

'Behind the Scenes at Ark Putney Academy': A guide to The Sixth Form

Behind the Scenes at Ark Putney Academy': A guide to applications and what Ark Putney has to offer 'Behind the Scenes at Ark Putney Academy' is a series of blog posts written by Sarah Sterne, a parent and governor at our school. Sarah writes from a parent's perspective about the challenges in selecting a Secondary School, getting past the jargon of new progress measures and finding the right learning community environment to suit a child's individual needs.

Post 4: The Sixth Form

When choosing a secondary school, one factor to consider is whether the school has a sixth form and what that sixth form looks like. Although making a decision about Post 16 Education may seem a long way off, it is at least worth knowing what the options are and how they differ. I was fortunate to be invited to meet the APA Sixth Form staff and students to find out more about what is offered.

APA's Sixth Form

Ark Putney Academy's Sixth Form has inclusive aims; offering both academic A-level and vocational BTEC qualifications, with a minimum entry level of 5 GCSEs from 'A*' to 'C'. This goal is to provide the greatest possible future opportunities for the students. There is also an opportunity for those that need to retake English or Maths GCSE, since the school recognises how critically important these qualifications are.

What courses are offered?

Most students start by choosing four A-Level subjects (or a BTEC alongside an A-level) but many choose to reduce that to three subjects over the course of the two years. The sizes of the classes are generally small, ranging currently from two to twenty one. The students are put into tutor groups and each group has two tutors to mentor them. The students have targets in all their chosen subject areas and these are checked every three weeks to ensure that they do not fall behind. Expectations are high in terms of the commitment that the students need to show to their subjects but they are well supported in this endeavour. One student I spoke to said, *"The school is a good environment if you want to get your work done and go to University."* Another said that she benefitted from the small class sizes and individual attention. The students also commented on the help they were offered in terms of time management and workload.

What does the Sixth Form Community Experience?

"Every one of our Sixth Formers is expected to be a role model in the school community. That doesn't just mean putting their utmost into all their academic activities: that means demonstrating exemplary behaviour around the school; embracing all the enrichment activities on offer; supporting younger students; and proactively engaging with the world of work and future study" Matthew Neuberger - Head of Sixth Form

The community ethos of the main school is reflected in the Sixth Form. The students are in houses and are expected to be role models. The Sixth Form has a strong student voice. Leadership through clubs and societies is offered, along with Prefect and Head Boy/Girl opportunities. As in the main school, the Sixth Form staff value the relationships that they can build with families to support the students. Students make a gradual transition towards more independent learning over the course of the two years, differing from a college which for a student may mean a more sudden change of learning culture.

The sixth form students have excellent facilities available to them including their own common room. They benefit from the outstanding facilities that the school is fortunate to have such as a modern spacious art room and a cutting edge professional sports hall.

In keeping with its inclusive approach, financial support may be awarded by the school upon entry to the Sixth Form through scholarships and bursaries (dependent upon GCSE results and/or financial hardship). The Ark Network is also able to award generous bursaries upon entry to university (dependent upon significant contribution and/or financial hardship).

What about the results/admissions to university?

APA's Sixth Form came in the top 10% for value-added in Psychology and English in 2016 and has a strong record in admissions to Oxbridge (Oxford or Cambridge) (53 students to date). The school is equally proud of its track record of admissions to the Russell Group Universities. The Russell Group are the 24 leading research universities in Britain.

There are many individual success stories to cite but one that has touched me is that of Hayley Belgrave who left APA with an 'A*' in History, 'A' in English Literature and 'A' in Sociology. She then went on to study Modern History and Politics at Manchester University. Her ambition is to become a human rights barrister after learning about atrocities in the Rwandan genocide.



Another student who has inspired me is Maan Al-Yasiri. Maan came to the UK from Syria where his family were living to escape political persecution. As a teenager, he lodged with a family in London and attended APA's Sixth Form. Maan studied hard, received support from APA and he is now studying History and Politics at Oxford University and you may have seen photos of him in APA's advertising on the back of local buses! Click [here](#) to read more about him.

Sixth Form Society

The Sixth Form Society meets every Monday. The students are visited by a range of inspirational speakers and are encouraged to get involved in questions and debates. In 2016, following a visit from the American Ambassador, a group of students from APA was invited to meet President Obama during his visit to the UK ([Read about this in the Wandsworth Guardian here](#)). More recently, Secretary of State, Justine Greening was welcomed by the school and took questions on key issues such as Grammar Schools and lowering the age of voting to sixteen ([Read about this in Wandsworth SW18 here](#)).

APA clearly has much to offer it's Sixth Form students beyond A-Levels. During my visit, it struck me that the Sixth Form are key members of the school community and are very well supported.