

SUMMER 2026



St Francis of Assisi  
CATHOLIC ACADEMY TRUST

# Messenger

Documenting the life and learning at the St Francis Trust



*Pupils from Sacred Heart celebrate Year of St Francis*

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Mr Celano  
Chief Executive Officer

# A Celebration of the Year of St Francis

Welcome to the Summer 2026 edition of the Messenger. As you will see from the front cover we are focussing on a celebration of our Patron, St Francis, over the next few months. This is because this is the 'Year of St Francis' – from January 2026 to January 2027 – dedicated a special Jubilee Year by Pope Leo XIV to mark the 800th anniversary of the Saint's death (1226–2026). Across our Trust we have been arranging events and opportunities for pupils and staff to enjoy and practice the values that St Francis himself inspired us to live by – compassion (especially for the most vulnerable), peacemaking, reconciliation and care for creation.

Therefore I'm hopeful that St Francis will be pleased to see the practical action of 'Charity Week' in each of our schools (p5) which has successfully raised thousands of pounds for charities like CAFOD and Mary's Meals who support some of the most vulnerable in society. As part of the Year of St Francis we enjoyed a Mass (p3) for over 100 of our Pupil Chaplaincy Leaders – celebrated by Fr Emmanuel from the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal – in which pupils heard stories including of how St Francis befriended the fearsome Wolf of Gubbio, and in so doing taught us, amongst other things, the importance of compassion towards all living creatures – even the ones that frighten us!

You will find Franciscan values in many of the articles in this Messenger. Whether that be from the multi-school collaboration of our SEND lead (p10) working to support pupils with extra needs, or from our Trust Leaders (p8) working across our schools to ensure the best start for our youngest and most vulnerable, I hope you enjoy reading the ways in which the values of our Trust and our schools are being lived out.

Thank you for your interest in our family of schools – please do keep our pupils, staff and communities in your thoughts and prayers.

# Celebrating the Year of St Francis Across the Trust

Over 100 Chaplaincy team members and pupils from across the Trust gathered for the Year of St Francis Mass, marking the beginning of this special anniversary year. This special year, marking 800 years since the death of St Francis of Assisi, offers pupils a meaningful opportunity to reflect on his life and values.

Held at St Mary's Catholic School in Bishop's Stortford, the Mass was celebrated by Fr Emmanuel from the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal. He showed the pupils the importance of the Mass, our relationship with God and how St Francis could be a guide to total devotion to him. A choir and musicians from St Mary's accompanied the liturgy with beautiful hymns throughout the Mass.

At the end of the Mass, Thomas Hutchinson, Assistant Headteacher (Catholic Life), thanked Fr Emmanuel and Brother Paul for their spiritual guidance. He encouraged the Chaplaincy team members to share the message of the Gospel within their schools and communities, following the example of St Francis in showing care and compassion for others.

Following this celebration, Chaplaincy Teams across the Trust began launching the Year of St Francis in their own schools through liturgy assemblies before the Easter break.

Pupils worked collaboratively to prepare the assemblies, creating presentations, practising readings, and rehearsing their roles with enthusiasm and dedication. The liturgy focused on St Francis' message of peace, kindness, and care for others.

Through Gospel stories such as *The Good Samaritan*, pupils explored how to live out these values in daily life – showing kindness through simple actions like helping others, using kind words, and welcoming new friends. Younger pupils also learnt about

the story of the *Wolf of Gubbio*, reflecting on compassion for all living things.

The assemblies concluded with prayers and a shared mission to be more caring, forgiving, and thoughtful. Pupils left inspired to make a positive difference in their communities.



# Welcome to EYFS – Where Little Journeys Begin

By Lisa McLaughlin, EYFS Lead

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is where the magic of learning, I believe, truly begins. Designed for children from birth to five, it's a place full of wonder, imagination, and discovery – where every day brings something new.

With 25 years of experience in education, I have seen how these early experiences shape children into confident, curious learners with a zest for life. That spark of discovery, when a child experiences something for the first time, happens every day across Trust Primary schools.

## A Day Full of Wonder

No two days are ever the same in Early Years – and that is what makes it so special! Children learn through play, exploration, and hands-on experiences that spark curiosity and excitement.

In a typical day, your child might:

- Build a castle, become a superhero, or run a pretend café through play-based learning
- Explore the outdoors, splashing in puddles, hunting mini-beasts, discovering nature through our 'OPAL' settings
- Enjoy stories, songs, and rhymes that bring language to life
- Laugh, share, and make friends while developing important social skills

While it feels like fun, every moment is well planned. Our curriculum is carefully sequenced and rooted in how young children learn best, ensuring meaningful progress for every child.

## What Makes Our Trust Special

Across our eight fantastic Trust primary schools, we create places where children do not just learn – they belong, achieve, and most importantly, thrive!

Despite the unique context of school, we are united by a shared vision:

- A warm, nurturing environment where every child feels safe, happy, and valued
- A strong Catholic ethos, rooted in love, kindness, and respect
- Passionate, experienced staff who truly understand how young children learn best
- Close partnerships with families, because we believe that we grow stronger together

We take pride in a community where every child is known, supported, and celebrated.



Lisa leading a fun lesson with her young pupils.

*Our greatest strength lies in our unity.*

St Francis of Assisi

## Growing Confidence, One Step at a Time

In EYFS, children are gently guided to grow in confidence and independence. They learn to try new things, solve problems, express themselves, and believe in their abilities. By the time they move on, they are not only prepared – they are excited for what comes next.

## Come and See the Magic for Yourself

Choosing the right start for your child is so important. We warmly invite you to visit one of our schools and experience the joy, care, and energy that make our EYFS settings so special.

*'The very best Catholic education now and for generations to come.'*  
Your child's journey starts here – we cannot wait to be part of it.



From left to right: Young pupils from Sacred Heart, St Paul's and St Joseph's (Waltham Cross).



# Successful Charity Week Across Trust Schools Raises Funds for Those in Need



At St Joseph's (Bishop's Stortford), the school hall was transformed into a lively marketplace as pupils sold handmade products and ran fun games.

## Schools across the Trust organised Trust Charity Week, each adopting its own themes and activities to raise funds for charitable causes.

Throughout the week, a range of engaging events brought staff and pupils together in meaningful and enjoyable ways, creating lasting memories while showcasing pupils' initiative, teamwork, and commitment to supporting others.

Funds raised by the Trust's schools will support Mary's Meals, helping to provide meals for children in some of the world's poorest countries. On this occasion, St Mary's Catholic

School also raised funds for CAFOD and Across Paths.

At St Joseph's (Bishop's Stortford), pupils from Nursery to Year 6 ran 11 stalls, selling handmade snacks, crafts and gifts, with older pupils taking responsibility for everything from product design, packaging to promotion, demonstrating strong enterprise skills.

At St Joseph's (Hertford), Year 6 pupils organised 'I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here' style challenges

in support of Mary's Meals. They designed and delivered a range of entertaining trails for teachers, including creative smoothie challenges and a messy final challenge, all to great laughter, without anyone saying, "I'm a teacher...get me out of here" The school's special thanks go to the Chaplaincy team and house captains for showing that fundraising can be both fun and impactful.

At St Paul's in Cheshunt, the Chaplaincy Team organised activities including a cake sale and a football penalty shoot-out, encouraging wide participation.

The Trust's schools raised approximately £6,938 for Mary's Meals, helping to provide daily meals for children in some of the poorest parts of the world.

At St Mary's Catholic School, Charity Week was a joyful celebration of service, compassion and generosity. Led by the Year 12 Mission Team, with support from teachers, pupils organised events such as *St Mary's Got Talent and Family Fortunes*, bringing energy and community spirit to the school.

Highlights included the Lip Sync Battle, which was won by teachers for the second year running, and the popular 'Soak the Teacher' event. With the generous support of the whole school, over £8,000 was raised for CAFOD and Across Paths, reflecting a shared commitment to helping those in need.

The Trust extends its sincere thanks to all pupils, staff, and families who contributed to making Charity Week such a meaningful and memorable success.



The St Paul's Chaplaincy Team hosted a cake sale and penalty shoot-out.



St Joseph's (Hertford) pupils led the event with fun teacher trials, including inventive smoothie challenges.

# A Celebration of Reading Across Trust Schools

Pupils and staff across the Trust celebrated World Book Day with a range of engaging activities that promoted a love of reading.

Throughout the day, pupils took part in book-themed events, including costume parades and classroom reading sessions. Many pupils and staff dressed as their favourite book characters, bringing stories to life and creating a vibrant atmosphere across the schools.

As part of the celebrations, pupils across the Trust were inspired by a special visit from Zanna, a Year 5 author from St Paul's in Cheshunt. She shared her writing journey and encouraged pupils to read widely and follow their passion for storytelling.

The celebrations highlighted the joy of reading and encouraged pupils to discover new books and authors.



St Thomas of Canterbury marked World Book Day with a special 'Breakfast with a Book' event, many pupils arrived early to enjoy breakfast and share their favourite stories.



At St Cross, pupils brought World Book Day to life with Alice in Wonderland inspired costumes.



Zanna shared how reading inspired her writing during a session with pupils and staff at Sacred Heart.

## Trust Pupils Explore Curiosity in British Science Week

Schools across the Trust enjoyed a fantastic week celebrating British Science Week 2026, inspired by this year's theme: 'Curiosity – What's Your Question?'

The week began with launch assemblies, where pupils were encouraged to think like scientists and record the scientific questions they were curious about. These thoughtful and imaginative ideas were explored further through classroom discussions led by teachers and science ambassadors.

Many schools also held a science-themed dress-up day, with pupils and staff arriving as inspiring scientists or in creative science-

inspired costumes. It was a fun and engaging way to celebrate science and spark conversation across the school community.

Primary schools also took part in a Trust-wide competition, investigating their own scientific questions and presenting their ideas in creative ways, including posters, models, speeches, drawings and presentations. Winners from each phase were selected within schools before being shared across the Trust.



# Two Executive Headteacher Appointments

The Trust is delighted to announce the appointment of two new Executive Headteachers for three of our primary schools.

In their roles, Mrs Keating has strategic oversight of Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School and serves as Executive Head of Primary School Improvement for St Francis Trust, while Mrs Worton-Geer oversees both St Paul's Catholic Primary School and St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School.

In the recent letter to parents, Mrs Keating outlined her priorities for the summer term, placing a strong emphasis on the foundations of effective learning. Key areas of focus include the development of pupils' communication skills through Oracy, enriching play experiences through

OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning), and strengthening provision for pupils with SEND.

Similarly, in her letter to parents, Mrs Worton-Geer set out her vision for the schools she leads, emphasising high standards, a nurturing and inclusive environment, and a shared commitment to ensuring the best possible outcomes for all pupils. She highlighted the importance of strong partnerships between school and home, and a balanced focus on both academic achievement and pupils' wider development. Her message reflects a commitment to building on existing strengths while working



Katie Worton-Geer



Michelle Keating

closely with staff, pupils and families to support continuous development.

With their extensive experience within the Trust and dedication to education, both leaders will continue to play a key role in strengthening the schools and supporting positive outcomes for all pupils.



Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School in Ware.

St Thomas of Canterbury Catholic Primary School in Puckeridge.

St Paul's Catholic Primary School in Cheshunt.

# Meet Our TLR Leaders

Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) leaders play a vital role in driving high-quality teaching and enriching pupils' learning experiences across key areas, including EYFS, Catholic Life, and Oracy & Writing. Here, they share their key responsibilities and reflect on the impact of their work in supporting both staff and pupils.

**Thomas Hutchinson**  
Assistant Lead of Catholic Life



In my role as Assistant Headteacher with responsibility for Catholic Life at St Mary's, alongside teaching History and RE, I have led the development of Catholic ethos, placing prayer, liturgy, and formation at the centre of school life. As Assistant Lead of Catholic Life for the Trust, I support schools through high-quality teacher formation, enabling staff

to confidently lead pupils in prayer. I work closely with leadership teams to embed our shared Catholic mission in daily practice and coordinate cross-trust liturgies, bringing schools together in celebration of our faith. Through this, I foster a strong sense of unity and shared identity, ensuring Catholic Life remains at the heart of the Trust.

**Lisa McLaughlin**  
EYFS Lead



As Assistant Headteacher at St Joseph's (Bishop's Stortford), I lead Early Years and Religious Education, supporting children at the start of their learning journey and nurturing a love of learning. As RE leader, I promote a strong understanding of the Catholic faith and high-quality teaching, recognised in a recent positive RE Inspection. I am proud to be part of

the first TLR roles, highlighting the Trust's commitment to enhancing collaboration and support across all schools. As EYFS Trust Lead, my aim is to work with practitioners to build confidence, develop high-quality provision, and support professional development through evidence-based research to secure the best outcomes for our youngest children.

**Nicky Blackwell**  
Oracy & Writing Lead for EYFS & KS1



I am Early Years and Key Stage 1 Leader at St Augustine's School in Hoddesdon. My key responsibilities include being a Reception Class Teacher as well as leading English, Oracy and RJED across the school. I am committed to nurturing inclusive, high-expectation environments where every child can thrive. I believe strongly in the transformative power of oracy and writing to build confidence, wellbeing,

and long-term success. Across the Trust, I work closely with Headteachers, English and Oracy Leads to strengthen outcomes in writing, embedding a consistent, high-quality oracy-to-writing approach across EYFS and KS1. This work supports improved teaching practice, greater curriculum coherence, and measurable gains in pupil attainment and engagement across all schools.

**Lexi Curran**  
Writing and Oracy Lead



Having taught across KS2, I understand pupils' development as writers and speakers. In my current role leading UKS2, Writing and Oracy at St Joseph's (Bishop's Stortford), I support high-quality writing and purposeful talk. As Writing and Oracy Lead, I am particularly keen to promote a love of writing and

meaningful opportunities for talk, ensuring that all pupils see themselves as confident communicators. I look forward to supporting and building with colleagues to build on the excellent practice already in place, while exploring new ideas that inspire and engage the wonderful children in our care.

# Sporting Excellence Across Trust Schools

Our school community has much to celebrate following recent sports achievements across different year groups and disciplines.

At St Thomas, the Year 6 Thomas Tigers team won the Hertford and Ware School Sports Partnership District Football Tournament in March, conceding only one goal throughout the competition. Their teamwork, effort, and sportsmanship made them a credit to both their school and the Trust.

At Sacred Heart, pupils have shown great enthusiasm and commitment across a range of sporting activities. The football team reached an important milestone by winning the Hertford and Ware School Sports Partnership District Football League, demonstrating strong teamwork and determination. In addition, the school has taken part in 18 further sporting events, giving pupils valuable opportunities to build skills and confidence.

At St Mary's, siblings Isla (Year 9) and Bella K (Year 7) performed very

well at the Hertfordshire Schools Cross Country Championships held in St Albans. Both secured gold medals in their respective races, with Bella winning the Year 7 event and Isla finishing first in the combined Year 8/9 category. Isla has also qualified for the National Schools Final later this year, reflecting her commitment and consistent effort.

We also recognise Year 13 student Kai, a talented athlete and positive role model in the school. He achieved a personal best time of 48.25 seconds in the senior men's semi-final at the British Indoor Athletics Championships. The result highlights his focus and dedication to his sport.

These achievements reflect the continued commitment to sport and active participation across our schools.



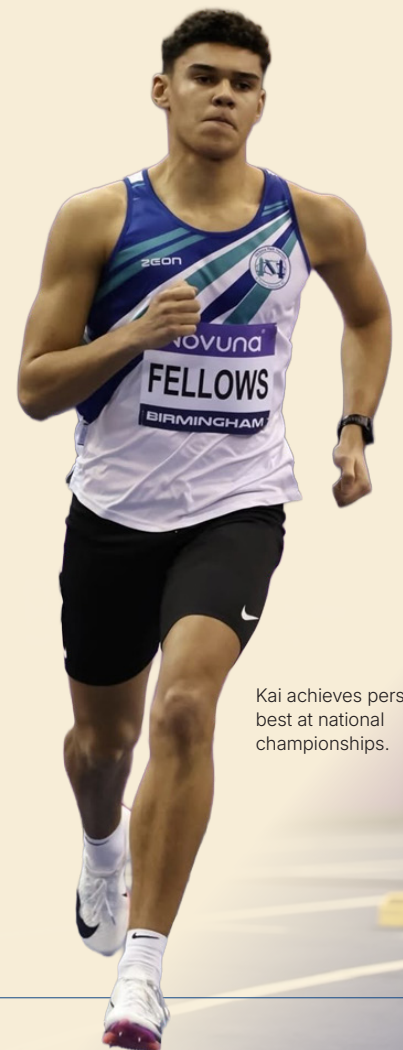
St Mary's siblings shine at cross country championships.



Sacred Heart football team celebrate district tournament in.



Thomas Tigers celebrate tournament victory.



Kai achieves personal best at national championships.

# Cleaning and Catering Update

By Andrew Howard, Chief Finance Officer

We are delighted to share that work is now underway across our Trust to secure new cleaning and catering contracts, launching on 1 September 2026. These services are pivotal to everyday school life. The cleaning contracts will ensure high standards of cleanliness across the Trust schools whilst the catering contract will deliver nutritious, high-quality meals that help our pupils thrive.

This is an exciting opportunity to enhance and reimagine how these essential services are delivered across the Trust.

A robust and competitive tender process is currently in progress, designed to identify reputable suppliers who can deliver outstanding quality, strong operational performance, and meaningful added value across our Trust.

A key strength of this approach is the active involvement of colleagues from every school. Leadership and support staff are playing a central role in evaluating bids and attending supplier presentations, ensuring that decisions reflect the specific needs and priorities of each school.

Following site visits, shortlisted suppliers will present to a panel in June, sharing their vision for service delivery, contract management, and

the wider benefits they can bring to our schools.

All proposals will be carefully assessed against quality, innovation, sustainability, and value for money, ensuring the best possible outcomes for our pupils and staff.

We look forward to sharing further updates as this exciting tender journey progresses.

# Shaping the Future of SEND Support

By Emma Overett, SEND Executive Lead

**Executive Lead Spring term was a pivotal time for SEND news, with the latest reforms published alongside discussions and initial plans beginning to take shape nationally and locally.**

On 17 April, I attended Hertfordshire's SEND Reforms Co-production event, where colleagues from health, SEND specialist teams and school planning came together to begin mapping out the county's response to the elements of the White Paper which do not require legislative change. Hertfordshire's rapid and collaborate response I hope brings reassurance to the parents of SEND children.

The focus was clear: strengthening high-quality ordinarily available

provision and ensuring children receive the right support earlier. A key discussion point was the "Expert at Hand" model, which aims to give schools timely access to professional advice at a targeted level – helping meet pupils' needs before escalation to an EHCP becomes necessary. Lively discussions were had around the amount of practical time each pupil will receive delivered by experts and how this can be effectively implemented equitably in Hertfordshire.

These changes will take time to embed, and I want to reassure parents and carers that we will be navigating this carefully and thoughtfully as a Trust. In my role I will be working closely with partners to ensure our schools remain informed, contribute meaningfully, and implement

changes in a way that genuinely benefits our pupils and families. Our families and staff are called to contribute their views to the consultation process which remains open until 18 May 2026 and can be accessed via [www.consult.education.gov.uk/send-reform/](http://www.consult.education.gov.uk/send-reform/).

At St Francis Trust, our priority remains the same: providing inclusive, responsive support for every child. We are committed to being part of this evolving system and ensuring these reforms translate into real, positive impact over time.





## NEWS FROM AROUND THE TRUST



### Dance and Music Festival Highlights from Sacred Heart

Pupils from Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School recently took part in both the Dance Festival and Music Festival, enjoying memorable opportunities to perform and collaborate with other local schools.

The Dance Festival was an amazing experience for the pupils, with this year's theme based on films. Pupils performed a lively routine inspired by *Pirates of the Caribbean*. After weeks of practice, they travelled to a secondary school to perform. With several schools taking part, the pupils felt proud that their performance stood out. Everything went smoothly, and it was a truly enjoyable and rewarding day.

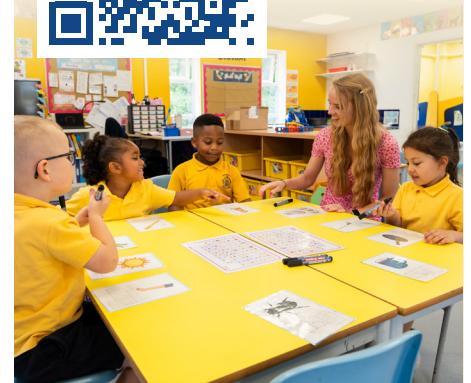
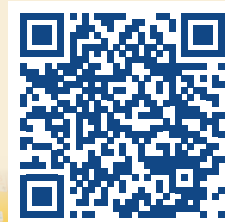
In April, the school's Year 5 pupils participated in a Music Festival locally, where they performed *The Journey* by Chris Hazell. The performance was conducted by Charlotte Brosnan, a professional singer and musician. Pupils had the opportunity to perform as part of a large choir along with other local schools, accompanied by a live band.

### Welcoming Families to Our Primary Schools

The Trust's primary schools warmly welcome prospective parents considering Nursery and Reception places. Families are encouraged to get in touch with their nearest Trust school to find out more and explore what is on offer.

Please scan the QR code to visit our school websites.

[stfrancistrust.net/our-schools](http://stfrancistrust.net/our-schools)



### Junior Duke Award Success at St Thomas of Canterbury

St Thomas of Canterbury is proud to celebrate the success of its pupils in the Junior Duke Award, a programme that encourages independence, resilience and the development of practical life skills.

Sophie, a Year 2 pupil, has made excellent progress towards her Gold Mini Duke Award and is on track to receive her badge at the end of the year – an outstanding achievement.

Talking about her experience, Sophie shared her enthusiasm for the programme. She particularly enjoys the cookery element, regularly making homemade meatballs, and also likes practising her packing skills. She explained that the Award has helped build her confidence in cooking, and she now enjoys preparing food for her family.



## NEWS FROM AROUND THE TRUST



### Celebrating St Mary's Year 13 Students' Prestigious Offers

St Mary's Catholic School congratulates four of its Year 13 students, who after a challenging application and interview process, are now all holding offers from medical schools, including UCL, Queen Mary, Kent and Medway, City St George's and ARU.

The school would also like to extend their congratulations to two students who have secured degree-level apprenticeships with Price Bailey LLP (accountancy firm) and BDO Global (accountancy firm) – an excellent pathway that combines professional experience with academic study. In addition, many of St Mary's students have secured offers from the top

10 universities in the country, including Durham, Loughborough, Bath, Warwick, Lancaster and Exeter.

The school is incredibly proud of its students' accomplishments and wishes them every success as they continue their studies. Keep aiming high!

### St Paul's Year 5 Pupils Excel in HFL Maths Challenge

Year 5 pupils from St Paul's recently took part in the HFL Year 5 Maths Challenge, a fun and engaging competition designed to test problem-solving, reasoning and teamwork skills. Competing against other schools, the pupils tackled a range of mathematical challenges that required both accuracy and quick thinking

The pupils scored an impressive 142 points in the heats, well above the average score of 123, which secured them a place in the final. This is a fantastic achievement, and the school is very proud of its pupils' performance.

The HFL Year 5 Maths Challenge, organised by HFL Education, is an inter-school competition that promotes teamwork and problem-solving through a range of engaging mathematical activities.

