



13th July 2020
In all things faithful

Dear Parents and Carers,

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Headteacher

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

I trust that you are well. Welcome to the last fortnightly letter of the 2019/2020 academic year. This letter contains some updates and information for your perusal in these strange times.

September 2020

It is my hope that there will be a return to some normality in September. At present the senior leadership team is doing thorough planning to reopen safely and sensibly. However, this is a complex situation and at the time of writing I have to be frank and say that it is highly unlikely that it will be 'normal' as in before March 2020. I intend to send a letter the week before we start in September with more details [National guidance is changing/updated] but below are some changes you need to be aware of.

I stress that this is correct at the time of writing and is subject to change: September is a '*long time away*' and there is the real possibility of many changes, but the following is balanced and proportionate based on the guidance available.

- **Form Groups.** National Guidance and case studies show that there will have to be changes to forms in order to ensure that pupils in different year groups have minimal contact with other year groups. As such, we are planning that teaching groups in Key Stage Three will be based on Form Groups to minimise the risk of transmission. Consequently, all form groups at KS3 will be changed accordingly.
- **Pupil Groupings.** Furthermore, due to National guidance around health and safety restrictions, we will be looking at the **size** of pupil groupings. In essence, many teaching groups **will** see a reduction in their numbers to accommodate safety and appropriate distancing within the classroom. All decisions made will have been carefully considered and based on the safety of both pupils and teachers. At this time, safety of all is my number one priority. Parents need to understand that this is necessary.
- **Zones.** Due to the guidance, pupils will be in 'zones' to minimise the risk of transmission. The easiest [and probably only] way to zone pupils in a meaningful and practical manner is to keep them in the same parts of the school for most of the day in their year groups. Again, this is not ideal, but it is clear from the guidance that this is the expectation. As Headteacher, safety is the over riding priority, especially in the first half term.
- **Curriculum provision.** Although we will continue to provide a strong academic curriculum which is broad and balanced, the current guidance says that some areas of the curriculum, for example contact sports, will be withdrawn. As a school, we have to plan accordingly. This will have an impact more on the 'practical' subjects and this will be reviewed when we establish the routines in school.
- **INSET days and first week back.** Unlike previous years and to ensure that we are planning for the return of our pupils in September there will be changes to the first week back. The governors have agreed that in the first week back the plan for readmitting pupils will be as follows: Tuesday 1st and Wednesday 2nd September will be INSET days and **closed** for all pupils. Thursday 3rd September will be open **only** for Year 7 and Year 11 pupils. **All** pupils will be welcomed back on

Friday 4th September. Can I reiterate that this is for safety reasons as we establish new systems as to school as quickly, but as safely, as possible.

- Behaviour Policy. As you are aware, the standards at St Damian's is a major factor in the many great successes we have had together. In September the success of reopening will depend on the maturity and compliance of our amazing children and the support from our great parents. The behavioural policy will be updated and shared with all parents in due course to reflect the implications of Covid. Changes such as one-way systems, importance of personal hygiene and following the '*Catch it, Bin it, Kill it*' advice are all new. I ask that parents support the school in these new aspects of behaviour. For avoidance of doubt, I will enforce these rules.
- Buses. I have been informed that buses will be running as normal but will have some 'imposed' rules that I will share with you before we start back in September. I simply don't have all the details yet to share but government guidance is actively discouraging the use of public transport.
- Staggered times. Because of the manner in which pupils arrive at school, a sizeable number on school buses, it is not feasible to have a staggered start. However, the pupils will have a staggered and controlled 'exit' from the building to ensure that we social distance as much as possible.

In essence, parents must understand that this is an unprecedented situation for St Damian's, is highly complex and extremely challenging. Most importantly, they must **accept that it won't be 'normal'**. Having said that, I want to reassure you that all decisions will be in the best interests of your children and staff here at school.

At these times I ask that you remember our official motto, '*In Omnibus Fidelis*' and pray that we re-open safely in September without any major issues.

Year 10 pupils

I am pleased to report that the past few weeks, overall has been a resounding success for the Year 10 pupils. Whilst I accept that there is no replacement for 5 days in school, from speaking to both pupils and teachers, the face to face teaching and physically being in the school, has been largely beneficial to their well-being. The conduct and attitude of your children has been great to see. I have appreciated your patience and understanding at this time. I reiterate again that the great staff of St Damian's will rise to the challenge of the September opening in a manner that will be positive for our pupils.

During this final week, I encourage Y10 pupils to engage fully in the Virtual Work Experience activities. Whilst it is no substitute for being on a proper work placement, these activities will help put pupils at an advantage when they apply for college, apprenticeships and further training in the Autumn term. It will also help them increase their awareness of the skills needed for the world of work.

At present there is a national consultation process around how the GCSE exams will look next year. As soon as I have more information, I will summarise it for you, but the proposal is that the GCSEs *will be* going ahead with a few tweaks. Watch this space.

Staff leavers July 2020

It is with sadness that we say goodbye this year to four valued members of staff. All four have served the pupils of St Damian's with commitment and dedication to ensure a first-class educational experience and their impact in ensuring St Damian's is outstanding cannot be understated. Mr Graham has supported the school the past few years and is going to be retiring this summer. Ms Tomkow, lead teacher in MFL, leaves us to take up a leadership post in a Manchester school. Mrs Battaglia, Head of Year, leaves up to take up a leadership post in a Rochdale school and Mrs Rothwell is taking early retirement to travel the world.

I am sure everyone at St Damian's will echo my sincere thanks to them and wish them all the very best in their future endeavours.

Safeguarding updates

A] Keeping your child safe online during Covid-19

The DfE have produced a concise and easy to use document that helps parents to navigate their way through the online safety for their children. This document covers issues from safety settings that can be installed on home computers/devices to how to obtain help for more complex online abuse. Many of the support strategies that are suggested have been signposted in previous letters to parents but please take the time to visit the website below so that you know how to respond to concerns.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-keeping-children-safe-online>

As always, the excellent safeguarding team at St Damian's advocates parents having open and honest discussions about online activities to help your child understand the everyday dangers that are posed on the internet. And remember the mantra, 'it could happen to any child'.

B] Keeping your child safe from abuse and harm

St Damian's prides itself on being able to provide children with a safe place to be during school hours. However, the coronavirus pandemic has removed the day to day routine for school children and has unfortunately provided opportunities for children to be potentially at greater risk to possible harm and abuse. This is a national issue and in response the Government has produced an easy to navigate document for parents and carers to give you advice on how to prevent and support your child from the possible dangers. The document covers issues from domestic abuse to criminal exploitation and can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-keeping-children-safe-from-abuse-and-harm/advice-to-parents-and-carers-on-keeping-children-safe-from-abuse-and-harm>

It is worth all parents and carers familiarising themselves with the information on this website so that we can safeguard effectively within our homes.

Parental Support

As we approach the end of the academic year, I have to briefly mention the support from parents. When I say support, I am referring not only to the past few months, but the past few years. As Headteacher tough decisions have to be made that may not be popular. But all decisions made are for the benefit of the children and the wider community and I believe that the support of parents is fundamental to a successful school. I am proud to say that the support for what the staff do at St Damian's is simply overwhelming! My staff value this support, I value this support, and I have never, nor ever will, take it for granted. In essence, this is your school community. The comment below is from a Year 7 parent that I received just over a week ago. I have contacted the parent for approval and removed the parents name.

Dear Mr Logue

I just want to take this opportunity to thank you and all your staff for all the hard work you have all put in during this pandemic. My son is only in year 7, but I can see already what a fantastic team/family you all are and I am very proud that we are now part of it. The teachers have been amazing putting work on teams and my son has been able to follow the work quite easily. It's clear that they have put in lots of effort and we have really enjoyed working through the subjects together as a family. It has made the situation a lot less stressful throughout. The phone calls have been a massive help too, as it makes pupils feel like their still thought of plus in my opinion it really helps with mental health. Well done St Damian's staff you are all a credit to the school and I can see why it is OUTSTANDING. Thank you and kind regards.

Some of the words in here such as ‘fantastic team’, ‘well done’ or ‘amazing’ are lovely to here. But the word ‘family’ is the word that I hope describes best what we, St Damian’s, are all about!

Support for parents

At St Damian’s we use the expertise of external partners to ensure that your child gets a true education, which develops the whole person. One such partner is called Elevate. We have been informed that they are providing a free webinar to parents. This webinar will be on *time management and organisation* to support parents in getting their children organised ahead of the new academic year. The webinar is called ‘*How to help your child manage their time effectively and overcome distractions when studying*’. This will take place on Tuesday 14th July 2020 at 6pm. The sign-up link is <https://get.elevatecoaching.info/uk/webinar-signup-14-july/>. I would encourage as many parents as possible to take advantage of this free webinar. More than ever, parents need to be supporting their children, if only to reassure them in these challenging times.

Attendance

A few weeks ago I informed you that nearly 200 letters were posted to pupils congratulating them for their effort and quality of work produced during lockdown. Well I am pleased to now recognise the brilliant attendance of 125 pupils who had 100% attendance up to March 2020. As a school we have always promoted good attendance as evidence strongly shows that good attendance correlates with pupils achieving their potential. Year on year the attendance of the pupils at St Damian’s is always above National Averages. This is great because it means that they are more likely to achieve, but importantly it also shows that the pupils love coming to school. I hope that this continues in the future. Well done to those pupils. A letter, with a little surprise, is in the post!

Two successes in our Community

We are delighted and proud to share with you the fantastic achievements of Nicholas Unsworth in Year 7. Some of you might be aware that Nicholas took part in BGT as part of the group *Sign Along With Us* and even received the Golden Buzzer from David Walliams! More recently he has appeared on Blue Peter and received a special edition music Blue Peter badge which was designed by Ed Sheeran. Well done Nicholas!

Also, we are delighted and very proud to announce that Josh Thewlis, an ex-pupil, was named as ‘*Young Player of the Year*’ at Warrington Wolves. He has now played for the first team and England U21s and next season will be playing regular first team professional rugby league. Josh left St Damian’s in June 2018 when he continued to pursue his love of Rugby. We are hoping that next year Josh will take time out of his busy schedule to come into St Damian’s and talk to pupils about his journey/dedication to become a professional Rugby player. If you would like to see Josh in action, click on this link <https://www.facebook.com/WarringtonRLFC/videos/2455409888048642/>

Year 11 Results day

This is one of my favourite days of the year as it is a day of great joy and celebration for pupils, parents and teachers. This year I will be that little bit more nervous as I will also be celebrating with my daughter Caitlan who is already getting excited about the day, or should that be nervous?

Due to health and safety reasons we are planning that this day will be ‘staggered’ in order to keep everyone safe. Although this is not ideal, we have to think about the safety of pupils and staff. To this end, you will receive a letter at the *end of July* which will give you a time to collect your results. I ask that you strictly adhere to this time.

Brief updates

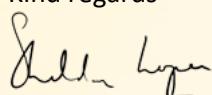
- **Head Boy/Head Girl next year.** My sincere apologies that Miss Joyce and I did not get the opportunity to interview for the prestigious Head Boy and Head Girl at St Damian’s. However, this is an important and privileged position at St Damian’s, not least because they will be the

lead pupil ambassadors for this Community and these interviews will go ahead as soon as it is possible.

- **School day.** A reminder that the times of the school day have changed. Pupils will need to be in school at 9am as usual but will be finishing 15 minutes earlier, at 3.10.
- **Transition update.** Due to recent changes in government guidelines, some of the information given with regards Transition is no longer accurate. Parents of Year 6 pupils will receive an additional letter, outlining any changes made. We are confident that all of the changes made will enhance their first experiences as part of our community and look forward to welcoming our new cohort of pupils on **Thursday 3rd September**. Your children are coming to a great school and we can't wait to welcome them into our Community for what will hopefully, be a successful 5 years.
- **The BIG Award.** We have been recognised for our work on Anti-bullying and have gained external accreditation from the BIG Award. We are very proud to have achieved such an accolade which focused on our '*Excellence in Challenging Bullying*'. At St Damian's our ethos is based on the core value of respect. Following on from this, we have re-established our 'Bully Busters' team. We look forward to returning in September to continue the work that the peer mentorship team started earlier this year. Applications for new members will be open in September.
- **STEM Big Bang Digital 2020.** This is an online enrichment event taking place on Tuesday 14 July 2020 which celebrates the amazing work of scientists and engineers in the pandemic. The event entitled '*Science, Engineering & Covid-19*' is free and hears about the challenges, innovation and collaboration during lockdown. Events explore: The worldwide race to develop a vaccine, The environmental impact of staying at home, Keeping the water flowing, Designing a social distancing lanyard and Feeding the nation. Pupils can get involved with interactive polls, live Q&A sessions and Big Bang activities. The website is: <https://www.digitalbigbang.co.uk/>.
- **Virtual Taster Day for Y10 pupils.** Ashton Sixth Form College are inviting pupils to their first Virtual Year 10 Taster Day on Tuesday 21st July 2020. The current situation means that pupils are unable to visit the college as normal. On the 'Virtual Day', pupils will be able to experience all courses on offer, meet the college Principal, tour the facilities and take part in a live Q&A with the Admissions team. Website is: <https://www.asfc.ac.uk/apply/starting-in-2021>
- **Oldham Sixth Form College.** OSFC have a dedicated page for College updates aimed at Y10 pupils. Please click on: <https://www.osfc.ac.uk/school-students/year-10/>

Finally, a massive thanks for your patience over the past few months. As said above, I am overwhelmed by the massive levels of support received. My great staff and I will repay your support and loyalty from September onwards as we, hopefully, welcome back our great children to St Damian's and towards some kind of 'normality'. Fully opening in September will allow us to do what we do best. And that is to ensure that your children get a world-class education in an environment that is supportive and develops their spiritual, moral and emotional development. It's the least that your children deserve.

Kind regards



Mr Logue
Headteacher