

# PANAGA SCHOOL



## Parent Information Letter No 4 Extra.

Date: Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2008

### More about Sinterklaas

The Feast of Sinterklaas, or St. Nicholas, is an annual event, which has been uniquely Dutch and Flemish for centuries. St. Nicholas' Feast Day, December 6th, is observed in most Roman Catholic countries primarily as a feast for small children. But it is only in the Low Countries - especially in the Netherlands - that the **eve of his feast day (December 5th)** is celebrated nationwide by young and old, christian and non-christian, and without any religious overtones.

All Dutch children know that Sinterklaas (the name is a corruption of Sint Nikolaas) lives in Spain. Exactly why he does remains a mystery, but that is what all the old songs and nursery rhymes say. Whatever the case may be, in Spain he spends most of the year recording the behaviour of all children in a big red book, while his helpers Zwarte Pieten/Black Peters stocks up on presents for next December 5th. In the first weeks of November, Sinterklaas gets on his white horse, the Zwarte Pieten swing a huge sack full of gifts over their shoulders, and they board a steamship headed for the Netherlands. Around mid-November they arrive in a harbour town - a different one every year - where they are formally greeted by the Mayor and a delegation of citizens.

Their parade through town is watched live on television by the whole country and marks the beginning of the "Sinterklaas season".

On the 5<sup>th</sup> December Sinterklaas and his helpmates ( Zwarte Pieten/Black Peters) are suddenly everywhere at once. At night they ride across Holland's' rooftops and Sinterklaas listens through the chimneys to check on the children's behaviour. Zwarte Piet jumps down the chimney flues and makes sure that the carrot or hay the children have left for the horse in their shoes by the fireplace is exchanged for a small gift or some candy. During the day, Sinterklaas and the Zwarte Pieten are even busier, visiting schools, hospitals, department stores, restaurants, offices and many private homes. The Zwarte Pieten ring doorbells, scatters sweets through the slightly opened doors and leaves basketfuls of presents by the front door.

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