



St Michael's School

Society of St Pius X

Burghclere - July 2026



Deo Gratias

This is my last letter to friends and benefactors of St Michael's School. After nine years as headmaster, I am preparing to leave for South Africa to take up new duties on the outskirts of Durban.

The past nine years have been industrious and challenging. The headmaster must balance the expectations of pupils, parents, staff, inspectors and superiors so that all live in happy harmony, while ensuring the smooth running of the school. Policies must be written, procedures followed, decisions documented, funds raised, budgets managed, buildings maintained and regulatory bodies satisfied. The role is demanding and very time-consuming. It is good that priests do not marry!

Amidst the relentless flurry of activity, Divine Providence has been very active. Nine years ago, no one could have imagined renovated buildings and a new church. Our Lord only gives *daily* bread. We would prefer a monthly or yearly allowance, but He knows best.

The children have prayed to St Philomena for their benefactors every day, for nine years. They will continue. Our benefactors are the instruments of God's gracious providence. We cherish the tools that serve us

best. God cherishes those through whom He is able to bless and provide.

Fr Dominic O'Hart will take my place in August. He is an old Michaellean, brother to Fr Thomas O'Hart who left us last year.

Along with all our benefactors, there are many others to whom I am forever grateful. My priestly confrères are not just colleagues, but friends. We have lived and worked to alleviate each other's burdens, and they have always laughed at my jokes. I am also indebted to the Heads of Primary and Secondary, without whom St Michael's would have faltered within a year or two of my tenure.

Innocence and purity are the reflection of God's likeness and beauty. No effort is sufficient to preserve and protect our children. I ask you to pray that more men and women choose a career in teaching. Catholic teachers wishing to devote themselves to God's work are very hard to find. Yet, teaching is a noble vocation. Christ was a teacher.

May God bless all our benefactors and friends.

Rev. John Brucciani, Headmaster

The Department of Education places great emphasis on schools' obligation to nurture and develop, and to ensure what is called PSHE or RSHE. These are acronyms for Personal, Social, Health, and Economic Education and Relationships, Sex and Health Education.

Most topics that fall into these rather vast and vague categories would be covered within the confines of a family setting. The rough-and-tumble of the family home is rich in learning opportunities. Then there is the shared experience of life together in a hierarchical setting in which children are expected to respect, obey and emulate their parents in skills, attitude and outlook.

Sex education, in particular, is a very sensitive topic. The Church has always maintained the absolute and exclusive right of parents to dispense this delicate formation at the onset of adolescence. The Church also maintains that it must be conducted privately between father and son and mother and daughter, through natural, grace-filled conversations. The classroom is not an appropriate space for such discussions. The mystery of life is too sacred and too beautiful to be treated as a mere study topic in a classroom setting.

However, with the breakdown of family life and so many children bereft of loving parental guidance, the state mandates that all schools must integrate PSHE and RSE into the school curriculum. How does St Michael's comply with this request?

Our approach is and always will be Catholic. St Michael's recognises the needs of the time. The world is a difficult place to navigate, and the best families sometimes need help.

At St Michael's, as explained in the PSHE and RSE policies, our PSHE curriculum is taught primarily through the Catholic ethos that permeates every aspect of school life. In turn, the Catholic ethos that forms the backbone of "pupil development and wellbeing" (Ofsted criterion) is derived from the Gospels, i.e. Christ's vision of what we are and how we should live. Hence, the importance of our RK curriculum, which must influence and inform all aspects of teaching, notably the PSHE curriculum.

Consequently, St Michael's models its PSHE curriculum on its RK curriculum. The PSHE curriculum is divided into topics for discussion per year group (internet safety, health and hygiene, privacy and boundaries, social virtues, authority, healthy relationships, dangers of social media, critical thinking, addictive behaviours, etc.). The

topics are presented in a way that ties them to what the children are learning in their catechism. Some topics are standalone (internet safety, Fundamental British Values, etc.), but most PSHE topics can be studied through the prism of our Catholic ethos, as informed by the Catholic Faith that we pupils learn through the catechism.

The great advantage of our Catholic Faith is that much of the subject matter that is put forward by the Department of Education finds its echo in the teachings and commandments of the Church. Whereas school must teach British Values, such as the rule of law, individual liberty and tolerance, St Paul instructs us to obey all lawful authority, and our Lord tells the story of the Good Samaritan. And Aristotle has some wonderful words on the primacy of the Common Good.

St Michael's is acutely aware of the need to preserve the innocence of youth. Discussions are age-based, and materials are vetted so that no child is at risk of learning too much too soon. We must be, in our Lord's words, as wise as serpents and as simple as doves. (Mt 10:16)

The materials that make up our PSHE and RSHE curriculum are defined in separate policies and divided into age-appropriate themes and topics. These are made available to parents for consultation. The school is very aware that its teaching and counsel in these areas must echo the expectations of Catholic families who have chosen St Michael's for its Catholic teaching and ethos.

In a strange and paradoxical way, our Catholic Faith is our best protection against the secularisation of education. Religion is a protected characteristic guaranteed by the 2010 Equality Act. St Michael's is legally entitled to teach its pupils through the prism of Catholic doctrine. And lest we fear that this would reduce the scope of a child's formation and limit his ability to cope in modern society, we must remember that the Gospel truths are at the very root of Western civilisation. Secular values such as caring for others are but the shadow of the great Christian commandment to love one another, not any old how, but as Christ has loved us. Divine grace elevates the natural to the supernatural. Our pupils have access, therefore, to something much greater and more precious than the letter of the law. It is the spirit that vivifies, and, at St Michael's, we teach all things in the spirit of the Gospels and of the Church. ✠

RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

AT ST. MICHAEL'S

In most Catholic schools, religious education is a rather nebulous subject that leaves students wondering who Jesus Christ really is, what He did and why anyone would want to be a RE teacher.

St. Michael's RE curriculum is unique in today's educational world because no one in the UK teaches religion as we do.

Religion is part of the virtue of justice whereby we give to God His due: to love Him with our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind and with our whole strength and our neighbour as ourselves. (Mk. 12:30-31).

RE at St. Michael's is about acquiring the truths of salvation so that we can shape our lives in a manner pleasing to God and helpful to our neighbour. God has given us clear instructions on how to structure our lives. These are contained in the Holy Gospels and Epistles and in the teachings of the Catholic Church.

RE is, therefore, a very clear and defined subject that gives pupils clear reference points as they begin preparing themselves for adult life. The world needs men and women of principle and conviction, shaped by a worldview that gives sense and meaning to the inevitable difficulties and sorrows that we all experience in life.

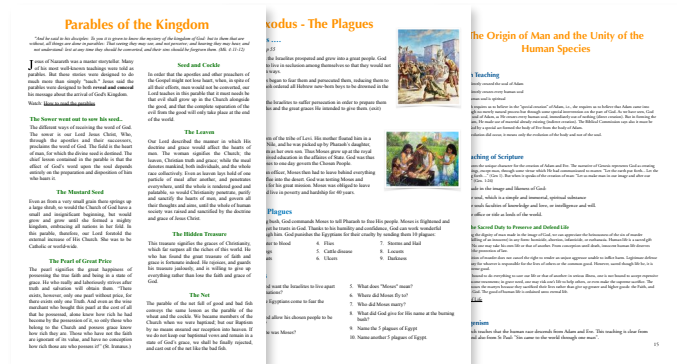
Saint Michael's Religious Education program is shaped as follows.

In Primary School, children are lucky enough to attend Holy Mass and Benediction during the week. They receive 2 hours of religious instruction each week and follow the liturgical season closely. They also learn the salient parts of the Old and New Testament Bible Stories. Their religious instruction is also enhanced with biweekly assemblies and lots of traditional hymn singing.

From Year 7 onwards, pupils receive two hours of Religious Education each week. The lessons are prepared and taught by priests who are best qualified not only to present but also to counsel. Learning one's catechism generates many discussions in the classroom, especially as pupils grow older.

An enhanced overview of the entire catechism (Apostles Creed, Commandments, Sacraments, Prayer) is given in Year 7 using the book by Canon Cafferata: *"The Catechism Simply Explained"*. Pupils learn by heart certain parts of their catechism. Year 7 offers a chance to summarise the most important parts of their primary school catechism. Learning with a priest is a whole new experience for some pupils, and they love it! By the end of year 7, pupils begin making connections between what they learn inside the classroom and what they practise at church or in the home.

In Year 8, pupils embark on a detailed tour of the Old Testament. This provides the opportunity of explaining themes and notions such as sin, the Mosaic



Law, blood sacrifice, prophecy, the Messiah and other aspects of Jewish tradition without which there can be no real understanding of the Gospel story and the teachings of Saint Paul in particular. Schuster's *Bible History* provides the narrative text which pupils must read and understand.

Year 9 is dedicated to a thorough reading of the Gospel narrative and the Acts of the Apostles (time permitting). Weaving in and out of all four Gospels, pupils learn about the life and times of Christ and his most notable teachings, in particular the parables. It is surprising how little children know of our Lord's life and teaching. Their knowledge is partial and fragmented. Year 9 is a year of New Testament exegesis.

In Years 10 and 11, pupils return to learning the various parts of Divine Revelation as a whole. They are encouraged to view the internal coherence of Revelation and to grasp how the truths of the Faith are in complete harmony with human reason. Using notes composed from Sheehen's *Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine* and the books of Fr. John Laux, the Faith is explained and presented according to the plan laid out in St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*: God's existence, His Divine Nature, Creation of Man, Sin, Redemption, Grace and the Sacraments. Pupils are able to acquire the beginnings of the Christian worldview around which they will shape their adult lives.

Religious Education is an exciting subject because it can have a profound impact on the individual child. Hence the importance of confiding this delicate subject to a trained priest. There is no doubt that self-taught Religious Education in a homeschool environment cannot match the impact and influence of religious instruction received in the classroom from the hands of a priest.

Before closing, we must not forget that RE is not confined to the classroom. Pupils also attend mass twice a week and are able to visit the Blessed Sacrament every day if they wish. Feast days are carefully prepared and celebrated. The child lives in an atmosphere that acknowledges the silent presence and tender love of Jesus Christ, His Blessed Mother and all the saints. Our religious education informs the whole person of the child, securing for our pupils a better chance of a happy life here and beyond.

Annual Prizes & Colours

SECONDARY SCHOOL ACADEMICS

Excellence Humanities (<i>Warwick Prize</i>)	Joseph Mal. & Jack W.
Excellence Humanities KS3	Francesca Al.
Excellence Sciences (<i>O'Connor Prize</i>)	Nicholas Al.
Excellent Science KS3	Hugo A.
Excellence Religious Knowledge	Francesca Al.
Excellence KS4 Maths	Gerard M.
Excellence KS3 Maths	Francesca Al.
Excellence Religious Knowledge	Francesca Al.
Excellence PE KS4	Harry C.
Excellence PE KS3	Joseph P.
Most Improved Religious Knowledge	Theodore, Bercel
Most Improved Humanities	Maria Dz. & Francis Cz.
Most Improved Sciences	Florence J. & Hamish M.
Most Improved Maths	Aurelia K. and Fabian K.
Best Progress Physical Ed.	Theodore, Fabian K.
Highest Annual Merit Tally	Laurence H

BEST MICHALEAN

JACK W.



Best Michaelean and Winning Team Captain, who knows how to supervise, motivate and guide.

Well done, Jack!



Spiritual

Physical

Behaviour

Academic

THE FOLLOWING STUDENTS HAVE BEEN AWARDED

HALF-COLOURS

Nicholas N., Hugo, Francesca, Laurence and Nicholas Al. for achievements in the UK Maths Challenge.

Bercel, Pelayo and Harry, for promotion to Senior Acolyte

Theodore, for completing the Chartres International Pilgrimage

Bercel, 18th out of 600 runners in the Newbury Park run

FULL COLOURS

Alexander - for achieving "Best in County" in the national Poetry by Heart competition.

Jack - qualifying as a FA referee.

Florence - RAD Grade 5 in ballet

Laurence - achieving the highest tally of academic merits this year.

SECONDARY SCHOOL COMPETITIONS

BEST SERVER	Joseph Marsh.
BEST BOARDER	Hugo A.
BEST SPORTS/PE	Nick N. & Jack W.
MOST IMPROVED SPORTS	Alex M & Bercel
BAND - BEST MUSCIAN	Bercel & Peter W.
BAND - MOST IMPROVED	Pelayo O.

Trips & Activities



SCHOOL COUNCIL 2026

Our School Council has a representative elected from each class. Their job is to bring to School Council meetings ideas and issues raised by the pupils in their form and to work on projects set by the school.

The main focus this year, apart from menu suggestions (!) has been to fundraise for Haven House Children's Hospice, which provides family care for terminally ill children. Secondary pupils held a sponsored jogathon **and raised an amazing £3100!** The hospice was delighted and expressed overwhelming gratitude to all the participants.

Members of the school council also organised an assembly on ideas for careers, which included, in large part, the ideas of a priestly or religious vocation. It is good that the children are thinking about these things!



A school party had the wonderful opportunity to attend the **Grange Park Opera** rendition of **Verdi's Don Carlo**. Ten free tickets, a delicious picnic mathematically prepared by Mrs B, and mandatory bow ties. The boys carried themselves perfectly. This was the first time they had attended an opera. They loved it.



Years 9 & 10 travelled to **Bath** as part to deepen their understanding of Roman Britain and admire the wonderful architecture of this beautiful city. They visited the Roman baths, deciphered Latin inscriptions, examined artefacts and explored the town. School trips are a great complement to classroom learning. Pupils love them until they discover that a two page essay awaits them at the end of the day, based on what they have learned!



Primary Phase



Year 6, moving on!



Luke wins the ANGEL Award 2026

Here we are at the end of another school year.



Each year comes with many joys and blessings. These have included watching each child grow in confidence and knowledge and pass milestones such as their First Holy Communion, as well as exceptional acting and singing in the school play.

The children have been instructed and guided by a united team in Primary. The teachers and staff have gone above and beyond their duties, caring that each child makes academic progress, but more importantly, caring for the formation of virtue in each child.

There have been many exciting opportunities for learning during the year, such as cookery, a design technology project, school trips and sports day. These broaden our curriculum, teaching skills that will help in life.

For me, it has been an enormous joy to watch my class (the Year 5/6 children) work hard, support each other with learning, take care of the younger children and be a good example in school.

They have exemplified our 'ANGEL' virtues- by being angelic, neighbourly, gallant; they have endured and have been good listeners. I am proud that the Year 6 children are ready to move to the senior school, and hope they carry with them all they have learnt in the primary School.

I would like to thank our loyal and generous benefactors, without whom the school could not exist. You are remembered in the children's prayers.

Primary Book Day

Welcome to Bill and Betty Burglar, Robin Hood, Snow White and others!





Primary gave a magnificent rendition of **Toad of Toad Hall**. The acting, recital and singing were first rate. Bravo to primary staff and to parents for the wonderful costumes.



Reflections on a Year of Achievement & Growth



In her end-of-year address to parents, Mrs Webb reflected on the successes and challenges of the school year, celebrating the children's achievements while emphasising the importance of character formation.

She spoke of the joy of watching pupils grow in confidence and knowledge, highlighting special milestones such as First Holy Communion and the exceptional acting and singing displayed in the school play.

The Headmistress also addressed the theme of behaviour, noting that the phrase "*It doesn't matter*" had been heard frequently throughout the year. And yet, in a child's education, the small things *do* matter. Everyday actions, responses and attitudes help to shape character and build virtues such as obedience, respect and resilience.

Mrs Webb encouraged parents not to overlook opportunities to guide their children, explaining that learning to accept instruction, to persevere through difficulties and to step outside one's comfort zones helps young people develop confidence and strength of character.

Mrs Webb thanked the children for their efforts throughout the year and praised those who had tried to listen carefully, thought of others and performed their duty with prompt obedience. Her final message was a simple but memorable one: the small daily choices children make truly matter, and these efforts help them grow into thoughtful, responsible and virtuous young people.

The children were all very sad to learn of Fr Brucciani's departure. They spontaneously ask to write good-bye letters, much to Father's delight. With their letters, they joined a generous spiritual bouquet.

Here is one letter that summed up what we all think and feel. Thank you, Fr Brucciani, for your cheerful visits to Primary. There was often mischief in the air when you popped in.

Dearest Father John Brucciani,
Thank you so much for allowing me
to have a school, where I can learn
the Faith.
Thank you also for building a wonderful
new church.

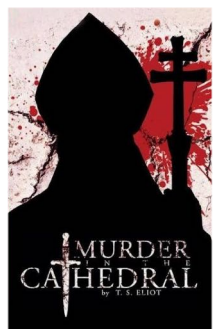
I will ~~go~~ remember your funny jokes
to Gabi!

I pray you have a safe journey to
South Africa and May Our Lady
always protect you.

With
Love & prayers

Year 10 Visit to *Murder in the Cathedral*

On St. George's Day, Year 10 pupils and several teachers visited the Oxford Playhouse to see the Oxford Theatre Guild's production of T.S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, following the company's successful staging of *Pygmalion* last year. Although some might doubt that a verse drama about a 12th-century archbishop would hold the attention of modern teenagers, the performance quickly proved more engaging than expected.



At first, the play's free verse poetry, symbolism, and Greek-style chorus seemed challenging, and it was difficult to gauge the students' reactions. The modern costume choices were initially surprising, with Thomas Becket appearing in contemporary clothing. However, the atmosphere changed dramatically with the arrival of the choir, whose performance of Allegri's *Miserere* helped transport the audience to medieval Canterbury. Combined with more traditional costuming, this created a powerful sense of place and reverence.

Perhaps the production's greatest achievement was its ability to create a genuinely sacred atmosphere despite the modern theatre setting. Eliot's play, originally designed to mirror the structure of the Catholic Mass, retained its spiritual depth and timeless significance. The simplicity of the plot, symbolic characters, and frequent breaking of the fourth wall evoked the style of a medieval morality play, drawing the audience into both the historical drama and its deeper moral questions.

While the martyrdom of Thomas Becket forms the climax of the story, the true focus of the play is his inner struggle. The central drama lies in his willingness to submit to God's will, regardless of the personal consequences. The audience was challenged by the self-justifying speeches of Becket's murderers, prompting reflection on whether we would have the courage and integrity to stand for what is right when faced with pressure or danger. The chorus of Canterbury women reinforced this theme, questioning whether people prefer a comfortable but unfulfilled existence to a life that confronts difficult truths.

The journey home shifted from philosophical reflections on martyrdom to more immediate and mundane concerns about food, as students continued the evening's high drama with their own complaints of starvation. Ultimately, the trip proved both culturally and spiritually enriching, leaving everyone with much to think about. As a final note of satisfaction, we were delighted to receive the compliments of fellow attendees. They explained that their hearts stopped at the initial sight of a group of school boys whose certain mischief would inevitably "wreck their evening". They were astonished and delighted at their concentration and demeanour.

For several years now, St Michael's secondary students have been competing in the national poetry

**POETRY BY
HEART**

competition, Poetry by Heart. It's an event anticipated eagerly in Key Stage Three English. Years 7, 8 and 9 compete for the coveted three spots allocated to each school in the National Competition. The event has grown exponentially in recent years: this year, one in four state secondary schools in England participated.

The rationale behind Poetry by Heart is to counter the notion that memorisation of poetry no longer had a place in our digital world. The event seeks to make the art of poetry memorisation and delivery accessible to every school in England. The competition gives a forum to students to showcase their learning and vocal interpretation.

Results regardless, the opportunity to compete is surprisingly effective as a springboard for teaching poetry: students in St Michael's Year Seven move from recitation of poetry, through composition of simple forms, to analysis of poets' messages. Beginning with recitation recaptures the idea of poetry as a social art akin to storytelling, song and debate. The practice reframes poetry as something shared and culturally valuable, avoiding the danger of its being wheeled out annually as an examination staple.

It came as a delightful surprise to hear that our own Alexander M had been awarded Best in County prize for his melodic recitation of "Up in the Morning Early" by Robert Burns and a beautifully interpreted "The Language of Cat" by Rachel Rooney. Statistically, he outpaced at least 11,500 other students in the county- a fantastic achievement. **Congratulations to Zac and John** who also represented the school and whose recitations were commended.



*As part of their Drama studies, Year 9 pupils wrote and performed a fifteen-minute adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Their impressive performance demonstrated a strong understanding of the novel's themes and characters, bringing this classic story vividly to life, albeit in a very simple setting!*



The Summer Fair offers the opportunity to demonstrate the difficult art of marching in parade. The boys look so sharp in their band uniforms, courtesy of Mr Newton, our faithful patron and friend. The children

are mesmerised as the cadets march in, to the sound of drums and fifes. Bravo to Mr Joseph K for managing to turn a Catphony Cadet Corps into a marching band! And how we love the uniforms!



Sergeant Christian, aided by his faithful colleagues (NCO's Joe K, David S, David M. and Harry W.), continues to deliver first class training and formation to our Cadet Corps. He works closely with Fr Holden who visits each term to check things over. The Cadet Corps is an important component of St Michael's educational plan. Cadets learn valuable personnel and team skills. They learn how to sort themselves out, how to « rough it », how to « make do ». This year's highlight was a visit to the **Bovington Tank Museum**, courtesy (again) of Mr Newton to whom we are forever grateful. Sergeant Christian proved an engaging and fascinating tour guide, full of stories and facts about the most famous exhibits.



MAINTENANCE & REPAIRS ... NEVER ENDING.



The great gym window has moved, breaking the seal between window and walls, thus allowing water penetration into the gym. Cause: the cement verge has perished, which causes gable movement. Solution: re-cement the verge and re-seal the window to the walls.

Quote: £2900

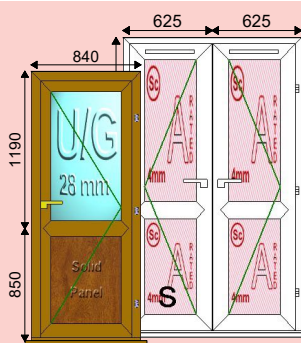
OLD CHAPEL ROOF

As announced in the Christmas letter, the old chapel roof threatened imminent collapse. Urgent works were carried out in February and March. The building was buried in scaffolding, the roof and rafters removed, the gable wall demolished and rebuilt, and a new roof laid. We were able to use the old tiles.

The builders did a fantastic job under the watchful and sometime menacing eye of Richard (below), our maintenance maestro who joined us last year. Plus, thanks to our benefactors, we raised more than £25K towards the project, which cost £110K. Thank you to all our readers!

Maintenance Maestros

Richard and Thaddeus, without whom St Michael's School would fall apart, literally!



The classroom and gym doors are almost 20 years old and heavily used. One by one we must replace them as they break beyond repair. This summer, one double fire door and one classroom door must be fitted.

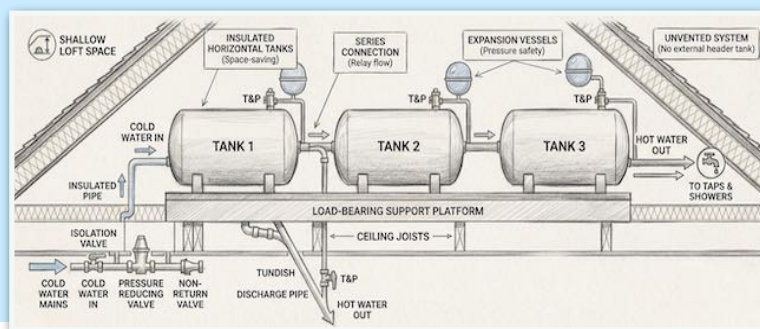
Cost: £3337

REPLACEMENT DORM WATER SYSTEM

Since mid-May, buckets have been a common sight in the upper dormitory due to water leaking through the ceiling. Investigation revealed that the large hot-water tank supplying the dormitory bathrooms, refectory toilets and kitchen has corroded beyond repair and must be replaced. This issue was also noted during the recent Ofsted inspection, which was otherwise very positive.

Unfortunately, the tank was installed between the roof and ceiling joists and cannot be removed intact; it will have to be cut out. To avoid the far greater expense of removing part of the roof to install a replacement of similar size, a new system of three smaller, linked tanks has been proposed. These can be brought in through the existing ceiling hatch and installed with minimal disruption.

Estimated cost: £11,000.



ROUTINE SUMMER JOBS

- ➔ Install actuator (Ref. & Boarding House)
- ➔ Repair Science Lab Roof Leak
- ➔ Replace Projector Physics Lab
- ➔ Install screen in Art Room
- ➔ Sand/revarnish Walsingham Hall windows frames.
- ➔ Weld new footing on White House Fire Escape
- ➔ Carry out Fire RA repair works
- ➔ Repair/paint damaged dorm bathroom ceiling
- ➔ Repair.paint Boot Room
- ➔ Repair/paint Housemaster Door Frame (rotten)
- ➔ Repair/paint Laundry, Boiler & Workshop Doors
- ➔ Repair/replace canopy walkway purlins & eaves
- ➔ Sand/Treat Primary School eaves.
- ➔ Etc.

Boarding House Galore

Awards, from Silver to Gold to Platinum?

This half term, the housemaster treated many of the boys to ice-cream in celebration of their Silver Award. Having earned over 50 boarding merits, this is no small achievement. Well done to them all. Meanwhile, **Hugo** in Year 7 has gone even further, earning a Gold Award with more than 100 merits. **He is this year's Boarding Prize Winner.** To mark the occasion, he enjoyed a delicious meal at the Carnarvon Arms with a fellow boarder of his choice. With Gold already secured, could a Platinum Award for 200 merits be next on the horizon? All eyes are on what comes next!

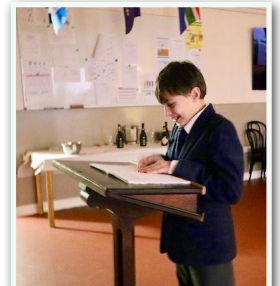


Marking the Feast Days

This year we have begun a new custom. Each term, to mark an important feast day, the boarding house organises a special evening meal. Simple though it is, it gives the occasion a sense of importance. When the boys enter the refectory, they immediately notice the difference: the tables are properly laid, the atmosphere is calmer, and it is clear that the evening is a celebration.



The aim is not formality for its own sake, but to give the boys a chance to experience a meal conducted with care and dignity. The etiquette they have been learning—how to sit, serve, and carry themselves—can be put into practice naturally. It is also a small reward. The boarders take on much of the daily work that keeps the school running, from refectory duty to cleaning tasks, and deserve an evening that acknowledges their efforts.



An old boy always joins the meal. Having once shared the same routine, he returns as a grown man to speak about his memories and the role St Michael's has played in his life. His presence and conversation provide a quiet example of what the boys may one day become.

Singing also plays a part. Carols and folk songs strengthen unity among boys and staff and encourage singing without self-consciousness. Two or three boys give brief prepared speeches. These provide excellent practice in public speaking and often provoke much laughter. The adolescent view of reality can be both refreshing and wonderfully cheeky.



The evening concludes with Compline in the church. Moving from the refectory to the chapel gives the celebration its proper ending and links it directly to the liturgical feast.

Afterwards, the Upper Dorm boys return to clear and wash up. It is a practical reminder that shared enjoyment and shared responsibility go hand in hand.



The evenings are greatly appreciated by boys and staff alike. They offer a calmer and more meaningful way to relax, draw everyone more deeply into the spirit of the feast day, strengthen friendships, and show the boys a simple, genuinely Catholic way of spending time together.





Fr Holden catching up with Drs Engelbert and Michael, MD. Engelbert completed his A levels in 2013 and qualified as a medical doctor a few years ago. Michael completed his A Levels in 2018 and received his diploma in June 2026. Englbert is here picture on his wedding day, which we hope won't be the happiest day of his life ... with happier days still to come!

Educational development is often described as enhancing teaching, learning, and organisational effectiveness through pedagogical training, curriculum design, and evidence-based practices. This definition might be found online, and perhaps it broadly reflects the ten-minute sessions most students experience in schools, whether they skip along happily or drag their feet depending on mood or willingness to speak. Indeed, Ofsted has long championed the principle of individualised support, "pupil voice", and targeted one-to-one guidance as a key indicator of effective pastoral and academic provision. Yet the reality of many school-based mentoring conversations is that they can become little more than brief check-ins, rather than the purposeful, personalised progress-planning opportunities that inspectors so enthusiastically endorse.

At St Michael's, however, educational development is far more than a simple conversation that ticks a box. Rather, it offers a scheduled opportunity to speak with a priest.

Meetings are not merely an exchange of words to fill ten minutes. Rather, they are a chance to go deeper, far beyond academic performance. At times, emotional and social aspects of life are discussed, but even these do not fully capture what makes our sessions special.

At St Michael's, we ultimately speak about the spiritual life of the soul: those interior movements hidden from human sight and beyond the grasp of simple psychology. These depths are known only to God and to ourselves — provided we are honest with ourselves.

And yet, in the presence of a priest, it is striking to see how readily the boys share. The questions that arise are no longer the rudimentary inquiries of catechism, but something much more personal and profound.

One might say this is because the priest stands, in some sense, close to God. A soul feels free to speak to him, as Mary Magdalen or Nicodemus spoke freely with Our Lord. There is a trust, openness and ease.

But there is another reason. Because our boys live and study in a Catholic boarding school, they are familiar with the life of the priest. The distance is reduced. They see him daily. They know him; they know his humanity, even his imperfections. They laugh at his jokes, or perhaps endure his repeated remarks — always respectfully, thanks to their formation.

In this way, a boundary is softened: between youth and adult, between the soul and God, whom the priest represents. And so they open up. They speak. They share their thoughts, struggles, joys, and questions. Nothing seems to stand in the way. Might we not recognise here the beginnings of spiritual direction, whereby the priest helps souls to choose their state in life in God's presence and according to His will.