

April 2024

Dear Parents/Carers

I hope that you had an enjoyable Easter break with your family. It is the final term of the academic year, but nonetheless, a very important one. I hope that you enjoy reading this month's newsletter.

Catholic Life of the School

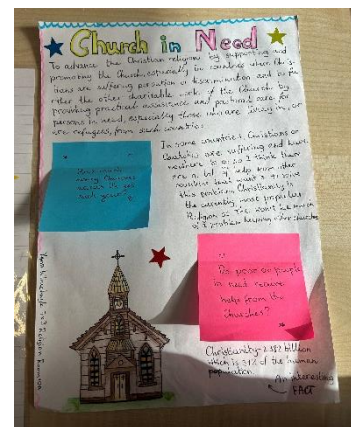
- *Year of Prayer 2024.* As part of the 'Year of Prayer' dedication from Pope Francis before the Synod, Yr7 have been creating a Chapel display that will help students to understand what the year is all about. The Yr7 GIFT team are also planning their form time liturgy with the focus on The Lord's Prayer, the Our Father. Taught by Jesus, this prayer can help us all in times of need as well as connect us more closely to God.
- *GIFT Team Focus.* As we are now in the final term there are new GIFT team themes which we advertise throughout the term. On Monday the Yr10 GIFT team are focusing on the Live Simply Award/CAFOD, on Tuesday the Yr8 GIFT team focus on Pupil Formation, on Wednesday the Yr9 GIFT team focus on Student Leadership and on Friday our Yr7



GIFT team focus on the Faith in Action Award. These themes promote different aspects of student leadership within the Catholic life of the school. Each GIFT Team has a focus for the summer term. As always, new members are welcome. As part of our connection to the local parish, each Wednesday at breaktime Sister Rosaline will

lead 'Time out with God' which is a special voluntary liturgy that takes place in the chapel with Sr Rosaline. This has been well attended and we encourage everyone to attend at least once per term.

- *Global Learning.* Yr7 are currently studying the newly written curriculum "To know you more clearly". Our focus for this term has been to produce a group presentation and charity campaign for Aid to the Church in Need. Yr7 have been outstanding in delivering hard hitting campaigns, raising the profile on persecution around the world and producing excellent ways we can make a difference such as prayer, petitions and charity events.



- *Yr7 Curriculum.* To support RE in their evaluation of this newly written curriculum, the Teaching and Learning team observed four Yr7 lessons and I am delighted to report that the feedback was

fantastic. An ambitious curriculum is being delivered and is reflected in the fact the students were able to demonstrate a depth of knowledge through evaluation and analysis of the units' key topics. The 'Big Question' guided the units and allowed for a very developed understanding across all the units delivered so far. Highly accurate use of key concepts and instance by staff to link to sources of authority. Staff were knowledgeable and it was evident that high quality CPD was at the core of the departments planning.

- *Careers in RE.* To support our students in their future careers the RE department planned and developed a careers lesson. Using the CAFOD game 'FLOOD' students had to work in teams to make quick decisions to save lives in a 'flood'. They had to manage funds and make strategic decisions. This demonstrated that by studying RE and being introduced to global learning the students can build on their transferable skills. At the end of the lesson students looked at roles working for CAFOD, with jobs in the UK and around the world. This broadened their understanding of how charities operate to help others.
- *Update on Lenten Walk.* I am proud to announce that The Big Lent Walk 2024 was a huge success! Together as a school community, we've raised an incredible **£884.25!** Thank you for your generous donations supporting CAFOD in their fight against poverty. Let's keep walking towards a brighter future together! A massive thanks to Mrs Jinks who organised [and participated 😊] in the 'Walk'.
- *Yr11 Revision.* The Easter holiday gave the students time to revise the more challenging evaluation topics. The engagement of the students was strong as shown by the RE staff receiving practice question answers from students who were working at home. The RE staff were very proud of their efforts. Again, any student wishing to send questions for marking, need topics explaining, or simply need to ask their RE teacher a question, please contact your teacher via TEAMS.



Educating and Safeguarding our Yr9 Students on 'Exploitation'

We live in a world where children are exploited in a number of ways. Sadly, our great students are not immune to this possibility and as a school that prides itself on a holistic education, we seek opportunities to educate on this 'real' issue our students may face in their future. Last week Yr9 students enjoyed a live performance from 'Oddarts' theatre group who delivered an interactive theatre performance and workshop using specialist facilitators to explore key issues around exploitation and serious youth violence. The aims of the session were to increase awareness and recognise warning signs for exploitation/grooming, reduce the risk of violence and harmful behaviours, and explore safety and prevention strategies including how to get help. Students took part in discussion exercises and engagement with actors in order to search for solutions. Following on from this, students enjoyed a post-performance discussion to explore triggers, warning signs and signposting to support services. The actors were impressed and commented on how wonderful the students were "*showing great maturity in their questioning and answers and their behaviour was superb.*" Well done to Yr9 and thanks to Mrs Taylor, our PSHE co-ordinator, for organising.

Yr11 Update

As I write this it is only a few days away from the official start of the GCSE exams. I am very proud of my great staff here who have all '*gone the extra mile*' in the true spirit of the 'St Damian's Way' to prepare them to be successful. I am equally delighted that the vast majority of students have responded well to this genuine support. I hope that you get what you deserve on results day in August. A few updates for your perusal.

- ✓ *Easter Revision:* Feedback indicated this was a huge success. The maturity of the students who attended bodes well for their results in August. In a recent assembly, I shared the many positive teacher comments.
- ✓ *Intervention before exams:* We have continued after school revision sessions over the past few weeks but a new after school intervention schedule will be issued to students for when the exams start.
- ✓ *Independent learning:* It is important your children continue to work hard at home, follow a routine and keep the momentum going. From experience, before you know it, 'the exams are over'.
- ✓ *Expectations:* Our expectations of students behaviour and following the rules over the next few months will continue. This includes, for example, punctuality, no jewellery and wearing the correct uniform.
- ✓ *Attendance.* As I have said before, there is a strong correlation between attendance and attainment. In essence, poor or irregular attendance results in lower GCSE outcomes. The aim must be 100% attendance.
- ✓ *Leavers Mass:* The date has yet to be confirmed. Five years ago students had a welcome Mass and it is fitting that they have a leavers Mass. Watch this space!
- ✓ *Study Leave:* There is no planned study leave and the expectation is that your child is in school as normal until their final date is decided.
- ✓ *Stress:* This can be a stressful time, but we have lots of support in place, including strong pastoral systems. I ask that parents look out for signs of stress and support your child through the next few weeks.
- ✓ *Prom:* Invitations were sent out to all students who have met the 'criteria' that has been set out since September. This was simple and transparent. No more than one exclusion, good attendance, good punctuality and completion of all work
- ✓ *Believe to Achieve.* This is the mantra we try to instil. Students who have belief and confidence are more likely to achieve or surpass their targets. Students must remain positive during the exam period, believe in themselves and take one exam at a time.

**BELIEVE TO
ACHIEVE**

Goldsmiths' Award for Community Engagement – FINALISTS I am delighted to announce that St



Damian's have reached the national finals of the 'Goldsmiths' Awards for Community Engagement'. After attending the virtual heats, students had to deliver a presentation and be interviewed in front of a panel of judges. Mrs Gerschler was very impressed with our students and proudly said to me **"they smashed it!"**

The judges said that the standard of the submissions this year for the Awards was extremely high and determining which

entrants should proceed to the National Final was not easy. We are now one of just eight schools to make it through to the Final. The students, accompanied by Mrs Gerschler will attend the National Final at the Goldsmiths' Hall in London on Tuesday 25th June 2024. Watch this space. On a personal level, I was extremely impressed by the maturity and confidence of our great children. It was truly humbling and is a major reason why St Damian's is such a special place. The joy on their faces when they found out they were through to the final was a joy to behold.



Barcelona 24!



Mrs Brophy, Ms Joyce, Mrs Hayworth and Mr Healey had the pleasure of taking 40 students to Barcelona during the Easter holidays. The feedback from staff was that *'the kids had a blast!'* The Monday started very early with the coach leaving school for the airport at 2.15am. However, the early start did not deter the intrepid explorers as once they landed in Barcelona they went to the beach, visited the Guadi Cathedral, Parc Guell, the Camp Nou experience, eating out in restaurants, fitting in a bit of shopping and most importantly of all having the chance to relax and make

life-long memories! It certainly was a superb experience for everyone, and the staff would like to thank the students for their exemplary behaviour and conduct! Mrs Brophy said *'it was a pleasure to be able to spend time with these amazing young people!'* Watch this space as a trip to London in 2025 will be advertised soon!

Yr8 Food Preparation and Nutrition: Linking our Curriculum to the World we Live in

Yr8 are currently focussing on food provenance, looking at where our food comes from and how we can be more sustainable in the future. Each child has been given the opportunity to grow and nurture a basil plant and it has been amazing to see our green fingered students take responsibility for potting and watering their plants. The hope is that by next year they will have become established plants that will be used in our practical lessons. The next move for the basil is into the greenhouse when the weather becomes a little warmer! It is fantastic to see our students proactively thinking about simple steps to help save the planet and care for the world that God has created for us!



Prefect Update

Ms Joyce and I were extremely impressed by the quality of Prefect applications this year. The standard of applications for Head Boy and Head Girl was exceptional. It is always very challenging to select just one student for each role, but we would like to congratulate every pupil that was selected for an interview. The successful candidates will be announced once the Yr10 examinations have been completed.

Yr9 Romeo and Juliet English Projects



During March, all students in Yr9 completed an independent learning project based on the social and historical context of the play 'Romeo and Juliet'. This is an essential part of their study of this GCSE literature text. The standard of work across all teaching groups was outstanding and it was an almost impossible task for teachers to choose the best projects, as their work has been so creative and beautifully presented. The winners in each class were rewarded in a special assembly. The English Faculty have been genuinely impressed and proud of their superb work. A massive well-done Yr9!



Yr8 Football Team

Mr Healey, the Yr8 manager, was extremely proud of our fantastic Yr8 football team who narrowly lost to Audenshaw School 1-0 in the Tameside final. It was a very close game throughout with chances for either team and the boys were unfortunate not to come out with the win. They have played fantastic all year and are still in the Catholic cup semi-finals which are to be played soon. Good luck!

2 emails I received during the Easter break

As Headteacher, I receive many emails from parents. These are overwhelmingly positive and reflect the support we have from parents. I share these emails with staff. In this letter, I will share 2 indicative examples for your perusal, one from a grateful parent and one from a local member of the community.

- The first email is from a parent of a student in Key Stage Three. I have removed the student's name, but she was delighted that I wanted to include it in my letter. You know who you are, so can I say 'thanks' for taking the time to email. It is appreciated!

"Good afternoon, I just wanted to say a huge thank you for everything teachers and staff do for my daughter and me. I hope you all know how appreciated, and how grateful we are for all you do, and to see my daughter come home with three certificates from assembly this morning is testament to the kindness and hard work you do, from the bottom of my heart thank you".

- The second email is from a member of the local community who took the time to email the school to pass on their thanks with regards to 2 of our students showing a great act of kindness. I am extremely proud that our great students demonstrated our values of help and compassion in their actions!

"Good afternoon, I would like to say a very big Thank You to 2 of your students that were coming out of school on Tuesday 2nd April at around 12.00. My husband, who is nearly 70, regularly goes jogging along Lees Rd, Lilly Lane but last Tuesday he tripped on the kerb just outside St Damian's and fell over. The 2 students immediately went over and helped him up and asked him if he was ok. Luckily, he was ok. He had cut his elbow, but he was ok to carry on jogging, nothing stops him 😊. He didn't get their names, but they were very thoughtful and kind and we would just like to say a big Thank You. We are very pleased to know that our Grandson is able to go to your school. Kind regards, Mr and Mrs Kavanagh"

Staff Profiles

As always, I love reading and sharing with parents 'staff profiles' in my monthly newsletters. This month I focus on 2 members of our great support staff, Mrs Jinks and Mr Bentley.

- ✓ *Mrs Jinks, Exams Manager:* Wow, it's nearly 15 years since I started here and the saying "time flies when you are having fun" is true as I certainly love my job and working here. As a former student and with my children having attended as well, I have developed a special connection to St Damian's. In addition to overseeing exams, I have the privilege of leading many of the school's community initiatives, such as the Macmillan Coffee Morning and Santa Dash, or organising fundraising events like Share Day. Taking on the voluntary role of Wellbeing Champion and contributing to the BEE Well strategy for staff has been immensely fulfilling. St Damian's has been incredibly supportive of my professional development, enabling me to obtain a Diploma in School Business Management through the Leadership Learning Centre. Being shortlisted recently for two prestigious awards, 'School Support Star of the Year 2023' and 'Community Champion 2023' was a tremendous personal honour. In my spare time, I enjoy spending quality time with my family and my dog, Willow, exploring the beauty of Anglesey during holidays. Recently, I've reignited my passion for reading, finding it a wonderful way to unwind after a hard day.
- ✓ *Mr Bentley: ICT Network Technician.* The last 14 years of my career have been spent working in the education industry. One of my first roles in this field was for an IT support company, which I held for 8 years. My work involved IT support and installations of projectors, touchscreens, and sound systems to schools in the Northwest. Prior to this, I studied Musical Instrument Technology at London Metropolitan University. This consisted of designing and making guitars as well as studying music theory and history. At university I joined a band, recorded some albums, and played at many festivals. My favourite gig would have to be The Cavern Club in Liverpool. I have always loved Technology, so combining my creativity with IT to work on such things as web design, photography, music and video editing is very interesting to me. I also enjoy problem solving, supporting students and the staff at St Damian's with any IT issues that occur daily. I started working at St Damian's in 2018 and feel incredibly proud to be working at such an excellent school.

Well Done... Miss Smith



Miss Smith, one of our great MFL teachers completed the London Marathon in a fantastic 5 hours and 34 minutes! She said it was "pretty difficult at some points and tears were definitely shed, but overall it was an absolutely incredible experience". Miss Smith was raising money for *Cardiac Risk in the Young*, a very worthwhile cause to fund screening and research to help prevent young people dying from cardiac-related conditions. If any parent would like to donate please click on the link below. All

donations will be gratefully received. On behalf of the St Damian's staff, a massive well-done Sarah! See her picture as she was nearing the finishing line!
<https://www.justgiving.com/page/sarah-smith-1704399319277>



Finally...

It has been over a year since Mrs Betty Jones, our ex-chair of Governors, passed away. The governors, led by Mrs Dean, have continued to ensure that over the past year St Damian's continues to go from strength to strength and this is Betty's lasting legacy for our community. I know that she will be extremely proud of the work of all the staff and governors. Please remember her in your prayers at this time.