FAITH • HOPE • LOVE

St Thomas
Catholic Academies Trust

OCTOBER
2026

Half-Term Newsletter

A Message from our CEO:
Mark McLaughlin

From Mission to Impact

As I begin my second year as CEO of our Trust, I find myself reflecting both on how far we have travelled and, more importantly, on where we go next.

Last year marked a significant personal transition for me, moving from leading school improvement across our Trust into the role of CEO. In many ways, though, the purpose of my work has remained exactly the same. Our mission — 'The glory of God is a human being fully alive' — continues to provide the starting point. Our responsibility is to create great Catholic schools where children and adults can flourish, discover their gifts and achieve extraordinary things.

As I look back on my first year as CEO, there is growing evidence that the approach to improvement we have developed together is having an impact.

Last year, six of our schools experienced Ofsted inspections under the renewed framework. Safeguarding was met in every school and Attendance and Behaviour was judged Strong in all six. Across those inspections, significant strengths were also recognised in

Inclusion, Personal Development and Wellbeing, Early Years, and Leadership and Governance.

For me, these inspections are much more than individual judgements. They are milestones in the story of our Trust.

I think particularly of St Margaret of Scotland, Luton and St Mary's, Caddington. These schools have been part of our Trust from its earliest days, and each has travelled its own improvement journey. There have been challenges and difficult decisions along the way, but over successive

inspection cycles we have seen schools develop from schools facing significant challenge into communities where we can recognise significant strength. St Margaret's received six Strong judgements in its most recent inspection, while St Mary's and St Vincent's each received five. These schools have transformed and the children within them are benefitting.

St Michael's, High Wycombe and Aylesbury, perhaps demonstrates particularly powerfully what purposeful improvement can achieve. An all-through community operating across a primary phase and two secondary sites, it joined our Trust from a challenging starting point, and its journey has required us to be brave: making firm decisions,

	Holy Family CPS, Langley
Catholic Life & Mission	Outstanding
Religious Education	Outstanding
Collective Worship	Outstanding

CPS = Catholic Primary School

identifying and supporting strong leadership and establishing a clear sense of purpose. What has followed has been an enormous community effort. The speed with which the school has improved and developed into the high-performing community we see today is testament to its pupils, staff, leaders and families. For other schools in our Trust, we have supported them to continually improve – in Slough, St. Joseph's and Holy Family have continued to thrive, developing and strengthening the quality of education that they provide. For Holy Family we must doubly celebrate the remarkable strengths recognised by Ofsted, but also the Outstanding recognition from the Catholic Inspection.

These schools have different stories, but the principles behind their success are remarkably consistent.

Our approach to school improvement has always begun with mission. Before asking what we should do, we ask why we are doing it and how it will improve the lives of the children we serve. We have then been prepared to make the big decisions when they are necessary. But we have also learned that sustainable improvement is rarely created by one dramatic intervention.

It is built from the classroom upwards.

It comes from developing deep professional knowledge; understanding what excellent teaching looks like; identifying and developing strong leadership; looking carefully at evidence; sharing expertise between schools; and doing the right things consistently. It is improvement pursued with purpose and

	St. Michael's CS, High Wycombe & Aylesbury	Holy Family Family CPS, Langley	St Joseph's CHS, Slough	St Margaret of Scotland CPS, Luton	St Mary's CPS, Caddington	St Vincent's CPS, Houghton Regis
Safeguarding	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Inclusion	Expected	Strong	Expected	Strong	Strong	Strong
Curriculum & Teaching	Expected	Expected	Expected	Strong	Expected	Expected
Achievement	Expected	Strong	Expected	Strong	Expected	Expected
Attendance & Behaviour	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong
Personal Development & Wellbeing	Strong	Strong	Expected	Strong	Strong	Strong
Leadership & Governance	Expected	Expected	Expected	Strong	Strong	Strong
Early Years Foundation Stage	Strong	Expected	N/A	Expected	Strong	Strong
Sixth Form Post 16	Expected	N/A	Expected	N/A	N/A	N/A

CPS = Catholic Primary School CS = Catholic School CHS = Catholic High School

integrity, not simply in preparation for inspection.

Our educational outcomes tell another part of that story. Particularly encouraging is the strength of the foundations we are establishing. Our provisional Year 1 phonics pass rate is 87%, compared with the latest national comparator of 80%, having risen from 76% in 2024. The Matthew Effect tells us that the rich readers get richer quicker – so the sooner the children we serve can read, the better.

At KS2, Trust outcomes at the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Mathematics continue to sit above national comparators. This matters because it represents our philosophy in action: build strong foundations, develop knowledge and expertise, and improvement follows. Our strong performance in our Secondary schools will then continue to build on these firm foundations.

As I begin my second year as CEO, however, my strongest feeling is not satisfaction with what has already been achieved, but excitement about what comes next.

We know there is more to do. We want greater consistency between schools and phases, increasingly strong curriculum and teaching, and even better outcomes for every child. The challenge now is to take what we know works and make it increasingly normal everywhere.

There will be more inspections this year and more opportunities for the quality of our work to be tested externally. We should welcome them. But inspection has never been our purpose. Our purpose is to build great Catholic schools: schools filled with Love, where every person belongs; animated by Faith, where mission becomes action; and characterised by Hope, where we believe deeply in what every child can become.

Entering this second year, that is what excites me most. We have increasingly strong foundations beneath us. Now our task is to keep building – with courage, knowledge, integrity and an unwavering belief in what our children and communities can achieve – so that everyone entrusted to our care has the opportunity to become fully alive.

MARK MCLAUGHLIN
Chief Executive Officer

A Community Called to Flourish:
How STCAT is investing in its people to help every child thrive

Our People, Your Children, Our Shared Future

When parents think about what makes a great school, they often think about inspiring teachers, caring support staff, strong leadership and the warm relationships that help children feel safe, happy and ready to learn. We couldn't agree more. At St Thomas Catholic Academies Trust, we know that the people who work in our schools are at the heart of everything we do.

Every member of staff plays an important part in a child's journey. From the teacher who sparks curiosity in the classroom, to the teaching assistant who offers encouragement, to the office teams and site staff who keep our schools running safely and smoothly, it takes a community of people working together to help children flourish.

This is why, over the coming academic year, we will be developing a new Trust-wide People Strategy.

Now, 'People Strategy' might sound like a piece of business jargon, but the idea is actually very simple. It is about

making sure that the people who work in our schools feel supported, valued and able to do their very best work. It is our plan for how we attract great staff, help them grow in their careers, support their wellbeing and create a culture where everyone can thrive.

You might wonder what this has to do with pupils and families. In reality, it has everything to do with them.

When staff feel happy, supported and motivated, children benefit. Strong staff retention means greater consistency for pupils. High-quality professional development helps staff continually improve their skills. A positive workplace culture creates school environments where children feel safe, cared for and

inspired to succeed. Simply put, investing in our staff is one of the most important ways we can invest in our children.

As a Catholic Trust, our approach is rooted in our belief that every person is made in the image and likeness of God, with unique gifts and talents to offer. We want our schools to be places where people are treated with dignity, where wellbeing matters and where everyone has the opportunity to grow and flourish.

The first step in creating our new People Strategy is listening. Throughout this year, we will be asking colleagues across all our schools to share their experiences, ideas and aspirations. We will be launching a Trust-wide staff survey and creating opportunities for open conversations so that we can better understand what is working well and where we can improve.

Most importantly, this work is about the future. We want STCAT to be a place where talented people choose to work, where they build rewarding careers and where they feel proud to serve our communities. By doing so, we can continue to provide the very best education and care for every child in our schools.

Over the coming months, we look forward to sharing more about this journey. Together, with our staff, pupils, parents and wider communities, we will develop a People Strategy that reflects our values, supports our people and helps every child entrusted to our care achieve their God-given potential.

After all, when our people flourish, our children flourish too and we are all able to become fully alive.

MICHELLE CHAPPELL
Director of People and Inclusion

Personal Introduction to the Trust

Meet Our New Chief Financial Officer

Having joined St Thomas Catholic Academies Trust in July, I would like to say a warm hello to everyone across our schools and wider community. I have already had the opportunity to meet many colleagues, and I am grateful for the welcome and support I have received.

My background includes over 18 years in education finance, progressing from a receptionist and finance assistant to Group Chief Financial Officer. I am also a qualified accountant and Fellow of the ACCA. This experience has taught me to listen carefully, understand the challenges colleagues face and find practical solutions together.

What I enjoy most about working in education is knowing that our work has a purpose beyond the balance sheet. Every financial decision helps shape what we can offer our pupils, how we support our staff and how we sustain our schools for the future.

As CFO, I want colleagues to feel comfortable asking questions and confident in the financial support available to them. I look forward to working closely with our school communities, building on their strengths and helping ensure our resources make the greatest possible difference to the children we serve.

PARAS PATEL
Chief Financial Officer

First Few Weeks of Teacher Training

Welcome to our new SCITT Teacher Trainees

September has marked the exciting start of a new journey for our 19 SCITT teacher trainees, with 9 trainees joining our Primary programme and 10 joining our Secondary programme.

For our trainees, the first month of teacher training has been a time of new experiences, new challenges and plenty of learning. From meeting their pupils and getting to know their placement schools, to planning lessons, observing experienced teachers and beginning to develop their own teaching practice, it has been a busy and rewarding start to the academic year.

Beginning the journey

Our SCITT programme provides trainees with the opportunity to learn the craft of teaching while being immersed in the day-to-day life of a school. Working alongside experienced teachers and mentors, trainees begin to develop their knowledge, confidence and classroom practice while building strong relationships with pupils and colleagues.

For our Primary trainees, the first few weeks have been about getting to know their classes, understanding the Primary curriculum and beginning to explore how children learn across different subjects and stages.

Our Secondary trainees have been getting to know their subject areas, observing a range of lessons and beginning to take responsibility for teaching their own classes. They are already developing their understanding of effective explanations, questioning, classroom routines and the needs of individual pupils.

A first month of discovery

The first month of training is always full of memorable moments. While every trainee's experience is different, there are some common themes: the excitement of meeting pupils for the first time, the challenge of managing a classroom, the satisfaction of seeing pupils make progress, and the realisation that teaching is a profession in which there is always something new to learn.

Here are some reflections from our trainees on their first month:

'Starting my teacher training has been an exciting, challenging and rewarding journey so far. A few of my highlights have included: building positive relationships with my class, delivering lessons on topics I feel particularly passionate about and learning from my amazing mentors. Training with STCAT has already provided me with multiple opportunities to learn about theories and strategies that I can immediately put into practice in the classroom. Having the support of my Hub Lead has made the transition into teaching both manageable and enjoyable. She is always there to reassure me and answer any questions I may have. I am really looking forward to continuing to develop as a teacher and learning from all the expertise I have around me.'

Primary Trainee at St Anthony's Catholic Primary School, Slough

'My first month at Xavier Teacher Training has been a very positive and rewarding experience. It has been a month of learning, reflection and gradually building my confidence as a teacher. I have particularly valued the opportunity to develop my teaching practice within the supportive environment of the STCAT Trust, where I feel encouraged to learn from experienced colleagues and reflect on how I can continue to improve.'

Secondary Trainee at St Michael's Catholic School, High Wycombe

'STCAT are extremely supportive and adaptive to individual needs on the course. It has been great to have training from lots of different people who share their expertise with us. I have been lucky to have such a supportive mentor, SCITT Lead, Subject Tutor and Hub Lead who go above and beyond to ensure I am looked after and I am getting the best experience possible. I am really looking forward to seeing how the course continues.'

Secondary Trainee at St Joseph's Catholic High School, Slough

Learning together

Although trainees are based in different schools and, for our Secondary trainees, across a range of subject specialisms, they are also part of a wider SCITT community. Training sessions provide opportunities to share experiences, discuss challenges and celebrate successes.

This sense of collaboration is an important part of the SCITT experience. Teaching can be demanding, particularly during those first few weeks, and being able to learn from experienced colleagues and from one another is invaluable.

As the year progresses, our trainees will continue to develop their teaching practice, deepen their subject and curriculum knowledge and become increasingly confident in the classroom.

Looking ahead

The first month is just the beginning. There will undoubtedly be challenges ahead, but there will also be many moments to celebrate: a lesson that finally comes together, a pupil who suddenly understands something, a positive conversation with a parent or colleague, or simply the growing feeling that 'I'm really becoming a teacher.'

As we look ahead to the year to come, we hope our trainees will flourish both personally and professionally, discovering the joy and purpose of teaching and embodying our mission: 'The glory of God is a human being fully alive!'

Here's to a fantastic first year of teaching, learning and discovery!

COLLETTE COOPER
Director of Training, Development and Inclusion

Celebrating Catholic Education Week

Celebrating Catholic Education Week and the Year of Saint Francis

As a Trust, we were delighted to mark Catholic Education Week, joining schools and parishes across the Diocese in celebrating the faith, community and distinctive mission of Catholic education. This year's celebrations were particularly special as they took place during the Year of Saint Francis, commemorating the 800th anniversary of the death of St Francis of Assisi on 4 October 1226.

Throughout the week, our schools reflected on the values and example of St Francis, whose life of prayer, humility, care for creation and service to others continues to inspire pupils today. We were also pleased to share our latest Celebrating Catholic Life Newsletter, showcasing the many ways pupils across St Thomas Catholic Academies Trust experience God's love and put their faith into action within their schools, parishes and local communities.

Read the Celebrating Catholic Life Newsletter:

Watch our Year of Saint Francis reflection video:

Thank you to all the schools, staff, pupils and parish communities who contributed to these celebrations and continue to witness the joy and strength of Catholic education across our Trust.

JANE PORTER
Trust Leader of Chaplaincy

Admissions/Application process

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Choosing the Right School for Your Child's Journey

For many families, the admissions process is one of the most important decisions they will make for their child. Whether your child is preparing to take their first steps into Primary School or moving on to Secondary School, it can be an exciting time filled with anticipation, questions and, understandably, a few nerves.

At **St Thomas Catholic Academies Trust**, we understand the significance of this decision. Every parent wants a school where their child feels safe, happy and supported, where they make friends, develop confidence and achieve their full potential. Most importantly, parents want to know their child will be cared for and valued as an individual.

That is exactly what our schools strive to provide.

Across our schools in Luton, Slough, Buckinghamshire and Central Bedfordshire, we are proud to offer warm, welcoming and inclusive communities where every child is known, valued and loved. Our Catholic faith shapes who we are, but our schools are open to families of all faiths and none who share our values of faith, hope, and love. We believe that when children know they belong, they flourish.

A Place Where Every Child Can Flourish

Choosing a school is about more than academic outcomes. It is about finding a community where your child can grow socially, emotionally, spiritually and academically.

Our schools nurture the whole child, helping them to:

- Develop confidence and resilience
- Discover and nurture their individual gifts
- Build strong friendships and positive relationships
- Grow in kindness, character and compassion
- Achieve their academic potential
- Become the very best version of themselves

We are committed to providing inclusive education for all learners, including children with additional needs, ensuring every child has the support they need to succeed.

Key Admissions Deadlines

If your child is due to start school or transfer to secondary education in September 2027, now is the time to begin exploring your options.

Secondary School Applications

Applications for children transferring to Year 7 generally close on:

31 October 2026

Primary School Applications

Applications for children starting Reception generally close on:

15 January 2027

As admissions arrangements differ slightly between local authorities in Luton, Slough, Buckinghamshire and Central Bedfordshire, we encourage families to check the specific guidance provided by their local authority and our individual schools.

Visit Our Schools and Ask Questions

There is no substitute for experiencing a school for yourself. We strongly encourage families to arrange a visit, attend an open event or contact schools directly to discuss any questions they may have.

Our school leaders and staff understand that choosing a school can feel overwhelming, and they are always happy to talk through the admissions process, explain what daily life is like in their school and help families understand the opportunities available to their child.

Whether you are considering one of our Primary Schools, looking at Secondary School options, or exploring a faith-based education for the first time, we would be delighted to welcome you.

In-Year Admissions

Families moving into the area or looking for a place during the academic year are also encouraged to get in touch. We welcome **in-year applications** across all of our schools and will do everything possible to support families through the process.

Find Out More

More information about admissions, including links to individual school admissions arrangements and local authority guidance, can be found on the Trust website:

www.stcat.co.uk/our-schools/admissions/

Whatever stage of the journey your family is at, we look forward to helping you discover a school where your child can thrive, belong and become **fully alive.**

> *JO QUIRKE*
> ***Marketing and Communications Manager***

Are you interested in supporting governance in our schools?

Are you a practising Catholic?

Can you commit 3-4 hours a month?

We have vacancies on our Local Academy Committees for Foundation Governors.

If you are interested, then we would love to hear from you. For more information go to:
www.stcat.co.uk/governor-vacancies

Let's see what our schools have been up to!

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St Anthony's Catholic Primary School, Slough

Girls' Football Tournament

Some of our girls represented St Anthony's at the SSSN football tournament at Powerleague in Slough. It was a brilliant opportunity for them to compete, work together as a team and represent the school.

Eco Team – Green Fingers

Our Eco Team have also been busy this week working with Mrs Galanakis and getting their hands dirty around the school grounds. They've been developing their gardening skills while helping to look after and improve our school environment.

St Michael's Catholic School, Aylesbury Campus

From St Michael's to the Big Screen

We're incredibly excited to celebrate the success of our very own Year 10 student, Hugo McGinn!

This October, you can catch Hugo in cinemas, starring in the feature film Ghosts: The Possession of Button House.

And that's not all... Hugo also starred in BBC One's Dexter Procter: The 10-Year-Old Doctor, which has just been nominated for an International Emmy Award in the Kids: Live Action category!

The winners will be announced in New York this November – and the whole St Michael's community has everything crossed!

What an incredible achievement – congratulations, Hugo! We can't wait to see what comes next.

Open Day at St Michael's

What a fantastic Open Day showcasing the very best of St Michael's Catholic School!

Every department across the school got involved, giving prospective students and their families the chance to experience what life at St Michael's is really like. From exciting Science experiments and live music to Art, Humanities, Languages, English, Maths, Technology, PE and so much more – there was something happening around every corner.

A huge thank you to all of our staff and students who worked incredibly hard to represent their departments, run activities and give our visitors such a warm St Michael's welcome.

And, of course, thank you to all the families who joined us. We hope you enjoyed meeting our community and seeing our students and staff in action!

One school. Every department. One brilliant community.

Celebrating St Michael's Feast Day

A special day for our St Michael's community as we came together to celebrate St Michael's Feast Day Mass.

A beautiful celebration of faith, community and togetherness, made even more special by the wonderful contributions from our students through readings, music and serving at Mass.

A proud moment to see our school community come together and celebrate what it means to be part of St Michael's Catholic School.

St Michael the Archangel, pray for us.

A Warm Welcome to Our Year 7 Families

It was wonderful to welcome our Year 7 students and their families for our Year 7 Welcome Mass and Meet the Tutor Evening.

The evening was a lovely opportunity to come together as a school community, celebrate the start of an exciting new chapter and give parents and carers the chance to meet their child's tutor.

We hope our Year 7s are settling in brilliantly, building new friendships and already beginning to feel at home at St Michael's.

Welcome to the St Michael's family, Year 7!

St Martin de Porres Catholic Primary School, Luton

A New School Year at St. Martin de Porres

What a wonderful start to the school year it has been. Our school community has been buzzing with excitement, learning and opportunities to come together in support of others.

We were delighted to welcome our newest pupils into our Reception classes. The children have settled beautifully into school life, making new friends, exploring their classrooms and embracing all the exciting learning opportunities on offer. We are incredibly proud of how confidently and enthusiastically they have started their school journey.

This half term also saw our annual Macmillan Coffee Morning, where families, staff and friends of the school came together to enjoy refreshments and raise money for an important and worthwhile cause.

We were also proud to announce the appointment of our new Head Boy and Head Girl. They have already demonstrated outstanding leadership, responsibility and commitment to our school values. We look forward to seeing the positive impact they will have throughout the year.

Our pupils and families have also shown tremendous generosity through our Harvest Heroes Campaign. Children and families have already donated a wonderful collection of food that will help support local people in need. This campaign has reminded us all of the importance of compassion, gratitude and serving others; values that are at the heart of our school community.

Each pupil has been presented with a set of rosary beads from the Mission Together charity. As we enter the Holy Month of the Rosary, we look forward to prayer and reflection each day in October when we say the Rosary.

As we reflect on the term so far, we are grateful for the enthusiasm, kindness and support shown by our pupils, staff and families. We look forward to another exciting term filled with learning, faith and opportunities to grow together.

St Margaret of Scotland Catholic Primary School, Luton

Engineer in the Making

Bobby, Year 5, has demonstrated fantastic creativity and determination by building a drone at home using parts from old electronic toys - including a motor, wires, batteries and a motherboard. By reusing materials and experimenting with different ideas, he has shown great understanding of technology and engineering.

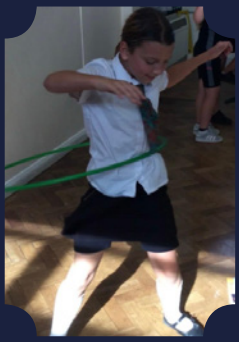
New School Year Mass

The children in Years 4, 5 and 6 gathered together for our New School Year Mass, to celebrate and commission our new Faith Ambassadors. During this special service, we welcomed the children who will help to lead and promote our Catholic values throughout the school year ahead.

The Mass was a wonderful opportunity for the school community to come together in faith, prayer and celebration as we begin a new year of learning and growing together.

A-Life Workshop Day

The children had a fantastic time recently taking part in a fitness workshop run by A-Life Fitness. We are very impressed with their levels of stamina and resilience. They engaged with a variety of tasks such as balancing on wobble cushions, trampolining, boxing and circuits.



St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Chalfont

Exploring in Reception

Our new Reception class has been fully immersed in our 'Let's Explore' topic, embracing every opportunity to learn through play, investigation, and discovery

The children have enjoyed climbing and developing their physical skills, performing on the stage, smelling and exploring lavender, sharing stories together, and investigating pumpkins grown by last year's Reception class.

They have also been exploring and investigating the Creation Story, asking thoughtful questions and developing their understanding of the world around them.

It has been wonderful to see their curiosity, confidence, and enthusiasm grow as they learn through exploration and hands-on experiences.

Faith Leaders Visit Dementia Café

Our Years 4 and 5 Faith Leaders enjoyed their first visit to The Dementia Café today.

It was wonderful to welcome our new group and see them getting involved in a variety of activities, including crafts, puzzles and singing. The children showed great kindness, enthusiasm and respect, helping to create a joyful and welcoming atmosphere for everyone.

We are so proud of the way they represented our school and lived out our values in the community.

The glory of God is a human being **fully alive!**

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St Martin De Porres Catholic Primary School,
Pastures Way, Luton, Beds,
LU4 0PF

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