



Friday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2026

# HEADLINES

St Mary's Catholic School



Dear St Mary's Community,

It is with genuine delight that I write to you this week, as our school continues to celebrate the remarkable achievements and growth of our students across all year groups.

First, I must extend my warmest pride for our Year 12 students who have recently returned from their Easter Pilgrimage to Lourdes with Across Paths. Their dedication and service to others has been truly inspiring, and I encourage you to read their accounts and view the photographs featured in this week's edition. What strikes me most profoundly about this experience is witnessing our young people put their faith into action, growing as leaders with Christ as their anchor. This pilgrimage would not have been possible without the exceptional generosity and fundraising efforts of our parents and wider community. Your support enables these transformative opportunities, and we are deeply grateful.

I am thrilled to share outstanding news from our Year 13 cohort. Four of our students (pictured above) have successfully navigated a challenging application and interview process and now hold offers for medical school, including places at UCL, Queen Mary, Kent & Medway, and City St George's. Additionally, two students have secured degree level apprenticeships with Price Bailey and BDO. Beyond these exceptional achievements, many of our students have received offers from the top 10 universities across the country, including Durham, Loughborough, Bath, Warwick, Lancaster and Exeter. These successes reflect the hard work, resilience and ambition of our young people. We wish all our students the very best as they continue their studies and encourage them to keep aiming high. We keep them very much in our prayers in the final few weeks of their formal education here at St Mary's.

I must also take this opportunity to commend our Year 10 and Year 12 cohorts who have begun their formal progress examinations with remarkable determination, hard work, endeavour and maturity. We wish them well as they progress through this important period.

On a different note, you will have seen the announcement in the news on Monday regarding the Government's decisive turning point in its approach to mobile phone use in schools. Whilst we have maintained a long-standing mobile phone policy here at St Mary's, school guidance has now been formally elevated into a legal requirement. This shift reflects growing concern among policymakers, Headteacher and safeguarding bodies about the impact of smartphones on learning environments, student wellbeing, and school discipline. The amendment to the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill introduces a statutory obligation for schools to maintain a phone-free environment throughout the school day. I will be sharing further details with you in due course. In a world where technology dominates and social media has replaced children's ability to form and sustain real friendships this really is a great step in the right direction at protecting all young people.

Thank you for your continued support of our school community.

God Bless,

Deirdre McHugh

## DATES FOR THE DIARY

**Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> April**  
Y8 HPV Vaccinations

**Monday 4<sup>th</sup> May**  
Bank Holiday - school closed

**Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> May**  
GCSE and A-Level exams begin



**GO 4 Schools**

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

# Lourdes 2026

During the Easter break, six Year 12 students, accompanied by Mrs Brewin and Mrs Rowan, took part in a pilgrimage to Lourdes organised by the Across Paths charity. Travelling on Good Friday in a fully equipped "Jambulance," the group spent eight days supporting sick and disabled pilgrims, known as VIPs, helping them to enjoy a meaningful and joyful "holiday with Our Lady."

The trip was made possible through funds raised during the school's Charity Week, thanks to the generosity of parents, students, and local businesses, as well as additional fundraising efforts by the student helpers themselves. Throughout the pilgrimage, the group dedicated their time and energy to ensuring that the VIPs had a comfortable, uplifting, and memorable experience.

In the following pages, we present a selection of photographs from the trip along with reflections from some of the students on what the experience meant to them.



The Lourdes trip was a beautiful experience and I would LOVE to do it again! My faith has never been more inspiring and loving while on this trip because it showed me that it's not all about what you buy or what you're given; it's about the thought of being grateful for what you have that others don't and to appreciate the privilege of being able to do things others struggle to do.

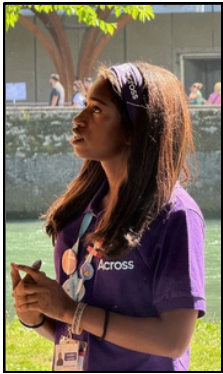
I hope this trip inspires others to spread God's love because that shows how kind-hearted you are and that you should love your neighbour and not judge. The main highlights for me on the trip were to ensure the VIPs were happy and safe (even when I was feeling unwell), and to also get to know more about the others on the trip (leaders and helpers)!

This trip has been the most memorable and faithful thing I've ever experienced and it makes me want to stay in Lourdes, continue to look after the VIPs (or anyone with difficulties) and never come back!

Lots of memories made with love and will never be forgotten.

Juliana

# Lourdes 2026

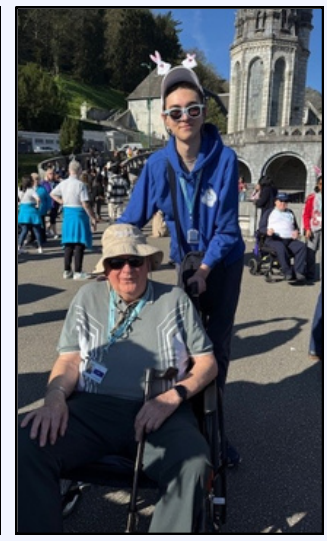


My time in Lourdes was incredibly rewarding, though physically demanding. Breaks were rare, depending on the needs of our VIPs, which made the experience quite intense and, at times, exhausting. However, it pushed me to be more patient and resilient, and made the experience feel even more meaningful. Being surrounded by so many different children from a wide range of backgrounds and with varying disabilities was really eye-opening, and it created such a strong sense of community and understanding.

Before going, I hadn't fully expected the level of closeness that would develop with the VIPs. People often describe Lourdes as having a family-like atmosphere, but actually experiencing and feeling that was something completely different. The connections formed felt genuine and natural, and it quickly became clear how strong those bonds could be in such a short space of time. The bonds we formed were genuinely special and made it all worthwhile.

Lourdes felt like a place where those with disabilities weren't seen as different or left out, but completely included and valued, which made it even more special. The masses were especially memorable, full of energy, singing, and a strong sense of community that made them feel really joyful and uplifting rather than formal or routine. Being surrounded by so many people sharing the same spirit created such a positive atmosphere, and alongside that, the weather was really good, which made the whole experience even better.

*Christabel*



The main highlight of the trip for me was the HCPT Torchlight Procession. It was not only beautiful with the lights and fireworks, but also incredibly joyful as we prayed and sang together. However, I found some of the best moments were the ones in between: helping a VIP send photos to their family, finding the courage to read a bidding prayer in front of a crowd or sharing love through the Sign of Peace each Mass.

Each day brought the chance to spend time with different VIPs. It was an absolute pleasure getting to know every one of them as I heard their stories and perspectives on life. Although there were times of exhaustion and emotional challenges, being with such a supportive and loving group of people really helped me to keep going as they played an important role in my journey in Lourdes.

Overall, I would honestly say it was a life-changing trip and I'm sad that it went by so fast. The trip helped me step back from all the distractions in my life and I'm grateful I had the opportunity to understand myself as well as understanding where serving others and faith fits in my life.

*Michael*

# Lourdes 2026

During the Lourdes trip I felt that I developed my faith through service. Discussing with our VIPs every day, hearing about them and their families was so wholesome, and connecting with them through our faith was amazing. For example, one of the VIPs I was with the most was Veronica - a sweet, caring woman who was always asking questions and wanting to know what was happening next. When I asked about her former careers, she told me about how she worked in multiple jobs including being a school lunch lady.

Multiple times throughout the trip we visited the grotto, searching for little streams of Holy Water and taking time to talk and reflect to God, St Bernadette, and Our Lady. We also had two opportunities for the Torchlight Processions - one with HCPT and one without. Hearing the prayers & readings in all the languages was so surreal, especially because they were in the evening where the lights stood out beautifully, such as the lights of the Crown Virgin.

Another extremely unique experience was being able to do the full submersion. While this was closed for multiple years because of COVID-19, it was an opportunity open to us during the trip and I took it. Thankfully, I wasn't alone in experiencing this for the first time as one of our adult helpers, Dai, and another youth helper from our school, Emily, also underwent the experience for the first time. Praying the Hail Mary, then my personal intentions, being dunked (avoiding going above my shoulders) and then praying again was a relaxing and refreshing experience.

Overall, the amount of time taken to fully serve others, reflect for myself in terms of my position in my faith, and connecting more with God were what made the Lourdes trip so special and memorable for me. Even though there were some tough times throughout, the memories made, the experiences and the self-development made it all worth it.



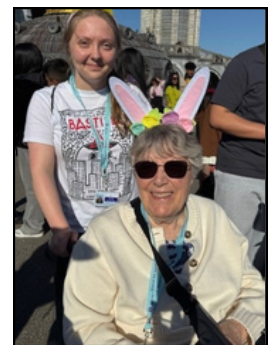
Keannan



Before we left for Lourdes, I don't think any of us realised just how much of a lasting impact it would have spiritually, but also personally. I knew a lot about Lourdes with Across before we left, but it wasn't comparable to how it was to actually be there and become so close with everyone. I loved the opportunity to support the VIPs with their journey around Lourdes, but I also think that it was such a privilege to hear from them, some of whom had been many times before, and it was really nice to listen to stories from their experiences of Lourdes.

One part of our trip I always looked forward to was the masses we had. We had one every day, some of which were with HCPT and were large scale masses, and others with just our group by the lake. All of which were so beautiful and something that was really important for me on the trip to help me connect with my faith.

I really valued the time I had at Lourdes, it's something I'd definitely love to do again. We were blessed to have such lovely weather, and I was so grateful for the people on the trip because it felt like being with family. Overall, Lourdes definitely was emotionally challenging but in a way that strengthened my faith, bringing me closer to God and the people I went with.



Emily

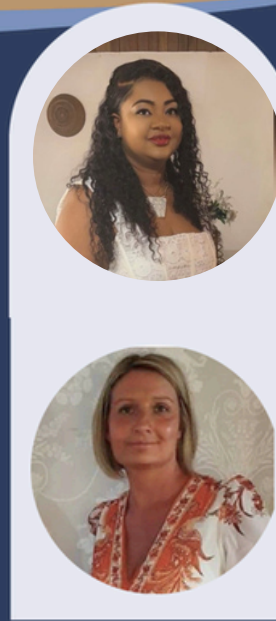
## FOSM News



We are delighted to announce the appointment of two new trustees to the Friends of St Mary's (FoSM):

Belinda Lathbridge

Joanna Hunt



### Parenting Teens Webinars

CELEBRATE Trust ([www.celebratetrust.org](http://www.celebratetrust.org)) is excited to announce two new webinars for parents and carers of teenagers. We are aware that bringing up young people in today's world can be both a joyful and challenging experience, so we have booked some experts to share their wisdom with you, help you gain confidence and provide you with some practical ideas to support you at home.

#### **Confident parenting in a world of screens: Wednesday 29th April @ 8pm**

Hardly a day goes by without headlines highlighting the impact of smartphones and social media on our teenagers. They face a whole new level of complexity as they grow up in a digital world, but as parents and carers there are so many things we can do to help them navigate it well. This webinar with Kate Duroux from Care for the Family, a national UK charity, will help us consider how we can best support our teenagers through the challenges of the digital world, and offer practical advice and principles to apply in our own unique families.

#### **Raising teenagers in a Catholic family: Tuesday 2nd June @ 8pm**

The beginning of adolescence is in many ways a "rebirth" of the child, and when this "rebirth" happens, many parents feel as if they are learning how to be a parent all over again! This is the great journey from childhood to adulthood, and it is not always an easy road for parent or child. But God always gives the grace parents need, and Mike and Alicia from the Messy Family Project, a Catholic family ministry from the US, remind parents of this fact. They also give empathy and guidance on how to successfully navigate the tween and teen years by modelling for children the behaviour they wish to see in them and investing in the relationship on a deeper level.

To reserve your place, book now by visiting [www.celebratetrust.org/faith-parenting](http://www.celebratetrust.org/faith-parenting)



### Young Carers Offer

Support for Young Carers is now being provided by a new Young Carers team within Hertfordshire County Council, following the end of the young carer contract with Carers in Hertfordshire.

This includes assessments, help with managing caring responsibilities, regular reviews, ensuring the voices of young carers inform the support they receive, and support in preparing for adulthood.

The registration process for young carers is now via a new [Young Carers webpage](#). This new webpage has been developed in collaboration with young carers and their families and includes information about the support available, team contact details, and 'a Day in the Life of' form to register a young carer online so that they can get the support they need.

Hertfordshire County Council has contacted all registered young carers directly to welcome them, provide updated contact information, details on how to access support, and a link to the new webpage.

If you need to make contact with the team, please email [youngcarers@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:youngcarers@hertfordshire.gov.uk) or call 01992 658469.