



Friday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2026

# HEADLINES

St Mary's Catholic School

# HAPPY NEW YEAR



Dear St Mary's Catholic School Community,

A Happy New Year to you and your families. May 2026 be filled with every blessing and happiness.

We start our Spring term with a strong emphasis on teaching and learning. Following our INSET day on 5th January 2026, our focus remains steadfast on securing and maintaining excellence in our standards, ensuring students have quality first teaching and learning in every lesson, every subject, every day.

In the school calendar, over the next few weeks, we have our Y7 and Y9 Parents Evenings coming up shortly, providing valuable opportunities for feedback to parents and student on academic progress and targets to improve directed by your child's class teachers. These evenings are crucial in ensuring every child secures and reaches their target grades. I warmly encourage you to put these dates in your diary and engage fully with this important process of supporting your child's educational journey. A reminder please for parents to log on to [Go4Schools](https://www.go4schools.com) where you can see live data of your child's target grades, assessments and track their curriculum journey and progress data.

This is a live document and is constantly updated as and when assessments are completed and so enables you to track your child's progress in real time.

With the month of January bringing cold and wet weather, I would like to remind parents about some practical considerations. Please ensure your child has a warm winter coat and wears sturdy and sensible school shoes appropriate for the winter weather. These simple preparations will help keep our students comfortable and ready to learn, regardless of the conditions outside. Please do stay safe and warm in the wintry weather.

I wish you and your families a restful and relaxing weekend, we look forward to a productive and inspiring term ahead.

God Bless,  
Deirdre McHugh  
Head Teacher

## DATES FOR THE DIARY

Monday 12<sup>th</sup> -  
Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup>  
January

Year 13 DT Mock  
Exam

Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup>  
January 2026

Ski Trip  
Information  
evening, 6pm

Thursday 15<sup>th</sup>  
January 2026

Year 7 Parents'  
Evening

Saturday 17<sup>th</sup>  
January 2026

BSET Annual  
Future Fair  
@Bishop's  
Stortford College



**GO 4 Schools**

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

### THE DANGERS OF FROZEN WATER

Every year children are at risk when they are tempted to play on the ice formed on open waters and adults find themselves at risk as they attempt to save them. Over 50% of ice related drowning involved an attempted rescue of another person or a dog.

Areas with frozen waters can be beautiful to look at but they are also extremely dangerous. Here are some useful tips to help you enjoy these areas safely.

#### TOP TIPS TO STAY SAFE

**NEVER GO ON THE ICE UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES**  
This includes attempting to rescue another person or animal who may have fallen through the ice.

**ONLY USE WELL LIT AREAS**  
Try to take walks in the daylight but if you must walk in the evening, only use well lit areas and avoid anywhere with water.

**KEEP AWAY FROM THE EDGE OF THE WATER**  
Never go close to the edge or lean over to touch the ice. You may overbalance or trip and fall in.

**ALWAYS WALK WITH AN ADULT OR A GROUP OF FRIENDS**  
Look out for each other and if someone does fall through the ice there will be others around to raise the alarm and get help.

#### WHAT TO DO IF YOU FALL THROUGH THE ICE

Keep calm and shout 'help'!


Spread your arms across the surface of the ice in front of you

Try to kick your legs and pull yourself out of the water and on to the ice

Lie flat, spreading your weight across the surface and pull yourself to the bank, you may find it easier to roll.

If you cannot climb out, wait for help and never let go! As possible, keep your head above the water, press your arms by your side, and keep your legs together.

Once you are safe, it is important that you go to hospital immediately for a check up.



Warning Thin Ice

#### WHAT TO DO IF YOU SEE SOMEONE FALL THROUGH THE ICE

Shout for **'HELP'** and dial **999** or **112** if you can

**DO NOT** walk on to the ice to attempt a rescue

Shout to the person to **'KEEP STILL'** and offer reassurance.

If they are close enough, **LIE DOWN TO AVOID OVERBALANCING** and falling onto the ice, and try to reach them with a tree branch clothing tied together or anything else which can extend your reach.

If you cannot reach them, **SLIDE SOMETHING** which floats across the ice, such as a plastic bottle or a football, so that they can hold on to it to stay afloat whilst help is on the way.

If they are too far away, **WAIT FOR THE EMERGENCY SERVICES** and reassure the casualty from the safety of the bank.

**StayWise**

# Head Teacher's Tea

Just before the Christmas break, we hosted a Head Teacher's Tea to celebrate students who have demonstrated excellent attendance so far this academic year. This special event recognised the commitment, resilience, and positive attitude demonstrated by students who make coming to school every day a priority.

Invited students enjoyed a relaxing afternoon treat of hot chocolate and a selection of cakes, providing a well-deserved reward for their dedication. The event also offered an opportunity for students to spend time with the Head Teacher, reflecting on their achievements and the importance of strong attendance in supporting learning and success.

We are incredibly proud of these students and the example they set for others. Regular attendance plays a vital role in academic progress, wellbeing, and building positive routines, and it was wonderful to acknowledge those who consistently demonstrate this commitment.

Well done to all students who attended the Head Teacher's Tea – we look forward to celebrating many more successes throughout the year.



# Sporting Achievements

We are delighted to share and celebrate an exceptional sporting achievement by one of our students, Gbemisola (Y9).

On Saturday 13th December 2025, Gbemisola competed in the 2025 U17 Women's Indoor Pentathlon held at Lee Valley. She delivered an outstanding performance, finishing second overall with an impressive 3,052 points.

According to *Power of 10* athletics data, this remarkable result places Gbemisola within the Top 50 athletes nationally in the U17 category for High Jump, 60m Hurdles and Pentathlon (overall).

This achievement reflects her dedication and commitment to excellence, and we are incredibly proud of her success. She is a wonderful example of what can be achieved through hard work and determination.

Congratulations, Gbemisola – and may God continue to bless and guide you on your journey.



# Inter-House Swimming Competition

The recent Inter House Swimming Competition, held at the Bishop's Stortford College swimming pool, was a fantastic event at which students from Years 7–10 represented their Houses with enthusiasm and exemplary sportsmanship.

The full programme of races across year groups saw students demonstrating impressive commitment both in and out of the water. For many, this was an opportunity to compete in a formal swimming event, and they rose to the challenge admirably.

Throughout the afternoon, students supported one another wholeheartedly, cheering on teammates and respecting competitors from other Houses. The standard of swimming was high, and several races were decided by the narrowest of margins.

Congratulations to all the students who represented their Houses. Taking part in an Inter-House competition requires courage, preparation, and a positive mindset, and every swimmer should be proud of their contribution.

Thank you to the staff and House teams who helped organise the event; the Bishop's Stortford College pool staff for their support and facilities; and parents and carers for all your support!



# Highest House Points - Autumn Term 2

Throughout the last half term, students worked exceptionally hard to earn house points through their commitment to learning and positive behaviour, as well as their contribution to school life. These points reflect the values we aim to nurture across the school, and we are incredibly proud of the effort shown by so many students.

To recognise this dedication, students with the highest house point totals in Years 7 - 10 were entered into a prize draw. The winning students each received a gift voucher as a small token of our appreciation for their consistent hard work and positive attitude throughout the term.

Congratulations to the winners of last half term: Olivia N (8J) and Henry (10M). Thank you to every student who contributed to their house points. We look forward to seeing this enthusiasm and commitment continue into the next term.



## Notices

### Medical Leave of Absences Information

A gentle reminder to parents and carers when requesting medical leave authorisation from the school. Please email appointment evidence to the child's Head of Year (f.surname@stmarys.net and attendance@stmarys.net).

**Allow a minimum of 48 school hours lead time.**

Due to the volume of students at St Mary's we cannot guarantee your child will be able to attend same day appointments unless there is evidence of urgent care needed.

A minimum of a 48 hour lead time also applies to all Leave of Absences forms that need to be completed and returned to [rjuliff@stmarys.net](mailto:rjuliff@stmarys.net) for Miss McHugh's review. Leave of absence forms can be found on [this page](#) on our website.

The school requests any medical appointments should be scheduled outside the school day and in school holidays where possible.

Thank you for your support.

**BSET Futures Fair 2026**  
Saturday 17 January 2026  
11.00am – 4.00pm  
**FREE TO ATTEND**

**Meet with** representatives from 35+ universities, including Cambridge, Newcastle, Hertfordshire, Oxford Brookes, Lancaster, Birmingham, Sheffield, Suffolk, Warwick, Exeter, and Anglia Ruskin.

**Discuss** career opportunities with employers, including Tees Law, Price Bailey Chartered Accountants, the British Army, the Royal Air Force, Affinity Water, and Tui.

**Hear from** experts on a range of key topics, to help you with choosing the right course, ensuring your application stands out, and applying to universities overseas.

Full programme details available soon.

Register your interest now to attend.



**BISHOP'S STORTFORD COLLEGE**  
ESTD 1848

[bishopstortfordcollege.org](http://bishopstortfordcollege.org)



**TRAIN TO TEACH**  
**BSITT INFORMATION EVENING**  
**AT LEVENTHORPE**

◆ **MONDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2026**  
◆ **18.00 - 19.30**  
◆ **LEVENTHORPE SCHOOL**

JOIN US & FIND OUT HOW WE CAN HELP YOU START YOUR TEACHING JOURNEY!

MEET THE TEAM

INFORMAL PRESENTATION

CHAT WITH CURRENT AND FORMER TRAINEES



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PLEASE REGISTER YOUR INTEREST VIA OUR WEBSITE:  
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# What Parents & Carers Need to Know about

# YOUTUBE

YouTube is a video-sharing social media platform that allows billions of people around the world to watch, share and upload their own videos with a vast range of content – including sport, entertainment, education and lots more. It's a superb space for people to consume content that they're interested in. As a result, this astronomically popular platform has had a huge social impact: influencing online culture on a global scale and creating new celebrities.

## INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

YouTube is free and can be accessed via numerous devices, even without creating a YouTube account. Some content is flagged as 'age-restricted' (requiring the user to be logged into an account with a verified age of 18), but children can still view some mildly inappropriate material. This can include profanity and violence, which some young users may find upsetting.

## CONNECT WITH STRANGERS

YouTube is a social media platform which allows people to interact with other (usually unknown) users. Account holders can leave comments on any video they have access to, as well as messaging other users directly. Connecting with strangers online, of course, can potentially lead to children being exposed to adult language, to cyberbullying and even to encountering online predators.

## SUGGESTED CONTENT

YouTube recommends videos related to what the user has previously watched on their account, aiming to provide content that will interest them. This is intended to be helpful but can also lead to binge-watching and the risk of screen addiction, especially if 'auto-play' is activated. Users without an account are shown popular videos from the last 24 hours, which might not always be suitable for children.

## HIGH VISIBILITY

Content creators can also be put at risk – especially young ones who try to make their online presence as visible as possible. Creating and uploading content exposes children to potential harassment and toxicity from the comments section, along with the possibility of direct messaging from strangers. Videos posted publicly can be watched by anyone in the world.

## TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

YouTube is teeming with trends, challenges and memes that are fun to watch and join in with. Children often find these immensely entertaining and might want to try them out. Most challenges tend to be safe, but many others may harm children through either watching or copying. The painful 'salt and ice challenge', which can cause injuries very quickly, is just one of many such examples.

## SNEAKY SCAMMERS

Popular YouTube channels regularly have scammers posing as a well-known influencer in the comments section, attempting to lure users into clicking on their phishing links. Scammers impersonate YouTubers by adopting their names and profile images, and sometimes offer cash gifts or 'get rich quick' schemes. Children may not realise that these users are not who they claim to be.

## Advice for Parents & Carers

### APPLY RESTRICTED MODE

Restricted Mode is an optional setting that prevents YouTube from showing inappropriate content (such as drug and alcohol abuse, graphic violence and sexual situations) to underage viewers. To prevent your child from chancing across age-inappropriate content on the platform, we would recommend enabling Restricted Mode on each device that your child uses to access YouTube.

18

CENSORED

### TRY GOOGLE FAMILY

Creating a Google Family account allows you to monitor what your child is watching, uploading and sharing with other users. It will also display their recently watched videos, searches and recommended videos. In general, a Google Family account gives you an oversight of how your child is using sites like YouTube and helps you ensure they are only accessing appropriate content.

### CHECK PRIVACY SETTINGS

YouTube gives users the option of uploading videos as 'private' or 'unlisted' – so they could be shared exclusively with family and friends, for example. Comments on videos can also be disabled and channels that your child is subscribed to can be hidden. If your child is only uploading videos that are protected as 'private', they are far less likely to receive direct messages from strangers.

### CHECK OTHER PLATFORMS

Influential content creators usually have other social media accounts which they encourage their fans to follow. Having an open discussion about this with your child makes it easier to find out how else they might be following a particular creator online. It also opens up avenues for you to check out that creator's other channels to see what type of content your child is being exposed to.

### MONITOR ENGAGEMENT

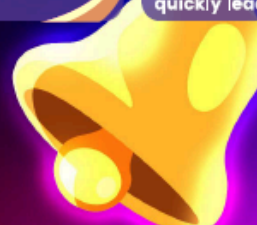
YouTube is the online viewing platform of choice for billions of people, many of them children. Younger children will watch different content to older ones, of course, and react to content differently. You may want to keep an eye on how your child interacts with content on YouTube – and, if applicable, with content creators – to understand the types of videos they are interested in.

### LIMIT SPENDING

Although YouTube is free, it does offer some in-app purchases: users can rent and buy TV shows and movies to watch, for example. If you're not comfortable with your child purchasing content online, limit their access to your bank cards and online payment methods. Many parents have discovered to their cost that a child happily devouring a paid-for series quickly leads to an unexpected bill!

## Meet Our Expert

Clare Godwin (a.k.a. Lunawolf) has worked as an editor and journalist in the gaming industry since 2015, providing websites with event coverage, reviews and gaming guides. She is the owner of Lunawolf Gaming and is currently working on various gaming-related projects including game development and writing non-fiction books.



National Online Safety®

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