

Dear Parent/Carer,

Enclosed in this pack are a number of vital pieces of information that we felt were important to post direct to all our parents.

1. Specialism launch letter
2. Examination results – key headlines
3. Ofsted Report – key findings
4. Letter to students regarding Ofsted findings

The Specialism launch will be an opportunity for parents and the community to take part in some exciting activities and to see the work of these areas of the school. If you can attend even for a short while you will be most welcome.

Our examination results this summer were the best ever for the Academy showing improving results for the third consecutive year. This year we have achieved a 15% improvement in 5+ A*-C grades, with 47% of our students achieving these results. 5+ A*-C grades with English & maths, rose by 7% to 29%.

	2006 Mitcham Vale	2007 St Mark's Academy	2008 St Mark's Academy	2009 St Mark's Academy
5+ A* - C grades	21%	24%	32%	47%
5+ A* - C grades Including English & maths	14%	19%	22%	29%

Individual St Mark's students achieved some outstanding results this year. Karl Tomsk achieved 6 A*s and 3 A grades in his GCSE's. Tanya Kanagaratnam achieved 4 A*s, 4As and 1 B grade. Bertha Jonazi achieved 3 A*s, 3 As and 2 B grades.

We are very pleased with the improvements shown this year and congratulate all our students and staff for the hard work and commitment demonstrated to achieve these results. St Mark's Academy is improving year by year; this year's results are a clear indicator that standards and achievement are continuing to rise across the Academy.

We have received the formal Ofsted report today 14.09.09. A number of parents have enquired why the school has not informed them about the outcome of the inspection, this is purely due to the fact that Ofsted had not published the report until today. The full Ofsted report will be published on the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk within the next 5 days. However, enclosed with this letter are some of the key headlines, summary judgements and student letter.

Ofsted – Key headline quotes

St Marks provides an acceptable standard of education for its students. It is an improving academy, with satisfactory capacity and momentum to continue this trend. The associate headteacher and executive principal lead the academy well and have worked determinedly to bring about a step change in provision and outcomes for students. The academy has come a long way in the past twelve months. The quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum have improved and both are satisfactory. However, there is much ground to make up and the teaching and curriculum are not yet good enough to accelerate the progress that students are capable of. The views of many of the parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire can be summed up by one who wrote, 'I fully appreciate the fact that the school still has a long way to go but - speaking as a local resident for 20 years - it has already come a long way since becoming an academy.'

Achievement and standards

Students are on track to improve on the 2008 results, for instance in the academy's specialisms and in the proportion of higher grades which include English and mathematics. Positive signs are also evident in students' achievement in vocational subjects, with accreditation already gained this year. However, there remains too much variability between the students' progress in different subjects or key stages.

Personal development and well-being

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are satisfactory. Students say they feel safe and there are clear systems in place for reporting concerns to staff or the school-based police officer. There are few recorded incidents of racism. Students have a satisfactory awareness of and commitment to healthy and safe living. The 'Heroes' programme is effective in helping students to develop positive lifestyle choices and to deal with risk. Attendance is satisfactory but, for some students, it is too low. Inspectors observed satisfactory behaviour in lessons and around the academy.

Teaching & Learning

Teaching and learning have improved significantly since the monitoring visit in September 2008, when Her Majesty's Inspectors judged them to be inadequate. There are pockets of good teaching, but the majority of teaching and learning is satisfactory. There are a number of strong features in more effective lessons. Teachers' planning is well structured and activities, resources and pace are used well to engage and hold students' interest and attention. Lessons are underpinned by the positive interaction between teachers and students and are characterised by a purposeful work ethos where students are focused and eager to learn. In these lessons, teachers give students good opportunities for 'thinking time' and, through effective questioning, help them to explain their views and reasoning. Additional support is used effectively so much so that it is sometimes hard to distinguish who is leading the teaching. Written and oral feedback is used well to help students know what levels they have achieved and what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

The curriculum is broad and balanced and is now more tailored to meet the particular needs and abilities of students. The academy has responded to the views of students in providing a range of vocational or alternative education pathways to better meet their interests and capabilities. The academy is well placed from its involvement in the local 14-19 partnership, to enable it to expand on the better range of options evident this year. Students value the work of additional tutors in helping to improve their progress in English and mathematics. This is having a positive impact, for instance in the completion of coursework. Nurture groups for some Year 7 and Year 8 students with language or learning needs, or low levels of numeracy and literacy, have had a positive impact on their progress and learning. The academy provides a range of enrichment opportunities, some linked to its specialisms, and participation rates are satisfactory. Students whose first language is not English are encouraged to gain qualifications in their home language and this year this involved over 40 students, with languages including Polish, German and Urdu. The impact of information and communication technology is improving and was evident in some of the lessons observed by inspectors.

Care, guidance and support

The academy provides satisfactory care, guidance and support for its students. The provision to meet the needs of students with English as an additional language and support for the most vulnerable, such as students who are in care, are stronger.

Safeguarding procedures are satisfactory and the vetting of staff and adults meets current government regulations. Systems to promote good attendance and response to absence have tightened and the attendance officer is tenacious in following up absence. Effective and valued support is in place to help students make the transition from primary school. Since September, better use has been made of data to track academic progress, identify students who are at risk of underachievement and target effective support.

Leadership and management

In the past year, the associate headteacher and the executive principal have brought much needed competent leadership and management to the academy. Consequently, there is a clear drive and commitment to raising achievement, underpinned by short-term and longer-term strategic planning. Robust performance management is now in place. Decisive action is being taken in response to identified areas of weakness. Teaching is more consistent and the impact of training, coaching, support and challenge for teachers is having a positive impact on their practice. Senior leadership is strong.

Dates for your diary

1. Early closure Thursday 24.09.09 – The Academy will close at 1.25pm for students to enable the Specialism launch event to take place.
2. Early closure Wednesday 30.09.09 – The Academy will close at 1.25pm for students for open evening.
3. 21.10.09 school photographs
4. Thursday 22.10.09 11.00-12.00pm
Coffee morning for all parents. An opportunity to meet the headteacher and hear about improvements in the Academy and discuss any issues you may wish to raise.

Thank you to all parents for your continued support, this has been an excellent start to a new academic year and your support for the changes we have introduced is much valued and appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Esther Holland
Associate Head