

Overmark

An Unofficial Newsletter Produced By Pupils For Pupils.

Overmark Now Endorsed By School!!!

Well following the 'capture' of one of our lead reporters the school has been showing some resistance to our paper, following our controversial Good-Teacher-Bad-Teacher story in the February Issue. The school claimed our paper was operating illegally by firstly violating the data protection act and secondly by violating publishing laws as we chose to remain anonymous. The school said that by allowing us to continue they were leaving themselves open to prosecution...and that we ourselves were also liable.

The school said that if the website was not shut down, or if a third issue was produced the year 11 reporter would face severe persecution, including possibly not being allowed to stay on for 6th form or given a good reference. At this stage we decided we had to back down, or at least appease because we could not compromise someone's school life over this. The reporter in question resigned from active duties, and now remains as our school contact.

In order to appease we removed all specific names from our website; we were not going to shut it down as the school cannot claim to have authority over the internet. Now we have arranged a long-term solution; before each issue is produced the school checks it for libellous or factually incorrect information. We wish to point out this is NOT censorship, we are assured that nothing will be left out simply because the Core Team disapprove of our journalism.

Hopefully this means we can move on and continue informing you of the truth about our school free from persecution and fear of reprisal. We also hope this means we can continue our anonymity without having to worry about the school 'tracking down' our other reporters and members.

BUMPER SIX PAGE ISSUE!!!

Issue 3, Volume 1, February 2004, Page 1 of 6

Well here we are again for our third issue; it was looking like we were going to have to stop producing Overmark papers, hence this issue is out much later than originally planned, but we have overcome these internal problems and can now continue keeping you up to date with the truth about our beloved school.

In this Issue we round off our investigations into Uniform by exploring alternatives to our uniform, and then giving you the chance to vote on what you think should happen to our uniform. Also in this Issue we look at the current issues of Top-Up fees and cannabis.

Just to clarify one issue; we would like to point out the contrary to what we would loosely call our rivals, *Inside Mark*, published we are not banned and we are continuing indefinitely, this is hardly "exclusive" as it has been on our website for some time. Also we are called *Overmark*, not "*The Overmark*".

As we can now operate more freely we are looking to expand, and are in search of more reporters. If you would like to join us please e-mail us and let us know; the address is overmarked@yahoo.com, you don't have to give you name but we would like to know your age and gender.

Lastly, as you may have noticed our website has recently had a major makeover, unfortunately there are still minor problems with the site so please be patient with slow pages and missing features! You can visit our site at www.overmark.vze.com.



Also In This Issue

- **OFSTED UNCUT:** We reveal the bits the school won't be telling you...
- **CANNABIS:** Now the law is relaxed, what does that mean for YOU?
- **UNIFORM:** Is there an alternative to Uniform? We explore further...
- **TOP UP FEES:** Blair got his way, but how will that affect YOU?

UNIFORM: *Is There Another Way?*

In our previous issues we have explored how our school deals with uniform, and the idea of abolishing uniform completely. In this Issue we want to put forward the last alternative; a better uniform. We also want to know what you think, we have placed a survey on our website so we can find out what YOU think should be done about uniform at our beloved school. To vote please visit www.overmark.vze.com, alternatively text us your vote; 07952 273911.

Bush's Words Of Wisdom

If anyone ever needed proof of George W. Bush's intelligence, here it is... He genuinely said all of these things at various rallies around America!

"I believe a military of high morale is conducive to keeping the peace"

"Families is where our nation finds hope, where wings take dream"

"A surplus means there'll be money left over, otherwise it wouldn't be a surplus"

"Well, I think that if you say you're going to do something and don't do it, that's trustworthiness"

"The American people want a president that appeals to the angels"

"I know the human being and fish can coexist peacefully"

"I will have a foreign-handed foreign policy"

"I don't need to be subliminal"

"We'll let our friends be the peacekeepers and the great country called America will be the pacemakers"

"I reconciled my love for my dad a long time ago"

"Drug treatments are replacing a lot of medicines as we used to know it"

For more examples of Bush's words of Wisdom see our website, www.overmark.vze.com

Do you hate our school uniform? Perhaps you would be happier with one similar to that in other local schools? Maybe you have your own ideas about what our uniform should be like? In this brief article we aim to present some alternatives to abolishing uniform completely.

The first alternative we see is to adopt a less formal uniform, something like the Howard uniform for the boys and a Rainham Girls uniform for the girls (unsurprisingly, unless anyone has any objections?) The advantages of this would be that there is no blazer, however is it really enough of a change to be worthwhile?

Secondly we could introduce a uniform similar to that which we wore in primary school, for example St. John Fisher school do this; and Upbury Manor Arts College have something similar. Although this may at first seem more appealing we think it makes pupils look younger and more immature (and how *would* you distinguish between year 7s and year 2s?)

Another suggestion is that we could take a massive step and create a 'modern', 'stylish' uniform that people wouldn't mind wearing. Our immediate thoughts were for a jeans and light shirt for boys and skirt / jeans with blouse for girls; although it could be literally anything. This kind of uniform would allow us more individuality as well as being more comfortable and more likable. The main problem with this idea is that whatever the uniform was there would still be people who didn't approve and perhaps liked it even less than they did do the current uniform. Another problem is that if a fashionable uniform was adopted it would have to be changed on a regular basis which would be both expensive and unpractical (one classic example of this was the '70s uniform for girls at RMGS (then Gillingham Tech), ask your parents; they may remember the batgirl cape!).

Then there is of course the other obvious option; abolish uniform completely. We discussed this issue in great depth in the last issue (if you missed it you can still read it online) but in summary we ask if it works for 6th form then it should work for Lower School too; on the other hand there would inevitably be problems with bullying and complaints.

So what do you think, please vote in any of the ways described in the box and let us know, we will reveal the results

In the rumour mill this month...

Keeping our ears to the ground we have picked up on one interesting rumour in the last week; and that is that following our status as 'Science College' the school is considering renaming Rainham Mark Grammar School (RMGS), Rainham Mark Science College (RMSC). This is only a rumour and we have not been able to validate this in any way, Mr Moore chose to make no comment on it in our meeting. If true, we ask is it really necessary? It just sounds to us like being a little pointless (like Upbury Manor Arts College). But what do you think about this new name?

Ofsted

UNCUT

We Reveal The Rest Of The OFSTED Report...

Well seeing as you've probably heard all the good things OFSTED have to say about our school, we decided that it was only fair to point out all the negative things they said! We've subdivided all of the interesting points into categories for easy reading.

STAFF

"Not all teachers follow the school's clear guidance on the correction of spelling and punctuation."

A rather ironic comment really seeing as we found at least one grammatical error in their document!

"Teachers tend to talk too much."

Ofsted's ability to make somewhat understated comments seems "only a smidgen" better than ours.

"Nearly all teachers have good qualifications"

Nearly? The fact that some don't is concerning!

SITE

"[A lack of music facilities] prevents potentially talented pupils from doing as well as they could."

In all fairness the school is sorting this with its new music block, but according to Ofsted work will take place **"In the next month"** (i.e. January / February), but there is currently no sign of this!

"An area was identified during a fire evacuation where people could not get away quickly enough."

Now this is a serious concern, we know that the area concerned is the 'Upper' entrance to the tennis courts; perhaps a wider gateway could solve this problem?

"The lack of some resources, such as storage and technical support, has an adverse effect upon the students' experience."

To be more specific they are talking about the Art and Music departments which need technical support for the AppleTalk networks, and about the lack of storage in the Art department.

"The way that lunchtimes are organised is poor"

This is something we at Overmark believe is particularly important in the general school lives of pupils. Ofsted go on to say

"Younger pupils find the queues intimidating and overwhelming"

and that

"the supply of food runs out quickly leaving pupils with little or no choice".

Ofsted conclude that

"arrangements could be improved considerably."

To combat this Ofsted suggest staggered lunchtimes, we believe this would help significantly. We can also reveal that the school is trying to remedy this situation by placing a member of senior staff on the lunch queues every day—but will it be enough?

"And of course we couldn't possibly do normal lessons next week, what with Ofsted being here".

(Anon Teacher)

"If you know the answer put up your left hand, if you don't put up your right. That way you all look more clever and I look like a better teacher".

(Anon Teacher)

ATTITUDES

Ofsted say; **"the replies to the questionnaire indicate that the students themselves do not feel that there is a good range of enrichment courses and worthwhile activities."**

However they respond to this by saying:

"The inspectors judge that their criticisms of the range of enrichment activities, and the support they receive are not justified."

But, their evidence for this seems to be:

"hotly contested inter-form scrabble competitions"

Which, no disrespect to anyone involved, we suggest is not everybody's idea of a **"worthwhile activity"**.

"The pupils overwhelmingly express positive views of the school"

Well what can I say...?

OTHER ISSUES

"To meet statutory requirements [the school must provide a daily act of collective worship]"

This is an interesting point, as in Ofsted's *previous* inspection in 1997 they said:

"Although revised arrangements have been introduced for collective worship and assemblies these still fail to meet statutory requirements"

Which means that in the report *previous* to that, which we believe happened in 1991, the school wasn't providing adequate assemblies, which means this has been a problem for more than 12 years, and still the school has done nothing about it! According to Ofsted:

"The school does not have sufficiently large spaces to offer a full programme of year group assemblies, and has not developed sufficiently adequate alternative arrangements."

Remember the school has had over 12 years to sort this out, we ask what the problem with space is anyway? The Hall can hold 3—4 years, the drama studio and library can hold a year each and there are two gyms each capable of seating approximately two year groups, that's five year individual assemblies at once, and the 6th form have a common room for each year...

"The recently revised prospectus"

The prospectus being given out at the open evenings in 2003 had photos of current year 11 students when they were in year 7; the 'new' prospectus was produced when Mr Decker joined the school!

CONCLUSION

So do you think this is a more accurate picture of our school? Just remember some of the quotes we have from teachers before Ofsted arrived! Or are we just being picky? Don't forget that despite what we may say our school is still in the top 5% in the country and is a lot better than a lot of other local schools (mentioning no names); and Ofsted *always* find something to complain about. On the other hand don't forget that some issues, for example Assemblies have been raised repeatedly by Ofsted as being below legal requirements. You can let us know what you think via e-mail.

Valentine's Dance

FLOP OR NOT?

Well Trinity have done all right so far, but is their Valentine's Dance one step too far?

The original plan seemed to be to only allow sixth formers to attend, however a slow ticket uptake means that year 11 have been invited as well. From what we know a fair investment was made in a DJ, drinks etc yet a lack of advertising, especially in Year 11, means very few people are aware of the dance at all.

Overall it seemed like a good idea, but in reality who wants to go to a ball at school? How many people really want to spend Valentines at school, being supervised by teachers without alcohol!?!?

Another problem people seem to have is the dress code, dresses and proper trousers, once again a nice idea but in practice people don't want it!

Well before we are too judgemental let's wait and see what actually happens, our sources about poor sales may have been incorrect. As you are reading this the dance will have been and gone but at the time of writing it has not. To keep up to date on this story try our website in the 'Breaking News' section on the home page.

Quotes From The Planner

In our school planner it says "When you do something well your teacher will recognise this ... perhaps giving a commendation. Commendations earned in this way will be recorded on your report and will contribute to the award of Certificates of Merit." What it does not say is that once you get beyond year 9 there is no reward system, and this in fact applies to 4 years, as opposed to three who do have a reward system. We feel this is wrong and not at all encouraging for pupils, if they do a good piece of work, or regularly behave well they get no actual reward for it.

We appreciate that in most cases upper school choose not to continue with commendation cards, but perhaps a more 'mature' alternative could be found. We intend to investigate this further in a later issue but let us know what you think...

TOP UP FEES

As you are no doubt aware the Labour Government got its way (just) and the white paper for Top Up Fees passed through Parliament. It will now be analysed by a committee before returning to Parliament for a second reading. However most agree that the bill will be passed by the summer and despite opposition we will ultimately have to start paying top up fees. But when, and how much? We have tried to outline the facts surrounding top up fees as well as offering *our* view of the situation. Remember the changes will take place in 2006 so this will affect years 12 and below; but not year 13.

The current plan is for fees to become variable, this means Universities can charge anything from £0 to £3000 per year. This means Universities can be more independent however it also means universities will have to 'compete' with each other even more and that we could see some universities charging higher fees for popular courses unnecessarily. It also means that some universities in poorer areas may charge less but offer a 'second rate' degree with poorer quality of teaching and insufficient equipment.

The plan also says that students will only pay their debt off after they start earning £15k or more, this would seem to be a good idea, but all it is in fact is doing is putting off the debt, at present most students take out interest free student loans anyway so this is actually not a great gain.

The new system would mean any student whose parents earn less than £32k would have their fees paid by the state, and receive more bursaries for living costs, they will come out of university with little or no debt. On the other hand 'middle-class' families will have to pay everything without support, with estimated debts being shown below:

Tuition Fees; £3000 x 3 years
Student Loan; £4000 x 3 years
Total Debt £21000

Then consider coming out of university and looking for a house, getting married and trying to lead a normal life... Of course our figures are only for an average student taking a three year course; lawyers, doctors and vets could be looking at debts of up to £30k.

Although we appreciate disadvantaged students need support, under the new system they will get most fees paid while middle-class students pay for this in their fees and their taxes.

The view taken by many is that all this palaver is just about figures, someone somewhere has said at least 50% of university students should be from impoverished backgrounds with no regard for anyone else and this, in our opinion is not how education should be. If a student is able then they should have the option of going to university; instead we see a system where you are in fact advantaged by being from a poor background and many less-able poor students are taking the place of middle class able students.

Investigating **CANNABIS**

The aim of this article is not to patronise you about why you shouldn't take illegal drugs, rather our aim is to inform you about the facts, and about the new legal implications. We're not going to pretend that none of you have smoked cannabis, we just want to let you know what will happen to you if you are caught. In the same way this article should serve to warn potential users about what they are letting themselves in for.

Firstly, obvious as it may sound cannabis is still illegal, the government has launched a major campaign to combat confusion about this. Just because cannabis is now Class C it is still illegal.

The Criminal Justice Minister of Northern Ireland summarised this point quite well; he said "It is against the law to have, give away, or deal in cannabis in any form, including plants." he also pointed out "Reclassification does not mean that cannabis is now a legal drug, or that it is not harmful to health," this is a key point, the reason cannabis has been downgraded to Class C is that firstly it is not as harmful as other drugs, and secondly it means Police time can be spent on cracking major hard drug organisation rather than wasting time on those who casually smoke marijuana.

So what happens if you are caught with cannabis on you? If the amount you have on you is seen to be only for your own personal use then the police officer is expected to make a "presumption against arrest," if you have lots on you then you will be arrested for dealing, and the maximum sentence for this was increased in January to 14 years. However this is not to say that it is 'safe' to carry cannabis on you, ultimately the decision as to your punishment is up to the police officer involved, and he in turn is influenced by the position of his police division to Cannabis. In some areas you may be arrested anyway, while in others you may get off with just an informal warning.

The other thing which may affect your punishment is where you were caught smoking, many areas enforce a zero-tolerance policy on people smoking cannabis in public, and especially in front of young people.

So what do we suggest? Well we don't think it is our job to inform you about what you do with your life; we take the view that it is your right to do what you want with your life assuming you are informed (as you now are) and that you do not harm other people in doing so. All that said and done, just remember Cannabis is more dangerous than smoking, and we've all seen the horrific QUIT adverts currently showing on the TV. Also remember that the average *cigarette* smoker spends over £30,000 on cigarettes in their lifetime (so we estimate you can probably double that for a cannabis user), just think of all the other things you could spend that on...

FAQs

Q. Is Cannabis dangerous?

A. YES. Cannabis is still a dangerous, illegal drug. The fact that it has been reclassified just means that it is less dangerous than 'hard drugs' such as Heroin and Cocaine.

Q. How dangerous is Cannabis?

A. Cannabis can kill you if you overdose; apart from that cannabis contains cancer-causing agents, and smoking it has the same medical effects as smoking tobacco. As well as this cannabis users often experience paranoia, schizophrenia and depression.

Q. Is cannabis addictive?

A. Cannabis is not addictive in the same way that nicotine is; that is to say that it is not chemically addictive however it is psychologically addictive, and this often makes it even harder to give up once you've started

Q. Can cannabis relieve pain?

A. YES. Measured amounts of cannabis can be used to help people suffering from MS and other conditions that cause severe pain, however this is an effect many illegal drugs share, for example heroin is closely related to morphine.

WANTED!

We here at Overmark are looking for a sports reporter. The role will involve providing regular reports on Inter-form and Inter-School matches in all sports; as well as information about PE in general at the school.



We had one response to our ad before, however we later found they were in fact a member of 'Inside Mark' and after contacting them with our ideas for stories we heard nothing else from them - strange? Maybe, or maybe they were spying?

If you are genuinely interested please contact us by e-mailing overmarked@yahoo.com

NEWS IN BRIEF ...

THEY'RE STILL NOT YELLOW

The long awaited buses are **still** not yellow, it now appears that the expected arrival is after half term, however if you know different please let us know! It is getting to the stage where we wonder if we are ever going to see them?

STILL NO COKE...

The situation is worsening for all you fizzy drinks addicts, not only is the Ribena machine still there, but there is less and less Coke available over the counter. What little there is is only diet, it seems our Ribena boycott hasn't been working. We still suggest that all you die-hard addicts continue not using the machines as no matter how much pressure the school puts on Megabytes, ultimately if the machine doesn't make a profit it will go!

6TH FORM BLOCK

Well our sources indicate that the 6th form block is due for a makeover in the Easter holidays. The plans seem to be to turn G2 (upstairs) into a study area for **both** years and convert F3 into a common area for both years which will have a small kitchen amongst other things. Overmark considers this a good idea, but in practice we ask will it actually work? We predict vandalism / accidental damage will quickly incapacitate the kitchen, while overcrowding will only make problems worse.

MUSIC TEACHER NAME...

Well many apologies but we actually made a mistake in our paper last month! Oops! It seems Mr Ething was not the replacement music teacher, but Mr King **is**. He is the new permanent music teacher replacing the recent run of short-term teachers who ultimately replaced Mr Podesta. We hope this teacher stays on and brings some stability back to the music department (no pun about the flood intended!).

WHAT GREEN BINS?

Well after all the talk and the hype where are the green bins? Looking around the school we have seen *no* green bins, and only a limited number of green *sacks*. What green sacks we have seen aren't being used properly anyway and their placement seems inappropriate as well. For example there is one in a German room which produces very little paper waste, while there are none in the art areas which produce the most paper waste.

AND THE GRAND TOTAL IS...

£2500 (approximately). Although this is a large amount of money going to very good causes it is substantially less than what has been raised in previous years. Statistically it only works out as £1.50 per person. We believe this is due to a 'suppressed' week of events; perhaps because of the presence of Ofsted as well as the lack of Kiss-o-grams?

In The Next Issue; Due Out March 15th

- **MOBILE PHONES:** Should we be able to bring mobile phones to school, and are they actually dangerous?
- **UNIFORM:** We reveal the results of our exclusive survey into what you think should be done with uniform at our school.
- **And Much Much More!!!**

Did Ofsted Read Overmark?

Despite the fact we heard many of you say "if Ofsted want to know what we think, give them a copy of Overmark" we wonder if they actually read it.

In the 6th Form subsection of the Section entitled "Pupil s'attitudes, values and other personal qualities" it says **"Recently the students have initiated a school magazine, which is developing and improving rapidly,"** before we jump to conclusions we have to remember that another paper does exist, although their issues seem to be few and far between.

From what little we know about our rival paper we don't think they were 'student initiated' as the head of English is ultimately responsible for it, and a lot of its team is year 7-8 not 6th form...

It would be interesting to know if they read Overmark, and if they took any notice of our "Investigating Ofsted" article, unfortunately we will never be able to find out and can only guess.



For more details about any of the stories featured in this Issue, or to raise concern about factual errors, or to just make general comments about this paper you can contact us by e-mailing: overmarked@yahoo.com

USE EXTREME CAUTION!!!
This product can cause grievous body harm used in the right way.

THIS PRODUCT MAY CONTAIN TRACES OF NUT.

PLEASE RECYCLE THIS PRODUCT BY PUTTING IT IN A GREEN BIN (IF YOU CAN FIND ONE) OR BY GIVING IT TO SOMEONE ELSE!!!

This unofficial newsletter is produced for pupils by pupils, it does not necessarily reflect the views of Rainham Mark Grammar School's management. The website is also built and maintained by pupils. The makers of this newsletter wish to remain anonymous. Quotes included in this paper are genuine comments from teachers, and in places the 2004 Ofsted report for Rainham Mark Grammar has been quoted. The mobile phone line is managed by Virgin Mobile; and the phone is privately owned by a member of the team who produce Overmark. Texts are charged at the standard network rate, which means texts from another Virgin phone only cost 3p, and calls are also charged at standard rate. Please note that we will not store your number or pass it on to any other person or organisation. Please also note that we will NOT answer any calls to the phone, but you may leave voicemail messages. #0402#070204#001M