



16th December 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

The following is the last letter of 2020. This has been a very challenging year for our fantastic pupils and my great staff. Parents have been overwhelmingly supportive, and I start by saying, on behalf of all staff, a simple but genuine 'thanks'. We have remained united, we have persevered, and we have stayed positive and optimistic. As Headteacher I couldn't be prouder of what we, and I use the word 'we' deliberately, have achieved this year. Despite massive changes and challenges this term the school has continued to provide a high-quality education for your great children.

The following highlights key aspects of St Damian's that [nearly] reflects 'it's business as usual'. I will refer to these as Covid 'keeps' and I hope that they cheer you up in the week before Christmas.

Covid 'Keeps'

- *Well-being for our great pupils.* This continues to be exceptional at all levels. Our strong pastoral care, starting with Form Tutors and Heads of Year is a strength of our community. This is complemented by our two experienced Student Support Officers.
- *High quality teaching.* Despite, for example, restrictions on 'rooming', the creation of bubbles and inability to deliver certain practical elements, teaching still continues to inspire our pupils with the aim of maximising their potential. Staff professional development continues to ensure that staff are equipped to be kept up-to-date with current research and provided with opportunities to share best practice.
- *Remote learning.* The changes to this aspect of Teaching & Learning have been phenomenal. In a short period of time we have managed to create a system that allows pupils to continue learning if they are self-isolating. However, this system is not without its flaws and, in my opinion, will never be a substitute for face to face interaction with teachers.
- *Delivering our curriculum.* At St Damian's we are really proud that we deliver a robust academic curriculum. This prepares our children for their futures and ensures that their ambitions are not limited. This term, despite many restrictions, we have continued to deliver this. Our formal curriculum was complemented by our ASPIRE day in October which focused on a range of pertinent issues. Both the planning and delivery of this was sublime and was part of our Mission, to 'develop the whole child'.
- *Careers education.* Quite simply, our careers provision is truly comprehensive. Having spoken to several people including our Enterprise Adviser and Enterprise Co-ordinator from outside the school I am delighted to say that we are up there with the best across Greater Manchester. This aspect, like the ASPIRE day is to develop the whole child and prepare them for the next stages of their lives.

The above continues to be complemented by our proud Catholic ethos, based on our core Gospel values of love, respect and kindness. This term we have continued to educate pupils in the faith. Below are some examples promoting our core values. This list is not exhaustive.

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St. Damian's RC Science College

During Advent, forms have been using the CAFOD advent calendar to look at the lives of other people around the world at Christmas. This is a chance to pray for others around the world as we prepare for the birth of Jesus.

- During Advent Year 7 have had an opportunity to 'Grill the Priest', asking Fr Simon questions about himself and his vocation. Year 7 have been brilliant, asking Father some very challenging questions!
- Despite Covid, our traditional Nativity and Advent service will continue, albeit differently. We will record it and put it on Twitter and the website. I hope that you make time to watch this wonderful St Damian's tradition and reflect on the true meaning of Christmas. Watch this space!
- During the past few weeks, staff have celebrated the joy of Advent through organising a random 'acts of kindness' event. These gestures not only underpin our values of hope and kindness in which there is an abundance in our Community, but also reinforce them.
- We are currently planning our second ASPIRE day that focuses on 'The St Damian's Way' and what it means to be part of our community. As well as celebrating our feast day, we will also take time to reconnect with our Mission Statement and allow pupils and staff time to reflect on what it means to be part of an outstanding Catholic community.

Inevitably, and sadly, there are some activities that we have had to curtail on safety grounds. For example, the traditional Parents' Evening and meeting parents face to face have been cancelled, after school activities have been restricted or pupils are limited in participating in sports competitions. Furthermore, many pupils have had to self-isolate and this disruption no doubt causes anxiety.

I know, and appreciate, that it's not perfect but be rest assured that the St Damian's community is strong, united and resolutely committed to providing the best education to our pupils, **your** children. I am proud of all my staff and I hope that we can all celebrate the endless positive energy that radiates from each one of them.

Charity at Christmas

The St Damian's Food Bank is our advent charity this year. We decided that the most appropriate way we could help this Christmas was to donate and support local families. I ask that, if you can, please contribute through SIMS pay. For example, a small donation of £5 will provide an evening meal for a family and a chance to be together. As a community let us help others during these difficult times. At the time of writing, we have reached a massive **£1915**, which shows the generosity of our Community. This does not include pupils donating on Christmas Jumper day. A massive thank-you. Helping others is integral to the 'St Damian's Way'.

National Tutoring Programme

Over the next few months, some of our pupils will be invited to take part in the National Tutoring Programme. Pupils will be asked to work in small groups either face to face in school or online. The aim will be to support pupils address learning needs that remain, following the return to school.

Safeguarding over Christmas

Christmas is an exciting time for most families but the prospect of being away from school again under Tier 3 restrictions may be daunting for some children. To help children stay mentally resilient, the NSPCC have put together some fantastic reading for parents. I encourage you to read this.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/childrens-mental-health/>

Also, this is a great time of year to remind parents about the importance of helping children stay safe online, especially when new phones and tablets are being received. It is important that parents know phones have got access to the internet and this comes with a health warning.

<https://www.internetmatters.org/advice/14plus/>

NB. It is important that parents understand that 'anxiety' can happen to **all** children and that 'risks' associated with use of the internet' can happen to **all** children. The mantra should be '*it could happen to my child*'. I ask that all parents adopt this mantra as it is better to be proactive.

Pupil Leadership

Pupils from all years have fully embraced all aspects of pupil leadership contributing to the delivery of our academic and pastoral curriculum. From high quality Form Captain presentations, producing STEM display boards or launching our new 'Parental Engagement' area on the school website, we are really proud of their maturity and willingness to engage in school life. I am also getting excited about our pupils planning a new termly publication produced by the students *for* the students called '*The Secret World of Creativity*'. Watch this space!

Congratulations to 2 of our Year 10 pupils

Jessica Akubuo entered a Hospitality & Catering Competition run by The Manchester College for pupils across Greater Manchester. Jessica's performance was exceptional, resulting in her winning the competition. She was awarded a gift voucher as her prize by The Manchester College. A massive well-done Jessica from all at St Damian's!

And a big congratulations to Angel Ryan. She was one of three prize winners in the GM Higher Competition. Angel took part in a festive competition called the '12 Days of Higher Education' running from 1st-12th December for pupils in Y9-13. The competition was run by the Consortium of Universities in Greater Manchester for all schools in the North West region. Well done Angel!

We are always really proud when a member of our community is recognised for their hard work. If any parents have something that their child has achieved, please let me know and I will be sure to share!

Year 11 Updates

- *Mocks.* Throughout the Mocks I was extremely impressed with the maturity of pupils and their behaviour was impeccable. I ask that you pass on a big thanks to them. This bodes well for the future.
- *Intervention.* Starts second week of January and is an excellent opportunity for your child. Where applicable I ask that you support the school and ensure that your child attends if needed. This intervention will be before AND after school.
- *2021 GCSE exams.* Your child should have a good rest over the Christmas period ready for a great start in January. From experience, pupils who work hard from January fulfil their potential. Just to reiterate what pupils already know, there really is no substitute for hard work and revision. A few weeks ago, the Government announced some plans regarding these exams. On first inspection they offer some reassurance, but I await finer details before I can comment in depth. Until then, it is '*business as usual*', i.e. high-quality teaching supported by exceptional pastoral care.

- January/February exams. The following exams are taking place when we return in January:
 - Thursday 7th January: Construction & Music
 - Tuesday 2nd February: Sport
 - Thursday 4th February: Child Development

If your child is sitting these exams, it is vital they prepare thoroughly.

- *Post-16 Destinations.* It is great to see the ambitions of our pupils and what they plan to study next year. For example, A Levels in Maths, Sciences & Humanities & new subjects such as Psychology & Law, Vocational courses in Catering & Early Years Education & T Levels in Electrical Engineering. However, regardless of what your child is planning next year, the mantra should be to maximise their GCSE grades as this will open up more opportunities.
- *Support.* January onwards can be a very anxious time for your child. We have strong pastoral support mechanisms in school. I ask that if there is an issue, please speak to Mrs Stoneley [Head of Year] or myself as soon as possible.
- *Working together.* I promise that the teachers are doing everything possible to maximise your child's potential. But **a]** we can't do it alone and **b]** we don't have a magic wand. We are here to help and support, but I ask that you understand that we can't resolve 'every' issue and that you speak respectfully to staff. Please impress upon your child the importance of the exams, the need to work hard both in class and at home and, most importantly encourage your child to do their best. Positivity, through genuine praise works wonders for teenage children!

And on a real positive note Year 11 pupils had **100% attendance on 1st December**. This was despite the pandemic, the Mock exams and the freezing cold morning that day. This should be commended. Very few schools in the country could boast of such a statistic and it is testament to the resilience of our Year 11 and wanting to be in school. Many staff commented to me regarding this, saying that they were really impressed!

Year 10 Enrichment Opportunities

Each year a number of St. Damian's Yr10 High Ability pupils are invited to take part in the Greater Manchester High Ability Programme run by Loreto Sixth Form College. We are pleased that 25 Yr10 pupils attended the online launch event on 2nd December. The event included presentations from the Principal of Loreto College and the University of Manchester as well as Loreto College students. Over the next two terms, pupils will engage in enrichment opportunities which will support pupils' ambitions to achieve Grades 8 & 9 at GCSE.

Year 7 Updates

I am delighted to report that Year 7 have settled in well to their first term. They have adjusted well to secondary school and overall, they have followed the 5 rules. Two further points:

- *New Head of Year 7.* Over the past few weeks Mrs D'Rozario has become the new Head of Year 7. I know that Year 7 parents will support Mrs D'Rozario as she endeavours to ensure that your child will get a great education and be looked after during the coming months and years.
- *Changing forms.* Over the past few weeks Year 7 pupils have completed assessments. This means there will be changes to Year 7 groups when pupils return in January. These changes will ensure your child continues to get the best possible academic and pastoral provision.

General Information

- *Anti-Bullying Week.* As a school we take bullying very seriously. I am on record as saying that bullying is likely to happen anywhere where there are a number of people. St Damian's, sadly, is not immune to bullying. But we do **not** accept it and we deal with it promptly and robustly. Last year we retained the BIG Award for our commitment to Anti-Bullying, our Form Captains delivered presentations to their forms about the impact of bullying. For the avoidance of doubt, bullying contravenes our values and isn't tolerated.
- *Food for Life.* I am delighted to say that, yet again, we have been awarded the *Food4life* Gold Certificate in recognition of providing healthy food and drinks which have met evidence-based nutrition and oral health guidelines.
- *Admissions Sept 2021:* I am delighted to say that we, yet again, have had a real positive response from parents wanting to get their children a place in St Damian's. Nearly 670 parents have put us down as a choice with nearly 250 putting us down as first choice with only 165 places available. Sadly, there will be a lot of disappointed parents, but it demonstrates that the wider community have trust in the St Damian's staff that we will provide a great education for their children.
- *Admissions Consultation.* The Governing Body are consulting with regard to proposed changes to the Admissions Policy for entry to school for 2022/2023. Full details are available on the school website at <https://www.stdamians.co.uk/admissions-consultation-2021>. Any comments should be sent to Mrs E Jones, Chair of Governors, by 12th January 2021.
- *Behaviour.* As usual, the vast majority of our pupils follow our 5 simple rules. It is not only a reflection of our standards in school but is also a reflection of the parental support for the school. I never take parental support for granted and I thank parents for supporting these rules, which are embedded. However, a small number of pupils are at risk of permanent exclusion. I have spoken to a few parents with regards to this. For the avoidance of doubt, continued misbehaviour and/or the disruption of pupils' learning will not be tolerated.
- *Uniform.* Most mornings I am at the front of the school and I can't help but be amazed at the standard of uniform. It is, quite simply, outstanding and demonstrates that pupils are proud of the school. Equally, I am proud that they are ambassadors for St Damian's. I am also impressed by the near universal wearing of masks. Again, can I express my thanks to parents for ensuring the safety of our community.
- *Attendance.* The attendance this term has been astonishing and in many respects it has never been so great. If figures for self-isolating are 'removed', attendance has consistently been higher than last year for the same period. This reflects that pupils love being here and that parents are supportive and have trust in the school during these challenging times.
- *Early Closure:* School will finish at 1:25pm on Friday 18th December for Christmas. School buses have been arranged and all services, apart from Stotts 771 to Clayton & Stotts 775 to Fitton Hill are able to collect at 1.25pm.
- *Car Park.* As you are aware the car park at St Damian's is small and is extremely busy before and after school. I have witnessed parents 'jumping' red lights, blocking other cars and parking in bus lanes. And this morning I was informed that a parent allegedly swore at a member staff. All of this is unacceptable, more so at St Damian's where respect is at our core. Staff are there to ensure that your children leave the school **safely**. Please be considerate and preferably, drop you child off outside of school.

- *Snow Closure:* We recently had the first snow of the year. If school has to close due to severe weather conditions a text will be sent to parents as early as possible. If we are forced to close during the day, pupils will be asked to contact parents to make arrangements for their safe journey home. School will remain open until all pupils have safely left the building.

Covid Update

Sadly, Covid hasn't gone away and it is still very 'real' and dangerous. I know there is talk of a vaccine, but we need to remain alert as we approach the festive season. As a community we are not immune to this. Over the years I have formed great relationships with many parents who I know that have been affected and several of my staff have also been adversely affected. I wish them all, parents and staff, a speedy recovery and I ask that parents remember all those in our Community who have suffered in their prayers.

I also want to give credit to the pupils in all years who have had to self-isolate, especially those that have had to self-isolate on more than one occasion. They have come back and maintained their levels of engagement despite missing out on work.

Christmas Cheer

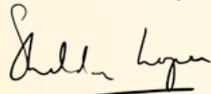
All this week we have made a determined effort to ensure that Christmas Cheer is prevalent throughout the school. Each morning I have been 'forced' to deliver some festive cheer to forms dressed in a variety of different outfits. From the smile on pupils' faces it was worth it! And during form time this week the elves at St Damian's have been ensuring that all pupils have been treated to a hot chocolate. When we talk about living out our values, this is exactly what we mean. St Damian's truly is a community based on love and hope. It has been a joy watching the pupils enjoy a bit of Christmas cheer. Thursday is Christmas Jumper Day and I know that pupils and staff will embrace this and really get into the spirit of Christmas.

NB. These Christmas activities were thoroughly planned by my fantastic support staff. The sole purpose was to **bring joy and smiles to our great children and improve their general well-being** at a very difficult time. At the time of writing, I am thrilled that this objective was achieved! And to avoid any confusion, these activities have been conducted under strict Covid restrictions, as you would expect from St Damian's.

Finally...

On behalf of the governors and staff, I wish you all a Holy and Happy Christmas and let's pray for a better 2021. Let's continue to be positive and optimistic that 2021 will be different and that we can get back to some normality. Stay safe and God bless!

Yours sincerely



Mr Logue
Headteacher