



NEWSLETTER

19th December 2025



It is certainly continuing to feel a lot like Christmas as we journey through this season of Advent, a time for preparation and anticipation of the birth of Jesus Christ celebrated on Christmas Day. Our Advent wreath now has two purple candles alight, with the third pink/rose candle lit at the beginning of this week to remind us of John the Baptist who came to prepare the way for Christ - *"St. John the Baptist was the herald for the imminent Messiah..."*

It was wonderful to welcome parents/carers and other friends of the school this morning, as we came together as a school community in fellowship to celebrate our 'Preparing for Christmas' Eucharists with Fr. Mark in the school halls. Once again it gave us an opportunity to really focus on the true meaning of Christmas, in amongst the many festive distractions we face at this time of year.

I would like to take this opportunity, once again, to congratulate all the EYFS & Key Stage 1 staff and children on their superb performance of *'A Miracle in Town'* earlier this month. I am sure there were some very proud parents/carers, grandparents and other family members who were amazed at the confidence and talent on display...it certainly got us all in the festive spirit of Christmas! Following the retiring collections after the three performances we raised a fantastic **£549.60** for our school charities, Kids Inspire and Rock UK.

Last week it was the turn of our Lower Key Stage 2 children to put on a wonderful Christmas performance of *'Angels Up High!'* It was a joy to watch and to witness the amazing individual gifts and talents on display – we certainly had some angels with attitude! My thanks also go to all the staff who have worked so hard to ensure all the performances were of such a high quality despite the many challenges we have had to contend with – mainly sickness absence. It is hard to convey to you how much time, effort, energy and love go in to these performances from all the staff involved. Thanks to your generous donations at the end of the Lower Key Stage 2 performances we raised a further **£557.54** for Kids Inspire and Rock UK.

On Tuesday our Upper Key Stage 2 Christmas Carol Concert took place in the Key Stage 2 Hall. This was a very thoughtful and moving collection of carols, hymns and readings which took us through the sequence of events which unfolded on that first Christmas. Thank you to all those that attended and joined in with some hearty singing of those more traditional carols. At our retiring collection another **£434.86** was raised – giving us a grand total of **£1,542**. Sadly, we had many children not able to return for the evening concert performance so we will be reviewing this for next year, with the possibility of holding two afternoon performances instead to ensure all children are able to participate and support this important annual event.

In addition, and back by popular demand, we also held another festive treat on Wednesday afternoon as the children and staff from across the primary school took part in the festive *'Santa Dash'*. This involved completing the Daily Mile whilst listening to Christmas music and wearing an assortment of Christmas hats and hairbands. It was a great opportunity to see our school community coming together with the older children helping out the younger ones to clock up the laps. By the end of the afternoon there were certainly a few red faces and red noses but huge smiles all round.

The celebration of Christmas brings much anticipation and joy at this time of year. In school we have been focusing very much on the true meaning of Christmas during our journey through Advent - on the qualities of hope, peace, love and joy. I do hope that many of you will be celebrating Christmas and the incarnation of Christ by attending church on Christmas Day.

A SPECIAL
THANK YOU
FOR YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS

Staffing Update

I am delighted to inform you that we have now successfully recruited two new Catering Assistants to join our fantastic catering team. **Mrs Jamila Chowdhury** has taken up her post this week and is starting her induction under the careful supervision of Mrs Turner (Catering Manager). After the Christmas break, we will also be welcoming **Miss Danielle Frost**. I am sure you will join me in welcoming our two new staff members as they settle into their new roles within our school community.



I would also like to thank our catering team for providing such a delicious Christmas dinner on Wednesday – it was absolutely fabulous and there were certainly a lot of happy customers and clean plates!!

Sadly, we are saying a fond farewell to **Ms Gina O'Leary** today as she leaves her post as Learning Support Assistant (LSA). Ms O'Leary has been a committed and dedicated member of our support staff team and we will miss her in school. Ms O'Leary is leaving us to take up another LSA post at a local school and I am sure you will join me in wishing her every success and happiness in her new role.

Following a recruitment process, I am delighted that we will be welcoming **Mrs Katie McCabe** to the Learning Support Assistant team after Christmas. She will take up her role in January 2026 and joins us having previously worked in a primary school bringing with her a wealth of experience and skills. I am sure she will be an asset to our staff structure.

Attendance Matters!

The Department for Education (DfE) and Essex Local Authority continue to communicate a clear message on the critical importance of not disrupting the education of children and young people by promoting regular school attendance and punctuality. This is fully supported by the Governing Body of St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Primary School, as set out in 'Working Together to Improve School Attendance'.

School attendance is mandatory. Enabling children and young people to attend their education setting regularly continues to be a national priority. All children must attend school every day and arrive on time. Sickness absence must be reported via the Studybugs app. Leave of absence will only be granted in very exceptional circumstances.

In the New Year, through our partnership with **Aquinas School Attendance Provision**, we will continue to monitor and contact parents/carers of children who have attendance of below 90% - currently there are 81 children who fall in to this category. These children are identified as 'persistent absentees' and we will want to identify any barriers to regular attendance and offer support, advice and guidance as appropriate.

To date, the attendance percentage by Year Group is:

Reception – 90.7%

Year 1 - 93.2%

Year 2 – 94.0%

Year 3 – 94.9%

Year 4 – 94.6%

Year 5 – 96.1%

Year 6 – 94.5%

IMPORTANT DATE: January 2026 Return



The children return to school for the start of the spring term 2026 on **Tuesday 6th January 2026**.

Please note: Monday 5th January 2026 is a non-pupil professional development and training day and the school is CLOSED to all pupils.

Tuesday 6th Jan 2026

Winter Reading Challenge 2026

Your child is invited to sign up for this year's Winter Reading Challenge at your local library.

The Winter Reading Challenge is a fun activity put together by the Essex Library Service for children aged 0-12. It encourages children and families to keep reading over the winter and to visit their local library. Children are invited to complete 6 challenges from a list of 12 reading and creative activities, and it's FREE to take part. Their mission is to help some friendly animals that work in different professions across Essex!

The challenge starts on Saturday 10th January 2026 and runs through to the end of the February half term on 22nd February 2026. Further details have been shared via Parent Hub this week – I would encourage as many of you as possible to take part. We love reading at St Thomas'!!



Finally....

Last week we received confirmation from the Royal British Legion that St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Primary School raised **£764.74** this year towards the annual Poppy Appeal – well done!

The Brentwood Foodbank have also issued us with a letter and certificate of thanks for all the donations received as part of our Harvest collection before half term. The Primary School donated a total weight of **207.95kg** – which is amazing! (we donated 277.80kg in 2024)

REMEMBER.....When we return after Christmas on Tuesday 6th January 2026 the menu will continue with **Week 1** choices.

On behalf of all the staff at St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Primary School, may I take this opportunity to thank you for all your Christmas cards, festive messages and generous gifts – they are very much appreciated!

I wish you and your families a safe, happy and Christ-filled Christmas and a wonderful start to 2026!

Mr D. Moran
Headteacher

And...please remember if you have any questions or queries or comments feel free to contact us:
admin@stthomaspri.essex.sch.uk

A Christian community where children are known by name and loved, which empowers them to learn and to grow in faith, knowledge and fellowship.