

Sancta Familia Newsletter – February 2026

Message from CEO



Thank you for everything that you are doing each day to support our students, their families, and each other. It has been another brilliant half term as a Trust and thank you for the part you have played in it.

By the school year 2030-31, we have set ourselves an aspirational goal to be **internationally renowned for excellence in faith formation, service, development of talents, and academic progress.**

This certainly is an aspirational goal but with yourselves and the colleagues we have – not to mention our wonderful students, families, and communities - our goals should be aspirational. I do hope that it is a goal you can get behind as we work to make Sancta Familia the best Catholic Academy Trust possible.

Over the past six months we have been working on the clarity of our vision and values. We have been influenced by Patrick Lencioni, a Catholic Organisational Health Leader who suggests that every organisation should ask itself, and be able to answer, **six critical questions**; namely: 1) Why do we exist? 2) How do we behave? 3) What do we do? 4) How will we succeed? 5) What is most important right now? 6) Who must do what? Questions five and six are for teams to answer, so I won't go into these here. However, please see the answers to questions one to four below that make up **our Trust vision and values.**

Why do we exist?

To provide an exceptional education for every student, every day; driven by love, service, humility and our Catholic faith.

How do we behave?

- **Love** – “love one another as I have loved you.” *John 13:34*
- **Service** – we serve the needs of others, and we respect everyone - seeking to understand rather than be understood. *St Francis of Assisi*
- **Humility** – we aim to be the best, but we know that to do so we must put ourselves last - “think first the foundation of humility. The higher the structure is to be, the deeper must be its foundation.” *St Augustine*
- **Faith** – God has given us faith, and we have courage to use it - “have courage! Get up; he is calling you.” *Mark 10:49*

What do we do?

We lead a family of Catholic schools from across South London where everyone is **known, loved, and adds value** to our community.

We believe in **autonomy with coherence** – we have a duty to share and implement best practice across our schools but also encourage the development of next practice to drive continual improvement.

How will we succeed?



By being **a little bit better tomorrow than we were today** through excellence in faith, service, personal development and academic progress.

This means (our pillars):

- **Faith:** we take time every day for service, reflection, and prayer.
- **Service:** we serve our communities - with preferential treatment - for those who are poor in spirit or circumstance.
- **Personal development:** every member of trust works hard to develop their talents each week.
- **Academic progress:** we provide excellent education for every student, every day.

Please note, our trust vision and values explained by the answers to the above questions are not replacing our school's charism, vision or values. The charism, vision and values of each school are unique to each school and are to be cherished. Our Trust vision and values provide a goal for all of us to aim towards and a way of acting with ourselves and each other.

Our 2-5 Year Strategic Plan

Step 1: Establish baseline policies and operating systems across all key functions whilst codifying what we mean by our pillars: excellence across faith; service; personal development, and academic progress; agreement on the entitlements for staff, students, and families at a Sancta Familia School.

Step 2: Estates, IT and AI strategy launched - operating systems become embedded (HR, Talent, Finance, Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, SEND and Safeguarding) and driven as a service to schools - codified examples of pillars shared more widely across sector, Sancta Support initiated (outreach to schools and Trusts).

Step 3: Operating systems across functions support schools to drive excellence. Entitlements for students, staff, and families are lived and planned for across all schools so that every member of our community receives the best standard of education possible in terms of resources and delivery. Sancta Support is in place and starts to generate income.

Step 4: Internationally renowned for excellence in faith formation, service, development of talents and academic progress (school year 2030-31).

New Appointments on our Central Team

We have appointed **Tiffany Uwatse** as our Governance and Communications Lead. Tiffany has a strong background in HR, legal services, marketing, and communications. She is due to start on 1 April.

In addition, we have appointed **Nicola Hawkes** as Primary Trust Lead for Maths (currently Deputy Head and Maths Lead at St Elphege's) and **Kate Dall** as Primary Trust Lead for English (currently Assistant Head and English Lead at St Elphege's). Nicola and Kate will remain in their current roles at St Elphege's and will be released for half a day each week to coordinate the leadership of Maths and English across our primary schools.

We are interviewing for a Trust SEND Lead this Friday. This is a cross-phase role to support the delivery of SEND across primary and secondary. In addition, we are hopeful that we will be interviewing for our Primary Trust RE Lead after half term.



As secondary schools join, we will be advertising for similar roles to lead English, Maths, and RE across secondary too.

New Schools Joining the Trust

The governing body / trust boards of four schools have recently voted to join our Trust. In addition, good progress has been made with another five schools who are likely to be voting on joining us next half term. As our Trust begins to grow in size, it will provide wonderful opportunities for us to learn and share best practices with each other. I will provide a more specific update on this in our next newsletter before Easter.

Other Updates

- We received a strong response to our Primary IT Tender process. We have shortlisted four potential providers and will be interviewing at Head Office this week.
- St Elphege's and Ursuline High School have been selected by the DfE to host RISE events (open-house opportunities for other schools to learn from their practice). Congratulations to both schools for this acknowledgement of the great practice taking place.
- Our early years strategy continues to make excellent progress, with the new nursery now up and running at Regina Coeli and a significantly increased provision at St John Fisher.
- Bridget Phillipson wrote to Regina Coeli, St Elphege's, and Ursuline High School to commend the schools for the excellent attainment of students.
- Our inaugural Trust Liturgy at St. Elphege's Church was a great success. A big thank you to Fr. Simon and Fr. Michael for leading this joyous service. All schools were well represented with many pipeline schools also in attendance - the singing was wonderful too!
- We will be trialing our Trust wide surveys next half term across St Cecilia's, St Aidan's, St John Fisher, and Ursuline High School. These will be launched across all schools in the second half of our summer term. Your voice is important, and we need to make sure that we can learn from your wisdom and that of our whole community.

There are many other exciting developments taking place, but I wanted to share a few highlights with you.

Kindest regards,
Michael





Message from Executive Team



We have been moving forward with several key projects this term, designed to strengthen the Trust's long-term financial resilience and improve the environment across our schools. A focus has been the tendering for IT for primary schools from 1 April 2026. This will assist us in improving our digital infrastructure which can better support teaching, learning, and operational efficiency. By carrying out a full audit by the successful provider, we aim to secure best-value, enhance reliability, and future-proof our networks for the years ahead.

Alongside this, we are making progress with capital works. Our School Conditions Allocation funding has been allocated this term to a number of projects including compliance and condition improvements from fire alarm replacement, and asbestos removal to playground refurbishments. Our goal is to support schools in enhancing and creating safe, high-quality facilities that enable excellent education across every school. We look forward to providing updates to these projects.

Nichole and I are also collating a number of options from April for employee benefits such as cycle to work schemes, discounts on gym memberships plus much more. We hope this will be available for all colleagues from the summer term onwards.



The first half of the Spring term seems to have whizzed by and it has been fantastic to see what a busy and positive start our schools have made to 2026.

Many congratulations to the whole school community at Regina Coeli who have worked so hard to achieve the significant accomplishment of opening a Nursery provision to further extend their school family.

As a Trust, we are working hard to develop our Early Years Strategy with a clear understanding of the importance of securing great foundations for our youngest learners. In both expanding and extending our Early Years offer in many of our schools, we are also working to secure a stable and strong base from which our schools can continue to flourish in pupil numbers in years to come.

The Trust Liturgy was a real highlight of the half term and I am very grateful to all those who helped to prepared for and attended the event – making it such a success. The first of many opportunities to come together as a Trust family and, crucially, to involve our young people in building their relationships and networks with each other – just as our Trust leaders and staff continue to do.



As we reach the end of this half term, it has been a real pleasure to spend time in our schools, meeting staff and being part of everyday school life. I have felt privileged to support schools through hands-on HR work, including being involved in recruitment and the appointment of colleagues into TLR roles at Sancta Familia. Working alongside leaders and teams in this way has been both valuable and rewarding.

This half term has also marked some important milestones for the Trust. We came together for our very first Trust Liturgy, which was a thoughtful and meaningful occasion and a real reflection of the shared values that bring our schools together. We have also celebrated the Trust reaching its first anniversary, a welcome opportunity to pause and reflect on how much has been achieved in such a short time.

I continue to look forward to serving our schools and communities as we move into the next half term.

Safeguarding – from the Trust safeguarding lead



All schools are now using CPOMS as the Trust's standard platform for safeguarding recording and reporting. Following a comprehensive Trust-wide review of safeguarding categories, a best-practice toolkit has been developed to ensure consistency, accuracy and high-quality recording across all schools. The toolkit has been externally quality assured and will provide the Central Team and Board of Directors with clearer, more reliable safeguarding intelligence, strengthening strategic oversight and assurance of compliance with statutory requirements. The toolkit will shortly be shared with Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) for consultation prior to full implementation across all schools.

A Trust-wide Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) Forum has also been established, creating a structured and professionally focused space for collaboration, reflection and appropriate challenge. The forum supports the sharing of best practice, discussion of complex cases, dissemination of emerging safeguarding intelligence, and alignment with Trust priorities. The first forum will take place following half term and marks an important and exciting step in strengthening professional networks across the Trust, bringing colleagues together in service of the common good.

As we approach school holiday periods, safeguarding teams and all staff are reminded to review arrangements for vulnerable pupils and families during times of school closure. This includes ensuring that any safety plans are current, confirming appropriate information sharing with external agencies and ensuring families are aware of key contacts and sources of support during school closures. Particular consideration should be given to pupils and families supported through statutory or consent-based services, those with attendance concerns, and any emerging contextual risks. Prioritising these families reflects our commitment to the preferential option for the poor and vulnerable and demonstrates solidarity with those most in need within our communities.



The proactive approach we all share and our collective effort in professional curiosity and the clear communication channels with families provides additional assurance that vulnerable children remain safeguarded when school-based oversight is reduced. The vigilance and commitment of all our staff in supporting children, families and colleagues is crucial at this time in the term. Rooted in our Catholic ethos and the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, placing the dignity of the child at the centre of our practice ensures that safeguarding is not only a statutory obligation, but a lived expression of our mission and values.

Spotlight on Our Schools

St John Fisher

This term St John Fisher has launched OPAL Play, and it is already making a big splash! OPAL (Outdoor Play and Learning) enhances opportunities for physical activity, socialisation, cooperation, resilience, creativity, and enjoyment. At St John Fisher, we know that children learn vital life skills through play. Since 20% of a child's time at school is spent playing - equivalent to 1.4 years of primary school - we want to ensure this time is of the highest possible quality.

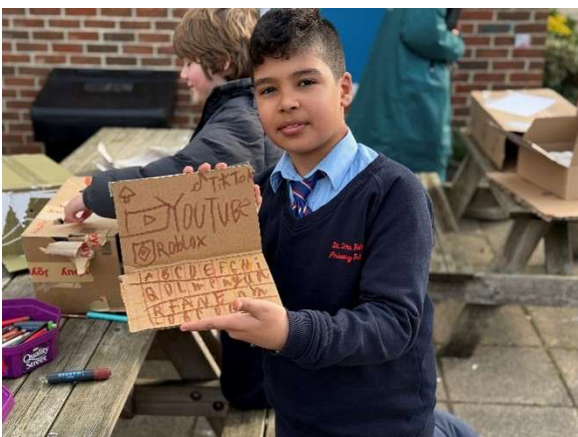
We are blessed with a fantastic school site and have begun to explore it fully, regardless of the weather. Through regular Play Assemblies, we have celebrated successes and worked with the children to agree on activities and equipment use.

- The children are delighted with the changes:
- "We can go out even when it is raining."
- "I love den making with my friends from different year groups."
- "Splashing in puddles is my favourite thing to do!"

We are thrilled about this project and have many ideas to build, develop, and explore in the coming months.

There have been many other opportunities to take learning 'outside' this term, with a variety of educational visits and trips to enhance and support pupils' learning. Year 5 pupils have been busy preparing for a forthcoming musical extravaganza at the Royal Albert Hall as part of Merton Music Foundation's 'One Voice' project, alongside hundreds of pupils and community choirs from across Merton. We can't wait to take our seats and enjoy what is sure to be a spectacular evening in March.

At the end of this half term, the school will mark a very special event with a very special Mass. After 33 years of dedicated service, Margaret Aldred, our Attendance and Admissions Officer and longest serving member of staff, will be beginning a new chapter of her life as she retires. The whole school community are looking forward to celebrating a very special Mass in Mrs. Aldred's honour and give thanks for her service and love for our school





Ursuline High School

Ursuline High School has made a strong and purposeful start to the Spring Term, with students and staff returning with energy and determination despite early challenges caused by severe weather. Students have demonstrated excellent standards of uniform, organisation and engagement in lessons, reflecting the high expectations across the school. Academic achievement has been a particular highlight, with outstanding GCSE re-sit results for Sixth Form students in English and Maths, well above national averages. Students in Years 7, 8 and 12 have also completed key assessments, while Year 11 students received their mock GCSE results through the school's 'Brown Envelope Day', supporting reflection, resilience and clear next steps as they prepare for their summer examinations.

Achievement beyond the classroom has also been a key feature of the term. Ursuline hosted the Sixth Form politics conference *Brexit Britain: 10 Years On*, welcoming students from across London to engage with MPs, journalists and specialist speakers in a high-profile academic event. Students have excelled in enrichment opportunities, including the Jack Petchey Speak Out Challenge, where pupils demonstrated exceptional confidence and communication skills, with several progressing to the next stages of the competition. Subject visits, guest lectures and workshops across Film Studies, Economics, Drama and Music have further enriched students' learning and aspirations.

Catholic life and community remain central to daily school life and continue to provide opportunities for spiritual growth and shared celebration. Students and staff came together for Epiphany Mass and have begun preparations for the Feast of St Angela, reinforcing the school's strong faith foundation. Parental engagement has been another significant strength, with excellent attendance at options evenings and parents' evenings across year groups. Notable individual successes have also been celebrated, including Sixth Form students securing offers to study at Oxford University. These achievements together reflect Ursuline High School's commitment to academic excellence, personal development and faith-led education within Sancta Familia Catholic Academy Trust.



St. Aidan's

Spring Term 1 has been full of wonderful achievements and memorable experiences across our school. At St Aidan's, Year 2 and Year 3 pupils gave a fantastic stage performance of *Rats, the Pied Piper of Hamelin*. The children impressed everyone with their acting, singing and dancing, and it was a joy to see how much confidence they have developed. Performing in front of an audience is no small achievement, and the pupils should be very proud of themselves.

Our pupils have also taken part in some truly inspiring opportunities beyond the classroom. Year 5 pupils performed alongside 8,000 other children at the O2 Arena as part of the Young Voices Choir, singing a range of songs from *Wicked* and popular musical medleys. The excitement and joy on the children's faces was unforgettable, and performing in such a prestigious venue was an experience they will remember for years to come.



Supporting pupils' wellbeing and spiritual life has also been a key focus this term. Children have been delighted to use the new sensory room, with Reception pupils especially enjoying this calm and supportive space. In addition, Year 3 pupils joined children from across the Trust for a very special Trust Liturgy. It was a meaningful occasion that brought our schools together and reflected the strong sense of community and shared faith at the heart of Sancta Familia Catholic Academy Trust.



St Cecilia's

This term, our children have enjoyed an inspiring creative journey, working alongside a professional artist to develop their technical skills in sculpture, with a particular focus on large-scale forms. We were delighted to welcome artist Steve Porter, who collaborated with pupils across Key Stages 1 and 2, guiding them as they brought much-loved storybook characters to life.

Inspired by the children's own ideas, the project centred on creating bold, imaginative sculptures of Elmer the Patchwork Elephant, the Gruffalo, and the BFG. Using cardboard and wirework, pupils worked in teams through each stage of the sculpting process, learning how ideas are transformed into impressive three-dimensional artworks.

Children worked with Steve in small groups, completing a sculpture each day. Subsequently, each evening Steve added final refinements before the pieces were left to dry, ready for the next stage of their journey. Now beautifully finished, the sculptures are touring the school, delighting pupils and staff alike, before taking pride of place in their permanent home in our school library — a lasting celebration of creativity, collaboration and a love of storytelling.

Year 6 Mission Week - Homelessness

As part of our commitment to living out the Gospel in daily life, each year group at St Cecilia's takes part in a Mission Week, focusing on a particular aspect of faith or Catholic Social Teaching. These special weeks invite our pupils to deepen their understanding of what it means to follow Christ in service, compassion and love. This week, our Year 6 pupils have been exploring the Catholic Social Teaching principle of the preferential option for the poor, with a particular focus on the reality of homelessness. Through thoughtful research and discussion, the



children have learned about the complex reasons why people may find themselves without a safe place to call home, challenging assumptions and growing in empathy and understanding.

A powerful highlight of the week was the Year 6 “sleepout”, during which pupils took on the role of a chosen character and experienced, in a small but meaningful way, the uncertainty faced by those who are homeless. Using cardboard and sleeping bags, they created simple, temporary shelters within the school, reflecting on the discomfort and vulnerability that so many endure night after night.

In a true spirit of service, the children also raised funds for the Cardinal Hume Centre, supporting its vital work with homeless and disadvantaged young people. The experience concluded with a humble soup kitchen, where pupils shared a warm, nourishing meal together, before coming together in a moment of quiet, reflective prayer. In this sacred time, they entrusted to God all those who struggle with homelessness and asked for the courage to be witnesses of hope, justice and compassion in the world.

This moving and memorable Mission Week has helped our Year 6 pupils to grow not only in knowledge, but in faith, reminding us all of Christ’s call to love our neighbour, especially the most vulnerable among us.



St Elphege’s Federation Infants and Juniors School

St Elphege’s Designated Music Lead School for Sutton.

We’re thrilled to share that St Elphege’s Schools have been designated the Lead School for Sutton by the South West London Music Hub and Sutton Music Trust. This brilliant news celebrates the schools’ long-standing love of music and their dedication to creative learning. As ambassadors for music education, St Elphege’s will now support other local schools by sharing best practice, offering staff training, and helping to ensure every pupil has access to a broad, exciting, inclusive, and high-quality music curriculum. It’s a wonderful achievement for the whole community!

Sancta Familia Academy Trust Liturgy

We are bursting with pride following the first-ever Sancta Familia Liturgy, a truly magnificent event that brought our school community together in faith and song. Our children from across both the Infant and Junior Schools represented us with grace and enthusiasm. A special mention must go to our School Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, who served as fantastic ambassadors for St Elphege’s throughout the celebration. The liturgy was a wonderful reflection of the hard work and dedication within our Trust. It provided a unique opportunity to see the collective spirit of our schools in action.

St Elphege’s had the distinct honour of leading the schools in song. Our pupils sounded absolutely wonderful, filling the church with their voices.



Fr Hough's 90th Birthday Celebration

Last Saturday, we had the immense joy of celebrating a very special milestone for a truly dear friend of our community. Father Hough, who served St Elphege's with such devotion for over 30 years, celebrated his 90th birthday!

To mark the occasion, six of our pupils were selected to attend and sing at his celebration Mass at his home parish of St Ambrose. Our students were, quite simply, fantastic. They served as wonderful ambassadors of the St Elphege's spirit. It was a moving tribute to the decades of service Father Hough gave to our school family. The cake was delicious, too!



Regina Coeli

January marked an exciting milestone for Regina Coeli Catholic Primary School with the opening of our very first Nursery class. Our new pupils received a warm and thoughtful welcome, supported by the school's Pupil Parliament, who helped ensure a smooth and positive transition into school life. The youngest members of our community have already settled in beautifully, approaching their new learning environment with confidence, curiosity and enthusiasm. This development represents an important step forward for the school, enabling us to extend our high-quality, faith-based education to children aged three and four.

Alongside this milestone, the school has enjoyed a vibrant and creative National Storytelling Week and Book Week. With William Shakespeare as our theme, pupils across the school explored his work, developed their understanding of language and storytelling, and even had the opportunity to write their own sonnets. The week was a wonderful celebration of literature and creativity, encouraging pupils to engage with classic texts in an accessible and inspiring way.

The celebrations concluded with a fantastic staff performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which proved to be a real highlight for pupils and staff alike. The performances were full of energy and humour, and the children thoroughly enjoyed seeing their teachers bring Shakespeare's work to life. It was a memorable end to a week that showcased the school's commitment to creativity, learning and community spirit within Sancta Familia Catholic Academy Trust.





SANCTA FAMILIA
CATHOLIC ACADEMY TRUST

We'd love to hear from you

This is now our third staff newsletter, and we'd really value your thoughts. What did you find helpful? What would you like to see in future editions?

Please share your feedback by emailing n.burley-burton@sanctafamilia.co.uk.