



Diocese of St. Albans



18<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

I remember the sadness and worry with which I wrote the last newsletter, before schools closed in March, compared to the happiness I and my colleagues feel now at re-opening and seeing the students again. It feels right to have the building full of them and their chatter now.

The exam results this year (or rather the national 'process' around the gradings, with the last minute changes) was a challenge. Staff found it stressful, so we can only imagine the anxiety the students themselves suffered and feel very much for them.

That said, our students did very well and achieved an excellent set of results. It would be easy for onlookers and outsiders to assume that we awarded high grades without justification; however, this was not the case. I was determined at the start of the Centre Assessed Grades process that we would conduct ourselves with integrity and award appropriate grades based on evidence we had, and I feel our results were an accurate assessment of what students would have achieved, had they been able to take the exams. On the strength of the excellent GCSE results, we now have the biggest Sixth Form I believe we have ever had, with a large intake into Y12. There were some Y12 students on a one-year course with us and they did really well, moving on to college, apprenticeships or work. Additionally, the excellent A level/Level 3 BTEC results meant another large cohort are going off to university, including two students going to Cambridge. I would like to congratulate them all on their many successes.

Having talked about students who have recently moved on to the next stage of their lives, whether it be our Sixth form, college, work or to University, it now seems appropriate to think about those who have just joined our family, and those who will be joining. I would like to welcome all new parents/carers (most of you have children in Y7, but a few are in other year groups) and it has been a delight to start getting to know your sons/daughters; we are looking forward to getting to know you better over the coming months.

This week would have been our Secondary Transfer Evening (where students in Y6 and their parents/carers spend the evening with us and tour the school). In 2020 we are unable to do this (you yourself may have been planning to visit with a younger child) and so we are putting a lot of information on-line. There is already a talk from me ([here](#)) and by next Friday (25 September), there will also be a virtual tour of the school. In addition there will be talks from key subject staff, Mr Flores (the prospective Head of Y7), several of our Governors and, probably most importantly, some students in Y8 who were new to the school this time last year and will be sharing their thoughts about St Mary's and examples of their work. I am running short tours of the school in small groups (8 maximum) – these take place from 9:00-9:30am Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday over the next few weeks. The timing allows the visitors to be inside the building when no students/staff are on the corridors, and leave before lesson changeover. If you know parents/carers of children in Y6, please let them know about these events and encourage them to think about St Mary's as their school of choice.

WE BELIEVE EVERYONE IS EQUAL: EVERYONE DESERVES THE BEST

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Headteacher: Mr Nicholas Simms B.Sc. (Hons), NPQH

*'Students feel happy and safe at school'* OFSTED 2019

*'An exceptionally inclusive and caring community'* SIAMS Inspection 2020

I have been impressed with the way the students have settled back into what we call **The New Normal** (our one-way systems, staggered breaks, and frequent use of hand-gel) and are being so helpful in following the rules. We have had a few students grumble about the one-way system, where it takes you on a long route round, but please let your son/daughter know how pleased we are with them in general and take some time to re-iterate that these are in place **for all our safety**, not just to be difficult.

Just for your information, we are now running Study Club for Y7, Y8 and Y9. We have been able to staff it until 4:30pm each day and it will be in the dining room where we can socially distance students in different year groups. We are currently looking at how we do the same for Y10 and Y11.

Finally, we are adopting a new motto, changing from **Aspire – Challenge – Succeed** to **We believe everyone is equal: everyone deserves the best**. We still maintain the high aspirations and desire for challenge and success, because we **believe everyone deserves the best**; however, the new motto explicitly states that we believe in equality (irrespective of your background). The combined statement is much more clearly grounded in our Christian Vision that **Through God's love we are the rich soil where seeds flourish and roots grow**.

As always, I wish you good health and a lovely weekend.



Nicholas Simms  
Headteacher

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