



Summer 2022

Alumni Newsletter

A message from the Headteacher, Anthony Pontifex:

No matter where life takes you after you leave St James', the St James' family remains together. We value all our alumni and believe that staying connected benefits the whole St James' community. Our newly launched Alumni Network has already had a variety of ex St James' students sign-up with some of the earliest being from the class of 1985! I want to thank each and every one of you for volunteering your capacity in some way, be that your offer to come and speak to children, support with mentoring or your capacity to support pupil wellbeing.



In 2019 our school values were reworked; teaching staff, support staff, canteen staff, cleaners, children, parents and Governors were all involved in determining our collective values, mission and philosophy. The three values are simple but powerful; Family, Faith and Excellence. These values embody everything we do at St James'.

Had you visited our school in 2019 you would have seen a tired and dreary building, the school has been completely refreshed and rebranded. This creates an environment in which children want to learn and which models excellence. But St James' goes beyond this, it is not about what we see on the walls, it is about the people in the building, the school family and the most important part of this, the children. This is felt through the Catholic ethos that permeates our school and our school mission 'to educate and develop global Catholic citizens' and we truly believe in this. This is why we have looked at a strategic direction in which our students don't just leave with strong academic qualifications but also with a better understanding of themselves and the world around them.

From being a school where technology did not play a huge part in our day to day teaching, the year of 2020-21 forced us to rapidly move to online learning, providing all staff with iPads, training, guidance, weekly updates and facilitating the ability to teach online lessons. The clear and decisive direction then enabled us to move very rapidly to hybrid learning once we were back in school to allow any isolating students to have continuity of learning. This meant our full curriculum was delivered to students with no dilution and this included Form time sessions allowing staff to keep the students' wellbeing at the forefront. One Form time a week focuses on mental health and wellbeing, we have trained mental health first aiders and regularly provide information to children and parents about the various avenues of support available to them. We take our value of Family seriously.

We recognise that the children in our care benefit most from when we look after the wellbeing of staff, to this end we have set up a staff led wellbeing committee providing them with the opportunity to discuss any issues that are reported directly back to us and we can act on ideas. We have provided



staff breakfasts, considered the calendar to reduce trapped time, facilitated free days during drop down week and led a wellbeing twilight where staff could opt for a session ranging from cycling to cooking and from rounders to open water swimming. Looking after the St James' family matters to us.

All of this is delivered by a wonderful group of committed staff who are led by a Senior Leadership Team that is focused on our school mission and which strives to promote our school values through everything we do.

I hope this first newsletter will provide you with updates about the school and once again thank you for being a St James' alumnus and remaining part of the St James' family.

Thank you so much for joining St James' Alumni Network. You may not have been sure what to expect when you signed up. Some of you may just want to be kept up-to-date with a termly newsletter, while others have volunteered to help come into school and talk to pupils, or offer work experience, mentoring and wellbeing support. Many of the additional opportunities will be coming in the new academic year but we wanted to get you started with our first alumni newsletter to bring some of the school updates to you and share a vision for the network.

Share the network

Getting sign-ups to networks like these is done through our personal connections and word of mouth. If you are still in touch with any other former St James' pupils then please share [this link](#) with them and encourage them to sign up.

Let us know what you've been up to

We are really keen to hear stories and testimonials from former students which can help contribute towards our school careers programme. Being able to hear from relatable alumni who also went to St James' about what they've been up to since they left can help to inspire and motivate students. If you are able to do a short write-up (150-200 words) about yourself and your career that we can share in our school careers newsletter then please email it to g.ashworth@stjamescheadle.co.uk.

A message from Paul Kirrane

Paul has been a teacher at St James' since the very beginning, many of you might remember him from your time at school. Paul is going to be retiring this year and has written a summary below of his time as a St James' member of staff.

I qualified as a teacher in June 1980, joining the new St James' school on 5th January 1981 as a Craft Design specialist, teaching Woodwork, Metalwork and Technical Drawing. As the years progressed so did the curriculum and different titles for the subject, during the following years I taught my main disciplines (a wood, metal and plastics combination – Resistant Materials) but also Graphics, Art, History and Religious studies. I also acted as Head of Art for a 3 month period and Head of Design and Technology on two occasions, eventually, subject wise, becoming Second in the Creative technology department by 2001. In 1991 I was promoted to the position of Head of Year a very diverse job description then, ranging from being responsible for each pupils academic learning to pastoral care,



behaviour, their spiritual life and development, attendance and punctuality to mention a few obligations, plus providing leadership for a Year team of five staff. In 2008 after 17 very rewarding years of being a HoY, I made a sideways career move doing a more administrative role and was given the grand title of Teacher responsible for the school's Learning Environment – Becoming the link between teaching staff, site staff and external agencies. Being responsible for overseeing and implementation of work schedules, building and maintaining work. Linked to this position was being the School's EVC person (Educational Visits Coordinator) - Responsible for overseeing the implementation and guidelines for Educational visits and journeys, for the Governing body, Headteacher, advising and training staff on authority procedures as appropriate when running trips and visits.

On a voluntary bases I coached, refereed and ran several year 7 -11 football teams, achieving great success over two years in 1986 by becoming Stockport League champions, Stockport Cup champions, Greater Manchester Cup Semi-finalist – 1987 and Flood Cup (FA National cup) Quarter finalist -1987. As a great believer in a holistic, Montessori approach to education and non-academic development, I have always been involved in extracurricular activities, becoming involved very early in my career in PGL activity trips and outdoor activities in Derbyshire/peak District. Between 1991 and 2017 I was the Party leader of the school's annual school French Activity residential, each year taking well over 100 children to France. Over 26 years over 2500 children have experienced so many different academic, cultural and social circumstances, leading to life -long memories. Amazingly over that time I had only one major accident, a broken arm. In 2017 I decided that it was time to retire from teaching after 36 years, this did not last long. I was back working at St James' as a Technology Technician and occasional supply teacher by 2019.

On September the 16th when I walk out of a classroom I have known for 41 years I will be thinking of the fantastic staff I worked with, so many brilliant teachers and characters, most now retired and many sadly no longer with us; but I will also remember and be very grateful to the staff who were not teachers, the Teaching assistants, cleaners, kitchen and office staff who make every teacher's day to day life so much easier. And of course, the pupils who arrive every September eager and enthusiastic to start a new chapter in their lives, many now parents (some grandparents), supporting their grandchildren to have the 'St James experience', as my own children did.

Teaching is still a vocation and teachers do and very much influence and change lives and I have been lucky and very privileged to have had such a long and fulfilling happy career. On a personal level I will now be able to get on with my many continual DIY projects, watercolour painting classes, visiting my first grandchild and watching my beloved Manchester United. On whether I was a good and caring teacher and HoY I will leave others to judge but since arriving in 1981, I have always believed that no matter what lesson, task or role I have undertaken I should do it to the best of my ability and use the talents I have been given. So no matter what I do next, I will always live by the belief 'What I am is God's gift, What I become is my gift to God'.

Alumni events

While we are not in a position to organise any alumni events or reunions, we would be happy to facilitate this if there was an interest in organising one from some alumni. If this is something you are interested in organising or hearing more about then please email d.rarity@stjamescheadle.co.uk or g.ashworth@stjamescheadle.co.uk



ST JAMES'
CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Thank you once again for signing up to the St James' Alumni Network. If you have any further questions or want to know how you can get more involved in the network in the future please get in touch - g.ashworth@stjameschadle.co.uk.

Yours faithfully,

G Ashworth

Miss G Ashworth

Careers Advisor