



# Messenger

Documenting the life and learning at the St Francis Trust



*'Engineers' building their future at St Paul's*

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Mr Celano  
Chief Executive Officer

## How being a multi-school family benefits pupils and staff

Sometimes it is helpful to remember what is truly important in life – taking a moment to focus on our priorities. As a Trust, one key priority is how we ensure that being a Multi-Academy Trust brings unique benefits to staff and pupils, as compared to when our schools were individual organisations. I am delighted that this newsletter is full of examples of exactly that, and it is my pleasure to highlight just a few in this introduction.

Our recent Staff Training Day (page 6) was our biggest ever training event; providing professional development for more than 250 of our Teachers and Teaching Assistants. As a group of nine schools, we are able to offer a far wider range of professional development activities for staff and at a lower cost than would have been possible for individual schools. This is a double-win for both staff and pupils arising directly from our being a Trust family: the training is broader, and upskills more staff, saves each school money, and from thereon the pupils benefit directly.

Naturally, the Catholic life of our staff and pupils is a top priority, which makes me doubly delighted to see coverage of the beautiful Trust Carol Service in which hundreds of pupils and parents heard the massed choirs from across our schools – an unforgettable experience for all those present. We often hear

evaluations and testimonies from pupils telling us of how the larger-scale events and faith-building moments with peers from other schools really helps them to grow in their faith.

I would also like to celebrate the work that goes on 'behind the scenes' to strengthen our schools. As a Trust, we can harness joint purchasing, contracting, efficiencies and Academy-only income streams, which in turn generates income to support school budgets during these challenging financial times. As a family of schools, we have raised and saved £4.5m as of Spring 2026, and I would like to thank the Finance Support Staff featured on page 10, who work tirelessly to maximise these benefits for our schools.

I hope you enjoy reading this newsletter, and thank you for your continued support of our mission to ensure that pupils and staff always benefit from being part of our Trust family.



Pupils wrote wishes and hopes on olive-shaped cards and placed them on a decorative tree, symbolising peace and harmony.

## Trust Chaplaincy Team Gathers for Day of Reflection

**Nearly 90 young chaplains from across the Trust** came together for a special day of prayer and reflection ahead of the Feast of St Francis of Assisi.

Representatives from all nine schools gathered to give thanks for their school communities and explore how they can continue to share God's Word within their own schools and across the wider Trust family.

Drawing inspiration from the example of their patron saint, pupils prayed for strength and guidance to help build communities rooted in compassion, kindness and love – places where everyone feels supported and valued.

Each participant received a Chaplaincy badge in recognition of their commitment to living and sharing the values of St Francis through service and daily actions. Pupils also wrote their wishes and hopes on olive-shaped cards and placed them on a decorative tree, symbolising peace and harmony across the Trust.

The gathering provided a valuable opportunity for pupils and teachers to exchange ideas and plan fundraising initiatives for the year ahead.



Each pupil received a Chaplaincy badge in recognition of their commitment to living and sharing the values of St Francis.

# Trust Primary Pupils Perform at 'Young Voices'

Trust primary pupils joined thousands of children from across the country to take part in 'Young Voices' at The O2, London.

Choir members from St Paul's in Cheshunt, Sacred Heart in Ware, as well as St Augustine's and St Cross both in Hoddesdon, proudly performed at the event, enjoying an unforgettable opportunity to sing as part of one of the world's largest school choir concerts.

Performing alongside other schools, pupils experienced the excitement of live music while developing teamwork and confidence in a world-class arena. One of the pupils from Sacred Heart shared the event "was so good – I have still not got my voice back!"

Katie Worton-Geer, Headteacher of St Paul's, said the event offered a memorable celebration of music and community, inspiring children

through the power of singing together.

Joanne Walsh, Executive Headteacher of St Augustine's and St Cross, added: "It was a joyful and uplifting experience for our pupils. We are proud of the children for their enthusiasm and outstanding performance. The children from St Augustine's loved the 'Wicked Medley.'" She added: "Choir members from St Cross opened their hearts, sang beautifully, and thoroughly enjoyed the experience."

The pupils returned to school with wonderful memories of the evening, having had the unforgettable experience of performing at one of London's most iconic venues.





St Mary's Catholic School in Bishop's Stortford



St Paul's Catholic Primary School in Cheshunt

# One Trust, Different Journeys Voices from St Paul's and St Mary's

Schools join St Francis of Assisi Catholic Academy Trust at different stages, but shared experience quickly emerges – a strengthened Catholic identity, collective support, and long-term stability. Headteachers from St Paul's in Cheshunt and St Mary's in Bishop's Stortford reflect on the impact of being part of the Trust from both recent and long-standing perspectives.

For Katie Worton-Geer, Headteacher of St Paul's, joining the Trust has been transformative. *"The biggest change has been the sense of belonging,"* she explains. *"We immediately became part of a wider Catholic family."* She highlights the Trust support in Religious Education, SEND and leadership development, while centralised HR, finance and safeguarding systems. *"This has reduced pressures on school leaders and allowed us to focus more clearly on teaching, learning and pupil wellbeing."*

From a longer-term perspective, Deirdre McHugh, Headteacher of St Mary's and one of the earliest schools to join the Trust, describes the growing impact over time. *"Being part of the Trust has brought stability and confidence,"* she says. *"We have made significant progress through shared expertise, targeted school improvement support and leadership coaching."* She notes that safeguarding and estates management have been areas of strength.

Miss McHugh adds, *"Importantly, we have retained our school's identity while benefiting from collective responsibility and support. The Trust has provided a strong foundation for sustainable improvement, ensuring we continue to serve our community with confidence and purpose."*

While their journeys differ, both schools share the same outcome – a stronger sense of belonging and shared purpose.



Katie Worton-Geer



Deirdre McHugh

# 250 Staff Gather for Trust's Biggest Training Day Yet

The largest gathering in the Trust's history saw 250 teachers and teaching assistants come together at St Mary's Catholic School for the annual Trust conference – this year expanded for the first time to include a dedicated programme for teaching assistants.

*“Where in the past there was rivalry, now we ask institutions to converge. Unity is our most prophetic strength”*

Delegates heard from guest speakers and participated in workshops covering behaviour management, support for children with special educational needs, and curriculum leadership.

Opening the conference, CEO Andrew Celano set out the Trust's vision as a collaborative enterprise.

*“Our schools, staff, pupils and communities are stronger as a result of working together,” he said. “That vision has become our lived reality and now we are ready to take this approach further. We are looking forward to growing our*

*Trust family, with more secondary and primary schools joining over the coming terms and years.”*

Deputy CEO Barbara O'Connor reinforced this message, drawing on Pope Leo XIV's recent Apostolic Letter on Catholic education.

*“Where in the past there was rivalry, now we ask institutions to converge. Unity is our most prophetic strength,” she quoted.*

Teaching staff gave positive feedback, describing the training as practical, relevant, and an excellent reset for the start of the year.



Staff from across the Trust listen to the keynote speaker at St Mary's.



# Trust Schools Gather for Festive Carol Service

**More than 200 pupils filled St Augustine's Church with festive spirit and joyful music as all nine Trust schools came together for the annual Carol Service in December.**

Each school performed an individual carol before joining together as a Trust to sing alongside the wider congregation. Parents were invited to attend, making the service a true celebration for the whole school community.

The event showcased the strength of music and leadership across the Trust, with pupils and staff working together to support and inspire one another.

The Trust was pleased to be supported by the St Mary's Band, while St Cross received special mention for its handbell performance, which added an extra highlight to the service.



St Augustine's Choir rehearsing in preparation for the Carol Service.

Pupils of St Cross rehearsing handbells ahead of the annual Carol Service.



# Farewell After 36 Years in Education

A personal reflection by Michelle Fusi, former Headteacher of Sacred Heart

I will be saying goodbye to Sacred Heart, where I have had the privilege of serving as Headteacher since September 2013. During my time here, countless children have passed through our gates, and I have had the pleasure of meeting so many wonderful and memorable people.

Being a headteacher means wearing many hats. It is a challenging role, certainly – but it is also one of the most rewarding. I have been fortunate to work alongside outstanding teachers, including some who have gone on to headships of their own, all of whom have shown unwavering commitment to our school. I have also been supported by exceptional current staff, our dedicated office team, and our governors, whose guidance, encouragement, and friendship have meant so much.

There isn't one single standout moment from my years at Sacred Heart; every day has brought something different, with surprises both big and small. If I had to name what I will miss most, it would be the wonderful community that makes Sacred Heart so special – our children, staff, governors, and parents. Greeting the children each morning and sharing in our Friday Celebration Assemblies will be particularly hard to leave behind.

Sacred Heart has a remarkable ethos, and I know it will continue to evolve and flourish, with exceptional staff guiding exceptional children.



Michelle Fusi

## Trust Schools Mark Feast of St Francis with Prayer and Creativity



At St Mary's, pupils began the day with a special Examen reflection, focusing on the life and mission of St Francis.

**Prayerful liturgies, thoughtful reflections and hands-on activities** marked the Feast of St Francis of Assisi across all Trust schools.

Pupils took part in Masses, chapel prayers and special assemblies, learning about St Francis's life, his values and his care for creation.

Children explored these themes through music, art and craft, creating displays inspired by nature, animals.



# St Paul's Pupils Shine in National Radio Competition



Radio Maria's Priest Director Fr Toby and St Paul's pupil Zanna in the studio.

**A pupil from St Paul's in Cheshunt has claimed top honours in the Radio Maria England 2025 'Young Broadcasters' and 'Young Herald' national school competitions, showcasing outstanding creativity, faith, and confident communication.**

Year 5 pupil Zanna won First Place in the Young Broadcasters Competition with her entry "Gaming and Virtues" – an inspiring accomplishment. She also gained Joint Second Place in the Young Herald Competition (Ages 7–11) with her piece 'May We Be One as You Are One', demonstrating her talents in both creative writing and music.

These results reflect not only the dedication and effort of our pupils, but also the school's commitment to nurturing young people to use their gifts to share the Gospel.



'On Air' – St Paul's pupil Zanna during the competition

## Trust Members Join Jubilee Pilgrimage Walks

The Trust was pleased to take part in two Jubilee Pilgrimage Walks organised by the Diocese of Westminster Education Service – one for Headteachers, and another for staff members.

Following the same pilgrimage route, both groups enjoyed the opportunity to come together in faith and prayer, reflecting on the Jubilee theme and sharing fellowship along the way.



Headteachers at Westminster Cathedral.



The Trust's Executive and Central Teams at St Etheldreda's, Ely Place.

# Trust Finance Teams Unite for Strategic Planning Meeting

**The Trust's central finance team and school finance leads** came together for a productive in-person meeting to review the Trust's financial position, priorities, and key updates.

The meeting provided a clear picture of how schools are managing budgets in a challenging climate, while highlighting the collective strengths of operating as a Trust.

Discussions focused on audit feedback, HR guidance, long-term procurement opportunities, and sharing examples of best practice. A highlight was the exploration of how strong HR processes can deliver financial savings across various situations.

The review of the annual audit report confirmed that robust financial processes are in place across the Trust and demonstrated how finance teams work collaboratively for the benefit of pupils.



Central finance team members and school finance leads came together to review priorities and share key Finance and HR updates.

Looking forward, the group discussed future procurement opportunities and the budget setting process for the upcoming season. The meeting closed with clear action points and a reaffirmed commitment to using Trust-wide resources effectively so every school can continue to thrive.

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## Celebrating Success in Supporting Specific Learning Difficulties

By Emma Overett, SEND Executive Lead

**As SEND Executive Lead, I am proud to celebrate the continued success of our Trust's provision for pupils with specific learning difficulties (SpLD), particularly in literacy, through the implementation and embedding of the IDL programme.**

Specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, affect the way pupils process information, particularly in reading, spelling and writing. Early identification and targeted intervention are crucial in ensuring pupils are supported to reach their full potential. The process of embedding and over learning taught content is imperative for long term retention and progress for pupils with SpLD and those with difficulties with reading and spelling.

IDL is a computer-based, personalised assessment and intervention programme designed to support



pupils with SpLD and children who find reading and spelling more challenging. It works by delivering short, structured daily or weekly sessions that target gaps in literacy (and mathematics), while providing progress data for staff. St Francis Trust has funded annual IDL subscriptions for all nine schools, now in its second year, with SENCos and teachers monitoring pupil progress every eight weeks.

The impact has been significant. Eight schools are using IDL not only as an intervention tool but also as a screening tool to help identify pupils with possible SEND.

This Trust-wide investment has supported over 130 pupils across eight schools, demonstrating our shared commitment to inclusive, evidence-based practice and improving outcomes for all learners.



# NEWS FROM AROUND THE TRUST

## Brand New Library Opens at St Joseph's (Hertford)

St Joseph's (Hertford) has celebrated the installation of a brand-new library, made possible thanks to the fantastic efforts of FOSJ (Friends of St Joseph's).

Over recent months, the parent committee worked tirelessly, organising a range of fun fundraising events to support the project. An underused area of the school has now been transformed into a vibrant library hub where pupils can share books, enjoy stories, and nurture their love of reading.

The school extends its thanks to Hayley (Chair of FOSJ) and Christopher (Governor) for their instrumental roles in bringing this project to life.



The new library at St Joseph's (Hertford)



One of the new art installations at St Joseph's (Bishop's Stortford).

## New Art Installations Brighten St Joseph's (Bishop's Stortford)

Pupils and staff at St Joseph's (Bishop's Stortford) are delighted with new art installations funded by the school's governors. Children were excited to see new images of their house saints revealed in the hall, bringing big smiles all round.

*"I love our new welcome wall – it makes me feel happy because it's so bright,"* said one pupil.

*"Now all our visitors will know the Mission Statement like we do,"* added another.

A third shared: *"My favourite bit is the tree – our brains and hearts grow like trees until we are full of knowledge and kindness."*



## St Joseph's Achieves Outstanding in Catholic Inspection

**St Joseph's (Bishop's Stortford) has achieved an overall grading of Outstanding, with eight 'Outstanding' judgements out of nine following a Catholic Schools Inspection in late November.**

The inspection evaluated Catholic Life and Mission, Religious Education, and Collective Worship, with the school judged outstanding overall across all three areas.

Headteacher Ann Cassidy-Jones said the results reflected a thriving school community.

*"I am absolutely delighted with the outcome," she said. "The inspection was a wonderful opportunity to share our successes and have our self-evaluation externally validated."*

Inspectors praised the school's positive and caring culture, noting that relationships are outstanding and that staff and pupils know they are loved. The report highlighted that pupils speak confidently about the care shown by their teachers, which fosters a deep sense of belonging.

Behaviour was described as exemplary, with pupils showing high levels of engagement and concentration. Inspectors also commended the school's commitment to ongoing development and its highly effective self-evaluation.

*"Being part of the Trust means we can share best practice with colleagues across other schools, access joint training opportunities, and benefit from specialist support," said Miss Cassidy-Jones. "It gives us access to resources and expertise that we simply wouldn't have as a standalone school."*

The inspectors specifically highlighted the quality of leadership at St Joseph's – an area strengthened through the school's participation in the Trust's collaborative quality assurance and peer review processes.

