



BISHOP WILKINSON

CATHOLIC EDUCATION TRUST

BWCET NEWSLETTER SPRING 2026



*Through Christ, in partnership,
enabling all to flourish.*

FROM OUR ACTING CEO...

As we journey together through this academic year as a Trust family, I would like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to every member of our community.

Across all our schools, I continue to be inspired by the dedication of our staff, the enthusiasm and kindness of our pupils, and the steadfast support of our families. Your commitment to our faith, to service and to community ensures that our Catholic mission is not simply spoken about, but lived out each day in classrooms, playgrounds and parish partnerships.

The start of Lent offers us a special moment to pause and reflect. This most sacred season invites us to renew our faith, to turn our hearts more fully towards God, and to consider how we can grow in prayer, generosity and compassion. In our schools, we will be encouraging our pupils to embrace the three pillars of Lent: prayer, fasting and almsgiving, helping them understand that even small acts of kindness and sacrifice can make a profound difference.

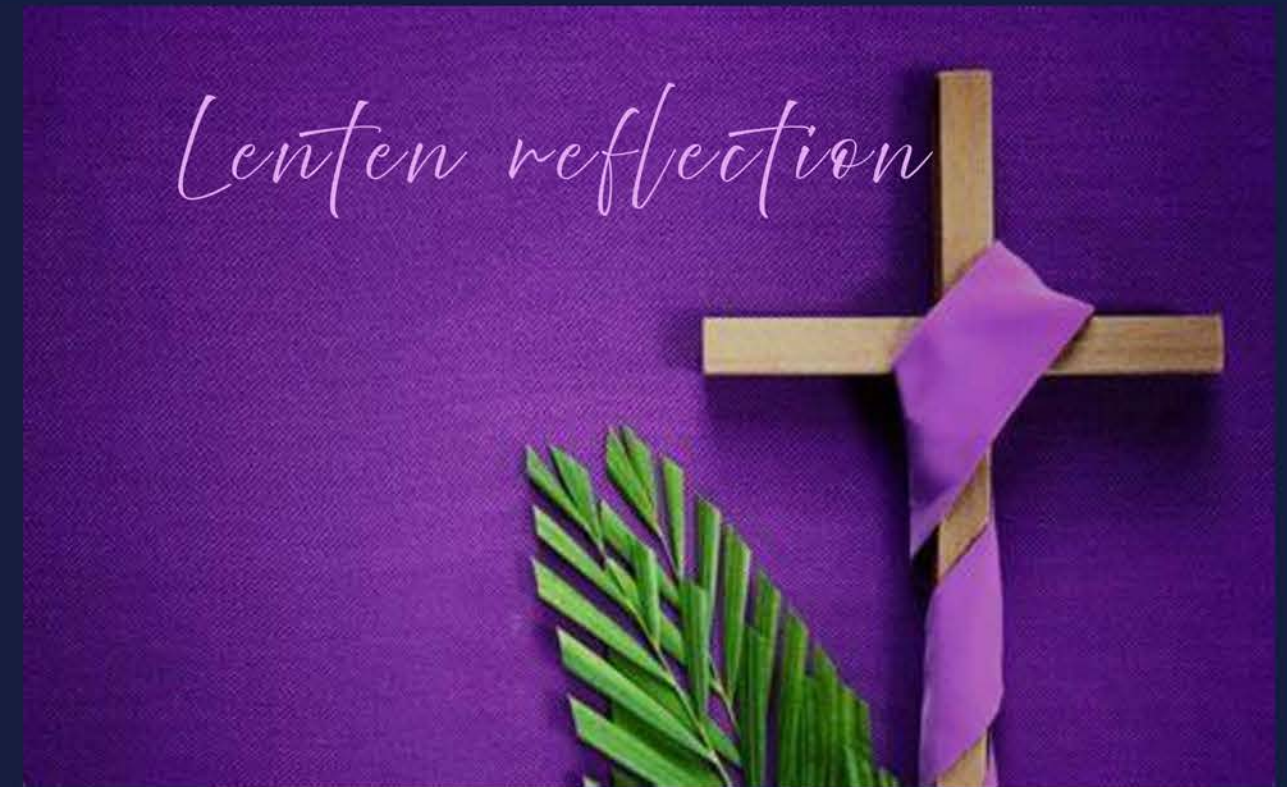
Lent is also a time of preparation and hope. As we look ahead to Easter, we are reminded that after sacrifice comes renewal, and after darkness comes light. The message of the Resurrection speaks powerfully to our school communities: perseverance, love and faith always lead us forward.

Thank you for the many ways you contribute to the life of our Trust: through the daily nurturing of our shared values, encouragement at home, participation in school events and charitable outreach. Together, we are shaping compassionate children and young people, grounded in faith and ready to serve others.

May this Lenten season be one of reflection, growth and grace for you and your families.

Lucie Stephenson

Acting Chief Executive Officer



Inspired by our patron, St Carlo Acutis

Our goal must be the infinite, not the finite. The infinite is our homeland. Heaven has been waiting for us forever.

This Lenten season is an opportunity for us to focus on the infinite- our true home, in heaven. Lent is a time to reset our focus, to detach from the finite things of this life and strive for what truly lasts. Lent is a time for renewal, when we allow God's grace to shape us into His image.

**Heavenly Father,
During this Lenten season, teach us to fast from selfishness, to pray with spirit and to give with a generous heart.
Help us to remember that You have
'been waiting for us forever,'
and give us the courage to detach ourselves from what is temporary
and seek what is eternal.
Amen.**



A MESSAGE FROM BRIDGET PHILLIPSON



Earlier this term we were immensely proud to celebrate the achievements of a number of our schools who received a letter of congratulations from the Secretary of State for Education, Bridget Phillipson MP, praising their strong outcomes for pupils, particularly those who are disadvantaged.

The schools recognised include All Saints Catholic Primary in Lanchester, Corpus Christi Catholic Primary in Gateshead, St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School in Chester-le-street, St John Boste Catholic Primary in Washington, St Patrick's Catholic Primary School in Dipton, St Joseph's Catholic Juniors in Birtley, Cardinal Hume Catholic School in Gateshead, St Leonard's Catholic School in Durham and St Augustine's Catholic Primary in Gateshead.

In her letter to the headteachers, the Secretary of State commended the schools for their commitment to ensuring that pupils, especially those who might be more vulnerable, achieve positive outcomes, highlighting the impact of high-quality teaching, strong leadership, and inclusive school cultures.

This success reflects the Trust's mission to serve its communities through excellent Catholic education, ensuring that every child is supported to flourish.

We are delighted that the outstanding work of our schools has been recognised at a national level. This is testament to the commitment and dedication of our staff and our pupils, and the strong partnerships with families.

WELCOME ST JOSEPH'S, HIGHFIELD



St Joseph's
Catholic Primary School

Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust has been a family of 47 schools for some time now, but with one more school waiting in the wings. Very sadly, due to some complications linked to shared building arrangements, there have been some inevitable delays in the complex process for St Joseph's to join the Trust. We are thrilled that we are coming to the end of that journey and we expect St Joseph's to be officially part of the Trust this summer. We are also very grateful to Fr Adrian and the parish for their extensive support.

While not officially a Trust academy, BWCET have always ensured that leaders, staff and pupils have benefited from the support available from the Trust and they have always been seen as important members of our Catholic family.

Here, headteacher, Joanna Bircham, shares her thoughts on joining the BWCET family officially.

We are delighted to finally be joining BWCET. St Joseph's journey into the Trust has been extended due to the complexity of our school building, but we have worked very closely with the Trust during this time and feel very much part of BWCET family. As a Head Teacher, I have worked closely with my BWCET colleagues from the formation of the Trust and have always been part of the team.

We have benefited greatly over the last few years from collaborative support for teaching and learning development which has resulted in a first-class curriculum for our pupils and excellent training for staff at all stages of their careers. As a very inclusive school, we are particularly excited about staff development linked to the Trust's SEND strategies which have strengthened our expertise in helping vulnerable pupils to thrive.

In our small village community, St Joseph's embodies the Catholic values of our parish in the support we offer to our pupils and families. In a recent survey a Year 2 parent said:

This school has been an absolute joy to be a part of. The support not only the children receive but also the parents is what makes the school not just a school but a family. All the staff are amazing and have all the time in the world for everyone and could not ask for a better community of people and place of education for my children.

Being an official member of the BWCET family will enable us to continue our mission far into the future ensuring that our Catholic school can flourish. We look forward to working with our BWCET family to secure the best for our pupils.

Joanna Bircham, headteacher, St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Highfield.



SPOTLIGHT ON...



SUSTAINABILITY

Meet our Sustainability Champions



Ellie Sheppard
Estates Cluster Manager



Andrew Freeman
Director of ICT Operations
and Strategy



Barbara Reilly-O'Donnell
Director of Ethos

Our Sustainability Champions are part of a wider team who regularly consider the environmental impact of Trust actions to ensure that we are good stewards of our common home.

Looking at our building developments and estate management, IT provision, procurement and supply chains, catering, and administrative processes, as well as education, the team seek opportunities to:

- reduce carbon emissions
- manage energy and waste efficiently
- adapt to the changes caused through climate change
- engage with nature and explore biodiversity
- provide climate education
- develop 'green skills'
- help our pupils consider 'green jobs.'

If schools would like support to consider how they can develop their sustainability action plan, our champions are happy to help.

SUSTAINABILITY @St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary

St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary, Chester-le-Street, were the first recipients of our BWCET Sustainability Gold Award.

Energy conservation

Waste reduction

Innovation

Sustainable transportation



Water conservation

Education

Biodiversity

Community engagement

Headteacher, Angela Garrity, reports...

At St. Cuthbert's, we are committed to caring for our common home through a range of practical and meaningful sustainability initiatives. We have developed a school travel plan, supported by the necessary permits from Durham County Council, to promote safer and greener travel.

Pupils play an active role in growing our own fruit and vegetables, supported by our system for collecting and reusing grey water to keep plants hydrated. We are also enhancing our grounds by planting a variety of trees and hedges, increasing biodiversity and strengthening environmental resilience.

To reduce waste and encourage reuse within our community, we run a popular Clothes "Schwap", (swap and shop) giving pre-loved clothing a new life.

We are proud that these efforts have been recognised with the BWCET Gold Sustainability Award, celebrating the commitment of our pupils and staff to being responsible stewards of God's creation.



SUSTAINABILITY @St Mary's Catholic Primary

St Mary's Catholic Primary, Blackhill, recently installed solar panels as part of the *Solar for Schools* initiative.

Pupils were visited by representatives from *Solar for Schools* and *Great British Energy*, and Liz Twist MP also joined the children as they learned the facts about their 'solar power station school.'



- St Mary's has 60 solar panels.
- St Mary's will save 95 tonnes of carbon over 25 years- it would take 3,000 trees to do the same.
- St Mary's could generate up to 27kW per hour.
- St Mary's could generate 27,000 kW of power every year- enough to power up to 9 homes.

Facts about St Mary's



LiveSimplyAward

CAFOD A better world needs all of us

Many of our schools have achieved the CAFOD Live Simply Award, in recognition of the commitment staff and pupils have to care for one another and our common home.

The latest recipients of the award, **St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Stanley**, are rightly proud that they are living simply, sustainably and in solidarity with communities around the world

Pupils took part in a range of Live Simply actions, including running a Fair Trade Tuck Shop, opening a prayer space with the support of our local community, and raising vital funds for global charities. The children's enthusiasm and pride shone through as they made ethical and compassionate choices that have already made a difference.



I wanted to help because it feels really good to make a difference and do something that helps other people and our world. When we work together, even small actions can become something big.

Y6 pupil



Being part of the Live Simply journey has been truly inspiring. Our children, families and wider community have shown such generosity, creativity and compassion throughout every action we've taken. Watching our pupils grow in confidence as they realised the difference they can make to the world has been a real privilege. This award celebrates not just what we've achieved, but who we are as a school community.

Julie Ashby
Live Simply Coordinator



To find out more about the Live Simply Award, please visit the [website here](#).

PASSIONATE ABOUT READING!

In BWCET schools, reading is not just a skill to be mastered. Reading opens doors. It enables pupils to explore new ideas, encounter diverse perspectives and deepen their understanding. Through stories, poetry and non-fiction texts, pupils not only develop language and comprehension skills, but also empathy, resilience and curiosity. These qualities reflect our Catholic mission to nurture the whole child – academically, spiritually and morally.

Across our Trust, schools are working tirelessly to foster a love of reading from the very earliest years. High-quality phonics teaching ensures that pupils quickly gain the building blocks they need to read fluently. Carefully chosen texts in our English curriculum immerse pupils in ambitious vocabulary and powerful storytelling. Inviting reading corners and regular opportunities for shared reading in class and in tutor time help make books a visible and valued part of daily school life.

Staff are dedicated to ensuring that every pupil is supported and challenged in their reading. Those who need additional practice get the help they need, while enrichment activities such as author visits and reading celebrations inspire excitement and pride in reading achievements.



We are incredibly proud of the commitment shown by leaders, teachers and support staff in making reading a priority. Their hard work is reflected in pupils' growing confidence, improved attainment (which is above the national average) and, most importantly, their genuine enjoyment of books.

Families play a vital role in this journey. Sharing a book at home, listening to children read and talking about stories together reinforces the progress made in school and creates precious moments of connection. Together, as schools and families united in faith, we can continue to nurture lifelong readers who are enabled to flourish. Thank you for your ongoing support in helping us place reading at the heart of our Catholic community.

OUR UNIQUE CONTEXT - HOW IT BENEFITS READING

We are so lucky that our Trust provides an educational journey from early years through to sixth form as our schools are arranged in cluster groups. This helps us to strengthen the transition for pupils between our schools at key points such as Year 6 to Year 7, or between our first and middle school in Hexham.

We have given top priority to reading in our transition arrangements. Secondary schools work closely with primary partners to establish a clear picture of pupils' reading ability and any support they might need. We do this through a diagnostic assessment in the summer term. Our secondary leaders use this information to make sure that pupils who need extra help with reading receive this from the first week in their new school. This makes sure that pupils feel well supported to fully benefit from the brilliant opportunities on offer.

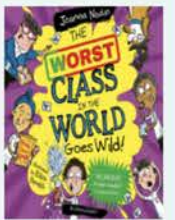
BWCET
BETWEEN THE PAGES
LIVE

JOIN US
FOR AN ONLINE FEAST OF STORYTELLING
AND INSIGHT INTO THE LITERARY WORLD

5 March 2026

WORLD BOOK DAY

A highlight of our academic year is World Book Day - known to us as BWCET 'Between the Pages Live.' Our pupils from across BWCET schools come together online for a feast of treats, including live sessions with authors talking about their stories, live illustration workshops and even a dance-along this year! The day ends with a hometime story from a special guest. We are especially grateful to Martin Gray, Headteacher at St Matthew's Catholic Primary in Prudhoe, who works with our central education team to develop the programme and then acts as our compere on the day!



STRENGTHENING MATHS THROUGH COMMUNITIES OF EXCELLENCE

At Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, our commitment to “Through Christ, in partnership, enabling all to flourish” guides every aspect of our professional learning. One of the most significant ways we are realising this vision is through our Communities of Excellence. These are collaborative groups bringing teachers from across our trust together to deepen expertise and strengthen classroom practice across all our schools.

What are the Communities of Excellence?

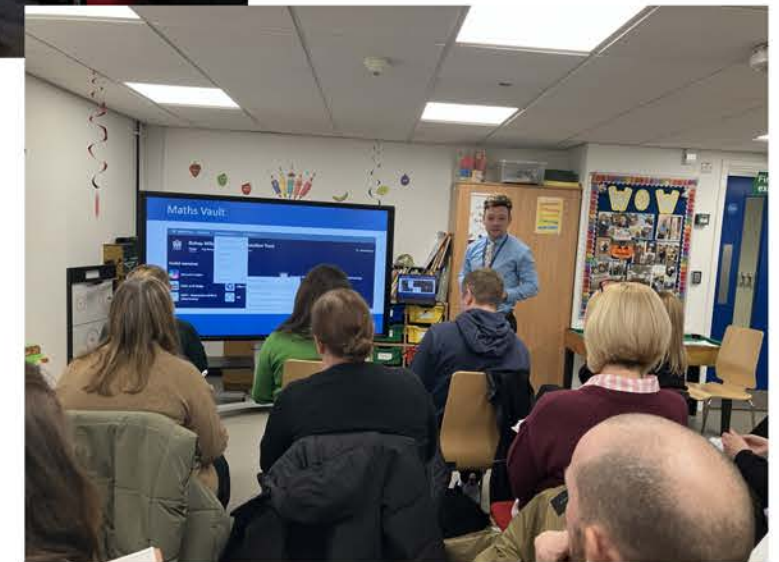
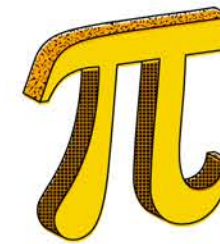
The Communities of Excellence exist to improve teaching through sustained, meaningful collaboration. In primary maths, this means teachers and leaders coming together to explore subject knowledge, refine pedagogy and reflect on approaches that make the greatest difference to pupils’ learning. These are not one-off CPD events; they form part of a long-term, Trust-wide commitment to high-quality professional development.

Each community of excellence provides space for colleagues to share experiences, ask questions, and engage in rich professional dialogue. A key feature of our sessions is the opportunity to observe live teaching with a Teaching for Mastery Specialist, allowing teachers to see effective practice in real time.

Collaboration at the Core

Collaboration is the heartbeat of our Communities of Excellence. Teachers engage in structured discussion, explore mathematical representations, examine misconceptions, and consider how core ideas can be taught with greater clarity and depth. Trust-wide networking ensures we develop a shared language of professional development, helping effective practice travel between schools.

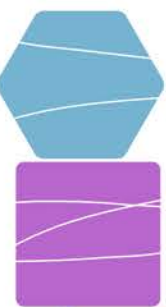
Our sessions frequently include joint problem-solving and collective analysis - whether exploring strategies to strengthen number sense, developing mathematical talk, or ensuring high expectations for all learners.



Looking Ahead

As our Communities of Excellence continue to grow, the next phase of development will focus on Early Years.

The Communities of Excellence are already building stronger connections, deeper knowledge, and a shared Trust-wide understanding of what high-quality Primary Maths looks like. By continuing to invest in collaboration we strengthen not only individual practice but the collective capacity of our entire Trust to enable all to flourish.



I am currently the proud Head of School at St Anne's Catholic Primary School in Gateshead, a role I am privileged to undertake. Being part of BWCET has always been a significant strength for our school community, providing us with support, encouragement, and outstanding professional development for all staff. This collaboration has enabled us to build upon our strong foundations and secure even greater outcomes for our pupils.

Working alongside Trust specialists has offered invaluable expertise to staff across the school, equipping them with the knowledge and skills required to continually drive teaching and learning forward. The time and commitment invested into the development of all Trust schools reflects the unwavering dedication to the mission to "enable all to flourish." During crucial moments - whether Ofsted inspections, policy development, safeguarding, or more - Trust colleagues provide immediate, high-quality guidance and support that is second to none.

I am grateful to be part of a Trust that consistently places children, staff, and school improvement at the heart of everything it does.

*Mrs Kelly Watkins, Head of School,
St Anne's Catholic Primary*

LEADERSHIP LENS



Mrs Watkins and pupils from St Anne's on a recent visit to Durham cathedral to explore local history and learn more about the lives of the local saints.



CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE: INSIDE THE ST AUGUSTINE'S STRONG PRACTICE HUB

Our Trust's commitment to evidence-informed, high-quality classroom practice is reflected in the high quality offer from our Trust's designated Strong Practice Hub at St Augustine's Catholic Primary in Gateshead. The hub brings colleagues together from across our primary schools to share expertise, deepen subject knowledge, and see great teaching in action. Through a carefully designed programme of themed sessions, the hub has quickly become a model of collaborative professional development, strengthening classroom practice and fostering a culture of continuous improvement Trust-wide.

A school at the centre of professional learning

With each session hosted on site, participants benefit from live examples of effective classroom environments, clear instructional routines, and strong behaviour cultures that reflect the school's ethos of high expectations and support for every learner. Participants leave each session with strategies they can apply immediately, promoting improvements that are both rapid and sustainable.

Our programme of strong practice sessions

The hub's offer spans three central strands of strong practice, each designed to support teachers at all career stages.

- **Effective teaching and learning strategies**
- **Leading behaviour and culture**
- **Spotlight on Early Years**

How the Hub strengthens practice across the Trust

Each session brings together staff from a range of schools, phases and backgrounds, helping strengthen relationships, build confidence and encourage the sharing of good practice.

With more sessions planned for the summer, the St Augustine's hub continues to evolve, offering staff a valuable professional development opportunity aligned with our Trust values, enabling all to flourish. We are extremely grateful to leaders and staff at St Augustine's who give their time so generously to others.



ATTENDANCE MATTERS: ST THOMAS MORE, BLAYDON

We know that attending well is key to benefiting from the high quality Catholic education on offer in our BWCET schools. Our Trust-wide focus has led to significant improvements in attendance. St Thomas More, Blaydon, buck national trends, with their pupils attending more regularly than pupils nationally. Here, headteacher, Jill Turner, explains how her staff team work together to support all pupils to attend well.

1. Our whole-school commitment to ambitious attendance for all

At St Thomas More, our approach to ambitious attendance begins with one central principle: cultivating a deep sense of belonging. We believe that pupils attend school consistently when they feel that they are a part of their community - safe, welcomed, known, and valued. This is underpinned by our relentless focus on identifying and providing 'reasons to attend' for every pupil.

Creating a sense of belonging may sound like something schools naturally "just do," but for us, it is our uncompromising daily commitment - in every interaction, every relationship, every decision - that makes the real difference. Belonging is not left to chance; it is intentionally crafted.

2. Understanding the 'reasons to attend'

Research exploring why children attend school consistently encourages leaders to reflect deeply on the needs of their cohort and to identify the drivers that motivate different groups of pupils. It asks schools to consider that what encourages one pupil to attend may not be enough for another - and to build purposeful opportunities that respond to these specific needs.

For some pupils, the joy of learning, achieving, and progressing academically is motivation enough. For others, however, additional reasons to attend must be created - reasons grounded in joy, connection, enrichment, and meaningful experiences.

At St Thomas More, this has led to a range of whole-school initiatives, including:

- Our Termly Attendance Challenges with rewards that are available to all pupils (750 winners in Autumn term!)
- A newly developed outdoor games area to promote play, connection, and wellbeing with Table Tennis and Table Football
- Our Brand New Gym to allow students to get fit with their friends
- Indoor social spaces offering safe, inclusive environments for pupils who need calm, friendship, or adult support
- Trips both far and wide (Skiing, Iceland, France, London and more)
- Whole School Events such as taking the whole school to the cinema at Christmas and our annual 8 mile sponsored walk!

These initiatives ensure that every pupil can find something in their school day that brings them joy, purpose, comfort, or pride.

3. Relationships at the heart of attendance

A major part of this daily commitment is our deliberate focus on interpersonal relationships. We are committed to making sure that Every Interaction Matters. We work relentlessly to ensure that every child is greeted, noticed, and acknowledged throughout the day. Strong relationships build trust - and trust builds the will to attend.

Alongside this sits our structured, trauma-informed behaviour approach, anchored in the principles of apology and forgiveness. These guiding values help us maintain a culture where pupils feel emotionally safe and know that mistakes are part of learning. When pupils feel accepted and understood, they feel confident walking through our doors each morning.

4. Leadership, consistency, and collective commitment

Creating an authentic sense of belonging is not a token gesture - it requires strategic leadership, relentless implementation, and consistent modelling by every adult in the building. We are therefore immensely proud that our staff tell us they have a clear and consistent understanding of our approach, and that they feel empowered to apply it confidently each day.

Most importantly, our pupils tell us that they enjoy coming to school. Their voice is the most powerful indicator that our approach is working.

Recently, our attendance was recognised nationally, placing St Thomas More in the top 10% of all FFT secondary schools in England. This is an achievement we celebrate, but it is not the statistic alone that brings us pride. What matters most is why that statistic exists.

It exists because our pupils trust us. Because they are happy. Because they want to be here. And ultimately, because they have the all important sense of belonging.

As a community, that is our greatest success - and the foundation of everything we do.

Headteacher, Jill Turner, and the senior leadership team at St Thomas More



BUILDING NETWORKS AND SHARING EXPERTISE: OUR SECONDARY SUBJECT COLLABORATION MEETINGS

The journey is much more bearable when one goes forward with the help of another.

Pope Leo XIV

Over the past three years, our secondary subject collaboration model has grown into a professional network, uniting more than 100 leaders across 16 subject areas in shared purpose and collective expertise. This structured approach is strengthening curriculum thinking, deepening subject knowledge, and building a culture where staff across all schools feel more connected and supported.

Networks built on shared expertise

Our subject collaboration groups were established in partnership with our secondary headteachers to make the most of the exceptional talent within our schools by creating structured opportunities for subject specialists to work together.

Subject groups meet regularly through a blend of in-person and online sessions. A rolling programme of central and school-based locations ensures that collaboration is accessible and purposeful. Senior leaders and group facilitators from across our schools are an invaluable source of support for the sessions.

Specialist moderation sessions, in some subject areas, have been hosted in schools allowing colleagues to review work, compare standards and strengthen consistency across departments.



Shared problem-solving and curriculum thinking

During meetings, colleagues collaborate to address common challenges, exchange fresh perspectives and create solutions that enhance learning experiences for all students. These discussions not only refine our practice but also foster a culture of continuous improvement across our schools. A rich source of future discussion will be the recently published DfE curriculum and assessment review

A shared priority across our secondary schools-improving outcomes for vulnerable pupils

A strong focus on the achievement and the progress of disadvantaged pupils threads through all subject discussions. Meetings have included sessions with national expert Marc Rowland to embed evidence-informed approaches to tackling disadvantage.



Professional belonging

Perhaps one of the strongest benefits is the sense of community created by the meetings.

After our most recent meeting in February feedback included the following:

"A great opportunity to meet together and share good practice. We enjoy having the time to collaborate and discuss."

"...the chance to ask questions and get support, as a new subject leader, is invaluable."

To return to the words of Pope Leo XIV: "The journey is much more bearable when one goes forward with the help of another" - our secondary subject networks embody that spirit.



CATERING



Free school meals

Our Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust Catering Team is delighted to be working with the Department of Education as a pilot Trust in the Free School Meal eligibility checking service.

From 16th February 2026, seven Trust schools will have the ability to share an online link to this innovative new service with parents. The application process is significantly simplified and means that, by entering data directly, parents can receive an immediate response on whether or not their children are entitled to receive free school meals. This decision is also sent automatically to the school's admin team.

We are confident that the process will benefit families whilst removing the sometimes cumbersome systems which have been in place for a number of years.

Really importantly, when families actually apply for free school meal entitlement, every successful application also generates extra funding for our schools in the form of Pupil Premium. This additional funding directly supports teaching, resources, and wider opportunities for pupils.

We are hoping to roll out the service to parents of children in all Trust schools once the pilot has concluded.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Trust-Wide Web Filtering Upgrade Coming This April



A new web filtering system will go live across all BWCET schools on 1 April 2026. This upgrade will strengthen online safety with improved monitoring, smarter detection, and automatic blocking of harmful or inappropriate content.

Designated Safeguarding Leads will receive full training after launch to support them to use the new tools effectively.

SPOTLIGHT ON: LUCA TOMASSETTI, CATERING CLUSTER MANAGER: MENUS AND SPECIAL DIETS

Luca gained a higher diploma in catering services and a diploma in hospitality before beginning his career in restaurants in his beloved home city, Rome. He later relocated to the UK in 2008, taking up chef positions within respected hotel chains such as Hilton, Radisson and Indigo. After rising to the role of Head Chef in Hotel Indigo, Luca was appointed chef-manager at St Leonard's Catholic School in Durham City in 2020 and was subsequently promoted to his current Cluster Manager role in September 2022.



Luca's flair and creativity are evident in his work, designing and developing the menus across both our primary and secondary schools. He regularly meets with parents to ensure medical conditions and special dietary conditions are not a barrier to children enjoying nutritional school meals. Luca is also recognised our 'Canva poster king' producing the posters and flyers which are both displayed in school and sent to parents.

Luca said: "I love my job because I'm proud to be able to make a meaningful difference for the pupils in our schools every day. I enjoy being part of a knowledgeable and supportive team and I thrive when designing recipes and menus which offer hearty, nutritional meals, every day."



DEVELOPING OUR PASTORAL LEADERS AT BWCET

Across Autumn term 2025, we were delighted to bring together some of our pastoral leaders from across our five secondary schools.

Colleagues enjoyed pastoral and wellbeing training spread across three days with tasks set in between the sessions to take back to school for reflection and to inform practice. The training was developed and designed by two of our senior leaders, Vicky Curry, Deputy Headteacher at St Leonard's Catholic School in Durham and Jessica Harle, Assistant Headteacher at St Thomas More Catholic School in Blaydon, working in partnership with several colleagues from our central Trust education team.

The training proved to be impactful and energising, strengthening both knowledge and confidence across our settings. Focused on supporting the most vulnerable students, the sessions equipped colleagues with practical strategies firmly rooted in statutory duties and research-informed best practice.

From the outset, the training reinforced that safeguarding remains a fundamental responsibility for all leaders and must underpin every aspect of school life. Colleagues valued the clear exploration of what constitutes vulnerability, including the personal, family, and societal factors that may increase a young person's risk of harm.

A key strength of the training was its practical focus. Leaders engaged with tangible, actionable strategies to strengthen attendance monitoring, improve communication with families, analyse data effectively, and improve collaboration with external partners when barriers to attendance and engagement arise. This emphasis on early help, coordinated support, and problem-solving resonated strongly, with several schools already adapting their systems in response.

The deep dive into how we manage alternative provision was also particularly well received. Leaders appreciated the clarity around the purpose, implementation, and safeguarding responsibilities associated with alternative provision, including due diligence, communication between school, provision and families, and monitoring arrangements.



Case studies brought the learning to life. Exploring real scenarios allowed colleagues to discuss risks, effective interventions, and multi-agency approaches in a supportive environment, encouraging both reflection and shared learning. Leaders noted that these discussions boosted their confidence to respond to complex situations and reaffirmed the importance of collaboration.

A strong theme running throughout the session was the central role of partnership—within schools, with families, and with external agencies. Effective communication and information-sharing remain at the heart of safeguarding, and colleagues left with renewed commitment to continuing to build and strengthen these relationships.

The training concluded with a powerful call to action: to review current practice, refresh policies, invest in staff development, and strengthen monitoring and review processes within each school. Leaders left the session motivated, informed, and ready to drive positive change for the students who need us most.

This training continues to support our collective mission: ensuring that every child—particularly those facing the greatest challenges—is safe, supported, and able to flourish.

LEADERSHIP LENS



This term, this year, and especially throughout the challenging time marked by RAAC disruption, St Benet's have felt deeply supported by our trust family. When our community faced uncertainty and displacement, we never had to carry the burden alone. We came together as one family in Christ, strengthened by a shared mission and our core values. Our Trust family walked alongside us with compassion and practical support, nurturing us with wisdom and care so that we could remain focused on providing stability, hope, and high-quality Catholic education for our children and community.

Working in partnership, we have lived out our calling to serve one another, rooted in Christ's example of love, dignity, and humility. We continue to nurture every member of our community and to uphold the values that shape who we are: kindness, resilience, unity, and faith. Even in the most difficult moments our schools have faced, we have grown stronger together, confident that God has been present in every step we have taken. As part of a wider Catholic family, we have experienced first-hand how powerful it is when we live out our shared vision by supporting one another, and we move forward with renewed faith, purpose, and gratitude.

Catherine Young, Headteacher, St Benet's Catholic Primary, Ouston



St Benet's
Catholic Primary School



LEADERSHIP LENS

Being part of Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust means having the support and opportunities to empower us to always give our best for those who matter most in our school: the pupils.

There is great encouragement to share strong practice across schools and the wide range of experience and expertise we have between us is recognised and celebrated. As we have developed our curriculums together in several subjects, the way in which we can support each other has improved further, and I feel that we now work as a family rather than isolation in separate schools.

The quality and richness of the CPD we receive means that there is always a source of inspiration and motivation to improve. The continuous input we receive from the consultants at the Trust, in school and through network meetings, supports us to be knowledgeable subject leads, and as a deputy head, our Emmaus network has been an excellent way to meet other deputies and to develop in the role.

There are so many opportunities for us to develop ourselves as teachers and be part of something different and exciting. I am glad to be part of a Trust which champions continuous improvement for staff and children alike.

Lisa Curran, Deputy Headteacher, St Joseph's Catholic Primary, Gateshead



GOVERNANCE

We have worked closely with our Diocese and have recruited five new foundation governors who will bring a range of skills and expertise to strengthen Trust governance further.

We are always interested in applications from candidates for foundation governor roles. Please contact us at governance@bwcet.com if you would like to find out more about the role.

We are delighted to have recruited a new foundation director for our Trust board. Kourosh Manoucheri brings finance and business expertise and we are eagerly awaiting the appointment of two further directors.

This term we have delivered a range of training sessions including training for new chairs of governors and general sessions on relationship and sex education, interpreting school data to provide meaningful challenge, and bespoke sessions for our safeguarding link governors. Our training programme continues next half term with induction for new governors and a session on sustaining a Catholic ethos.

We continue to deliver the national programme of safer recruitment training for school staff and governors, as well as marketing this training outside of our Trust.

STRONGER TOGETHER BWCET SIXTH FORMS SUPPORTING LEARNERS

At BWCET, our sixth form provision is rooted in a shared commitment to helping every young person reach their potential. Across our five secondary schools, KS5 leaders meet each half term to share expertise and ensure that students benefit from a joined-up approach. This collective thinking means no school works in isolation and leaders can draw upon the combined experience and insight of colleagues.

One example of the collaboration is our upcoming Year 13 revision day. The event in March will bring together a selection of Year 13 students from all five BWCET sixth forms at the central Trust building.

Leaders are working together to design a day, delivered by staff across the Trust, that is practical and motivating. Students will be able to choose from a range of focused revision workshops and work alongside peers from other schools, demonstrating the value of collaboration.

Dan Gribbin, Head of Sixth Form, Cardinal Hume Catholic School

SEND: COGNITION & LEARNING STRATEGY

The recent launch of our BWCET Cognition and Learning Strategy in February 2026, the third of our suite of four strategy packages linked to the broad areas of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), brought together over 80 SENDCos and Headteachers from across the Trust for a productive and insightful day.

Colleagues had the opportunity to explore the challenges faced by pupils with cognition and learning barriers in the current education system, reflecting on issues such as processing difficulties, working memory, executive function, and the implementation of targeted adaptations. These discussions created a shared understanding among our colleagues.

Our leaders then had the opportunity to examine a range of targeted and specialist strategies designed to pinpoint gaps in learning, and support learners more effectively. Sessions showcased practical approaches that schools can implement straight away, helping staff to reduce pupils' cognitive load, whilst strengthening understanding within specific subject areas, and planning more effective personalised support.

The launch event also provided valuable time for collaboration, with colleagues sharing experiences and building a collective vision for how the new strategy will be embedded across all phases. Leaders expressed confidence that the tools, guidance and resources shared will help ensure an ambitious approach to meeting our pupils' diverse learning needs.

This successful launch marks an important step in strengthening inclusive practice across the Trust. We extend our thanks to all who attended and contributed to shaping the next phase of our work to help every pupil flourish.



VALUABLE INSIGHT THROUGH PARTNERSHIP WITH COLUMBIA GRANGE SPECIAL SCHOOL

Colleagues from across the Trust recently had the privileged opportunity to visit Columbia Grange Special School, gaining an invaluable first-hand insight into what highly specialised provision looks like. The focus was on precision teaching, exploring staff expertise and reflecting on staff's deep understanding of individual pupils' needs. The visit offered our leaders the chance to observe how specialist teams thoughtfully design and adapt learning experiences, tailoring every element of practice to support pupils with a wide range of complex needs.

A key highlight was seeing how the physical environment and learning spaces can be manipulated to remove barriers to learning and promote calm, focus and independence. Staff were able to reflect on how purposeful use of space, sensory regulation areas, and structured classroom design can significantly influence a pupil's ability to access the curriculum.

For many, the experience served as a catalyst for challenging their own preconceptions of what is possible within both specialist and mainstream settings.

The visit encouraged colleagues to consider which approaches, routines and environmental adaptations could be modified or transferred into their own schools to enhance inclusive practice to continue to strengthen the way in which we meet the needs of all learners.

We extend our sincere thanks to John Lines, headteacher, and the entire Columbia Grange team for warmly welcoming us into their community. Their openness, expertise and generosity in sharing practice made the experience both inspiring and transformative. We look forward to building on this partnership and returning for future visits.



Columbia Grange
School

TRANSFORMING HANDWRITING A TOOL FOR LIFE

Over the last year, school leaders have taken significant steps to strengthen one of the most fundamental skills in a child's education: handwriting. While digital tools are embedded in everyday life, handwriting remains vital for learning, communication and self-expression. It supports memory, fluency and organisation, enabling pupils to record and communicate their thinking effectively. Fluent and automatic handwriting frees up cognitive capacity so that pupils can focus on deep thinking, problem-solving and expressing their learning clearly across the curriculum.

Handwriting is more than a curriculum requirement. Research shows that fluent handwriting supports:

- cognitive processing and deeper thinking
- improved composition quality
- greater confidence and independence
- better exam performance due to speed and legibility.

Our Trust-wide handwriting initiative launched in conjunction with the National Handwriting Association, bringing expert guidance, evidence-informed practice, and high-quality professional development to our schools. This collaborative start ensured that our approach is consistent, research-led, and aligned with national expectations.

In Autumn 2024, all primary schools took part in a Trust Handwriting Conference, bringing staff together to explore the principles of handwriting, the mechanics of writing, the research underpinning effective handwriting instruction, and the crucial role of modelling and deliberate practice.

Since then, School Improvement Partners have provided focused support and progress visits to every school. These visits have helped leaders review their provision, refine teaching approaches, and ensure that pupils, particularly those who find transcription difficult, receive the targeted support they need.

A diagnostic assessment and tracking tool

A significant development has been the creation and rollout of a Trust-wide diagnostic handwriting assessment tool. Used in all primary schools, this tool allows teachers to identify:

- specific letter-formation gaps
- difficulties with shape, spacing or sizing
- issues linked to posture or grip

This helps teachers to deliver precise help to pupils. Importantly, this isn't just about identifying issues—it's about securing progress and giving pupils a clear sense of their next steps.

New training package developed with and for secondary schools

We know that handwriting doesn't stop being important at the end of Year 6. To support pupils as they move into more demanding curriculum writing, a training package for secondary colleagues has been developed, with central education team colleagues working with leaders at St Bede's Catholic School in Lanchester. This training aims to ensure that all staff across KS3 and KS4 are equipped to recognise transcription barriers, understand the link between handwriting fluency and the quality of written responses, and support pupils who need further practice.

This work helps make sure pupils' handwriting remains an enabler, not a barrier, as curriculum expectations increase.

Demonstrable gains

Across our schools, we are already seeing handwriting improvements translate into:

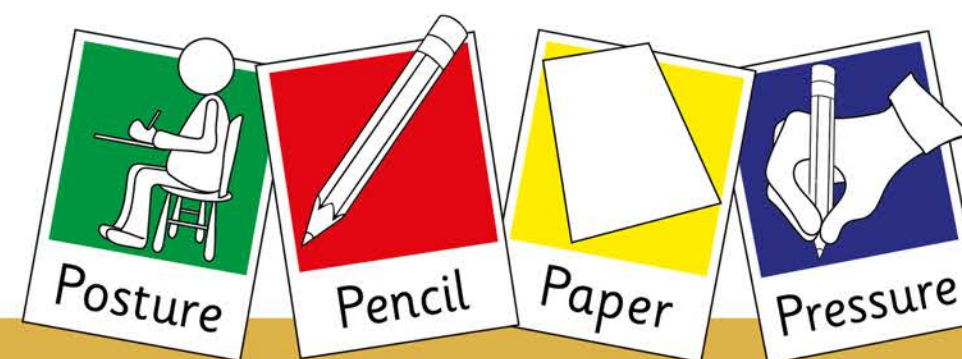
- greater pride in presentation
- improved stamina for longer pieces of writing
- reduced cognitive load, allowing pupils to focus on the content of their ideas
- increased engagement, especially for pupils who previously avoided writing tasks.

For many children, becoming confident writers has opened doors—helping them participate more fully in lessons, express themselves with clarity, and approach longer writing tasks with enthusiasm rather than anxiety.

Looking ahead

This work represents a significant Trust-wide commitment to pupils' long-term success. By strengthening handwriting from Early Years through to Year 11, we are equipping our pupils with a life skill that supports academic success and retains its relevance throughout adulthood.

We look forward to sharing further updates as this work continues to grow. Our thanks go to all staff, pupils and families for championing the importance of handwriting and celebrating the progress we are already seeing across our schools.



STRENGTHENING STAKEHOLDER VOICE ACROSS OUR TRUST

Understanding the experiences of our staff, pupils and parents is central to how we develop as schools and as a Trust. When we listen well, we make better decisions, identify issues earlier, and build a culture where everyone feels valued.

A working group of primary headteachers has collaborated with the support of Trust central team colleagues to design a package of simple, purposeful surveys using the nationally recognised School Surveys tool. Their aim has been to create a coherent approach to gathering stakeholder views, to support schools to listen and respond in a way that is manageable for busy leaders in primary schools.

The group has developed an annual suite of short surveys, each containing no more than ten questions, covering:

- Staff voice – with a focus on ethos, safeguarding, well-being and workload.
- Parent voice – including Catholic life, safeguarding, SEND, experience of school for new families and overall satisfaction.
- Pupil voice – Catholic life, well-being, safeguarding, and sense of belonging.

These surveys are spaced across the academic year, giving school leaders regular but manageable communication with their communities.

One of the most valuable features of the School Surveys tool is its built-in analysis. Once responses are collected, the system automatically: analyses the data, produces a straightforward report and benchmarks results against other similar schools nationally. This is particularly powerful. It helps leaders understand whether a theme is unique to their school or part of a wider national picture, giving far greater meaning to the findings.

Schools only need to share a link or QR code with the relevant stakeholder group - no additional administration required. Schools can also create their own surveys within the tool if they want to explore a specific issue in more depth.

We are extremely grateful to the headteacher working group for the time they have invested. Their work has created a meaningful way for primary schools in the Trust to strengthen stakeholder voice.



LEADERSHIP LENS



Joining BWCET in 2023 as headteacher of St Michael's Catholic Primary School in Houghton marked a significant and positive step in my leadership journey. Before this, I served as a headteacher in a Northumberland school outside of a Trust, without the wider professional network that a Trust provides. Becoming a leader within BWCET has shown me how powerful and transformative a strong, collaborative community can be.

Belonging to a Trust family provides access to a professional network. Through collaboration with fellow leaders and the expertise available across the central team, there are consistent opportunities to share best practice, refine approaches, and ensure we provide the very best education for the children we serve across all schools.

Our staff also benefit greatly from the opportunities available through working together as one Trust family. High-quality professional development, career pathways, leadership networks, cross moderation and the chance to work alongside colleagues from other schools have all strengthened practice and supported us in achieving strong outcomes in all areas, not simply academic, for all children.

A further strength of our Trust is the way schools work together on key priorities. Recent collective work on identifying and supporting vulnerable children has been particularly powerful, ensuring that those needing more targeted support are quickly identified, helped and closely monitored. Alongside this, our shared focus on high quality teaching has helped refine classroom practice, strengthen consistency, and ensure that high expectations are evident in every lesson.

Trust-wide collaboration around our strategy for special educational needs has also been invaluable. Working together has enabled us to strengthen provision, sharpen identification processes, and ensure that children receive the support they need to thrive. Early language screening and development has strengthened our work, recognising that foundations in communication and vocabulary underpin every stage of future learning.

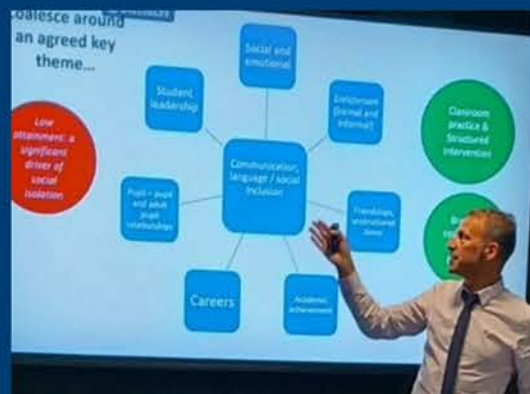
All of this work reflects a common belief that getting the fundamentals right, early and consistently, sets pupils up for success not only in primary school but throughout their entire educational journey within our Trust.

Leading within Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust is a privilege. The professional community, shared commitment to excellence, and collective determination to serve our children well make it a place where both staff and pupils can truly flourish.

**Nick Reeson, Headteacher, with
pupils from St Michael's Catholic
Primary School**



SUPPORTING OUR VULNERABLE PUPILS TO FLOURISH



Over the past two years, Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust (BW CET) has continued to strengthen its commitment to equity, inclusion, and excellence for all pupils through a purposeful partnership with national education consultant Marc Rowland. Marc's research-informed work on improving outcomes for vulnerable pupils has supported thinking and practice across our Trust, enabling leaders and teachers to refine their approach and focus on what truly makes a difference.

A partnership rooted in evidence and purpose

Marc's work nationally emphasises the importance of high-quality teaching, strong relationships, and deep understanding of the barriers faced by vulnerable pupils. Our collaboration builds on these principles, bringing them to life across our school family. Over the past year, Marc has worked closely with Trust leaders, and classroom practitioners to help us embed long-term, sustainable strategies, moving beyond short-term interventions and towards a culture of consistently excellent provision for every pupil.

School visits across the Trust

A key part of Marc's work with BW CET this year has been his direct engagement with schools. Across primary and secondary school visits, Marc spent time reviewing classroom environments, discussing practice with staff and offering reflections on culture, aspiration, and pupil engagement. His observations have sparked valuable conversations across schools and informed next steps for improvement.

Marc's guidance has underscored the importance of intentional, relational practice—ensuring our most vulnerable pupils benefit from consistently high expectations, well-structured lessons, and emotionally intelligent teaching.

Our partnership with Marc is not limited to one-off events. Throughout the year, Marc has engaged with our leaders, also contributing to professional development sessions with secondary subject leaders, emphasising the role that curriculum and disciplinary thinking play in supporting our vulnerable pupils.

LEADERSHIP LENS



I became Headteacher at St Thomas More Catholic Primary School in Belmont in September 2021, when our school joined the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust. From the very first day of my headship, the Trust has provided practical support. This has included guidance in HR, governance, finance, estates and education. As a new headteacher, this made a significant difference and it continues to shape the stability and strength of our school.

One aspect that has always stood out is the Trust's genuine care for its people. In 2023, our school experienced both an Ofsted inspection and a Catholic Schools Inspection within a six-month period. These times were naturally demanding, yet I felt fully supported throughout. The central team offered calm, measured reassurance and their presence made a real difference to staff wellbeing.

The Trust's belief in St Thomas More has been transformative. There was a period when falling pupil numbers placed the school at real risk of closure. The Trust stood by us without hesitation. With their backing and strategic guidance, we were able to rebuild and secure long-term stability. Today, our pupil roll is the highest it has been in more than eleven years. The successful opening of our nursery has played a key role in that growth and has enriched our school community.

Curriculum development is an area I am particularly passionate about. I have been fortunate to work closely with Trust colleagues on the implementation of our humanities curriculum. The training we received has had a significant impact on teaching and learning. It has strengthened subject knowledge, deepened curriculum thinking and enhanced pupils' experiences in the classroom.

The Trust's wider training offer continues to benefit staff throughout the school. The programme is well-designed, research-informed and focused on classroom impact. This commitment to high-quality professional development ensures that children receive the best possible education. I am grateful to work within a Trust that champions collaboration, stability and continual improvement. The journey since 2021 has been one of growth, strengthened practice and renewed confidence for the whole school community.

Tom Hunt, Headteacher, St Thomas More Catholic Primary, Belmont



St Thomas More
Catholic Primary School

ESTATES

Achievements and Future Initiatives

Last summer, a total of 40 capital works projects were successfully completed across the Trust, all focused on enhancing safety and improving the overall learning environment for our pupils. These initiatives include:

- Extensive refurbishments of pupil toilets.
- Roof replacements across multiple buildings.
- Implementation of new safeguarding and security measures to maintain safety on our school sites.
- Resolution of drainage issues to prevent future disruptions.
- Refurbished changing rooms to enhance facilities for our pupils.

Additionally, there are over 40 similar projects planned for funding and completion during summer 2026 as we work to provide the best possible environments for pupils and staff.



ESTATES

Exciting Collaborations for Sustainability

We are thrilled to share that we are partnering with the GB Energy Programme to install solar panels and EV chargers at three schools within the Trust. This exciting initiative underscores our commitment to sustainability and aims to reduce our environmental impact for many years to come.



The Trust is collaborating with the Flood Resilience team from the Department for Education and ARUP to develop tailored flood risk assessments for schools within our Trust.



FINDING OUR BOYS...

The Centre for Social Justice has recently published a series of research papers entitled, 'Lost Boys.'

The research highlights a significant and growing crisis among boys and young men in the UK. Despite advancements in gender equality, current trends indicate that young men are finding things challenging across a number of domains, and this is particularly the case for some boys in the north east of England. The findings of the research include:

- The progress in education of boys lags behind girls from early years until they leave higher education.
- Girls outnumber boys in university by 3-2.
- Between the ages of 16-24, boys are less likely to be in education, employment or training, compared to girls.
- For the first time, the gender pay gap for those aged between 16-24 has been reversed, and girls are more likely to be earn more.
- Boys are now more likely to have a smartphone than live with their dad.
- 96% of prisoners are men
- Boys in the north are 6 times more likely to take their own lives than a woman in the south.
- Boys are half as likely to read for pleasure than girls
- Young men are increasingly drawn to extreme political movements

The recent Netflix drama,
ADOLESCENCE,

highlighted the toxic influences that expose young people to extreme, violent and misogynistic views.

The Centre for Social Justice maintains that because some boys are struggling, they are reaching out for meaning, direction and role models.

With the rise in availability of digital technology, young people are increasingly likely to value the views shared online, and are therefore at risk of being influenced by extreme views.



Would you be interested in inspiring our boys by sharing your story? If so, please contact BWCET [here](#).

The research paints a challenging picture for boys and young men, especially those who are not financially secure.

BWCET has a clear vision to enable all to flourish and we are working to dispel any inequality. The personal development network for our primary leaders has explored actions that promote equity:

- Identify and address unconscious bias
- Create environments which avoid stereotypes and are welcoming to all
- Challenge stereotyping
- Address any variation in expectations or aspirations
- Embed a curriculum which empowers pupils to think critically and dispel misinformation
- Carefully select resources which promote positive role models
- Celebrate achievements and provide aspirational careers advice.

Meet some of our amazing BWCET boys who have shared their stories to inspire others across our Trust schools...



Lucas
Member of the
Youth Parliament
and
Youth Ambassador
for the Children's
Commissioner



Ahmed
Proud member of
the Islamic
community



Joe
Goalkeeper for the
England Amputee
Football Team

OUR TRUST FAMILY

	All Saints' Catholic Primary School		St Joseph's Catholic Primary School		St Wilfrid's Catholic Primary School		Corpus Christi Catholic Primary School
	St Pius Xth Catholic Primary School		St Patrick's Catholic Primary School		St Patrick's Catholic Primary School		St Joseph's Catholic Junior School
	St Patrick's Catholic Primary School		St Oswald's Catholic Primary School		St Mary's Catholic Primary School		St Joseph's Catholic Infant School
	St Mary's Catholic Primary School		St Michael's Catholic Primary School		St Thomas More Catholic Primary School		Our Lady and St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
	St Joseph's Catholic Primary School		St Joseph's Catholic Primary School		St Joseph's Catholic Primary School		Our Lady and St Joseph's Catholic Primary School
	St Joseph's Catholic Primary School		St Joseph's Catholic Primary School		St Godric's Catholic Primary School		St Anne's Catholic Primary School
	St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School		St Bede's Catholic Primary School		St Bede's Catholic Primary School		Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School
	St Benet's Catholic Primary School		St Alban's Catholic Primary School		St Augustine's Catholic Primary School		Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Primary School
	St Agnes' Catholic Primary School		St Peter's Catholic Primary School		St Philip Neri Catholic Primary School		St John Boste Catholic Primary School
	St Mary and St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School		St Matthew's Catholic Primary School		St Joseph's Catholic Middle School		St Mary's Catholic Primary School
			St Michael's Catholic Primary School		St Mary's Catholic Primary School		



*Through Christ, in partnership,
enabling all to flourish.*



Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education HQ,
Barmston Court, Turbine Business Park,
Nissan Way, Washington, SR5 3NY
(0191) 8239208
info@bwcet.com
www.bwcet.com