



"We are called to be the hands and face of Jesus as we learn, love and grow together"

Headteacher: Mr J White BEd (Hons) NPQH

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Dear parents and carers

Writing to you as we return from a week's half term holiday, I hope that you have all had a chance to spend some quality time together as a family. As we return to school, we have entered the season of Lent and are ready to ensure that our focus shifts to the three pillars of the Lenten season: prayer, fasting and almsgiving.



In assembly this week, we unpacked what these three pillars might look like as we journey together and a number of simple suggestions were made. Maybe you would be able to support these as a family during this half term?

- Find out about the stations of the cross (prayer)
- Set aside time each day to read a short bible passage (prayer)
- Visit St Joseph's to say a prayer before school or spend some time in the school prayer garden before the start of the day (prayer)
- A prayer / reflective walk to school from the Noah's Ark / Valley car park / Maze car park (prayer)
- Give up something e.g. biscuits (fasting) and offer what you save to charity (giving)
- Bring in an item each week for the Stevenage Food Bank – there is a box at the main entrance (giving)
- Seek out someone who needs your friendship at school: for a child this could be a peer, for an adult this might be another parent(giving)
- Cut out a treat on Friday (fasting) and give the money you save to CAFOD (giving)
- Have a clear out at home and donate to a charity shop (giving)
- Support your class fundraising efforts for Fr Kakuba and for CAFOD (giving) ... details to follow (Easter Egg Raffle and Sponsored Walk).



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Lent is a time of preparation and change; a time when we aim to soften our hearts and make Jesus' love even more real to others in our community. To do this, we must focus our time on preparing. I am really keen that as a community, we are able to work together on this. I am happy to coordinate each Thursday morning (starting on Thursday 1st March), before school, a Lenten activity for you to complete with your child in the Junior Hall should you wish to take part. I have asked all children and staff to focus on an act of prayer, almsgiving and fasting each week during Lent. Our combined efforts could be very significant to local community life if we all took part. Please do help if you can.

School Development Priorities: a message from John Sloan (Chair of Governors)

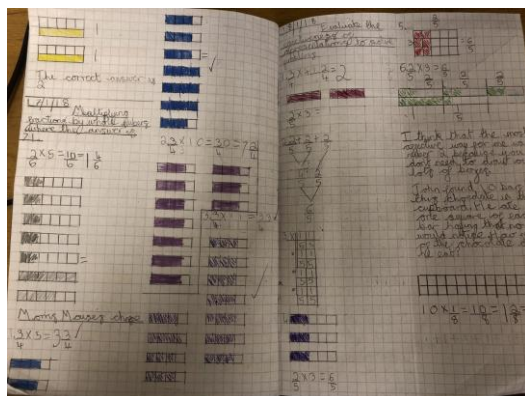
You may remember that we asked you to complete a questionnaire last year on what you liked about the school and what you thought could be improved. Staff were also asked to complete the questionnaire and participate in two workshops. I would like to thank you for the 120 questionnaires received and the staff for their enthusiasm in contributing so many ideas for improving the school.

All of the thoughts and ideas have been carefully considered by Governors along with Mr White following his appointment and mapped into a School development plan which can be viewed on the school website (<http://www.stvincent.herts.sch.uk/keyinformation.html#nil>). Any ideas received that we have not been able to include in this year's plan, will be considered again when it is refreshed for next year. In the meantime, I am always grateful to hear your ideas on how we can continue to develop an outstanding educational experience for your children. Please email any ideas to chair@stvincent.herts.sch.uk.

God bless,
John Sloan

Maths priorities

One of our significant developments this year relates to changes in the way that we teach mathematics throughout the school. You may be aware that mathematics was one of the areas that OFSTED suggested the school pay particular attention to on its last visit. The last term has seen significant changes which are already having a positive impact. Since January, mathematics is now taught in class groups (rather than ability sets as it was in Yrs 4 to 6). This has allowed a greater flexibility in the delivery of the maths curriculum (as it is no longer bound by year group timetabling constraints) and has removed a ceiling on attainment. With colleagues, I have watched maths lessons in each class since the changes have been implemented and have been impressed by the inclusivity of the learning as well as the challenge for all. Many pupils have explained how they feel empowered to achieve by the changes and this has clearly been witnessed in the lessons that I have visited.



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Alongside the removal of setting, teachers have also introduced a new planning scheme, 'Essential Maths' from Yr 1 to Yr 6. This places a model of 'concrete, pictorial and abstract' development of mathematical concepts at the heart of its learning philosophy. As such, there are less drill and practice elements, text book work or practising of skills that pupils are already confident in and much more use of practical mathematical equipment for solving problems in every year group (including Year 6). Pupils are encouraged to develop 'pictorial models' of their mathematical understanding as you will have seen in their books at parent consultations. In just half a term this has transformed mathematical learning and has enabled pupils to reach yet higher standards of attainment.

This is an exciting time for mathematics at St Vincent de Paul School and we have been well supported by advisers from Herts for Learning as well as from expertise within the school. Recently our Hertfordshire Improvement Partner reviewed the maths curriculum with senior leaders and was pleased to recognise significant positive changes in such a short period. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all staff, teachers and teaching assistants, for their positive response to the new maths initiative. As always, we are open to feedback relating to these changes – please email head@stvincent.herts.sch.uk with any comments or pass them on to your child's teacher.

Finances – tightening the belt

You will be aware that all public organisations are looking for ways to 'pull in their belt'. Our schools are also attempting to find ways to make savings at the same time as constantly improving standards for our children. This juggling act is becoming increasingly difficult and, as such, as we prepare for the financial year ahead, cut backs and savings will become more apparent for us. Careful financial planning over the years has enabled us to be sheltered from many of the cuts in previous years but this now may begin to hit home more. I urge you to put pressure on your MP and others who hold office to campaign for fair funding for our schools to enable the excellence in education that each of our children deserve.

In the meantime, we continue to rely on the donations of parents through PSA fundraising for many essential items (e.g. recent practical mathematical equipment) rather than the luxury items that PSA funds used to support. We are incredibly grateful to our PSA for their continued efforts to support our school – without the £12K that they are currently able to raise for us each year, the school would struggle to make continued improvements. As such I would like to thank you for on behalf of students and staff for the support of their events and would ask that you consider giving of your time to help them.



The PSA AGM will take place on **Thursday 22nd February at 7pm** and committee members will be elected for the year ahead. Special thanks should be offered to Theresa Taylor-Brooks who will be standing down from the PSA at this meeting in order to take up her role as a School Governor. Theresa, along with her dedicated team, has given many hours to the school over a number of



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years and we are all very grateful for her efforts as well as the efforts of her committed team. Theresa is keen to continue to support the new committee in all of their plans. Please do come along, show your support and have your say.

Travel Ambassadors

Our pupil Travel Ambassadors have been meeting regularly in school with Mrs Sherry. They have many ideas and are really keen to promote healthy and sustainable school travel options. You may have noticed that Traffic Enforcement Officers were patrolling the area outside of the school recently. Please do make yourself aware of parking restrictions that exist here as exceptions can not be made when parking fines have been issued. Both local schools and Hertfordshire County Council are keen for parking behaviours to improve; school neighbours are equally keen for this to improve! I urge you to be considerate when parking on the school run and to change habits if necessary – this concerns the safety of our children in both schools and we all dread the day when there is a significant accident that will impact on one of our families. I urge you all to prevent this and thank you for the change habits that I have witnessed from many.

Mini Vinnies

Our committee of Mini-Vinnies (from Year 4) are keen to support the Stevenage Food Bank, doing their bit for those most vulnerable in our local community. Please do support them if you can by leaving items regularly in the box outside the main reception to the school. Your support is very much appreciated.



Healthy Lunches

We are keen to encourage healthy eating in school. As such Herts Catering ensure that all meals prepared on site meet strict national nutritional standards and make use of fresh (increasingly local) produce, cooked on site and promoting healthy lifestyles. If you are preparing a packed lunch for your child, please ensure that it also promotes a healthy lifestyle. As such, we do not permit chocolate bars or sweets as part of a packed lunch. This week in school, we are launching the 'Golden Mile' and by the end of this term, all children will have received extra lessons in healthy lifestyles, funded through the government's national Sports Premium.

Pupil Premium

Any pupil who has been registered as being in receipt of 'Free School Meals'(FSM) at any point in the past six years attracts funding to the school to develop their learning provision. Mrs Sherry, as 'Inclusion Lead', is keen to discuss with families how this funding is used and to gain an insight into what else might help. If your child has been in receipt of FSM funding and you have not yet had the opportunity to meet with Mrs Sherry, please do make an appointment to see her. We are



keen to work in collaboration with you to ensure that this funding is best spent to the benefit of your child. A report on our use of Pupil Premium Funding is available on the school website at <http://www.stvincent.herts.sch.uk/keyinformationpu.html>

General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

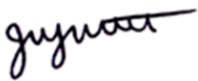
You may have heard about the GDPR from recent media articles. We are currently working through the guidance of The Diocese of Westminster and HertsforLearning to ensure that we are fully compliant with the new data protection regulations which come into play later this year. New arrangements will require us to ask for consent for the use of the data that we hold on those associated with the school and will ensure that all data is rigorously protected and is only held for an intended and communicated purpose. The regulations will also protect our children as they access information through internet services. We will be in regular contact over the rest of this academic year in relation to the requirements of the new legislation and how it will impact on you.

A window on the school - Twitter

Remember to follow **@svdp_school** on Twitter for a window on school life and a taste of what is going on in school. If you do not make use of Twitter, the tweets can be followed on the front page of the school website at www.stvincent.herts.sch.uk. We are currently reviewing the information available to parents and carers on the school website – please do let us know if there is anything else that you would find useful.

Thank you for everything that you do to support your children in their learning and faith development at St Vincent de Paul School – it is very much appreciated.

God bless you and those most dear to you,



Mr Jon White
Headteacher

IMPORTANT FORTHCOMING DATES

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|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 st March | World Book Day (Dressing up optional) |
| 19 th March | Sponsored Lenten Walk |
| 26 th March | The Way of the Cross |
| 29 th March 2pm | Break for Easter |



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