

## **Newsletter January 2017**

Welcome to our second newsletter, where we celebrate the successes and achievements of our students and inform you of some exciting things to come.

After a really busy term we can honestly say that we've never had so many successes from our students. They continue to amaze us with the good work that they do both inside and out of school. As I have said before, it is an honour to be the head teacher at St Thomas's Centre where great things really do happen. This is down to our wonderful pupils, students, supportive parents and our dedicated staff.

Many students this year have opted to take the challenge of Sports Leader Award. Aply facilitated by our staff member Dan, the cohort spend lessons playing sport, leading others and planning and teaching lessons to younger students from our KS3 provision. A variety of sports are undertaken and the students have flourished in this engaging environment. Lessons have taken place indoors and outdoors. Many have found that they have true leadership skills and this will be beneficial in not only this award but in their future lives. One student said;

"The whole thing has been a great experience for me."

This is testament indeed that the course has been a success so far.

Our careers education system goes from strength to strength in helping the young people in our care. The school have recently had the benefit of Michelle Hurst's expertise as she has been a careers advisor for many years. Michelle works individually with the students and offers a bespoke service to help them achieve their aims. Whether this is in the form of apprenticeships, college or

training. Michelle interviews all students from year eleven and helps them by offering any guidance, going through application forms and organising college open evenings where further support is given. Some of the college trips have taken place already with many students now being motivated to apply for the next stage in their education or training. In addition to all this, Michelle organised a visit from an Army Careers Officer recently and this was successful for both boys and girls who wish to investigate or follow this career. Our students will be invited to an event called 'New Year New Direction' where over twenty providers from 16+ education will be on hand to offer expert advice about future pathways and choices.

In October we had a very special event which focussed on our children's literacy skills. We entered the national 'Busta Rhyme' competition and our students studied popular song lyrics as a stimulus for writing their own poem or rap. We had some excellent results and several were entered to the competition. We also had our own internal rewards for the best student responses and displayed their super work. Because of the popularity of this, it has led the way to regular in – house writing competitions.

Our annual Children in Need event was successful as staff and students excelled themselves in preparations for the day. The theme was Spots and it was embraced with vigour. Several prizes were awarded for 'The person with the most spots'. Other activities that day were organised by our AQA business group which included guessing the amount of sweets in a jar and naming a teddy bear. It was a lovely day which showed the generosity of our students who raised over two hundred pounds.

As usual at St Thomas's we commemorated Remembrance Day with activities showing respect for service members in the past and

present day. Several students studied war poetry and made displays reflecting this whilst others made poppies and hair decorations out of salt dough. A school trip was organised to the Preston war memorial and students compared modern and historical warfare. This was invaluable as one of our SMSC days.

It's not every day that a school can converse with a speaker from the House of Commons but that's exactly what our students did recently. We 'skyped' John Bercow in his London office in order to ask him some very challenging questions. Topics included: his role in the House of Commons, some political issues and one or two personal questions. The children found this experience thoroughly engaging and rose to the challenge of this live 'Skype' conversation. One of the students commented on the success of the session.

"He was a very enthusiastic and honest man who gave his opinions freely. It was an enjoyable, unique and different."

We are grateful for the input of the students as Mr Bercow commented: "These are some of the best questions I've been asked". Needless to say, the experience was a huge success.

After introducing Arts and crafts at St Thomas's last term many students have benefitted from exploring their creative sides by producing glass painting, card making and a variety of other items. Most popular events have been enjoying Decollage card making and creating chocolate churches for the festive season. Some of these products have been exemplary and were on sale at our Academic Review Day. In addition to all of these activities our Crafts teacher Nat and her able students managed to make enough Christmas decorations to decorate five trees at the local St Peter's church in Darwen. Their skills were celebrated in the church's first Christmas tree festival and the local community enjoyed the sheer delight of

over fifty fully decorated trees altogether. We are very proud of our students' efforts, especially those students who gave up their own time to help this cause.

As you can see we have had an extremely busy and productive year so far. We thank you and our students most sincerely for all of your support and look forward to our continued success.