



In all things faithful

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Headteacher

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Dear Parents/Carers

A warm welcome to my latest newsletter that is, again, jam packed with a range of opportunities and activities that allows our great students to flourish academically, spiritually and socially. I hope you enjoy reading as much as I did writing!

St Damian's Day, 3rd February

Our St Damian's day was another resounding success. This day was about celebrating our Mission Statement, the '*St Damian's Way*' and highlighting our commitment to Catholic Social Teaching. The quality of planning, the excellent engagement and the range of activities was superb! Read below!

- Our Yr7 students visited the local Hindu Temple. This was part of our outreach and solidarity with our neighbours. Yr7 learnt about the temple, how it was built, the history of the religion Hinduism and some prayer traditions. True to form we got an email from Manni Dhokia, Co-ordinator and Volunteer at the temple, who said *"Just a note to say thank you for bringing your Yr7 classes last week to visit the mandir. I hope they enjoyed the visit and got some learning from it. I must commend the pupils for their behaviour and engagement. They are a credit to the school, teachers and their parents"*. Please pass on my thanks to your children in Yr7. I know Mrs Gerschler and her RE team were uplifted and proud of their engagement.
- The St Damian's day diversity panel was an opportunity to learn about multiple world view perspectives. Guest speakers included The Oldham Inter-Faith Forum, Tameside police and a Jewish community representative. Representing our school were members of staff from diverse backgrounds and members of our student council who spoke with authority and confidence. Issues discussed included capital punishment and gender, allowing students to listen to constructive and thought-provoking issues.
- Two groups of Yr10 visited Emmaus, a charity in Mossley that helps homeless people change their lives. The first Emmaus community was founded by Father Henri-Antoine Grouès, better known as Abbé Pierre. He was an MP, Catholic priest and former member of the French Resistance who fought to provide homes for those who lived on the streets of Paris. Visiting Emmaus was a fantastic opportunity for students to see **Catholic Social Teachings** at first hand. Students were taught the history of the charity, had a tour of the huge mill and all the operations that go on there and explored the shop and supported the charity themselves!
- Our creative task this year focused on 'Hunger Cloths'. Yr 8, 9 and 10 had the opportunity to create their own Hunger Cloths. They tell stories of God helping people in the Bible and are still used in developing countries to give people hope. They have themes of *Justice and Peace*, which reflects the Catholic Social Teachings. Furthermore, it developed students understanding of the distinctive Catholic identity and mission of St Damian's in a different way.
- Yr8 students enjoyed their first school Mass at St Christopher's. The Mass was prepared and delivered by members of our Yr8 GIFT team and reflected Catholic Social Teaching through its focus on *Stewardship and Human Dignity*. The Gospel and Homily encouraged students to reflect on the importance of putting their words into action. For example, if we are God's stewards then we need

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to care for the environment through things such as recycling. Another excellent opportunity to develop collective worship, we also welcomed students from St Christopher's.

- An aspect of the day was human dignity. CAFOD talks focused on the work they do to support Catholic Social Teaching. The society for the protection of unborn children [SPUC] focused on the sanctity of life and uniqueness of each person made in the image of God. Both visitors gave students opportunity to reflect on how we are connected to a bigger global community.
- 'Hope for the future' was the focus of our Yr7 GIFT team and part of our outreach was inviting St Christopher's RC Primary school Faith Leaders into our school for a Pizza and Prayer Party. A fantastic opportunity to further develop our connection with our parish community. Watch this space to find out more about their exciting plans!

Well done to Mrs Gerschler, the RE team and all the staff who embraced the many varied activities throughout the day. The feedback from the staff was outstanding.

Safeguarding

A few weeks ago Mrs Brophy, delivered assemblies to all years regarding 'anxiety'. Increased anxiety among children is an issue and St Damian's students are not immune to this. Anxious feelings are a natural emotion and when it is controlled it can really help students to focus and motivate themselves. However, we are aware some students have anxious feelings that become overwhelming and this in turn can have a negative effect on their lives. Students have been signposted to the Anna Freud website. Here are 93 simple activities to allow children to apply self-care to their daily routines when feelings of anxiety arise. Your child may from time to time have anxious feelings so I advise you to visit this link to help support your child: [Self Care, Anxiety, Depression, Coping Strategies | On My Mind | Anna Freud Centre](#) . There is also a link for parents and carers based on self-care: [Self-Care for Parents and Carers | Why consider self care? | Anna Freud Centre](#). These websites are full of important information and tips for both students and their parents.

Yr11 brief updates

In this letter I highlight some brief, but important, points for your perusal as we are only a few months away from the start of the GCSE exams.

- *Time*: I led an assembly yesterday where I highlighted there are only **42 school days** left before the exams. Time will literally 'fly past' over the next few weeks and months.
- *Attendance*: This is an important factor in the success of our students. In essence, if your child is not in school, **they cannot learn**.
- *Revision*: It is important over the next few months that your child is revising between **2-3 hours** each night. As a parent I ask that you ensure your child is in a routine each evening.
- *Intervention*. There is an *after* and *before* school schedule that is an **excellent opportunity** for extra revision, gain exam tips and boost confidence. I ask that you ensure your child attends these if asked.
- *February half term revision*. I ask that you please congratulate your child for attending the half term revision. The feedback from staff was really positive.
- *Easter Revision*. There will be **extra revision** lessons during the Easter holidays. Dates and subjects are yet to be confirmed and I will let you know when this has been finalised.

- *Parental support* and encouragement will have a **massive impact** on their achievements. I ask that you support both your child and the school over the next few months.
- *Prom*. Remember that this is by **invitation only** and any silly behaviour, poor attendance or lack of effort and the invitation will be withdrawn. Sadly, several students have already had their invitations withdrawn.
- Finally, there is **no substitute for hard work**. Students who work hard will achieve in their GCSE exams and their hard work will be rewarded with 'good' GCSE exams. At present there is still a small, but significant, number of students who, although working hard in school, are not working hard enough at home. I ask parents to support their children by ensuring a quiet place to study at home, following a clear routine, taking an interest in their work and listening to any concerns.

Yr11 Mentoring

A group of year 11 students have been assigned a mentor to support them on the run up to the GCSEs. The students were chosen based on Mock performance and their most recent progress check. If your child has been assigned a mentor, please encourage them to make use of this. *'The greatest gift anyone can give, is the gift of time'*. I will take this opportunity to thank the teachers who have voluntarily given up their time to help and encourage your child to succeed.

Year 11 SEND study skills programme

Mrs Baynham continues to engage our SEND students in developing their study skills through a structured programme to improve independent learning. The first two sessions have focused on revision strategies which can improve memory recall and the *'pomodoro'* technique which can improve efficiency when studying. Students have been overwhelmingly positive and it bodes well for the future as they have shown their determination to work to the best of their ability. The last session, during the half term, put into practice all the revision strategies that have been developed. The sessions have been such a success that they are being extended into half term leading up to Easter.

Mathematics opportunities

- *UK Mathematics Trust – Intermediate Mathematical Challenge*. 75 students from Yrs 9, 10 and 11 took part in this UK Mathematics challenge. The challenge is taken by high ability students across the UK and British schools overseas and involves a one hour assessment which requires high level analytical skills. Nationally, only 8%, 16% and 25% of entrants achieve Gold, Silver and Bronze Awards. I am delighted to announce that an amazing 31 students achieved awards, 5 Gold, 8 Silver and 18 Bronze Awards. This is a great achievement. Well done! Mr Willerton was proud of all the students' efforts and achievements.
- To stretch and challenge our gifted Mathematicians, ten Yr11 students, who attend the extra-curricular Mathematics club, will be entered for the *Further Mathematics* Level 2 certificate. This course explores the most challenging topics at GCSE whilst introducing new content from the Mathematics A-Level. This is a great opportunity to prepare those students who want to take Maths A-Level.

Both the above opportunities demonstrate the extra-curricular provision in Mathematics at St Damian's. Watch this space as we enter for the Junior Mathematical Challenge in April.

Yr 9 Options Evening

Over the past few weeks Yr9 have had their Options Assembly and Subject Assemblies. These have taken place to inform students before Options Evening which is on **Thursday 23rd March (6-8pm)**. Personalised recommendations of subjects to choose will be given to students on this evening, and there will be the opportunity to see students work and talk to options subject teachers. The options deadline is **31st**

March. We are excited to offer a number of new qualifications this year and look forward to speaking to the Yr9 students about their choices. Please put the date in your diary and make every effort to attend this important evening.

Yr8 Parents' Evening

This evening was another real positive school event where parents could discuss their child's progress with all their subject teachers. Parental questionnaire responses showed that 104 parents would recommend the school and 2 would not. Some of the comments are below for your perusal. As always, all comments are on the school website.

"A very positive parents evening for my son. All teachers were very enthusiastic with positive ways in which my son can improve, very proud my son goes to St Damian's"

"I cannot thank the staff involved with my daughter, teaching and non-teachers, who have helped her grow because of their support, kindness and positivity"

"Thank you for your fantastic work, my son loves school"

"I have two children in this school and the support given to my children has made my children happy and confident"

Again, can I take this opportunity to say a **massive thanks** to our parents for their support. My staff and I are committed to ensuring that your children get a great holistic education.

Curriculum Updates

- **English:** The English department has arranged access for every Yr11 student to 'MASSOLIT,' which will supplement their programme of revision for the English Literature GCSE. This is an exceptionally useful resource with access to high quality academic lectures on each of the set texts. Some students have still not created their account. The link can be found here: https://www.massolit.io/users/sign_up. Their class teachers have the class joining code. I ask that parents speak to their child to ascertain if they are accessing and using this vital resource.
- **Sparx Learning:** The Maths department have recently invested in a programme called 'Sparx' that enables students to access personalised Maths homework tailored to their ability. The Artificial Intelligence behind it quickly assesses their ability and provides work which will support and challenge. Homework will be set weekly, allowing their teacher to quickly identify gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Students having difficulty accessing 'Sparx' at home will have the opportunity to complete work at school during lunch time. I ask that parents support this new initiative as it will build upon the outstanding classroom practice that they receive at St Damian's.
- **Science Carousel:** There are exciting learning opportunities currently for KS3 and KS4 Science independent learning, using our online package *CAROUSEL*. This allows students to revise topics taught and then answer key questions selected by their teachers to support their learning journey. Students can then self-mark against model answers to find out their score and how to improve. Teachers will feedback in lesson time and reward effort for how well they have retained their Science knowledge.
- **RE & Yr11 Support:** Yr11 RE revision can be supported at home using the Yr11 RE class TEAMS page. Here the students can access *three digital textbooks*. These are free and can be accessed without passwords. Here, students will find detailed knowledge and information, practice exam questions and exam tips and advice. RE teachers encourage students to use these to revise and to complete homework questions.

- **MFL:** Knowledge of key vocabulary is the key to success in Languages. The MFL team have uploaded our half termly key vocabulary lists onto the app www.quizlet.com where our students can learn this essential vocabulary in a fun and engaging way whilst competing against their classmates. Our Language Ambassadors will be awarding prizes for the top achievers each half term. Class teachers have shared links via teams so please ensure your child has signed up.

Personal Development Updates

- **National Apprenticeship Week [6th – 10th February].** It's never too early to start thinking about future aspirations and, during National Apprenticeship week, Miss Joyce organised many activities that enabled students to gain an understanding of some options available in further and higher education. All students in Yrs7 - 10 engaged in a variety of form-based activities and virtual workshops, raising awareness of different apprenticeships on offer. The highlight of the week for me, saw Yr7 and Yr8 students benefit from a face-to-face workshops with local entrepreneur, Lee Mason. These opportunities are all elements of our excellent careers provision!
- **Children's Mental Health Week [6th – 10th February].** The theme this year was 'Lets Connect/ Express' yourself. All years received an assembly that highlighted strategies that support how young people can look after their own mental health. On Friday 10th February 2023 we had an own clothes day, 'to express themselves' and all proceeds went to the Children's Mental Health Charity – Place to be. Throughout the week, we displayed positive affirmations around our school along with a mental health display board in our piazza.
- **Year 10 Work Experience 17th – 21st July.** A big well-done to 125 of our Yr10 students who have successfully secured a work experience placement. Time is running out, and anyone without a placement will be expected to attend to school during this final week of the summer term. Work experience is a valuable opportunity to build confidence, resilience and independence while experiencing the 'world of work'. It is important that your child secures a placement.
- **Realising Aspirations, Ashton 6th Form College.** Fourteen Yr10 students have enrolled on the Ashton 6th Form's annual programme with the aim of raising their aspirations to attend University. The programme provides a unique insight into post-16 education, whilst helping them to improve study skills, time management and build confidence. Our students have elected to study a variety of topics including Science, Business, Humanities, Drama, Dance and Social Sciences. The programme was launched on 16th February and students will engage with 4 sessions after school over numerous weeks. We look forward to celebrating their success in May at the awards evening.
- **STEM Careers Newsletter.** Our Yr10 STEM leaders are working hard on their personal development and leadership skills by creating a STEM careers newsletter to be distributed to KS3. This will promote the range of careers that are available within STEM, whilst sharing their own future career ambitions and aspirations. Inspired by both the International Women's and girls in Science day and our pastoral theme this half-term, Serena Akinyele has created a 'Diversity in Science' display. This will be displayed in the Science area during Science Week for all students to see.
- **KS3 Competition 'Step into the NHS'.** STEM leaders are also promoting our KS3 competition @step into the NHS' where students will learn about over 350 roles in the NHS, raising their career aspirations in this massive employer. To enter the competition, students will create a fun and unique job advertisement for their chosen role. This will be taking place in careers week and promoted in assemblies next half term.
- **Student Council:** After a very successful HT3, preparing for and being part of the 'Diversity Debate' on St. Damian's Day, the Student Council are now looking to attract new Yr7 members. They will be going into Yr7 assembly on March 3rd to inform our students about the Student Council and how

they can apply. There will also be another Student Council 'Drop in' on Thursday 2nd March in the Literacy Hub. This is where students can speak to members of the Student Council about any ideas they have with regards to life around school. Being part of the student council increases their confidence, communication and leadership skills, all skills needed for their futures.

- **Yr10 PE:** A massive congratulations to our Yr10 football team who have made the Tameside Cup Final for the **first time** as their year group. A convincing 4-2 semi-final win over Longdendale has ensured they feature in the finals that will take place at Hyde United FC after Easter. Watch this space. Mr Burtles, their proud manager, was delighted with their achievements. Good Luck lads! We also wish the Yr7 and Yr11 football teams good luck in their semi-finals which will take place after half term.

Prefect Applications 2023

Over next few weeks, Yr10 will be informed about how they can apply to become a prefect. Prefects are ambassadors of our school community both in school and outside of school. It is a position of responsibility and an accolade, which, any student should be proud of. Ms Joyce will soon deliver an assembly on the criteria to become a prefect and give advice on their application. Whilst all applicants may not meet our high expectations during the first selection round, we hope all Yr10 aspire to become a prefect over the next 12 months. Information on how students can apply to be Head Boy and Head Girl will be shared at the launch assembly in March. Good luck to our Yr10 students!

Mid-Year Update

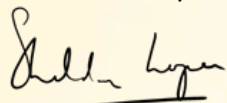
As I write, it is half-way through the academic year at St Damian's and I am delighted with the opportunities that our children have experienced thus far. Some highlights include a magnificent St Damian's Day that highlighted that we really are a strong catholic community, many opportunities show off our excellent careers provision, over 100 students engaged in bespoke reading classes and a range of comprehensive student leadership opportunities to boost the confidence and resilience of our great children. Staff training has included various safeguarding briefings, professional development on the 'Education Inspection Framework [EIF]' and further training on 'Relationships and Sex Education' – a fundamental part of our school's PSHE curriculum. This ensures that staff are at the forefront of developments in education. A few weeks ago, the DfE released the final data for GCSE outcomes in 2022. You will be delighted to know that we are above the National Averages in **all** measures, reflecting the quality of teaching at St Damian's. This is in addition to excellent teachers delivering an outstanding curriculum. Feedback from all parent's evenings has been overwhelmingly positive. As Headteacher of such a positive, caring and thriving community, I could not be prouder of the great students at Damian's and the absolute commitment and professionalism of my fantastic staff. Every day I am humbled by the outstanding relationships between students and staff. Long may this continue.

Some Important Updates

In the week commencing Monday 13th March, there are 2 planned strike days. These are on **Wednesday 15th and Thursday 16th March**. Unlike the 2 previous one day strikes which were in the North-West, these 2 days are *National Strikes*. At the time of writing, I do not know how many teachers will be striking that day and thus can't share any plans yet. This is a 'heads-up' so that you are aware. That week, on Friday 17th March there is also a staff INSET planned.

As always, thanks for your support!

Yours sincerely



Mr Logue
Headteacher