



31 March 2023

Dear Parent / Carer,

We returned from Christmas to our Epiphany Masses at the beginning of the year for all year groups and this has, I believe, set the tone for the year. This term staff and students have continued to work hard in our endeavour to make St Bernard's a school that is outward looking, forward thinking and meeting the needs of all of our students. I continue to be very proud of our students, their kindness and maturity given that we have the best part of a thousand people on site each day!

January began our year 7 Retreats. As a school, we are well supported by our governors to ensure that these Retreats take place off site in form groups in order for students to experience the day as a means of strengthening relationships and getting to know better their form tutor. This year, we were pleased that we had our first Commissioning Mass for all of our students who take on positions of Catholic school leadership at student level as part of the spiritual dimension of our school. We were grateful to Fr. Alex and Fr. Viktor for allowing us to use St Helen's Church as well as to Fr. Paul Fox who celebrated the Mass for us. We were pleased that parents and teachers came to support our students and were able to share some refreshments with us afterwards.

In February, we began our pre-Lenten journey with our preparation for our annual pancake races on Shrove Tuesday. A tradition uniquely St Bernard's, the students did not disappoint in their engagement, participation and all-round fun! The next day our Ash Wednesday Services were as reverent as expected and supported us all in considering how we could make this Lent even more a time of penance, reflection and genuine desire to serve and give glory to God in all that we do and say. The month also began our first return to educational visits abroad as a group of year 12 and 13 Art students had a wonderful time in Amsterdam visiting galleries, art exhibitions and soaking up the culture in order to bring a new dimension to their own work.

March has been a very busy month. We started with our second World Book Day which was even better than our last! The vast array of student and staff costumes and books was heart-warming to see as a number of students really brought their creativity and love of reading together. The quizzes seemed to be enjoyed by the younger years in particular and the readathon has given those more voracious readers a chance to shine and diversify their reading content. As a school, we have been looking more closely at our whole school strategy for reading and seeing how we can further extend and enhance the provision that we already have on offer.

The month has also seen the large majority of our practical subjects have externally moderated or examined assessments for both year 11 and year 13 – a pre cursor to the beginning of the national timetabled examinations. The students have done very well so far, particularly in managing the nervousness that accompanies this time. It is important to remind your child that, particularly if they are in year 11 or year 13, they must seek support from staff at the school if they are unsure about anything or worried. In the majority of cases, we are able to come to a resolution that supports them.



We also had our Ofsted Inspection. The last took place in 2016. We await the report and so findings are confidential until its publication, but I would like to thank parents and carers who were able to respond to the survey (the Inspector did share some of the comments) in what was a very tight turn around. I also wish to commend your children on their usual exemplary behaviour and their kind welcome to our visitors. I will write to you again once the report is published.

During inspection, we were delighted to welcome almost 200 children from St Helen's and Our Lady of Lourdes to the dress rehearsal of our whole school production of Annie. The first whole School Production after COVID and what a production to come back from COVID with! An outstanding production showing off the determination, resilience and talent of our students. The music was spectacular and with the acting, singing and choreography (in my opinion) all worthy of West End stage. It was very much the perfect end to a busy week that re-emphasised why we exist as a school – so that each child can have their gifts and talents nurtured, developed and included within our whole school community. I am incredibly proud of them all and reserve special thanks to Mrs Githu, Mrs Lebeter, Mrs Alexander and Mrs Bell for their relentless dedication in bringing the school production, in all its awe and wonder, back to St Bernard's.

Whilst writing this, our year 13 are in their final preparations for the Passion Masses today. Last year, I was so moved by the young people's powerful interpretation that I wept in awe and spiritual connection. I am hopeful not to repeat the same level of emotion this year but suspect that this may prove even more difficult this year. This year, we are joined by some of the education team from Brentwood Diocese, so we are looking forward to hosting them. Also today, we say goodbye to our skiers who go to Austria. I take the opportunity to thank staff for giving up a significant part of their Easter break to enable students to have this incredible experience.

As you know, charity and fundraising are dear to our hearts here at St Bernard's and the girls are always looking at ways in which they can put their values into action. To this end, please congratulate your children who have raised in excess of £8,300 since November for the following charities:

- Young Minds
- Trust Links
- Anti bullying Alliance
- CAFOD
- Little Havens
- TKF Care
- Safe Steps
- SNAP
- National Literacy Trust
- Save the Children
- Cancer Research
- Women's Aid



In fact, we are still raising funds at the moment for more charities. I thank you for your support and for being so instrumental in raising such thoughtful, caring children who really want to make a difference in the lives of others.

Please keep in your prayers as we end this term in our school – staff and students alike but in particular, our examination year groups. This is a crucial time for them post the mock examinations to further focus their revision and do all they can to be as well prepared as possible for the approaching summer exam series.

A reminder that we finish today, 31 March, at 3.30pm as normal in order for all students to be involved in the Passion Masses. Students are expected to be on the school site by 8.45am on Monday 17 April 2023.

For our Catholic community as we near Palm Sunday, we are given the opportunity to reflect, repent and acknowledge God's love for us in its full entirety demonstrated through Christ's Passion. I encourage those of you who can, to attend the Tridium services this Easter. As our Lenten journey comes to an end we can appreciate the full joy of the Resurrection in our Easter celebrations for new life and an opportunity to renew our commitment to our faith.

I wish you, your family and all you love a holy and happy Easter!

Warm regards

Mrs A Moise-Dixon
Headteacher