

3 July 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

### **End of Trinity Term Letter to Parents 2020**

As we reach the end of this most extraordinary term, I write to reflect on an academic year like no other.

When the College opened its doors in September, little did any of us know what enormous challenges this year would bring, and that it would demand all the courage, creativity and compassion we could muster, as we necessarily adapted and reimagined our ways of working, offering the best of ourselves in the current, whilst remaining forward-thinking and ambitious in our aspirations for an increasingly exciting future.

### **Recent challenges... and opportunities**

The coronavirus pandemic has without doubt wrought seismic changes to many areas of our lives, and has been a time of great anxiety and uncertainty. It is ironic that in the midst of the lockdown, we commemorated the 75-year anniversary of VE day; an extraordinary time in the College's history, and the only other time, since 1888, that we have been shut down and relocated. This time, it was not a relocation to Reigate, but a relocation to remote learning. Equally as different, and doubtless equally as challenging, for those trying to maintain an education in exceptional circumstances. I am so proud of how this community has risen to the challenge. We were quick off the mark in planning for a robust remote learning strategy, and we confronted the many difficulties with a determination to be creative and ambitious in our educational choices, but also with a commitment to honesty and transparency in how the various decisions were communicated.

I am most grateful to all of you who took the time to write to me and thank the College staff for all they have done in these most trying of circumstances. I also want to take this opportunity to thank every member of the St Dunstan's community for the truly exceptional efforts that have been undertaken across recent months. To have rolled out a virtual learning programme, including new courses for Years 11 and 13, a virtual Forder programme, virtual pastoral support programme, virtual Festival, and everything else alongside, has required an extraordinary work ethic, flexibility, resolve, patience and good humour from all. It has also served to cement even further our connections with the local community, as we have been able to help in many material ways – donating unused food to local food banks, continuing to open the school for the children of key workers, opening up the Jubilee Grounds for

NHS staff to use for parking, and donating all our goggles, eye defenders, aprons and gloves to a variety of hospitals and care homes. The DT department used our laser cutters and 3D printers to produce much needed face shields for hospitals and care homes – hundreds were distributed in total, to those working on the frontline against the pandemic.

The horrific death of George Floyd in America provoked an understandable call for more to be done in the reformation of our education system. I wholeheartedly support this and believe it to be long overdue. I am also most grateful to so many current and former Dunstonians for the constructive dialogue that was held on this matter, and the common understanding that whilst St Dunstan's rightly prides itself on the ambitious and forward-thinking approach it now takes with its educational offering, there is always more that can be done; I am very much looking forward to working with many of you on this in September.

### **An Inspector Calls**

Back in Autumn 2019, our minds were fixed on other challenges. We knew that we were likely to be inspected at some point during Michaelmas Term, and when the call duly came through, we were fully prepared. I could not have been more proud of the shining endorsement we received from the ISI Inspectorate. It was not just the fact that we achieved the highest possible recognition in every category, but the captivating language that was used throughout the report was so touching: 'Pupils [at St Dunstan's] show compassion and kindness for each other and have a discernible appreciation for their community and the world beyond. They think deeply about the lives and experiences of others and about the values that are important to them and the school.' To receive such public endorsement of our philosophy is truly heartening.

Indeed, the reputation of our College certainly seems to be going from strength to strength. I believe that St Dunstan's is the independent education families are increasingly looking for. A school culture that champions individuality and is underpinned by open-minded, liberal values. An unashamedly broad education, where young people can find their own way, plough their own furrow, and be true to themselves. A school that is proud of its heritage but not constrained by it. A down-to-earth, but ambitious and forward-thinking school. And perhaps it is for these reasons that the Independent Schools Awards shortlisted St Dunstan's for the prestigious category of 'Coeducational School of the Year', the winner of which will be announced in October – please keep your fingers crossed!

In the meantime, we continue to receive record interest for places in the College and, despite being amidst a pandemic, have had no choice but to bring forward our plans for a slight expansion of College roll, starting in September with 5 forms in Year 7 and 3 forms in Year 5. As most of you will be aware, this increase in entry to the Senior School will continue to be accommodated as the new buildings open in September 2021.

## Memorable moments

There have been a number of other memorable events across the course of this year. Our annual Remembrance service was, once again, a most moving occasion. To see the whole College community, supported by the CCF, from Nursery to Year 13, lined up around the front of the College, in reverential silence, and reflecting with such sincerity upon that enormous loss of life suffered by St Dunstan's, gives me hope that, at St Dunstan's at least, we are a community that will use lessons from our past in guiding our narrative for the future.

The Michaelmas Term Concert highlighted again just how far we have come with our musical ambition. The College orchestra was on sensational form, performing two of Dvorak's Slavonic Dances with barely any support from our visiting music teachers. The Chapel Choir produced accomplished performances of significantly challenging repertoire, and SDC Voices raised the roof with songs from the shows! A magical Carol Service at St Pancras Church opened with a candlelight procession, and ended with the rousing singing of *Hark the Herald*. It was an exceptional evening of music making that showed the College community at its very best.

Although it was cut short, there were many other achievements during Lent Term; 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 LGBTQ+ 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!*

Our Lent Term Senior School production is always a highlight, and this year was set to be no different, with a production of *Legally Blonde*. It was such a blow to the dedicated cast and production team that lockdown came during the very week scheduled for production. However, the character of Dunstonians never fails to amaze me; to see those young people 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, no matter the challenge before us.

This year has seen record numbers of pupils represent the College in sport, and it has also been notable for the increased presence of St Dunstan's pupils and teams in the latter phases of County competitions. This year, 9 boys and girls were selected to represent Kent Hockey. The College U16 basketball team progressed to the regional round of the London Youth Games along with our Senior badminton 4, the U14 rugby team were finalists in the Kent Shield and the U14 netballers fought to our highest ever finish at a Kent Tournament, missing progressing to the regional round by one place. The pupils at the College can only benefit from the challenges that this higher-level competition presents, and we look forward to supporting them to more opportunities next year.

And then, of course, we had myriad achievements brought to the fore by the lockdown and our remote learning. Be it Nursery pupils becoming spider experts, and making their own webs, Reception pupils building and painting dens, or Year 3 enjoying a virtual residential

week making pizzas, packing suitcases and building fairy houses, there has been no shortage of creativity in the education of our youngest children in the College. I was so pleased that, despite the current conditions, we were still able to host a Year 6 end of year celebration, and even The Junior School Sports Day, with contributions both on site and from home.

In the Senior School, I am particularly proud of the enrichment opportunities we have been able to provide through our remote Forder programme. Some highlights include: the Phoenix Project, in which KS3 pupils had the opportunity to produce a film challenging public perceptions of the coronavirus pandemic; the SDC Virtual Concert in which our musicians were able to work together and create a Trinity Term performance like no other; and the wonderful submissions from our Remote Photography Club. Our PE team did a fantastic job keeping the community fit and active during lockdown with initiatives such as the 'Screen Free Fitness Project' and the 'Two Point Six Challenge', culminating in our final 'Forder Thursday', complete with morning workout and healthy lunch tips from our Catering team.

The Opening Minds Lecture Series was another a real highlight. The topics covered ranged from the benefits of a good night's sleep, how to be a designer, what it takes to become a lawyer, 'Jerusalem', expeditions to Papua New Guinea, climbing Kilimanjaro, and becoming a Royal Marine sniper. All of the thought-provoking talks have been uploaded to our YouTube channel, and are well worth watching.

Whilst the St Dunstan's Festival could not physically take place, our Festival of Curiosity was a resounding success and a fantastic way to end the term, after all its challenges. The range of possible topics meant there really was something for everyone, and we have been so impressed with how pupils have engaged so wholeheartedly with it. The quality of the projects has been outstanding.

## **Not standing still**

Having signed the various build and financing contracts in the autumn, January saw the contractors arrive on site and work began in earnest on our new build. The contractors were able to continue their work through the lockdown, albeit at a slightly slower pace, and we are therefore still on track for the new Junior School, STEM block and Sixth Form Centre to be completed by September 2021. This is a major milestone for the College, representing the most substantial redevelopment of the school since our foundation in 1888.

It is remarkable that other works have continued on site, despite the restrictions of the pandemic. I know the Junior School are thrilled with their new Woodland Classroom and my thanks go to the Estates team who invested so much in making this project come to life. We are also very excited about the senior school pond which we hope will be in place for September.

Pupil voice has continued to be a focus this year, and it has made huge strides. The highlight of the year was the College Parliament's G12 Summit, which took place at the end of Lent

term at the Lewisham Council Chambers. The ideas raised there were taken forward by the College Leadership Team and fed into the Development Plan for next year.

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.

There have been some necessary structural changes to a couple of important departments in the College. You will see significant developments to both College Sport and SEND departments upon your return in September. Most noticeable will be that both now have more staff to support in the ambitions we have for these areas. In Sport there are now full-time coaches in hockey, netball, swimming, and strength and conditioning, alongside the teaching team. In SEND, the College-wide SENDCo will be supported by separate Learning Support Coordinators in both the Senior and Junior Schools, allowing for one centrally coordinated SEND strategy, but ownership of the provision in each of the respective schools.

I am most grateful to all of you who fed-in to our review of parent communication. We have much to be proud of in our communication of recent months, but we must also learn from the improvements that have been engendered. We will be writing to you with the main headlines of what you said about our communication, as well as how we intend to respond to it. There will be changes as a consequence, including a move to one weekly bulletin email containing all links to relevant letters and documentation, as well as a wholesale review of the iSAMS parent portal, across the course of next year.

One of the consequences of the pandemic has been that our ICT strategy has in fact been accelerated as remote working forced us to adopt some of our future plans more swiftly than anticipated, and we are in a particularly exciting position going forward for the new academic year.

## **The future**

The future is really very bright for St Dunstan's, despite the current fog of uncertainty. In a testament to Vera Lynn, I am very confident that the blue skies will drive the dark clouds away, and when they do, we will have much to be excited about; state-of-the-art facilities on track for occupation next September, some extremely ambitious cohorts of children coming through the College, and a school culture that is genuinely different and actively sought after. It is of course essential that we continue to realise the phases of our building projects that we have planned. To demolish the Physics block, Prep building and Music department, and to landscape this into the stunning new 'Plaza' – named by the pupils – and offering a recreational and co-curricular outside space, in the hub of our Stanstead Road site, will cost us an additional million pounds. Likewise, to convert the Design Technology workshops into

a state-of-the-art theatre and performing arts centre, will cost another million. Two million pounds to fundraise between now and Easter 2021. An ambitious target for an ambitious school. Much work has already been undertaken in our fundraising, and I have been working extensively with a number of our alumni, but we still have a long way to go to realise this ambition. I would be thrilled to hear from any of you if you are able to offer support in any way for this exciting period of development for St Dunstan's.

### **Farewell and welcome**

As ever, we say goodbye to some staff at the end of this academic year and thank them for all they have given to the College. We also welcome a number of staff to the College, starting with us in September. Please follow these links to see a full list of [valete](#) and [salvete](#).

### **And so, to summer**

There are of course so many other achievements from this term – too many to mention – but all of which are captured in the Chronicle, which will be with you shortly into Michaelmas Term and in the termly newsletter, The Shield.

I hope you found the guide to reopening the College helpful. It is an important document for you to read in preparation for next term and it can be found [HERE](#). I am very conscious that the situation is changing all the time, in line with the ever-evolving guidance from government. It would be perfectly possible for me to send you communications throughout the summer as this guidance evolves, but that is not sustainable for any of us! It is with this in mind that we are committing to our plan until it is reviewed again in August, with a potential communication to you on 7 August, and a definitive communication of our plan for reopening being sent to you on 21 August. Aside from these dates, please do not expect to hear from the College regarding our plans – unless something dramatic happens (!) – as we all try to enjoy something of a break.

I do very much hope that you can all enjoy a summer holiday in whatever way the circumstances allow. This year has demanded a great deal from all of us and now we must allow ourselves the opportunity to recoup and refresh, ready for the challenges of a new and exciting next chapter in the journey of St Dunstan's College.

Albam Exorna!

Yours sincerely



Mr N P Hewlett  
Headmaster