



In all things faithful

February 2024

Dear Parents & Carers,

Welcome to my latest newsletter. Although February has been a short month, I am delighted that we are providing a great holistic education as evidenced by the following content.

St Damians Day, February 2024

Our traditional celebration of 'St Damian's Day' took place on Friday 2nd February. Our theme this year was FEAST day, a chance to celebrate and enjoy everything that is 'great' about the St Damian's community. As usual, this was a day when students and staff had opportunities to reflect, engage in a range of formation activities, learn about other faiths and listen to external guests on pertinent issues, such as mental health. I outline the plethora of activities for your perusal below:



- *Timetabled Lessons.* In January staff were tasked to prepare a lesson that would allow our students to "FEAST" on their subject. We posed the question, "In your subject, what would be the one topic you would love to teach that would make the biggest impact on our students lives now and in the future?". As always, the great staff here delivered! These 'WOW' lessons included topics about Space, Sikhism, Earthquakes and more!

- *Celebration of Mass.* We celebrated Mass with Yr9 students. This was central to the day and allowed students to connect with God and deepen their faith. Our feast day celebrations coincided with a special feast day of the Church, The Presentation of Our Lord. This feast commemorates how Jesus, as a baby, was presented to God in the Temple in Jerusalem. Students reflected on how we can recognise Jesus in our own lives. Furthermore, the Mass was also a chance to connect with our global family as in 1997, Pope St. John Paul II, dedicated this feast as a World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life. During Mass we prayed for Father Jude and Sister Roseline who have chosen to dedicate their lives to God.

- *Mental Health Speaker.* We introduced Kyle Clayton from the charity 'Time Isn't up' to St Damian's. Launching his 'tour' around the country, this talk allowed a safe space for students to listen to Kyle's story and his own journey with Mental health. They listened and learnt about how sometimes in life hard things will happen that you will have no control over, but the message was stay hopeful and be resilient; talk and get help when you need to. In a world where there are many issues, St Damian's continues to be a **place of hope**, where staff provide fantastic pastoral support to all our students.

- *Bhangra Dance.* Our Yr8 students said they loved the Bhangra dance workshop. This was led by Rajeev Gupta, who has performed at the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games 2012 and taught professionals on Strictly Come Dancing. Students learnt the history of Bhangra music and dance that is traced back to the region of Punjab in North India. Then students and staff learnt a routine and had a fantastic time!



- *Talk about Islam.* Miss Jameel, one of our English teachers, led our students through her personal faith and educated students on the Islamic religion. Students learnt about religious beliefs and key festivals

St Damian's RC Science College

Lees Road
Ashton-under-Lyne
OL6 8BH

Tel: 0161 330 5974

Fax: 0161 331 4744

Email: admin@stdamians.co.uk

Web: <http://www.stdamians.co.uk/>

Follow us on Twitter: @StDamiansRCSC

Follow us on Facebook

Headteacher

Mr S Logue BA (Hons), MEd., NPQH, NPQEL

St. Damian's RC Science College

but more importantly they heard first hand from a member of the faith about what it means to live out their faith in modern Britain today. Miss Jameel answered many questions from the students. Additionally, staff, myself included, were able to taste some cultural food and food that was mentioned in the Qur'an. A massive thanks to Miss Jameel.



- *Visit to the local Hindu Temple.* Yr7 students visited the Hindu Temple on Lees Road as part of our outreach and solidarity with our neighbours. They learnt about the temple, how it was built, history of the Hinduism religion and prayer traditions. On a personal level, it was my first visit to the temple, and it was a very spiritual place to experience. Later that day, I received an email Mayur Patel, Co-ordinator and Volunteer at the temple, who said *"All the children were exceptionally well behaved, a real credit to you and the school."* The welcome we received was truly genuine and appreciated.

- *Emmaus Mossley.* We were invited back this year again to Emmaus Mossley. Two groups of Yr10 students had the opportunity to learn about the charity that aims to help homeless people change their lives for the better. Visiting Emmaus was a fantastic opportunity for students to see how Catholic Social Teachings work within the world and not just our school community. Students were taught the history of the charity and had a tour of the huge mill and all the operations that go on there. Students were treated to a snack and drink in the café and then were able to explore the shop and support the charity themselves! It was a fantastic opportunity to ensure that excellent links are forged with other agencies that support Catholic Social Teaching in action!



- *The 'Big Issue North'.* We invited the Big Issue North to come to school and share their work and experiences with our children and to raise awareness of homelessness in communities across England, but particularly in Greater Manchester. Rebekah Cheshire presented to 2 year groups before working



alongside the Yr8 GIFT team in a workshop session. Rebekah was thrilled to work with our students and emailed to say *"I wanted to send a message of appreciation to you today to say a very big thank you to you and your team at St Damian's for making me feel so welcome last Friday when I came to visit for our Big Issue North presentations and workshop sessions. The students were absolutely perfect, especially year 9 with a lot of hands raised at the end of the talk for questions – which I loved, as it shows they had absorbed some information and were curious as to the charitable community work we do here to help people in need."*

The work Yr8 produced is being featured in a community piece for The Big Issue North which will be available on the social media platforms and The Big Issue North website. We are hoping to make the editors cut for the magazine feature in the printed weekly issue. Watch this space!

A massive thanks goes to the RE team who planned and co-ordinated the day buy also to the students and staff, who embraced the 'drop-down' day to make it such a resounding success! This day is a brilliant example of how we provide a holistic education for our students, your children.

Attendance Update

As I have repeatedly said, good attendance is extremely important. Parents have a 'legal duty' to ensure that their child attends. As a school we are proactive in analysing absence and the attendance team's strategy 'CAREs' is embedded within the school. CARE stands for **C**ommunication, **A**ttendance Team,

Rewards, Education outcomes & Signpost. However, there are still issues with the attendance of a significant number of children where attendance patterns are irregular or where parents are asking 'permission' for holidays during term time. These requests are rarely, if ever, authorised and may result in a penalty fine.

For clarity, attendance matters because of the following reasons. Firstly, because at St Damian's we sequence our learning and build upon prior knowledge. If your child is absent, then they will not be able to recall what has been previously learnt. Secondly, your child is safest when they are in school. Thirdly, they spend quality time socialising and forming relationships that support their general well-being and development. I ask that parents ensure that their child attends school regularly. **Arguably, by doing so you are giving your child the best chance to succeed in the future.**

Safeguarding Update



This half term, Mrs Brophy, has delivered assemblies on the Government's Prevent Strategy with a focus on the Fundamental British Values of democracy, rule of law, mutual respect, individual liberty and tolerance. All students have been educated on the importance of these values and how they underpin their conduct at St Damian's. We are confident that by learning and implementing these, our students will be able to leave school as young adults feeling safe, valued and with the ability to contribute to the good of themselves and others. Students have been educated on extremist ideologies and what it looks like to be radicalised. Importantly, students know they can speak to a member of staff for reassurance and guidance if there is an issue.



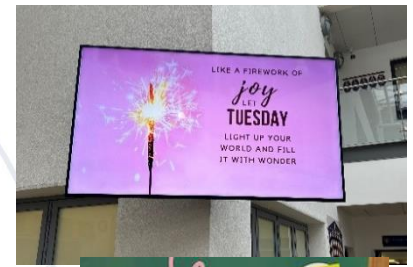
Referrals and identifying Special Educational Needs

At St Damian's we always use 'best endeavours' to identify and meet individual needs. However, over recent years requests for referrals, for example assessment of Autism, ADHD and Dyslexia have massively increased. Furthermore, some requests for assessment are suggested to parents/carers by external agencies, though additional evidence is often not provided. This is not helpful to the school. Due to increased numbers, Mrs Walker, our SENDCo operates a 'list' which children are placed onto in turn. Then begins the lengthy process of referral, which is never just a matter of completing a 'form' and sending it off. For example, referrals for Autism involve a 12-week pre-referral stage. On occasions students may not meet the threshold for being referred, a decision not made by St Damian's staff. Please also note that there is no simple 'test' for Autism, ADHD or Dyslexia, which is a common misconception. When a referral is made, it is then 'out of our hands' and sadly, waiting lists for referrals are very lengthy. As an example, an initial appointment may not be offered by CAMHS for 12-24 months and we can't speed this process up or move pupils up the list. Where referrals are made, the Learning Support department will contact parents/carers as soon as they have any updates to share. Regarding Dyslexia, staff in school are not able to 'diagnose' this condition. Whilst we have a screening tool, this is not diagnostic. The only way for a formal Dyslexia assessment to be made would be through the parent/carer sourcing a British Psychological Society accredited assessor (which would come with a financial cost). Finally, be assured, referrals are made where there is compelling evidence that a child has an unidentified special educational need or disability. In the meantime, St Damian's will continue to provide high quality teaching and pastoral support, so that all children thrive, regardless of their needs.

The Governors have recently appointed an Assistant SENDCO, Miss Bury, RE Teacher, to ensure we have the capacity to manage the increase in SEND needs. This is a key appointment for the school.

Children's Mental Health Week, 5th - 9th February

During this week, we raised awareness of Children's Mental Health through the theme of "My Voice Matters". This was to encourage and empower students to use their voice to make a positive change in their lives. Our Student Support Officers opened a "Nattercafe" at lunchtimes to encourage students to take time out to talk.



Julie Rushworth, our TOGMIND mental Health practitioner offered a drop-in session in school on Wednesday which was attended by a number of students. One student has requested a referral to her service.

On Friday 9th February our whole school community came together to support Children's Mental Health week with an own clothes day, and we raised an amazing £530.53 for Place2Be and TOG Mind



Charities. Additionally, a group of approximately 20 students joined our 2 student support officers, Mrs Hunter and Mrs Harrison for a free lunch followed by watching a well-being webinar called 'My Voice matters'. The webinar supported attendees with their mental health and how they can access support.

Yr11 Update

Below is a quick update for Yr11 parents as GCSE exams move closer.

- ✓ *Half term revision.* This was well attended, and the teachers were very positive. I was very pleased with the teacher feedback. This bodes well for the next few weeks and months. There will be further opportunities at the Easter break.
- ✓ *Intervention after school.* This is continuing since we came back from the break and again I am pleased with both the turnout of students and their attitudes towards their learning. I ask parents to support this where applicable.
- ✓ *In school intervention.* A number of students have been withdrawn from PE and PSHE to further support their revision in the run up to the exams in May/June.
- ✓ *Extra Mock exams.* On St Damian's Day there was an opportunity to sit a further mock exam in English and Maths. Indications show that Grade 4 and above in English increased from 58% to 74% and in Maths increased by 9%. This shows that hard work 'pays-off'. Note that there is still a few months to go and it is all to play for.
- ✓ *Assembly.* This week I delivered an assembly that focused on 'tips' for success. One of the key messages, is that there is no substitute for hard work. Additionally, **every pupil** can achieve their potential!
- ✓ *Parents' Evening.* This year we are trialling an extra Parents' Evening. This is the last formal time to speak to your child's subject teachers. The date is 20th March from 4pm to 7pm.
- ✓ *'Study Leave'.* There is no planned study leave. Students are expected to attend school until their final exam in full uniform with the same expectations.



- ✓ *Prom.* I ask that parents discuss with their children their GCSEs and their work rather than getting distracted by the 'Prom'. The vast majority of students have followed the rules, are working hard work and will be attending this celebration. I have, thus far, rewarded three students with a free ticket to the Prom for outstanding work/effort and over the next few weeks and months I hope to reward others. Sadly, a small number of children have had their invitations withdrawn.



- ✓ *Days to the Exam.* On the 1st March there will be **34 school days** before the first exam on the 7th May. This time will go quickly. It is essential your child is doing 2-3 hours revision each night, including weekends.

Finally, my staff and I have been very impressed with the vast majority of Yr11 and their attitudes. This bodes well for great results in August! I respectfully ask that parents are ensuring that their child is working hard at home: working together is the best way for your child to achieve their potential.

Parents's Evenings

Since my last letter, there have been 2 further parents' evenings. Both have been highly successful. I love reading all the lovely comments.

1] Yr10 Parents' Evening

This was the first meeting where parents and staff could formally discuss your child's progress, attitude to learning and general behaviour since commencing their KS4 studies. I am delighted that 100% of the parental returns stated that they would recommend the school. This is a phenomenal response and shows the massive trust of parents in the school. Thanks for entrusting your child's future at St Damian'. Below are some of the overwhelmingly lovely and positive comments that were written on the night. There were simply too many positive responses to include them all.

"My son is doing brilliantly at school. He loves coming in everyday and enjoys his lessons"

"Fantastic school. Our daughter's confidence says it all 😊"

"I've been very happy that both my children attended St Damian's and both have enjoyed their time here"

"Very pleased with the progress our daughter is making and the obvious ambition the school has for her"

"Fantastic school that has provided a super education for both my children"

"Our daughter has achieved well and this is down to the exceptional staff, your support and encouragement is amazing, I can't thank you enough"

"Can't speak highly enough of this fantastic school. Thank you to all staff who make it what it is – outstanding"

"My daughters are thriving at St Damian's: staff are brilliant and put the pupils first and foremost, thank you"

2] Yr9 Parents' Evening

This parents' evening was the last one before choosing options for study at KS4. Again, parents were overwhelmingly positive about the school as reflected by the comments and the response to

recommending the school. Of 116 returns, 111 parents would recommend the school, 4 wouldn't and 1 didn't comment. Sadly, those who didn't recommend the school did not include their names so I am unable to accurately pinpoint and then address, their concerns. However, I must also add that parents, regardless of whether they recommend the school or not, must work with the school to ensure the importance of hard work and good behaviour. Below are some of the comments.

"Great work you do for the children and their futures!"

"Very informative & encouraging evening. All staff delivered information appropriately & enthusiastically!"

"We are delighted with every part of St Damian's and our son is doing very well"

"Overall fantastic standards throughout, highly recommended to other parents"

"Our son has settled into the school really well. He has enjoyed being at St Damian's and has adapted to life very quickly. Staff and pupils have been very supportive, and he is thriving in the environment and is very happy. He has definitely made the right move"

Note. All comments will be on the website. Under the heading '*parental information*' and then '*parents evening and feedback*'.

3] Yr7 Parents' Evening

On Wednesday 6th March, our Yr7 students will have their first Parents' Evening at St Damain's. This is an important opportunity for parents and carers to meet with teachers and discuss their child's progress. Please make your child aware of the times you are available on the evening, so they are able to make appointments with their teachers. I look forward to meeting parents and sharing all the fantastic work completed by Yr 7's so far.

Yr10 and Prefect Application Process

The process to become a prefect is starting soon. Ms Joyce will be launching the prefect process in the Yr10 assembly on 12th March. During this assembly Ms Joyce will outline the process and the deadlines for applying. I ask that you encourage your child to apply as student leadership opportunities like this build confidence, communication skills and self-esteem. Students can apply for a range of prefect roles including black tie, blue tie and Deputy Head boy/girl and Head boy/girl. Yr10 are a fantastic year group, and I am expecting many applications. As always, I will have to make tough decisions, but rest assured that the process is fair and robust.

Yr9 Options



We have started the Options Process this half term. This has included assemblies for each of the options subjects, 'taster' lessons for the students to understand some of the content at GCSE and will culminate in our Annual Options Evening, delivered by Mrs Kelly, on **Thursday 14th March starting at 6pm**. It is vital all parents of Yr9 children attend. The process will end on Friday 22nd March.

Curriculum Update

Our most recent Curriculum Snapshots have been uploaded onto our website. We hope that you find these useful to understand what our pupils are studying each half term. Please click here to find them <https://www.stdamians.co.uk/curriculum-information>

Yr10 Poetry Masterclass Trip to Hulme Grammar School featuring Poet Laureate, Simon Armitage

On Wednesday 7th February, Mrs McCardle accompanied an enthusiastic group of Yr10 students for a unique opportunity to enhance their poetic skills at Hulme Grammar School [HGS]. The students were among 80 peers from 10 local schools: all congregating to develop their knowledge of a range of poetry.



Students attended a plethora of captivating workshops delivered by HGS staff and local poets Dom Conlon and Adam Lowe, who were nominated by staff from the University of Manchester and MMU's Poetry Library. After discussing and reflecting, students were encouraged to be creative in writing their own poem.

I am pleased to say that St Damian's students **won awards** for '*Best Delivery of an original poem*'. These incredible poems are to be released in an anthology in due course - showcasing the talents of our students! The day culminated in listening to the current Poet Laureate, Simon Armitage. He spoke about his childhood in the locality, the meaning behind his poems and how he initiates and sustains his writing. Students asked Armitage questions, including what his favourite poem was and even what football team he supports! Armitage kindly posed for a photograph with our students - giving words of encouragement for their future studies. This enriching experience left a lasting impact of creativity for our promising poets and one student commented on how "*this was an inspirational trip!*" A big thank you to Mrs McCardle who said "*It was an absolute privilege to be with such fantastic, mature and creative students who really are a credit to the school. I was so proud to be with them!*". It is enriching experiences like these that make St Damian's outstanding!

Staff Profiles

In this newsletter you will read the profile of 2 members of the Maths staff. Our Maths department has consistently produced excellent outcomes over the recent past.

- *Miss Price, Acting Subject Leader of Maths.* I have worked at St Damian's now for 8 years, and I am loving my new role! I'm so lucky to have an awesome team, and every day at St Damian's is a little different from the last. I first thought about being a maths teacher way back in Year 3; my primary school teacher was so inspiring and definitely fostered my love of maths. I had a wonderful time studying Mathematics at Newcastle University, and it was when I first discovered the beautiful North-East and Northumbrian coast! My first graduate job was visiting schools to encourage engagement in STEM subjects, and it confirmed that being in a school was the place for me! I spent time travelling in Asia, before working for a charity in Hong Kong for a year. Although I was teaching English, the school experience was still something I loved, and it was great to get an insight into the culture of a school on the other side of the world! I'm so lucky, that I get to work in a school like St Damian's, and lead the subject I love to teach. I really am grateful for the opportunities St Damian's has given me to grow both personally and professionally.
- *Mr Jones, Lead teacher in Maths.* I have been a part of the St Damian's community since the age of 11 when I started here as a student. I loved my time at school and that hasn't changed in the last 8 years of me returning here as a teacher of maths. Maths is something I have always enjoyed studying and continued to do this at Ashton Sixth Form college and later at the University of Salford. I hope to be an inspiration for young people from the local area and show that with hard work and determination you can achieve your goals. I have taken on different roles within the maths department such as mentoring trainee teachers, which is vital for the future of education; and more recently key stage 3 coordinator

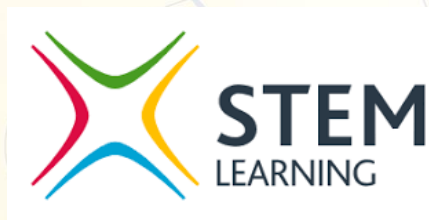
which has given me the exciting opportunity to analyse and implement new strategies to help our amazing students in Yrs7, 8 and 9.

Personal Development Update



- *Barcelona Trip, April 24:* We are fast approaching the first trip abroad from St Damian's post-covid. Forty lucky students from Yr8-10 are excitedly preparing for 4 days in Barcelona where they will experience Las Ramblas, visit the Guadi and Nou Camp and sample authentic Spanish cuisine. The students fly out from Manchester at 6am, an

early start, so we are expecting a few tired travellers. However, we are expecting warm sunshine, which will [hopefully] give students the energy to go and explore this wonderful city!



- NCE Computing Quality Framework [CQF]. St Damian's has signed up to the CQF with the aim of achieving the nationally recognised 'Computing Quality Mark'. This accreditation is earned through providing proof that our Computing departments good practice are aligning with what the National Centre for Computing Education and the Department for Education regard as Good or better. The CQF is designed to help

schools review and plan how they teach the computing curriculum, offering guidance to achieve a curriculum in the future that is both Innovative and inspirational. Watch this space !

- *BeeWell Survey.* Last term 60,000 young people in 187 schools across Greater Manchester completed this survey. This questions young people on a range of issues to do with their Physical and Mental Health, how they feel about their home, school and social lives, along with their general life satisfaction. We are very pleased that our students reported they feel like they 'belong' to our school and that they are supported by staff who care for them. They also reported that bullying occurred less in our school than with comparable schools and that they were well supported by their peers. However, it is worth noting that from students responds, only 1 in 3 exercised for at least 1 hour a week and only 54% of Yr10 students were getting enough sleep, to help them feel awake enough to concentrate in the classroom. Adequate sleep and physical activity can really support young people in feeling happy in their lives.



- *School Choir.* Now boasting an impressive 65 members, the choir recently showcased their musical talents at the recent Mass for Yr9 students. Currently, they are diligently preparing a captivating repertoire for the upcoming Easter celebrations and eagerly looking forward to performing at our annual celebration evening. A notable highlight is the selection of 25 choir members who have embarked on a musical journey, joining a vocal harmony group. This talented ensemble dedicates their Tuesday afternoons to rehearse enchanting songs from renowned musical productions, adding an extra layer of artistry to our vibrant school community. Stay tuned for more melodious moments as our choir continues to captivate audiences with their exceptional talent! The choir is an outstanding example of our students' talents!

Mobile Phone Use at St Damian's

Last week the Government spoke about a 'crackdown' on the use of mobile phones in schools.

For the record, there will be **no changes** to our procedures which are simple, transparent and effective. In fact, our procedures are embedded and haven't changed in over ten years. But for clarity, the use of mobile phones by students is not permitted anywhere in school at anytime. If a student has their phone out on school premises, it will be confiscated, and a parent will have to collect it. There are no exceptions to this simple rule.



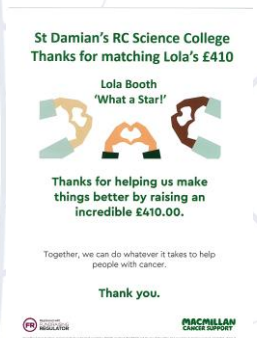
Upcoming dates for your perusal

- ✓ **6th March:** *Yr7 Parents' Evening.* The first formal meeting for parents. Always well attended!
- ✓ **14th March:** *Options Evening.* I ask all Yr9 parents to attend to ensure informed decisions.
- ✓ **18th March:** *INSET Day.* School is closed for all students.
- ✓ **20th March:** *'Extra' Yr11 Parents' Evening.* Last chance to speak to subject teachers.
- ✓ **28th March:** *School closes at 1.30pm for the Easter break.*

Finally, good news...

I am proud to update you on 2 remarkable members of our community.

Firstly, Lola Booth in Yr7. In my December letter I told you about a pledge St Damian's made to match the impressive £410 Lola raised after completing a 5k run for Macmillan. This has now been recognised by Macmillan who have contacted school and sent certificates to both Lola and St Damian's, thanking us for the combined donations. Liam Everett, the Relationship Fundraising Manager for Macmillan Cancer Support said *"This is absolutely amazing, what a star! We appreciate her amazing effort and thank you for helping us make things better by raising an incredible £410"*. Well done Lola, we are all so proud of you! Your determination and resilience are key attributes that underpins St Damian's!



Secondly, I received an email from the parents of an ex-student who wanted to share her achievements. Susanna Shibu, an ex-Head Girl of the school, who left in 2021, wants a career in medicine and has started her degree at The University of Birmingham. She has started her 'medical journey' and is in her 5th month of her first year in university. Her proud parents said *"She's enjoying studying medicine"*! An example of the high aspirations and ambitions that we have for our students, your children. *Well Done Susanna!*

We are now at the beginning of spring and the nights are getting lighter. Here is hoping for some nice weather over the next few months!

As always, thanks for your support and here's to a great 2024 at St Damian's!

Yours sincerely

Mr S Logue
Headteacher