



St Michael's School

Society of St Pius X

Burghclere - January 2025



WARNING! DANGEROUS CREATURES ON THE LOOSE IN BURGHCLERE. BEWARE!

God's playground

St Michael's is such an interesting place! Between our infant classes and our most senior resident (see further on), nine decades have elapsed. How the world has changed in that time. The world is a very unsettled place nowadays.

How lucky we are to maintain a little island of sanity, studiousness, and laughter for our children! If they can grow up in a happy and stable environment where routines define the day and generous self-sacrifice define a boy or girl's true character, they will be able to confront the challenges of a world without God.

We face new challenges this year. The school and parents must now pay further contributions for the sacrifices required to send children to a Catholic school. We must now pay VAT payments on fees, food and board in addition to the income tax that pays a child's place in the state sector. The school will absorb most of the sudden increase in fees. More than ever, we are reliant on the generosity of our readers and benefactors.

As the parish grows and the new church resonates with beautiful music and liturgical grandeur, it becomes obvious that God blesses our endeavours. Former pupils return, this time to marry or to baptise their children. The St Michael's of yesteryear has managed to form good and solid families who now carry the flame and who honour those without whom St Michael's never would be. Many young families look to St Michael's to help them raise their children in the Catholic Faith. It is our duty and our mission to help them provide the Church with the next generation of adorers of the One, True God.

Providing the Infant in the manger with faithful disciples and friends is a wonderful legacy. Our Lord instructed us: "Suffer the little children and forbid them not to come to me: for the kingdom of heaven is for such." (Matt. 19:14) St Michael's is nothing more than the fulfilment of Christ's dream. He is undoubtedly grateful to those who make His dream a reality.



Fr John Brucciani, Headmaster



Contrary to common perceptions, teaching is not something that can be improvised. It is a highly skilled art that takes time to learn and master. Over the past eight years, St Michael's has successfully endeavoured to replace kindly volunteers with trained teachers who bring to the classroom not only the requisite subject knowledge but also tried and tested teaching techniques which ensure that pupils receive the best learning experience possible. In such a small school as ours, the specific learning needs of certain children stand out and require teaching skills that cannot be improvised.

Readers who have received the St. Michael's Newsletter for a few years might recall a piece from Christmas 2019 that outlined how the school helped two of our experienced teachers to formally pass Teacher Induction. This was an example of the school's particular support for staff development and professional qualifications, and since then we have supported other staff to train either as a nationally recognised SENCo, an Exams Officer or join professional networks and undertake training in their fields.

This past term, we have added a dimension to our support for the teaching profession by providing a programme for a parishioner in Leicester to begin the process of training to teach. Mr. James Bland has been in both the primary and secondary schools since November, observing teachers and undertaking some team teaching. Next term, he will oversee the teaching of particular lessons and a sequence of lessons. This amounts to an 'in-house' teacher development programme, overseen by senior members of staff, that provides Mr. Bland with an opportunity to experience teaching first-hand and all that goes into the learning and assessment process.

Teaching tends to be one of those professions that everyone has an opinion on, or thinks, even secretly, they could do it better, given the chance. Mr. Bland's reflections below hopefully show that there is much more to effective teaching than many people appreciate, even when students are as well-behaved as ours.

Our 'in-house' teacher development programme has provided an opportunity for reflection within the school. The training process doesn't just benefit those who are trained. Teachers who were observed or have been part of the process of supporting Mr. Bland have all commented on how it has helped them to consider more deeply their teaching vocation, what they do each lesson, and what it is they are trying to achieve for and with the students. This is at the heart of what education, or more broadly, what knowledge should be. All teachers will recognise that results are seldom immediate. It takes time to build trust, knowledge and understanding between teacher and student and these are sometimes only really appreciated by students once they have moved on to other educational settings or situations. All our former students comment on the wonderful relationship they had with their teachers during their time at St Michael's, something they now realise is unique, especially when they move to classes with 30+ students. The teaching profession is an essentially generous one that seeks first the benefit of others. Former students really miss the friendliness, ease and fluidity of relationship they used to have with their teachers at St Michael's.

Reading through the reams and reams of non-statutory and statutory guidance published each year by the Department of Education, or perusing the websites and brochures of plush independent schools which vie with each other to offer better facilities, better opportunities, better equipment, etc., it is clear that modernity understands education as a commodity to be reinvented, redefined and ultimately monetised. Like the elixir of life, modernity seems to be in search of the ultimate education formula that guarantees knowledge, understanding and success. This is reprehensible.

The erroneous views on education flow from a point in history referred to as the 'Enlightenment'. Francis Bacon claimed that knowledge is power and should be used to subjugate nature and our fellow men. Knowledge is seen as a utilitarian thing, a tool to make money. Totalitarianism and Marxism follow from such thinking and continue to



Mr Bland and Mrs Joyce sharing notes!

affect and infect our world today. Conversely, the medieval world saw knowledge ("Scientia") as a universal good to be shared for the benefit of all, especially if it led to the growth in understanding of Our Lord and the world He created.

Herein lies the fundamental reason why we train or develop other teachers at St. Michael's School. It is part of any school's duty not only to enlighten the minds of children so that they come to see God's order in all things, but also to foster new teaching vocations so that the light can be effectively and efficiently passed on from generation to generation.

Does the institution gain anything in fulfilling its educational vocation? Is the profession of teaching in the classrooms, marking assignments and preparing future lessons worth the time and money required (lots of it!) In a worldly sense, certainly not. Catholic schools are expensive endeavours with no monetary returns. Teachers work very, very hard and do not always experience the joy of an abundant intellectual or moral harvest! Yet teaching is an essential part of Christian generosity which recognises that everything is a gift from God. Were we to be jealous of or selfish with knowledge, we would fail Him Who is the source of all knowledge, Christ, the Word of God. Education is part of how the Church 'teaches all nations' and there can be no limits in this endeavour. This is why Catholic schools like St. Michael's need a great generosity of spirit among the faithful so that some come forward in each generation to use their talents and knowledge as teachers. Something, perhaps, for those currently considering their career options to ponder. 🍷

I have been considering a career in teaching and was fortunate enough to be offered the opportunity to spend some time at St Michael's school.

Both the teachers and the students have been very welcoming, and I have felt very much at home.

There is a lovely atmosphere here at the school which you feel as soon as you step onto the grounds. The pupils are unfailingly polite and well mannered but also very keen to learn, I have also noticed that they are also very kind and considerate to each other.

The ethos of the school is very much centred on the faith but at the same time is academically rigorous, and the teaching is uniformly of a very high standard.

The main thing that has struck me about the teaching profession during my short time so far at St Michaels is the time and care that goes into preparing and planning a lesson or a series of lessons.

The general understanding of teaching I think is that it is an art practiced by certain gifted individuals who though sheer dint of personality manage, somehow, to impart knowledge to their pupils. This is of course true to a certain degree but much more important is what you might call the scientific/methodical approach that teaching requires.

Whilst teachers need to "know" their subject, more importantly they need to understand how to explain it to their pupils so that the pupils can know and understand it themselves. Subject knowledge is a good start but the key to effective teaching lies in the art of transmitting one's knowledge to the class so that it is understood, admired and retained.

When preparing a lesson a teacher needs to consider multiple factors, such as:

- What is the objective of the lesson, what do I want the pupils to understand at the end of the lesson?
- How will I achieve this?
- How will I explain difficult concepts?
- What format is best to get across said concept: verbal, diagrammatical, audio-visual?
- Which pupils may need additional assistance and in what form?
- Which pupils will need stretching/challenging?
- How will I design a series of lessons to both build and develop knowledge at the correct pace?

In summary, teaching is very much a professional craft, and whilst I feel like an apprentice at the moment, I am certainly in the right place to learn from the excellent teachers at St Michael's how to hone my craft.

James Bland, BA Hons Geography

Primary Phase

Another busy term completed! We have a healthy and lively infant cohort this year (16 pupils) who keep Miss Waddelove and Miss Nalumansi on their toes. Their individual characters and love of play require skill and patience as the school routines slowly streamline their natural exuberance and help them to channel their energies into learning and sharing!

The children have enjoyed their term, with visits to Salisbury and Winchester, cookery classes and carols at a nearby care home. The lunchtime letter club remains popular and it is wonderful to see the children's excitement when they receive a reply in the post!

During the second half of term, Mr Bland joined the staff team, to explore the possibility of a career in teaching. It was good to share experiences and reflect together on methods, expectations and goals. The children deserve only the best. I leave you with a wonderful

Christmas Morning by Diana, year 4, our budding artist!



description below of what a typical day in primary looks like. The children never omit to pray for their benefactors. They love their school. It is a privilege to teach and care for them.



Mrs Webb, head of primary

Zachary describes his day for his grandparents

A Year 6's normal Friday starts with a times tables test. We start at the 2s, then go up to the 12s before we are tested on division facts. Next, we will do some maths from textbooks. After assembly, which is usually about the feast of the day or liturgical season, we have a break. We play football or just stroll about chatting.

English is after break. Usually on a Friday, we have a comprehension. Lately, we have just finished our class reader: The Firework Maker's Daughter by Philip Pullman. We read a chapter together, then answered questions on it and looked up any vocabulary words we didn't know in a dictionary.

Next is RE with Fr. Steele. I really like his lessons as they are very interesting and fun. This term we are studying the Old Testament. Then we have lunch. We have been listening to Bible stories linked to the Jesse Tree for Advent. The team on duty clears the tables before a forty minute break outside.

In the afternoon, we have PHSE or poetry. In PHSE we learn about health and safety and in poetry, we recite a poem by heart. Our most recent poem we have learnt is 'The Listeners' by Walter de la Mare. Lastly, we have art with Mrs Pearce and it is very fun.

Zach, Year 6



Visits to Salisbury Cathedral (above) and Winchester Cathedral (below)! An area rich in patrimony!





GUN FIGHT!

Mr Newton, our Cadet Force promotor, guardian, sponsor, supporter, adviser, helper and greatest friend, invited a team of cadets for a day at the Itchen Valley Shooting Club. The boys had a fantastic time, learning rifle safety and shooting live rounds from bolt action and semi automatic .22 rifles and a beautiful lever-action repeating "Winchester Cowboy" rifle

(.38 calibre), by far everyone's favourite. Joseph M won the shooting competition, beating the headmaster by a single point! The lads were thrilled with their experience, and so were the club personnel. Here is what they wrote: *"Just a quick note to say how impressed I and the other club members of IVSC were with your students. What refreshing, young gentleman they all are, very polite and respectful, such a change from some of the youngsters of today. I for one will gladly give up my time to teach them anytime, it's very nice, in this day and age, to see and be with young men like these students."*



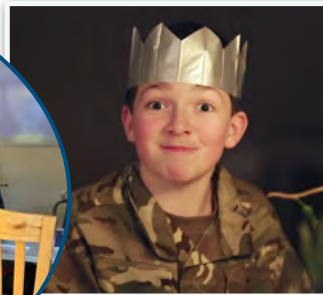
Traditional Christmas NCO meal



A newly ordained Fr Grolet gives his first blessing.



He is a former student of the headmaster, from France. Christian and his team of former Cadets, whose dedication is a fantastic example to the boys.



Life in the boarding house can be a game of RISK!



Boarders enjoyed weekend hikes, picnics and excursions to the Newbury Country Fair, Corfu Castle, Winchester, and Saturday evening classical concerts in nearby churches. Next term they can look forward to ice-skating, bowling & Fort Nelson.





A very interesting description of the challenges of teaching pupils to read and write - today a critically endangered skill thanks to mass exposure to screens, social isolation and "social media speak".

Defining 'English'

Planning delivery of the English curriculum whilst keeping its breadth and balance is more formidable a task than it might seem. There are, first of all, the various aspects of literacy, which ought (in theory) to have been acquired by age 11: fluent decoding (reading of words); recognition of phrasing and punctuation, encoding (spelling); pronunciation and spelling of phonetically irregular words...and underlying all this knowledge, a sound basis in oracy and the meaning of words. Each of these skills is, in practice, in the individual eleven-year-old at a very individual level of development, with some pupils far exceeding the expected threshold for entry to secondary, and other pupils still developing their literacy skills. There remains, even after basic literacy is acquired, much else: the conceptual aspect of English- its ability to communicate and shape ideas; the historical and cultural significance of the language; its interaction with the unique perspective of the student until a personal 'voice' and style is acquired.

Clearing the Decks, Laying the Foundations

First steps in Year Seven generally involve building on the usually very varied spectrum of literacy skills that may exist in our unstreamed classes. Fortunately, their small size makes it possible for each student to have opportunities for individual/small group spelling and reading help. Typically, our students arrive at Key Stage Three as fluent readers and writers, but some still require support in developing phrasing, chunking longer multisyllabic words, and structuring accurately and effectively sentences, paragraphs and whole texts. 'Clearing the decks' also involves removing any blocks to literacy that may have developed, such as an inadequate understanding of grammatical rules or lack of vocabulary.

'Laying the foundations' means developing students' awareness of the literal and non-literal meaning of text as well as giving students tools to develop their own reading and writing.

Understanding of figurative language is key, and learning to work out word meanings from context, syntax or etymology is an important skill. It's

essential that a balance is maintained throughout KS3 between the reading and writing of "whole" texts and word or sentence study. In each scheme of work and as far as possible in each lesson, care is taken to develop language at word level, sentence level, paragraph level and text level. Where possible, the teaching of language and literature is interwoven so that excellent grammatical models are chosen from interesting texts. Sentence and paragraph structure are taught in years Seven and Eight and linked explicitly to writing for purpose: for example, one may end a descriptive paragraph with a metaphor which effectively sums up the item described, or an argumentative paragraph with a rhetorical question.

Finding A Voice

After literacy has been developed to a fluent accuracy, students still need to develop their style and voice for composition. Grammatical activities are then linked to the type of writing being produced: the process of opinion writing, for instance, is greatly eased for students when conjunctions and other connectives are explicitly taught in categories both of meaning (cause and effect, chronology) and grammatical function (linking ideas or linking clauses.) Nonetheless, these skills on their own only render a student's work accurate and coherent. Style must still be acquired. And style is provided by studying the Masters. Hence the importance of classic works of literature, taught yearly at St Michael's: students at Key Stage Three are exposed to a range of classic and contemporary drama. Shakespearean studies in Years 7-9 have included *The Tempest*, *Julius Caesar*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, but later works such as *Pygmalion* by Bernard Shaw and *A Man for All Seasons* by Robert Bolt have featured in recent years too. Novels chosen, such as *A Christmas Carol*, *Animal Farm* or *Lord of the Flies*, have been dramatised by students (much to their delight) across the years 2020-2024. Poetry is taught from Year 7, with the emphasis on the oral art of recitation and the composition of simple poetry before analysis begins in Year 9. All of this exposure to literature (and there is much more on the syllabus than this brief summary explores) enriches and develops the student's own composition.



Examinations: A Long Shadow?

It is important to avoid the over-influence of GCSE examinations on the syllabus, as formulaic or repetitive approaches to examination questions can be counter-productive in terms of student engagement and achievement. This is where teacher planning really comes in. Teachers need to be very aware of their assessment-based goal, i.e. the achievement of target grade or higher at GCSE, and must plan this goal into lessons, but in such a natural and text-driven way as to avoid detracting from the ultimate goal: the development of fluent expressive and receptive linguistic ability and the frank enjoyment of a wonderful piece of writing or speaking. That is why textbooks, whilst useful in their place, are somewhat limited in the English course and are chiefly used for quizzes and follow-up exercises, with most activities being based on real literary texts, followed by differentiated tasks or whole-class discussions planned on literary extracts. With the ultimate goal in mind, we also moved in 2022 to the Pearson Edexcel syllabus, which includes a Spoken Language component. This has allowed our students to achieve a very high level (entirely Merit and Distinction grades) across the first two exam cohorts in Speaking (an aspect of work which always formed part of the syllabus at St Michael's but which only had its first exam-based reward in 2023.) Other successful attempts to make English relevant and real over the past few years include the development of the students' own functioning library, now at over 500 titles and counting - we have come a long way from our travelling bookshelf of ten novels in 2019! ❖

SCHOOL COUNCIL 2024

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.

This year our School Council Representatives are: Francesca (Yr 7), Nicholas (Yr 8), Jack (Yr 9), and Oscar (Yr 11). Oscar has been chairing the meetings and the



With their thinking caps on...



BRILLIANT NEW BENCHES!

The main Science laboratory had its main bench tops replaced over the summer holidays. The old tops had been in place longer than anyone could remember and were very worn and stained by years of experiments.

All four bench tops were replaced. They are 'state of the art' from specialist laminate fabricators Bousfields. They are stain proof and heat resistant, so they should give many years of service and be used by many hundreds of pupils for their experiments! A huge "thank you" to the benefactor who answered our call for help in the summer newsletter.

other representatives have been taking it in turns to take notes and produce minutes. After the meetings notes are forwarded to SLT for consideration, discussion and action.

This term discussions have included: the range of sports provided during the after-school activities; boarders' daily snacks and the Friday lunch menu; Year 9 also requested new blinds for their classroom. All these discussions have resulted in changes within these areas.

This term the School Council has also been tasked with arranging fund raisers for our Advent Charity the Sacred Heart Orphanage in India. They have organised a successful Bake Sale and Line of Coins event, which has raised over £360 for the orphanage. A Christmas Jumper Day at the end of term also raised money for the school.

Thank you to those serving so maturely on our School Council. They are acquiring and practising skills that will be very useful to them in their futures. We look forward to next term's discussions and events!



Our groundsman, Mr Keating, recently celebrated his 95th birthday. A quick celebration, then back to work! Life is too short !



Mr Keating with his former trucking colleagues, visiting from Ipswich to salute « the legend », as they describe him. Mr Keating hauled to Eastern Europe and the Middle East in the 80's. It is fascinating to listen to his stories of adventure.

Following his recent success at the Taekwondo UK Open Championship, Nicholas has been awarded FULL COLOURS. He won a gold medal for special technique and a bronze in the sparring competition. Bravo, Nicholas, for this amazing achievement! Perhaps we should give you some supervision duties.



Congratulations ...!

Matthew Brucciani, 2013 -18, recently graduated from Leeds University: MEng Mechanical Engineering, 1st cl. He became Head of Electric Vehicle Dynamics of Leeds Gryphon Racing, and, as far as I understand it, builds full size scalextric cars for FE racing!



Emma Blyth, who completed GCSEs at St Michael's in 2019 and went on to graduate from Oxford Brookes University with a Bachelor's of Science (Hons) degree in Occupational Therapy.

Behaviour

Physical

Spiritual

Academic

THE FOLLOWING STUDENTS HAVE BEEN AWARDED

HALF-COLOURS

FRANCIS AVERY, for achieving an orange belt in karate.

FULL COLOURS

HELENA TURNER - for achieving Grade 5 in Music Theory.

NICHOLAS ALFORD - for achievements in the Taekwondo UK Championships