

January 2015

Dear Parents,

It is almost a year since we received the really positive Ofsted report that deemed the school as 'good'. As Headteacher, I was very pleased that the hard work of the committed staff at St Damian's was externally recognised. I was also delighted that the fantastic pupils of St Damian's can now proudly boast that they go to a 'good' school. Along with my great staff and the pro-active governors we will continue to relentlessly drive forward the school so that we can meet our vision of becoming an '*outstanding Catholic school*'. I have no doubt that working in partnership with our supportive parents we will achieve our vision.

The following letter is simply an up-date and outlines some important information which I would like to share.

### **Liturgical Life of the school**

As a fiercely proud Catholic School, I am able to report that the liturgical life of the school is truly extensive. The Liturgical Group is very active in promoting our values. It does so through numerous opportunities to ensure your child receives an education that 'develops' the whole child. Always on the look-out for new members, they organise charity work, help prepare Masses, lead on the SVP Old People's Christmas Party and partake in the Carol Service. This alongside other opportunities such as chapel assemblies and retreats ensures your child is developing morals and values conducive to becoming mature adults when they leave St Damian's. Furthermore, on *Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> February* we are privileged to host a visit of a holocaust survivor who will speak about their personal experiences as a child. The visit aims to educate and inform Year 9 pupils about the horrors of racism, religious prejudice and intolerance towards minority communities.

### **Academic Achievement**

For the third successive year our GCSE results show that St Damian's is providing a good education in terms of academic outcomes. Below are some headlines:

- ✚ English & Maths GCSE results: above National Average
- ✚ English & Maths expected 'progression': above National Average
- ✚ 5 A\* - C grades, including Maths & English: above National Average

Indeed our English results were **outstanding** and the best in the history of the school. This was recognised in December when the school was awarded a trophy by Tameside LA in recognition of '*outstanding pupil outcomes in English in all categories*'. These outcomes are due to great Leadership and teaching in the English department.

I assure you that my staff, leadership team and I, are absolutely committed to ensuring that these results continue. Indeed this year, we are looking to break even more 'records' in terms of academic outcomes. **WATCH THIS SPACE!**

I have just received news that an ex-pupil, Lisa Marie Chadderton, is going to study Biological Science at Oxford. This follows on from, Katie Barlow who successfully secured a place at St Catherine's College, Cambridge to read Natural Science. This shows how high our standards of academic outcomes are for our pupils, many of whom go onto study at a range of top universities.

### **Brief Overview of Year Groups**

#### Year 11

- **Revision:** I ask that you support the school in ensuring your child attends revision classes: these are an excellent opportunity for your child. Furthermore, whilst I know that the children are working very hard in school, I ask that you ensure they do sufficient 'supervised' revision at home; revision at home is vital if your child is to reach their full potential.

- **Extra Parents' Evening:** This will take place during the week 9<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> February but ONLY for pupils who we feel are not working to their full potential, this will be the last opportunity to inform parents so that they can support us.
- **The Prom [Friday 19<sup>th</sup> June]:** A magnificent occasion for our Year 11 leavers. Details will follow but ONLY pupils who have contributed to school life, have excellent attendance/punctuality and work hard in school will be formally invited. Please note that I reserve the right to withdraw any pupil if I am concerned about behaviour or work rate.
- **Congratulations** to Declan Horan who won an award at the TALL Awards ceremony run by Tameside LA in recognition of pupils' outstanding progress in English at KS4 and to the other KS4 pupils who received nominations: Jade Burnett, Jonathon Ryding, Amber Grennan and James Allcock
- **Revision at February half term:** Science will take place on the Monday; pupils will be told details later

#### Year 10

- **End of Year Exams:** Many pupils in Year 10 are sitting GCSE exams in May/June, e.g. Science. These can't be 'done again' in Year 11. Therefore, it's vital that students are preparing for these through revision at home. Again, I ask that you support the school by ensuring 'supervised' study at home.
- **Maths Breakfast Club:** Some pupils have been selected by the Maths Department to attend a Tuesday morning breakfast club. Again, as a parent you will have been informed and I ask for your support.
- **Controlled Assessment [CA]:** In most subjects, pupils will be completing CA. In some subjects this can account for 75% of the final grade. Consequently, you must ask your child for regular updates so that you can encourage and support.
- **Year 10 Examination Week:** w/c Monday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2015. This exam period is important as pupils in Year 10 will be sitting linear exams at the end of Year 11.

#### Year 9

- **Options Evening:** This will be held on *Monday 9<sup>th</sup> March*. The evening is part of a structured programme of guidance to assist pupils with their option choices. I encourage parents to become actively involved in this decision process. There will be a presentation for parents at 6.30pm. Subject Leaders will also be available to provide additional help and advice as required. Pupils will receive their Options booklets, giving details of the KS4 curriculum pathway structure and all of the courses on offer, as well as their options forms.
- **Parents' Evening:** Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> March. Parents and pupils will have the opportunity to discuss academic progress, option choices and other related matters before your child starts KS4 study.
- **Retreats:** This takes place during the weekend of 27<sup>th</sup> February - 1<sup>st</sup> March at Castlerigg. It is an excellent opportunity for pupils to develop the spiritual dimension of their lives.
- **Year 9 Examination Week:** w/c 27<sup>th</sup> April 2015. These are last exams before starting GCSE courses at KS4
- **Homework Club:** From the recent Progress Check Data some pupils have been identified as underachieving and have been invited to attend homework club on a Tuesday evening. As a parent you will have been informed and I ask that you support us by encouraging your child with their studies at home.

#### Year 8

- **Congratulations** to Shauna Griffiths who won an award at the TALL Awards ceremony run by Tameside LA in recognition of pupils' outstanding progress in English at KS3 and to all other KS3 pupils who received nominations: Kyie Hayes-Twist, Jacob Williams, Cameron Stewart and Lydia Taylor.
- **Parents' Evening:** Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> January.
- **Year 8 Examination Week:** Week beginning Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2015

#### Year 7

- **First term finished:** The pupils have now been at St Damian's for a term. I can honestly say that they are going to be great ambassadors for St Damian's!
- **Parents' Evening:** Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> March. This will be the first formal opportunity to discuss with teachers the progress of your child at St Damian's
- **Theatre Production:** On 4<sup>th</sup> February the 'Takeaway Theatre Company' are coming to school for a production with the aim to empower our pupils and explain strategies to combat bullying with a focus on cyber bullying and to promote the safe and responsible use of ICT and the internet.
- **Year 7 Examination Week:** Week beginning 16<sup>th</sup> March. These will be the first of many exams at St Damian's
- **Retreat:** This will take place in the summer term and will be to Crich.

- **Aspire:** Can I congratulate the 70+ pupils who have already achieved the 'Bronze' Aspire Award through hard work and effort. Well Done!

### **Literacy Awareness Week**

Literacy Awareness Week takes place week beginning 2<sup>nd</sup> March. A whole host of activities are planned which include a return visit from the Mancunian Poet 'Mike Garry' who will be running workshops all day. KS3 & KS4 lessons will have a whole school literacy focus while the English department will be having a writing competition in KS3 lessons with a focus on creative/imaginative writing. We will celebrate World Book Day on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> March followed up with a trip to the Harry Potter Studios on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> March. This trip is open to pupils who have read more than a million words on our 'Accelerated Reader' Program.

### **Sporting Achievements**

Since September we have been successful in many sporting events. For example at the recent Tameside Swimming Gala we had some excellent individual and team results. Our talented Netball teams from Yr7 – Yr11 have maintained their winning streak, with all 5 teams either first or second place in the Tameside School Netball League. Our Boys Football teams are currently progressing through both the Greater Manchester Schools Catholic Cup and Tameside Schools competition rounds and we hope the upcoming Basketball competitions will be just as successful. Our newly formed developmental Year 9 - 11 Volleyball teams had some success in the Tameside Schools Volleyball Cup with Year 10 boys and girls teams taking bronze medals. A big well done to the PE department as we look forward to more winning trophies in the near future.

Can I remind parents that there are many extra-curricular opportunities provided by the PE Department. These are updated each term and there is something for everyone as the range of sport on offer is extensive: football, dodgeball, basketball, volleyball, netball, badminton and table tennis. Timetables can be found on the school website or collected from the PE staff.

### **Pupil Learning Forum**

Led by Mrs Lowe, with attendance by the Chair of Governors, Mrs Jones, this is a vibrant forum that allows our pupils to input in a positive manner on the Learning & Teaching in the school. It has worked very hard to support pupils across the College in their learning. The pupils in this forum are empowered to become responsible adults and help in our efforts to continuously improve Learning & Teaching to become outstanding. In this they are succeeding! An example of this was that pupils were involved in collaborative lesson planning with teachers before participating in an INSET delivered to teachers. Another example includes some members attending weekly study clubs to support pupils in other year groups with their organisation and high quality completion of homework. Both these examples are great opportunities to develop leadership skills; vital for their future aspirations.

### **Parents' Evening Feedback**

To date there have been 2 Parents Evenings, Year 11 and Year 10. I am delighted that the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. This 'working together' is not taken for granted by my staff I but I would like to say a simple 'thank-you' for the confidence shown in St Damian's. The following sums up the responses from the parental questionnaires collected on the evenings.

Year 11: 58 questionnaires were returned. 57 of these would recommend the school to another parent [one said no]. Although there were dozens of positive parental comments, I would like to share this one as it talks about ALL staff rather than simply teachers: *"I think you and your staff are showing every day that this school is getting better and better. So much so we have applied for our younger daughter to attend next year"*

Year 10: 77 questionnaires were returned. 76 of these would recommend the school to another parent [one was not completed]. There were many comments but this encapsulated what St Damian's is all about: *"Fantastic, caring teachers who have helped our son develop into a confident young man we are very proud of. Thank you"*

The above responses from parents follows on from the responses in all year groups last year and shows an overwhelming confidence in the school. My staff and I appreciate this and we will not become complacent in moving towards our vision.

## Admissions

I am pleased to announce that we have broken another 'record'. With well over 500 parents putting us down as a choice, a **staggering 236** put us as 'first choice' for 150 places. This smashes any previous 'first choice' preferences and I believe that this could make us one of, if not the most, popular school in Tameside. This shows massive confidence that what we are doing at St Damian's is right and endorsed by the wider Community.

## Our School Motto

The pupils in our school are getting a great education. I know this as daily I ask many pupils and they tell me they 'love' the school, "it's great". They are developing an attitude where they are not accepting second best and now have a belief that if they work hard, then anything is possible. As a result of this, our school motto is now '**Believe to Achieve**'. All the teachers are instilling this belief in the children through support, encouragement and challenge. St Damian's will do everything to ensure your child gets a first class education; it's nothing less than what they deserve.

## Behaviour

The 'behaviour' of our pupils is very good [indeed EVERY external visitor says it's outstanding!] and this reflects our mantra and the fact that students want to do well. However, a very small number are not conforming to the rules. As I have said before, I will **not** tolerate repeated poor behaviour by **any** pupil. It simply is not fair for a few pupils to 'ruin' the education of others. ALL pupils know the rules and my expectations. The 3 simple 'rules' are:-

1. **Respect:** This underpins everything we do and permeates everything we do as a Catholic school, for both children and adults.
2. **Uniform/Hair:** Our pupils look extremely smart and must be congratulated. It shows they are 'proud' to be part of the St Damian's community. Full uniform is a 'must' and extremely short or coloured hair is not permitted.
3. **Mobile Phones/ICT gadgets:** These are not permitted in school

These simple, reasonable and accepted rules are NOT open for negotiation.

NB: Can I also remind and/or inform parents that I have the authority to sanction pupils who misbehave outside the school, most notably on the school buses or the inappropriate use of ICT, especially using social media such as facebook or Twitter outside of school hours, including at week-ends.

Thank you for supporting me in upholding these 3 rules. I know that you expect high standards as it sets the expectations for the adult world. As parents, you should be unashamedly proud of your children, we are!

## Attendance

Can I take this opportunity to ask you not to expect me to authorise time-off during school time. I can only authorise in 'exceptional' circumstances. The attendance of our pupils over the past few years has been above the National Average and I would like that to continue. There is a strong correlation between attendance and the achievement of pupils. 100% attendance should be the target for every pupil.

## Duke of Edinburgh Award

I have some exciting news about St Damian's becoming a centre for Duke of Edinburgh for Year 9 pupils in September 2015. I recently met with Mr M Chadwick the Duke Of Edinburgh Lead in Tameside Youth Services and it is my intention that St Damian's pupils are given the opportunity to participate in this prestigious award scheme. The D of E award develops skills for life and work and helps fulfil young people's potential towards a brighter future. Achieving the D of E Award will give pupils the skills, confidence and a view on life that everyone is looking for, from employers to colleges and universities. Pupils currently in Year 8 will receive further details of the D of E scheme during the summer term.

## Brief Updates

- *Homework clubs:* Every Tuesday after school. Please support. For Year 8 pupils there will be an extra homework catch-up club Thursday lunchtime in Room 27 (Mr Gregory's room)
- *Use of ICT:* It is of paramount importance that parents are aware of the dangers of using ICT in an inappropriate manner. We encourage all parents to follow the advice given by NSPCC. Their new campaign '**Share Aware**' guidance to parents can be found on their website <http://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/share-aware/>. Also pupils can report any misuse with CEOP <http://ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>
- *Communication with Parents:* To keep you up-to-date of events happening in school and other information in an instant you can follow us on:



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Our website <http://www.st-damians.tameside.sch.uk>

#### **A message from the Chair of Governors, Mrs Jones**

On behalf of the Governors I would like to say how proud we are of the many good things happening at St Damian's. Over the last three years our school has gone from strength to strength. With the excellent facilities, the superb vibrant staff and your hard working, well turned out, well-mannered pupils this is a special place to be. As well as things being in place for your child to achieve academically I would like to mention the pastoral support our pupils receive. We have always been a caring catholic community and this is reflected in the excellent behaviour of your children. They care and show respect to all they come in contact with and I think the future has never looked so good and it is to our credit that we are producing not just academically bright pupils but well-rounded individuals who will make a difference in their chosen field. We are an inclusive school where every child really does matter. Last week in his homily in Manila Pope Francis said *"we need to see our children as a gift to be welcomed, cherished and protected"*. When I read this my first thought was this is how we see our pupils. Please be assured your child will receive the best care and attention we can give them and the Governors will wholeheartedly support in any way they can.

#### **Finally.....**

Finally, I would like to thank you for your continued support and I can assure you that the governors of the College, my Leadership team and my staff are hard-working, conscientious and determined to ensure your child receives the best education possible. I am a Headteacher who likes to be visible and accessible to everyone, including parents. If you would like to arrange to speak to me, please do not hesitate to do so. I would rather we sort out any issues that may be affecting your child's education sooner rather than it developing into a problem later. Just contact my PA, Mrs Jo Biggs to arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely

Mr Logue  
Headteacher