



In all things faithful

St Damian's RC Science College

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Headteacher

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November 2022

Dear Parents/Carers,

A warm welcome to my penultimate newsletter of the year. I hope that you enjoy reading it as much I enjoyed writing it!

Catholicity of the school

This has been a real busy time for Mrs Gerschler and the RE department. I outline the range **and** depth of our liturgical opportunities below.

- ✓ *Remembrance Day commemorations.* Our liturgical service, conducted with absolute reverence and respect, was supported by our Cadets and was a very fitting tribute to those people who died and those effected by war today. We also prayed for those effected by war today in Ukraine and continue to support those from the country that have joined our community.
- ✓ *Inter-Faith week.* We celebrated our diversity by partaking in the National Inter-faith week. This year our Debate Club took part in arguments for and against the philosophical question "Does God Exist?". Teams presented arguments for both sides and challenging questions were asked from the audience. The team supporting God's existence won! During our INSET, staff attend an Inter-Faith breakfast and reflected on the 'Big Question': 'The origins of the world and do aliens exist'? This allowed time for reflection and team bonding!
- ✓ *Caritas Ambassadors.* This student leadership group launched our Advent Charity Hamper Appeal in assemblies. This year we are focusing on supporting members of our local community who need extra help with the cost-of-living crisis. Form groups are currently collecting items needed to build a hamper for more vulnerable members of our community, for example, the elderly. Can I thank parents in advance for your support.
- ✓ *Christmas Hampers.* Staff will be collecting for hampers that we will be donating to Infinity Initiatives who address inequalities in our community. This is putting our Catholic Social Teaching into practice, helping those in need and showing solidarity as a community. This service is integral to the 'St Damian's Way'.
- ✓ *Charity Clothes Day.* Our Caritas Christmas Own Clothes Day will take place on 14th December and a suggested donation of £1 will go towards the Caritas campaign #BeeThere for someone. More information can be found on their website <https://www.caritassalford.org.uk/beethere/>
- ✓ *Caritas Catholic Social Teaching Award.* Our Caritas Ambassadors awarded our trophy to Mrs Jinks for her dedication to charity and her commitment to ensuring our annual share day is such a success. We are excited to see who our next winner will be – supporting Catholic Social Teaching by encouraging, recognising, and rewarding love in action.
- ✓ *GIFT teams and Advent.* We will be inviting local parishioners from St Ann's and St Christopher's into school to watch our fantastic Yr7 rehearse for our Carol Concert. Fish and Chips will be served, and a special Advent Reflection will take place in the Chapel, led by our Yr10 GIFT team. Working alongside the Ashton SVP, this will help build bonds and support our local parishioners. Our Yr8 GIFT team launched the season of Advent with a special Friday reflection for the whole school. Forms will welcome The Travelling Nativity and take part in a special reflection in the next few weeks to celebrate the birth of Jesus.
- ✓ *Carol Service.* On Monday **12th December**, our traditional Yr7 Advent Carol Service and Nativity will take place at 6pm. This is a great evening to share in the Christmas story. Information on tickets will be available soon. Keep the date reserved, its always a packed house!

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- ✓ *Yr11 RE.* Well done to the Yr11 attending RE intervention over the past few weeks. So many have come along for extra revision that biscuits have had to be restocked! Pass on our thanks to those who have attended.

Safeguarding updates

- ✓ **A focus on Domestic Abuse/Violence.** This half term staff were educated on domestic abuse to help support some of our children and families. Unfortunately, domestic abuse is prevalent within our society, and this means that some of our students may see, hear or feel the effects of it in their homes. There is a wide range of domestic abuse including physical, sexual, economic, emotional and psychological abuse, including controlling and coercive behaviours, harassment and stalking. Witnessing these behaviours is detrimental to the development of our children and can have long term effects. At St Damian's we support children involved with domestic abuse through close partnerships with the Operation Encompass team. If you need help/support around domestic abuse you can contact the safeguarding team in school or visit the following websites: [Getting help for domestic violence and abuse - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk), [Domestic Violence UK](https://www.dvuk.org.uk) or [Domestic Abuse \(tameside.gov.uk\)](https://www.tameside.gov.uk)
- ✓ **National Online Safety [NOS].** Following on from the letter sent by Mrs Brophy, St Damian's is now an affiliated member of National Online Safety. This is a superb safeguarding tool to help students, staff and parents navigate the ever-changing cyber world. Whilst we all agree that the internet has opened up an array of opportunities to help educate, inform and inspire, it is very easy to be misguided and misled. The NOS platform has a wide range of webinars, courses, videos and guides. For parents we are creating a 'watchlist' to help point you in the right direction to understand how to protect your child and keep them safe. The letter sent by Mrs Brophy explains how you log on to NOS but if you need any support don't hesitate to contact school
- ✓ **Think bikes. Think safety!** More and more children are cycling to school. That is great news and whilst I admire this eco-friendly and healthy approach to travel, few of the children are wearing a safety helmet. Can I respectfully ask that parents/carers ensure that children have helmets to protect them in the case of an accident. This is even more important as the dark nights close in and children and visibility is much less. The National charity 'Brake' chooses November to promote road safety for cyclists and have shared this fact; "It is important to be aware that low speed falls are frequent and do cause preventable head injury, and that a well fitted, good quality helmet can reduce the risk of serious head injury or brain injury by 69%". If in doubt, helmets do help to keep our children safe.

Year 11 update

The following is important information for Yr11 parents.

- ✓ **Positive attitudes & Mock exams:** It is crucial that all students have a positive attitude towards their studies and have a strong self-belief that they really **can** achieve their potential. This starts with focusing in all lessons, attending appropriate revision sessions and working hard at home. The Mock exams have now started, and the expectation is that your child is working hard at home. I ask that parents support the school in ensuring that your child is working **at least 2** hours a night on revision, homework or independent study
- ✓ **Attendance.** I repeat again that there is a **strong correlation** between a students' success in their GCSE outcomes and their attendance. Put simply, good attendance equates to 'better' grades and this opens up many more opportunities post-16.
- ✓ **Intervention.** This has taken place in various subjects this half-term, including English, Science and Languages. However, from January, after the Mock exams, this will be co-ordinated at whole school level. This will include the creation of 'Key to Success' form groups.
- ✓ **Exclusions and Prom.** At the time of writing several Yr11 students have been suspended since September. Yr11 students who have been suspended will get a warning letter and if they are suspended again will have their invitation to the Prom withdrawn. *The Prom is by invite only.* Furthermore, if a students' attendance or their attitude to learning are poor, again they will have their invitation to the Prom withdrawn. However, students with poor attendance will be given an opportunity to improve.
- ✓ **College applications:** Please remind your child that there are digital links to college application forms on our Yr11 Teams website. The deadlines are also approaching. Please encourage your child to apply even if they are considering apprenticeships as 'Late' applications may get rejected

- ✓ *Btec PE exam.* Students are approaching a critical time in their course as units of work are completed and the final Leadership Unit is introduced. Students will be asked to plan, lead and review a sporting activity in the New Year. We also have an important cohort of students who are working hard to increase their chances of attaining the top grade in Sport by resitting their exam unit in February. Intervention evenings are each Thursday and will be increased in January. Good luck to all students!

Finally, there was great turnout at the recent parent's evening. An overwhelmingly positive night. Out of 98 responses, 96 parents *would recommend the school*. My staff are very appreciative for this. The full response of the questionnaire is on the school website under parental information but below are some comments from the questionnaires.

"My son is very happy in this school, he feels safe, he learns a lot, thank you"

"I would not hesitate in recommending St Damian's to other families. The education and support offered is second to none"

"Brilliant and exceptional, caring staff!"

"Both my children have attended this school and they have both enjoyed the full experience – great school"

"Not only does the school have high expectations for my child. They want the best for them, to be the best version of themselves. A school that I am proud to send my children to"

"I fully support the ethos of the school and know that this is reflected in the results my child is attaining"

"Brilliant School!"

The Elizabeth Jones MBE Literacy Hub update

I am delighted with our new 'Literacy Hub' and how our students have embraced this new facility for reading and private study. The 'Hub' is open before and after school, and during break and lunch for students to immerse themselves in a world of reading. As the author George R R Martin said *"A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies. The man who never reads lives only one"*. I cannot stress the importance of being able to read. Reading is the gateway to the curriculum and allows students to build knowledge and vocabulary needed to access all curriculum subject areas. A reminder: St Damian's has an online digital library, SORA, that students can access from any device. A link to SORA can be found on the school website under the 'student' tab and then 'library'. I encourage you to please use this fantastic resource.

Stretching the more able in Yr10 Maths

There are currently twenty Yr10 students attending after school Mathematics Master Class sessions every Mondays. They are working towards the OCR Free Standing Maths Qualification [FSMQ] which is an additional Maths qualification designed as an enrichment for key stage 4 students that are targeting, a high grade in GCSE Mathematics. This exam will stretch students with stimulating questions on GCSE Maths content plus some additional material (such as logarithms and calculus) that enriches the key stage 4 curriculum. The course encourages a love of maths, enabling students to show their confidence in the subject beyond the GCSE and is great preparation for A Level Maths. A thank you to both Mr Wilson and Mr Willerton who have voluntarily give up their time to organise.

Study clubs for students with Additional Needs

At St Damian's it is our priority that students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) thrive. To support students, we have created study clubs. We have been overwhelmed with the positive uptake and parental support for these. The focus of these clubs is on encouraging independent learning, support with homework and organisation skills. These clubs provide a calm, nurturing and positive environment for our students, enabling them to achieve their full potential. Please see below for details:

- Yr7 - 3:10pm-4pm Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays in Ambrose with Miss Gardiner
- Yr8 – 3:10pm-4pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays in Room 11 with Miss Walthew
- Yr9 – 3:10pm-4pm Wednesdays in Ambrose with Miss Gardiner
- Yr10 - 3:10pm-4pm Thursdays in Room 11 with Miss Walthew

- Yr11 - 3:10pm-4pm Thursdays in Room 11 with Miss Walthew

Changes to the school day from Sept 2023

As mentioned in my letter last month, the government have announced that each school should deliver a school week of **at least 32.5 hours** by September 2023. At St Damian's we are currently below this minimum expectation. After consultation and feedback, I will be changing the school day from September 2023. The start of the school day will be at *8.45am and the school day will finish at 3.15pm.*

Feedback from trainee teachers

As you know, St Damian's has many excellent teachers. Our core business is quality teaching, and I am proud that St Damian's is playing a part in training future teachers with many teachers sharing their expertise to develop and mentor trainees. Recently, I was delighted to read comments from trainee teachers in English, Languages and Geography. I will share a few of these comments with you.

"I had a brilliant placement: My subject mentor was absolutely amazing and I have learnt a lot!"

"The staff have been incredibly welcoming and supportive. All members of the English department at St Damian's have offered me support and guidance, providing feedback on almost all lessons that I have taught."

"Absolutely fantastic school where I was made to feel so welcome by all. Amazing mentor who was always there to support guide and help. Loved every minute of being part of the school family."

"St Damian's RCSC was such a warm and welcoming community to become a part of".

"All of the staff helped me work towards my goals and were always willing to help".

May I take this opportunity to thank Mrs Sutton, our professional mentor and the subject mentors, Mrs Turbatu, Mr Stoneley and Miss Beeley.

Ofsted and Inspections

Since November 2020, schools who have been judged outstanding are no longer exempt from routine inspections. In the news recently there has been a lot of disquiet about a significant number of schools who were once outstanding being downgraded to good [or below]. In fact, 80% of outstanding schools have been downgraded. As a school we know we will be inspected *before* July 2025. I believe that the quality of education and care that we provide is outstanding. However, the new framework is very robust. I hope that the hundreds of positive comments we receive from parents will be reflected when we eventually get the call. Remember, that this is your school and community. Be proud of it!

KS4 targets [Yr11 and Yr10]

Yr10 targets have now been sent out to parents. These targets are aspirational and reflect the grade that your child is capable of achieving in their GCSEs. Please note that these targets may change at the start of year 11 if a teacher has the evidence that your child is capable of a higher grade. We have recently reviewed the Yr11 targets, and a large number of students have had their target increased due to exceptional assessment scores and classwork in Yr10. Targets are aspirational, achievable, and used to motivate our students.

Yr10 work experience: 17th-21st July 2023

This is an essential and compulsory part of your child's Careers Education. Engaging and embracing with work experience helps your child to develop important employability skills such as time keeping, working as a team and using your initiative. Furthermore, it enhances personal qualities such as self-confidence or motivation. Students organise their own placement and upload the details of this on to the '*Connect Placement Manager*' app. Details of how to do this and guidance on suitable placements have been sent to all parents/carers via a text link. This information can also be found on our website at <https://www.stdamians.co.uk/careers-advice-guidance>

INSET Day

On Friday 18th November we had an INSET day. These are fundamental for whole school professional development and building the St Damian's team. Mrs Heenan, our Associate Assistant Headteacher, led a teacher staff training day and sharing good practice on challenging our high ability students and how we can continue to engage boys in

their learning. Mrs Ogden and Mrs Jinks planned and executed a 'building teamwork' activity for admin staff that focused on the importance of collaboration and effective communication. Overall, the training was a resounding success aimed at further building the capacity of staff here at St Damian's.

Staff Profiles

Following on from my October newsletter, below is the profile for another two members of staff for your perusal. I hope you enjoy reading them, I did!

- ✓ *Mrs Forbes, Data analyst:* I started working at St Damian's in January 2018 as a data analyst. Prior to this I worked for a bank for many years. My role as a data analyst involves producing data for staff, Senior Leaders, Governors and students. My other tasks are the administration of Careers and Work Experience. Careers admin includes various tasks such as promoting Yr11 College & Apprenticeship open days as well as arranging careers appointments with our external Careers adviser. The admin for Work Experience involves helping students to navigate the process, liaising with our external provider about placements & risk assessments as well as dealing with parent queries. What I enjoy most about working at St Damian's is interacting with students.
- ✓ *Mr Stoneley, Geography teacher:* I am currently in my 8th year of teaching – a career which has taken me to Thirsk, Yarm, and now Ashton. As a student, I look back on my school days fondly, part of which I put down to my teachers. Their support, enthusiasm, and positivity helped me to achieve my full potential. Therefore, my inspiration to become a teacher was simple – to make a difference to young peoples' lives. potential. After watching the TV series 'Educating Yorkshire', I saw the positive impact a teacher could have on a young person's life. It was this moment that made me realise teaching was the profession for me. Alongside my teaching role, I lead the St Damian's Eco Club, which enables me to encourage our students to spread awareness of environmental issues within the St Damian's community. After spending 5 years at St Damian's, I feel privileged working here. The staff are supportive and friendly, whilst the students are enthusiastic and hardworking.

Personal Development updates

- *Yr10 Careers Exhibition Trip:* On the 3rd of November, 30 students visited Connell College, Manchester, for a Careers exhibition. This enabled some of our students to speak to a variety of employers and Apprenticeship providers. All students found the visit worthwhile, and Mrs Harrison, reported that she was exceptionally proud of their conduct and behaviour.
- *Careers Update:* As part of our Personal Development offer at St. Damian's, your child has access to an exceptional careers programme. Please take time to visit our website <https://www.stdamians.co.uk/careers-advice-guidance> and familiarise yourself with the variety of opportunities they have access to. Here you will find information about Work Experience, Apprenticeships, Applying for University and also the local 'Labour Market Information', giving you the insight to the jobs available in the Greater Manchester Area.
- *Student Leadership:* The Student Council is excited to launch 'Thursday Drop-In' in the Literacy Hub. Students from all years are encouraged to speak to members of the Student Council about all aspects of school life. This may be about what helps them to learn, revision techniques or as simple as a formal chat. The first 'Thursday Drop In' will be held on 24th November.
- *Duke Of Edinburgh [DoE] update:* This year we have had a record number of students wanting to partake in the DoE award but sadly, we can't offer a place to every student. Students were chosen based on the quality of their application and their behaviour and attendance records in school. Miss Price, the DoE co-ordinator, has spoken to students about the next steps and will be able to signpost the unsuccessful applicants to various local organisations who may be able to help your child achieve their award. Students now need to choose a physical, skill and volunteering role that they will be able to do for 1 hour each week. This could be running/walking at Parkrun each week, volunteering at a local Brownie or Scout group, and completing a free online British Sign Language course. There are hundreds of activities to choose from and many of them can be done cost free. Please ask your child to see Miss Price if they are struggling for ideas. What an exciting year ahead! Can I thank Miss Price for this excellent opportunity for our great students.
- *LGBT+:* St Damian's has an active group of students who enjoy coming to lunch time sessions. Recently they have been making posters so that we can introduce ourselves properly. When asked what it meant to them to have

an LGBT group, students said they enjoyed having a space where they can be themselves. This group meet on a weekly basis.

- *Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) Play by Odd Arts:* Yr8 & Yr9 watched a play on CCE. The aim was to improve their understanding of CCE, raise awareness of exploitation and grooming and boost their resilience. After the play students reflected on what they had seen and talked about just how difficult it can be to avoid being coerced into difficult situation when targeted by strangers. Overall, our students were engaged and not only enjoyed the session but genuinely seemed to take away an increased awareness of the dangers of CCE and the support services available to them should they, or someone they know, ever need them
- *Anti-Bullying Week:* The theme this year is 'Reach Out' which empowers young people to do something positive to counter the harm and hurt that bullying causes. This half term we have been raising awareness and promoting anti bullying week. Yr7 have had access to an online Anti Bullying awareness production called 'Hope'. Yr8 students watched the performance 'Out Loud'. This focused on raising students' awareness and understanding of diversity and discrimination. The play helped students to understand the effects of bullying and reflect on the way they communicate with each other. Their attitude and behaviour throughout the performance was impeccable, demonstrating both maturity and respect and asking relevant questions to deepen their understanding. We have held our first meeting of our newly formed Bully Busters Team. The students successfully applied to become Bully Busters and are committed to providing nurture and inclusion through their work. They want to reflect on their own behaviour, set positive examples and create a kinder community. Watch this space for exciting initiatives the Bully Busters will bring to St Damian's!

Supporting families in need

As you are aware, nationally there have rising living costs that have had a detrimental impact on many families. The reality is that families [and children] at St Damian's are not immune to these pressures. With Christmas approaching, this will put extra strain on many, even to the extent that some families may struggle to purchase food for the Christmas period. This year Active Tameside are producing Food hampers for those in need. If you think you would benefit, please contact Mrs Harrison in school and she will complete an application form for you. All applications have to be submitted by 12th December. Don't let this chance pass you by if you are struggling financially.

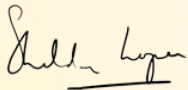
Finally...

Two brief points.

Firstly, again, thanks for your overwhelming support. Parental engagement is a real strength of our community. My staff and I never take this support for granted. However, a very small number of parents continue to believe it is their 'right' to shout at reception staff. For clarity, this is not, and never will be acceptable. St Damian's is built on respect and this value will always be at its heart. Thankfully, issues are extremely rare at St Damian's, but when they do arise, we endeavour to sort them. Being rude or shouting won't solve the issue.

Secondly, I continue to be really impressed with your children. They truly are a great asset to our community. As a token of my appreciation for their conduct, students were rewarded with a non-uniform Friday 21st October. True to the spirit of the '*St Damian's Way*', they behaved and worked impeccably on the day! Please congratulate them on behalf of the staff here.

Yours sincerely



Mr Logue
Headteacher