



— Friday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2025 —

# HEADLINES

St Mary's Catholic School



Dear St Mary's Community,

I wanted to take a moment to share some wonderful highlights from our recent school activities.

First, I must extend a heartfelt thank you to our incredible students and parents for their tremendous support during our Open Evening on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> September. Watching our Year 5 and Year 6 prospective students tour the school was truly inspiring. Our current students were absolutely outstanding - kind, well-mannered, engaging, and enthusiastic as they toured the families around our school and visited the various departments. The atmosphere was nothing short of fantastic. I could not be more proud of how they represented St Mary's. A special thanks goes to you, our parents who supported the event by managing drop-offs and collections to enable your children to volunteer and give their time or school service. Thank you!

We had a remarkable spiritual experience with our Year 12 and Year 13 Retreat on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> September. Our Sixth Form students as a collective of 16-18 year olds were privileged to spend a day of reflection and prayer, guided by the exceptionally gifted Fr Paschal, Fr Clement, and Mr Hutchinson. The retreat's theme, 'Tend your soil', was a powerful message empowering our students to explore and utilise their unique gifts and talents, encouraging them to be beacons of light in their future journeys. You will see a collection of photos in this edition to get a taste of the student experience. Retreats are a key feature of our school calendar, to ensure every child has the reflective opportunity for spiritual growth and finding their anchor through the Gospel Values.

I'm also excited to share an exciting opportunity for our talented students! We are launching our School Musical for 2025-2026 - Moana Junior! Calling all actors, singers, musicians, and dancers: auditions will take place on 1<sup>st</sup> October. I warmly encourage every student with a passion for performing arts or who simply wish to join the auditions and be part of this fantastic production. Ms Wojcik, Ms Matthews and the production team are very excited to cast this year's school musical.

May I take this opportunity to wish you and your families a restful and relaxing weekend.

God Bless,

Miss Deirdre McHugh  
Head Teacher

## DATES FOR THE DIARY

**Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> - September**  
Yr 11  
Information evening

**Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> October**  
Yr 13  
Information evening

**Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> October**  
Flu  
Immunisation

**Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> October**  
Yr 8  
Information evening

**Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> October**  
Yr 13  
Information evening

**GO 4 Schools**

Click [here](#) to access your child's academic achievement and progress data.

LOVE - RESPECT - FLOURISH

# Year 12 and 13 Retreat

On Friday, our Sixth Form students gathered at St. Theresa's Church, Stansted, for a retreat day themed **"Tend Your Soil"**, inspired by the Parable of the Sower.

The day began with Mass, beautifully enriched by music and readings, inviting students to reflect on how they might prepare their hearts to receive God's word. As Jesus says: "The seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it" (Matthew 13:23). Entering Sixth Form is a time of new freedoms and responsibilities, and the Mass encouraged students to consider how listening to God's word can bear fruit in their lives—kindness, resilience, integrity, and compassion.

Afterwards, team-building games brought energy and laughter, strengthening community before lunch in the parish grounds. A highlight was Fr. Paschal's talk, reminding students that Sixth Form is a time of choice and growth. He gave practical examples of how to "tend their soil"—through prayer, wise decisions, and perseverance—and encouraged them to let faith be their compass.

*"The retreat was a really positive experience and felt very different from our usual school routine. We began with Mass, which included lots of singing led by a school band that created a great atmosphere. Afterwards, we went outside for some games and activities before enjoying lunch provided by the school, with time to relax in the sun. To finish the day, Father Pascal shared his unique story and answered questions in a Q&A, which gave me a genuine insight into the priesthood. He then picked up his guitar and led us in more songs, which was a great way to end. At the end, I had a conversation with him, and we both agreed that organising another trip like this would be fantastic.*

Sam



*"The Sixth Form retreat was an incredibly enriching experience. Father Pashcal was engaging and very insightful, guiding us through reflections that really made us think about our own faith journeys. The music was amazing and lively though I may be biased, as I had the opportunity to sing for the Mass, but it truly lifted the whole atmosphere and brought everyone together. I really enjoyed the team-building exercises, which were not only fun but were also linked to the theme of the Mass, The Seed and the Different Types of Ground, helping us to reflect on the Bible passage and how our own hearts can be fertile ground for growth and faith.*

Marie

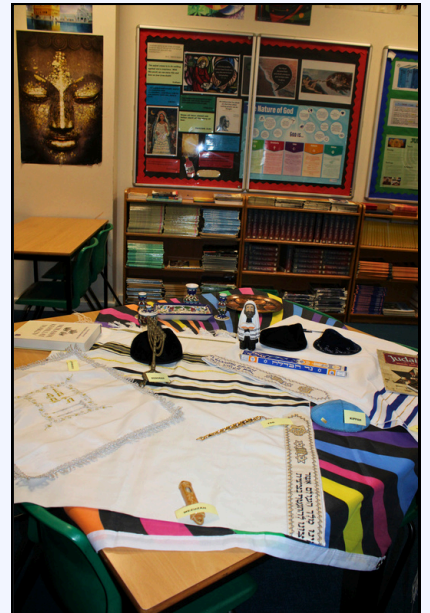
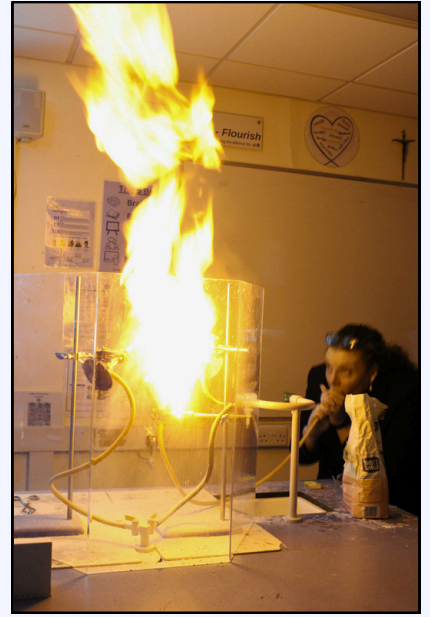
*"Friday's Sixth Form retreat was a meaningful day of connection and reflection. Team-building games helped us bond and build trust, while quiet moments gave space to think about our values and goals. Father Pascal's motivational talk was a highlight—his message of resilience and purpose left a lasting impression and set a positive tone for the year ahead.*

Patricia



We are deeply grateful to Fr. Clement, Fr. Pashcal and the parish community for their warm welcome, and to all staff and students who made the day so special. The retreat reminded our Sixth Formers that the choices they make now are like tending their soil—preparing not just for exams, but for lives rooted in faith, resilience, and a commitment to bearing good fruit.

# Open Evening snapshots



## Prayer Intention Requests

As a Catholic school community, prayer is at the heart of everything we do. We believe, as St James reminds us, to “pray for one another” (James 5:16) and to lift up each other’s needs to God. Prayer not only deepens our relationship with the Lord but also strengthens us as a community of faith, reminding us that none of us journey alone.

We would like to invite you to share any special prayer requests you may have – for your family, friends, or loved ones. These intentions will be remembered during our student (Wednesdays at 9.30am) and Staff (Friday) morning prayer, so that together we can place them before God with faith and hope.

If you would like to send in a prayer request, please follow the link below . All requests will be treated anonymously, and with care and respect.

<https://forms.office.com/e/ct8Mb7rJPA>

Thank you for joining us in living out our Catholic mission to support and pray for one another.

God Bless.



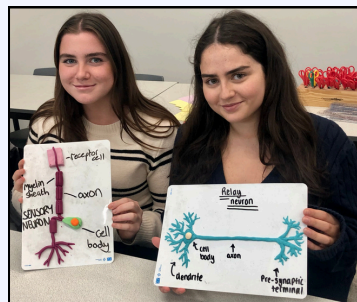
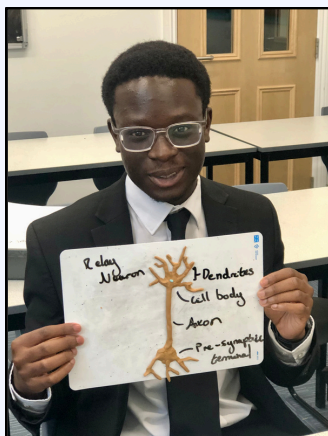
## Lunchtime Mass

Fr John Cunningham has kindly agreed to come in every Monday for the next four weeks to offer mass at lunchtime. This is a great opportunity for the students to focus on Christ in their day and celebrate the eucharist as a community. He will alternate the lunchtimes as follows. Please encourage your son/daughter to attend mass, we will make sure there is enough time to eat afterwards before their next lesson.

- 29th September - Early Lunch
- 6th October - Late Lunch
- 13th October - Early Lunch
- 20th October - Late Lunch

# Year 13 Psychology

Year 13 had fun using Play-Doh to recreate different types of neurons as part of the Biopsychology topic in Psychology. This nostalgia-filled activity created quite a bit of competition and was an enjoyable way to learn about the importance of the nervous system.



# Online Safety Webinar

Together with the other Bishop's Stortford secondary schools, we have set up a parent/carer online safety webinar.

The session will be run by the excellent ECP Safeguarding and will take place on **13th October between 7pm and 8pm.**

The session will include:

- The positive side of the online world
- Creating a safer set up at home
- AI
- Grooming
- Social media platforms & online gaming
- Pornography, gambling and addiction
- Digital footprints
- How to have conversations about all of the above



To join the sessions, you must register in advance using the link below.

**Please note**, there is a limit of 1000 attendees across all the schools so only register if you are definitely going to attend.

Register here: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7542620529914266203>

All attendees are asked to read this document prior to joining the session: <https://tinyurl.com/49zm7y97>

## Notices

Calling all singers, dancers and actors...



St Mary's Catholic School's  
production of

Disney  
**MOANA**  
JR.

Auditions: **1<sup>st</sup> October 2025**

Location: **M1**

Time: **3.30pm**

Please collect an audition pack  
from  
Ms Wojcik or Miss Matthews

LOVE - RESPECT - FLOURISH

Windhill, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, CM23 2NQ Tel: 01279 654901 Email: [info@stmarys.net](mailto:info@stmarys.net)

# What Parents & Carers Need to Know about WHATSAPP

AGE RESTRICTION  
**16+**

in UK and Europe;  
rest of the world 13+

With more than two billion active users exchanging texts, photos, videos and documents, as well as making voice and video calls, WhatsApp is the world's most popular messaging service. Its end-to-end encryption only allows messages to be viewed by the sender and any recipients; not even WhatsApp itself can read them. This privacy issue has been in the spotlight recently, as the UK's Online Safety Bill proposes to end such encryption on private messaging; WhatsApp is unwilling to do so and has reportedly considered withdrawing its service in the UK should this legislation go ahead.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

### EVOLVING SCAMS

WhatsApp's popularity makes it a lucrative hunting ground for scammers. Recent examples include posing as the target's child, requesting a money transfer because of a spurious 'emergency'. Plus a scam where fraudsters trigger a verification message by attempting to log in to your account, then (posing as WhatsApp) call or text to ask you to repeat the code back to them, giving them access.

### CONTACT FROM STRANGERS

To start a chat, someone only needs the mobile number of the WhatsApp user that they want to message. If your child has ever given their number out to someone they don't know, that person could then contact them via WhatsApp. It's also possible that your child might be added to a group chat (by one of their friends, for example) containing other people that they don't know.

### FAKE NEWS

WhatsApp's connectivity and ease of use allows news to be shared rapidly – whether it's true or not. To combat the spread of misinformation, messages forwarded more than five times on the app now display a "Forwarded many times" label and a double arrow icon. This makes users aware that the message they've just received is far from an original... and might not be entirely factual, either.

### 'VIEW ONCE' CONTENT

The facility to send images or messages that can only be viewed once has led to some WhatsApp users sharing inappropriate images or abusive texts, knowing that the recipient can't re-open them later to use as evidence of misconduct. People used to be able to screenshot this 'disappearing' content – but a recently added WhatsApp feature now blocks this, citing increased privacy.

### CHAT LOCK

Another new option allows users to store certain messages or chats in a separate 'locked chats' folder, saved behind a passcode, fingerprint or face ID authentication. The risk here is that this function creates the potential for young people to hide conversations and content that they suspect their parents wouldn't approve of (such as age-inappropriate material).

### VISIBLE LOCATION

WhatsApp's 'live location' feature lets users share their current whereabouts, which can be helpful for friends meeting up or parents checking that their child's safely on the way home, for example. However, anyone in your child's contacts list or in a mutual group chat can also track their location – potentially letting strangers identify a child's home address or journeys that they make regularly.

## Advice for Parents & Carers ...TYPING...

### EMPHASISE CAUTION

Encourage your child to treat unexpected messages with caution: get them to consider, for example, whether the message sounds like something a friend or relative would really send them. Make sure they know never to share personal details over WhatsApp, and to be wary of clicking on any links in messages. Setting up two-step verification adds a further layer of protection to their WhatsApp account.

### THINKING BEFORE SHARING

Help your child to understand why it's important to stop and think before posting or forwarding something on WhatsApp. It's easy – and all too common – for content to then be shared more widely (even publicly on social media). Encourage your child to consider how an ill-judged message might damage their reputation or upset a friend who sent something to them in confidence.

### ADJUST THE SETTINGS

It's wise to change your child's WhatsApp settings (go to 'Privacy', then 'Groups') to specify which of their contacts can add them to group chats without needing approval; you can give permission to 'My Contacts' or 'My Contacts Except ...'. Additionally, if your child needs to use 'live location', emphasise that they should enable this function for only as long as they need – and then turn it off.

### CHAT ABOUT PRIVACY

Some parents like to check in with their child about how they're using WhatsApp, explaining that it will help to keep them safe. If you spot a 'Locked Chats' folder, you might want to talk about the sort of chats that are in there, who they're with and why your child wants to keep them hidden. Also, if your child has sent any 'view once' content, you could discuss their reasons for using this feature.

### Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



...HEY OSCAR...



National Online Safety®

#WakeUpWednesday

Source: <https://blog.whatsapp.com/an-open-letter> | <https://faq.whatsapp.com/1077018839582332> | [https://faq.whatsapp.com/361005896189245/?helpref=hc\\_fnav](https://faq.whatsapp.com/361005896189245/?helpref=hc_fnav) | <https://www.whatsapp.com/security> | <https://blog.whatsapp.com/chat-lock-making-your-most-intimate-conversations-even-more-private> | <https://www.aura.com/learn/whatsapp-scams>