

Overmark

An Unofficial Newsletter Produced By Pupils For Pupils.

Farewell Year of...



1999 saw the Kosovo War, the introduction of the single European currency, Star Wars: Episode 1 and Who Wants To Be A Millionaire, and the building of the Millennium Dome. It also saw over 150 children in oversized blazers being waved goodbye to by their mummies outside the RMGS gates.

A lot has changed in the past seven years: a shed and bike rack have been replaced by the shiny new music block, Mr Decker has joined us, seemingly hundreds of science teachers have left us, and those little year 7s have blossomed into big year 13s. Most of them are still clinging on at RMGS too, and as their time here draws to a close, we at on the Overmark team felt it only appropriate to bid them a fond farewell, especially as they have been the source of several of our own reporters.

From the religiously attended General Studies lessons to the mayhem that is charity week, the last few years have been especially packed with memorable moments. The school has recently been invaded by pirates, gangsters moles, and 80's fashion victims, and in true RMGS student fashion charities' bank balances have been the ones to benefit. Buggy Malone, Gizmo, numerous concerts and of course Rock'n'Roll have all starred members of this talented year group, which has also borne many sporting and academic achievements.

But how have they found their time here? Is RMGS really the bed of roses it's cracked up to be? Will it be remembered as the centre of learning and people-moulding that it would like to be, or as a slightly smelly, personality-restricting hole? When asked how they would remember their time here, we received the following responses from a some typical year 13s:

- ♦ "I wish I COULD remember my time at RMGS"
- ♦ "Crazy as f*ck! Yet with some of the most interesting and lovely people you will ever meet! We've gone through a dramatic change from tiny, stereotypical year 7's to amazing individuals!"
- ♦ "There are many reasons I would like to move on and forget RMGS: attempts to control individuality, too much focus on aca-

ademic achievements, routine, routine, routine! And, oh God, early mornings! Who wouldn't want to forget all that?! However there is no way I could not miss RMGS! Not for any geeky, intellectual reasons, but for the people I've met along the way who I don't think I will ever be able to, or want to, forget!"

- ♦ "And lets not forget those few...and I stress FEW... amazing teachers who were crazy, in a good way and are part of the reason I almost feel sad leaving!"
- ♦ "The school tries to turn you into a work machine, the stereotypical grammar school students....doesn't work however! It's all the friends you make and the teachers that are the right balance of 'teacher' and people who are more like friends who can relate to students in a different way to those high up in authority that help you mature and turn you into someone who is ready to tackle 'the after school life.'"

So it would seem that there are, unsurprisingly, mixed reactions to leaving the school. But one this is for sure – it won't be a seven years that will be forgotten!

So all that remains is for Overmark, on behalf of the rest of the school, to wish our leavers the best of luck everywhere they go after RMGS. Here's to the Year of '99 – may they live long and prosper.

Also In This Issue

- **Yes, We're Back!** But, ssssh, don't tell anyone, we're not supposed to be...
- **Healthy Eating:** We investigate the impact and effectiveness of the new policies.
- **Apple Vs Windows:** We look into whether Art is making the right decision.
- As well as **General Studies, News in Brief** and more!

We're Back!

but ...

Who Are We Again?

We're back! Yes, despite hefty opposition from the powers-that-be we have briefly returned, because we couldn't bear it any longer. To be honest we have no permission to be printing and distributing this paper anymore, but that doesn't stop you reading it!

For those of you who don't remember, or who weren't here when Overmark last produced printed copies of its newspaper, Overmark is the schools "underground", newspaper. The school has two newspapers, "Inside Mark", which is run by The English department with volunteers. We are "Overmark", and we operate entirely anonymously, printing more controversial stories aimed at the cynical reader. As regular readers might know, the school banned us after two printed issues - they said we were operating illegally. They "caught" one of our reporters and threatened them with all kinds of unpleasant things if Overmark continued "illegally".

Despite repeated efforts to get the paper endorsed again, and numerous compromises on our part the school still refuses to allow us to print papers. We have continued online still fighting for the same causes, as not even Senior Management can control the internet...

And as for this issue? Basically, currently our directorial team is comprised of Year 13s, and seeing as we're leaving the school in just a few days, (or perhaps we've already left, it depends when you get to read this) we don't have much to lose anymore! We felt we couldn't leave without producing one final issue together before handing over to the new editors for next year.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we've enjoyed making it (although it gets you into far less trouble than us). As usual you can get in touch with us about any of the issues raised in this paper by e-mailing us at overmarked@yahoo.com or by visiting our website, <http://www.overmark.vze.com>.

What you've missed...

For those who haven't been keeping up to date with our website, we thought we'd let you know what you've been missing by quickly listing some of our favourite online-only articles.

Most memorable there was the letter from Mr Lydon, this broached many issues within the school, from management, to respect to healthy eating. In fact his letter was so memorable we tried to get it printed despite being banned at the time— just because we thought you should read it.

We've looked at issues such as the new uniform cards, followed up our investigations into the school toilets, and investigated what Science College status really means.

As well as all that we've reported on current affairs within the school, including the renaming of the buildings, the new rules on food, the snow days and pirate day...

On top of all this we've added some great new features to the site, including the ability to leave comments on our articles.

So don't miss out anymore! Join our mailing list or subscribe to our RSS feed to ensure you never miss an article again.

Investigating:

HEALTHY EATING

With 'fat tests' being introduced into primary schools, and the government taking its lead from TV chefs, one might well be depressed at the state that our diets have fallen into, whether by our own lax attitudes or otherwise. Fortunately for RMGS students, our beloved school is once again leagues ahead of the rest of the country with its Healthy School Scheme. But is it actually working?

Since its introduction some time ago, the school has slowly but surely moved from almost solely 'chips and chocolate' into its present 'salad days.' Presented with some of the fiercest opposition that the school council system has ever managed to muster, coupled with the subversive yet idle mutterings of a good proportion of the evidently nugatory student population, the shift has occurred with virtually no obstructions.

It is now being billed as such a success that even the national media have shown an interest, with several television crews having visited the school since its implementation. Overmark, the school-banned student-run opinion outlet, wonders whether this was to be attributed to the school's encouragement of the media's use to promote free speech. Or perhaps yet another opportunity for RMGS to cast itself in a rather ill-fitting spotless light? Readers are invited, by us at least, to make up your own minds.

Although 'healthiness' is a rather abstract and difficult to quantify concept, it may be noticed that the average width of students does not seem to have decreased all that noticeably, yet the length of the queue for cooked food during morning break, when deep fried cholesterol is still available, has grown somewhat. The healthy vending machines now selling water and Disney marketed raisins (perhaps a cunning ruse designed to encourage our preschool students to eat them) are no longer thronged with people throughout the day, but the sixth form breakfast bar is.

It has long been the case that one can lead a horse to water, but cannot make it drink, especially if there is cola on offer elsewhere. Rather than replacing the 'bad' for the 'good', many simply visit the canteen at break instead. All the while the offer of other, less healthy foodstuffs is available, many, especially the rebels among us, will inevitably choose those over the encouraged healthy options. Of course, we wouldn't advocate the school cutting out the 'junk' altogether – it would be another gross misuse of its power and fly directly in the face of everything we at OM have ever stood for.

So what now then? Pro-choice. As unsatisfactory as it may seem, a school that so clearly wants to nurture freethinking individuals must allow an element of choice, if only to separate the wheat from the chaff, or put another way, the acne-free future of tomorrow from those destined for angina in their mid-30s.

Wait! There's more!

If we're honest, this issue was produced in a bit of a rush, and as a result there are a number of stories that never made it to print. These include an article on Respect within the school, as well as commentary on the last-day stunts and pranks, not to mention some of our regular features such as "Words of Wisdom". These are however all going to be available online soon!

Apple Mac Vs Windows

With the incredible popularity of the iPod, and software such as iTunes and the iTunes Music Store becoming market leaders it seems that Apple, the company behind all this is reaching new-found levels of success, and demand for their own brand of computers and operating system (Mac OS) has never been higher... But not at RMGS...

Last year when the new music block opened, the Music Department ditched their Apples in favour of Dell computers running Windows XP and now we have learnt that the Art Department may be about to follow suit.

Currently Art has quite a few Apple computers, many of which are piled up and rarely used, one person we spoke to commented "its criminal that such excellent computers are being allowed to rot", but are they lying discarded because they are Apples, or because of a reluctance from Art to embrace the possibilities of computer-aided design?

Art has most certainly made full use of its computers in the past, Mr Lydon was a keen Mac user and oversaw the introduction of computers into art with open arms. Art was in fact the first department to run a wireless network, and amongst the first to request an interactive whiteboard (although they still haven't received one). So what has changed to allow these computers to now lay unused? The computers are still there, the software is still there, only the staff have changed.

But what has this got to do with Windows? Well, the plan as we understand it is to replace Art's Apples with Dell machines running Windows XP—like the rest of the school. On the face of it, this would seem a good idea, after all consistency can help both with teaching and learning ICT skills, but we spoke to one expert on Apples and they disagreed... [The full interview is available online]

OM: In your opinion, what makes Apple computers especially suited to Art and Music applications within school?

Expert: they have long been associated with the creative industries, and most graphics houses and music studios use Macs exclusively. The main reasons for art use tend to revolve around the fact that (a) Apple created desktop publishing with the LaserWriter printer and their DTP package, and (b) Macs have a hugely complex screen

setup to ensure what you see on the screen is exactly what comes out of the printer.

OM: Clearly the Apple OS does look and feel different to the Windows environment, would that not be a problem for students to move between the two systems where Art and Music used Mac but other subjects including ICT prefer a Windows system?

Expert: i would argue that students should be given as broad an overview of OSs as possible - so they should be using Windows, Mac OS X AND Linux on a regular basis. This will put them in the best position to make an informed choice on what they do or do not wish to use, and will give them more skills for use in the workplace or at university.

OM: Music have already ditched Apples, and Art we hear is soon to follow, do you fear this will impact the use of IT within these subjects by limiting the power and effectiveness of the computers?

Expert: yes. i do worry about that. music not so much, as there is good MIDI software for Windows and the music department have the most powerful computers in the school aside from servers, but art will struggle without 1.8 gamma displays (Mac-speak, there) and (if it turns out to be so) sub-standard computers without enough RAM or processor power. I also worry about the logistics of storing 70MB PhotoShop files on the main school network as opposed to a dedicated art network. You have to think of the students who will go out into the publishing industry not having a clue about how to work the industry standard.

With this in mind we do have to ask why are Art moving from Apple to Windows? One source told us it was because Adobe PhotoShop Elements, one of the main pieces of software used on the computers will no longer be available for Apple. This however is wrong, a quick visit to Adobe's website tells us that, packages such as Photoshop are aimed at Apple first, and Windows second because of the use of Apples in professional design environments.

If the Art Department are unwilling to embrace ICT within art, surely we should at least maintain the computers better suited for the job, rather than wasting more money setting up less adequate computers only to be left unused as well?

General Studies: Why Waste Our Time?

There is one subject which, on the mention of its name, teachers and sixth formers alike begin to experience a rise of emotions inside. To some it is a waste of time, to others an important subject which should be respected, in the timetable it is simply 'General Studies'.

For those who don't know General Studies is supposed to teach you about a wide range of things, a sixth form equivalent of Ethics. You begin studying it in year 12 and choose to either continue in year 13 or change to Critical Thinking.

The problem lies in the fact that most students see General Studies as a waste of time, and this is not without reason; most universities don't count General Studies towards your total in UCAS. What, they argue, is the reason of studying a subject when it won't help towards university?

To make matters worse General Studies suffers from a severe case of bad management, from rooms changing at the last minute, classes changing or teachers changing. Despite only being for one or two periods a week it causes the most problems on the timetable.

Time after time students have been directed to wrong rooms, or been in the wrong class, because the timetables have been wrong

"Time spent in General Studies is time I could have spent doing work for proper subjects"
-Sixth Form Student

"General Studies is a pointless waste of time"
-Sixth Form Student

"Inefficient organisation with incompetent teaching"
-Sixth Form Student

or hard to read. This isn't helped when new teachers are brought in, some classes having more than 4 teachers in one year. We have also had instances where the teachers have flat out told us they don't know what to teach us, or what we should be being taught, this is not what should be happening in an A Level class.

On top of all of this, those students who opted for the Critical Thinking instead of General Studies are allowed to enter the General Studies exam as well—without having had any lessons—with teachers saying there was nothing you needed to learn for general studies anyway. One student commented, "I've actually been to all my [General Studies] lessons, and still not learnt anything in two years."

Most students freely admit to skipping General Studies lessons, some claiming to have been to none since the beginning of year 12, and until the lessons are taken seriously by staff that organise and take the lessons this trend will continue.

What do you think? Should we still take General Studies? Let us know...

NEWS IN BRIEF ...

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE?

In a recent evaluation the school did not meet the full requirements of the new Investors In People standard. We have been assured that this is not unusual because of the new criteria of the standard. It does however mean the school is placed in a 6 month probationary period in which it must show it is making headway to meet the full requirements.

We have been told that the school failed on minor issues, including confusion about the role of middle management, and inconsistencies in the induction of support staff.

CHANGE OF TIMES REJECTED

Overmark has learnt that proposals to change the structure of the school day have been rejected. The plans, which have been adopted on a trial basis by some other schools, would have seen non-teaching time reduced in order to fit in structured activities towards the end of the day.

According to our sources these plans were not welcomed by many teachers who felt it would not have left sufficient time at registration for pastoral care.

OVERMARK GOT HAXORD!

We apologise for any problems you may have had with the site in the last few weeks, unbeknown to us the database which powers this site had been hacked causing none of the site content to display correctly, and users of Microsoft Internet Explorer may have experienced problems with their browser crashing when trying to view the site. We have fixed the exploit they abused, and changed all our passwords, so hopefully it won't happen again...

YEAR 13 PROM

A dedicated team of highly organised year 13s has been beavering away preparing this year's prom. Despite many complaints about the price, the venue and the team members themselves the event looks to be a roaring success, and certainly not something to be missed.

Just to confirm some details, the prom is open to all students in Year 13 as well as staff and will take place on August 24th at the St George Hotel in Rochester. Tickets are on sale at lunchtime at a price of £25 for students and £10 for teachers.

You can get more details from their website:
<http://rmgs-prom.blogspot.com>

WHITEBOARDS WHITEBOARDS EVERYWHERE...

In one final push this summer all remaining rooms should be fitted with Interactive Whiteboards. We have reported before on the benefits of these when we spoke to the first user of them at RMGS—Mr Riordan.

Since then Interactive Whiteboards have really taken off, and our school will be joining many others to have them in every single room. Obviously this has huge potential for integrating ICT in all subjects, but the implementation of this will not be without resistance from some subjects and teachers.

WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE



THE YEAR 13 DIRECTORS OF OVERMARK WANT TO KNOW WHO THEY ARE?

VOTE NOW ON OUR
WEBSITE TO FIND OUT
WHO HAS BEEN
BEHIND THE LAST
THREE YEARS OF
OVERMARK!

[HTTP://WWW.OVERMARK.VZE.COM](http://www.overmark.vze.com)

In The Next Issue....

→ **Will there be a next issue?** The editorial team responsible for this issue have now left, but a new team is right behind rearing to go. Will they dare to produce more paper issues? You'll just have to watch this space...

We fight for freedom of speech, and search for the truth behind school propaganda.

If this is sounding like the kind of thing you would like to be involved in, then let us know - we are always looking for new reporters. You can contact us by e-mailing overmarked@yahoo.com

If you have been affected by any of the issues in this paper then phone our dedicated psychiatric line and leave us a message, 07952 273911.



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