

Assembly 14 January 2008

After the Examinations

I am sure you would agree that the Christmas holiday seems a long time ago. Yet it has been only three weeks since we were opening presents, eating good food, spending time with family members and enjoying the company of friends. Some of us spent Christmas overseas. I returned to Perth, Western Australia, to catch-up with my family, to relax and to recharge my batteries. This was easier said than done, however, as Christmas this year was extremely hot in Perth and 44 degrees in the shade is not the best weather for sitting in the garden or going to the beach. My Christmas was spent indoors with the air-conditioning set at a level of cooling more akin to that experienced here in the School Hall.

Unfortunately, Christmas and New Year came and went too quickly and we all returned to the normality of daily life. At least I was fortunate to have a few days relaxation. I imagine that for most of you, the holiday was simply a short break from the study that needed to be done. For Form 5 and Form 7 students, this would have meant focusing on the subject material that needs to be covered before your school examinations in late February and early March. For Form 1 to 4 and Form 6 students, the focus of your holiday study would have been the examinations of the last two weeks.

The result of all that work will become known to you in due course. If you are in Form 1-4 and Form 6, the results will come to you over the next few days. This week is probably one of the most important times in the school year. It is a time of judgment and a clear indication of where you are in terms of your learning; where you are heading; and what you need to do from this point on.

Last Friday I asked some of you how you had gone in the examinations. A Form 1 boy said "I hope I passed all my exams. I'm pretty confident that I did but you never know. I have not taken examinations like this before and I have no idea what the teachers are looking for." A Form 6 said "I am anxious about my results as I don't think that my answers reflected what I really know. In some subjects I think I did OK but I'm worried that I might have failed others."

The reason why this week is so important is that the rest of this year will be determined by how you react to your examination results. Experience tells me that:

- Most students will get their exam papers back, check the marks and then file their answer papers.
- Only a small number of students will look to see what they got wrong and then fix the mistakes in a way that they will remember the correct answers next time.

Unfortunately, many of you will have only two things in mind when the examination papers are returned. Firstly, to check and then recheck that the teacher has added up the marks correctly. Secondly, to file the paper and forget about the mark as quickly as

possible. To many of you, the examinations are something that must be done and then forgotten about.

To the 'smart' student, the examinations will be seen as a way of demonstrating his understanding of a subject today and then working out what needs to be done for the results to be better the next time. However, a smart student does not only have to be the one who passed all his examinations. A smart student is any student who, no matter what the result, is willing to learn from their mistakes. A smart student is always looking for improvement.

So what are the most common mistakes made in examinations? I am sure that your Form teacher and Subjects teachers will be talking to you about this over the next few days. However, I would also like to express my view. I believe that most examination mistakes fall into three categories:

Firstly, there are studying and reading problems. A common reply might be 'I kind of knew the answer, but did not know enough detail to choose the correct multiple choice answers or write a long enough reply'. This is a classic case of studying but not studying in enough detail.

The second category of common exam mistakes relate to how you approached an examination. Some students will say that they 'didn't completely answer the question, so lost marks.' Others will say that 'I didn't have enough time to finish the paper.'

The third category relates to difficulties during the examination: 'not following instructions' or 'didn't check the answers carefully' or 'didn't answer the question at all. For some, the outcome might be even more extreme: 'I had a mental blank; I became confused and then panicked.'

So we come back to this week and why I believe it is the most important week of the year thus far. When your subject teachers are going over the papers, look out for the following:

- Know what questions you missed and why you missed them.
- Read your teachers' comments so that you will know what is expected next time.
- Go over the subject material carefully and store that information in your long-term memory.
- Ask your teachers questions while the examination is still fresh in your mind
- Finally, review how you studied for the examinations and then look for even better ways.

It is always essential that you concentrate in class but no more so than over the next two weeks. Be a smart student and look for ways to improve.