

27 March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

### **Headmaster's Letter – Lent Term 2020**

In 1898, the first Head of St Dunstan's, Charles Maddock Stuart, spoke to the school, reflecting on the daily biblical verse. His words are apposite:

'I want to speak to you today a little about *endurance*. This is a quality which we all admire very much and which we all think that we possess, especially in regard to muscular labour and fatigue... The fact is that we have to learn to endure many things, and to endure physical fatigue is the very smallest of them. We have to learn to endure mental fatigue... Our whole life here is one long strain of endurance. Nothing goes exactly as we want it; rich or poor, worker or sufferer, boy or man, we have each to endure some contradiction, to stand quietly in the presence of something we should like to alter.'

This Lent Term of 2020 will always be remembered for plunging us into 'the presence of something we should like to alter' and there is no doubt that we have needed, and will continue to need, all our mental endurance to see us through it. However, from what I have seen this term, St Dunstan's College is a community that will not only come through it, but will do so with distinction.

I firstly want to thank every member of the St Dunstan's community for the truly exceptional efforts that have been undertaken in recent days and weeks to prepare us for remote learning. To have forecast and responded to events in the way we did was admirable, to say the least, and to have rolled out a virtual learning programme this quickly has required an extraordinary work ethic, flexibility, resolve, patience and good humour from all – characteristics the St Dunstan's community has in abundance.

None of this should detract from the significant upset and uncertainty these events have caused to Year 11 and Year 13. For these students not to now have the opportunity to showcase the best of themselves in their GCSE and A Level examinations is tragic. And for these young people not to be able to enjoy the fun and celebration that characterises the end of their respective educational chapters, feels wrong and like an injustice has been served. However, as Stuart said, 'nothing goes exactly as we want it', and I can only ask that those students 'stand quietly in the presence of something we should like to alter', and work with us to ensure that we make the very best of a bad situation. We are committed to placing all these students in the best possible position for some outstanding examination outcomes, and outcomes that will see them go on to access some of the very best Universities in the world. We are equally committed to ensuring that Year 13 will 'graduate' and will enjoy the celebratory events that we do so well at St Dunstan's.

I am also very conscious of all the other pupils who remain at home and for whom the immediate excitement of virtual learning will be quick to wane. Households will undoubtedly see frustration and ill-temper encroach in the context of these circumstances that have been thrust upon them, and we are acutely aware that we want to help support and manage wellbeing and mental health as best as we are able, just as we are supporting children in the fulfilment of a curriculum. Mrs McLellan has populated a fantastic set of resources on Firefly that address this very issue and offer your children pastoral support virtually, in exactly the same way as teachers are committed to continuing support of academic studies. In the same pastoral support area of Firefly, we are creating an enrichment zone for the Easter holidays to provide academic stimulation beyond the curriculum as well as suggestions for physical activity, a photography competition, cooking challenges and more! Equally, you will be thrilled to hear that we are working on a 'virtual Forder' programme for next term, which we hope will give pupils co-curricular fulfilment amongst the trials of the current circumstance. Do encourage your children to make full use of the facilities we are providing.

I hope you will be reassured by the Chairman's letter. There is a clear emphasis on our College value of compassion. We want to support you throughout this period, whether you find yourself in financial difficulty, or whether the whole thing is simply becoming very challenging for your family. Use this community to support you – we are known as a community school and never has this been such an important part of our DNA.

There is, without doubt, hope. The character of Dunstonians never fails to amaze me; to see those young people in *Legally Blonde* take to the stage in the way they did, knowing that it was never meant to be 'for one afternoon only', but to do so with such grace, enthusiasm and positivity, was an example to us all that we must carry on in the spirit of optimism.

Indeed, moving away from Coronavirus for a moment, it has actually been an extraordinary term. We once again enjoyed record numbers of interest in the school; we assessed more pupils than ever before and the acceptance rate rose again. It is absolutely obvious to me that the culture of what we offer at St Dunstan's is what families want for their children; a down-to-earth but ambitious, co-educational school that allows individuality to flourish within a broad and forward-thinking education.

There have been so many other achievements this term, all of which will be covered in our termly publication of *The Shield*, which will be posted to you during the Easter holiday. Although too many to mention in one letter, I do call to mind, in particular, a hard-hitting assembly to the whole school on the climate change emergency, led by Otilie in Year 13, our annual celebration of LGBT history month, student-led charitable events raising funds for the wildlife affected by the Australian fires, an outstanding woodwind recital in the Great Hall, a rousing whole-school House music competition, and last but not least, a spectacular Year 4 production of *Seussical*!

## **Development Plan Progress**

There have been a number of areas of progress against our agreed College Development Plan, but I want to pick up on two or three highlights.

Our scholars' programme has been an area of considerable development this year and it is flourishing. Lower School and Year 10 scholars enjoyed an exchange trip to India over the Christmas holiday, where they shared ideas with the children of Delhi Public School; without doubt an unforgettable experience for all involved and we look forward to the return visit before long. Year 12 scholars have enjoyed various activities as part of the Sixth Form Scholars' programme, and it was a particular privilege for me to introduce them to the world of opera by hosting a trip to see the superb production of *Madama Butterfly*, at the English National Opera. We also enjoyed our annual Scholars' Retreat to Dorset for the newly appointed Sixth Form Scholars, from Year 11. In addition, there have been various visiting lecturers this term as part of our Opening Minds lecture series, including Lord Drayson OD, who entertained Sixth Formers on themes of Science and Entrepreneurship, and from Ross Harrison, a film-maker on environmental issues, to whom I taught A Level Geography back in the day (which makes me feel very old!).

Pupil voice has continued to be a focus this year and it has made huge strides. College Parliament strategy meetings have continued to take place every half term with suggestions from pupils coming through weekly pupil meetings, and ideas being implemented as a consequence. The highlight of the year was a full G12 Summit which took place at the end of this term at the Lewisham Council Chambers. Every College Parliament representative met 'in the round' to discuss their successes thus far this year and their development plan priorities for the future. All ideas will be taken forward by the College Leadership Team across the Trinity Term as we create our Development Plan for 2020/21.

The Sustainability Committee has met regularly throughout this year. External speakers have attended each meeting, including our building contractors, Willmott Dixon, who explained some of the environmentally friendly construction methods they have chosen, Lewisham Council, who shared information about sustainable travel, and a St Dunstan's parent who, as an Environmental Manager, spoke about sustainability strategies and the importance of having an effective Environmental Policy. The Ecology Club has also been invited to present their plans for pond and wildlife areas across the College sites.

## **Building developments**

We enjoyed the ground-breaking ceremony that took place at the beginning of this term and we have been fortunate to allow a number of visits onto the site for pupils onto, not least from Year 1 and Nursery, who I hear thoroughly enjoyed the diggers!

The building works have continued in earnest this term and at the time of writing are still slightly ahead of schedule! 'Customer Engagement' meetings have taken place for all staff to spend time looking at proposed designs and furniture layouts, with opportunities to input ideas and make changes. Work on the refurbishment of our 1888 buildings and the use of vacated spaces has also begun, with a whole day workshop taking place in early March.

## **Fundraising**

The fundraising committee met at the beginning of this term and developed a clear strategy for the fundraising campaign we now need to enact. It is regrettable that a number of the

planned events have had to be cancelled because of the recent situation. However, I do hope you all enjoyed reading the latest publication regarding our extended building plans which also contains clarity regarding the fundraising now needed to realise them.

### **Staffing updates**

The only staffing change at the end of this term is that Mr Watts leaves us upon the return of Ms Byrne to the History Department. Mr Watts has left an indelible mark on a great number of students (many of whom wrote to me directly to extol his virtues!) and we wish him well as he relocates to the north of England.

### **Conclusion**

I do not know how long this period of virtual learning will last, but I think we all recognise it could be some considerable time. It will be a challenge for us all to maintain a momentum and motivation in these exceptional circumstances, and it will pose unique challenges for each individual member of our community in ways we cannot yet fully recognise. But I want to reassure you wholeheartedly that we will always maintain your children at the forefront of our minds; we are in the fortunate position where collectively we can continue to offer them the pastoral support and academic stimulation that they will so desperately crave as time continues, and I encourage you all to take full advantage of it and to engage with everything we are offering.

I do wish you a restful and enjoyable Easter, despite the current challenges, and let us all hope that this period of difficulty passes quickly and we can resume normality as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N P Hewlett', with a stylized, cursive script.

Mr N P Hewlett  
Headmaster