

Dear Parents, Carers & Students,

A very warm welcome to the Christmas edition of our Newsletter.

As we approach the end of another term here at St John's, I wish to take a moment to reflect on what has truly been a busy, positive and successful start to the academic year at our very special Catholic School. I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to all of our students, and especially our new Year 7 and Year 12 pupils, who have made such a fantastic transition into life at St John's. Your enthusiasm and dedication have not gone unnoticed, and we are delighted to have you as part of our school community.

This term has been filled with a range of fantastic events, trips, and enriching activities that have allowed our students to represent St John's values wonderfully well. It is always uplifting to see our pupils engage wholeheartedly in these experiences, learning and growing together. Whether they were participating in sporting or Performing Arts-based activities, cultural trips, spiritual retreats, or academic challenges, our students have continually exemplified all that is good about St John's, in a spirit of collaboration, respect, and perseverance.

Equally important is our ongoing commitment to charitable causes. This year, our participation in the Christmas Shoe Box Appeal, in support of the Salvation Army, has been particularly inspiring. We managed to fill a record 141 Shoe Boxes which will be donated to under-privileged children in the local area; an absolutely fantastic achievement! It is incredibly heartening to see our students embrace the opportunity to act on their faith and contribute to those in need, embodying 'Faith in Action' and our school ethos of 'Service to Others'. Thank you to all parents who have supported this initiative and encouraged your children to be generous and compassionate.

Furthermore, I would like to emphasise the special nature of our Catholic community. As we journey together in faith, it is vital that we continue to nurture this spirit among our students, encouraging them to deepen their understanding and appreciation of our shared values of love, tolerance, respect and forgiveness - especially important in this very special season of Advent and Christmastime.

As we draw this term to a close, I would like to take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to each and every one of you for your unwavering support, encouragement, and involvement in our school community. Your partnership is invaluable in creating an inspiring environment for our children to flourish. The collaboration we share plays a pivotal role in shaping our students' experiences and helps to build a strong foundation for their futures.

As we prepare to celebrate the upcoming holidays, I wish you and your families a Happy and Holy Christmas filled with joy, peace, and love. May this festive season be one of reflection and gratitude, and may the New Year bring continued blessings for all. We very much look forward to welcoming our students back in January 2025, ready to embark on the next chapter of their educational journey.

God bless,
Matt Barron
Headteacher

Shoe Box Appeal



CHRISTMAS SHOEBOX APPEAL

THE SALVATION ARMY

Thank You!

We have filled a record 141 boxes

Amazing!

2022 = 77
2023 = 125
2024 = 141

Thank you so much for the wonderful support with this year's Christmas Shoe Box Appeal. We have filled a record, 141 Shoe Boxes, which is an amazing achievement.

Special thanks to the School Council, for all of their excellent efforts throughout the day in ensuring each box is wrapped and contains age appropriate gifts. The shoe boxes will be delivered to the Salvation Army before the end of term and gifted to under-privileged children across Gravesham and the South East.

St John's students collaborate on 'Dance for Camera' Project



Students across years 7 - 12 that were successful at auditions, took part in an exciting opportunity to work with a professional videographer. They have created a 'Dance for Camera' video piece that is currently being edited by Meros Productions.

The students worked in various locations at Chatham Historic Dockyards, and were both professional and enthusiastic throughout the project.

It was lovely to see students of different ages from across the school coming together to create something unique. All students involved represented St John's in a mature and positive manner throughout the day; well done to those involved, we can't wait to see the final edited video!

Mrs R Steadman. Teaching and Learning Leader.



St John's school produces the overall winner at the International Alliance of Catholic Knights (IACK) 2024 essay competition.

On 1st December 2024, the International Alliance of Catholic Knights (IACK) announced the 2024 winners of their International essay competition. This is the very first time that St John's students have entered this competition. We were absolutely delighted that Nora, in Year 12, was announced as the overall winner of this very prestigious competition that attracted participants from around the world. Nora wrote a superb essay, entitled; 'My calling in making God's dream come true' and took home the winning prize of £1000.

Nora's essay very much embodies the St John's school mottos; of 'Excellence for All', 'Service to Others' and 'Inspired by Christ'. Nora wrote in her essay: "I strive to treat every individual with dignity and respect, to form a positive environment in the lives of those that I serve – expressing that faith can be shown through kindness and understanding one another even outside of a church or religious setting."

The newly elected Supreme Knight of the Knights of St Columba in the UK, Brother Michael Akinrele, wrote "Nora has taken part in all the Competitions available to her age group and has met with great success. She either wins her age group or is placed in 2nd or 3rd. More often she wins. The greatest pleasure I have had the honour of being involved in, is Nora winning the International Alliance of Catholic Knights (IACK) essays worldwide competition. This is testament to Nora's ability... I am very much still on cloud nine at Nora's win. A student at St John's Catholic Secondary School Gravesend winning against the World. Congratulations to Nora."

St John's Head teacher, Mr Barron wrote: "Nora is a truly delightful student, and one who fully embodies her faith – the prize could not go to a more worthy winner (her essay reads very well too!)"

Huge Congratulations to Nora, who has also won a plethora of prizes at National competitions run by the Knights of St Columba, which is a lay Catholic Order in the UK. I very much hope that this win will encourage more students to participate in such competitions in 2025.

Mr F Juma. Teacher of Religious Studies.

Year 8 visit to Dover Castle

In October, Year 8 History students participated in a visit to Dover Castle to enrich their studies of the KS3 History curriculum. The students had a very busy day, and were able to have the opportunity to:

- Explore Dover Castle's key structures and link the castle's changes over time with national and international events.
- Understand the function of Dover Castle's key defences and be able to explain the significance of the castle's position on the south-east coast.
- Recognise Dover Castle's strategic position and how the castle has adapted over time in defending England from the Roman period to the Second World War.
- Have a guided tour of the secret war-time tunnels at Dover Castle which were used in World War Two.



Thank you to the staff who helped to support on the day with the students.

Mr B Smith. Assistant Headteacher/Teacher of History.

Remembrance Assembly

On the 110th anniversary of the First World War, our school held a Remembrance Assembly to honor the sacrifices of those who served. The event was graced by the presence of distinguished guests, including representatives from the Royal Engineers, the Royal British Legion, and the Mayor of Gravesham.

Aligned with the Catholic Ethos of solidarity and human dignity, the assembly was themed "Human Resilience and Adaptation to Changing Times." This theme encouraged us to reflect on the challenges faced by those who lived through the war and the challenges sometimes presented by modern technology. Student speakers were invited to share their thoughts on the importance of remembrance, and to consider how we can apply lessons from the past to our lives today.

Using Pope Paul VI 's message 'If you want Peace, work for Justice', we hope to build a more compassionate world by acknowledging the suffering of others. We are very grateful to our students, staff, and guests for their contributions to this event.

Mr S Lam. History Teacher



Art News

Congratulations to our students, Oscar Year 12 and Chetna Year 9, who submitted entries to this year's Christmas Card Competition run by the Kent Catholic Schools Partnership (KCSP).

Oscar won first place and Chetna was highly commended. Oscar's card will be printed as the official KCSP Christmas card and Chetna's has been printed to sell and raise funds for St John's 'Sanctuary' (Homeless Shelter) appeal. We are privileged to work with such talented students.



Oscar with his certificate and winning design

Students Shortlisted for Biggest Art Competition in Kent



Phoebe pictured with her excellent art work

The John Downton Award for Young Artists is an annual exhibition run by KCC which encourages and celebrates the creativity of Kent's young artists. It is open to students aged 11 to 18 from schools and colleges across Kent.

The John Downton Awards were, as always, very exciting and the competition from other schools was of an exceptional standard. We would like to congratulate our students Sandra P, Phoebe M, Saira C and Alex G who were shortlisted for the 2024 Awards. Our students' work looked very impressive hanging alongside the other work displayed. The exhibition is at County Hall, Maidstone, and will be running until the end of January and can be visited between the hours of 9am and 4pm Monday to Friday.

Mrs D Lal. Art and Design Technician.

Year 12 & 13 Visit to BBC Broadcasting House, London - Friday 18th October.

In October, our Year 12 & 13 BTEC Media students had a wonderful time visiting the BBC Broadcasting House in London. A large number of well-known BBC shows for radio and TV are recorded at this venue and as you can imagine the students were very excited. During our visit to BBC Broadcasting House, the pupils spent time in the radio theatre gaining behind the scenes insight to the production and skills required to work in this industry. They were hosted by BBC Newsround presenter and podcaster De-Graft Mensah.

Here is a list of the amazing experiences our students were lucky to attend

- A podcast masterclass by BBC Producer Daniel Wittenberg #Americast #BBCNewscast.

· A presentation by engineer turned award winning podcast producer, Tommy Dixon, to hear all about his career journey and tips.

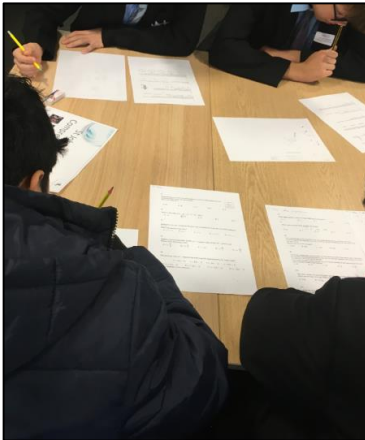
· Bringing an actual podcast live to the stage! Tommy presented and recorded a special episode of his podcast 'Colouring in Britain' which uncovers the incredible lives and stories of Britons of colour, past and present.

Opportunities for students to learn more about the BBC Apprenticeships schemes can be found online via the BBC website.



Mr S Warwick. Media Studies Teacher.

Maths Competition.



In November, a team of four of our Year 10 students participated in the Invicta Secondary Maths Challenge; a competition organised for all Year 10 students across the county, hosted at the Invicta Grammar School.

The competition was a combination of mathematical, communication and teamwork skills. The students experienced what it was like to compete against other schools and discovered a new way of expressing and developing their enjoyment of Mathematics.

Well done to those students who took part in the competition - you represented the school very well indeed.

Miss M Bailey. Maths Teacher.



Summer School Crazy Golf Event: Staff and Students Have a Blast!

Our Summer School Crazy Golf event was a huge success, bringing together students and staff for a fun-filled day of friendly competition and teamwork. The event saw staff members enthusiastically joining in, showing their competitive spirit and support for the students.

It was wonderful to see such great participation from all involved. Thank you to everyone who made the event so special – it truly was a fantastic day for the school community!

A very special 'thank you' to the RNJ The Gift of Golf Foundation, for their incredibly generous support of our Summer School. If you would like more information on this amazing local charity, please follow the link: [Vulnerable Children - Being A Child for A Day](#)

Mr M Athikesavan. Operations Support Officer.

Gymnastics Squads Shine at Regional Team Trio Competition



On Sunday 1st December, the Under 13 Mixed and Under 19 Mixed gymnastics squads competed in the Regional Team Trio competition at Tormead School.

The Under 13 Mixed team achieved 2nd place, and the Under 19 Mixed team achieved 1st place, resulting in both teams gaining a place at the National Finals being held in Stoke-on-Trent in March 2025.

Well done to all those who competed, and trained so hard for the competition. Wishing you all the luck for the next Regional competition on Sunday 26th January 2025.



Mrs L Weller. Assistant Headteacher (Teaching and Learning).

Active Kent and Medway

Students participated in team building activities and sports through Active Kent and Medway. The aim of the trip was to develop **teamwork, cooperation and leadership skills**.

It was a fantastic opportunity for some of our Year 7 students to team up and mentor Year 6 students from St John's Primary.

Students represented our school incredibly well and enjoyed the opportunity to develop positive friendships with one another, nurturing fantastic transferable skills to take back to the classroom.

Students worked well as a team and were highly motivating and positive role models to each other and to their Year 6 team mates.

Our students were awarded with a medal and certificate for their excellence and positive attitude throughout all challenges by Active Kent and Medway.

Congratulations to all students who took part in the event.

Miss T Ficchi. SEND Manager.



Geography trip to Stratford

Year 11 GCSE Geography students recently attended a trip to Stratford, London, to explore urban regeneration. London is a GCSE topic that students study in Year 10 which is why we take them Stratford to see the area in person and practice fieldwork methods for their examinations.

Students collected a range of data throughout the day to answer the question 'to what extent has regeneration had positive impacts in Stratford'. Given the wide array of lunch options within Westfield Shopping Centre, students were in agreement that regeneration has indeed been positive! Thankfully the weather held out on each of the three days that the trip ran and students had an enjoyable and memorable experience.

Mr B Thilthorpe. Head of Geography.

Sports News



This term the Kent Schools Table Tennis Team tournaments have taken place and St John's have had some welcome successes. Above, the U13 A team won a bronze in the Plate competition defeating Oakwood Park GS on countback after drawing 4-4 in matches.



In the U16 tournament the Girls team won a silver medal and the Boys A team won a bronze in the Plate competition. The U19 boys also won a silver to make it a successful day all round. February sees the individual tournaments take place.

Mr S Ward. Physical Education teacher.

Year 10 & 11 Netball Team Celebrate a Strong Start to the Season

The Year 10 and 11 netball team have had an impressive start to their season, securing victories in two out of their three league games and competing in several friendly matches to hone their skills. Their hard work and determination have paid off, as they currently sit at the top of their group in the Gravesham Competition—a fantastic achievement that reflects their talent and teamwork.

Notable performances have come from Erin G, whose accuracy and composure as Goal Shooter have been crucial in securing wins, and captain Leyla A, who has led the team with skill, strategy, and unwavering dedication.

Congratulations to the team, and best of luck for the rest of the season!

Mr R Kyle. Head of Physical Education.

Tenerife Trip 2024

On the 7th of November, students from the Geography and Spanish GCSE groups embarked on an unforgettable educational trip to Tenerife. The vibrant island, renowned for its breathtaking landscapes and rich culture, became an open classroom, offering students a unique opportunity to connect their studies with real-world experiences.

For the Geography students, Tenerife provided a spectacular backdrop to explore volcanic landscapes, including a visit to the lava caves, and Mount Teide, Spain's highest peak. The group delved into the fascinating processes of volcanism and observed how these natural phenomena shape both the environment and local communities.



Meanwhile, Spanish students immersed themselves in the local culture and language. They practiced their conversational skills in authentic settings, gaining confidence and a deeper appreciation for the Spanish way of life.

The trip was a perfect blend of hands-on learning and adventure. Students returned inspired, with a wealth of knowledge and memories that will undoubtedly enhance their academic journey.

Miss Y Pizza. Head of Modern Foreign Languages.

Year 13 Psychology Bethlem Museum of the Mind Trip



On the 19th of September, Year 13 Psychology students visited the Bethlem Museum of the Mind to enrich their understanding of Psychology. The museum focuses on the history of Bethlem Royal Hospital, its programme of care, and its patients. During their visit, students were presented with an insightful history of treatments for mental health problems, which complemented various topics studied in Psychology, such as 'Schizophrenia' and 'Psychopathology'.

They explored various sections of the museum, including labelling, diagnosis, constraint, treatment, and recovery. Additionally, students participated in an interactive workshop focusing on the ethics surrounding mental health care provision. Students had an enjoyable and informative day that will undoubtedly enrich their studies further.

Mrs O Collins. Psychology Teacher.

"I loved visiting the Bethlem Museum as it gave me greater insight into psychopathology. Both the gallery and the grounds were intriguing and cool." J. Kent.

"I enjoyed learning about the history of Bethlem, and it was especially interesting to discover that in the past, there were only two diagnoses of mental illness." J. Lopez.

Walk Eat Talk Eat - KS4 Food Trip

A number of Key Stage 4 Food students enjoyed a food walking tour around the East End of London in October, including Spitalfields Market, Old Street and Brick Lane.

As well as learning some of the history of the area and spotting some Banksy artwork, students got to visit a range of artisan food stores, getting the opportunity to try a selection of dishes from each vendor.



Dishes included Sri Lankan Kothu Roti, savoury Bangladeshi snacks, chocolate truffles and hot chocolate from a Ghanaian chocolatier, bagels from the famous Beigel Bakes and lastly, sourdough raspberry jam Doughnuts.

Christmas Community Afternoon Tea

Key Stage 4 BTEC Food students prepared and served a festive Afternoon Tea for 60 guests on Tuesday 10th December. Guests included retired staff members, local parishioners, the Mayor, local veterans and members of the Royal British Legion, as well as friends and family of our school community. Students from Dance and Music, along with the choir, also supported with entertainment throughout the event.

A very special mention and well done to our waiters: Randeep B, Tarique T, Elesha-Mai T, Emily C, Sophie H, Madison W, Eshaana S, Sarak K, Christy B and Anamaria I!

We hope all our guests enjoyed the festivities and have a wonderful Christmas!



Miss S Gosling. Subject Leader Food Technology.

Project Power Workshop



A number of Year 9 girls participated in a Project Power workshop. The project Power team were joined by One Active Athlete Megan Branch. Megan Branch is a former St John's student.

Megan hosted the workshop, taking the girls through a body weight workout followed by her story and Q&As. The Project power team also gifted the Year 9 girls with a full set of active wear: Leggings, T-Shirt and sports Bra.

The girls were full of joy during the event and made us all proud.

Project Power commented:

'We truly felt the passion and gratitude from all the teachers and students yesterday, it really means so much to us.'

Miss H Thomson. Physical Education Teacher.

Wellbeing Ambassadors Take Part in KCC Big Mental Health Conversation and Raise Funds for Charity

On the 9th October, the Wellbeing Ambassadors went to Detling for the KCC Big Mental Health Conversation; this was attended by various schools across Kent. St John's pupils attended a variety of workshops including Therapy ponies; Wellbeing Walk; Exam anxiety and the Benefits of Physical activity. The Wellbeing Ambassadors had a great day out and learnt a lot from the workshops.

The Wellbeing Ambassadors were instrumental in organising the 'Odd socks day' for Antibullying week. They also delivered the 'Antibully alliance' assembly to all year groups for that week.

The school community did a fantastic job in raising money for the odd socks day and the following charities each received £500 – MIND, The Antibullying Alliance and The Elliot Holmes Foundation.

Please see some useful resources below:

The Kent resilience hub has a lot of resources for parents and carers to help support their children.

The website is: <https://kentresiliencehub.org.uk/supporting-your-child/>

Kooth, the online mental health and wellbeing platform, will be available throughout the winter holidays.

While hours may vary slightly, Kooth means your children always have a safe, confidential space to turn to, with professionals ready to listen when things feel overwhelming.

In addition, you'll find free resources and training to help you, school colleagues, parents/carers, and students.

Online safety has a number of resources to support parents and carers in the online world. I have also included some factsheets to accompany this newsletter that may be of help.

For Parents – Loot Boxes

For many children and young people, playing games is predominantly about socialising with their friends. Because of this, there can be significant peer pressure to look and be better than everyone else, to get further in the game than others. In-game purchases, such as loot boxes, capitalise on this peer pressure, essentially enticing users to get ahead more quickly by spending money. Loot boxes have been a concern for a long time. A few years ago in the UK it was thought that loot boxes would come under the updated Gambling Act, but this never happened due to a lack of research; however, loot boxes can be a gateway or lead-in to gambling. Concerningly, a BBC investigation has found that, out of the top 45 biggest games on the Google Play store, most are not disclosing that the games contain loot boxes properly. Many parents rely on the information that is available on the various game/app stores as well as ads to decide what is/is not appropriate for their children and this lack of important information is inexcusable.

I do hope you have a restful Christmas break

Mrs O Kelham. Senior Assistant Headteacher (Designated Safeguarding Lead, Mental Health Lead).

Chaplaincy

The 2024/25 school year has been a really busy year so far for Chaplaincy. It is a pleasure to see so many pupils engage with in the Spiritual Life of St John's.



In September, a selection of pupils from across the school represented St John's at the KCSP 'Beginning of Year Mass' at Aylesford and the Diocesan 'Beginning of The School Year Mass', at St George's Cathedral, Southwark. The KCSP Mass was celebrated by Bishop Paul Hendricks, auxiliary Bishop for the area and Southwark Diocese, and Archbishop Wilson celebrated the Mass at Southwark Cathedral, with young people from schools across the whole Diocese of Southwark.

Our retreat programme commenced with Year 7 pupils visiting Aylesford Priory. The pupils became pilgrims for the day, spending time reflecting on their life journey from primary school to secondary, how they have changed and who will walk beside them as they journey through St John's. The groups explored different ways of praying and pupils were gifted Rosaries and a guide to the Rosary. The highlight, it would appear, was feeding the many geese and ducks at Aylesford Priory.



December for any school is busy.



Our Year 12 pupils organised a collection of soft toys, donating them to the Teddy Tombola stall for the Christmas Parish Bazaar. Our senior pupils collected over one hundred soft toys, gratefully received by the parish. On the day of the Christmas Bazaar, many pupils gave up their time to help. Pupils stayed late on the Friday evening prior to the event to assist parishioners in carrying goods from cars. Then on Bazaar day, students served behind stalls, and ran themselves to exhaustion as runners for 'Spin the Wheel', then remained at the event afterwards to help clear the school, ready for Monday morning. This was definitely 'faith in action'; young people guided by Catholic Social Teaching, called to participate in their community.

Despite the business of the last three months, students are seeking God in the quiet times of school. The chapel is busy most break and lunchtimes. It is a place of peace and calm. Something we all need in our lives.

Chaplain's Corner

Christmas seems to start earlier each year.

The summer holidays had barely started when I noticed Christmas-themed chocolate in the shops. To me, it feels like we jump from summer to Christmas in a breath, with a minor diversion of Halloween. We are constantly planning, panicking, playing catch up.

I am completely guilty when it comes to buying into the Christmas drama. Every year I make promises to myself around June: this year Christmas will be different. I will be organised. Shopping will be completed by the end of November. I will plan Christmas events at school months in advance. This will of course allow me a stress-free run into the 'Big Day' with plenty of time and space to spend time with my family. I could catch up with old friends; indulge in every sentimental Christmas film channel 5 can throw at me. I may even bake Christmas treats!

Of course, these promises are sadly broken. Every television advert throws me into a tailspin. Gnomes from A**A, stockings singing the tunes from Buggy Malone and the BFG send me mildly manic. The cooking programmes, my usual form of relaxation, broadcast marvelous people demonstrating how to make Christmas awesome. I just hope not to poison the family with an undercooked turkey. How I long for the Dawn French fairy to help. To make things worse, even David Beckham seems to have Christmas dinner sorted.

All this searching and striving of the 'perfect' Christmas make me a less-than-perfect person to be around. I am grumpy, bad-tempered and stressed.

Is this what God wanted for us all when He became incarnate?

Looking at our school Nativity gave me clarity.



I think of the Birth of Jesus Christ. A child born to a couple rejected by many before arriving at the stable. A humble introduction to earth. Born into a world of intolerance, hatred, injustice. A baby shining light into the darkness of human hearts.

Two thousand and twenty four years later, our world is similar, if not worse than the world Jesus was born into. There is much suffering resulting from the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. Just this week, reports of the trauma endured by the Syrian people have left me speechless. Even in our own nation, there is much hardship and cruelty to our fellow human beings.

Think of the Nativity of Christ. His Birth is a celebration of humankind. Jesus' birth is a reminder that we are not alone and that God is present in the world. It may not be a perfect world, we may not be perfect, but we have the Hope, Love and Peace of Jesus. A hope that faith in Him will help us to strive for peace. A pure Love, shining Joy into our lives. Our messy, imperfect lives and world.

Together, let's make a promise to count our blessings this Christmas. To be thankful of the presence of people in our lives, rather than the amount to presents we receive. To always hope that the presence of God will shine on our troubled world, giving us the courage to seek peace for all. Let us promise to strip Christmas back to the simplicity of the Nativity. God chose a pure simple moment filled with love for His Son, Jesus, to be born to our world.

Can we manage that, just for one day?

I hope with all my heart for your Christmas to be bursting at the seams with Love, Peace, Hope and Joy.

Please keep in your prayers those of us who mourn this Christmas, who are lonely or facing desperation. Our Global family living with the uncertainty accompanied by war and violence. Give thanks for our blessings, no matter how small or insignificant they may seem.

Let's keep it simple, with no undercooked turkey! I'll let you know at Easter if I managed to serve an edible Christmas dinner.

May the Peace of Jesus rest in our hearts and homes this Christmas.

God Bless.

Susanne.

Susanne Gibbons. School chaplain.

