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Dear Parents, Carers and Families,

Assemblies for many of our students this week touched in part on a man called August Landmesser. Not much is known about August, and indeed the story most commonly associated with him is not 100% verifiable, but a man believed to be him can be seen in a photo from 1936 refusing to raise his arm in the Nazi salute as all around him do at the launch of a new German naval vessel. August was married to a woman called Irma Ecklet who was Jewish and under the antisemitic laws of the Nazi state their marriage had in effect been rendered invalid. By refusing to raise his arm August faced punishment. He was sent to a concentration camp, but he demonstrates that while community and collective endeavour are central to all of humanity's achievements, this should only happen against a backdrop of ethical strength and that true strength, such as he showed, is to be found when asked to go along with the "mob" but refusing on the basic grounds that the mob is wrong.

Thankfully, most of the young people in our collective care won't be faced with such challenging and stark decisions but all of them will at some point feel the pinch of peer pressure and have a sense that they are going along with, or at least silently acquiescing to, something they know to be wrong. It's normal to feel this way and indeed I would suggest all of us can look back at moments in our own lives when we've done just that, but this doesn't make it right and the students I admire the most are the ones who show the maturity to remain true to their own sense of morality when the easier path might be to go along with the herd or not speak out against injustice. The phrase we use with students most often is "be an upstander, not a bystander."

On a practical level this means we encourage all our students to not only understand what is and isn't acceptable but to also feel that they can speak out when they encounter things they know to be wrong. The best way to do this is of course for them to speak to their teachers, usually their form tutor in the first instance, not to challenge things head on themselves as this can be both difficult and prompt conflict. Outside of school it may mean not involving themselves in things they know to be wrong, which here in 2024 often means not engaging with online content that can cause distress or be inappropriate. I've witnessed this positive behaviour in multiple ways recently, from the Year 12 students supporting others in lessons and gently reminding them to focus, to the Year 11 students who realised others weren't aware they were in the way of an anxious Year 7 student keen to get to Doctor Who club so asked them politely to move aside. Many thanks to the parents, carers and families who support this message on a frequent basis.

Finally, last week I used this letter to appeal to a parent who'd shared some information about their Year 7 son struggling to make friends. I'm pleased to report that the parent got in touch; many thanks for doing so.

Many thanks for your continued support of the school; I hope you all have a good weekend.



Michael Wright

Please find this week's key messages below.

Students in the News

Bradley Smith in Year 13 was recognised last week at a DABGC event held at the Ramside Hall Hotel for his achievement in becoming a national boxing champion.

Paired Reading

Last week our newly trained reading mentors in Years 12 and 10 met with their reading 'buddies' for the first time. It was great to see them get to know each other and to see some bonding over a mutual love of Michael Morpurgo's books!

Students in Court (in a good way)

Our Year 12 Social Sciences students have had an enlightening visit to Durham Crown Court this week, sitting in on pre-trial proceedings, plea-hearings and closing arguments and experiencing first-hand the complexities and realities of the justice system.

Crime Awareness Day

All of our Year 9 students were involved in sessions run by the Prison, Me? No Way! charity on Wednesday, focusing on the causes and consequences of crime, and on how to stay safe. Highlights included hearing about the experiences of a soon-to-be released prisoner, exploring railway safety using VR headsets, and visiting a replica prison cell. The staff delivering the sessions fed back that our school is always one of their favourites across the country to attend, because our students are consistently polite, enthusiastic and engaged.

School Nurse Drop In Sessions

From Monday 7th October, we will have NHS School Nurses on site to support our students and offering fortnightly 'drop-in sessions' at break and lunchtimes. The nurses can help with a variety of issues including anxiety, self-esteem, drug and alcohol support, exam related stress and healthy living advice. If you would like your child to see the nurses, please contact the relevant Year Team to arrange this.

Parking near the school

Local residents have contacted me to say that since the beginning of the new school year residents of DAMHA bungalows have experienced cars parking in the cul-de-sac despite signs stating that parking is resident only. All the residents of these properties are elderly and many are infirm. Your assistance in this is greatly appreciated.

Key Year 11 Information

- Progress meetings

You should have received your progress meeting appointment via Class Charts this week. This meeting is an opportunity for you and your child to meet with a senior member of staff to discuss current progress in Year 11 and how they can be preparing for the forthcoming mock exam series, commencing on **Monday 18th November**.

Please note - due to the volume of appointments being conducted, we are unable to change appointments or reschedule. Your child will attend their appointment on their own should you be unable to attend. There will be another opportunity to attend a subsequent progress meeting in the New Year.

- Raising Achievement Sessions (RAS)

RAS started on Monday and will run until the start of the November mock series. These are targeted sessions designed to intervene where students struggle with key concepts and/or have knowledge gaps. Students have received an assembly about RAS this week and have been told how they work, why they exist and the importance of attending RAS if they have been selected to attend.

Students were selected to attend up to 3 sessions a week and the majority of the sessions take place at lunchtime, after your child has had a break and time to eat. Some maths, English and French sessions occur after school.

There are two more blocks of RAS, one in January in the build-up to the February mock series and one in April in the run up to the GCSE exam period. If your child doesn't have a session appear on their timetable for this block, it is likely they will be selected for one in the subsequent RAS blocks.

We have asked the students to 'trust the process', and to look at being invited to RAS as a positive thing, one that will help them achieve the outcomes we know they are capable of. Your support in getting your child to these sessions is crucial and much appreciated as we help prepare your child for their mock exams.

Staff Update

We've welcomed Mr Harvey in music into the school this week. Mr Harvey brings a wealth of experience to the role and we're very happy he's bringing both his passion for music and his passion for teaching to the school.

Year 6 Open Evening - additional thanks!

Following our praise to all the student helpers who made this evening such a success could I also publicly thank the following students:

- Megan and Lucy, Student Presidents, who spoke so eloquently to prospective parents and their families
- Callum, Ella and Grace who did the same but as Year 7 students and offered great insights into their time here so far.

- Arjika and Thi – lots of students acted as guides on the evening but some of the visiting parents specifically asked the outstanding efforts of these Year 9 students to be recognised for their politeness.

Silver Duke of Edinburgh Expedition – An Update from Mr Boreland

On Friday 27th September students returned from their final expedition for their Silver DofE Award. The expedition was challenging. One student was forced to withdraw on the morning of day 1 due to a severely injured ankle from the night before, meaning that they were unable to start the expedition. Once we began the expedition with the remainder of the team, we aimed to get approximately 14km down river. This progress was delayed! Two of our students capsized their boat on an 'interesting' grade 2 rapid. They "achieved" this by crashing their canoe into a rock with such force and precision, they were both thrown clear and the canoe was pinned to the rock and forced under water by the river. After 4 hours of trying to retrieve the boat, we had to leave it and it is still there, in the River Tweed, 4km from our starting point.

On day 2, the students endured some of the worst winds that I have paddled in and I have paddled in some questionable conditions over the last 15 years. The students all showed massive amounts of resilience and determination to make it through this day, with the occasional smile and sarcastic comment. At the end of day 2, we had paddled 15km of our intended 30km due to the effect of the head on winds; every inch gained was a fight.

On day 3, the students really demonstrated their learning. Camp was packed up and taken care of very effectively and we were paddling as the sun was still rising. This was the first time the students had the opportunity to show real enjoyment. We had calm conditions, salmon jumping, swans flying just overhead and, crucially, no wind. This day went without a hitch and the students all finished the expedition, passing this section of the course.

They were all a real credit to the school and to themselves.

Mr Boreland

Parent/Carer Information Evenings

A reminder of the dates and times of Parent/Carer Information Evenings. This will be an opportunity to hear in person from senior and key pastoral staff about the outline of the academic year for your children. The Year 10 evening will feature the Heads of English, Maths and Science giving specific guidance on how to support your child in these key subjects.

- Year 10 Wednesday 9th October 6.00pm