

3rd November 2008

Dear Parent / Carer

I am writing once again to update you on developments at Sir Frank Markham Community School.

Firstly, I need to advise you that having originally agreed a three month contract with the Local Authority when I first came to Sir Frank Markham School, I will be finishing as Headteacher at the end of this term after a spell that expanded into a little over three years.

When I made the decision 18 months ago not to apply for the post of Academy Principal, I did so realising that a point would be reached in the 2008-2009 year when the school needed to be led by senior staff who would be moving over to the Academy in September 2009. By the end of this term that point will have been reached, and from January my leadership team, as well as other staff, will be working increasingly closely with Lorna Caldicott, the Principal Designate for the new Academy, to ensure the smoothest possible transition.

A major part of the transition work will revolve around making sure that we build on the improvements of the last three years so that after the big improvement this summer results are even better next year. Very detailed plans are in place and already being implemented to make sure that this happens, and a large number of Year 11 students have already gained A*- C qualifications in Science and ICT.

I have an excellent Senior Leadership Team, and am delighted to inform you that the school's governors and the Local Authority have appointed my two deputies, David James and Jonathan Giles, to be joint Headteachers from January until the end of August 2009. Both have excelled in their roles as deputies, and both have the skills required to be successful Headteachers.

I am proud of the school's progress over the last three years (whilst knowing there is much still to do), which would not have been possible without a strong commitment from the overwhelming majority of students as well as from staff and governors. It would also, however, not have been possible without your support as parents and carers, and one of the most heartening sights of the last three years has been the vastly improved attendance at consultation evenings as well as at events such as productions for Dance, Drama and Music. Demonstrating this best of all was our recent Achievers' Evening held in the Woughton Theatre, when demand for places was so strong that in spite of running separate, back to back events for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 students we still had to provide extra seating in order to meet demand. The following evening also saw a packed Sports Hall for meetings between form tutors and parents / carers.

The Academy will be building on a record of solid progress and strong commitment, and with its fantastic, state of the art facilities it has the potential to accelerate current improvements and be a transformational influence alongside other partners in the local community.

For my part, after a second stint as Headteacher (which has been the most rewarding job of my career), I now, with my family, hope to be doing something very different, running a hostel in New Zealand for travellers of all ages from all over the world. No matter where I am, however, I will continue to follow the progress of the school and new Academy with great interest.

Progress Update

Sixth Form

Our new Sixth Form is developing well, and over the half-term break a private study area has been equipped with new computers and other resources. In addition, ICT facilities in other sixth form teaching rooms have been improved, and money has also been made available to equip a social room for students.

A key priority for all sixth form students is to develop their skills in working and learning independently. Sixth Formers have fewer taught periods than younger students, and they are expected to plan and prioritise their time so that they make good use of private study periods as well as evenings, weekends and holidays. The ability to work and learn independently is also a crucial skill for higher education and employment.

Key Stage 4

Having achieved a best ever 50% of students gaining 5 or more higher grade passes this summer (previous best was 22%), we have set another very ambitious target for next summer for 75% of students to get at least 5 higher grade passes. We have a very detailed plan to help us achieve this which runs to several hundred separate actions, and progress indicators so far are very encouraging. A large number of year 11 students have already obtained higher grade passes in Science and ICT, and good progress is being made in other subjects.

Last week, during the half-term break, students from years 10 and 11 were in every day working on homework and coursework, and once again next half-term our Study Club will run every night after school. In English and Maths additional staff are being used to help students boost their grades, and we are also encouraging students to make good use of on-line learning resources such as SAM Learning and My Maths. SAM learning covers most of the subjects students are taking in years 10 and 11, and enables them to revise material and tackle questions at different levels according to their ability and the paper that they are likely to be entered for. The more students revise and practice past questions in addition to working through syllabus requirements, the more they will succeed next summer.

Key Stage 3

We welcome the government's decision to scrap the SATs tests for Year 9 students. The management of external assessment in English, Maths and Science this summer has been a fiasco, and there are major doubts about the reliability of the process. We have recently sent out information on teacher assessments of the levels students had reached at the end of year 9 last summer, and will publish external results in the spring term if and when the papers have finally been remarked.

The ending of the SATs allows us to focus more on our own assessment practice, and we will be providing parents and carers with half-termly progress updates during the course of the year.

Attendance

Very good student attendance and punctuality is one of the keys to success at school. Statistics show clearly that students who have poor attendance and punctuality are less likely to gain good qualifications. Attendance and punctuality are also key priorities for employers and the school provides attendance and punctuality figures in any student reference.

Whilst overall attendance is improving, the school's attendance figures continue to be seriously affected by families taking students out of school during term time for holidays. This has had a negative effect on student progress and examination results. Further to earlier communications last year, I wish to remind you that the school will not authorise family holidays taken during term time except in the event of their being exceptional reasons for doing so. Such exceptions aside, therefore, parents / carers may be liable for fixed-penalty notices in circumstances where they plan to take their child out of school during term time for an unauthorised holiday.

Home School Communication

We are developing the use of our website to provide useful information for students and parents / carers. For example, you can find homework timetables for all year groups on the website, information about extra-curricular activities (paper copies of HW timetable and extra-curricular programme are also enclosed with this letter), our annual as well as a weekly school calendar, and also a new contact page providing you with E Mail addresses for all key staff that you may need to contact.

Our website address is www.sfmcs.org.uk, and we encourage you to make use of it. Suggestions for ways in which we can further improve the website further are strongly welcomed.

Academy Developments

The Academy buildings are taking shape and it is still expected that building work will be completed on time next summer. Recently an evening for prospective pupils and parents / carers was held at the Xscape Cinema in Milton Keynes, and shortly after another evening event was held for Year 11 students and parents / carers about the new Academy Sixth Form. Sir Frank Markham Staff are currently being matched to posts in the new Academy, and it is expected that this process will be completed by about Christmas time, allowing two further terms preparation for the opening of the Academy in September 2009.

MK Dons Initiative to promote Healthy Lifestyles

The MK Dons Sport and Education Trust are launching a new initiative called 'Onside for Life'.

It is a free, fun programme for children to become fitter, healthier and happier. If you are worried that your child is not adopting a healthy lifestyle or may even be overweight, this may be the scheme for them. It is aimed at children between 7 and 13 and is to give them the opportunity to build foundations for a healthy life.

If you would like to take this further please contact Jemma on 01908 622885 or email jemma.murry@MKDONS.COM. The school contact for this initiative is Ms.Gockelen, who can be contacted at dgoekelen@sfmcs.org.uk.

Photos of the School at Work / Use of Student Images

During the course of the school year we take photos of many school activities and events and use them for displays around the school as well as on our website. No information is provided about students who appear in photographs, and past feedback from students as well as parents / carers has indicated that use

of images for these purposes is seen as a valued recognition of the ways in which students participate in the life of the school.

If for any reason, however, you do not wish an image of your child to be used in a display or on our website please contact Mrs. Diane Taylor on 01908 607416 or at dtaylor@sfmcs.org.uk.

All parents / carers will still be contacted for permission if it is proposed that any image of your child be used as part of a Press Release or Radio or TV interview.

Responsible Use of the Internet / Unauthorised use of School or School Related Images

Along with you as parents / carers we have a responsibility to ensure that students use safe and appropriate behaviours when using the internet. For the most part our students are very sensible and use the internet in appropriate ways as both an educational and social tool.

There have been a small number of inappropriate uses, however, that we take very seriously. In one or two incidents where a student or students have used the internet to bully, insult or humiliate another student we have taken firm action within school and also involved the police.

This term, on two occasions, incidents at school were filmed without permission and placed on YouTube. All the students involved received either fixed-term or permanent exclusions, and again the police were informed.

I would be most grateful for your support as parents / carers in stressing to your child that any unauthorised filming of events at school is strictly forbidden and will be punished severely. Any student who takes this one step further and places an unauthorised film on an internet site is likely to be permanently excluded.

This also applies to unauthorised filming of events outside of school where Sir Frank Markham School students are clearly identifiable as such or where reference to the school is made.

Where students wish to make a film which includes any reference to or images of the school, for example to advertise a young enterprise business, to publicise a record or to create an on-line record for leavers, written permission must first be obtained from the Headteacher.

Dates for your diary

November 13 th	Early closure at 1.30 for In-Service Training
November 17 th	Year 12 Parent Consultation Evening
November 24 th -28 th	Year 11 mock Examinations Longrigg Trip for c. 24 Year 9 students Black History season "Fame Academy"
December 18 th	Closing date for academy 6 th Form applications
December 19 th	Last Day of Term – early closure at 1.30 pm.

Yours sincerely

Mike O'Mahony
Headteacher

