St John Fisher News

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A change for the better

Each week I receive many invitations in the mail to complete surveys and almost as many reports based on those surveys. Most are ignored as there is not enough time in the day to spend completing them. But this week one took my eye: it concerns the results of a national survey of teenagers on whether or not they smoke, drink alcohol or have ever taken drugs. Until the smoking ban the first of these was always an issue in schools and most adults remember tales of being 'caught smoking'. Our experience is that this is now very rare and many students shy away from smoking for social reasons – it is frowned on – and because it is expensive. Most are also very aware of the health risks and this too influences their decision not to smoke. The survey agrees with this and shows that only about 25% nationally say they have ever smoked, which may seem quite high but is under half the figure in 1982.

I was surprised to see the same fall for both 'drinking alcohol in the last week' and 'took drugs in the last month/year/ever': all of them show a continuing fall.

We so often hear criticism of teenagers that this is some welcome good news. Things are not perfect and there is further to go, but the signs are very encouraging.

Another success

Last night's charity concert was another success and greatly enjoyed by those who attended. If you were among the audience thank you for supporting the students. We were pleased to welcome students from St Thomas More School for this event. Both their students and ours had practised hard for this event and this was evident in the quality performances. Congratulations to all the performers and thank you for raising funds for Cancer Research UK. When we know the final total we will announce it in the newsletter.

Focus Days

Next week we have the final three Focus Days, on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. An awful lot of planning has gone into these days and I hope that the students find them enjoyable and beneficial. My thanks to the staff for organising and planning them.

All students should know about what they are doing each day and where they need to report first thing each morning. If anyone is unsure you must find out the day before and not turn up hoping you have what you need. It shouldn't need saying, but Friday is a normal school day and all students should come ready.

Academic News

Throughout the year we send reports home with details of how students are progressing, usually following one of our Assessment Points. It is pleasing to see that there is a general and steady improvement in performance. Year 11 are already on course to achieve record results this summer and although the exams are all completed a group of them returned last week to do an additional course on Health & Nutrition: as one of the major supermarkets says, Every Little Helps!

Year 10 are already on course to match these results and we are working with many other schools nationally to share tips and advice on supporting them to do their best. These schools meet monthly in London and it was my turn to attend the meeting last Friday. As well as the usual advice for GCSE there was much available now for both Key Stage 3 and the Sixth Form so we hope to trial some of this next term.

Ofsted are continually changing their focus when inspecting schools and have recently decided that as well as asking about the performance of students who have ever received free school meals, they are now going to track the progress of students who achieved Level 5 in primary school. This is something that we already do but don't record separately: in future we will need to.

Since January we have been doing some extra work with Year 7 students who did not achieve Level 4 in either English or Maths in primary school. The final group are working with Mr Rawlinson at the moment. We have decided on a different approach to this work next year so that the students remain in class and receive support throughout the year and not just for a short period. This has involved an increase in staffing and time for English and Maths but we feel sure that it will benefit the students involved.

Sean Hayes

Word of the Week:

~~ Antithesis ~~

The direct opposite

Speakers for Schools

The 2012 Olympic Games held in London, represented our country in such a positive light. Thousands of volunteers and technicians worked towards the remarkable ceremony which astonished the entire world. I am proud to say that Mr Shepperd, one of the technicians responsible for the Opening Ceremony of the 2012 Olympics, visited our school last week and gave us an inspiring and motivational talk. I was pleased to see how he developed his interest from organising stage lights in a theatre from the age of 16, to bringing together one of the most outstanding events the UK ever held.

On behalf of the school would like to thank Katherine Ager for arranging this visit and encouraging the younger students to strive higher to achieve the greatest outcomes. *Ewelina Strug R6*

Last week we had a special visitor whose identity remained a secret until his appearance. Surprisingly, it was Mr Piers Shepperd. It was incredible to find out how much work went into that one wonderful ceremony, witnessed by the world. Before last week I often wondered who could possibly stand behind such a creative event and all the work that has been put into the ceremony. What struck me about Mr Shepperd was that, at my age he was never sure what his career would be. However, he worked hard doing what he loved and he became the technical director of events such as the Olympics. The opportunities will be there, as long as you work hard.

Dominika Ciach B8

Exam Success

Congratulations go to Genista Tate-Alexander on achieving a First Class Honours Degree in French and European Literature from Royal Holloway University, London.

Genista was a student here from 2002 to 2009. It also happens that Genista's mother works in our Admin department and is obviously a very proud mum. Congratulations to you both! *Mr Reilly*

Visit to France

Last week two of our students, Jordy Link and Markus Balogun, joined students from Jack Hunt School on a visit to France. Here's what Markus had to say about the experience.

Of all the school trips I've been on in my life, this one beats all the rest by far. From my view, being in Paris was one of the biggest parts of my art project, we visited places like the Palace of Versailles outside Paris which was incredible. There were some paintings there I'd never thought I'd see in my life. We also visited the Louvre, the Eiffel Tower and many other famous buildings and monuments.

For the people who went for the French language side of the trip, I thought it was useful because they started to pick up French phrases and sayings. Which brings me to the fact there is no better way to learn French than to be in Paris itself. Paris was amazing!

Markus Balogun

The students are pictured above, waiting to board the Eurostar to Paris. *Ms Roberts*