



St Francis of Assisi
CATHOLIC ACADEMY TRUST

NEWSLETTER

January 2025

Happy New Year from all our Trust Schools



The very best Catholic education now and for generations to come



Mr Celano
Chief Executive Officer

Happy New Year

Welcome to our January Newsletter. On behalf of the Trust, I would like to wish you all a very happy New Year.

On the topic of 'welcome', I am delighted to be able to announce that St Paul's Catholic Primary School, Cheshunt, should soon be joining our Trust. They will be our ninth school. You can read more about that overleaf but I speak for everyone in the Trust when I say that we are all thrilled to have St Paul's join the family.

Indeed, welcoming St Paul's is one of our strategic objectives for this school year as you can see from the list below. As I look at that list, I am encouraged that progress on many of them is reported on in this very newsletter.

Another on the list is 'communication' and I am grateful for the positive reaction to last term's newsletter, and hope that you feel positive again after reading this latest newsletter.

We are delighted to have recruited Hannah Hurworth as our Marketing Manager with a fundamental goal of increasing understanding of our Trust and the profile of our schools; improving our communication across the community. She starts with us in February.

As we write, we are also set to launch a refreshed Trust website which we hope will be a useful resource to all.

And on the topic of resources, we also have two new appointments in HR, bringing valuable support to our headteachers. Welcome to Claire and Karen.

Finally, I hope you will enjoy reading about the appointment of two new headteachers, and how our work together across the Trust is bearing much fruit.

Trust Strategic Objectives 2024/25

1. Deliver ever better School Improvement initiatives via the 24/25 Trust Development Plan's ambitious programme of educational cross-school collaboration.
2. Caring for Creation; effective environmental stewardship in every school, based on the example of St Francis.
3. To grow by welcoming St Paul's into the Trust, and by continued active engagement with the Director of Education at RCDOW and the Bishop's strategy for Diocesan-wide Academisation.
4. To support the Interim Leadership at St Joseph's and St Mary's in Bishop's Stortford, and recruit Headteachers for those posts.
5. To use the new Government-approved employment flexibilities to create a unique flexible working package to encourage the best staff recruitment and retention.
6. To participate in and contribute to St Mary's University system-wide research and collaboration on the distinctiveness of Catholic Trusts.
7. To successfully install five new Central Team posts to provide increasing levels of service to schools.
8. Realise ever-increasing savings for our schools, identify and win new funding-streams to benefit staff and pupils, and secure more efficient HR processes to improve service.
9. Deliver more effective communication to 'tell our story'; building confidence across the Trust and beyond.
10. To use the CEO's commencing work as an OFSTED Inspector to help schools prepare for the new Framework of Inspection launching September 2025.

Welcome to the Trust



Toward the end of 2024, we announced that St Paul's Catholic Primary and Nursery School was intending to join the Trust. We spoke with their Head, Katie Worton-Geer, to find out more about their journey.

Q. Firstly, welcome. How are you feeling about joining the Trust?
It is a privilege to be able to join our family of Catholic Schools in the Lea Valley Deanery and become part of the St Francis Trust. We have been working alongside the family of schools for several years and more recently started our journey alongside them in a range of school improvement projects and collaborations.

Q. Tell us a little about St Paul's?
I would like to take this opportunity to share a little about our school with you. St Paul's is a very special place with a caring and supportive Catholic ethos committed to high expectations and pupil outcomes. As a Catholic school, Christ is at the centre of everything that we do, in every aspect of our school life.

'Our school is a place of learning, a place of love.'

We strive to walk in the steps of St Paul as we work and play together, ensuring that everyone is valued, respected and welcomed. Our vision is to place children at the centre of all we do in school, ensuring we enable children to grow into confident, capable and caring individuals. This means developing children who have strong moral values, achieve high academic standards, are socially and emotionally literate and who are creative and forward thinking.

Q. What do you see as the advantages of joining the Trust?
One of the advantages of joining the Trust is that we have started to be part of the opportunities for children and staff to work with their peers from the other schools. Our Chaplaincy team regularly take part in reflections and services with other Chaplaincy teams across the Trust. They enjoy connecting with the other children who share the same passion to lead their schools' Catholic life and spiritual development.

For staff, for example, we have also recently started the Voice21 oracy project alongside the other schools in the Trust. Voice21 is a whole school approach to oracy which is developing talk to support our children's language skills.

Joining the Trust will certainly strengthen St Paul's school.



- S** **Spiritual** - We celebrate our life in Christ
- T** **Teamwork** - We play and work together
- P** **Polite** - We are polite and respect everyone we meet
- A** **Always** - We always try to do our best
- U** **Understanding** - We try to understand people's feelings
- L** **Learning** - We love to learn about our world in many different ways
- S** **Sharing** - We share our time, our gifts and our belongings



Introducing the new Heads of St Mary's & St Joseph's (Bishop's Stortford) Schools

Deirdre McHugh, Headteacher St Mary's

This is my 24th year of teaching! I began as a Geography teacher and in that time I have been Head of Geography, Head of Year, Head of Sixth Form, Assistant Headteacher responsible for pastoral care, Designated Safeguarding lead, Deputy Headteacher and Interim Headteacher. Through all of these roles I have gained a lot of experience as a classroom teacher, middle leader, and a senior leader and indeed helped lead a school through remote education through a global lockdown situation. I enjoy the challenge of teaching and learning and always love being in the classroom and helping pupils learn.



St Mary's Catholic School is a very special school. We are diverse in our catchment but united in our Gospel values and faith as our anchor. St Mary's is not just a community, it is a family; our love and support for one another puts our mission statement into action where excellence for all means the pupil is at the centre of every action and decision in providing the very best in education, spiritual growth and opportunities for every child to thrive and flourish.

Being in the Trust has been invaluable! 70% of all our pupils come from the Trust primary schools, knowledge of the child since aged five helps a child thrive and succeed in continual catholic education sharing the same values and goals. The shared and streamlined understanding of the primary education system at KS1 and KS2 has strengthened the child's transition from primary to secondary into KS3 where there is no 'lost' learning, but building on the schemes of learning has enabled great pupil progress to be secured. Working within the trust has been invaluable to me in my early days of Headship, reaching out to my executive and headteacher colleagues when I have a question and learning from their experience and expertise has been a gift.

Ann Cassidy-Jones, Headteacher St Joseph's, Bishop's Stortford

I am absolutely delighted to have been appointed as Headteacher of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School. I have always been passionate about Catholic education, and I firmly believe that our role in Catholic schools is not only to help the children to grow their brains, but also to help them grow their hearts as they realise that they are uniquely known and loved by God; to me, leading the school in this mission is an enormous privilege.



Working as part of our Trust has been extremely beneficial to me in my previous role as Interim Headteacher at St Joseph's through providing a supportive space to share ideas; the support received from the executive team and other headteachers has been invaluable, and I look forward to continuing to learn from the expertise within the Trust as we work together to ensure the best outcomes for our family of schools.

I am most looking forward to continuing to work with our staff to create a space where our children and their families feel a strong sense of belonging and are able to thrive.

Trust Development Plan

Our Trust Development Plan (TDP) last year was extremely successful with a focus on SEND, writing, Catholic life and embedding our Franciscan values as well as reviewing our core vision for core curriculum areas. The success and impact of these key priorities are evident in all schools. In this article, Barbara O'Connor and Michelle Keating overview some of this year's TDP activities.



Mrs O'Connor



Mrs Keating

Headteachers & School Improvement Executive Heads

Writing remains a high priority. Both primary and secondary pupils continue to be a part of our termly writing development programmes and enhancement activities. Moderation of writing continues to be of paramount importance across all year groups, for example, ensuring KS2 writing curriculum feeds directly into Year 7 planning.

SEND continues to be a priority, this is now led by our SEND Director Mrs Emma Overett. Much has been publicised this academic year about the challenges and increasing demand of SEND services at a governmental and local level. With a significant increase in the SEND community profile across all of our Trust schools, we have taken the positive step of introducing the SEND Director role. The aim of this role is to lead strategic development for the future of SEND provision as a Trust, but also to support our hardworking SENCOs, teachers and learning support assistants who work tirelessly to ensure our pupils receive the very best support to overcome barriers to learning.

Emma reports:

"This term I have visited all primary schools to familiarise myself with the context of each school, find out first-hand from SENCOs what support they feel would be beneficial in their individual setting and as a result have put together a package of training for staff in the early Spring Term. I have been able to support schools in their inspection experiences to celebrate the great work that is going on to support our most vulnerable children. I am now working closely with the local area managers and statutory SEND teams to see how we can move forward with increased transparency and support for our schools in the long term. Over the coming year we aim to enhance the current SEND provision further by drawing together resources, knowledge and expertise to provide the very best education for children with additional needs."

Science

As we progress through the academic year, we remain committed to fostering a love of science among our students, equipping them with transferable skills that will serve them well beyond primary and secondary education. Our recent discussions on the focus of our science clusters within the academy have reaffirmed our vision: to inspire a new generation of scientists and critical thinkers. In preparation for British Science Week, we dedicated time to planning engaging activities that would highlight a diverse range of careers linked to scientific fields. This initiative not only enriches our curriculum but also opens the eyes of our students to the various pathways available to them within the scientific field.

Furthermore, we have placed a significant emphasis on the transition between Year 6 and Year 7, particularly in science. Several schools are collaborating to develop a cohesive unit of work for Year 6, designed to align with the essential skills that will be revisited in the early weeks of Year 7. Our focus encompasses all learners. We are committed to ensuring that every child has access to an engaging and supportive science education that nurtures their individual potential. We are eager to see where the journey of science education will lead us and our students, as we continue to nurture their curiosity and capability in this subject.

Racial Justice, Equality and Diversity

This term we have continued to grow as a Trust with a sharp focus on RJED. We have shared each other's expert practices and own experiences. We have been able to use these CPD opportunities to reflect in our practice about how our children are seen, heard and voiced within each of our schools. We have all begun to undertake our six part sessions of 'underserved learner' and thinking of different aspects of RJED, for example the focus on efficacy and how we ensure our learners are served and represented within our environments, through images, displays, resources, talking opportunities as well as oracy opportunities. The knowledge and growth of our staff and leaders will continue to grow and the impact of this will be seen through each class and school.

Oracy - Voice21

In recent years we have observed an increasing trend of children with speech and language needs across all of our primary schools. In response to this, all Trust primary schools have embarked upon the Voice21 Oracy Programme. The Trust is funding the programme to ensure all schools can financially access this. Voice21 is the national charity that supports schools to build speaking and listening skills into the curriculum, teaching and learning and wider school life. Voice21 work with Oracy Champions in each primary school to develop a whole school approach to Oracy education through one-to-one support, expert professional development and a strategic approach to implementation across the curriculum. If you would like to find out more about the programme please visit "Voice 21 | Oracy | United Kingdom" at <https://voice21.org/>

Our aim is to ensure all children are well prepared for their next steps beyond school and their oracy skills are a fundamental part of this journey. We are planning an exciting summer term 'Speak out Challenge' involving all primary schools and St Mary's.

Trust Carol Service

Our first Trust Carol Service took place on 12th December.

It was attended by six school choirs who were led by our very committed and talented staff. It was a privilege to be a part of such an event and to celebrate the amazing talents in our Trust.

Thank you to Fr Julian at St Augustine's for hosting our event in their beautiful Parish church. The Christmas Spirit was certainly alive and I know all our parents left with a fresh appreciation of our Lord's great light shining down upon us this Christmas.



Mrs O'Connor
Headteacher &
School Improvement
Executive Head

Carols Sung

- Come All Ye Faithful
- Go Tell it on the Mountain
(St Paul's)
- Joy to the World
(St Joseph's, Waltham Cross)
- Once in Royal David's City
- Mary's Boy Child
(St Joseph's, Hertford)
- O Little Town of Bethlehem
(St Joseph's, Bishop's Stortford)
- It was on a Starry Night
(St Augustine)
- Silent Night
(St Thomas of Canterbury)
- The First Noel
- Away in a Manger
(St Cross)
- Carol Calypso Carol



Reading

Luke 2: 15-20

(St Thomas of Canterbury) When the angels went away from them back into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us."

(St Joseph's, Hertford) So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and saw the baby lying in the manger. When the shepherds saw him, they told them what the angel had said about the child. All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said.

(St Joseph's Hertford) Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them. The shepherds went back, singing praises to God for all they had heard and seen; it had been just as the angel had told them.



Celebrating the Feast Day of St Francis



Mrs Keating
Headteacher &
School Improvement
Executive Head

The Feast Day of St Francis is 4th October each year and commemorates the day of his death in 1226. St Francis is known for his ministry to the poor and underprivileged, his care for nature and animals, and founding the Franciscan Order. Amongst many qualities, his love of God's creation led him to be pronounced Patron Saint of the environment, animals and birds.

Within the Trust schools, St Thomas of Canterbury Headteacher Michelle Keating led the celebrations and explained what happens on the day and how it inspired our student chaplains...



All Trust School Chaplaincy Teams came together, at St Joseph's Primary School (Waltham Cross) to attend a special Trust Liturgy celebrating St Francis of Assisi Feast Day. Mrs Keating and Mrs O' Connor officially presented all members with their chaplaincy team badge on behalf of the Trust.

Our liturgy explored the life of St Francis and helped us see how we can be more like him.

The Chaplaincy Team continue to attend half termly virtual Trust Acts of Worship. Each academy Chaplaincy Team takes their turn to lead these.



Chaplaincy Prayer

Lord, God our Father,

Thank you for our school community. Just as you inspired St Francis of Assisi, inspire us to work together to spread your word within our school and across our family of schools.

Help us to create a community where love shines through us.

Help us to embrace God's creation by showing others how to love and care for our environment as stewards of the Earth.

Let the world grow as we follow your path.

Let us bring peace and care to one another and listen to God's Good News.

May you guide us and our academy today and always, on a path of a shared mission.

St Francis pray for us.

**“Start by doing what's necessary;
then do what's possible; and
suddenly you are doing the impossible”**

St Francis of Assisi

An Inspector called

Ofsted: the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. But what does it mean when the call comes to say they are paying a visit as they did with six of the Trust schools in recent months? And has anything changed in the light of recent nationwide Ofsted headlines? Deirdre McHugh shares her experience...



Miss McHugh
Headteacher
St Mary's

Q. What are Ofsted looking to achieve when inspecting?

They're primarily coming to evaluate and assess the quality of education, the behaviour and attitude of students, what the school is doing in terms of their personal development, how well the school is led and managed and in our case an interest in our Sixth Form. Throughout, they are "outcome" driven.

Q. How did you find the inspection different to previous ones?

They can turn up any time in theory but usually we get a day's notice. It is extremely busy throughout the inspection, but this time round there was a real shift in who they wanted to spend most time with - the students. For me, it was more a message of "don't tell me what is happening, show me". They wanted the real experience of the students and so spent most of the two days inspection talking with them in lessons and in confidential interviews.

Q. How many students did the inspectors speak with?

They spoke with 150 students and hand-picked them themselves. That's a big change, putting the student's voice right in the centre of things. My experience over several previous inspections was that they were about the quality of teaching; this was about the quality of learning and teaching. A subtle but distinct shift.

Q. Given this was your first inspection as a member of the Trust, was there extra support available?

Absolutely. I had colleagues within the Trust to call for help, insight and advice. Given that the Inspectors are looking for "development" and "progress" for students, to be able to also talk with Primary Heads on the topic was invaluable. Remember, many of our new students are from Trust schools so are known well by those Heads.

I also want to thank my own team for their support.

A marvellous effort from my Leadership Team, our middle leaders have driven their departments forward superbly and our classroom teachers have ensured that lessons are meaningful and on target.

Underpinning all that, our support staff; who are an invaluable and integral part of education, and who have lived up to their job title.

I'm incredibly proud of everyone who has been involved and the inspection outcomes have confirmed what we believed already; we are growing and we have momentum.

We are especially pleased that the quality of education, and behaviour and attitudes, has been graded as "Outstanding".

I hope that you will join with me and thank our governors and the Trust for their continued guidance and support, encouragement and counsel.



Ofsted Congratulations

St Mary's & Sacred Heart schools



Miss McHugh
Headteacher
St Mary's

“St Mary's is a very special community to be a part of”
“The quality of education pupils receive is exceptional”
“Pupils behaviour is exemplary”

When I took up leadership of the school in April 2024, I set some very specific objectives and the whole school community has worked hard to achieve the outcomes identified by the inspection. The outstanding ratings for quality of education and for behaviour and attitudes is recognition of the commitment of our staff and the hard work of our amazing students. This is reflected in the overall impression of St Mary's as reported by the inspection. I hope that you will join with me and thank all our students who continue to be a credit to our school community; the staff for their commitment and inspiration; our governors and the Trust for their support, encouragement and counsel.

The quality of education
Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes
Outstanding
Personal development
Good
Leadership and management
Good
Sixth-form provision
Good



Mrs Fusi
Headteacher
Sacred Heart

“This is a happy school, where everyone receives a warm welcome”
“Pupils know the high expectations that staff have of their work and their behaviour. Pupils strive to meet these high standards”

We are extremely proud of this positive outcome which is a testament to the care and commitment of our staff, the support of parents, and of course a celebration of the wonderful children. I am especially pleased that the report reflects our Catholic ethos - with Christ at the centre of all we do. I would like to thank all our children for being exceptional ambassadors for our school; the staff for their hard work and dedication; the parents who provided feedback online and the Governors and members of the Trust for their continued guidance and support.

The quality of education
Good
Behaviour and attitudes
Outstanding
Personal development
Outstanding
Leadership and management
Good
Early Years
Good

“The curriculum is well-designed and commonly understood. Teachers have the expertise to deliver subject content highly effectively. As a result, pupils achieve consistently highly in public examinations.”

St Mary's

“The school has a broad and balanced curriculum. The curriculum design puts the school's ethos at the centre. In most subjects, the curriculum clearly identifies the knowledge that pupils should gain.”

Sacred Heart

HR Resource - An update from our CFO

For the individual schools in the Trust one of the membership benefits is the provision of central services. Sometimes that means saving costs together but saving time is another huge advantage. So when the CEO and I asked the Heads what further services they might like help with, they quickly suggested that an HR service was a top priority. The wheels were then quickly put in motion and today, for the first time, each school has a dedicated HR resource in the form of Claire and Karen who job share the role.



Claire Boylan & Karen Yung
HR Executive

“Fundamentally, we provide a Helpdesk service for the Heads”



Mr Andrew Howard
Chief Finance Officer

For the individual schools in the Trust one of the main benefits is sharing services. Today, for the first time, each school has a dedicated HR resource in the form of Claire and Karen who job share the role.

“Fundamentally, we provide a Helpdesk service for the Heads”, explained Karen. “They will call up with their HR issues and we will research and provide the correct advice for them - that includes preparing job adverts and all types of HR materials as needs arise.”

Andrew Howard, who manages the Finance and HR function for the Trust, added, “It’s important to note that before this, Heads had to find time in their busy schedule to do this themselves as well as endeavouring to keep up with policies and best practice.

Now we are heading towards a common set of standards across the

Trust and that can only be a good thing, especially as it helps effectively manage a very important asset: the staff.

I know the Heads are delighted and are able to spend more time on other matters more directly related to the provision of front-line education services.”

“Part of our role is to find out what professional or other resources are available in a particular area,” continued Claire. “From there, we look to roll out advice, templates and guidelines to the Heads. Good work has been done at the schools already so there is always scope to share good practise among the group.”

“Karen and I are enjoying the job share and it does feel like we are contributing to improving the educational opportunities for students by supporting the Heads. That’s a very good feeling.”

Heads look ahead to 2025

Let us Pray

Amidst all that is new, we come back to our unchanging foundation upon which everything is built; our Lord and Saviour. We know that we are held in prayer by so many people and ask you to continue to do so. Here, our Heads share on what 2025 holds for them and their prayer requests.



Miss McHugh
St Mary's

Spring Term 2025 will be a time for St Mary's to focus on addressing and delivering impact on our School Development Plan. As a school the drive is on delivering outstanding teaching and learning and ensuring behaviour, attendance, attitudes and standards of conduct are consistently excellent. The spring term also will showcase "Matilda The Musical Jr" where our Drama, Music, DT, Art, English and PE staff are working collaboratively with 70+ students to prepare such a large scale school production. Our plans and aims for 2025 is to secure excellence in Catholic education in all subject areas and the wider life of the school. We thank God for the many blessings as a school bestowed to us and promise to use our gifts and talents in all that we do.



Mrs O'Connor
St Joseph's

2025 is another exciting time for St Joseph's. We will continue to welcome parents into our school for our many wonderful events and services. We are full of amazing ideas to raise money for The Catholic Children's Society in March with the Trust Charity week. At St Joseph's we cherish every child and allow them a voice that will ensure a bright future. That will truly be celebrated during our July Aspirations week. As a school community involving parents, Parish, pupils and staff we celebrate hopes for the future and inspire all. Together we will always live, love and learn with our hearts filled with Jesus' love.



Mrs Keating
St Thomas of
Canterbury

The jubilee year is a landmark moment in the life of the global church. As a St Thomas' community, we will be joining together as pilgrims of hope, working together for God's kingdom of justice, peace and love. Building on the incredible response from our wonderful, and very generous, gift donations for the Catholic Children's Society, we hope to continue working for the common good and look forward to our children proactively engaging in further fund raising and community projects in the New Year. Our dedicated staff team have worked hard throughout 2024 to introduce and embed significant enhancements to our curriculum and we look forward to providing the children with further enrichment opportunities to deepen their learning experience in 2025.



Mrs Fusi
Sacred Heart

Moving into 2025, Sacred Heart School looks forward to celebrating in the Pilgrims of Hope Jubilee Year, starting with our day of Spirituality on 6th January. We aim to join with other schools within the Trust in the various opportunities open to us. Our hope for 2025 is to be an outward looking school, serving our community and supporting each other in whatever challenges we may face. We pray for strength in our school community, enabling us to have compassion for others and to show love and understanding towards each other. In this Jubilee Year, we pray that we open the doors of our hearts to all people.



Mrs Worton-Geer
St Paul's

As we look ahead to 2025, we are excited to become full members of the St Francis Trust to continue to drive forward on ensuring the very best for our children. We are looking forward to greater collaboration for our staff and children including opportunities of growth in all aspects of school life. Our focus for 2025 is on developing our outside provision through OPAL and forest school alongside enhancing children's oracy skills through the Trust Voice21 project. We ask for the prayers of the community during this transition that God's blessing is upon us.



Mr Maloney
St Joseph's

Looking forward to 2025 St Joseph's are embarking on a maths mastery journey. We are pleased to announce our maths leader has recently been chosen to become a maths specialist teacher. She will be undertaking a series of intensive maths training sessions to develop her pedagogy around the teaching of maths. In January 2025, she will be sharing this good practice with the staff at St Joseph's; strengthening our already excellent maths teaching. Our hope is that this approach of upskilling all staff will yield better outcomes for the children.



Miss Cassidy-Jones
St Joseph's

There are many exciting things to look forward to in 2025. We will be completing the final stage of our memorial garden, which will become a place for our whole school community to pause and reflect on the beauty of God's Creation; and we are looking forward to participating in the Francis of Assisi Trust climate summit, when we are planning to share our journey towards becoming an accredited 'Eco School'. We look forward to seeing the school grow in strength and sharing the positive impact of the actions that we have taken this term on our new school website. We ask for God's continued blessings upon us as we pray for the flourishing of our school community.



Mrs Walsh
St Augustine's
& St Cross

As we embark into 2025 together, I am filled with hope and excitement for the opportunities ahead. It is a privilege to collaborate with such a dedicated Trust, united by a shared vision for the growth and success of our children and community. Together, as Pilgrims of Hope, we all have the ability to inspire, support, and uplift each other in pursuit of excellence and equity. I look forward to working alongside everyone to make a meaningful difference, ensuring that every child flourishes and our community thrives.