



23 January 2024

Dear Parents / Carers,

I thought that I would send a brief communication as we are well and truly into 2024 and settled back into the spring term. I hope that you and your families were able to experience the peace and joy of Christmas in some way; I know that Christmas can be a difficult time for some. May I therefore take this late opportunity to wish you all a Happy New Year and to reassure you of my continued prayers and best wishes for us all to exist in God's grace as a school community.

I hope that you have enjoyed reading our newsletters. They are a far better way of communicating the types of activities that are happening in the school than my words alone can convey. Therefore, I will keep these letters to celebrating our Catholic ethos and general notices.

Catholic Ethos

The Religious Education Directory (RED), *To know You more clearly*

This term, we are very much focusing as a school on the implementation of the new Religious Education Directory (RED) which is to be fully implemented by 2025. The Directory is designed to articulate the nature and purpose of religious education in Catholic schools. It is divided into two parts: (i) the nature and purpose of the religious education that children and young people receive in Catholic schools underpinned by the canonical norms and (ii) the curriculum model for the progression of what religious education should look like in Catholic schools over time.

As a staff team, we welcome this key document. Staff at St Bernard's work incredibly hard to support students on their educational journey and accompany them on their spiritual path. We are pleased with the way in which our students actively participate in the Catholic ethos of the school and demonstrate the principles of Catholic social teaching through their acts of prayer, giving and supporting others as well as their participation in the liturgical life of the school in the many opportunities that the school provides. Nevertheless, we are always looking at ways in which we can continue to support every individual student encounter God daily.

Last term, we had a beautiful Harvest Mass with the newest arrivals to the school, our year 7. We also had the pleasure of seeing our Year 11 Leadership Conference be another great success. Our students fundraising, organisational and project management skills were exceptional in providing a conference led by themselves for themselves empowering them to use their gifts and talents to the glory of God. In December our year 11 students also led our Advent Services. Once again, we were grateful to our local priests for providing us with the opportunity to participate in Reconciliation during Advent in school. Our Carol Concert was full of joy and hope as our readers, musicians and choirs filled the space in our preparation for Christmas and this was further deepened during our whole school Advent service at the end of term.

Staff (teaching and support) began the year with an INSET Day that was our Retreat Day. A day to nourish our own spirituality. We were delighted to welcome David Wells, a renowned speaker to lead us through our day and to reignite our personal commitment to our vocations.



This term, we have returned to our House Masses; another way of coming together as a faith school community.

General notices

Firstly, we have come back to year 11 and year 13 mock exams and for some students, completing live exams in IT and Applied Science. Students will have mock results shared with them in due course so that they can then further refine their revision in preparation for the summer exams. It is vital that students do not plan holiday dates before the contingency dates pass. Mrs Allitt sent this information in a previous communication last term.

Governance

I am pleased that we have two new parent governors joining us, Mrs Kat Lilley and Mrs Theresa Goodrich. Governors perform a crucial role in the school both supporting the school in its aims as a Catholic school and helping the school on its school improvement journey so that it can truly act in the best interests of all children. As it is a voluntary role, I am very appreciative of the time and commitment that our governors give to support our students, staff and parish community.

Attendance, punctuality and uniform

As you may be aware, the government has launched a national attendance strategy, Moments Matter, Attendance Counts. This is largely to address the legacy that COVID has had on our children, families and schools. With almost a quarter of the national school population persistently absent, the government understands that this is a significant issue that must be tackled. As a school, we have good attendance and we regularly convey the importance of this for students to achieve their potential. Much educational research confirms and we have strong internal evidence for a positive correlation between strong attendance and strong student outcomes. I know that generally, parents are very mindful of students missing school only when strictly necessary. I would reiterate however that routine medical appointments such as doctors and dentists should be booked outside of school hours.

It is also vital that students are punctual. We have students come to the school who live locally and much further afield. I am sure that families have factored in time scales when they applied to St Bernard's.

As the weather turns colder, students are advised to wear coats in line with school policy and hats and gloves. Hoodies are not permissible. Students should only wear the PE hoodies on days when they have PE. Please remind your child to adhere to this expectation. Equally, I would advise that students consider trousers, tights and socks that will keep them warm in line with the school uniform policy. However, students are not permitted to wear socks over tights - students either wear tights or socks but not both with contrasting colours. Usual uniform sanctions will apply to students who do not abide by this school rule.

Social media and communication

Increasingly, schools are aware of parental WhatsApp and other social media groups. Sometimes these are great as parental networks and sharing information about school events and notices. However, it has come to my attention recently that there have been 'conversations' and 'postings' that have been extremely unkind but, in many instances, factually untrue. In keeping with the ethos of the school and our general message to students, I would ask parents to consider what they write reflecting: 'Would I be happy to say this directly to the person



that I am writing about or be happy for them to see what I have written?' We are all human and as such we all make mistakes, but our school motto never gets old 'Love one another as I have loved you.'

I encourage any parent who has a concern or query to either email head@stbernards.southend.sch.uk or indeed speak to Mrs Booker, my PA, to arrange a meeting with me. This seems to be a more adult way of resolving issues and the way that I think we would all wish to role model to our children.

I would be grateful to parents to not use my school email as this is for internal use only.

I wish you all a wonderful spring, winter's chill will subside...eventually!

Warmest regards

Mrs A Moise-Dixon
Headteacher