



Mock Exam Diet

As in previous years, January will see S4 – S6 student participating in a programme of exam practice designed to support their preparation for the May SQA examinations.

Staff have been working closely with pupils to support them at this important point in their learning journey and it is essential that all students prepare carefully as the mock exams approach.

The Mock Exam Diet is an intense fortnight beginning 8th January which pupils can find demanding. In line with Scottish Government expectations we do not allow pupils study leave. However, normal S4-S6 classes are suspended and students are given the opportunity to study in class prior to each exam.

It is essential that young people make effective use of this study time – all should come to class well prepared with a variety of learning materials. Class teachers are available throughout this time to offer advice and support in order to ensure the best possible academic outcome.

Pupils have been reminded that Pastoral Support is always available should they require it. We recognise that this is a challenging time for students and we wish to ease as much anxiety as possible.

Pupils should see these Mock Exams as part of the learning process and while we wish them to achieve their potential it is important that they understand that the outcomes of these mock exams are merely a guide to the next stage in their studies.

The first day of Mock Exams will involve Geography, Modern Studies, Music and Art. Good luck to all students.



Message from the Head Teacher

Dear Parent/Guardian

As we approach the end of another year it is appropriate that we take some time to reflect upon what has been achieved over the past 12 months. As a Community of Faith we can feel very positive and confident regarding, not only the learning which has been achieved but also, the wider contribution our young people have made. As a Catholic School it is vital that through our academic results, our charitable giving and our day to day interactions we show ourselves to be a community which places our values at the centre of all we do. This year has been particularly notable in all areas given the very good inspection report we received, the record breaking exam results obtained by our young people and the outstanding contribution to charity and good causes which continue to be a feature of our school.

The key to our ongoing success is the strong partnerships we forge with all members of our school community. We continue to work hard to build links with industry, voluntary groups, external support agencies and our local Parishes. However the most important partnership is, of course, that between the school and the home. Parents are the primary educators of our young people. As such it is vital that we continue to work together to ensure our young people are supported and encouraged through the various challenges they will face in school and beyond.

Regular contact with home ensures pupils are fully supported in their learning and events such as our Parent Information Evenings provide an ideal opportunity to build strong links.

Newsletters are issued throughout the session and regular updates regarding school activities can be found on our Twitter feed (@stmatthewsac).

We regularly update our followers on the events and activities taking place in the school. Parents have commented very positively on the insight this allows into the day to day events in Saint Matthew's Academy. We also continue to make full use of the local press to ensure the wider community are aware of the positive work our young people are engaged in.

Throughout this time of Advent we are taking the opportunity as a School to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas. Our pupils and students are preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ through our charitable acts and personal sacrifice. All of which will lead to a celebration of joy and hope. This is a time for renewal and during Advent we are taking the opportunity as a Catholic Community to show our commitment to our Faith.

On behalf of all staff in the School can I take this opportunity to wish all parents, pupils and students a Happy and Holy Christmas with the very best wishes for a prosperous and successful 2020.

Finally can I remind all members of our School Community that we will return on Monday 6th January 2020.

Yours sincerely

S Colligan

Head Teacher



Pupil Information

To ensure the school continues to meet the needs of all our young people it is important that up to date information on all our pupils and students is maintained. Consequently I would ask all parents to ensure the school office is informed of any changes to personal details. Particular attention should be paid to any changes in the following areas:

- Home address and/or telephone number
- Emergency contact telephone numbers
- Information relating to health issues, including any regular medication
- Changes in domestic circumstances which may impact upon learning.

Information can be passed to our school office staff or to the relevant Guidance Teacher.

Valuables

I feel it is important that we once again remind all parents that North Ayrshire Council generally cannot be held responsible for the loss of valuables in schools. A number of pupils have informed me of the wide variety of gifts they hope to receive this Christmas and while I am sure they will be keen to show these gifts to friends I would ask that they are not brought into school in the new term.

All expensive items of jewellery, head phones, phones, tablet computers etc should be left at home for use at more appropriate times.

Every effort is made in school to safeguard personal belongings but it is important that parents and pupils alike are aware that this cannot be guaranteed.

Pupils and students are also encouraged not to leave bags unattended in and around the school. Valuables should not be taken in the PE changing rooms. Lockers are available and should be used.



A Commitment to the Integrated Education and Formation of the Whole Person

Parents will know from previous newsletters that academic attainment continues to improve year on year in Saint Matthew's Academy. In 2014 approximately 10% of S5 pupils achieved 5 Highers/ Level 6 qualifications whereas in 2019 the equivalent figure is 20%. This reinforces the "Very Good" rating we received for Improvements in Attainment and Achievement in Education Scotland's report.

However, while attainment continues to be a priority, it is equally important that we do not lose sight of the core mission of our Catholic School – the formation of the whole person in partnership with parishes and parents who are the first, and most important, educators of the child. This formation cannot focus purely on academic success but rather must be concerned with developing skills for life and work alongside skills for learning. And, while the school will always be committed to encouraging all our young people to achieve the highest levels possible in attainment, we are equally committed to providing as many opportunities as possible to be involved in activities beyond the classroom. The pictures above are designed to highlight just some of these additional activities which do much to provide our pupils/students with opportunities to utilise their talents to the full, achieve to the highest levels possible and experience a range of out of classroom experiences. These include acts of charity, partnership working with local businesses and show performances.

None of these activities (and many more which could have been shown) nor the ordered learning environment in classes, would be possible without the enthusiasm and participation of our pupils/students and the wholehearted commitment of the staff in Saint Matthew's Academy. This reflects the Catholic Ethos of the school which is often commented on by visitors and for which we have been commended on many occasions.

Well done everyone.

Travel and Safe Parking

A significant number of young people travel to and from school by bus each day. In order to ensure all insurance and Health & Safety requirements are met it is essential that all relevant information regarding any change in address is shared with the school. Please speak with Mr McGuigan if your child is entitled to a school bus pass and has moved house. Privilege passes are only valid for the current year and a new pass must be sought every academic year. There are unfortunately no guarantees that a privilege pass will be issued.

It is also important that those pupils who travel to and from school by car make use of the appropriate parent-drop off point. This can be found beyond the staff car park. We continue to have concerns with some parents dropping and collecting their child in the staff car park. We would ask that parents do not use the staff car park in this fashion due to the large number of vehicles either arriving or departing. This is in the interests of the safety of all pupils and is why our young people are asked not to leave by the staff entrance to the school. Those pupils and parents who need access to the disabled parking bays should, of course, continue to make use of them.



Catholic Education Week – Promoting Gospel Values

Catholic Education Week takes place every year and is our opportunity to reflect on the work of our Catholic Schools. 2019 saw the week move to its new home of November and representatives from Senior Management attended mass across our catchment. This was an opportunity to speak with parishioners regarding the work of our school and our commitment to the Gospel Values which drives all that we seek to achieve.

As you can see from the school values to the right of this page, Saint Matthew's Academy places the teachings of Christ at the heart of our school. Everything we try to achieve as a community is built on the Gospel: our desire to achieve academically; our commitment to service and care for others; our need to communicate Catholic social teaching and the promotion of social justice; and the promotion of respect for different beliefs and cultures. All are welcome to become part of our Catholic community. It is important that all know that we are a Catholic School which is inclusive and welcoming. Pupils do not need to be Catholic to attend but it is important that they have a strong understanding of the community they are joining and know that they are called to support and strengthen that same community.

This is why Catholic Education Week is so important – it provides us with an opportunity to share the good work of our school. We benefit from a community which is committed to the welfare of others. Our acts of charity are too numerous to mention them all but particular mention should go to the Caritas students who are helping in parishes across North Ayrshire. Our S6 leaders are currently organising charitable events across the school year with our most recent event, the Cabaret night, raising over £1400 for MacMillan Cancer Charity. Donations have been made to the John O'Byrne Foundation which supplies Christmas gifts to children in local hospitals. Our ongoing support for our partners in Malawi recently saw over a dozen boxes of Christmas presents make their way to orphans in Mzuzu. Our ongoing support of North Ayrshire Foodbank is a great help to those in our local community. This is Gospel Values in action and as a community we can be proud of the difference our young people make to the lives of those in most need.

Better Attendance Leads to Better Learning

Considerable effort is put in to ensure as high a level of attendance as possible is achieved by all pupils in the school so as to establish good habits for future years. While there are always individual incidents of absence which cannot be avoided it is important that all pupils have the best attendance possible. For example, parents are discouraged from taking term time holidays as this can have a hugely detrimental impact upon attainment.

Our target level for attendance is 91%. The table below highlights the current pattern of attendance (as of December 16th 2019):-

Attendance level (%)	Number	% of Roll
100	149	13%
96 or better	500	43%
91 or better	770	66%
80-90	265	23%
Less than 80	125	11%

I would like to congratulate the majority of our pupils who are working hard and attending at and beyond expected levels.

However, with over one third of pupils below the attendance target it is clear that this will have serious implications for learning and teaching and eventual levels of achievement. An attendance of below 90% is the equivalent of at least one day of absence a fortnight. It is impossible for a child to reach their full potential with such a pattern of attendance. Teachers can only support pupils who attend school. Non attendance is the biggest single factor in pupil underachievement. I must ask parents of those whose attendance has to be improved now to make every effort to support the school in encouraging and maintaining high levels of attendance throughout the session and particularly when we return for the new term on the 6th of January.

Our values underpin our ethos within Saint Matthew's Academy. They are CLEAR and we strive to ensure they are visible throughout our school.

Community - we

understand that each of us - pupils, parents, staff, parishes and partners - are called to engage as full members of our Community of Faith and Learning. We must use our gifts and abilities to help and support those around us while at the same time allowing ourselves to be supported.

Love - Jesus teaches us that

the greatest commandment is to love God with all our heart. The second is that we must love our neighbour as ourselves. We show love in our charity, in our service, in our forgiveness, in our compassion and in our patience. Love is the foundation of all our actions.

Equality - we believe that

all people are created in the image and likeness of God. By recognising the equal dignity of all, we celebrate difference and strive to create an inclusive, tolerant and welcoming ethos where each individual has the opportunity and support to participate fully in our community.

Achievement - our

Catholic school is one in which everyone has the opportunity to reach their potential. By providing high quality learning experiences we encourage all to achieve. We pursue excellence in all that we undertake to ensure each member of our community has opportunities to develop and grow their talents and skills in order to fulfil their potential in every area of their lives.

Respect - Gospel Values

only truly exist in our interaction with each other and with the world around us. By ensuring that all relationships are built on a mutual and genuine respect we create a Community of Faith and Learning where all can attain their full potential. We have respect for others and for ourselves as we understand and greatly value the gift of life we have been given.

Our Gospel values are at the heart of the Curriculum for Excellence which Saint Matthew's Academy provides.

A vital element of the success of our Catholic Community is the work of our Parent Body.

The Parent Council plays a key role in the ongoing improvement agenda of our school. Through participation in our Quality Assurance programme the Parent Council helps identify our school priorities,

In the past year the Parent Council participated in our School Inspection and our ongoing Quality Assurance programme through their engagement in Reflective Questions. Their responses are used by our Improvement Planning and Quality Assurance committee to inform school priorities for the following session. Our 19/20 priorities can be found in the documents section of our school website.

The next meeting will take place here at the school at 7pm on 21st January. All parents are invited to attend as part of the Parent Forum.

Emotional Wellbeing – Support Agencies

We have delivered a variety of supports to our young people, parents and staff over the past session. All events are designed to support good mental health. We are aware that for many this can be a challenging time of year. It is important that everyone in our school community knows that support for emotional wellbeing is available and can be accessed when required. However, some may prefer to talk with external agencies and a list of recommended groups is published below.

For Information and Support

The 'see me' website www.seemescotland.org.uk has information as well as fact sheets.

Also www.youngminds.org.uk has information and advice about young people and emotional wellbeing-for parents and for young people themselves. www.samh.org.uk provides a range of information on mental health issues

- ChildLine - 0800 11 11
www.childline.org.uk provides confidential advice and support to children and young people using their free telephone service. The organisation also publishes factsheets online through their comprehensive website.
- Breathing Space -0800 83 85 87
www.breathingspacescotland.org provides a free confidential listening service, offering advice, guidance and support. Advisors can also provide a signposting service to other agencies. Available Mon-Thurs 6pm to 2am and Fri-Mon 6pm to 6am.
- Samaritans - 116 123
www.samaritans.org.uk provides a 24 hour listening service to people in crisis or despair. You can also contact them anonymously by email: jo@samaritans.org
- Parentline - 0808 028 22 33
www.children1st.org.uk/services/46/parentline-scotland provides a confidential helpline to give parents an opportunity to 'offload' and be pointed in the right direction for information and support.
- Papyrus Hopeline - 08000 68 41 41
www.papyrus-uk.org provides information and support about prevention of young suicide.

Saint Matthew's Academy – Your Catholic Secondary School

End of Term Activities

1. Our Christmas Panto visit will take place on the 16 December. This is one of a number of events which take place in the final week of term. We will also have groups of students visiting the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Warner Brothers Studios and Kelvingrove Museum. Visitors from local care homes will also join us for a Christmas Dinner and some carol singing.
2. Our Talent Show will take place on 18 December during the school day. The last few weeks have seen rehearsals and auditions from which a number of acts have been selected to perform for what is always an enthusiastic and positive audience. Our S6 students have been central to this event and deserve not only to be congratulated for all their efforts but also supported by pupils at the event on the 18th. All proceeds will go to our Charities Campaign. Well done to all involved in organising, performing and supporting this superb community event.
3. The End of Term will be Friday 20 December at 2:30pm. On this day we will enjoy our Christmas Service, led by S5 RE classes which affords us the opportunity to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas. Later we will host our very popular Christmas Singalong which will see staff and pupils join together in some truly outstanding performances of classic Christmas songs. We will finish the day with our traditional Christmas Ceilidh before wishing all students a Happy and a Holy Christmas.
4. Pupils will return on Monday 6 January and our Exam Practice will begin two days later.

