



In all things faithful

St Damian's RC Science College

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Headteacher

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21st October 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

We have finally come to the end of the first half term in what I can only describe as an extraordinary and extremely strange half term. I have been in teaching for over 20 years and I can say that the past few weeks have been unprecedented and very challenging. However, we are a positive and optimistic community and I can say with good authority that the St Damian's community; pupils, parents, staff and governors have risen to these challenges and have been successful in keeping the school as 'normal as possible' for our great children, notwithstanding pupils having to self-isolate. Sooner or later this will, hopefully, come to an end and pupils will be in school every day learning as it is the least we can do for them.

Catholic Life of the School

During these unprecedented times, the Catholic Life of the school is more important than ever and we have implemented new routines to try and ensure continuity. For example, staff reflections and chapel assemblies that reflect Gospel values continue, albeit in a different format. Our GIFT Team did a fantastic job in supporting our virtual open evening discussing the spiritual life here at St Damian's. As October is Black History Month, the RE team wanted to share awareness of the diversity within our Church and pupils had the opportunity to learn about the African Saint, St Josephine Bakita, who was known for her smile and gentleness and holiness and preached forgiveness.

Working from home whilst isolating

As I write, it's a very mixed picture of pupil engagement whilst self-isolating. Although some pupils are working fantastically hard at home, there are too many pupils who are not accessing work at all. This is not only frustrating for staff who are setting high quality work, but it is also disappointing and there are no excuses for not working hard whilst self-isolating.

I ask that parents do not underestimate the effect on pupils' academic outcomes in the longer run, if their children are not working hard at home. I ask that parents, as best they can, support the school and impress upon their children that the completion of work is vital and it is not done in vain. Academic achievement will open up many more doors for your children when they leave St Damian's at 16.

A great way that parents can help is to ensure that your child gets into a good homework routine. The ability to work independently, to do revision and wider reading around subject areas will help accelerate your child's progress. All pupils should be doing 1-2 hours of either homework or independent learning each evening. In Year 11 this should be up to 3 hours.

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I would like to take this opportunity to say how grateful I am to the teachers as remote learning brings many challenges, but they have fully embraced this with their usual professionalism. Teaching a group in school whilst teaching those at home and/or setting work is quite a juggling act and I am proud of the manner in which they have risen to this challenge.

Face Masks

I would like to take this opportunity to thank parents for their support regarding pupils wearing face masks. To date I have been delighted that the vast majority of pupils are complying and doing everything possible to minimise the transmission of Covid. As said previously, please ensure pupils bring a spare mask in their school bags. As restrictions tighten and the threat of Covid increases, it is more important than ever that pupils continue to wear face masks travelling to and from school on the buses. I reserve the right to send a pupil home to get a mask or ask parents to bring a mask into school should a pupil forget.

Finally, although we do have a very small number of spare masks in school [for emergencies], some pupils seem to think that teachers should be continually providing masks before entering school. This is not the case. Masks have been part of the school uniform since September and are not optional. Thank you for your support in this matter, it is very much appreciated.

Safeguarding Update

The children have continued to adhere to the safeguarding instructions around Covid in school and this has allowed us as a community to monitor all pupils appropriately as the few positive cases have been identified. It is important that over the half term holidays children continue to follow the guidance and avoid meeting up with their friends. This will help to protect them and the school as we enter the winter months. It is understandable that children want to see each other in their free time but we must continue our great effort and put the safety of everyone first.

Also, this is an opportunity to remind you that the clocks go back on the 25th October. This means that the dark nights will be upon us when we return to school. Please speak to your child about their safety travelling to and from school. They will need to take extra care using public transport and crossing the roads.

Year 11 Mocks and an important Key Message for Parents

It is crucial that parents of Year 11 pupils are aware that the GCSE exams are only a few months away. These are scheduled exams, and the Government has stated that these will go ahead, albeit starting three weeks later, on 7th June. However, there is a chance that, like last year, teachers will have to put forward estimated grades in case the exams do not take place. ***It is therefore vital that Year 11 pupils are revising hard at home for the Mock Exams in December.*** I can't emphasise enough the importance of this message.

Year 11 GCSE Exams 2021

I have received information that states GCSE exams will commence three weeks later than usual and start on *Monday 7th June 2021*, although there will be a Maths and English exam in May. I will share more details when I receive them.

Importantly, although this seems quite a time away, it is vital that Year 11 pupils are working hard at home to prepare for these. A minimum of 2 hours a night is required. I ask that parents ensure that their child has a quiet area to ensure revision and preparing for exams is meaningful. There are some planned revision sessions over the October half-term and your child will know the details. If this is the case, please support the teachers and ensure that they attend. NB. Depending on national changes, these revision sessions *may* have to be cancelled.

Parents' Evenings this Year

As stated in the previous letter, Parents' Evenings will be very different this year. The plan is for some face to face contact, but this will be very limited, if indeed possible. However, plans may be withdrawn at the last minute due to issues beyond our control. Whatever is decided, I will be guided by safety issues as the most important factor.

Year 11 Parents' Evening

Despite extensive preparations for a face to face Year 11 Parents' Evening, due to the introduction of tier three rules, I have reluctantly decided to cancel face to face interaction between staff and parents because I no longer believe that this is appropriate. This decision was not taken lightly and is due to increased restrictions and rules in the area. Before the end of the week, Year 11 parents will receive a letter outlining these changes. Year 11 Parent's Evening is scheduled for **Thursday 12th November** between 4 and 7 o'clock and this date is unlikely to change. Please put it in your diary and encourage your child to get a 10 minute appointment time.

Seneca Learning

At St Damian's we have been using an online learning platform called Seneca Learning. Recently they have released a free parent monitoring platform. Although it does not check on the quality of work, it does have a feature that lets you see how long your child has spent on their different subjects, their average score & number of questions answered. I encourage you to use this facility to monitor their work. To get started all you need to do is create an account and 'invite' your child. You will then be given a code to share with your child and you will be able to review their progress.

Multiple children can be connected to the parent account and it is free to use. Here is the link to access a guide <https://help.senecalearning.com/en/articles/4135222>

The importance of Reading

It is crucial that your child is reading regularly. Due to the current Covid restrictions, public libraries in Tameside are now allowing new members to join online. Please ensure that you take advantage of this opportunity if your child is not already a member. Audio books, digital magazines, newspapers and eBooks can be borrowed, and members can also reserve books of their choice for collection at one of the 8 Tameside libraries. Please find the joining information below:

Students can find information about joining the Library online here: <https://www.tameside.gov.uk/libraries/joining/information> . You will need to scroll down slightly to the 'Join Online' heading and follow the instructions. Once joined online, members can download the Borrowbox app which gives free access to 1000s of books and also audio books, which can be very soothing and relaxing. Please also note that students are able to access Britannica Online for free with their Library card: <https://www.tameside.gov.uk/libraries/online-services#EB>

Remember the Dr Seuss quote: *"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."* It is vital for their future prospects that your child can read at the appropriate level. Parents should not underestimate the importance of promoting reading at home.

Pupil Leadership

This half term we have introduced a new strand of Pupil Leadership through the election of Form Captains/Vice Captains. Already, these pupils have planned and delivered a form time activity to support this term's theme of 'Healthy Minds,' as well supporting the form tutor with weekly spiritual reflections. Developing leadership skills amongst our students will help raise their self-esteem,

independence and their ability to work with others. New Form Captains/Vice Captains will be elected each term. Please encourage your child to put themselves forward when the opportunity arises.

Careers Updates

- During ASPIRE Day Y11 pupils will receive a range of important information on college applications, apprenticeships, university applications and changes in the labour market demands in relation to Covid-19, digitalisation and climatic change. Pupils will also have the opportunity to meet a range of employers to explore employability skills and the world of work.
- Y11 pupils should now be in the process of deciding on college courses and making applications. If pupils need independent advice, email our Careers Adviser Ms K. Patel: khyatipatel@positive-steps.org.uk
- Pupils in Y7-11 should check the 'Careers Team' on Microsoft Teams each week online to see the latest careers information relevant to their year group
- Careers Updates for parents / carers are on the school website and are updated each month
- All pupils in Y7-11 should now be registered with Xello, a career planning tool run by the Greater Manchester Careers Service. Pupils should ensure they have completed the activities requested

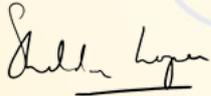
Travelling to and from School on Bikes

I would encourage this as it is a healthy alternative to public transport and an excellent form of exercise. However, some pupils are coming to school not wearing helmets and are weaving in and out of the traffic which is extremely dangerous. As dark nights approach, it is also preferable that they wear clothing visible to drivers and have lights on their bike. If your child does ride to school on a bike, please speak to them about these simple but important safety messages.

Finally, on behalf of my great staff, take care and have a restful half term and I pray that we all return safely after the break ready for the next half term.

Keep safe.

Yours sincerely



Mr Logue
Headteacher