

St Mark's Coptic Orthodox College
From the Head of College.
Victor Branson

Dear St Mark's Family.

Good News:
Higher School Certificate.

Congratulations on the truly outstanding results of our year 12 Graduates. The **Mathematics Results** led the charge with **27% of our students scoring the top band 6**, placing the College 45th in the state out of 900 schools in Mathematics. This result put the College above many high fee schools including Shore, St Ignatius', Trinity Grammar, MLC Burwood, Canberra Grammar, Loreto Normanhurst, Knox Grammar and Abbotsleigh among many others.

In **English** the results were excellent, possibly the best ever in the history of the School. Seven students achieved band 6 results and the average in Advanced English was 6 points above the state average.

The outcome of these results can be seen in the UAI's of our students. **14 of the 55 students scored above 90 UAI : a percentage of 25. This is more than double the state average.**

Three students were named in the All Rounder's list for getting band 6 results in every subject. They are Dina Ibrahim, Michael Iskander, and Christine Said.

Overall the School came **79th out of over 650** schools in the achievement of marks over 90 compared with the number of examinations attempted by our students.

The School Certificate:

Once again the Maths Results were outstanding. St Mark's gained **double the average A results with 27% scoring in the A range compared with 14% in the rest of the state.** The other outstanding results were in **Arabic and Music with 38% of our students scoring A in Arabic compared with 16% across the state and 50% in Music compared with 22% across the state.** In addition the results in **Science were very good with 53% scoring in the top two bands compared with 37% across the State.**

In the Humanities subjects the results were average and more work needs to be done to ensure that these literacy -based areas improve. I encourage parents to turn off the television and playstation during the holidays and get the children to read many books.

General Observations:

I have just completed my first term as Head of St Mark's College.

I thank the community for their warm welcome and take this opportunity to wish all of you a Happy Christmas in the knowledge that our Lord was born In Bethlehem as the Word of God incarnate to bring us God's rich blessing of forgiveness and grace through his life, death and resurrection. We rejoice in the hope of eternal blessing and live according to Jesus' example of compassion to the poor, the outcast, and the

oppressed. We live in the knowledge that to forgive is divine just as God forgives us through the sacrifice of his only Son.

I have enjoyed my time here. The College has many strengths. The great majority of students are working hard. Indeed the **willingness to learn** surpasses any school I have been involved in. Above all, I have appreciated the **warmth of the students from Kindergarten to year 12**. I also commend the strength of the Coptic community and the concentration on academic success for the purpose of producing highly effective citizens and families. I also commend the staff which is dedicated to the students' academic and social welfare. I have come to love the school very quickly while learning of its cultural differences. Obviously, I come from a very different background but my world has been opened up by contact with this distinctive culture. I am very impressed with the commitment of the children to Jesus and to their church. At a time when many Western churches have faded and are facing dwindling congregations, the Coptic Church stands as beacon of light for the way it passes on its traditions to the younger generations. All this is good.

However, there are some things that need to change within our community. I do not think that these are simply matters of my personal taste and the issue of cultural differences.

I appreciate that parents are anxious for their children. My wife and I have three boys who are now grown up and we have been through the education process from every angle, as a parent, a teacher and a Principal. The vast majority of parents are commendable for their support and encouragement of teachers. However, I am concerned about the level of acrimony that a small minority of parents express about their child's progress. I fear for the staff as they are far too often confronted by parents who use aggressive and sometimes simply bad language and behaviour in their dealings with staff. While I recognise that we all make mistakes, there is no place for abuse in the correction of these issues. I would appeal to all of you to use moderation and Christian principles of forgiveness and empathy in dealing with perceived problems in the classroom or in the playground.

Personally, I have not experienced this kind of behaviour but some of my staff are being harassed, (there is no other word for it) in the performance of their duties. Please remember that we are brothers and sisters in Christ and we need to love our neighbours as ourselves, and even love our enemies. So I appeal to you to attempt to put yourselves in the teacher's shoes. Teaching is a very rewarding profession, not financially but in terms of job satisfaction. However, the stress of confrontation with the small minority of parents who are unbalanced in their approach to issues, who do not know the full story, who only hear what their children have to say and jump to conclusions without giving the teachers a fair hearing is too much to bear. I have been a Head for over 10 years and believe that the teachers here bear a very big burden. It is a double load: they know that our parents want the best education possible; that is good, but the teachers should not have to put up with verbal abuse. Please be calm and understanding when you bring up an issue. In my limited wisdom, I have learned that there are two sides to every story. At least two! Furthermore there are some courtesies which should be understood in this kind of Independent school. As adults we should set an example to our children by refraining from talking during speeches by the Priests, the Head of College or by those in charge of a gathering. I understand that this is a cultural difference but I cannot be reconciled to this kind of poor behaviour. Also, I have observed that the

boys in our community are far too often argumentative and, especially with the women teachers, defiant and objectionable. Please parents, teach your boys good manners and obedience. Recently, I spoke about this at the year 6 farewell luncheon. To my surprise I got a round of applause from the mothers present. I must have struck a chord!

Some days later I read to the school assembly the story of Jesus as a twelve year old boy leaving his parents frantic (not knowing where he was) to discuss theology with the Rabbis. His parents were angry with him and he said he was going about his Father's business. They accepted that but the story goes on to say that from then on he was obedient to them. We should be teaching our boys the same thing. I will be speaking further about this early next year.

In addition, I was disappointed at the Junior School Presentation Night to observe that many parents left the assembly after their child had received an award and did not stay for other children to be congratulated and to listen to our year two musicians. We are looking at changing this for next year and I would appeal to all parents to respect this as a community event. We must gather for mutual blessing under God. We must not let our own selfish priorities determine the flavour of the community. We would be disgusted if a soccer player left the field never to return after he had scored a goal!

There is another serious issue we must grasp: **The payment of fees.** Once again the expression of selfish interests is contrary to the health of the community. While I respect the fact that a few parents are in financial difficulties, the extent of our bad debts is far greater. It is inconceivable that 14% of our parents are unable to pay the already very low fees.

There is a culture of avoidance and in some cases dishonesty reminiscent of another world in the failure to pay debts. The school has to run as a business in the sense that I have to pay my teachers, the electricity bill and so on. Your electricity company will turn off the power if you do not pay the bill. It is a fundamental indecency and deceit to avoid paying since this puts the burden on other parents to pay your bills. How unfair! How are we to expand, buy land and so on if we have such a high rate of debts. The industry standard is less than 2%. 14% is outrageous!

Now to more pleasant matters.

I urge all parents to assist their children in the holidays and at weekends to ensure that our students read books. Literacy is the foundation of all education. The truly educated person is a wide and discerning reader. These days even the Maths and Physics courses depend more than ever on an ability to read English correctly. I commend the reading of the great tradition of English novels, History books, biographies of great women and men, works of Science, Technology, and Art and Architecture.

Finally, may you all have a blessed holiday and enjoy the feast of Christ's birth. I reflect on the grace and benefits that have come to the world through Jesus. In the first century after his birth whole countries were beginning to be transformed, including Egypt with the Gospel transmitted by the patron of our school St Mark. In addition, St Thomas went to India and the good news was heard there just St Paul was preaching throughout the eastern Mediterranean in the midst of the peaceful times that Augustus had brought to the Roman world. As an Ancient Historian, I marvel that the turbulent times of the Roman Republic had passed and that peace

was widespread in the world. Of course there were hard times to come for the Christians and it would be many years before persecution ceased and Christian could practice their faith in the open. The Coptic Church has kept alive the memory of the great Fathers and Martyrs of the church and as we live in times of rising terrorism we remember their faith and example.

God bless and I look forward to seeing you in the New Year.

May the Peace of Christ be with you.

Victor Branson

21/12/2007

Key Dates for January and early February 2008

30/1/2008 Year 7 commences with Year 10 Peer Support Leaders

31/1/2008 Term commences for years 1 to 12

4/2/2008 Kindergarten Commences: K indy and Year 7 Parent Orientation 6.30 PM.

New Parent welcome 7.30 PM

6/2/08 Year 7 Camp departs

7/2/08 P and F New Parent Barbecue 6.00pm.

11/2/08 Year 12 Parent/Teacher Evening.

11/2/08 Junior School Swim School