



4th May 2020

In all things faithful

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Headteacher

Mr S Logue BA (Hons), M.Ed., NPQH

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope that you and your children are still well and keeping safe in these strange times. The following letter contains some updates and information for your perusal.

School 're-opening'

Over the past week or so there has been much media speculation around schools and their 're-opening'. Recent government statements make clear 2 issues. Firstly, that schools will not be open over the Summer Holidays. The second point is that schools are likely to be opened in a 'phased' way. My understanding is that the Government is working on the logistics of this behind the scenes and that further details and guidance will follow.

What I can say with absolute clarity, is that when St Damian's is safe for pupils **AND** staff to 're-open' we will do so. And we will do so in a planned and coherent way. When speaking to the great staff here over the past few weeks; support staff, teachers and leaders, it is obvious that they want to teach your children, care for your children, love your children and want to get back to St Damian's as soon as possible which is a place of hope and stability for us all.

Remote Learning

As I said previously, it is not the intention that parents 'home school' their children. That just wouldn't be either possible or practical. As I have also said before, remote learning is not an ideal situation for your child's education, regardless of their needs or abilities. Great teaching, the hallmark of St Damian's, is about building relationships and face to face interaction; neither of these can be successfully accomplished online. Having said that, the teachers are making massive efforts to ensure that the work on Microsoft Teams is both accessible and of high quality. We won't, and don't, always get it right but it isn't for the lack of trying and we are quickly learning from our 'mistakes'.

Parents must not put their children under too much pressure to get everything completed or everything right. Remember that the message is 'balance'. As experienced teachers we understand that not every child will get it all right and we will strive to address this when school reopens.

Furthermore, Mrs Henshaw is uploading weekly updates to the school web-site and there are examples of websites that support learning from home. The BBC Bitesize Daily programme is also available. I ask that you look at these with your children as they are invaluable. But they **do not replace** the work on Microsoft Teams, they are in addition to this and could support and reinforce their learning. Also, to support your children, it is crucial that they are actively reading. Reading underpins all that pupils will learn now and in their futures.

Pupils and work

I am pleased to report that there is excellent feedback from staff about how hard some pupils are working at home. This is great to hear. Last week, a new feature was added to Microsoft Teams to allow teachers to see the amount of time that pupils are spending on their learning. Whilst teachers were pleased with a number of pupils, it is clear that there is still a significant number of pupils who are not accessing their work online or responding to teacher comments to improve their work. This is a serious concern and is not the 'balance' that I refer to above. This needs to be addressed immediately to stop pupils falling behind. I ask that parents support the school and ensure that their children are completing the work set. Be under no illusion that this will affect their future prospects.

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Remember that if there are issues with ICT, please email pupilproblem@stdamians.co.uk and be patient for a response. Please also ask your child to check their school email for a response. Thanks for your co-operation in this matter. Please be assured that behind the scenes the ICT department is working hard to resolve any issues as quickly as possible.

Update on the proposal to change the times of the school day

Thank you to those of you who responded to the consultation about the changes to the times of the school day. As you are aware the consultation closed on the 17th March and I am now able to confirm the result. When we return from the summer break in September 2020 the St Damian's school day will change. The start of the school day will remain unchanged (**9am**) but the end of the day will **change to 3:10pm**. Throughout the consultation I have liaised with Transport for Greater Manchester and they have agreed to incorporate the 3:10pm finish into the school bus timetable for September.

As I explained in my letter I do believe that the benefits far outweigh any disadvantages and although the school day will be shortened, there will be no reduction in curriculum time. I would never do anything that would compromise the education of your children.

Stay at home

As the 'lockdown' continues it is imperative that we all continue to follow the National guidelines. At the time of writing the message is still to '**stay at home**' to protect lives. I know this is very frustrating for you and your children. I have two children, aged 16 and 14, and I appreciate that it's not easy but to ensure we protect lives and the NHS, it has to be done.

Phone call home

This week, it is my intention that all parents of pupils in Years 7 – 10 will be contacted by school. This is a quick phone call to ensure that all is fine in these strange times. It is not reasonable to expect the phone call to address all your concerns but rather a call to touch base.

Year 10 updates

- We have had to cancel the *work experience* opportunity for Year 10. We did so reluctantly but I hope that you appreciate that in these uncertain times there was no alternative
- A big well done to the 30 pupils who participated in the *Raising Aspirations Programme* at Ashton Sixth Form College. Their maturity shone through and feedback from the College was positive. I am proud that they were great ambassadors for St Damian's. They will receive feedback when they return to school. Again, well done!
- Disappointingly, some Year 10 pupils are *doing very little, or no work* at home. It is imperative that parents ensure their children are working on their GCSE work. This time is invaluable. Additionally, communicating with teachers via Microsoft Teams is a great mechanism for teachers to support them in their learning
- When we come back, Ms Joyce and I will be selecting *prefects*, including Head Boy and Head Girl. We want as many pupils to proudly represent the school as possible and be ambassadors for our Catholic community. One of the criteria for selecting pupils will be the work and effort that they are currently doing at home which will show their maturity to become a prefect

Year 11 and GCSE results 2020

I report that staff are working very hard in ensuring that our great Year 11 pupils will not be penalised for the cancellation of their exams this May/June. Over the past two weeks, and indeed over the next three weeks, teachers and subject leaders will be having professional conversations and dialogue about what your child was '**most likely**' to get in May/June if they sat the exams. This will then be QA'd by SLT before being sent off to be QA'd Nationally. Note that this process is

confidential, and parents are not to contact teachers regarding these grades. Please reassure your children that this will be completed with the upmost integrity by their teachers.

Safeguarding update

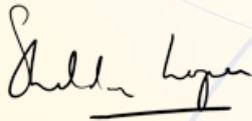
There is little doubt that many of our children are being affected by the Covid-19 global pandemic and will be struggling to make sense of the changes they are experiencing. Many adults may feel fraught or lack patience due to the confined space that we are living in, however, it is worth looking out for subtle changes in your child's behaviour as it may be a sign that they are asking for help but don't know how to do so. Signs of distress may include: low mood, concentration problems, aches, pains, bed wetting, loss of appetite, clingy behaviour and being fearful. If you do notice any of these, make the time to sit down and talk to your child, listen to their worries, keep calm, iron out any misconceptions and encourage your child to participate in some form of exercise – heart felt conversations can boost confidence and ease worries. *'It's good to talk'* should be the mantra. For further support, these web sites may be useful:

<https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/coronavirus-information-and-support>

<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/6-ways-parents-can-support-their-kids-through-coronavirus-covid-19>

Finally, on behalf of the staff and governors, take care. These are challenging times and you are in my thoughts and prayers. I hope that a return to 'normality' is sooner rather than later!

Yours faithfully



Mr Logue
Headteacher