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OUR LADY & ST. BEDE CATHOLIC ACADEMY

Head Teacher: M Wilkinson
CEO: M Shorten M.Ed., BA (Hons)
Chair of Directors: Y Coates

Thursday 16th Feb 2023

Dear Parents/Carers

Welcome to the first edition of "Heads up from the Head."

As we approach the end of what has been a very busy and productive half term, I thought I would take the opportunity to share with you some of the wonderful events and successes that pupils and staff at Our Lady and St Bede Catholic Academy have achieved over the past term.

If I could start by saying a massive thank you for your support with our standards refresh. As a direct result of home school team work, pupils have been exemplary in their mature approach to uniform, equipment and punctuality.

Our high standards and expectations around being a professional learner supports the positive mindset our young people need to access the amazing learning opportunities our teachers provide. We would appreciate your continued support after half term in maintaining our high standards and remind parents / carers to contact us if they feel they need support, further information or advice.

Half Term Highlights

OLSB is such a vibrant place to learn both in the classroom and beyond. We strive to give our young people as many opportunities and experiences as possible and we thought it would be a nice idea to share some of those opportunities with parents and carers.

- **Form masses:** Thank you to all our parents, carers and parishioners who have attended our two form masses this half term for St Teresa and St Cuthbert. It is lovely to share these Masses as a community and to celebrate the pupils hard work in preparing the bidding prayers, artwork, prayer card, opening and closing reflections. The next mass will take place on Tuesday 14th March for St Patrick, all are welcome.
- **NHS workshop:** On Tuesday 17th January, we were lucky to have an amazing workshop for our Year 8 pupils from the NHS. The workshop focused on a wide range of future career paths including, apprenticeships, T-Levels and university.
- **Dr Peter Vardy Lecture:** On Monday 23rd January, we were honoured to host a Trust event in school, led by the internationally renowned philosopher, Dr Peter Vardy, formerly of Heythrop College, University of London. The event focused on upward transition for Year 10 & 11 students and their parents. A huge thank you to Dr Peter Vardy for inspiring the Philosophers and Theologians of the future!
- The following day, we were honoured to host Dr Peter Vardy for the KS4 philosophy conference. 250 pupils attended from across the Northeast focusing on key questions such as 'what is truth?' and 'how will artificial intelligence impact the future of humanity?' After the conference our staff were treated to a CPD session led by Dr Peter which looked at what it truly means to be Catholic school.



- **Forgiveness, Justice and Peace Conference:** Earlier in the term we held our first Forgiveness, Justice and Peace Conference. 250 pupils joined us from across the Diocese for our conference, which focused on the three themes of forgiveness, justice and peace. Two of our key speakers were with us in person, Jo Berry and Richard Moore, who travelled to share their truly inspirational stories. Also, a huge thank you to Sister Helen Prejean, who by the wonders of modern technology, was with us via video to share her extremely powerful message.
- **Holocaust Memorial Day:** On Thursday 26th January, we came together as a school community to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day. We began with a liturgy, a time of prayer and reflection. This was followed by our exhibition where every department was represented. Our departments were tasked with reflecting on the theme of Holocaust Memorial Day 2023 "Ordinary People" and creating an exhibition piece which linked the theme to their subject area. However, it is important to note that this monumental achievement was not just the work of our amazing staff but was driven by our pupils who have given up break times, lunch times and afterschool to create the fantastic pieces of art which were on show.
- **Regional Final of the Cyberfirst Competition:** On Saturday the 4th of February, the Computer Science department took the 'Python' team to the regional final of the Cyberfirst competition at Northumbria University. The team included Amelia C, Mikhaela L, Eloise C and Keisha B from year 8. The team had to compete against 9 other teams from the North-East on problem solving and cyber security challenges. Although the team didn't win, they had a great day and it is a fantastic achievement to be in the top 10 teams in the Northeast.
- **Personal Development Day:** On Thursday 9th of February, we have our second Personal Development Day of the academic year, which focused on Mental Health and Wellbeing. Pupils had four sessions delivered by teachers throughout the day including:
 1. 'Chipping away': Coping with stress.
 2. 'Create the change': Body image and self-esteem.
 3. 'Changing places': How to be a supportive friend for someone who is facing mental health challenges.
 4. 'Tackling stigma': The stigma surrounding mental health and pupil presentation of things we can do in school to support pupils in school.
 Year 7 and 8 also had a performance from Zak, a young man who tours around the country sharing his music and his passion for mental health awareness. Year 9, 10 and 11 had a session from Alliance, focusing on how we can live mentally health lives and the support they will offer in the near future in school.
- **National Apprenticeship Week:** Week beginning February 6th was national apprenticeship week. At Our Lady and St Bede, we are passionate about our pupils having experienced a wide range of career and post-16 options! On Thursday our Year 8 and 9 pupils had an assembly from Stockton Riverside College and Middlesbrough College on apprenticeships and T-Levels. We also had an engineering company who runs apprenticeships in school to speak to pupils in the Hall during lunch time. Finally, we had two afterschool trips, firstly Riverside College for an Open Event and secondly to Stockton Apprenticeship Event.
- **"Music Week":** On Monday 13th, Mr Walker (Head of Performing Arts), took a group of pupils to Whitehouse Primary School to lead their 'Music Week' launch assembly! A massive thank you and well done to Eliza, Luke, Zdenek, Evie and Lewis who performed in the band and represented OLSB magnificently. You certainly inspired a lot of younger musicians!

The second day of NEU teaching union strike action will take place on Tuesday 28th February 2023. As reported through the media, the strike is happening because of a national dispute between the unions and the government over teachers' pay, and not because of any issues at our school. To ensure consistency of messaging, we would appreciate your support in explaining this to your child.

A number of our staff at all levels, have voluntarily declared that they will be taking industrial action on that day. Based on that information and given the fluidity of strike action impact, we have taken the difficult decision to direct year 9 and 10 pupils to work from home on that day to ensure we have the necessary ratio of staff in school to ensure the safety of pupils.

As per Covid lockdown protocol, due consideration will be given to vulnerable pupils in the year groups affected (in this instance year 9 and 10). If your child has an Education Health Care Plan, our SENCo will be in touch to discuss provision, and if your child is eligible for free school meals, they can collect a packed lunch from main reception between 9.15AM and 10.30AM on the day of the strike if they wish to do so.

Please note, that strike day in school disruption for year 7, 8 and 11 will be minimised as much as possible, but the very nature of strike action means this is a fluid situation and we ask that you support us with any necessary adaptations that might need to be made at short notice. Year 11's pre-public examinations will go ahead as normal on this day.

We are therefore directing pupils in year 9 and 10 to work from home on Tuesday 28th February and access learning resources either via their Microsoft Teams Year group platform or by clicking on the 'Curriculum' tab on our website and going to the 'Supporting Learning' pages for the relevant year group.

I understand that this situation may be frustrating, but rest assured that Our Lady and St Bede Catholic Academy and Bishop Hogarth Catholic Education Trust remains committed to providing a safe and secure environment for our pupils and delivering high-quality teaching.

I will inform you as soon as possible if arrangements change further between now and the 28th February but I wanted to give our families as much notice as possible to minimise disruption.

Finally, school will reopen as usual on Monday 27th February. We look forward to welcoming our wonderful pupils back to school in full uniform and with the right equipment and we ask and thank parents for your continued support in keeping standards and expectations high for the good of our whole school community.

Yours faithfully,



Mo Wilkinson
Headteacher