



De La Salle School

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Dear Parent/Carer,

Recent Press Coverage

I would like to thank the several parents who have been in touch with the school following the recent release of the exam league tables. Though I have responded to individuals, I think it might also be useful to send a brief response to all parents. The purpose of this letter is to provide an open and honest response to the main concerns that have, understandably, been raised by parents.

What about last year's results?

In my first letter of this school year, back in September, I directly addressed the school's poor exam results (extract below):

There were many success stories in our results over the summer including 34 grade 9s and 115 grade 8s, as well as the gap between boys and girls and the gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students reducing. I would like to congratulate all of our students and wish them well as they move on to college.

However, I am a firm believer in openness and honesty so I will not pretend that our summer exam results were brilliant. Trying to rectify the issues and disruption of previous years was always going to be a challenge within a year but the results fell well below what we want for our students and what our community expects and deserves. I can assure you that the work we have done over the past year, and are continuing to do, will lead to a rapid rise in GCSE results as we move forward.

As you can see neither I, nor the school, are hiding away from the fact that those results were not acceptable.

Why did they happen?

It is important that, as parents, you understand that the results last year were 5 years in the making. Many of the in-school factors that affected these results were the consequences of curriculum and staffing decisions made years earlier. One example of this is our school having 75% of the students following the very challenging set of English Baccalaureate qualifications (compared to 35% nationally). This is a decision that would have been made in 2015/16 but had a massive impact in how our students performed last year. The above example is not the sole reason but one of many historic issues like low expectations, over-reliance on supply staff, lack of effective systems and procedures and so on that, quite rightly, put the school into Special Measures. These issues were then further compounded by a lack of consistency in the headship and leadership of the school.

Are things different now?

Before my arrival in September '17, Ms Flaherty had already begun to implement key improvements to the school and these have been built upon over the past 18 months. I have tried to keep parents up to date on these improvements through letters and newsletters. Some key examples are given below:

- The quality of teaching has improved considerably, as judged not just by the school but Ofsted, the Local Authority and the Archdiocese in recent inspections.
- We are now fully staffed and no longer reliant on supply staff. Alongside this, the attendance of teaching staff has improved considerably, and is now much better than other schools nationally.

You can perform miracles by touching the hearts of those entrusted to your care.

- The curriculum has changed to provide a better range of subjects and qualifications for the students. Where the legacy curriculum was still in place, alternatives have been considered and introduced for example the switch to Engineering for the current Year 11.
- We now have clear expectations and quality assurance systems in place.
- The school now has clear schemes of work linked closely to assessments, which did not exist in the past.
- As mentioned in my last letter, we are in the process of making further improvements to the way targets are set, students are assessed and how this is reported to parents.
- Behaviour, which was already good when I arrived, has improved further, as has attendance to school as a result of clearer communication, policies and higher standards.
- One of the big changes is that the current Year 11, and subsequent years complete the teaching of the course in January (with exception of science, whose course is larger), previous years did not finish until after Easter. This allows for focused teaching to address gaps in previous teaching and learning.

These are just some examples, and there are many more. All of which are improving the school, and are recognised by those who monitor and inspect us, most notably the local authority who describe it as a totally different school to the one it was 18 months ago.

The changes given above relate directly towards academic progress but, like many of you, I believe school should do more than simply provide qualifications, though they are important. Below are some of the ways in which the wider school experience has developed:

- The school has also been through a considerable change in mission and vision, which you have also been a part of, culminating in our shared mission statement: “***You can perform miracles by touching the hearts of those entrusted to your care***”
- We have increased the number and variety of educational visits, across all years.
- We have created and trained the 1719 Society of student leaders who are having a significant impact upon many areas of the school.
- Sport has regained its prominence and we have competed in more sporting competitions and activities than in previous years.
- We are rebuilding the performing arts opportunities for all students, including the chance to perform in professional theatres.
- We are building our music opportunities, including the offer of free tuition for all Year 7 students during the last term.
- We are now a lead school for careers education across the Liverpool City Region.
- We have more lunchtime and after school clubs, societies and activities than ever before.
- We have listened to concerns about rewards and have changed our systems to ensure that all students who are doing the right things are getting rewarded appropriately.

This list could continue for another couple of pages but I think the examples above give you an indication of the healthy, happy and vibrant life and opportunities within the school.

When will we see the impact of the changes?

Some of the changes have already had an impact e.g. the quality of teaching has improved, student attendance has increased, the progress of younger students has improved, feedback from staff, parents and students is improving, behaviour has improved – with fewer incidents, detentions and considerably fewer exclusions. Indeed our current Year 11 students performed better in their Christmas mock exams than the previous Year 11 did in their final summer exams, without the 5 months preparation they have still to experience.

As you can imagine, however, turning a school around is complex and doesn't happen overnight, and the last thing to change is always exam results. Our predictions show clearly that the results will go up this year, and further still for our current Year 10 and Year 9. In the same way that the results of last year and the year before were the result of the decisions and actions of the previous 5 years.

Of course there are still further improvements to be made, as is the case for any school, and we will continue to make them and evaluate their impact. As each year goes by, their impact will grow and be reflected in the

outcomes for the students in each year group, through to those in the current Year 7 and 8 who have benefitted most from the stability and improvements within the school.

I apologise for the length of this letter but feel that such an important and complex issue deserves full explanation beyond the simplicity of a league table. None of us want to see De La Salle at the bottom of any performance table and we all share the desire to provide an outstanding level of education for the young people we serve. We are not there yet, but we are well on our journey.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Rannard', written in a cursive style.

Andrew Rannard
Headteacher