships held in Larne, Amy came second in both the 50-metre butterfly and 50-metre freestyle events. Meanwhile, younger sister Ruth was impressing at the Ulster Minor Girls' Competition staged recently in Bangor, securing second place in the 50m butterfly and third in the freestyle over the same distance.

Amy has achieved another significant milestone in her development as a top swimmer by being selected for the Ulster Schools' Training Camp, due to be held in Tenerife in October. This opportunity is reserved for the most promising young swimmers in Northern Ireland and comes after her strong performances at recent Championships, where she was prominent among the medal-winners.

Head of Girls PE Miss Heaney acknowledged Amy's achievement and paid tribute to her remarkable dedication to her sport. "Amy's training regime is rigorous and this latest accolade comes as no surprise. She is a very talented young swimmer who can only get better - we are really proud of her achievements."



Amy and Ruth Dornan



PUPILS TAKE TO THE SLOPES

Over ninety pupils enjoyed a week of snow, fun, frolics and good skiing during their recent ski trip to the Austrian resort of Ehrwald. Notwithstanding the potential for winter sports closer to home during a bitterly cold January, the large party departed for the Tyrol, anticipating the thrills and spills associated with this exhilarating pastime. The party was led by Deputy Headteacher, Mr Donnan, an experienced skier and veteran of several successful school trips. The pupils enjoyed a range of other activities such as tobogganing and sightseeing and by the end of the week even the most cautious novice had become proficient on the slopes. The picture shows Mrs Jacques and some of the pupils preparing for a descent, with Mount Zugspitze as the spectacular backdrop.



BEN'S SAHARA TREK

Ben Hanna (11S) has just returned from the experience of a lifetime – a 100 mile trek across part of the Sahara Desert in south-east Morocco. Ben spent his half-term break undertaking this gruelling challenge in an effort to raise money for MENCAP and highlight the plight of people with learning disabilities who face prejudice as they strive to play a full and active part in the community.

Ben's experience was the culmination of a long campaign of fundraising. He had to generate £4000 to take part in this adventure and is very grateful to his friends and family, whose efforts helped him reach this goal. Ben's classmates in Mr Woods' Learning for Life and Work class

were very keen to assist him. Aidan McGrattan (11M) takes up the story: "The class quickly set about brainstorming ideas and came up with the concept of a 'Sponge the Teacher' event, with the proceeds going to Ben's Sahara walk. A total of over £125 was raised and the entire class enjoyed the experience: that the proceeds are going to such a worthy cause makes it all the better."

Ben's trek ignored the established travel routes and pursued a path that is still used by the nomadic Berber and Toureg tribesmen. On his return, Ben was delighted with his achievement and said that he was very pleased that he had taken part in "this challenging and rewarding journey".



Ben Hanna reflects on his Sahara expedition



STUDENTS SHINE IN NORTHERN IRELAND EXAMINATIONS

A number of our students were delighted to receive the excellent news that they had secured some of the highest marks in Northern Ireland public examinations. The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) awarded Sarah Willis joint first place in the A Level Art and Design examination. Sarah has left Down High to pursue her studies at university and her achievement delighted the Head of the Art Department Mrs McCluskey and her colleague Mr Woods, both of whom commented on the consistently first rate nature of Sarah's work. At GCSE level, three more students are celebrating success having emerged ahead of thousands of candidates in English, English Literature and Double Award Science. Year 13 student Claire Hawthorne was joint first in English Literature while Kerrie Stevenson was joint second in English. Head of English Mr Park, who taught both girls, spoke highly of their achievements

and looked forward to their successes in Advanced Level study. Catherine Gilmore – also in Year 13 – was joint third in Double Award Science. Head of Science, Mr Mitchell, expressed his delight at Catherine's results from a field of hundreds of other candidates.

The overall results at GCSE, AS and A Level were very impressive. Twenty-six students gained three or more A grades at Advanced Level, with Patrick Johnston and Sam Lockhart securing five A grades each. Thirty AS Level students achieved three or more A grades. At GCSE level, pride of place goes to Fiona Rooney, who managed a magnificent eleven A* grades. Claire Gilmore, Astrid Nestius-Brown and Natasha Lloyd all secured ten A* grades in what was an excellent set of results for the current Year 13 pupils.



Top-ranked students Claire Gilmore, Kerrie Stevenson and Claire Hawthorne with Mr Logan



Sarah Willis receives her award for achieving the joint highest marks in Northern Ireland in A Level Art. She is accompanied by Mr Woods, Mr Logan and Mr David McKee, chairman of CCEA

Valete

We say goodbye to our Curriculum Vice-Principal Mr Eric Thompson as he prepares to take up his new position as Headteacher of Glenlola Collegiate in Bangor. We wish Eric every best wish for the future.

We also said farewell to Mrs Carol Johnston (Head of Careers and Teacher of Geography) before half-term. We wish Carol every success in her new role with the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.