



In all things faithful

12th March 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

Welcome to my latest letter which should give an update on all the activity at St Damian's over the past few weeks.

Before I update, I would like to take this opportunity to say thanks to the vast majority of parents for your patience and understanding over the past few months [indeed the past year]. Whilst talking to parents and reading the plethora of emails sent to school it is obvious that you are really supportive of what we have done and what we have achieved together. A great example of this was your response to remote learning. Over the past year many decisions had to be made, often at short notice and indeed on occasions no notice or in response to U-turns. We may have not always got it right, but I can assure you that the staff at St Damian's were an absolute credit to this community. Finally, like you, I am hoping and praying that this is the last lockdown so that we can continue to work together to ensure that your child gets the great education that St Damian's is renowned for.

Update on Testing

A massive thank-you to the parents who have consented to the tests. A massive 95% consented. As I had hoped, there was an overwhelming positive response to consent. For the avoidance of doubt, these are not medical tests and are relatively easy to self-administer. This testing is to ensure the **safety of everyone** in the school, both your children and my great staff. When I asked staff to volunteer to 'support' this testing, I was inundated by the responses. They embarked on comprehensive training and did so with a smile 😊. I was, and I am humbled by their willingness to put themselves in the front line for the greater good of the community.

Since January, we have been testing both the pupils and staff with great success. This week we embarked upon mass testing of 100s of pupils and thus far the process has run like clock-work. This process epitomises St Damian's; pupils and staff working together in an efficient and effective manner. Please pass on to the pupils my appreciation of their patience and behaviour.

NB: If your child has to isolate, like previously, they will be added to the *Online School* to complete work that follows the same curriculum as the pupils in class.

This Week Generally

The 'buzz' around the school this week was a real joy to behold. Seeing the energy and enthusiasm from children was great. Simple things that we have taken for granted such as speaking to friends and interacting with each other is something that the St Damian's community has missed. Furthermore, I was really impressed with their attitudes in the classroom. It was blindingly obvious that the pupils are pleased to be back.

Behaviour and Safety

Last time pupils returned from lockdown, I was really impressed with their maturity with regards to following the new systems and protocols with regards to implementing a Covid-secure school. This included, for example, washing hands regularly, wearing masks and following the one-way systems in school. Thus far I am, again, delighted to report that pupils understand the importance of the restrictions in place. They really are a credit to both you as parents and the school. As you would expect from me, safety of both pupils and staff is my number one priority during these challenging times.

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St. Damian's RC Science College

Lenten Message

Lent is a time to reflect on the meaning of Lent and evaluate the ways in which we could be better followers of Jesus.

- During form time pupils will watch a liturgy led by Year 7 looking at how we are making a difference during Lent and will be saying prayers for people who need them most
- Week beginning Monday 22nd March pupils will be led by their Form Prefects through *The Stations of the Cross*. This will give pupils a chance to help to examine their lives by taking a moment to think about Jesus' journey to the Cross and what it means for us today.
- Week beginning 29th March is the start of Holy Week and the RE Department is inviting Years 7, 8 and 9 to walk The Way of The Cross. A small group of Year 7 will re-enact the Stations of the Cross and at each Station a prayer and reflection will take place.
- The last day of term is Maundy Thursday, Father Simon has recorded a special blessing for the pupils so there is an understanding of the significance for Catholics everywhere.

Year 11 Exams

We have finally received the information regarding this years' examinations. All teachers and subject leaders are working hard behind the scenes to ensure that pupil grades are reasonable, fair and accurate. The grades will be based on a range of evidence including ongoing work over the next few months. It is paramount that pupils continue to work hard and submit high quality work so that they maximise their performance across their subjects. To support teachers in this grading process, Year 11 pupils will complete **Formal Assessments during the week commencing 10th May 2021**. These will require thorough preparation and revision and results from these will be used as part of the grading process. With grades having to be with the exam boards by 18th June, we are working back from that date in terms of building a timeline for additional assessment and factoring in time for marking work and internal moderation. I ask that you support your child over the next few months as we work together to maximise their Year 11 qualifications. Once Exam Boards release more guidance at the end of March, I will be able to give you a further update.

National Careers Week

The Careers provision at St Damian's is exceptional and last week during National Careers week was action-packed with very high levels of pupil participation in a range of Careers activities. Each year group participated in different activities.

- ✓ Y7 considered urban planning and architecture with a particular focus on the upgrade of Altrincham Town Centre.
- ✓ Y8 looked at the scientific use of sustainable resources and the management of recycling with Suez.
- ✓ Y9 researched jobs involved in the huge infrastructure project to upgrade the Transpennine Rail link as well as jobs in business, finance & marketing created by Autotrader.
- ✓ Y10 listened to a talk on the range of pathways in Engineering by our Careers Enterprise Adviser, Mr Lee Mason.

During the week, pupils heard important messages about key skills needed for the workplace and that with hard work, a positive attitude and good qualifications, anything is achievable. Please remind your child each week to check Teams for the latest Careers Updates. During the week we also held a National Apprenticeship competition. As expected, entries were of high quality and I am delighted to announce the winners as follows;

- ✓ Year 7 – Ava Matthews & Elsie Matthews (Joint winners).
- ✓ Year 8 – Ruby Brazier
- ✓ Year 9 – Aoife McLoughlin
- ✓ Year 10 – Ethan Gregory

Many congratulations to all pupils on the exceptional work submitted. The above winners will receive a certificate and voucher. Well done! Careers provision is an important aspect of educating the whole child and raising their aspirations.

Travelling to and from school

During the return to school period pupils and parents must understand that we are still in a national lockdown. We must all play our part to ensure that the transmission of the virus is minimised. As a school we will support children in understanding what they must do when attending St Damian's. However, children must maintain their high standards of personal care whilst travelling to and from school. Please view this link to help protect everyone at St Damian's and save lives. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/956093/Coronavirus_safer_travel_easy_read_guidance.pdf

Attendance

Our expectations on attendance are simple: all pupils must attend. As before, we have implemented extensive procedures to ensure that St Damian's is Covid-secure. I am delighted to report that attendance across all year groups was great. This reflects the fact that they want to be here. Importantly, all the staff also want them here!

Science Week

This week was National Science Week. The St Damian's Science Department was determined to have a fun filled agenda for this years' British Science week. And they didn't disappoint. There have been lots of webinars and online activities for the students to access including Nursing taster days and Nuclear careers talks. Our STEM leaders have been busy demonstrating home experiments which students can complete with parents' permission. They have also launched their competition which links with the theme of this year's British Science week and are looking forward to judging the entries. The deadline is 31st March.

Another Competition: Letters to a President – A National Competition

This spring the University of Manchester's programme in American Studies is asking UK school students to write "Letters to a President", to the incoming US presidential administration. Our Year 9 and Year 10 students will be exploring the answers to the following questions in their responses:

- What issues should the new President prioritise during their first few months in office.
- What are your hopes for the shape of our future world?

The competition will be judged by three Professors at the University. The competition closes at midnight on 30th April 2021. This is an excellent opportunity for pupils, including improving their persuasive writing skills.

Year 11: A Date for the Diary

As a parent as well as a Headteacher, I fully understand the loss of education time in school. At St Damian's we aim to make the 5 years here very memorable and hope that pupils look back on the time here and have had many great memories and experiences. On the whole, I believe we excel in this, most notably as past pupils return to the school and speak highly of their time here. To celebrate the current Year 11 leaving school we have provisionally booked The White Hart at Lydgate on **Friday 25th June 2021 for an end of year 11 'party'**. As this date is provisional, we kindly ask that pupils do not go out and buy expensive dresses and suits for this event. I will confirm more details in due course and in line with National guidelines.

Excellent STEM Opportunity

As part of our objective to raise aspirations four Year 9 pupils attended a BBC STEM Online Event. This showcased careers from Finance in the BBC to the role of the engineer in outside broadcasts. Students

attended a Virtual Reality session and filmed and edited their own broadcast. This was a great experience for the pupils. I was so proud of their confidence and participation.

Pupil Leadership Update

Next week, pupils in Years 7 – 10 will have an opportunity to nominate themselves for either the role of Form Captain or Vice-Captain. 95% of pupils who held these positions in previous terms enjoyed the experience, with over 90% of them reporting their communication skills and resilience had increased. I ask that you encourage your child to put themselves forward as this is an excellent opportunity to build confidence.

Prefects

Miss Joyce, in the Year 10 assembly on 16th March, will outline the process on how to apply to become prefects, including the expected timeline. Each year, the standard of applications is always exceptional making the selection process extremely difficult. However, this should not put pupils off aspiring for such roles in pupil leadership is all about building confidence and resilience.

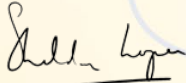
Finally...

I can't emphasise how delighted I am welcoming our great pupils back to school. We are a very strong community, and our pupils are at the heart of this. Once we re-establish our expectations and routines, we will quickly get back to what we do best. That is providing a safe environment for your children to excel in their learning. I will finish by adding an email I received on Wednesday morning. I have asked the parent for permission to include this.

"All staff and Teachers. My son is returning to school tomorrow, I would like to thank you all for ensuring my son had a constant source of schoolwork over this past year even when he had to self-isolate. Let's hope life can get back to normal soon".

I concur with these sentiments and I also hope that we can get 'back to normal'.

Yours sincerely



Mr Logue
Headteacher