



St Francis of Assisi
CATHOLIC ACADEMY TRUST

NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2025



In This Jubilee Autumn, May Hope Gently Guide Us Forward.

Cardinal Bartolomeo Reina opens the Holy Door
at St John Lateran, Rome, 29 December 2024.

Photo: Alamy

The very best Catholic education now and for generations to come



Mr Celano
Chief Executive Officer

Stories of Hope

Welcome to our Autumn Newsletter.

In our last newsletter, I encouraged us all to embrace the Year of Hope – 2025 – instituted by Pope Francis. I'd like to share three stories that have given me hope these past few weeks.

St Paul's Primary School Joins Our Trust

I'm delighted to welcome St Paul's Primary School in Cheshunt as the latest and 9th school to join our Trust.

What gives me great hope about this development is that St Paul's joins us after being an Associate Trust school for two years. Their experience was so positive – with pupils, staff, and the wider community benefiting significantly – that they wanted to become members for life.

Making a positive difference for staff, pupils, and parents is what we aim to do, so achieving this gives me great hope. Welcome, St Paul's!

Young People Returning to Faith

My second story of hope comes from beyond our Trust and reflects the life of the global Christian and Catholic Church.

You may have seen national press reports earlier this year about increases in church attendance, particularly among young people and 'Gen Z' (aged 13-28) who are identifying as Christians and Catholics.

Having the privilege of working across our Catholic schools daily, I witness young people exploring and developing faith all the time, so perhaps I'm not surprised by these reports. However, I'm sure it's a great encouragement to parents, school staff, and our wider communities.

Our Newest Saint: Carlo Acutis

Finally, my third cause for hope comes from reading about our newest Catholic Saint, Carlo Acutis, canonized earlier this autumn.

Born in London in 1991 before moving to Italy, he's the first millennial Saint. He died at just 15 after battling leukaemia. From a young age, Saint Carlo was preaching, sharing his faith, and supporting the vulnerable – all while living everyday teenage life in the early 2000s, including playing PlayStation and Xbox.

I hope his sainthood assures our young people that being holy doesn't exclude playing computer games or require waiting until adulthood!

Looking Forward

I hope that the news of flourishing Trust schools contained throughout this Newsletter will fill you with that same spirit of joy and hope, and as we embrace the 2025/26 academic year, I also hope your experience of being in our Trust will mirror the joys of those at St Paul's. May all our pupils, staff, parents, and wider communities be blessed with hope and joy throughout this year, Amen.



In July, we were honoured to welcome Bishop Paul McAleenan, who warmly engaged with colleagues to learn more about our work.

Welcome St Paul's to the Trust Family



We are delighted to welcome St Paul's Catholic Primary School in Cheshunt as the newest member of our Trust family. The school officially joined the Trust in July, marking an exciting new chapter for the entire school community.

To commemorate this special milestone, Mrs Katie Worton-Geer, Headteacher of St Paul's, and Mr Andrew Celano, CEO of the Trust, shared their thoughts on what this new partnership means for the future of the school and the wider Trust.

Message from Mrs Worton-Geer:

We are delighted to officially join the Trust as of 1st July 2025. St Paul's is a special place where children come first, and our mission — a place of learning, a place of love — guides all we do. Joining the Trust brings exciting opportunities, from school improvement projects to professional development and collaboration. It also offers a strong support network and valuable resources for our pupils and community. We are proud to be part of a Trust that shares our values. Thank you to our staff, governors, parents, and pupils for supporting this journey — we look forward to what's ahead.



Mrs Worton-Geer

Message from Mr Andrew Celano:

I am delighted that St Paul's School is now officially a full member of the St Francis of Assisi Catholic Academy Trust. As part of St Paul's decision to join our Trust, over the last 18 months we have been able to increasingly include the school in all our Trust developments, activities and collaborations, and so today's happy news confirms that the special relationship will now flourish for years to come. All our schools are united by our shared vision to deliver the very best possible Catholic education in our area both now and for generations to come, and so the formal addition of St Paul's into the family represents a real strengthening of that vision and provision; we are blessed by St. Paul's joining our Trust, and I send the school, staff, governors, parents and pupils my warmest welcome and best wishes.



Trust-wide Sacramental Celebration

Over 170 pupils from across the nine schools within the Trust came together for a joyful and reverent Sacramental Gathering at St Augustine's Catholic Church in Hoddesdon. The event was a special celebration of the children who recently received the Sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

The Mass was celebrated by Father Julian, who warmly welcomed all pupils and staff in attendance.

It was a beautiful occasion of faith, unity, and thanksgiving, a significant moment in the spiritual journeys of many young people from across the Trust.

With the wholehearted support and collaboration of all participating schools, the celebration became a joyful and memorable occasion for all involved. The gathering not only honoured the children's sacramental milestones, but also deepened the sense of community and shared mission within the Trust family.



Trust Pilgrimages – Year of Hope

The Trust schools presented individual events and came together to celebrate the Year of Hope.

Representatives from our Trust schools gathered at Westminster Cathedral for the Festival of Hope, a joyful liturgy uniting schools across the Diocese in this Jubilee Year as “Pilgrims of Hope”. Led by Cardinal Vincent Nichols, the liturgy featured a moving pledge procession and the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the Cathedral’s awe-inspiring setting.

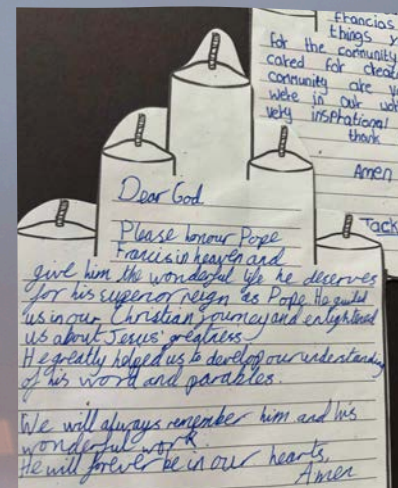
Inspired by the Church’s call to be Pilgrims of Hope, St Mary’s embraced this theme through reflective, faith-filled activities. A key event was the St Mary’s Way Pilgrimage, where KS3 students paused at stations around the school to reflect on finding hope in friendship, challenges, prayer, and the future. The school also joined St Joseph’s (Bishop’s Stortford) and the parish for a joyful Marian Procession, honouring Our Lady and celebrating hope as a faith community. These moments reflected a shared belief that Christ’s light guides even in uncertain times.



Remembering Pope Francis

In April, pupils across the nine schools of the Trust took part in prayerful activities to honour the life and witness of Pope Francis.

Each school marked the occasion in its own way, with pupils writing heartfelt messages and cards to express their prayers and condolences. These moments offered valuable opportunities for reflection and spiritual growth.



Pupils Shine at the Trust Speak Out Challenge

During the summer term, pupils from Year 4 to Year 8 across the Trust showcased their talent and confidence in public speaking at the “Speak Out Challenge”, held at St Mary’s in Bishop’s Stortford.

The event was warmly hosted by sixth-form students Jessica and Sofia, both alumni of St Joseph’s (Waltham Cross) and long-time students of St Mary’s since Year 7. They welcomed participants with enthusiasm and guided the programme with poise.



Jessica opened the event by saying, “We are so excited to see all these brave, talented speakers ready to take the stage and share their voices with us.”

Sofia encouraged the younger pupils, adding, “This is the perfect time for Year 4 to Year 8 students to build confidence, think clearly, and find the courage to speak their minds through public speaking.”

Each year group was given a unique theme – creativity, empathy, and critical thinking:



Jessica and Sofia opened the event, encouraging young speakers to build confidence and share their voice.

Year 4	“One issue that matters to me”
Year 5	“The change I want to see”
Year 6	“Sustainability and climate change – I would like to see”
Year 7	“How an act of kindness changed my day”
Year 8	“How social media affects teenagers”

Many pupils said they enjoyed their first Speak Out Challenge and felt proud of their achievements.

Sabrin, a Year 6 pupil from St Joseph's Catholic Primary School (Bishop's Stortford) and one of the Year 6 winners, said she was surprised to receive the award. "I prepared my speech over the half-term break, from brainstorming ideas to finalising the draft. I am so thankful to my dad for helping me edit it and giving me useful suggestions."

Midhun, a Year 5 pupil from St Paul's Catholic Primary School, also shared his experience. "I was nervous speaking in front of the audience during the event, but I think it was a great opportunity to build confidence and improve our communication skills" he said.

What Our Pupils Say:

Very nicely set up and enjoyed it very much. Thank you for organising this!

I would like to do it again more often because I really enjoyed it!

I like hearing different people talk and seeing how we can improve and learn.

It was a pleasure seeing the other schools and being invited was amazing!

I liked the efficiency, and I think the refreshments were a good way to calm down.



I had a great time; this helped me a lot with my confidence.



Mrs Barbara O'Connor (1st left) and Mrs Michelle Keating (1st right) with "Speak Out Challenge" winners.



Participants listen attentively to the pupil speaking.

Trust Pupils Lead the Way in Sustainability

Primary schools across the Trust are inspiring pupils to care for the environment through a wide range of eco initiatives. From recycling campaigns to conservation projects, children are learning how to make a positive difference in their communities and beyond.

At St Thomas of Canterbury, the Eco Council, led by passionate pupils, is helping the school become more environmentally friendly while encouraging care for God's creation. They organise regular litter picks on school grounds and in the local area, keeping the environment clean and safe. Following a successful non-uniform day fundraiser, the school has introduced new recycling bins to improve waste separation and reduce landfill.

The Council also led Walk to School Week, encouraging pupils and families to choose sustainable travel and appreciate God's creation. To further reduce waste, they launched food composting to enrich the school garden and placed reminder signs in classrooms, prompting everyone to switch off lights and interactive whiteboards when not in use. Through these actions, the Eco Council continues to promote sustainability and environmental stewardship.

At St Joseph's (Bishop's Stortford), pupils are becoming more aware of global environmental challenges, particularly those linked to climate change. Younger pupils were touched by learning about a dolphin that swallowed a plastic bag, while older pupils have taken greater responsibility by avoiding litter and switching off lights to save electricity.

The school's Eco Council, with 12 pupils from Year 1 to Year 6, has worked hard this year to achieve the prestigious Green Flag Award by meeting the national Eco-Schools Seven Steps programme. Their efforts included conducting an environmental review, creating an action plan, delivering initiatives across ten core topics, and helping to draft an Eco Code to reflect the school's commitment to sustainability.

Meanwhile, the Eco Club at Sacred Heart has also earned the Eco-Schools Green Flag. (See page 12)



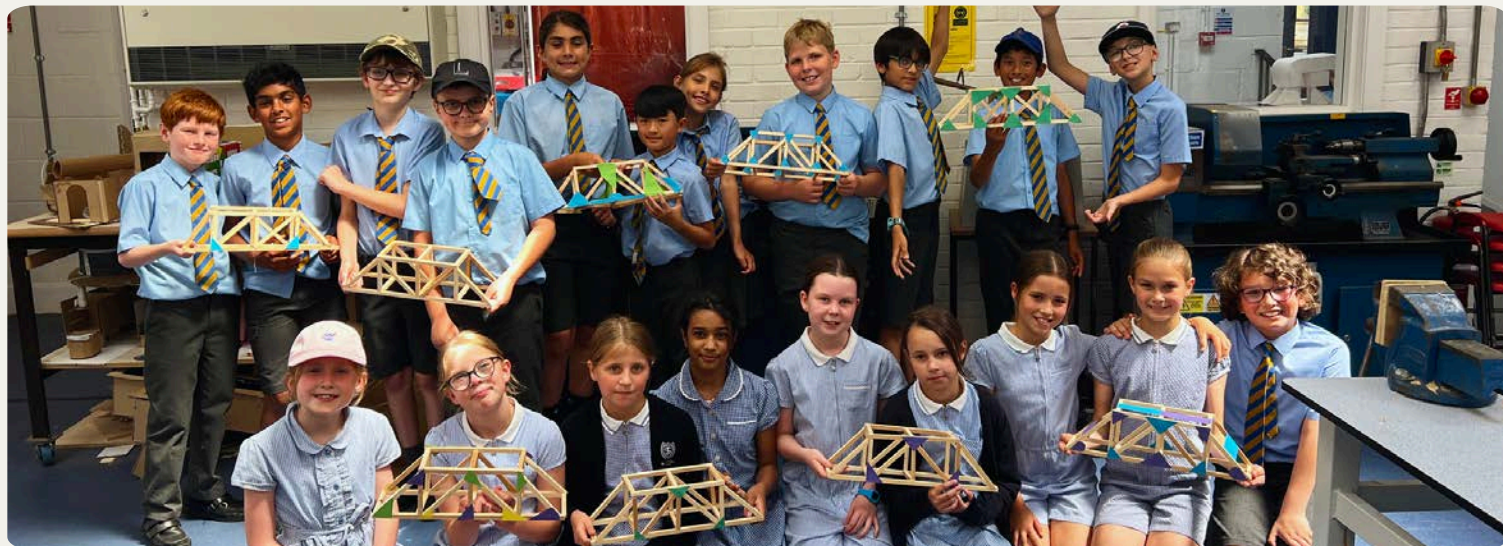
New recycling bins St Thomas of Canterbury to improve waste separation and reduce landfill.



St Thomas of Canterbury pupils launched food composting to help their school garden thrive.



St Joseph's (Bishop's Stortford) Eco Council worked hard to earn Green Flag.



Hands-On Learning: St Joseph's Year 5 Visit St Mary's

In summer, more than 60 Year 5 pupils from St Joseph's (Bishop's Stortford) joined a hands-on workshop at St Mary's. Guided by teachers, pupils designed wooden bridge models in the DT room or made their own pizzas while learning about food safety and nutrition. The visit gave them a valuable taste of secondary school life, encouraging teamwork, creativity and practical learning.



Exploring Light and Colour in Science Week

St Mary's in Bishops Stortford hosted pupils from six of the Trust primary schools for a three-day Science Week full of exciting experiments.

Through activities with chromatography, mirrors, and prisms, pupils explored reflection, refraction and the hidden colours in inks. Using microscopes, they examined leaves in detail, discovering veins, cells and stomata.

The week sparked curiosity and built scientific skills, making learning both engaging and inspiring for all involved.



Chromatography revealed hidden colours during Science Week.



Ink colours separated into vibrant patterns during chromatography experiments.

Year 3 Pupils Enjoy a Fun Maths Challenge

Over 160 Year 3 pupils from five Trust primary schools joined a fun Maths Challenge, working in mixed-ability teams on problem-solving and estimation activities. The event built confidence, teamwork and enthusiasm for maths. Congratulations to David, Florence, Rosie and Kasper from St Cross, the overall winners!

Franciscan Values Award

The Trust's Franciscan Values Award recognises students across all year groups who embody the virtues of St Francis – community, creation, compassion, and peace-making – through their words, actions, kindness, and leadership. These awards inspire spiritual growth and help our schools become shining examples of the Gospel and Faith in Action.

The list of this year's award recipients from each school is as follows:



Izzy
Sacred Heart



Ciara
St Augustine's



Freya
St Cross



Ugo
St Joseph's
(Bishop's Stortford)



Elise
St Joseph's
(Hertford)



Huda
St Joesph's
(Waltham Cross)



Pearl
St Paul's



Amelie
St Thomas of Canterbury



Tobiasz
St Mary's



Mrs Emma Overett
SEND Executive Lead

SEND Executive Lead Update

The new year is always an exciting time of fresh beginnings, and we are especially looking forward to the year ahead as important SEND reforms are due to be published in autumn 2025. These changes will help guide how we continue to strengthen our support for children and young people with additional needs.

Across our Trust, we remain committed to improving the quality and capacity of SEND provision so that staff feel well supported, resources are used effectively, and every child can thrive.

We are also delighted that St Thomas of Canterbury and St Cross are part of the **Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS)** project with the Department for Education and Hertfordshire County Council. This fantastic programme will bring new training for teachers, resources for schools, and closer partnerships with parents, helping us to meet a wide range of needs. We look forward to sharing updates on the impact of this as the school year progresses.



My Journey Through Trust Schools – From Pupil to Deputy Head By Miss Kate Entwisle

My journey in education began at St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School, where I was inspired by the dedication and care of the teachers who nurtured my love for learning. Their impact stayed with me and sparked my dream of becoming a teacher—someone who could make a positive difference in children's lives. I went on to attend St Mary's Catholic School, where the values and encouragement I received deepened my desire to pursue a career in teaching. From a young age, I always dreamed of becoming a teacher – a dream rooted in a passion for working with children and helping them grow.



With the support of inspiring teachers, family and friends, I went on to study Theology and Religious Studies at St Mary's University in Twickenham. This period of study was both academically enriching and personally fulfilling, giving me the foundation I needed to take the next step in my journey. Following this, I completed my PGCE, eager to put theory into practice and begin shaping young minds in the classroom.

In 2017, I joined St Joseph's (Waltham Cross) as a Newly Qualified Teacher. From the very beginning, I felt a deep sense of belonging and purpose in the school community. I have been fortunate to work alongside dedicated and passionate colleagues, past and present, and I have continually been inspired by the children and families I have had the privilege to work with. Their support, along with that of my own family, has played a crucial role in my development as an educator.

Today, I am incredibly proud to be the Deputy Headteacher of St Joseph's (Waltham Cross). It is an honour to be part of a school that places such strong emphasis on faith, learning and community. Every day brings new opportunities to support families, guide children in their educational and personal growth and collaborate with an inspiring and amazing team of educators shaping the next generation.

I look forward to continuing this exciting journey – one that began in the classroom as a child and has brought me full circle, now helping others begin their own.

Trust Schools Recognitions and Celebrations

Sacred Heart Awarded Eco-Schools Green Flag

Sacred Heart's Eco Club has been awarded the internationally recognised Eco-Schools Green Flag for its outstanding commitment to environmental education and action.

Over the past year, club members have led litter picks, biodiversity projects, energy-saving campaigns, and a whole-school 'No Energy Day'. They updated the school pond area, created a student-led 'Green Code', and conducted a full environmental review to develop a detailed action plan.

The initiative engaged the whole school community and inspired meaningful change. Eco-Schools assessors praised the students' enthusiasm, creativity, and leadership, particularly how sustainability was embedded into daily school life and the curriculum, with students taking real ownership of the process.



Eco Club members at Sacred Heart celebrated with the school's Sustainability Lead, Mrs Ellmore, after receiving the Eco-Schools Green Flag plaque.

St Paul's Awarded Outstanding School Travel Plan

St Paul's has once again achieved Outstanding Accreditation for its School Travel Plan, recognising its commitment to safer, healthier, and more sustainable travel for pupils, staff, and families.

The Plan promotes walking, cycling, scooting, and responsible public transport use to reduce car travel, ease congestion, and encourage active lifestyles.

In the past year, the school has run 'Walk to School' Weeks Active Travel challenges, road safety workshops, and transport officer visits.

It introduced a new OPAL playground with bikes and scooters, and replaced some coach trips with walking or public transport.

These initiatives foster sustainability, cut pollution, support family budgets, and help children enjoy more exercise and fresh air.



St Paul's introduced a new OPAL playground with bikes and scooters.

Trust Schools Recognitions and Celebrations

New Daily Mile Track Opens at St Cross

Supported by the Friends of St Cross, the Rotary Club, parents, pupils, and the community, St Cross successfully raised funds for the construction of a Daily Mile Track on its campus during the summer term. Through a range of creative fundraising initiatives – from the ever-popular Easter egg hunt to inspiring pupil-led challenges such as swimming 10 lengths of a pool or cycling 8 miles, the school raised over £6,000 for the project.

The new running track officially opened in April and is already being enjoyed by pupils on a daily basis. This fantastic facility will continue to support the health, fitness, and well-being of all pupils for years to come.



Mr Nugent, world triathlete and proud father of St Cross alumni, officially opened the new running track.

A Celebration of Milestones: Proms for Year 11 and Year 13

Before the end of the summer term, St Mary's Year 11 and Year 13 students celebrated their Proms, marking important milestones with joy, friendship, and lasting memories.

Year 11 Prom

The Year 11 Prom was a lively evening filled with dancing, sweet treats, and fun photo booth moments—a joyful way to celebrate the end of GCSEs.

Year 13 Prom

The Year 13 Prom, held at the Manor of Groves Mansion House, was an elegant farewell where students and staff shared laughter, music, and memories of their time together.



St Paul's Early Years Open Day & School Tour

Date: 7 October (Tue)
Time: 9:30 am to 11 am
Place: On site
<https://stpauls-herts.secure-dbprimary.com/herts/primary/stpauls>



TRUST OPEN EVENTS THIS TERM



St Joseph's Catholic Primary School (Waltham Cross) Open Afternoon

Date: 21 October 2025 (Tue)
Time: 2 pm to 3pm
Place: On site
Remarks: Reception and Nursery open session
<https://www.stjosephsherts.co.uk/>



St Joseph's Catholic Primary School (Bishop's Stortford) Open Mornings

Date: 6 & 18 November 2025 (Thu & Tue)
Time: 9:30 am
Place: On site
Remarks: Reception
<https://www.stjosephs207.herts.sch.uk>



St Mary's Open Evening Sixth Form

Date: 6 November (Thu)
Time: 6 pm to 8:30 pm
Place: On site
www.stmarys.net/sixthformadmissions



St Thomas of Canterbury Open Mornings

Date: 11 & 18 November (Tue)
Time: 9 am
Place: On site
Contact: Mrs Sellers, Office Manager —
admin@stcanterbury.herts.sch.uk
<https://www.stcanterbury.herts.sch.uk>



Academy Status Brings Us £1.1 Million

Capital Grant Success

The Trust Academies can bid for significant capital funding each year via the Condition Improvement Fund process. This year 10 bids were submitted and we have been successful with 5 of these. The success rate of 50% is well above the national average and reflects the hard work that has gone into these capital bids by finance leads, Heads and the Central team.

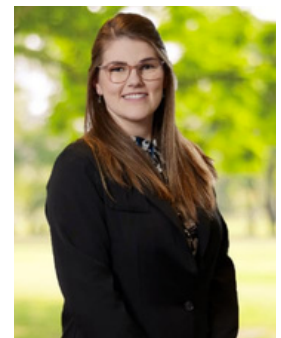
The 5 successful bids will result in additional funding of £1.12 million for the Trust which is fantastic news and will help the successful schools fund their summer capital works which will be commencing shortly.

Meet the Central Finance Team

The central finance team's purpose is to support the Head Teachers and Finance Leads of all schools in the Trust, ensuring financial procedures are always followed and finances are monitored to ensure they remain robust. Mr Howard, Chief Financial Officer leads the Central Finance Team. Here is an introduction on his colleagues who provide support on a daily basis:

Ms Turner – Deputy Chief Financial Officer

I joined the Trust as Deputy CFO in October 2024 supporting the CFO Mr Howard with Trust-wide financial management, which varies from month-end processes to VAT returns. I also work closely with school finance leads and headteachers on budgeting and management accounts. As a qualified accountant with a background in internal audit, I am passionate about strong controls and risk management. Before joining the Trust, I worked at a top 30 Accountancy firm, focusing on the education and charity sectors.



Ms Turner

Mrs Mardle – Trust Finance Manager

I joined the Trust in March 2023 as Trust Finance Manager, supporting CFO and providing financial services across all our schools, particularly St Joseph's in Bishop's Stortford. My career began at a private banking firm in 1980, where I worked across various departments before moving into the Finance Department at Head Office. After nearly 25 years, I transitioned to public service, joining Hertfordshire County Council's Corporate Finance Team for 12 years. I later served as Finance Lead at a well-known local bakery chain for five years before joining the Trust.



Mrs Mardle



Celebrating GCSE and A Level Success at St Mary's

This summer, St Mary's Catholic School celebrated the achievements of its students in both GCSE and A Level examinations.

At GCSE, students achieved excellent results. Highlights included Angus, who achieved eight grade 9s and two grade 8s, and Livia, who achieved two grade 9s, five grade 8s and two grade 7s. Ruby and Jayden also excelled, each securing eight grade 8s and 9s.

Both Angus and Livia shared their feelings after receiving their results. They expressed how immensely grateful they were for the support of their parents during what was a very demanding time.

Sixth Form students also enjoyed strong A Level outcomes, securing places at leading universities, as well as competitive apprenticeships and employment. A few examples are highlighted below.

The school is immensely proud not only of its students' excellent results, but also of the remarkable young people they have become. Their determination, independence, and resilience are truly inspiring.



From left: Livia, Angus, and Headteacher Miss McHugh.



Jayden



Ruby



Vivian achieved A*, A*, A* and is set to study Maths at Durham University.



Jessica achieved A*, A*, A and is set to study Medicine at the University of Birmingham.



Amelia achieved A*, A*, A, C and is set to study Maths at King's College, London.



Stefan achieved A, A, A, A, B and is set to study War Studies at King's College, London.