

THE BREEZE

No. 43

St. Michael's Association

April 2014

Letter from the Editor

As we are all aware, St. Michael's has been in continual operation at its current Tor Road site since 1946. This also means that the wear and tear in the school infrastructure is significant. In the near future, the school will be embarking in a major upgrading project in order to ensure that the school will continue to be operational for decades to come.

While the school charges an annual maintenance fee to its students, the contribution from the annual maintenance fee is not enough to pay for the planned infrastructure upgrade. Instead, the school will be turning to the wider community to pay for the upgrade, in the form of a Capital Campaign.

In a major development, the school has recently received the *tokuzo* status. This allows the donor a tax reduction on the amount donated to the school. This status allows the school to take the Capital Campaign to the wider community, and The Breeze will communicate the details of the upcoming Capital Campaign to the readers in the near future.

In 2016, St. Michael's International School will celebrate its 70th anniversary. We look forward to sharing the result of the Capital Campaign with you during the 70th anniversary celebration.

<http://www.smis.org/supporting-smis/the-capital-campaign>

Keyji Johnsen, *Editor*

SMA (Alumni) London / UK Branch

The first meeting of the London branch of the SMA (Alumni) was held on Saturday July 9th 2011 at the Tavistock Hotel in central London. I travelled down from my home town of Rugby and was thrilled to see many faces I recognised . The years seemed to roll back as we all talked and remembered our wonderful experiences as teachers or students at St Michael's. I was particularly thrilled to see one of my ex students- Shekhar Shah- who had travelled from Europe on the Eurostar especially for the day! The last time I saw him he was a 10 year old boy and now he was a

successful businessman, husband and father! The meeting was a wonderful success with people swapping emails and telephone numbers. I returned to Rugby with a smile on my face and a spring in my step!

The following summer the second meeting was arranged and the group met at the Tavistock Hotel again and later went to a local Indian restaurant for a delicious meal. Unfortunately not as many members could attend this meeting but a great time was had by all.

The third meeting of the group was in July 2013 and we met once more at the Tavistock Hotel. This was a small but select group as many of the members were unable to attend due to prior arrangements. We again laughed, talked and exchanged news and memories.

I would love to see more members of the SMA (Alumni) at the meeting this year. It would be wonderful if everyone who can attend tries to get in contact with any new members of the Alumni and invite them to the event. We should use the power of the internet!

St Michael's school has left a lasting impression on my life. I taught at the school from 1985 to 1988. I have taught and travelled all over the world and I have never again taught in such a wonderful friendly school. My years at St Michael's were probably my happiest time as a teacher. My parents visited the school on two occasions and echoed my feelings.

I visited the school when I returned to Japan on holiday in 1996 . The same atmosphere was there and I was welcomed with open arms and smiles.

I really hope that the SMA (Alumni) London / UK branch can continue to grow and attract more members and maybe organise more events throughout the year. The one obstacle is that a lot of the members are scattered around the UK and co-ordinating meetings and dates can prove quite difficult. It would be wonderful if we could organise some more events linked to activities organised by The Japan Foundation, The Japanese Embassy and The Japan Society of the UK. I will endeavour to look into this.

I wish all the staff and students at St Michael's a fantastic 2014 and I look forward to meeting some new members of the SMA(Alumni) in London in July - spread the word!

Julie Redpath (former teacher at St Michael's 1985-1988)

What Makes the Learning at St. Michael's International School, International?

When considering the content of this article, I was trying to think of something that would inform alumni about the present through an area that connects with its past (at least some of its past). Certainly whether judged by the name above the gate or through the staff and pupils that have filled its classrooms, for most alumni, I would assume that St. Michael's has been known as an international school.

However, despite almost 10,000 recognised international schools around the world, defining exactly what makes an international school 'international' is more difficult than one might think. Certainly, many academics and educators have tried, but in an area filled with such diversity (age-range, language of instruction, ratio of host country students etc...), finding an agreement on their defining features remains elusive.

Perhaps for most of us, the cornerstones of St. Michael's internationalist credentials may extend from an instruction in English based upon an anglophone national curriculum, delivered by a multinational teaching staff to a multinational student body. Certainly when I arrived at the school eight years ago, this would have been my summation and there is no denying that the daily interaction between the many nationalities within our school walls plays a significant role in opening our eyes to the world beyond it. I for one, have learnt much about different beliefs and practices, learning styles and the importance of picking cultural references carefully.

Undoubtedly, the osmotic effect of '*growing, working and learning together*' with those from so many different backgrounds ensures an international outlook higher than one might otherwise expect in a national setting. However, many international schools, including St. Michael's, have looked to take this further in recent years through trying to develop an academic curriculum that is international in nature to match the social experiences that naturally occur.

In our case this has been through the *International Primary Curriculum (IPC)*, which we have been embedding for over three years now. As a British-based curriculum, many of the learning outcomes remain the same as the UK National Curriculum. Indeed, as a fast growing alternative for UK state schools, it is required to satisfy the same government inspections and lead to the same overall achievement at Year 6. The major difference comes through the structure and methods upon which these learning objectives are reached.

When I first arrived, much of the history and geography was based around

that of the UK, linked where possible with Japan. My personal favourite was the castle topic that looked to compare European castles with those of Japan. It soon became apparent that in adapting the UK national curriculum, we were in danger of developing a very UK outlook mixed at times with Japan, rather than an international one. A lot of this was driven by the training backgrounds of the staff and the resources that were set for each year group.

Having been concerned about the relevance of this for our international students, the move towards the IPC has seen a complete transformation. As it was specifically designed to suit any global setting by focusing on topics that are relevant to all children regardless of their nationality such as 'Chocolate' in Year 3, 'Toys' in Year 1 and 'Go with the Flow (Rivers)' in Year 5, rather than specific units of national history such as the Victorians. Under such umbrella terms, each topic can be explored from a global perspective, every country has chocolate, toys and rivers after all! Such topics are more relevant and interesting for the children, more connections can be made within the learning they involve and a greater sense of how interconnected the world is, can be developed.

Beyond this however and perhaps most importantly, it also enables the children to research the topic area in two key contexts, their home country and their host country. The most important element for me regarding the IPC, is that it encourages the child to come home asking what 'Toys' are there in my family's country or history and what exists in the country around me, Japan. Obviously for some children this will be the same, for others, this may involve more than two countries or cultures. Through asking the children to research in this way, our hope is that the knowledge developed is more relevant to them and who they are. Furthermore, when the children then bring this 'home' knowledge into the school to share within the class, this further widens the children's international outlook and understanding of the similarity and differences amongst us all.

In the main, I have spoken about the humanities as these are often the most nationally specific. This is not to suggest however, that the school has lost its primary focus on the core subjects of English, Mathematics and Science. All three remain at the forefront of our teaching and indeed, the school still follows the UK National Curriculum in terms of skill progression in each of these subjects. However, the IPC topics again provide a relevant learning context in which to apply these skills. What better way to explore reversible changes than through melting chocolate or instruction writing through building lego models.

In returning to the title of the article, our hope is that the hard work of the last few years has resulted in us developing globally minded children not simply through '*growing, working and learning together*', but also from

learning about each other, our backgrounds, the country in which we live and importantly, other countries that may be an important part of our homelife. Perhaps most importantly, we hope that it has enabled us to provide a curriculum that is and will continue to be relevant to all of our students and the background of their families.

James Grimsby (Deputy Head)

Fund Raising Updates—The Annual Fund

The Annual Fund is an annual programme separate from the Capital Campaign described in the editorial. This year's Annual Fund will support improvements to our stage lighting and sound in order to enhance our children's performance opportunities. Your support is needed to make this a reality. We thank you for your contributions to this programme, and continue to accept contributions.

If readers feel that they could contribute to the Annual Campaign, kindly send your donations to the following account, including the phrase "annual fund". We thank you for your continued cooperation to make the school a special place for the students.

Bank: Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation
Branch: Kobe Eigyou Bu (Branch No.500)
Account Name: Sei MikaeruKokusaiGakko Dousoukai
Account No. 8579576
Swift Code: SMBCJPJT

Getting in touch with St. Michael's Association

If you find the need to get in touch with St. Michael's Association, the best way to do this is through this email address. You are also very welcome to leave a message at the School office.

alumni@smis-mail.org

SMA Diary (& Key Dates from the School Calendar) (2013-2014)

1 st March 2014 (Sat)	SMA Annual General Meeting
10 th March 2014 (Mon)	Founders' Day Celebration
26 th April 2014 (Sat)	School Bazaar
14 th May 2014 (Wed)	16 th meeting of SMA
27 th Aug 2014 (Wed)	17 th meeting of SMA

SMA meetings typically take place at 6:00pm on Wednesday evenings.
Further SMA meetings will be added upon confirmation of the date.

SMA Meetings are open to anyone who has been involved in St. Michael's in any way – International School students, English Language School students, or teachers. We publish *The Breeze*, organize alumni events, and generally keep in regular touch with past students and teachers of St. Michael's.

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