

9 April 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

I am writing to you ahead of the upcoming Easter weekend firstly to let you know that you have all very much been in my thoughts over the past few weeks; this period of national shutdown has created immense challenges for each of us in unique ways, but I hope that you have remained strong, purposeful and positive, as the country strives to push through the worst of the pandemic.

Thank you for the extraordinary kindness you have shown to St Dunstan's throughout this period. The emails of support have been most moving and very much appreciated by all.

You will be aware that there have been significant challenges for the College. Whilst our doors might have shut to all but those children of key workers, and the staff supporting them, there has been considerable work going on remotely, to ensure that St Dunstan's remains a going concern and successfully weathers the financial and educational challenges that the pandemic brings to bear, as well as offering support to our local community. I would like to update you on all three areas.

### *Supporting the Local Community*

I have been struck by the extraordinary willingness of staff at St Dunstan's to respond so selflessly in the support of those most in need across our local community. By working closely with our partners at Lewisham Council, various connections across the NHS and local care homes, and with our alumni (many of whom are actively tackling the pandemic as NHS workers), we have enacted a number of measures to help support:

- All unused food from our kitchens was donated to the local food bank by staff volunteers
- We opened our Jubilee Grounds for use of parking by the NHS staff at Lewisham Hospital
- We are currently working with Lewisham Council to open our kitchens and supply-chains to provide food and a place to eat for sheltered families within the Borough
- Our DT Department this week began production of face shields (using our laser cutters and 3D printers) for distribution to a variety of hospitals and care homes – at the time of writing, nearly 200 have already been distributed to those working on the frontline against this pandemic
- All our goggles, eye defenders, aprons and gloves have been supplied to a variety of hospitals and care homes
- Teaching and Support staff have given up portions of their holiday to come into College and support the care of children of key workers.

We will continue to support our local community and country in any way we can during this crisis and I am most grateful to everyone who is doing so much to support in whatever way they are able.

### *Education*

There have been a number of developments educationally. Firstly, the announcement from Ofqual, as to how they would like us to calculate public exam grades for Year 11 and Year 13 students, was issued last week. The guidance is extensive and a significant amount of work is now required over the forthcoming weeks to accurately draw on all the data we have on the cohorts of students on roll in these year groups, such that we can present the very best of them to examination boards at the end of May, and help them obtain the examination grades they deserve. More information on this will come from Mr Johnson and his team over the course of next term. We will also be moving over to enrichment courses for both year groups upon our return (pre A-Level for Year 11 and pre-University for Year 13), to make best use of their time and to keep them academically and mentally stimulated. It goes without saying that all our pastoral support for these year groups will remain in place throughout Trinity Term, as will the opportunity to work with us to undertake targeted assessments, where necessary and appropriate.

For all pupils, there has been an extensive review of the remote learning programme. Thank you to all pupils and parents for your feedback. A number of meetings have already taken place, with more scheduled to happen between now and the beginning of term, to ensure that the provision is the very best that it can be.

We very much appreciate that remote learning in a Junior School context presents some specific challenges, particularly for the youngest pupils in the College who require a substantial amount of support. Miss Whitwood and her team have reflected upon the extensive feedback, identified key themes and designed a revised model which we hope incorporates as much of this information as possible, looking closely at what is manageable and achievable in each section of the Junior School. We have also considered that what remote learning looks like in EYFS will be entirely different from what can be achieved in Year 6. Miss Whitwood will send you a revised remote learning timetable at the end of the Easter break ready to start the beginning of the Trinity term. Whilst we know we will be unable to achieve a 'one size fits all' model, we have proactively worked towards a flexible approach in order that parents, whatever their home circumstances, have available to them what they need to accommodate the needs of their individual situation, as much as is possible.

I would finally like to reassure you that provision for SEND and pastoral care will continue across all year groups. All Senior School children will be contacted across the course of the week by their tutor, who continues to keep an eye on both wellbeing and academic engagement, as well as circulating tutor time activities for pupils to access at home. Our most vulnerable children will have an additional dedicated regular check-in slot with their relevant lead professional, be that the nurse, counsellor, Head of Year or SENDCO. We have already put up a wealth of information on Firefly to support children's mental health and we will continue to add to this resource. We are pleased to have received very positive feedback

from pupils who have been making use of this whilst at home. It is particularly exciting that from next term, the beginnings of a virtual Forder Programme, including House challenges, will emerge!

It is our intention that detailed papers will be sent to you on Friday 17 April, outlining all the developments in our remote learning provision for Trinity Term. We hope very much that the developments will resonate with your own thinking and I thank you in advance for embracing all we are trying to achieve with such optimism and positivity.

### *Financial*

St Dunstan's College is a charity. We do not exist to generate large surpluses. Furthermore, we are not supported by a substantive educational foundation, nor are we part of a large educational trust. In addition to this, as you are well aware, we took the decision some months ago to embark on the most ambitious building programme since 1888; a programme funded in large part by borrowing and also by tapping into some of our limited reserves. This decision was taken with the best of intentions – to offer your children outstanding educational facilities – but also with no awareness that a pandemic was on the horizon. All this combined means that we just do not have large reserves to use in order that we might offer large percentage fee remissions in this time of shutdown. Having said this, with the full support and encouragement of the Governing Body, we have used the last few weeks to consider every possible way by which we might be able to make savings that can be passed back to you. These have included:

- The Furloughing of c. 80% of our support staff team
- The Furloughing of 8 teaching staff who are not required to deliver virtual lessons
- Freezing of operational expenditure and running costs across both our sites
- Cancelling subscriptions and contracts whilst the College is in lockdown
- Delaying the planned fee increases
- Delaying the planned pay rises for staff
- Undertaking a detailed analysis of all non-fixed costs

It is also the case that where we can find additional money in our reserves – and where this does not jeopardise the financial sustainability of the College – we will not hesitate to use these to pass on further fee remission to you.

It would be possible for us to go further and to Furlough more teaching staff. This is the only realistic saving that would be left for us to enact. However, we must not underestimate the impact of doing so. It would have a dramatic impact on our ability to run a remote learning programme anything like the quality you experienced at the end of last term and the enhanced programme we have planned for next. It is therefore our view that this is not in the best interests of your children. We also believe from the overwhelmingly positive feedback received from parents so far, that this is not something you would like us to do.

We do appreciate that the remote learning experience is not equally beneficial across all pupils. This is particularly the case in the EYFS and Key Stage 1, where the children cannot be left to self-educate. It is with this in mind that we are actively considering a model with a

skewed remission, with greater reductions being given to these year groups. However, I do have to manage your expectations; even if we were to Furlough the teachers in these year groups, the additional remission would equate to approximately 5%, and you must also appreciate that the quality of remote learning provision would also have to be reduced.

I am conscious that some schools have already committed to fixed percentage remission rates. I do not believe this is a sensible approach. This is because we do not yet know for certain what our savings equate to or for how long the lock down will last. The Bursar committed to a minimum of 10% in her most recent communication, to help provide you with some reassurance that it is our intent to pass all savings back to you and she and her team have continued to work on finding further savings. As you know, this crisis is rapidly evolving and we do not yet know for sure when schools will return to normal. It is for these reasons that we have decided to ask that you first pay your full fee bills for next term and we will then seek to return all possible monies to you thereafter, once they have been established. These will be issued to you through a mid-term fee bill.

As the Bursar promised in her letter to you last Friday, her team have been working their way through all expenditure lines to identify savings, and they currently believe that they may be able to pass approximately £800,000 back to parents (this includes salary/furlough reimbursements; curriculum resources; event cancellations; utility bills; stationery and equipment supplies; property maintenance and minor improvement projects; as well as legal/professional fees, subscriptions and the catering credit already applied). If this does materialise, and assuming that the College will be closed for the whole of the Trinity Term and the Government Furlough scheme transpires to offer what we have been led to believe, it might be possible to offer a remission structure as follows:

25% discount for EYFS  
20% discount for Years 1 and 2  
15% discount for Years 3 to 13

We will of course continue to work on this modelling as events unfold and as soon as we can reasonably commit to percentage remissions, we will do so.

We do appreciate that some individual families are under particular financial pressure at this time and we have therefore looked at how we can create an additional fund to help families in this position. Please do contact the Bursar directly should you feel that this applies to you.

For any family who does not need a remission of fees, we would gladly use this money to support those families who find themselves in particular financial need as a consequence of the virus, and for whom we are doing everything possible to support them remaining at St Dunstan's. Do contact the Bursar directly if you fall within this category.

### *Concluding Remarks*

I would like to once again thank parents for the overwhelming kindness that has been expressed to the College through an enormous number of supportive emails and messages. It is clear that the vast majority of you understand the situation the College is in and that we are doing everything in our power to manage the challenge as best we are able.

It will not surprise you to learn that the Bursary and other key members of staff have been working non-stop since the end of term. I have therefore insisted that the Bursary take a complete break from Thursday 9 April – Tuesday 14 April, inclusive. Furthermore, all staff, all senior leaders and all members of the College Executive will take complete break from Friday 10 April – Monday 13 April inclusive – please note that emails will not be answered over these periods of time. Thank you for your understanding.

Covid-19 is an extraordinary challenge for us all, whether you are in Nursery or Year 13, whether you are a parent or a member of staff. But we all have one thing in common, I hope, and that is a deep fondness for St Dunstan's, our wonderful community school, all that we are currently achieving, and all we have planned for the future. It is that sense of community and loyalty to it, that will both see us through this period of considerable challenge, as well as to ensure a bright future for the school and the many thousands of children who have enjoyed and will continue to enjoy the type of education we have developed.

With best wishes for Easter

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N P Hewlett', written in a cursive style.

Mr N P Hewlett  
Headmaster