



Greetings from English Country Schools! I hope this newsletter finds you and your family well and in good spirits as the festive season approaches.

With the British Pound currently trading at record lows against most other currencies our courses offer better value than ever. We have already taken a large number of bookings for next summer. Nevertheless the success of our courses is largely spread by word of mouth, so I hope you don't mind that we have enclosed a couple of extra brochures for friends or relatives who may be interested.

Thank you to all parents who returned Parental Questionnaires. We always read these with interest and strive to make each summer better than the last. The following is designed to bring you up to date with some of the changes and improvements on our courses:

#### **Port Regis– for 7 to 14 year olds**

- Port Regis School - has a brand **new academic centre**. Classrooms have all the latest technological facilities. The new building is light and airy and is cooled and heated without the burning of fossil fuels. Here are some photos of the new building:



We're delighted to have the use of this wonderful ecological building. It will provide a comfortable, modern and inspiring location for our Port Regis students to continue learning their English.



- The **Discover London** weekend is now an established part of our course at Port Regis. For Summer 09 we have booked accommodation on The South Bank, right in the heart of London near The London Eye. This is more expensive than the out-of-town hostel we used last summer; but we feel the extra cost will be justified in making the trip more worthwhile. We will spend less time traveling, more time seeing the sights of London. This will include a London Theatre trip to see 'Oliver' or similar; we will be visiting Covent Garden for shopping and will visit Madame Tussaud's.
- Younger children at Port Regis will also very much enjoy the new **tree house complex**. With its walkways, slides, swings and ladders they can safely have fun and expend their energy during break times.



You can view a video of the tree house complex in use at <http://www.portregis.com/news/index.asp>

## Sibford

We are also pleased to announce a number of changes and improvements to our course at Sibford School, venue for our teenage course:

- The girls' house – Margaret Fell - has been **completely refurbished**, bringing it up to the standard of the separate boys' house.
- Staff at Sibford have a **new summer school office, preparation area and relaxation lounge** with a private garden This will improve communications and staff morale, benefiting everyone on the course.
- There is a new **wi-fi enabled study area** with filtered Internet access for pupils. We've decided to allow students at Sibford to bring their own laptop computers if they wish. We're sure they will welcome this. Laptops must be used and kept in the study area, where there is a locker for each student. In order not to distract from the other attractions of the course, laptops are to be used only during specified free time periods. Students without laptops will continue to be able to use the school's own computers as usual.
- We're delighted to announce the appointment of James Stevens as **new Course Manager** at Sibford. James has been with ECS for many years: Sibford students will remember him as Director of Studies last summer. James is a thoughtful person with a good sense of humour and a calmly authoritative manner. We hope that this will be the first of many summers that James will spend with us as Course Manager. James' wife, Despina, will be returning to Sibford as **Welfare Officer and House Parent** for the girls' house.
- We will be working closely with Thomas Franks, Sibford School's **new catering company**, to ensure that meals are creative and nutritious meals and meet our expectations for choice and variety. The caterers will be offering a weekly **nationally themed meal** - Chinese, Greek, Spanish, etc. We hope that students will enhance the occasion with something typical from their country – for example a song or dance – to provide a complete cultural experience.
- The vast majority of our students do not **smoke**. Apart from the fire risk we have no intention of allowing our school to become a place where children learn bad habits. If we discover a student smoking we automatically inform parents. We also impose a collective sanction to avoid smokers being admired as 'rebels' by impressionable young people. Repeat offenders are asked to leave. As a result two students were sent home early this summer; a third student who was discovered smoking at the end of the course will also not be allowed to return. We make no apologies for this and if necessary will do the same again to protect the well-behaved majority of our students.



- On a happier note, the London Theatre trip for Sibford will be to **Mamma Mia**, the smash hit musical based on the songs of ABBA. There will be time for shopping on Oxford Street before the performance and the price includes an evening meal at McDonald's or similar. Tickets are limited and will be available on a first-come-first-served basis.
- The Sibford day excursion to London will offer a choice of sightseeing: a trip on The London Eye or a sightseeing trip on the River Thames, allowing time for shopping in Covent Garden. Although students love and always ask for more shopping, we also want them to experience more of British history and culture. There will be additional classroom preparation on Shakespeare before visiting Stratford-on-Avon and our Oxford trip will include a guided walk around the town and colleges. There will also be additional **educational trips** in class groups to a local church, a prehistoric stone circle and a castle.
- **Educational workshops** at Sibford again produced impressive results. You can find the journal at our web site and the photos at <http://countryschools.smugmug.com/> In 2009 we will be adding **video filming** as a new workshop and will ensure that drama, film and photography are showcased in the End of Course Review, as always intended.

**On both courses** our new **on-line reporting system** gave parents prompt and regular feedback about their child's progress. In some cases reports were a little brief and we will be asking all teachers to provide complete descriptions of what the child has been doing in class each week.

On both courses we will for the first time be appointing a **houseparent** for each accommodation building. This will help to improve the care and supervision of students, particularly during free time, as well as making domestic arrangements like laundry run more smoothly. The Houseparent will contribute to the end of course report, giving parents an additional insight into the behaviour and helpfulness of each child in the domestic situation.

Some parents complained that the exchange rate quoted at our **on-line payment page** was different to the rate applied by our bank (HSBC). This is a complicated area, but in general we agree. We will therefore accept all future card payments in Sterling. This means that your bank will calculate the exchange rate, not ours. In most cases this will result in parents obtaining a better exchange rate. It will also reduce confusion and speed up the process by which payments appear in your child's account.

I hope that the above helps to demonstrate our ongoing commitment to ensure that we offer an enjoyable and worthwhile experience for our students and the best possible value for parents. As always, Sarah and I look forward to the return of familiar faces and to welcoming new students to another summer of fun, friendship and learning in 2009.

With best wishes from me, Sarah and the boys for a happy and peaceful festive season,



Christopher Etchells  
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