



Established 1897

RONDEBOSCH BOYS' HIGH SCHOOL

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Dear 2009 Matric Parents

Some time has passed since the release of the 2009 Matric results, which were notable for a low Physical Science average and, at RBHS, an absence of A symbols. We have a broader understanding of this situation now, and felt it appropriate to inform parents and pupils about this.

Background

Our research indicates that the results we had seen in Physical Science were shared by many other schools in the Western Cape. Almost all schools had final averages which were lower than in their Mock exams, and almost all had seen a marked decline in A symbols. This was confirmed by the overall WCED Science results: the pass rate declined from 70% in 2008 to 50% in 2009, and A symbols declined from 3,8% of the total to 1,5% of the total who wrote.

In the country as a whole, only 0,45% of candidates achieved A symbols.

Action we have taken

1. RBHS requested that the WCED Director General, Ms Penny Vinjevold, conduct a special investigation into factors that led to this outcome. We also asked that we be allowed to view the scripts of those pupils who had shown the largest declines in mark from the September Mock results to the final result. The investigation was conducted by Mr Brian Schreuder, the Deputy Director General, and our request to view scripts as a School was turned down.
2. We later asked that all RBHS scripts be re-marked – not just those of pupils who had paid for this to happen. We offered to bear the cost of this exercise as a School, as we felt that all pupils had been done a disservice in this matter. This request has been refused. We have been told that in total 71 RBHS Science scripts were re-marked, and none obtained any change of symbol. SACS experienced exactly the same kind of re-mark outcome as we did – no symbol changes.
3. Numerous schools attended a special meeting in connection with the Science results called by the WCED on 6 February, which was addressed by Mr Brian Schreuder. Westerford, Bishops, Wynberg, RBHS and Herschel were all represented on that day and all expressed surprise and confusion at the outcomes, especially as they played out among the top pupils. A few of the other schools present had very high failure rates in Physical Science – something we fortunately did not experience. Mr Schreuder did point out that as the NSC was a new system, we could expect some outcome statistical fluctuation until norms had been established for each subject.

4. At this meeting, it became apparent that the Science papers had been marked strictly according to a tight memorandum, and that this was the cause of the drop in marks. We were told that Umalusi had adjusted raw marks upwards, but would not adjust beyond a certain point. It became clear to us that the raw exam script marks were very low before adjustment, and also that re-marks were not going to make much difference, as the same team which had originally marked the scripts was busy with the re-marks at that stage.

5. At this meeting, we asked Mr Schreuder to relay our request to Umalusi that all Science marks should be re-adjusted nationally, but a realistic assessment leads us to believe that this will not happen. Media scrutiny of this issue has abated, and the authorities would not want to re-open the matter and invite a further erosion of confidence in the examining process. We have, nevertheless, approached Mr Schreuder to inform us of the outcome of this request. We have also asked the MEC for Education, Mr Donald Grant, to intervene in this matter as we felt we had been unfairly treated.

As a School we are deeply disappointed at the outcome as we feel that our 2009 Science pupils have been negatively affected in this matter. We are also concerned at the deleterious effect that this kind of extreme variation has upon our current Science pupils and their teachers. We feel that we have exhausted all avenues in trying to deal with this matter, and are also clear in our minds that this result came about because of factors which were beyond our control as a School.

Yours sincerely



M Barker
Headmaster



CJ Wren-Sargent
Deputy Principal: Academics

