



Diocese of St. Albans



18th December 2019

Dear Parents/Carers

As we come to the end of the Autumn Term, and my first term here, I would like to thank you for your support since September. For those of you who contributed to the Parent/Carer survey, I thank you - I am waiting for Kirkland Rowell to provide the analysis and will report back on this in the new year.

I would like to wish you and your family a very happy and Holy Christmas. I like to remind students that this can be an incredibly busy time for parents/carers and that they should offer to 'lend a hand' at home during the busy times. Please feel free to get them involved in the preparation and work for Christmas; I take the view that if someone is old enough to own an expensive smart phone then they are old enough to do some household chores!

On 4th December, five students from KS3 represented St Mary's in the annual Mayoral Debate at the Council Chambers. Seven local schools took part. This year they were tasked with creating and presenting a group speech which argued that Broxbourne's green spaces must be maintained for relaxation, exercise and farming whilst the counter argument that some schools had to debate was that to secure a prosperous future, it is necessary to develop Broxbourne's green spaces for housing, retail and leisure - a very current and challenging topic I am sure you would agree. For some of the students it was their first time in public speaking, for others, it came after their recent public speaking LAMDA exams. All students spoke eloquently, with passion and clarity. Their arguments were well developed and all their lunch time and after school rehearsals paid off. The standard of entry gets better each year and the students can be very proud of their second place award. There will be a club set up where students can further develop their skills and interests in debating - watch this space. The students were: Starr (Y9) Rex, Louise, and Adam (Y8) and Daniel (Y7). We are also pleased that a number of parents/carers also lent their support.

We run Public Speaking exams twice yearly, in November and May. The group meets at lunchtime on a Wednesday and this is a great opportunity for students to develop skills in public speaking and in being able to talk about topics that interest and excite them. Recently, one student created two speeches, each lasting four minutes without reading from a script. One speech was on Jamaica, where her grandmother had come from there, her other speech was on overfishing of our seas and the environmental impact of this. Another student spoke about conspiracy theories. The next exam is in May and if your child is interested in getting involved then please ask them to see Mrs Crawford or Ms King for further details.

On Friday 29th November, 65 Year 11 students attended Poetry Live at the Apollo Victoria Theatre in London. All students were given a magazine upon arrival, which included background information on the poets, copies of the poems and exemplar responses from the Chief Examiner. Students were able to discover more about the inspiration and interpretation of their set poems and were particularly keen to hear from Imtiaz Dharker whose poem Tissue is the most contentious in the anthology. The most popular poet – John Agard – ended the day with an animated reading of his poems to roaring applause. In the examiner sessions, the Chief Examiner dealt with two skills vital for success in the GCSE English Literature examinations, giving advice and guidance on how to approach the challenging 'unseen' section of the exam. He explained how to think and write about the poems for the best possible results and to look at comparing poems most effectively – both really useful skills! This was a fantastic trip supporting students as they prepare for their examinations - the students who attended were a credit to the school.

Two weeks ago the A Level Drama students took a trip to the National Theatre to see a modern adaptation of Chekhov's Three Sisters. Set against the back drop of the creation of Biafra in the 1960s, the play engaged the audience in the tragic and sad story of Lolo, Nne Chukwo and Udo who long to escape their lives and return to Lagos. It was a great adaptation and both students and staff had a good evening. Chekhov is one of the great theatrical writers and it was so great to see a modern production engaging the audience.



Fig 1: A level Drama students at the theatre

The Modern Foreign Languages department have been impressed by the hard work and motivation demonstrated by the vast majority of our 26 French and 43 Spanish Year 11 students in their recent GCSE speaking mock exams, which took place 2nd – 6th December. Students were required to act out a role play situation, describe a visual stimulus and answer more general questions on a variety of topics. Many of our students sat the exam with great confidence, arising from their thorough preparation and revision, and we are proud of their efforts. A reminder for the final exam in May to revise in good time, using the role play, photo card and general conversation revision materials.

We take people's mental health seriously at St Mary's and last week the 6th form Student Leadership delivered a Time to Talk workshop during break and lunch. We had a number of students attend from Year 10 and Year 9 and the idea of the workshop was to get students talking about their mental health. We are hoping to hold similar workshops after the new year run by 6th form students and the aim is to encourage our students to talk to their peers about mental health and the importance of looking after it. If you would like to know more, please email the admin email address and mark your email for the attention of my colleague, Jane Gillett.

It cannot have failed to escape your notice that Christmas is coming, with the usual run of adverts on the television, on the internet and in the shops. Hoddesdon Town Centre held a 'Festival of Carols' in the town centre last week, organised by Borough of Broxbourne 'Town Centres Team' and the 'Love Hoddesdon' groups. We were one of 13 schools who participated over three days and our choir being the grand finale act. Our choir, and members of it, are regulars at our collective worship and before the final governors' meeting last week, they sang carols for the governors at a private concert. We were all very impressed, as no doubt the shoppers of Hoddesdon were!



Fig 2: St Mary's Choir in Hoddesdon Town Centre

On 5th December 49 KS3 students went to see the amazing production of School of Rock at the Gillian Lynne Theatre, Drury Lane London. For some, this was their first experience of going to the theatre, and they were not disappointed. Lots were able to see many of the techniques we use in our drama lessons and were able to talk excitedly about all the tableaux they could see, the staging, set design, lighting as well as the acting, all of which was very impressive. The group was a pleasure to take and we're already looking forward to the next theatre trip, hopefully in the Spring term.



Fig 3 and 4: Students at the School of Rock

The final piece of news for the performing arts is very exciting: we have once again been successful in our audition for a solo spot for the 'Voice in A Million' event in March 2020. Nyla achieved a merit, despite battling a bad cold, in her Grade 4 'Pop Vocals' and Charlotte achieved Grade 6 'Pop Vocals' distinction grade (the highest grade of all the candidates across all schools on the day). Our choir have not only been given a position onstage but will be a 'featured' choir with our own solo spot. This will be on Wednesday 18th March at Wembley SSE Arena in front of 10,000 people and as you can imagine we are both very proud and very excited about the success of the group.



Fig 5: Voice in a million

News from the sports desk:

The Year 10 boys' football team beat Haileybury Turnford 5-2 recently. The team showed great resilience after finding themselves 2-1 down at half time. The squad fought their way back in to the game and a hat-trick from Lewis, which included a 30 yard strike, was enough to secure the win. A very good team performance from the boys and they will look to build on this in their upcoming fixtures.

The Year 11 boys' football team beat Robert Barclay Academy 4-1 in their match on 4 December. The boys now advance to the next stage of the District Cup Competition. A special mention to Deniz and Anthony who both stepped up and volunteered to play in goal despite this not being their regular playing positions. Without their dedication to the team, the squad may not have been successful in this tough fixture.

Year 9 girls played in a nail biting game of netball against Robert Barclay Academy recently, with the lead changing every quarter. Both teams played outstanding Netball, the passing was quick and accurate and all seven girls supported each other in attack and defence. The positive attitude with which the girls approached the game with made a huge difference to their performance. Special mention to Charis and Maame who played in a new position for this game and were superb throughout. Samara was voted Player of the Match and this was the best game we

have ever seen the girls play. The thoroughly deserved the result and Miss Willis says she was exceptionally proud of how they played and conducted themselves.



Fig 6: Y9 Girls' Netball team

The Year 7 boys' football team competed in the District 6 a side tournament on 5 December. The results didn't go as well as we had hoped and definitely didn't reflect how well the boys played but the team came away having enjoyed a lot of pitch time and gained some areas for improvement that they can now work on in training. We are very proud of how



Fig 7: Y7 Boys' football team

We celebrated with our Christmas lunch on Wednesday. It was a real team effort and the students and staff loved it. We have a resident photographer in Year 12, Jack, and he takes the photographs for all our events. I will leave my final good wishes to you all expressed through one of the pictures he took at the lunch...



Fig 8: Merry Christmas to you all

Nicholas Simms
Headteacher