



15th June 2020

In all things faithful

Dear Parents and Carers,

I trust that you are well. Welcome to the latest fortnightly letter that contains some updates and information for your perusal in these strange times.

Re-opening update

After hearing the Government's ambition to re-open secondary schools to a limited number of pupils from 15th June, this is an appropriate time to give more information. On hearing the announcement, Senior Leaders made extensive and thorough plans, based on the guidance provided, to re-open to Year 10 *from* 15th June. However, late on Friday 5th June, I received a letter from the Director of Public Health in Tameside that strongly advised against re-opening until at least the 22nd June. So, after discussing with Governors, I followed this advice. Plans are now in place to open *from* 22nd June for a limited number of **Year 10 pupils only**. Year 10 parents have been sent an additional letter with a detailed outline of the proposals. This is on our website alongside the Public Health letter for your perusal.

On Friday 19th June parents of Year 10 pupils will receive a text with regards to 'Key Messages' for both pupils and parents. I ask that you read this thoroughly please as it sets out our expectations.

Staffing and re-opening

As we are now several months into this extraordinary and unprecedented scenario, I feel that it is my rightful duty to write a few sentences about the staff that I am privileged to lead. Speaking to members of staff in school, other Headteachers and others knowledgeable on schools, much of the news in the media portrays staff in schools as not 'wanting' schools to re-open. As Headteacher, I can't speak for other schools but I can speak for the staff at St Damian's. So, let me briefly outline what they have been doing over the past few months.

Since March, staff [and I refer to support staff, teachers and leaders] alongside the Governing Body, have been;

- Working continuously to deliver high quality resources on a daily basis to all Year groups to ensure that we minimise as much as possible the loss of face to face teaching and subsequently the learning
- Learning a remote platform that was 'forced' upon them due to the sudden, and unexpected closure of the school overnight. And although they/we are still learning this platform, thus far they have embraced this with admirable ease
- Ringing parents to reassure them and to tell them that we still care for their children, that they are still part of the St Damian's community and that at some time in the future, they will be coming back here
- Understanding the unprecedented and extremely difficult scenario of deciding GCSE Grades for Year 11 pupils in an unbiased manner. Like many things over the past few months, this was 'thrust' upon them. This has been very hard to do but the staff have excelled in this task

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- Supervising the children of key workers and those vulnerable children who attend school. This has included both the Easter and half-term holidays. Although the number of pupils has been relatively small, nonetheless, they still have to be properly supervised
- Working behind the scenes to ensure that any pupils with 'issues' have been followed up and signposted to ensure appropriate help. As you will appreciate, this lockdown has exacerbated the anxiety and Mental Health of many pupils in school. I can inform you that this has been extensive
- Ensuring that vulnerable children, for example those with Special Educational Needs, are being appropriately cared for and supported through these difficult times, and this includes completion of all the statutory requirements
- Embracing on-going professional development such as attending webinars, completing online courses and engaging in professional wider reading.

All of this has been undertaken under extremely challenging conditions, most notably, the real and serious issues surrounding health and safety. Please do not underestimate the seriousness of this. I am not asking parents to feel sorry for staff, but I am asking that you understand that they are not 'doing nothing'. They are working incredibly hard with one purpose in mind; **to help/support your children**. As Headteacher, I can categorically state that this is the case. And no, we are not perfect, and yes, we will make mistakes, but it won't be for the want of trying. Finally, I have to stress that the staff at St Damian's are ready AND willing to play their part in re-opening the school. When it does re-open, in whatever capacity, they will undoubtedly rise to the occasion as they have done many times in the past.

Can I take this opportunity to thank parents for their overwhelming support. I have been inundated with positive messages. When the time is right, I will pass these on to the staff.

Safeguarding

Despite the lockdown, we continue to ensure that Safeguarding remains the number one priority at St Damian's. However, as restrictions are slowly being eased some children may find it confusing that they are allowed to do some activities but not others. If your child is showing some signs of anxiety, there are some fantastic self-help apps and websites that we are currently recommending pupils to use. See below;

KOOTH. An online chat with counsellors, free, safe and anonymous support for young people (www.kooth.com)

Youngminds.org.uk. Child and adolescent mental health-supports young people mental health.

Mindshift APP. Mindshift is a free APP designed to help teens cope with anxiety 24 hours a day (healthyyoungmindspennine.nhs.uk)

As always, try to keep an open communication with your child as often simple worries can quickly be resolved by talking, rather than being left to manifest and may become more complicated.

Careers

Similar to safeguarding, we continue to ensure that the careers provision at St Damian's is exceptional. Below I highlight some updates.

A] Y10 Virtual Taster Days – Loreto Sixth Form College: Virtual Year 10 and New Student Taster Days will be running in the week commencing 29th June 2020. There will be a welcome and orientation, followed by interactive sessions in 3 or more subjects that students select to take part in. The interactive sessions are approximately 20 minutes each, followed by an interactive quiz. If interested, email careerprospects@stdamians.co.uk by Friday 19th June 2020

B) Y11 Applicant Update from Tameside College & Clarendon SFC. These will be ringing applicants in June whom they have not met yet due to the cancelled interview evening. Applicants have been notified. Teachers will ring to introduce themselves to the learners with the aim of making an offer for the course. Please visit the get ready for College websites. There is lots of information and activities relating to all courses across both colleges. These can be accessed by visiting www.tameside.ac.uk or www.clarendon.ac.uk.

C) Xello: Online Career Planning Tool. We are introducing a new online Career Planning Tool called 'Xello' focused on helping your child to prepare for future success. Xello will be used by all pupils in Y7-11. It is a tool provided to pupils by Greater Manchester Careers Service. Mrs Henshaw will be sending further details this week. Pupils in all year groups will have online assignments to complete by Friday 26th June 2020. These will take a maximum of 20 minutes.

Year 6 Transition

Unfortunately, due to the ongoing situation with coronavirus, we have, reluctantly, cancelled the planned Year 6 Transition day that was due to happen on 2nd July. Instead, we are in the stages of planning a 'virtual' transition. Further details will be sent out by Miss Joyce this week. We look forward to meeting our new cohort of pupils in September and the next academic year and to welcoming them into our special community. As a school, we will do everything we can to support their academic, spiritual and personal development over the next 5 years and ensure they get a first-class education.

Remote Learning update

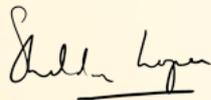
Please ask your child to read this week's Remote Learning Update. This is updated weekly by Mrs Henshaw for all pupils in Y7-10 and can be found on the school website/Student Closure Learning Resources. This week's update includes important information about pupil passwords and key messages from the Modern Languages Department.

Literacy Team – Microsoft Teams

All pupils have been added to a 'Literacy Team', run by Mrs Heenan, our Literacy co-ordinator. The purpose of this is to engage pupils with weekly book recommendations, website and APP suggestions to help with literacy, plus a weekly fun literacy task. As ever, it is vitally important that we encourage our pupils to read, to increase their vocabulary knowledge, and to shape and develop their minds both for the classroom and ultimately, outside of it. As I repeatedly say, reading is an excellent means to educate.

Finally, I end by saying that please continue to take great care as we move forward in returning to some form of 'normality'. Take care and God bless.

Yours sincerely



Mr Logue
Headteacher