



St Mary's Catholic First School Newsletter –
Friday 22nd March 2024

We love, we learn, we live.



Dear Parents and Carers,

Thank you all so much for dressing in yellow and donating to World Down Syndrome Day on Thursday, we raised £114. We hope the children's sunflowers survived their journey home and continue to bloom and grow!



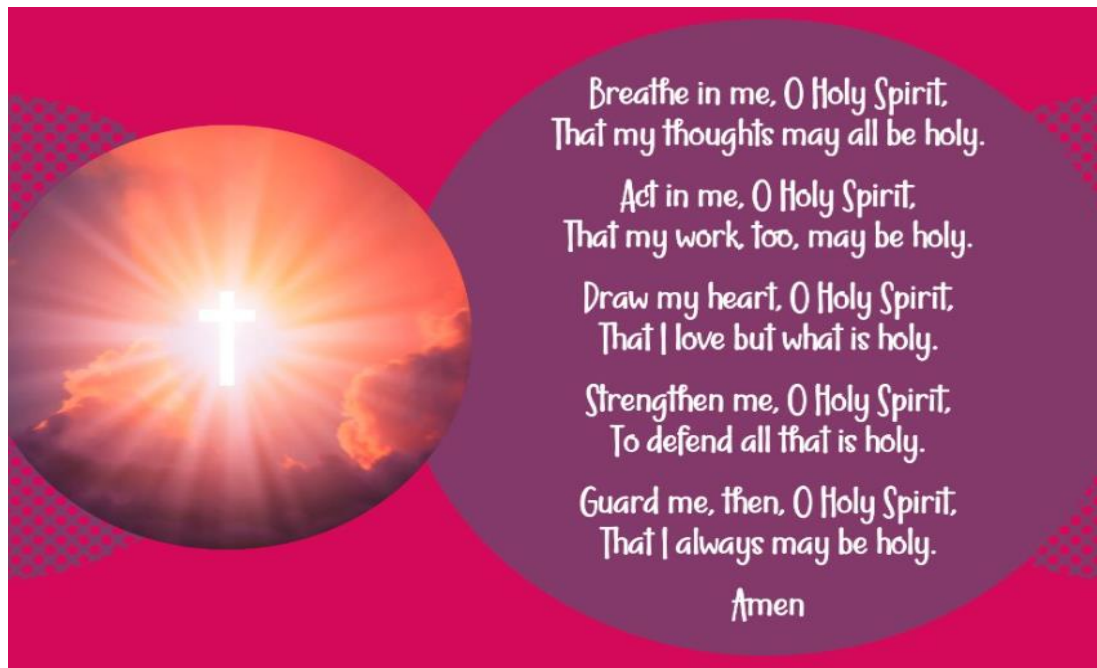
On Tuesday and Wednesday, parents/carers were invited to spend time looking at their children's books. It is lovely to see how proud the children are and to hear all the positive comments from parents/carers. This morning was another busy 'Blast Off with Books' breakfast session, a chance for parents/carers to take some time out of their day to spend some quality time reading through some stories with their child(ren).



**Artsmark
Silver Award**
Awarded by Arts
Council England

This week the pupils and staff of St. Mary's are celebrating after receiving a prestigious Silver Artsmark Award! Artsmark is the only creative quality standard for schools, accredited by Arts Council England. It supports schools to develop and celebrate arts and cultural education across the whole curriculum, bringing learning to life for children and young people. To achieve their Artsmark Award, St. Mary's had to develop our arts and cultural provision to embed a broad and ambitious curriculum. This was achieved by creating an overall plan that was committed to and delivered across the whole school. Huge thank you to all the team, especially our Art Subject Lead-Miss. Baird for helping us secure this amazing award!

Next week, the final week of the Spring term-is a busy one! On Wednesday, we have the Lenten Journey to the Cross Service at St. Mary's Catholic Church at 11am and the Easter Fair in the school hall after school. Parents and carers are invited to both these events. Thank you for all the contributions for the Easter Fair, all donations are greatly received! Finally, on Thursday morning we have The Big Lent Walk finale (see details below) and Easter Bonnet parade, fingers crossed the weather is kind to us!



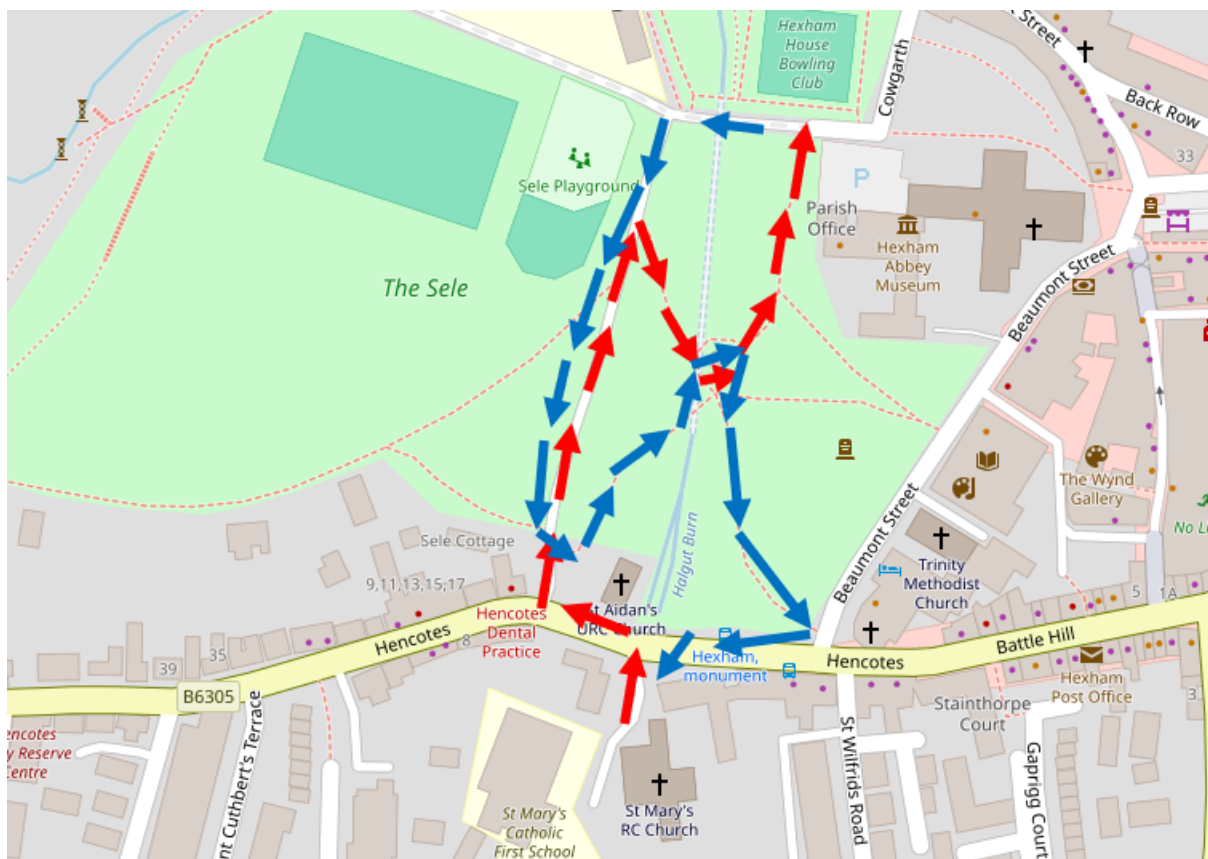
Have a lovely weekend,

Mrs. Oakes

CAFOD Big Lent Walk

On **Thursday 28th March at 10am**, the whole of St. Mary's school community of children, families and parishioners, are invited to conclude the Big Lent Walk Challenge by walking some laps around Sele Park. A huge 'thank you' to those that have already donated to our Just Giving page [St Mary's Catholic First School Fundraising Page is fundraising for CAFOD](#), it is lovely reading all your positive comments encouraging the children with their fundraiser. The children are getting in their steps every day in school and are really looking forward to taking part in the Easter Bonnet-Big Lent Walk finale next week. I am thrilled to announce that we have already surpassed our target of £150 raised for CAFOD, the donation page remains live for anyone who still wishes to donate. Thank you!

Families and parishioners are invited to join us on our walk on Thursday, please see the route we are taking outlined below (**red arrows are outgoing journey, blue arrows are the return journey**). Families and parishioners are welcome to either spectate along the route and/or join at the rear of the children and join in with the walk. Due to the limited width of some of the paths on the route and for safeguarding, we politely request that adults do not walk alongside the classes but join at the rear once all the children have passed through. We also ask that children are not taken out of their class lines by family members. Many thanks for your cooperation.



In the unfortunate event that the weather is inclement, we will hold the walk in the school hall at the same time of 10am. The school office will let you know if this is the case.

School Website

The purpose of this letter is to promote our school website: [St Mary's First School, Hexham – Part of the Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust \(hexhamstmarys.uk\)](https://www.stmarysfirstschool.org.uk). The website has all the key information that parents/carers need, from curriculum information to term dates etc. Our weekly newsletters are always posted on the website (on the bottom of the home page) and have all the key dates and notices for events taking place in and around school.



Free school Meals

Universal free school meals - All pupils in reception, year one, and year two are entitled to a free meal, without having to apply for this option.

Eligibility for free school meals - The government has made amendments to the eligibility criteria since April 2018. This is to reflect the introduction of Universal Credit.

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Education/Schools/Meals.aspx>

Easter Lunch- Thursday 28th March. If your child is currently on packed lunch and would like the Easter lunch. Please inform the school office.

Mini Vinnies

The next Mini Vinnies meetings will take place Monday 25th March. Our meeting will finish at 4:30pm.

Phonics Workshop for Y1 Parents

Parents of all children in Y1 are invited to a quick workshop after school 3.30pm on the 26th March. We will refresh you on what Phonics looks like in Y1 and the Statutory Phonics Screening Check that all children will be taking in June. Strategies to help your child read confidently and fluently will unlock learning in the whole of the curriculum and make academic life easier and more engaging, we look forward to seeing you there.

PTA Easter Fair-




On Wednesday 27th March, the PTA will be holding an Easter Fair in the school hall after collection.

<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/stmarysptahexham>



Mission Statement Value Award Winners:

If you would like to celebrate your child's achievements out of school and would like us to give them a mention in Celebration Assembly on a Friday, then simply fill out one of the Mission Statement Value Cards that have been sent home with your child or ask for one at our school office. We love to hear about all the children's wonderful achievements, both in school and out!

Class			
Reception	Elizabeth	Alfie R	William
Year 1	Frankie H	Dani-Skye	Florence
Year 2	Frankie	Ollie	George
Year 3	Juliette	Parker	Charlie
Year 4	Calum	Sebastian	Mason

St. Mary's Class Attendance	
This Week's Winners: Year 2 with 100%!	
<u>Reception</u>	92.94%
<u>Year 1</u>	99.09%
<u>Year 2</u>	100%
<u>Year 3</u>	98.18%
<u>Year 4</u>	98.64%



Attendance Ladder



Diary Dates

Mini Vinnies 3:20-4.30pm	Mon 25 th March
Phonics Parent Workshop for Y1 parents	Tuesday 26 th March
Whole school Lenten Journey to the Cross Celebration-St. Mary's Church 11am-Parents/carers welcome to attend.	Wednesday 27 th March
Easter Fair after school-School hall	Wednesday 27 th March
The Big Lent Walk-whole school-Sele Park & Easter Bonnet Parade <u>10am</u>	Thursday 28 th March

Easter Lunch	Thursday 28 th March
Last day of Spring Term	Thursday 28 th March
Easter holidays	Friday 29 th March-12 th April
Start of Summer Term	Monday 15 th April 8:40am
Y4 Moor House Trip 9th & 10th May	The final payment balance of £103.87 for the Moor House Adventure trip is now on Arbor. Regular payments can be made to clear the balance up until 26 th April. Please ensure all outstanding payments are made on Arbor by Friday 26th April 24 . Many thanks.

Safeguarding

This month our E-safety theme is 'Managing Online information'. The children discuss how not all information online may not be real or true.

Please take a look at the following information and advice for parents and carers on supporting your child in discussing 'Managing Online Information': [Educational Resources - UK Safer Internet Centre](#)

Pupil Support & Safeguarding

Designated safeguarding Lead- Mrs. Oakes

Deputy safeguarding Lead-Miss. Baird & Mrs. Stansfield

Assistant safeguarding Lead-Mrs. Stoves

SENDCo/Assistant SENCo-Mrs. Stansfield & Mrs Stoves

Please remember that we are here to support you and your child at any time. You can contact us via the main office (01434 603791) or by email (parentcontact@smfs.bwcet.com)

At The National College, our WakeUpWednesday guides empower and equip parents, carers and educators with the confidence and practical skills to be able to have informed and age-appropriate conversations with children about online safety, mental health and wellbeing, and climate change. Formerly delivered by National Online Safety, these guides now address wider topics and themes. For further guides, hints and tips, please visit nationalcollege.com.

10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators

ENCOURAGING OPEN CONVERSATIONS AT HOME

With tricky topics and occasional clashes of opinion, it can be challenging to maintain an environment where children feel able to talk candidly and honestly. However, encouraging such conversations helps to develop trust – making it easier to unpack even sensitive subjects as children get older. Here are our top tips for promoting open conversations at home.

1 CREATE A SAFE SPACE

Criticism, blaming or shaming can all prevent children from feeling emotionally safe – while showing affection, positive attention and an interest in what a child has to say builds their sense of security. These formative years are when children's opinions and values begin to take shape, so it's important to provide a non-judgmental environment in which to discuss them – especially if their opinions differ from your own.

2 CONSIDER OTHER OUTLETS

Some children may find it easier to talk while they're participating in another activity such as drawing, writing, walking or sport. If it's possible, taking part in these activities together presents you with an opportunity to communicate while doing something side by side. A child may feel less pressure that way and can be more inclined to open up of their own accord.

3 NORMALISE CHATS ABOUT FEELINGS

Incorporate mental health and emotional wellbeing into everyday conversations, using age-appropriate language and examples to help children understand their emotions. Ask questions like "How are you feeling today?", "What was the best and worst part of your day?", "If you could start today again, what would you do differently?" and "Is there anything you want to talk about?"

4 LISTEN ACTIVELY

When children express themselves, make it obvious that you're listening closely and giving them your full attention. Maintain eye contact and validate their feelings without immediately trying to solve the problem. It's not helpful to dismiss their issues as childish or 'teenage angst' – or to assume that they'll simply 'get over' whatever they're feeling. Children don't have your life experience; their resilience is still developing as they learn to push through difficulties and handle problems.

5 ASK OPEN QUESTIONS

Encourage children to share their thoughts by asking open questions about their feelings and experiences. Closed questions (such as "Did you enjoy school today?") are more likely to elicit a simple 'yes' or 'no' response. Instead, you could ask things like "Who did you spend time with at break?" or "Who did you sit with at lunchtime?"

6 RESPECT THEIR BOUNDARIES

If a child isn't ready to talk to about something yet, respect their boundaries: this reinforces that their feelings are important and worthy of consideration. Ideally, you're aiming to let them know you care without smothering them, so just make it clear that you're there for them whenever they're ready to chat. Gentle, regular check-ins can sometimes be the best form of progress.

7 LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Model open, honest and healthy communication in front of children and young people. Try to demonstrate kindness when talking about others and yourself, because if children hear adults being overly harsh, critical or judgmental, or see them having unrealistic expectations of themselves, it makes them more likely to adopt and repeat this behaviour themselves as they grow.

8 HAVE REGULAR CHECK-INS

Check in with children periodically to discuss how they're feeling and what's going on in their lives. This could be a weekly or monthly conversation, where the child has an opportunity to share whatever's on their mind. For parents and carers, getting away from the house and other distractions might be productive here: you could consider regular trips to a coffee shop or a café, or just a weekly walk.

9 PROVIDE RESOURCES

It's often beneficial to let children know about other support that's available to them if they're struggling to talk to you specifically. Encourage them to talk to school counsellors, trusted adults or even a therapist if necessary – while normalising this route and dispelling the harmful stigma around asking for help. Older children could engage with resources such as Kooth or YoungMinds.

10 CELEBRATE EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

It's beneficial to praise children for expressing their feelings honestly – emphasising how important it is to talk about their emotions and how proud you are of them for doing so. This can be especially pivotal for boys, who often experience more of a stigma around talking frankly about their feelings and their mental health – a barrier that can be overcome, with enough love and support.

Meet Our Expert

With 30 years' experience as a teacher, trainer, consultant and interim executive board member, Anna Bateman has a superb understanding of what works in pedagogy, school improvement and leadership. She has also advised the Department for Education on their mental health green paper.



#WakeUpWednesday

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