

LOVE • FAITH • HOPE

FEBRUARY
2026



St Thomas
Catholic Academies Trust

Half-Term Newsletter

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CEO Message

Fully Alive – *Love, Faith
and Hope Leading to
Academic Excellence*

Mark McLaughlin, CEO
– St Thomas Catholic
Academy Trust



At the heart of our vision for education is a simple and profound truth: every child is created in the image of God, with infinite dignity, promise and worth. In our Trust, this begins with a commitment that every child is not only taught and challenged, but truly known and loved.

St John Bosco expressed this beautifully: ***"It is not enough to love the children; they must know that they are loved."*** This is the spirit that animates our mission:

***"The glory of God
is a human being
fully alive."***

To be Fully Alive is to flourish as the person God intended — formed spiritually, academically, socially and morally — and equipped to live with purpose, joy and hope. From nursery through primary, secondary and sixth form, our schools walk with young people at every stage, helping them grow in confidence, character, aspiration and belonging. Our Trust values of Love, Faith and Hope underpin everything we do.

It is therefore deeply encouraging that our mission is increasingly reflected not only in our culture, but also in the achievements of our pupils — especially those children who need us most.

Recently, the Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson, wrote formally to a number of schools nationally in recognition of outstanding attainment outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. Within our Trust, several schools were included in this commendation, and we warmly congratulate:

- **Holy Family Catholic Primary School**
- **Our Lady of Peace Catholic Primary and Nursery School**
- **St Edward's Catholic Junior School**
- **St Joseph's Catholic High School**
- **St Margaret of Scotland Catholic Primary School**
- **St Michael's Catholic School**

This recognition is hope made visible — ensuring that disadvantage does not define destiny, and that the most vulnerable are supported to thrive. It also reflects the wider culture across our Trust, where every school is committed to the same mission of inclusion, ambition and care for all. Whilst these schools are mentioned for triggering a specific performance criterion, we are proud of the exceptional performance of all of our schools.

Across STCAT, we are seeing strong outcomes at every stage of education.

In the earliest years, children in our schools achieve exceptionally well, with Early Years outcomes well above national measures. Our phonics results are among the strongest they have ever been, with an average of

87%, giving children the vital foundations for lifelong reading and learning. At STCAT schools, children receive the best possible start to their education.



At Key Stage 2, pupils continue to achieve highly in reading, writing and maths, reflecting the strength of teaching, curriculum and care across our primary schools, performing far above national standards.

At secondary level, our schools continue to deliver secure outcomes for young people with attainment above national averages, ensuring they are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.

We are also especially proud to celebrate significant Sixth Form recognition. Cardinal Newman Catholic School has been certified as an ALPs 3 school, placing it in the top 25% nationally for A Level progress — a remarkable achievement. In addition, both Cardinal Newman Catholic School and St Joseph's Catholic High School have been recognised among the top 20% nationally for BTEC and applied subject outcomes. This highlights the strength of vocational and applied pathways that open doors and create opportunities for young people.

These successes matter because they represent the fruits of a continuous Catholic education: children growing year by year, supported at every stage, until they leave us at 18 ready to contribute positively to their communities and make the world a better place.

With more and more young people each year attending leading universities, securing high-quality apprenticeships and entering employment with confidence, we see the impact of our shared commitment to this mission.

In celebrating the excellent performance of all of our schools, I want to thank every member of staff, in every role, for your dedication to this shared purpose. The outcomes we celebrate are not separate from our Catholic identity — they flow from it: from Love that creates belonging, Faith that gives purpose, and Hope that insists every child can become fully alive.



Key Trust Update: Developing Our People to Serve with Excellence

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Director of Training and Development Introduction - *Collette Cooper*

I am delighted to introduce myself as the Director of Training and Development for St Thomas Catholic Academies Trust. It is a privilege to serve within a Trust guided by the mission, ***"The glory of God is a human being fully alive."*** This statement beautifully captures the purpose of Catholic education and strongly resonates with my own values and vocation as an educator.

I am passionate about supporting staff to grow professionally, personally and spiritually, recognising that when we invest in our people, we strengthen outcomes for the children and young people entrusted to our care. As a Catholic Trust, our commitment extends beyond academic excellence; we are called to nurture the whole person and to support colleagues in living out their vocation in the service of others.

Before this role, I served as a SENDCo and Assistant Headteacher, experiences which have profoundly shaped my approach to leadership, inclusion and professional development. Working closely with pupils, families and staff strengthened my commitment to ensuring that every child is supported to reach their full potential and that every colleague feels equipped and empowered in their practice.

I hope to bring the expertise I have developed in inclusive education, staff development and strategic leadership into this role, ensuring that our training programmes reflect the diverse needs of our schools while promoting excellence, compassion and equity at the heart of our work.

I currently lead our Primary Teacher Training Hub, working in partnership with 'Xavier Teach Southeast' to support and form the next generation of Catholic educators. Guided by our Trust mission, the vision for our Training Hub is to form, inspire and equip trainees to serve with excellence, compassion and faith. Rooted in the Gospel and the rich tradition of Catholic education, we aim to nurture both primary and, from September 2026, secondary trainees to become reflective, resilient and inclusive practitioners.





The expansion into Secondary Initial Teacher Training represents an exciting and important step for our Trust as we continue to strengthen recruitment, formation and retention across all phases. Our ambition is that every trainee leaves our hub not only as a skilled professional, but also as a living witness to faith, hope and love in action, bringing to life our shared belief that the glory of God is realised through people flourishing.

Alongside Initial Teacher Training, I also have the privilege of overseeing the support and development of our Early Career Teachers across the Trust. Supporting colleagues at the beginning of their teaching journey is something I care deeply about. High-quality mentoring, formation and professional learning are vital in helping teachers grow in confidence, resilience and expertise, enabling them to make a lasting difference to the pupils and communities they serve.



In my role, I look forward to working across the Trust to develop high-quality, evidence-informed professional development and leadership pathways that reflect both educational excellence and our Catholic identity. I am particularly keen to build on the strong practice already present across our schools and to ensure collaboration and shared learning remain at the heart of our work.

Having already had the opportunity to visit many of our schools, I am eager to continue meeting colleagues and learning from your experiences and aspirations. By working together, I hope we can further develop a culture of professional growth that nurtures staff wellbeing, strengthens our Catholic mission and supports every member of our Trust community to flourish.

I am truly honoured to be part of the STCAT family and look forward to working with you all.



Spotlight On: Training the Next Generation of Teachers

Choosing the SCITT route was one of the best decisions I've made. Like many trainees, I came into teaching with excitement, nerves, and a slightly unrealistic belief that I would immediately know where everything was kept and how every system worked. What I didn't fully appreciate at the time was just how important the people would be in shaping my journey and how much of a difference the right school culture makes.

From my very first day, I was welcomed not as "the trainee", but as part of the team. I was supported, encouraged, challenged in the right ways, and crucially trusted. Everyone has modelled exactly what this trust stands for: professionalism, kindness, and a genuine commitment to developing others and ensuring that both staff and students feel fully alive.

They have created an environment where it is safe to ask questions, safe to make mistakes, and safe to grow. And honestly, that kind of culture makes all the difference when you're at the very beginning of your teaching career, trying to find your feet while also remembering which class you're meant to be in. There's something incredibly reassuring about walking into a new school and knowing that people genuinely want you to succeed.

One of the biggest strengths of the SCITT model is how closely it connects trainees to real school environments. We're not learning in isolation, we're learning in practice, alongside experienced professionals who are generous with their time,

knowledge, and patience. You don't just teach us how to teach, you show us what it means to be a teacher. As Don Bosco says **'It is not enough to love the children, they need to know that they are loved.'** And that is ever present at every Trust school I have been to.

You are already shaping the next generation of teachers. And because of you, we are entering this profession feeling supported, inspired, and proud to be part of this teaching community.

Thank you very much.



CHARLIE MCCORNICK

STCAT Trainee Primary Teacher

School Spotlight: Bringing Learning to Life Across Our Schools

St Ethelbert's Catholic Primary School and Nursery



School Spotlight

History Day Brings Ancient Egypt to Life for Year 3

On **Wednesday, 14th January**, Year 3 were transported thousands of years back in time as they took part in an immersive **Ancient Egyptian History Day**, delivered by the brilliant educational company **Off the Page**.

The day formed an exciting part of the children's History topic on the Egyptians, giving them the chance to experience everyday life as it would have been in ancient times. Dressed for the occasion and fully embracing their roles, the children explored Egypt through a range of hands-on workshops that sparked creativity, curiosity and plenty of conversation!



Throughout the day, pupils produced a wonderful collection of Egyptian-inspired creations, including:

- Clay necklaces
- Clay organ collection pots
- Wood carvings
- Hieroglyph papyrus sheets
- Copper engravings

All of these special keepsakes were proudly taken home at the end of the day – a brilliant reminder of their historical adventure.



The celebration came to a joyful close with a **grand Egyptian feast**, where the children performed ancient **myths and dances**, showcasing everything they had learned and bringing the period vividly to life.

Our staff were full of praise for the visiting team, with one teacher sharing:

“Off the Page is a brilliant company that provides workshops on many historical eras. The children loved exploring life in Egyptian times through practical workshops, creating keepsakes and dressing up. It really brought History to life!”

Year 3 had a fantastic time learning, creating, and stepping into the shoes of ancient Egyptians. A huge thank you to Off the Page for helping make History Day such a memorable experience!



St Joseph's Catholic Primary School - Chalfont

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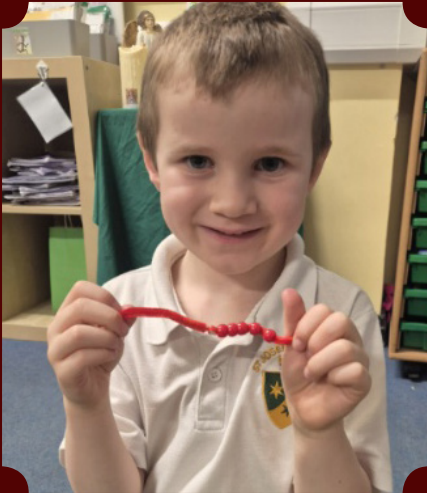
School Spotlight

Living Our Theme: *"You'll Always Be With Me, Like a Handprint on My Heart"*

This year's school theme has shaped daily life at St Joseph's as pupils and staff reflect on how small acts of kindness can leave a lasting impact. As we begin a new calendar year, we have taken time to reflect on our New Year's resolutions and the positive impact each of us can make in the world.

We know that meaningful change begins with our own actions. With this in mind, each member of our community has created a set of "good deed beads" to help us consciously choose kindness each day. By carrying these beads with us, we hope to strengthen our relationship with Jesus and with one another, letting our everyday actions leave a lasting and loving mark.





Celebrating St Thomas Becket



School Spotlight

We celebrated the patron saint of our Trust, St Thomas Becket, on Thursday, 29th January. As our patron saint, Thomas Becket inspires us to stand up for what is right, remain true to our beliefs, and care for those around us.

To honour his legacy, we created artistic depictions of St Thomas Becket.

These will be proudly displayed on our classroom doors as daily reminders of his values and the example he sets for us all.





Immersive Learning and Creative Expression

Year 5 Viking workshop and assembly

They explored fascinating artefacts and weapons, stepped back in time through role play, and asked brilliant questions to deepen their understanding of Viking life. They then shared their knowledge confidently and entertainingly with their peers and families.



Year 3 Tutor workshop

The pupils were fully immersed in the past through hands-on, historically accurate experiences that support their Tudors topic, including some lively Tudor dancing and creative activities.



Author visit for Storytelling Week

We were delighted to welcome children's authors Adam and Charlotte Guillain. To celebrate National Storytelling Week, the authors delivered enjoyable and engaging assemblies, story times and workshops.



The Power of Reading: Changing Life Trajectories

- Ruth Green

According to The National Literacy Trust, in England, 18% of adults aged 16 to 65 have very poor literacy skills.

18%

There is, however, positive news from our primary schools. A lot of work has been undertaken and is now showing impact. This is to ensure the percentage of children reaching the expected reading level by the end of Key Stage 2 is well above the national average.

In 2025, 75% of pupils achieved the expected standard in reading by the end of primary school. This means 1 in 4 children start their secondary education with significant gaps in their reading ability. The current national figures are alarming.

75%

This will give children the very best start to their secondary education. Last year, 83% of children in St Thomas Catholic Academy Trust attained the expected level or above in reading. Although this is already higher than all pupils nationally, our ambition is to raise this further in the coming years.

83%

In September 2022, a study found that 48% of teenagers who failed to achieve level 4 at GCSE had been identified as falling behind at age five.

48%

This year, I have the privilege of visiting all our primary schools, looking at "Reading beyond Phonics." There are many initiatives enabling our children to become confident and passionate readers. This will change the trajectory (as outlined in the study) for the children from Early Years to Year 11.

By sharing great practice, we will give children the best opportunities to develop their reading and grow to be confident readers. As this shared work moves onto its next phase, I look forward to sharing more about its fruit and the benefits and impact for our children.

Supporting Healthy Digital Habits: Digital 5-a-Day

- Michelle Chappell

The online world is difficult to navigate, but such a big part of our lives — with opportunities to socialise, learn and play, alongside potential online harms and negative experiences.

With so much information about what might be harmful and what might not be, both for mental and physical wellbeing, parents and carers can feel powerless and fearful about their online lives.

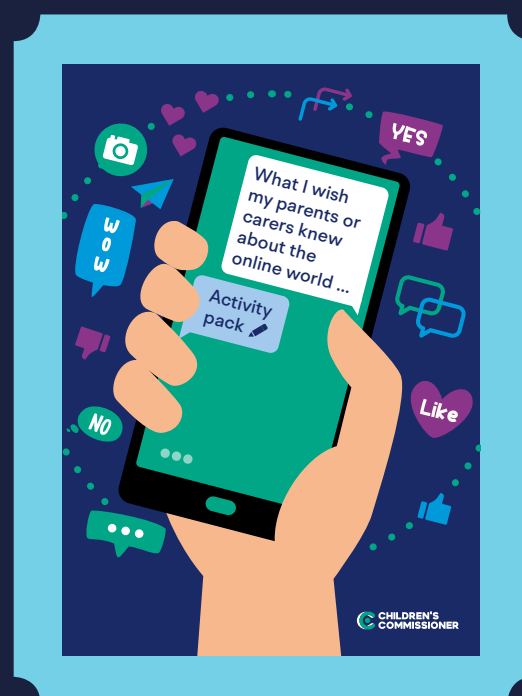
It is not just harmful content you are worried about; it's also habits. How much scrolling is too much scrolling? How much time should we spend on our phones? How can we build more offline activities into our lives? Do we feel comfortable talking to each other, especially if something bad happens?

The Digital 5-a-Day Activity Pack has been created with children, young people, parents and carers to open up conversations about online habits and wellbeing. Built on the NHS's **Five Steps to Mental Wellbeing**, it provides practical, easy-to-follow guidance for achieving a balanced digital life.

We encourage families to explore the pack together, talk openly about concerns and expectations, and support children in staying safe while enjoying the benefits of the online world.

Download the Digital 5-a-Day activity pack here.

5-a-Day activity pack



*The glory of
God is a human
being fully alive!*

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