



In all things faithful

3rd November 2020

Dear parent/carer

Update on COVID and the impact upon our Community

As we go through this second half-term, I have decided I would bring all parents up to speed with the ongoing COVID situation and the impact it has had on St Damian's. Since March I have tried to be as transparent as possible and to communicate as regularly as needed as doing so should stop any false information or rumours. I believe this is the least that you as parents deserve.

It would be great if I could say that we have not been touched by COVID, but the reality is that we have been and there has been disruption, most notably to pupils' learning in the classroom. I will briefly outline some issues below.

- **Receiving Notice of a Positive Case**

Last half term we were notified of 10 positive cases of COVID. When this happens, we follow a strict protocol, including contacting the Education Team [Population Health Improvement at Tameside] who liaise with *Public Health England*. They advise and support us on the process for identifying persons who should self-isolate and what action is being taken by the school. In essence, there is a considerable amount of follow up that we do including identifying 'close' contacts and ringing parents. When we do make the call to you it is important to note that when we ask your child to self-isolate it is because this should limit the chances of transmission. If your child has been asked to self-isolate it means that they must do so, in accordance with National guidelines. Sadly, some pupils have been asked to self-isolate more than once and I understand that this causes increased anxiety and lost learning. But I ask that you follow our advice and please accept that when we ask any pupil to self-isolate it is for safety reasons. As you know, we strongly promote attendance, and this is reflected in excellent pupil attendance. For us to ask pupils not to come into school, goes against our ethos.

At the time of writing, I am going to make an assumption that positive COVID cases are going to continue, and hence there is most likely going to be continued self-isolation amongst pupils and the inevitability of pupils missing time in school. If your child is showing symptoms: a high temperature, a new, continuous cough, a loss or change to their sense of smell or taste, please do NOT send your child into school. Get a test as soon as possible. Full guidelines are on the school website. These simple steps are for the safety of the whole school community and must be adhered to.

- **Disruption to Learning**

Sadly, all year groups have experienced disruption to their learning. Although true for all years, it is particularly disheartening for Year 11 pupils who will be sitting their GCSE exams this academic year. Despite staff adapting to the new challenges and ensuring remote learning, it is still not a substitute for face-to-face learning in the classroom. However, I have to reassure you that behind the scenes staff are working incredibly hard to ensure that any self-isolation and/or lockdowns are being prepared for and the on-line school is a great example of what this looks like in practice. Nonetheless, it is not an ideal situation where or when many pupils are 'working from home'.

- **Pupil Behaviour**

As you would expect at St Damian's, our expectations of behaviour, and pupils adhering to our 5 simple rules, is still very strong. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the mature approach of our

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great pupils to the changes last half term and their behaviour in general. I am proud to say that, overall, their behaviour continues to be positive and conducive to learning. However, there have been a few incidents where pupils have not followed simple instructions and/or the rules. I have spoken to a few parents over the past few weeks with regards to the very small number of pupils who believe the rules are not for them and that they can disrupt the learning of others. This is not only not acceptable but is also not fair. If these pupils continue to disrupt the learning of others, then they may be putting their places at St Damian's at serious risk.

Reminder. Masks are now part of the school uniform. Pupils must attend school with a mask, and I ask that they keep a spare mask in their bags. Pupils who do not have masks will ring their parents to bring a mask to school before entering or may be sent home to obtain a mask. This is a health and safety issue. Furthermore, just for clarification, we do not have an endless supply of masks to give to pupils on a daily basis.

- **Pupils' Attitude to Learning**

This is different from behaviour and for the purpose of this letter I will define attitude to learning as their attitude to work from home when self-isolating, revising when needed, undertaking independent study and completing homework on time and to a high standard. Again, overall this is positive, and this attitude will ensure that they achieve the grades that they deserve. However, there are a small number of pupils who, for example, are not working from home whilst self-isolating. There is no reason for this, and this will have longer term consequences in terms of achievement. The expectation is that if pupils are self-isolating they should be working at home as if they were in school. Furthermore, completion of homework and independent revision are also expected. As said previously, Year 11 pupils should be studying for at least a minimum of 2 hours each night.

- **The Well-Being of Pupils**

At St Damian's we believe that true education is holistic and develops the whole child. In essence a happy child achieves. An aspect of this is educate pupils on their well-being. There is no doubt that missing out on months of education, all the changes and 'forced' self-isolation is having an impact on many of our children. To support our children the Student Support Officers are working tirelessly to offer guidance and advice inhouse as well as signposting pupils to relevant external agencies. School have also set up a dedicated email address for pupils to ask for help, please remind your child of this facility: sso@stdamians.co.uk. Parents can support their children by always making sure that you make time to talk about the day and offer a listening ear, children often benefit and feel boosted by talking things through and knowing that someone has made time to sit and just listen to them.

- **Impact on the 'Normal' Running of the School**

Although we are running the school as effectively as possible, it's inevitable that the changes we have had to make have had some negative impact. I will not list them all, but I will give some indicative examples for illustration purposes;

- ✓ Parents' Evenings. Historically these are well attended, and feedback is overwhelmingly positive. Sadly, parents' evenings are unlikely to be face-to-face this academic year. Already Year 11 Parents' Evening on Thursday 12th November will be phone calls only.
- ✓ Curriculum Provision. Some subjects are being limited in their provision. For example, practical elements in a range of subjects have been curtailed. However, we are proud to say that we are continuing to deliver a robust academic curriculum.
- ✓ Meeting Parents. At this time of the year, I meet all Year 11 parents to discuss the importance of revision, Mock exams and to listen to any possible 'concerns'. Furthermore, numerous information evenings that focus on pertinent issues like well-being that have had to be cancelled

- ✓ After school intervention/revision. This has been well attended in previous years but again, sadly, we are unable to do this because of safety issues.
- ✓ Opening early in the morning. It was always great to see large numbers of pupils pre-school having a breakfast or simply socialising with their friends. Due to social distancing, even this simple activity is not permissible.

The examples above highlight some of the changes we have had to undertake but like everything we do at the minute, all activities and provision is always under constant review.

- **Impact on Staff**

My staff in school have also been subject to self-isolation, even when they have been tested and it comes back negative. Obviously, this impacts upon both learning and our positive environment. In the last few weeks of last half term, we had a significant number of staff self-isolating. Unfortunately, this has continued on the first day of this half term. I ask that you be patient as when there are a significant number of staff absent it has an impact on the quality of provision. Additionally, they have had to manage changes in their day to day work which have been substantial. Furthermore, despite St Damian's staff being very resilient, they are not immune to the effects of COVID on their well-being. They have family and friends who have invariably been negatively impacted. Despite all the challenges they are positive and continue to ensure that your child is cared for in the same St Damian's way as pre-COVID.

Safety

As I have stated on many occasions, safety of pupils and staff is the number one priority of the Governors, Senior Leadership Team and myself. We continue to review our robust risk assessment, have enhanced cleaning and have clear guidelines in school. St Damian's continues to be COVID secure, but it is not possible to ensure 100% safety. The reality is that nowhere can. However, we will continue to ensure safety remains our number one priority and will not become complacent.

Parental Support

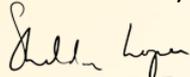
The actions taken at school level are necessary to stop transmission within our school Community, and in particular within the building and on the buses. However, I also need parents to help us reduce transmission rates in order to protect schools. For example, if your child is self-isolated by school then they should not be going out until the period of self-isolation ends. It is vital that we continue to open school as normal as we are doing to support face to face education and pupils' well-being. I ask that you please follow the National guidance with regards to face masks, social distancing, self-isolating etc. I have 2 children myself who have been self-isolating and I know, and appreciate, that this is not easy but I ask for your support to ensure our community is safe and the school continues to remain open for our great pupils.

Finally...

As we progress through this half-term, I once again ask that you support the school as in the previous half-term. The feedback I have had from parents has been remarkable and is testament to the great positive relationships that permeate St Damian's. I promise that all the staff at St Damian's, who are working under tight restrictions, are doing their best to ensure that your child is being educated in a safe and caring environment.

Keep safe.

Yours sincerely



Mr Logue
Headteacher