



13th September 2024

Fortnightly Bulletin

St Mary's Catholic School



This week has been a busy week in the life of the school as we have welcomed our Y7 parents for the first of our Autumn term Parents Information Evenings to learn key information, meet the Form Tutors and Head of Years who lead and support their child. It was wonderful to meet with so many parents and ensure we are working in such close partnership together as their children begin their St Mary's journey with us.

Last night, we welcomed our Y12 parents as their children begin the transition to Sixth Form life and the independence and opportunities this presents our young people post 16. Ecclesiastics 4:12 "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" inspires us to know that in working in partnership as parents, school and child that we get the very best outcomes for our children. We look forward to welcoming our Y8 and Y10 parents next week for their Information Evening.



I am pleased with the positive start our students have had to the 2024-2025 academic year. In my daily walks around the site, visiting classrooms and monitoring teaching and learning, I see standards are high, expectations are clear and learning in the classroom and students exercise books shows engaging learning and good progress. Please do take a look through your child's exercise book over the weekend, ask them to show you a piece of work they are particularly proud of and ask them to explain to you what they have learnt.



You will find in this edition a list of all the "Extra-Curricular Clubs" on offer for the Autumn Term. We encourage as many students as possible to actively participate in enrichment opportunities and strive to work towards achieving the different levels of the St Mary's Award and you will find further information to help support and encourage your child in this. I am also exceptionally delighted and excited that we are launching our School Musical for 2024-2025 which will be "Matilda"! We will be running auditions for the school production in the next few weeks – full details are in this newsletter, to find our lead roles and cast for our annual production. Please do encourage your child to get involved as we will be looking for set design, costume makers, dancers, musicians as well as our budding actors.



With a flying start to the new academic year, we look forward to the weeks ahead!
God Bless you and your families

Deirdre McHugh

Exercise Books!

As we start a new academic year at SMCS, we are delighted to be launching our brand-new exercise books across a range of subjects and year groups (initially across Years 7-10 and Year 12). Each book has been customised for each subject area, featuring graphics, subject-specific information and academic vocabulary to boost students' independent learning. In addition, each book features a tracking page on the inside cover to help your child and yourselves monitor their academic progress and targets for improvement across the year.

Please do take a moment to look through your child's new exercise books and offer any feedback from a parental perspective. We are very proud of these new designs and hope that they further raise students' aspirations and pride within their academic studies at St Mary's.



AUDITIONS



ROALD DAHL'S

Matilda

THE MUSICAL JR.

Dance:

Wednesday 18th September 3:15-4:15

Acting:

Friday 20th September 3:15-4:15

**All auditions take place in the Hume Theatre
See Mr McHugh or Mr McGinley for more details**

St Mary's Award for 24/25

We have a new design of badge, a new design of St Mary's Award and approximately 50 opportunities to choose from to enable your child to achieve the Extra Curricular Clubs category. In order to be awarded their Bronze St Mary's award badge this December.

Students must achieve all 6 categories below. With this issue of Headlines, you'll find a copy of the full clubs schedule, and you should receive some emails to enable you to sign up to some of the clubs with more restricted numbers, or to get on the waiting list.



CATHOLIC COMMUNITY-
liturgies, fund-raising,
service to others such as
peer-reading or helping
at open evening

EXTRA CURRICULAR-
clubs, sports fixtures, D
of E, non-curriculum
trips

SUPER CURRICULAR :
curriculum-linked trips,
academic competitions
and challenges.

INTERHOUSE-
participation at least
once each term

**ATTENDANCE-95+%, but
refreshes each month**

**OTHER- including
student librarians,
student leaders,
achievements out of
school etc.**

⚡ Sign the Hertfordshire Smartphone Free Childhood Parent Pact ⚡

<https://hertfordshireparentpact.smartphonefreechildhood.co.uk/>

Join a growing community of parents in Hertfordshire choosing to wait to give their children smartphones until at least the end of Year 9 – and see how many others have signed in your child's primary or secondary school.

It takes just 30 seconds to sign, and the more of us that do, the more powerful it becomes in shifting the social norm in Hertfordshire. Plus every signature will help to prove to the government how much this issue matters to parents across the country.



National
Online
Safety®

#WakeUpWednesday



Conversation starters for parents and carers: ONLINE CONTENT



Trying to start a conversation about online safety with children can be a daunting task. There are many reasons why children may not want to talk to adults about it. One might be that they don't think you'll understand or that you won't know how to help if they came to you with an online problem. It can also be hard to start a conversation about something that you might have limited knowledge about. However, with screen time increasing during the lockdown, it's important now more than ever, to be talking to children about what they are accessing online.

1 ASK THEIR MOTIVATION

Sometimes it's easy to assume we know why children choose certain games or apps. It can seem obvious, like the child interested in football will be enthusiastic about the new FIFA game. But sometimes it can be more subtle than that. It could be that it's an outlet for their creativity or it might be that they like the look of the main character. Learning their motivation and knowing why they like it can help advising them on how to use it safely and help you discuss the pros and cons.



6 MAKE TIME TO LISTEN

When your child can't wait to tell you about their new game, always try and listen to what they say. We always have a lot on our minds, so it's easy for us to drift off onto other things which may be more important. However try to stay involved and ask them more details about aspects of the game/app. Children will appreciate your interest and the more questions you ask, the more you can find out. If you act uninterested, then they are less likely to tell you about it again in the future.



2 CULTIVATE A BLAME FREE CULTURE

Children can often blame themselves if they come across something that scares them or makes them feel uncomfortable. There will be times when your child has gone against something that you have forbidden, however, most children do not intend to put themselves at risk. Therefore, it's important that your child is able to come to you with a problem and won't be blamed for it. Try to understand what happened and why and warn them of the dangers once more. Engaging in a 'told you so' dialogue or suggesting they are in trouble for not listening may deter them from reporting any future concerns.



7 ASK THEM TO BE THE TEACHER

Showing an interest in what children are accessing online is a great opportunity for you to learn something new as well. Children on the whole love sharing their experiences so by asking them to teach you how to use an app or play a game is not only a great way to bond, but you will also feel more empowered to talk about it. It is easy to shy away from conversations when the child perhaps knows more about the subject content than you do. This can help to turn this around.



3 SHARE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Starting a conversation by sharing something that you've seen or that has made you feel uncomfortable can be a great opener. Talking about your own feelings can help children realise that it isn't just them - adults can be affected too. You can then go into how you coped with it therefore indirectly giving children advice on how they can also cope in uncomfortable situations. You can also explain that the reason that you've chosen to talk to them about it is because talking helps. Children will hopefully be able to see the parallels in the experiences and mimic your behaviour in future.



8 USE SCHOOL MESSAGING

It might be that your child's school has sent out a message about the Childline number or to remind children to use the CEOP button to report content. Ask the children what they learned about these at school. When would they use the Childline number? When would they need to use the CEOP button? What does it look like? Asking the children why the school thought that the information was so important that they sent out a message about it reinforces what they learnt whilst at school.



4 TALK ABOUT THE NEWS

Asking children what their response is to news stories around online safety can be revealing. For example, there has been a recent survey conducted by the BBFC who are currently campaigning for the application of age ratings and content warnings on video sharing platforms. What do they think about this? Can they think of a time when this would have helped themselves or someone they know? Are they against the idea? If so, why? Could they be accessing something they shouldn't be?



9 ASK ABOUT THE RISKS

Many children may know what online risks are and will happily explain the potential dangers. Listen and try not to be overly shocked if they tell you something that disturbs you. This can then lead nicely into you asking the question about what steps they are taking to look after themselves or what help they could seek if something goes wrong. Sometimes it's just nice to know that your children know the dangers and have taken steps to help reduce the risk for themselves - this is the ultimate goal.



5 ASK FOR ADVICE

It could be that you really do have a friend at work who is debating whether or not to let their child do something online, or it could be that you're bending the truth slightly, but hopefully the outcome would be the same. Don't be afraid to ask others for advice. Not only why they should let the child use it, but also what would they tell the child to be aware of. What are the risks? This will help you understand the risks yourself and what to look out for in future.



10 ASK ABOUT RESPONSIBILITIES

Try asking open ended questions about roles and responsibilities online. Who is in control of the internet? Who is looking after you whilst you are online? Who decides what is appropriate for children to see? This can reveal a lot about a child's perception about who is responsible for their online safety. If they believe that it is up to everyone else to keep them safe, then you know you need to have a conversation about how they can reduce their own risk.



11 ASK ABOUT SCHOOL ADVICE

Sometimes it's hard to know what to warn children about. If there is a new app or game that your child has come across recently, ask them what they think their teacher would say about it. What advice would school give them? What have they been told about trusting people online or about fake news? Finding this out would be a good way to hear what advice they were given at school and help you reiterate the same message. Quick reminders about what to do if something makes them feel uncomfortable or who their trusted adults are can make all the difference.



Meet our expert

Heather Cardwell is a practising Online Safety Lead and senior school leader who is passionate about safeguarding children online and educating them around online risks. She has over 10+ years as a Computing Lead and has successfully developed and implemented a whole school approach to online safety in schools, delivering online safety training to both school staff and parents and helping to roll-out a bespoke online safety policy across her local network of education settings.

