

# Birmingham Schools and Colleges of Sanctuary

## Newsletter No. 12 April 2022

What a lot has been happening in our Schools of Sanctuary this term!

**St Peter's RC Primary** in Bartley Green, **Oasis Primary Academy Woodview** and **Wyndcliffe Primary** have all received the Sanctuary Award, and **Welsh House Farm** and **St Clare's** Handsworth were both re-accredited, showing their ongoing commitment to the School of Sanctuary ethos and vision.

We had some interest from the media about the brilliant Valentine's Day cards sent by schools to MPs - first of all there was a radio interview, which we did with the lay chaplain Anna O'Driscoll and two Year 8 pupils from St Thomas Aquinas Secondary school - listen to it here: <https://bit.ly/3BMISGR> (it starts directly with Anna speaking, leaving out the initial introduction by the journalist), and then the Birmingham Mail ran a feature about the cards sent by the children from Abbey RC Primary. We were also delighted when Tahir Ali MP name-checked **St Dunstan's** in the **House of Commons** debate on the Borders Bill and quoted from the Valentine's cards!

The cards were sent to MPs Tahir Ali (from St Dunstan's), Andrew Mitchell (from Holy Cross), Shabana Mahmood (from St Vincent's and Sacred Heart), Jess Phillips (from Holy Family) and Gary Sambrook (from St Thomas Aquinas), and also direct to the Prime Minister (from Abbey and St Mary & St John). Thank you to all those schools - Shabana Mahmood wrote a thank you letter to Sacred Heart Primary, and Gary Sambrook paid a visit to St Thomas Aquinas.

Then of course we were all horrified by the Russian attack on Ukraine, and here again our schools showed that pupils and staff have big, generous hearts, showing solidarity and support in various ways. Nor have we forgotten those fleeing from war and persecution in other parts of the world, and we are heartened to know that several of our schools have recently welcomed pupils from Afghanistan and Syria, some from families still being accommodated in hotels.

We know that our schools are totally committed to supporting their students from all over the world and celebrating their cultures and their achievements, as we can read in the report from **Washwood Heath Academy**. We were also glad to hear the report from Birmingham City University about the involvement of some of our schools in an ongoing international research project.

After all the hard work of this term, we hope everybody enjoys the Easter break and has time to relax and recharge.

With very best wishes,

Birmingham Schools & Colleges of Sanctuary team  
forbesbararae@yahoo.co.uk



In JANUARY, children from **St Dunstan's RC Primary** led one of the hour-long slots at the annual 24-hour "PrayForBrum" event, and included prayers for migrants and refugees. And they didn't forget to take their **Orange Hearts!** One of the children said: "We are proud to be part of a school which teaches us that we are never too small to make a difference. We are even prouder to be part of a city that is a sanctuary for anyone in need, a city rich in diversity and culture"

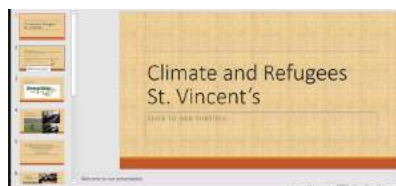
At **St Mary's RC Primary in Harborne**, pupils across the year groups explored the questions: How would you feel if it wasn't safe for you to stay in your community? How would it feel if you couldn't say what you believed? How would you feel if you had to live somewhere far away from everyone else?



They also created posters showing their welcome for refugees and placed their messages of welcome on the front of the school.



Also in January, the Churches Refugee Network held an international conference about the Refugee Crisis and Climate Emergency, with speakers from Nepal, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Switzerland. The introductory contributions came from pupils at **St Vincent's** and **St Dunstan's** who spoke about their recent art project on this topic. The participants in the conference were very impressed!



Share your news with us @BrumSchOfSanc

## Valentine's Day Cards



Our Birmingham schools flooded twitter with posts about their Valentine's Day cards and mightily impressed professionals in the field all across the country!

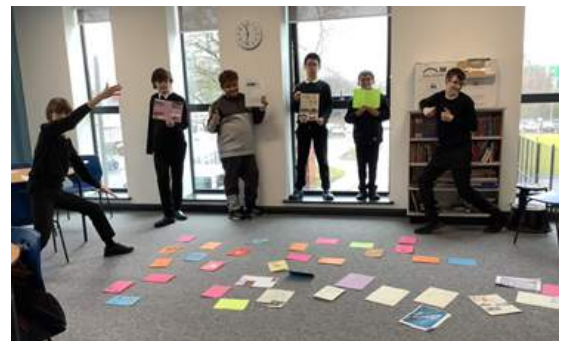
Cards from St Thomas Aquinas Secondary and the primary schools Abbey, St Mary & St John, St Dunstan's, Holy Cross, St Vincent's, Sacred Heart, Holy Family, St Alban's, St

Jude's, St Peter's..... We could easily have filled this whole newsletter with your Valentine's Day photos!



National City of Sanctuary shared this photo from **St Alban's Primary** to lift our spirits after the invasion of Ukraine, and within a couple of days it had almost 400 "likes". Spreading the message!

Pupils at **Oscott Manor** (a "can-do" community special school) made lovely welcome cards which were passed on to refugees who have newly arrived in Birmingham.



## With World Book Day taking place in March, schools focused on books about the experiences of refugees.



**St Jude's in Druids Heath** shared photos of the books they had acquired.

**Sacred Heart in Aston** shared this beautiful display.



**Welsh House Farm** pupils also read books about welcoming others and finding sanctuary.

And at **St Thomas More Primary**, staff joined in and set a good example.



### Some pupil responses were shared on social media:

#### At **St Alban's Primary**, pupils commented about their books:

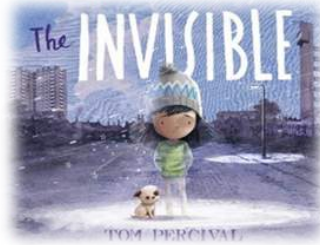
"I love this book because it shows us how important the gift of hope is and refugees really need it." "I love this book because it shows us the challenges refugees face. It helps me feel grateful for what I have." "I love this book because it shows us that Idris' future is going to be promising after living in a refugee camp." "It was upsetting because Azzi became a refugee and it showed how hard this is."

#### **St Jude's Primary** shared the pupils' art work in response to "A Story Like the Wind".



Pupils at **Oscott Manor Special School** read "The Journey" as a group. Here are some snippets from the following discussion: "What's it like to live through war? - Pretty bad. The dads have to fight and the kids are hiding at home instead of going to school. How would you feel? - Bored, fed up, sad, scared. Where would you escape to? - Canada."

**Holy Family Primary** had a whole-school project on “The Invisible” by Tom Percival who was happy to be invited to discuss the book on zoom. Literacy Lead Maria shares their experience.



We love reading at Holy Family School and each year plan a whole school reading and writing project based on a picture book. Pupil voice is extremely important so every member of our school community voted to choose our book during Parliament Week in November 2021 and the winning book was *The Invisible* by Tom Percival. *The Invisible* was published in 2021 and explores important issues through the story of Isabel.



During the project, the children worked on the themes of poverty, homelessness, worries and refugees. They explored Isabel's life and those of the people she meets including refugees, the elderly and the homeless who have become invisible due to being ignored and forgotten in society. The children thought about the feelings of those who have to leave their homes to find a safe place to live, sanctuary away from the familiar and often the people they love. We explored the feelings of refugees when they arrive in a new country and the worries and anxieties that they may feel.

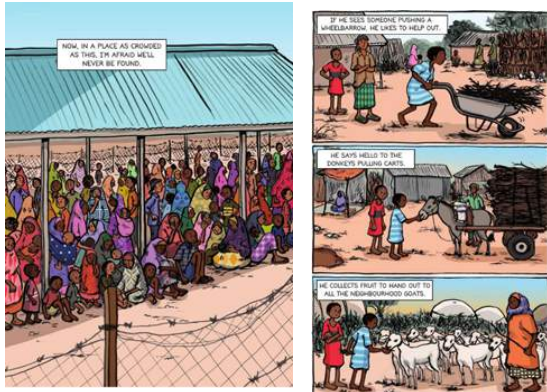
Through the project the children gained an understanding of feeling excluded from a community and how we can be a welcoming beacon and have the power to make a difference to everyone through kindness and compassion. This is a wonderful book to share as the messages and themes explored are so important in developing empathy and in understanding our catholic social teaching to be caring and to show dignity to others. As Pope Francis says: *“We pray for the many brothers and sisters who seek refuge far from their native lands, who seek a home where they can live without fear: that they might always be respected in their dignity.”*

This project has helped us as a school community to develop a greater understanding of refugees and the importance of everyone being welcoming and showing kindness so that we do make a difference in our world.

 <p>Thinking about what we can do for others and praying for refugees and the homeless.</p>	<p>Writing about how we can make a difference to others through our kindness and charity work.</p> 
 <p>Exploring feelings and writing about how Isabel felt being left out and ignored.</p>	 <p>Independent prayers written about those feeling invisible and alone in the world.</p>
 <p>Research about refugees and the agencies that support and work with people and families.</p>	<p>Follow up work about refugees.</p> 

**At Oasis Academy Woodview**, Year 5 pupils recently read “When Stars are Scattered”, a graphic novel about growing up in a refugee camp.

The story was told to the author, Victoria Jamieson, by a former Somali refugee, Omar Mohamad, who lived in a camp in Kenya for 15 years. The day-to-day life in the camp is depicted in all its aspects, including the care the young people have for one another and their hopes for the future.



In the course of reading the book (which was done with the help of the interactive whiteboard), one of the pupils suddenly burst into tears – not tears of sorrow, but tears because she had also lived in that camp, and her life there was being acknowledged. She was happy to share her story and explain how she too had experienced life in the camp.

**Advocacy on the one hand, caring on the other.**

**Across this academic year, pupils at Bordesley Village Primary have been active both in contacting the Home Secretary and in showing support for refugee families.**

Pupils in Key Stage 2 wrote letters to Priti Patel about the Borders Bill which will make life even more difficult for refugees who are looking for a safe place to live. In the letters, pupils expressed their anger and disappointment about the lack of empathy shown by the government for people who are in desperate need. Pupils asked Mrs Patel how she would feel if she was in difficult circumstances. The school has also been raising money to support refugees who access the Green lane Masjid and Community Centre. Mrs Kauser (Fundraising Lead) sold raffle tickets where pupils could win one of five prizes, and also organised a cake and biscuit sale. The money raised was donated to Green Lane Masjid and Community Centre, who will use the money to make food parcels for refugee families. Eight pupils from Year 5 will be going to Green Lane to help pack the food parcels.

## Abbey Primary's hope for a peaceful future

At the Abbey, we are grateful to be situated in the wonderful community of Erdington. Members of our community organised an event in honour of Holocaust Memorial Day, which was a great learning opportunity for our discerning and compassionate children.

Our KS2 children worked hard to produce Holocaust poetry in line with the theme of **One Day**, and wrote their prayer intentions onto a flame representing the Holocaust Memorial Day logo. These prayer intentions were collected and each formed one part of a whole piece of artwork. It was our School Council children who had the opportunity to join the memorial service in Erdington, participating through readings and poetry to remember the historic tragedy. Being reflective, we listened to the horrors of the past to ensure we are promoting a peaceful future in unity.

The Abbey, along with being a School of Sanctuary, uses Catholic Social Teachings to make the curriculum relevant for our modern day activists. We understand how important it is to stand in solidarity with our neighbours, an act which our school council children shared for Holocaust Memorial Day.

***'One day, I dream that genocide will come to an end.  
One day, I dream that every race, religion and gender are treated equally.  
One day, I dream that we are never separated from our loved ones.  
One day, I dream that we accept each other for who we are.'***  
***Written by a Y6 pupil from the Abbey.***





## Fly High, Swim Free



At **St Dunstan's Primary**, the children in Y5 and Y6 have worked with a local visual artist and mental health specialist, Jane Thakoordin, on a collaborative project alongside four other organisations that support refugees and mental health charities, to create a large textile with the theme 'Fly High, Swim Free'. The focus is on artistically expressing one's right to freedom and peace.



## Response to the war in Ukraine

**Across all our schools, pupils and staff showed their support for Ukraine. Parkfield Community School and Bellfield Junior School**



shared their special assemblies, while some of the Birmingham Schools Team shared in an online vigil at **Oasis Academy Woodview** which took place just before the Award Assembly.. **St Dunstan's** drew our attention to a special edition of First News and after reading "The Promise", looked at what Ukraine and its people need to flourish again.

**St Peter's** held a special day to collect money for the CAFOD DEC appeal.



Several other schools made special collections of items which they made sure went to agencies who could deliver them to the point of need - here is the collection from **Bellfield Junior School**, which was sent via the Red Cross collection centre in Kidderminster.



At **St Francis RC Primary** 18th March was declared "Freedom Friday"



when everyone wore the colours of the Ukraine flag and did various activities to show support and solidarity for those in Ukraine who have had to flee their homes due to the war. During that day the Reception children experienced what it is like for some of the children who are in the Ukraine who had to pack very little of their belongings and leave their home. The reception children walked from their classroom to the Junior Playground where they walked around the playground in silence, thinking about the children in Ukraine. Year 6

children came out to cheer them on their last few laps around the playground, where they all gathered to say a prayer.

## Engaging with our politicians



Following on from the Valentine's Day Card campaign, Northfield MP Gary Sambrook (Conservative) asked to visit **St Thomas Aquinas Secondary**.

He spoke to members of the chaplaincy team who handed over the Valentine's cards they had prepared earlier. One student is from S America and gave him a real grilling over the way the government treats foreigners and refugees. They were a real credit to the school and spoke articulately about asylum and refugee issues.

After Gary Sambrook's votes against the amendments to the Borders Bill, however, the school will be getting in touch with him again!

**As you will all be aware, our Schools of Sanctuary have been engaging in the Together With Refugees Orange Heart Campaign for many months now, showing their opposition to the Nationality and Borders Bill which seeks to criminalise asylum-seekers and which is in contravention of international law.** After passing through the House of Lords where many very good amendments were submitted, the Bill returned to the House of Commons where unfortunately it was voted through. It is unclear what will now happen to the Bill as it goes back to the House of Lords and the debate continues.

One highlight of the debate was the moment when **Tahir Ali, MP** for Birmingham Hall Green,, name-checked **St Dunstan's** and quoted from the Valentine's Day cards he had been sent.

You can see his contribution to the debate [here](#).

**On 21st March, the day before the Bill returned to the House of Commons, Together With Refugees declared an Orange Landmark Day when all over the country, Orange Hearts were on display everywhere and local landmarks were lit up in orange.** We did our bit in Birmingham with an Orange Heart chain at Carrs Lane Church in the city centre, with pupils from Cromwell, St Alban's, St Anthony's, St Chad's, St Dunstan's, St Jude's, and St Peter's, joined also by members of Amnesty International and Restore, - and of course our indefatigable supporter Councillor John Cotton,

who said it was "an absolute joy" to be with such committed and passionate young people. Thank you also to Rev Cristina Cipriani for such a warm welcome!



**As well as joining in our Orange Hearts chain, pupils from St Jude's also had the inspired idea of marking the event at the iconic Birmingham Bull statue.**

**Other schools marked the day on site, and at St Chad's the younger children even formed their own chain round the school - watch [here!](#)**

Remember that the pillars of School of Sanctuary work are

Learn - Embed - Share

Look at how Somerville Primary shared the news of its recent re-accreditation with a special page on the school website!

Watch [this](#), and it will make your heart dance!



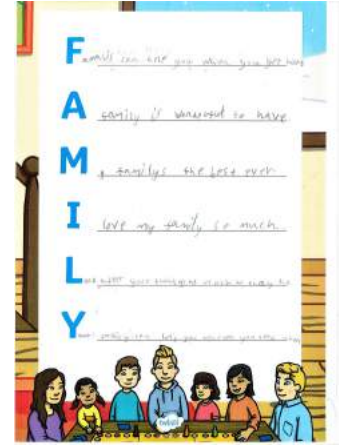
We hope that all our Schools of Sanctuary will have a special page on their website for this work! We are happy to share these on our new special [Birmingham Schools of Sanctuary webpage](#) which also has an archive of all our newsletters.



## City of Sanctuary National Poetry Competition

This term's national competition was to write a poem about how important it is for families to be together - raising awareness of government proposals which will continue tear families apart and in support of the coalition <https://famielsttogether.uk/>

We know that many poems from our Birmingham schools were sent on their way to the judges, and we will wait to hear the result after Easter! Meanwhile, we'd like to share this poem from a Year 2 pupil at Welsh House Farm



And this poem from a Year 6 pupil at Sacred Heart.

Also, take a look at the lovely display the pupils from Sacred Heart put up in their neighbouring Birchfield Library as a thank you for the many books about refugees which the Library provided for World Book Day.



## **Celebrating and supporting a multi-diverse school population - examples from Washwood Heath Academy**

Washwood Heath Academy is proud of its multi-diverse school population and to celebrate this we have begun recording special editions of our **School Podcast** featuring students who came here from other countries.

The Podcasts give them a platform to share the memories and traditions of their homelands and the journeys they and their families took to become part of our community. They speak with great joy about their lives in their homelands and how different life is in England. The students also talk about settling here and the many ways they were helped to learn the language and settle into their new lives.

The Podcasts will soon be available on the school website and Sound Cloud. Thank you to Mr Robinson who is behind this project!

Listen here to an interview with two Romanian pupils: <https://bit.ly/38e5OCN>

### **Homework support from 6th form students**

6th form students at Washwood Heath Academy have been providing support for students with additional needs. Volunteers support Homework Club every Friday and spend 45 minutes with EAL pupils.

The 6th formers are paired up one-to-one, which proves to be effective as the younger students are working at different levels and need help with different pieces of homework. Some students also benefit from the bilingual support provided by the 6th formers, which is a fantastic bonus - for example a Somali speaker in Y12 who is planning to go on to study architecture, is a brilliant help for a Y7 student whose main language is Somali. Those who have completed their homework then go on to educational activities on MathsWatch, Linguascope or Kahoot.



All students who attend Homework Club show great resilience and work well with each other. The 6th formers gain additional experience and are able to share their language skills and knowledge, and boost their confidence. The younger students make sure that their homework is complete and have a chance to further improve their literacy and numeracy with the help of the older students.

Well done, everybody!

## Birmingham Schools of Sanctuary support research project at Birmingham City University

Some of our Schools and Colleges of Sanctuary are involved in an ongoing BCU project to share experiences of pandemic-related school closures. The research (which is part of an international Erasmus+ funded Collaborative Community Mapping Project 'Co-MAP') explored the impacts of food and digital poverty and the impact of closures on school decision-making and practices, generating questions and ideas about the implications for future practice and developing school-community relationships. Three primary schools, one secondary school and one college - all of which are already recipients of the Sanctuary Award - took part in the research.

This was the first phase of a longer project - we will be including updates on the next phases as they take place. For more information and to request a copy of the report, please contact [mary-rose.puttick@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:mary-rose.puttick@bcu.ac.uk)



**Our network also includes two Colleges of Sanctuary and here FIRCROFT COLLEGE in Selly Oak shares some information about some of its courses:**

### Free Thinking at Fircroft College

Having College of Sanctuary status since January 2021 has helped us to recruit to our courses for new communities. Our 7 week Free Thinking course has been running since 2019 and is popular, with our current course due to finish on 20th March and the next course starting Friday 13th May. Free Thinking is for men and women from new communities with lived experience who would particularly benefit from experiencing residential learning with us, getting away from their everyday lives for a few days each week, learning new skills and sharing their stories with each other. **To find out how our Free Thinkers have benefited from the course go to <https://www.fircroft.ac.uk/free-thinking> .**

We have a new ESOL for Care course starting 9<sup>th</sup> May – 13<sup>th</sup> June delivered one day each week (non- residential) at the college. This is a new course and is perfect for people from new communities wishing to work in the care sector. As well as learning English, students will be well prepared for starting a job in care, with the modules of the Care Certificate, a qualification care workers are required to complete once they start work, explained in detail so that students will be ready to achieve the certificate once they start employment. Attending this course can also help to increase confidence in applying for work in care and familiarise students with working as part of a team.

**To find out more go to <https://www.fircroft.ac.uk/esol-for-care>**

If you know people who might like to find out more about these courses, please contact the Admissions team at [admissions@fircroft.ac.uk](mailto:admissions@fircroft.ac.uk) or telephone 0121 472 0116.

**Our network just keeps on growing! We have had inspiring introductory meetings with several new members of our network, and we are impressed by the dedication of four Catholic Secondary Schools who, when asked about holding a zoom meeting together, unanimously chose 07.30 a.m as the best time! Real commitment from Bishop Challoner, St Edmund Campion, St John Wall and St Thomas Aquinas!**

**This term we were delighted to hold Award Assemblies at Oasis Woodview**



**and St Peter's, where the pupils came dressed in orange straight from the event at Carrs Lane.**



**The re-accreditation awards at St Clare's and Welsh House Farm will take place in the summer term, as will the Award Assemblies for Wyndcliffe and possibly a few other schools who are in the process of presenting their evidence.**

**To quote Cllr John Cotton (see above on page 11), working with all these schools is indeed an absolute joy.**