



## Mock Exam Diet

As in previous years, January will see S4 – S6 students 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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.

Results from these practice exams can help inform Estimates which are submitted to the SQA prior to the May exams. As such pupils are encouraged to do their very best in the month ahead.



## Message from the Head Teacher

Dear Parent/Guardian

With Christmas fast approaching it is an appropriate time to pause and reflect upon the previous six months here at Saint Matthew's Academy. Our young people have shown themselves to be, in the main, highly committed to our Community of Faith and Learning and we can feel very positive and confident regarding the wider contribution our young people have made to the life of the school. Through our academic results, our day to day interactions and our acts of charity we show ourselves to be a community which places Gospel Values at the heart of all we hope to achieve.

Our ongoing success is built upon the strong relationships we forge with all members of our school community. Work continues every day to build effective 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. We understand that you, our parent body, are the key educators of our young people. 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.

Contact with home takes many forms. Our quarterly newsletters provide a snapshot of where we are as a school. We send regular text messages regarding key information and I would encourage you to follow our Twitter feed (@stmatthewsac) for weekly updates on the achievements of all our young people. Many departments also communicate in this fashion and it has proved to be very popular.

Staff regularly update 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.

The school website is utilised to ensure the wider community are aware of the positive work which takes place within your school. You can be assured that there are many outstanding young people here in Saint Matthew's Academy and we take great pride in celebrating their achievements

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 2024.

Finally can I remind all members of our School Community that we will return on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

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
- Email addresses
- 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

As always, 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. Pupils often inform me of the wide variety of gifts many of them 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. Incidents of theft are rare but sadly they do occur.

Pupils and students are also encouraged not to leave bags unattended in and around the school. Valuables should not be taken into 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 2023 the equivalent figure is 33%. This reflects the huge amount of work carried out in classrooms across the school by highly committed pupils and staff.

However, while parents should be under no doubt that attainment continues to be a priority, it is equally important that we remember the core mission of our Catholic School – formation of the whole person in partnership with parishes and parents who are the first, and most important, educators of the child. This means that we do not, and cannot focus purely on academic success but rather must seek to develop skills for life and work alongside skills for learning. Those skills include the capacity to develop as productive members of society who can contribute to the common good.

This means that our standards must remain high if we are to prepare young people for their life beyond school. We cannot compromise of our expectations of all who make up the Saint Matthew's Academy community. This is, first and foremost, about how we treat each other in our day to day interactions. Our school values of Love and Respect should underpin all relationships within the school. This ensures young people feel safe and cared for. It also ensures staff are trusted and their motivations to do their best for the children in their care are clear.

From this starting point we are able to reinforce our other expectations and standards. The Saint Matthew's Academy community expects high standards of behaviour from all and we support young people to achieve these standards through our Promoting Positive Relationships policy. Strong relationships are the key to successful learning and we are fortunate to be a school where this is the default. Visitors often comment on the warm and caring ethos which permeates the school. The young people and the adults build this ethos together and the school's success is dependent upon it. We do not seek to be a school where punishment is the default but we recognise that young people achieve more in a balanced environment of warm but strict care rather than one where either of those two aspects of teaching dominate to the detriment of the other. If young people struggle to match these standards we seek to support them with the resources we have available to us but we are also aware that it is important that children are aware that their actions can have consequences.

We believe in a clear approach to dress code and we are grateful to the overwhelming majority of families who support this. Our dress code unifies our community and reduces the risks of bullying behaviours. Families are reminded that the school is keen to support all with regard to uniform and can do this in a discreet fashion if required. Please contact your child's Pastoral Teacher if you wish further information.

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. Extra curricular activities and events are invaluable in our mission to develop the whole person. They are vital in helping children develop their interests and passions. They expand the social circle of all who participate. They help build skills which will be invaluable in future careers such as leadership, teamwork and communication.

In Saint Matthew's Academy we believe events beyond the classroom help develop the culture which has led to the improvements in attainment described above. To this end we prioritise addressing not just the "attainment gap" but also the "activities gap" and seek to provide all young people with the chance to participate in a wide range of experiences as we believe this to be at the heart of our work as a Catholic school.

The pictures contained in this newsletter 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.

Well done everyone.

## Our School Chaplain, Father Willie Boyd, reflects on his role.

When pupils from primary seven are about to leave for the "big school" they are overcome with a mixture of expectation and trepidation. When they finally arrive at St Matthew's, they are delighted to see a familiar face and become the most friendly members of the school community when they meet someone from their "old school". That, for me, is one of the many pleasures in being School Chaplain at St Matthew's Academy. Indeed, it is only augmented by similar experiences of meeting former pupils from St Mark's and St John Ogilvie's from further up the school, and on top of that, by the opportunity to make new connections with other students. The highlight is definitely the celebration of Mass in the school. The weekly Mass, on a Thursday at 1:15pm in the Oratory, is particularly enjoyable, but the Feast Day Masses are also extremely up-lifting, not just for me, but for the other priests from across the deanery who lend their support to ensure that as many people as possible get the chance to celebrate Eucharist. Last Easter, one of St Matthew's pupils became a full member of the Church through the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Communion), thanks to the support of a team of catechists from within the school and from two of our parishes. This year, three more pupils have expressed a similar interest, and with the support of the same team, are looking forward to the journey that lies ahead of them.

There are many encouraging signs surrounding the faith life of St Matthew's. I look forward to participating in the further development of the school and to seeing the hope that developing a personal relationship with God can bring to its members.



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.

## Catholic Education Week – Pilgrims of Faith

Catholic Education Week (CEW) takes place every year and is our opportunity to reflect on the work of our Catholic Schools. 2023 once again saw representatives from Senior Management attend 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 newly launched Advent Basketball Tournament, raising over £200 for Malawi. Donations have been made to the Small Changes charity through participation in November. Our ongoing support for our partners in Malawi recently saw the Saint Matthew's Academy fund a Christmas Party for the Lukalazi orphanage in Mzuzu. Our ongoing support of North Ayrshire Foodbank is a great help to those in our local community. This is the school putting our Gospel Values into action and as a community we can be proud of the difference our young people make to the lives of those in most need.

### Mr Harrison, our Faculty Head of RE, reflects on the theme for this year's CEW – Pilgrims of Faith

When I was younger, I had an opportunity to go on a journey. We would travel from Glasgow to London, then London to eventually reach Rome. World Youth Day was taking place, and we had travelled as pilgrims to be part of it. While the events of World Youth Day were fantastic, as Pope John Paul II spoke and celebrated mass, looking back it is the travelling together that is truly memorable. As we traversed each leg of our trip, and overcame difficulties such as cancelled trains and sweltering heat, the togetherness with a common goal became a source of joy. Together we were pilgrims, sharing the road, heading towards a moment when we could approach God in a new way. The memories of each struggle and triumph, and the closeness formed showed that the journey itself had been as rich as the goal we worked towards.

And that's what pilgrimage is all about...partially the destination, but much more about the struggle and endeavour to reach it. A religious journey towards a place of significance. For many, that's what education is about, journeying towards an end goal – qualifications, a job, a future. But each year, during Catholic Education Week, we are invited to consider whether education can offer more, if maybe the journey is just as important as the destination, and if maybe the time spent on the way can be as transformative as that moment of reaching the end. This year's theme is "Pilgrims of Faith", chosen to allow people to ruminate on the beauty of belief that changes lives, as well as recognising that that belief can be hard. Sometimes, trust in God can be difficult – the world seems so troubled, and maybe it all seems unbelievable.

But each of our young people (and the not-so-young people) in our schools are on a personal journey, one that will last a lifetime. Journeying through decisions and worries, thoughts and reflections, encounters and experiences. All the time, trying to work out what they believe, why they believe it and what impact it will have in their life. But hopefully Catholic Education Week helps us to remember that although this journey is personal, it is rarely done alone. In St Matthew's, we believe so strongly in community that it is placed first in our CLEAR values. A community of different ages, cultures, and beliefs. But a community that travels together on this journey, as pilgrims of faith. And while the destination for us may turn out to be different – different jobs, different experiences and different world views - the journey we share will shape the people we become and our impact on the world. The journey may be hard, but what memories we can make on the way.

All in Saint Matthew's Academy are aware that this time of year can be particularly challenging for families. Financial pressures are significant all year round but particularly at Christmas.

If you or someone you know is experiencing challenges of this nature please be aware that Saint Matthew's Academy has Audrey Ritchie, our designated Welfare Support Officer, who can help parents and families to help gain access to benefits or other entitlements.

Audrey is available via the following:  
Landline 01294 310498; Mobile 07799 075426;  
Email [moneymatters@north-ayrshire.gov.uk](mailto:moneymatters@north-ayrshire.gov.uk)

Further to this many of our local parishes run successful SSVP groups which can help those in need. Saint Mary's Parish in Saltcoats have asked that we make you aware that they can be contacted on 07379400568.

Please also be aware that the school has a wardrobe of free uniform and free breakfast club runs each day.

## Admin

Parents and carers are asked to be aware of the following information items:

Mr Coyle, Pastoral Principal Teacher for Blessed Pier Frassati House, will be moving to Notre Dame High School in Greenock at the start of next term. Mr Coyle has been a valued member of staff for over ten years and he will be greatly missed. All at Saint Matthew's Academy wish him every success in his new post. Mr Pless will serve as Acting Pastoral Principal Teacher from the start of term.

Miss Heather McFadyen has been appointed as Faculty Head of Social Subjects and will join us in the new term.

Parents of all P7 pupils who wish to send their child to Saint Matthew's Academy are invited to an information evening on 9<sup>th</sup> January here at the school. P7 pupils will take part in teambuilding events and parents will be provided with information regarding the operation of the school. Please see twitter for details.

An online information evening for S2 parents regarding our Option process will take place on 16<sup>th</sup> January. Invites will be sent in the new term.

February Holiday will take place from 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> February inclusive. 13<sup>th</sup> February is an Inservice Day.

# 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 to establish good habits for future years. While there are always individual incidents of absence that 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 18<sup>th</sup> 2023):-

Attendance level (%)	Number	% of Roll
100	128	10%
96 or better	414	31%
91 or better	783	59%
80-90	322	23%
Less than 80	218	16%

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

However, with almost two fifths 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. Saint Matthew's Academy has been on a journey of improvement over the past decade, which has led to excellent outcomes for young people. If these outcomes are to be maintained and improved upon we must have pupils in the building. Teachers cannot be expected to improve attainment outcomes if 40% of pupils are absent a day a fortnight or more. I must ask parents of those whose attendance has to be improved 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 8<sup>th</sup> of January. Please speak with your child's Pastoral Teacher if you need support in this area.

## Saint Matthew's Academy – Your Catholic Secondary School

### End of Term Activities

The last day of term will be Friday 22 December. Our final day of term has long been recognised as one of the best days in our school calendar. The day will begin with Christmas Service, led by Father Willie Boyd, our School Chaplain. During our service we will take time to share the true message of Christmas in our Catholic School: a message of peace, joy and God's overwhelming love for us all. The service allows us to consider what truly matters to us all – friends, family and God's love.

Following this, we will celebrate as the strong school community we are with our Christmas singalong before enjoying traditional Christmas Ceilidh in the afternoon. Former pupils consistently point to the last day of term before Christmas as one that provides many memories.

All our events are designed to ensure pupils can enjoy this special time of year in an environment where they know they are supported and loved. These events are opportunities for pupils and staff to come together and celebrate all that is good about our school. We are aware that not all of our young people will experience a Christmas that we would hope for and, as such, we try to provide a day that reminds them just how highly we value them all.

We would ask that all young people attend our final day of term in full uniform – tinsel and santa hats are an acceptable part of uniform on this final day.

Pupils are reminded that period equity products and toiletries are available from the stock in the Pastoral corridor. There is no need to ask permission to take items, pupils can avail themselves of any items they may need over the Christmas break. We are grateful to our partners in local supermarkets and SSVP groups for their support in providing these items for our young people.

Our day will end at 2:30pm and the Christmas holiday will then begin.

