



We are called to be the hands and face of Jesus as we learn, love and grow together

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Dear parents and carers

It has been a busy half term. I hope that you have enjoyed seeing images of the exciting things that your children have been up to on Twitter, Instagram and in the weekly Pupil Post document which has been ParentMailed to you. Before we find ourselves in the excitement of the final days, I wanted to update you on several matters.

Snowy surprise!

Heavy snowfall overnight has taken us all quite by surprise! Unfortunately, it was not possible to make the site safe enough to open today – our Site Manager is currently clearing and gritting all the paths ready for tomorrow. Many of our teaching staff live outside of Stevenage and the journey would have been treacherous for them today. Home learning is available as downloadable packs on the class pages of the website to keep everyone busy in between snow fun! Apologies to those parents who were due to attend today's first performance of the Nativity. I am unsure whether we will be able to fit in another performance but there are performances still on Wednesday & Thursday. The school site looks beautiful today.



Curriculum Developments

In our last email I shared with you a link to our extensive School Development Plan. A copy of this is available on the school website. Much work has been focused on this already.

- An advisor has visited the Early Years Foundation Stage twice and developments have resulted in both the outdoor area and the classroom environments being reorganised and rejuvenated to allow pupils quality independent access to enticing learning enhancements. This has all been very positive.



- EYFS, KS1 and KS2 staff have fully engaged with a 'mastery approach' to the maths curriculum, enabling pupils' mathematical learning to broaden and deepen at an appropriate level whilst ensuring fluency in key mathematical skills. Our Essential Maths scheme has been refreshed and rebooted throughout KS1 and KS2, ensuring that a 'concrete pictorial and abstract' approach underpins all that we do. This involves ensuring that the use of concrete apparatus is embedded across the school; this is then used for pupils to model their maths learning pictorially, before moving on to more abstract methods. There has been good impact in this.
- Our Little Wandle Phonics scheme has been rolled out to EYFS and KS1 and classes are currently working on consistency in their application of the scheme. Thank you for your patience and support as we have moved to a new way of teaching reading. We hope that you have enjoyed the new reading materials – we look forward to your feedback!



Great Representation Project

The great representation project involves schools in Hertfordshire working together to challenge themselves to consider what it really means to feel that you belong in our community. Our aim is to ensure that through this work we hold a diversity lens up to all that we do and consider the impact of our environment and decisions about learning on each of our pupils and how they see themselves. We also aim to support all of our children to have a voice and to feel heard. At the heart of this project are key messages about racial justice and creating anti racist schools. This has been an incredibly valuable project so far. Last week, we hosted a visit from four other partner schools who spent time experiencing our ethos and climate for learning, talking to our pupils and staff and helping us to reflect on our outward facing profile through our website, social media feeds and other publications. We were also able to discuss strategies for attracting a diverse pool of staff when jobs are advertised. Feedback from our colleagues was positive – they were very impressed with our children who always love a visitor! In the new year we will be reaching out to parents to find out your views in relation to 'representation' in school.

RE Developments

Hopefully by now you will have seen the update the 'Our Catholic School' pages of the website. Here we have tried to reorganise the information into four separate zones which will help you to find what you might need:

- (1) Catholic Life and Mission: where you will find out what makes us 'tick' as a Catholic School and how we live out our Mission. This is what we call our 'unique charism'.
- (2) Religious Education: where you will find out about our approach to the RE curriculum. Did you know that we have designed our own bespoke RE curriculum which makes links between scripture, church teaching and worship and then always links to how we live this in our daily lives?
- (3) Collective Worship: where you will be able to find out the way that we structure and plan our worship each week. This section also explains the many other liturgies and Masses that we engage with. You will also find a link to our Friday Mass Rota in case you want to join with your children at Mass
- (4) Useful Links



We are currently working on developing our articulation of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching throughout the school. Catholic social teaching is rooted in Scripture, formed by the wisdom of Church leaders, and influenced by grassroots movements. It is our moral compass, guiding us on how to live out our faith in the world. The following image explains what the key areas are. Your children will be learning more about each of these areas linked to their units of RE study over the year ahead in an age-appropriate manner:



Supply Teachers

You will probably be aware that the staff team has been significantly impacted this term through sickness. This has meant that we have needed to rely upon a range of supply teachers in order that we have been able to keep classes open. I know that this can cause anxiety for some as it is not the normal pattern. However, please rest assured that our supply teachers are highly qualified staff. They follow the extensive curriculum plans and learning sequences that are already in place for each class and are supported by the parallel class teacher who leads on the detail of the daily planning when a colleague is away. Assistant Heads (Mrs Hargrave and Mrs White) and Mrs Whitty and myself regularly drop in to see what is happening and in order to have an oversight of how things are going. In their teacher's absence, Mrs Curry and the teaching assistant team keeps a close eye on those pupils who require additional support to ensure that all needs are catered for. Whilst we try to ensure as much consistency as we can during a colleague's absence it is not always possible to book the same supply teacher as many already have pre booked commitments elsewhere. This year we have broadened the number of agencies that we work with to have a wider pool of supply teachers to choose from. I am very grateful to our regular supply teachers who prioritise us for work – they all state that it is a lovely school to teach in!

Staff Appointments

You may or may not be aware that we were unsuccessful in the Summer Term in appointing two full time teachers. Fortunately, Mr Richardson (Y6) and Mrs Chowdhury (Y1), long term supply teachers, came to the rescue and initially agreed to work with us for the term. To provide consistency for our pupils, I am delighted that they have both agreed to stay for the remainder of the school year. In the meantime, we will soon be advertising for teachers again for September 2023. Please do spread the word!

Food Bank Friday & Reverse Advent Calendar

Food bank Fridays during October, coordinated by the School Parliament, enabled us to deliver a huge amount of food to the Bedwell branch of the St Vincent de Paul Society to be distributed to nine local families. Thank you so much for your generosity – it will make such a difference locally! The School Parliament are now focusing on a Reverse Advent Calendar Appeal for Kenny Arnold's People4People Stevenage charity. Donations to this worthy cause can be left in St Joseph's workshop until Friday morning (16th Dec). Please email head@stvincent.herts.sch.uk if you would be able to help with delivering the collections to the



Foodshed on Friday. This is their last day of collecting to ensure that it gets to families before Christmas. A special thank you to Ahmadi Muslim Women's Association for their very generous donations and to each of you for tins, packets and other essential items.



Cost of living support for families

As the colder weather presents itself and the cost of so many products and services continues to rise, I thought that it might be useful to pull together information in relation to local support. This was sent via ParentMail at the weekend and is available on the school website. I am aware that the financial pinch on families is significant at the moment. With this in mind, we have set up a 'support fund' through some generous local charitable donations and are able to step in and support with an emergency payment (towards for example white goods or clothing) or vouchers (for food) if any of our families are in need. Clearly, this is a finite resource, but we are keen to make good use of it. We are able to turn things around quite quickly, so please do not feel proud in coming forward if you need some help. Everything will be dealt with in a sensitive and confidential manner. Please email finance@stvincent.herts.sch.uk or speak to Mrs Whitty, Mrs Lorimer or myself if you would like to enquire about possible support.

November Remembrance

Father Nigel joined us along with parents on 11th November for a poignant Act of Remembrance, led by our Poppy Appeal Team. The appeal team raised £311 for the Royal British Legion. On Remembrance Sunday, two members of our School Parliament joined me to participate in the Remembrance Parade in Stevenage Old Town, culminating in their laying of a wreath at the war memorial on Bowling Green. We were one of two primary schools represented at this Stevenage wide event.



Scarlet Fever

We have been informed that a small number of our children have been diagnosed with suspected / confirmed scarlet fever. We have followed Government advice and been in contact with Health Protection Team. We have been advised to continue as we are with additional cleaning, ventilation and hand sanitising.

Although scarlet fever is usually a mild illness, it should be treated with antibiotics to minimise the risk of complications and reduce the spread to others. The **symptoms** of scarlet fever include a sore throat, headache, fever, nausea and vomiting. This is followed by a fine red rash which typically first appears on the chest and stomach, rapidly spreading to other parts of the body. On more darkly-pigmented skin, the scarlet rash may be harder to spot, but it should feel like 'sandpaper'. The face can be flushed red but pale around the mouth.

If you think you, or your child, have scarlet fever:

- see your GP or contact NHS 111 as soon as possible
- make sure that you/your child takes the full course of antibiotics prescribed by the doctor.
- stay at home for **at least 24 hours after starting the antibiotic treatment**, to avoid spreading the infection.

Children who have had **chickenpox** recently are more likely to develop more serious infection during an outbreak of scarlet fever and so parents should remain vigilant for symptoms such as a persistent high fever, cellulitis (skin infection) and arthritis (joint pain and swelling). If you are concerned for any reason, please seek medical assistance immediately.

Further information in relation to this was sent out via ParentMail in the week.

Thank you to the Syro Malibar Community

The Syro Malibar community celebrated their parish mission day in October with a parade through our school grounds and a celebration afterwards in the infant hall. It was wonderful to join with members of this beautiful community for part of their mission day; I was humbled by their welcome and astounded by the talents of their performing young people. Following this successful event, the Syro Malibar Community generously donated £150 to the school which we have used towards the purchase of two new Advent wreath stands for each hall.

Advent

The season of Advent began with a 'go purple' message in the Wednesday Word assembly. By the Monday following the First Sunday of Advent all RE areas and key RE focus points throughout the school had 'gone purple'. Christmas trees and cribs (no baby Jesus yet) are in place throughout the school and there is a definite sense of anticipation.



Christmas preparations are well underway. We look forward to a KS1 nativity and a traditional 'Christmas in Song' event for Reception, KS1 and KS2. This will operate slightly differently this year as we wish to utilise the skills of the Diocesan Choral Director, Yvette Murphy, who takes singing and choir sessions in school all day each Friday. Christmas in Song will occur as two performances during the day this year (please opt for just one performance!). It promises to be a wonderful occasion and will even include the debut performance of our new school choir!

Academies update

It is the Cardinal's intention that all Catholic schools in the Diocese become part of a Catholic Academy Trust (CAT) by 2025. As a school, Governors have been directed by the Diocese to consider whether DOWAT (Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust) would be a suitable trust for us to join. DOWAT is the CAT that other local schools (JHN, St Thomas More Letchworth, Our Lady Hitchin, St John's Baldock & St Mary's Royston) belong to. In total it currently consists of 6 secondary schools and 5 primary schools. You can find out more about DOWAT here: <https://www.dowat.co.uk/>

No firm decisions have been made yet, except to find out more about DOWAT and the academisation process but Governors have met with DOWAT officials to pose many questions, to decide whether their vision is a suitable match for us and to begin a process of 'due diligence' which commits us to nothing but allows us to find out more. Governors have set up a formal working party to undertake this work and to report at each Full Governing Body Meeting on its progress.

It is important that you are aware that whatever happens, Governors are committed to the school maintaining its current individual identity, staffing structures and individual charism, whilst also looking to see how working as part of a bigger CAT could enable supportive collaboration.

Should a formal resolution be made to join DOWAT, governors are required to consult with all stakeholders (staff, parents, local schools etc) before joining and there would be a formal process for this listening process to occur.

Basketball

Congratulations to our basketball team who, under Mr Jennings guidance, won the Stevenage basketball tournament, putting them through to represent Stevenage in the Hertfordshire Games. We narrowly missed a third place here, but nevertheless the team played brilliantly. Well done everyone!



Thank you for supporting the PSA

Over 300 children attended our two Christmas discos on Friday evening and judging by the noise and dancing moves it would seem that they really enjoyed themselves. Thank you to the parents and staff for making this happen. The children really appreciate your efforts! The Christmas raffle has also been drawn. Maybe you were a winner? Details of how much these two events raised will be shared shortly. This half term the PSA presented the school with two new laptops which are used for projection in both halls – thank you!

Wishing you all peaceful Advent preparations and the joy of the season when it arrives. We hope to see many of you in the coming days at joyful plays and concerts.



May God bless you and those most dear to you

Jon White
Headteacher



Dates for your diary

Monday, December 12

10:00am-

Y2, Y1 & Rec Nativity

Tuesday, December 13

Christmas dinner day

Christmas jumper day

9:30am

Brass Christmas Concert

Wednesday, December 14

9:30am

Nursery Christmas gathering

2:00pm

Y2, Y1 & Rec nativity

Thursday, December 15

12:30pm

Y5 to Pantomime at Nobel

2:00pm

Y2, Y1 & Rec nativity (no toddlers)

Friday, December 16

9:30am

Christmas in Song

1:30pm

Christmas in Song

Monday, December 19

Christmas parties

Wednesday, December 21

2:00pm

SCHOOL CLOSING FOR CHRISTMAS

Thursday, January 5, 2023

OCCASIONAL DAY - SCHOOL CLOSED

Friday, January 6, 2023

INSET DAY - school closed to pupils

Monday, January 9, 2023

SCHOOL REOPENS FOR SPRING TERM

