

February 2016

Dear Parents / Carers

Firstly I would like to thank all the students and parents for their support with our appeal at Christmas. The non-uniform day was a great success and we have managed to raise over £1100 for Cafod; this will go towards ensuring that a community in the world receives the gift of fresh clean water.

This letter outlines just some of the work that has been going on within our community to improve outcomes for our students. We continue to focus on improving learning and teaching and further raising aspirations for all. I am pleased with the improvement in standards of uniform and we will continue to work on this, however we will be working on further improving the attendance and punctuality of our students. Good attendance for students is crucial; the government now states that any student with an attendance of 90% or less is "persistently absent". These are key skills for future life in employment and in higher education, meaning that it is vital that students are punctual to school and to lessons. Students should be on school site by 9am.

Prize Evening

On Tuesday 15th December we held our Prize Evening for last year's year 11s and 13s, where the students were awarded with their GCSE or A2 level certificates and trophies were presented to those with exceptional results. Students were presented their awards by our special guest for the evening, Denis Smith, Stoke City footballing legend. We were honored to have Denis with us and we are very grateful for him giving up his time to come and share the evening with us and inspire our students. It was a fantastic evening together and we wish every student, both those in the sixth form and those who have gone elsewhere, every success for their future.

Headteacher's Award

Every week we recognise the achievement of those students who have achieved the best Behaviour For Learning scores in each year group within the school. These are then totalled at the end of each half term and students in the top 10% of each year group receive an invite to 'Afternoon Tea With The Headteacher'. At the end of the Christmas term the students were also invited to the Hall for a party as a reward for their hard work. Students enjoyed Christmas music, drinks, snacks and time to celebrate with one another. At the end of this half term students have again been invited to afternoon tea with myself and other key staff as a reward for their hard work, effort and achievement.

Staffing

I am pleased to announce that our new Head of English Mrs Leese will join us from Shavington Academy at Easter. She will be joined in the English Department by Mrs Beasley (Second in English) who is currently at OSSMA and Mrs Edwards who is joining us from Painsley Catholic Academy. Mrs Bloor (Science) and Mrs Leese (English) are also leaving us at half term to begin their Maternity leave. We wish them good luck.

Twitter

You can now follow St Thomas More Catholic Academy on Twitter! Please follow @StThomasMoreCA for our latest news and information. We are very excited about growing our number of followers and being able to keep parents and carers informed about the hard working students at St Thomas More.

Independent Learning

To promote independent learning skills we are asking every pupil and adult at the school to choose and learn a new skill. Parents and carers are also welcome to get involved and we will be celebrating and rewarding our students' success at the end of the academic year. Several members of staff have already pledged to learn new skills; Mr Rankin has been learning 'magic' since the beginning of December! Also, students are being encouraged to become more independent in class by trying 'three before me' whenever they get stuck. This

means trying their brain, their book and their buddy before asking the boss (their teacher). Find out more on Twitter @3beforeme

Inspirational Speaker

On January 7th Greig Trout, a double cancer survivor on a mission to inspire others, visited our Year 11 and sixth form pupils just as they were completing mock examinations and revision, giving them a much needed boost. He told his fascinating and inspirational narrative with lots of humour and steered the audience through several emotions while tailoring the talk to our own situation. Members of staff said that Greig was very inspirational and pupils said it was the best assembly ever. One form tutor said "My Year 11 students were all so impressed by what they heard yesterday; the visit has made a big impact on them!"

Following on from Greig's visit we are reminding pupils about the buzz you get from positive visualisation and knowing that you are going to achieve your goals. The visit is also being used to reinforce our growth mindset and independent learning initiatives across the school.

Savio Retreat

A group of Year 7 pupils have been to Savio house 8th-10th February. This retreat was led by Miss Ford and Mr Brolly and was an opportunity for the students to get to know one another, and themselves better. Activities ranged from reflections to outdoor pursuits. It was a fabulous chance for the Year 7 pupils to have that time away from school, to work together as a team, and have the opportunity for developing their relationship with God.

Youth Chaplaincy Team (YCT)

The YCT have taken part in a number of activities this term. They have had a great input in helping the Chaplaincy team. Our YCT have led an Act of Worship to their peers and also those in the older years. They have also helped preparing the students with Lenten Services. In addition the YCT have also had a big input in marketing and the organising of Born for This. Week on week there has been continued support from YCT that has kept the motivation up because their fellow students are also helping direct the performance. Having student input is having a great output in the Faith life of our school.

Lent 2016

Our Ash Wednesday services took place on Wednesday 10th February 2016. To prepare for this our Year 7 pupils made the ashes in Chemistry by burning palms from last year's Palm Sunday Mass. The homemade ashes were then delivered at the Services on Ash Wednesday. This was a time of preparation and forgiveness ready for Lent. In addition to mark Shrove Tuesday we have delivered a 'Flipping Pancakes' event. This was a fundraiser for the Lourdes Pilgrimage. Pancakes available to staff and students and all for a good cause. The staff got into the cooking and the cleaning. A lovely fresh pancake was enjoyed by all.

CAFOD

Mr Phil Mayland, our school liaison officer for CAFOD visited our school on 1st and 2nd of February 2016, leading an Act of Worship for Key Stage 3 Pupils. This was a motivational talk to prepare students for Lent and why fundraising for CAFOD and their Make a Splash theme is important. Clean water is something that we take for granted and take from a tap. To some developing countries it is a full time job for the ladies of the family. Therefore fundraising would aid in providing more community water supplies.

Liturgy

The Vocations Mass took place on 9th February at Sacred Heart Tunstall. This was a time of prayer and reflection on personal vocation and also praying for more vocations into priesthood. 15 minutes of Faith has continued this term with our form tutors continuously working with their forms to produce some inspiring liturgies for form groups across the school. There has been fabulous feedback this term that staff and students should be very proud. These messages have been inspiring to us all.

Food Bank Appeal

Six key stage 3 students represented the school at the Food Bank by delivering the Christmas 'goodies' and a huge bin bag full of food that staff and students have donated during November and December. The students helped to weight and wrap Christmas boxes while they were there in preparation for a late-night set of volunteers to package up 85 boxes, working until about 9pm at night. The students were fantastic ambassadors for the school and were very keen volunteers. We are extremely proud to say that 13.1 kilos of food were donated by the school.

Ju-Jitsu Challenge

In preparation of her black belt in Kaeshi Ryu Kempo Ju-Jitsu Mrs Davis embarked on a charity Ju-jitsu challenge. In order to raise funds for Sebastian Adams (Mrs Adams' son), who has a rare chromosome disorder (1p36 deletion syndrome), Mrs Davis was thrown 100 times and had to drag herself 100 metres. Fellow student martial artists also threw Mrs Davis, demonstrating their fantastic skills. Staff and students attended to watch the event, demonstrating their incredible support, offering donations and cheering and encouraging Mrs Davis. Whilst the final total continues to increase, the latest total at this point is that an incredible £1393.57 has been raised. This will contribute towards intensive physiotherapy at 'Footsteps' to help improve Sebastian's mobility for which Mrs Adams' and Mrs Davis have been overwhelmed by the support of our school community and sincerely express their thanks

Pantomime

Year 11 Performing Arts students treated us to a wonderful pantomime performance based on the story of Aladdin. Students were superb, working together as a team to put on a spectacular show. It was wonderful to observe how students supported each other during rehearsals, allowing every member of the cast to shine. Well done Year 11!

History Trip to London

Y11 History students enjoyed being terrified on the Jack the Ripper walk and at the London Dungeons! As well as this, they got to experience life on board HMS Belfast and the glory of the West End show Miss Saigon on the 11th/12th December. The trip enriched both the Crime and Punishment and Controlled Assessment units of their GCSE course and provided a valuable team building exercise for the important GCSE months ahead!

Geography

Since Christmas the Year 7 and 8 students have been busy being creative in Geography with their 3D contour models and the annual volcano competitions coming to a close. The year 10s are completing in-depth research and designing their enquiries for fieldwork to Chester town centre. This is for their primary data collection for their Controlled Assessment week in early March.

The Bronze Duke of Edinburgh group have nearly completed their first aid training which will contribute to the Skills section of their award for some of the students. They will be using the skills learnt to marshal the Christian Aid Charity Walk around Tittesworth Reservoir on 19th March. The Silver team are planning for expedition in the summer and our Gold group are preparing for micro-navigation skills training in March.

Year 11

As stated at the top of the letter good attendance for students is crucial, none more so than in year 11; this year is a vital time for year 11 students and every single lesson counts. Year 11 are continuing to work really hard and have just completed a second Mock examination in English, Maths and Science. There are wide ranges of interventions occurring before school, after school, on some Saturdays and during half term and Easter holidays. It is imperative that Year 11 students use these sessions but focus in each and every lesson. During February half term we will hold a series of master classes for English candidates run by a principal examiner from the exam board. These sessions will target different groups of students. It is imperative that students continue to check the year 11 noticeboard for details of any sessions available to them. The current timetable is shown overleaf:

YEAR 11 INTERVENTION/SUPPORT SESSIONS JAN ONWARDS			
Period 6 Sessions (3.10-4.00pm)			
	Subjects Available	Room	
Monday	Performing Arts Coursework Clinic	PA block	
Tuesday	Maths (compulsory for targeted students). All welcome to attend.	Maths Rooms	MATHS INTERVENTION MUST TAKE PRIORITY FOR TARGETED STUDENTS ON TUESDAY
	History A*/A revision	S1	
	Spanish Revision	MFL dpt	
Wednesday	English (compulsory for targeted students). All welcome to attend.	English dpt	
	ICT and Computing Coursework Clinics	ICT Suite	
	Additional Chemistry and Further Additional Chemistry drop in sessions	Room 21	
	History Controlled Assessment Support	S1	
	French Revision	MFL dpt	
	Product Design and Resistant Materials Coursework Workshops	Technology Dpt	
	Geography (Mr Millington)	Room 28	
	Private Study for Year 11 only	Library	
	GCSE Art Workshops	Art Classrooms	
Thursday	Maths (compulsory for targeted students). All welcome to attend.	Maths Rooms	
	GCSE PE Revision	PE Classroom	
	Food and Nutrition Coursework Workshops	Food Tech	
	Geography (Mrs Adams)	Mrs Adams' room	
	General History Revision	S1	
	GCSE ART Workshops	Art Classrooms	
	French Revision	MFL dpt	
	Spanish Revision	MFL dpt	
Friday	GCSE Business Studies	Room 43	
Period 0 Sessions (8.15-9.00am)			
	Subjects Available	Room	
Tuesday	RE	PA block	
Thursday	RE	PA block	

Sixth Form

The Sixth Form had a wonderful close to last term with a fancy dress day raising money for charity. All are now working hard towards their final examinations in the Spring. The majority of Year 13 now have University and Advanced Apprenticeship offers and are focused on achieving these offers through dedicated preparation and study. I was thrilled to see such a large turn-out at our recent parents evening; students benefited from the opportunity to discuss with parents and teachers how best to approach these final few months of school life. Year 12 are now settled into post-16 study and I am delighted that such a large number of students are now utilising our extended open hours of 8am - 6pm to complete personal study. Year 12 students have started to visit universities and careers fairs to prepare for their applications next year. I look forward to our Year 12 Parents Evening on 8th March. Please do contact Mrs Todd in the Sixth Form if you have any questions relating to your son / daughter's progress.

Next half term promises to be as busy as this this last half term so I wish the students a well-earned break at half term and trust that they will come back refreshed to work even harder and make more progress in the run up to Easter.

Yours sincerely

Mr Rayner

Headteacher