

Report of the Stratford College Parents Association for 2010/11

We are delighted to present our Annual Report to you, the parents of children attending Stratford College.

First and foremost we wish to commend Ms. Gordon and her team for providing a *vibrant and nurturing learning environment* for our children. We are all passionate about our children having a positive secondary school experience, and delight in the respect and affection they show towards the staff, each other and the school itself.

At last years AGM we found ourselves as a small group compelled to get more involved in the Parents Association albeit somewhat by default. However, we have each thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to get to know each other, and to get more involved in our childrens educational experience. We all lead busy lives but the one hour a month we spend together has taught us alot about the experience our children are having at Stratford, as well as the considerable challenges facing Ms Gordon, her team and the school. We have been overwhelmed by the dedication we have seen in Ms Gordon and somewhat humbled by the modest contribution we have been able to make as a Parents Association Committee.

We have set goals for the Parents Association and as well as the purely social aspect of meeting each other and those involved more directly in the school, we would be delighted for you the parents to show us your support for our achievements but also our ambitions, by electing us to serve another term. We would also be delighted to welcome new members to the Association Committee. It is a modest time commitment but very much appreciated by Ms Gordon.

So what have we been doing for the last year ?

Our first discussions were to set out our *goals* and to assign *responsibilities*. You will have seen the document we produced that is of course included on the school's excellent website.

We decided to focus on three areas.

Firstly, to *promote Stratford as a choice of secondary school*. We are very aware of the close connections with the national school and are determined to ensure that every opportunity is taken to bring the parents of the two schools closer together. We are delighted that Harold is in a position to help to bridge this relationship coming from the position of Chairperson of the PA at the National School and being so well known to the parents and children there. The school is located in an area that is incredibly well served by both public and private schools, so the competition for pupils is exceptional. We absolutely believe that the school is unique but do feel that the profile of the school should be raised. The first year class has been quite small for the last few years, and while this is fantastic in terms of the amount of individual attention that the children receive, we are concerned to ensure that ongoing budgetary constraints from the Department of Education will not impact subject choice and the quality of facilities. We are absolutely committed to working with Ms Gordon on this. As highlighted by recent media coverage of private schools, the state contribution to private schools is significantly less than for public schools. Above all we believe that our children benefit from the small size of the school, as well as the excellent staff. Our children are individuals and rejoice in being recognised for their

particular talents and character. They are still very much children and are not well served by being a mere face in the crowd. We are delighted at the number of children who have joined this year across all of the classes but there is still capacity, especially in first year. Getting applications up and class sizes closer to 20 in each year is our goal. You, the parents, and your children, are the best advertisements for the school. Please encourage people you know to come along to the open day and indeed to other school events. For most of us that was the defining moment when we realised the unique opportunity presented by the school.

Harold and Derek continue to work with Mr Russell in preparation for this year's open day on 20 November. Derek also worked with Mr Russell to contact feeder schools and to engage with their parents associations. This is a huge challenge.

Secondly, we want to facilitate interaction amongst the parents and staff to *build a greater sense of community*. We all know how our children feel part of the school but with their increasing independence we get fewer opportunities to meet other parents at the school gate or on 'play dates'. We want to ensure that every opportunity is taken to bring parents together in the school. Cheryl and Michele have led this area by acting in a whole host of supporting roles. Most recently Cheryl did a superb job of preparing the school hall for the debs reception. We had quite a bit of fun, and exercise, in helping to clear snow and ice from around both schools last winter. The school play, battle of the bands, graduation and even a school book sale at the end of last year, were all great successes. We were delighted to contribute to that sense of community through these events.

Thirdly, we decided it would be a good idea to build the schools ongoing connection with past pupils and other folk who feel a connection to the school. We are still struggling with this, not least because so many past pupils are living outside of Ireland but we are determined to give this renewed energy this year. However, Michele had been looking at the idea of a business directory for parents, and Ms Gordon came up with the suggestion of using the superb school website to help create a 'business' network to encourage parents and other friends of the schools to support each others businesses, whether as buyers or sellers or both. Shelley took the lead on this and we ran the first Business Network event earlier this year. We had a wonderful speaker, but more importantly, we had a great turnout of parents and other friends. The buzz in the hall was incredible. We have over 50 individuals and businesses signed up on the Network, and with Ms Gordons help, we now have a Forum where participants can post messages about their businesses or just exchange views. This is in the early days but shows great promise. Please put 8am on Monday 14 November into your diaries for the next event. It is primarily social but why not help our friends advertise their businesses also.

We propose to stick with these three areas of focus. We would be delighted to hear your suggestions on what we could do better to meet our objectives. We would like to do some modest fundraising for the school but want this to be absolutely discretionary.

Personally, I have hugely enjoyed my time as Chairperson, and would be delighted to stick with it for another year. Like most Dad's I dont get much involved in homework, after school activities and visits of my children to meet your children. This year I have invested a small

amount of time for a huge return. I have got to know alot more about the people that my children spend so much of their time with. I also had the honour of attending last years Holocaust Memorial. An unforgettable experience. I have also been invited to the Synagogue on 19 October for Hoshannah Rabah. Having grown up in Terenure amongst the Jewish community, this will be my first visit to the Synagogue and I am very much looking forward to it. We are all learning so much from this community.

We would all like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to work as your parents association committee for last year, and ask that you give us another year. We ask you to take every opportunity to visit the school and to show your support for Ms Gordon and her excellent staff.

Many thanks