



St. Mary's on the Hill P.S. February Information 2026

Welcome to February's edition of our Information Sway.

This month we are pleased to share a range of recent school events, along with important updates and details of activities planned in the weeks ahead.

*As we move into the second half of the academic year, we would like to take a moment to emphasise the importance of **pupil attendance**. It is essential that the school is informed promptly of the reason for any absence. Attendance records are reviewed monthly, and every absence must be coded accurately in line with Department of Education guidance. By keeping us updated, you help ensure that our records are correct and that your child receives the best possible support.*

Regular attendance and punctuality are vital in enabling pupils to make steady progress and reach their full potential. We greatly appreciate your continued cooperation.

*This month also brings our **mid-term break**, and we hope all pupils enjoy a well-earned rest. We trust they will make the most of their time off and return to school refreshed and ready for the term ahead.*

If you have any questions or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact the school at:

info@stmarys.newtownabbey.ni.sch.uk

Kind regards,

Mr Matthew O'Brien

Principal

Values in St. Mary's on the Hill P.S.



One of the qualities we are most proud of at **St Mary's on the Hill** is the children's positive attitude towards their learning and behaviour. As part of our school's Values System, we are focusing on the value of **Curiosity** throughout the month of February. ✨

As we reach the halfway point in our school year, I will be speaking to the children about what curiosity looks like in everyday school life — asking thoughtful questions, showing enthusiasm for new ideas, exploring challenges with interest, and taking an active role in their learning. Curiosity also links closely with taking pride in their work, making good choices, and following school expectations, including wearing correct uniform and adhering to our healthy break policy.

We want our pupils to understand that being curious helps them grow, learn, and discover new possibilities.

Can I ask parents and carers to support this message at home? When children see the same values reinforced both in school and at home, they feel encouraged and confident to put them into practice.



Internet Safety at St Mary's on the Hill

Safer Internet Day 2026 will be celebrated globally on **Tuesday 10th February**, with this year's theme:

"Smart tech, safe choices – Exploring the safe and responsible use of AI."

Although our school will be closed on the day itself due to the mid-term break, we will be marking this important event when the children return to school.

Promoting Respectful and Safe Online Behaviour

Throughout the week, pupils will take part in a series of age-appropriate activities designed to help them:

- understand what respectful behaviour online looks like
 - recognise positive and negative digital interactions
- explore how AI technologies work and how to use them safely
- learn how to make safe, informed choices when using apps, websites and smart devices
- know who to speak to if something online makes them feel unsure, uncomfortable or upset

These activities help children develop the confidence and digital resilience they need in an ever-changing online world.

Supporting Online Safety at Home

Online safety works best when school and home send the same clear messages.

Parents and carers can find helpful, practical advice on how to support children's online safety by visiting:

 www.thinkuknow.co.uk

This website offers guidance on apps, games, privacy settings, and ways to talk to children about staying safe and making good digital choices.

Children's Mental Health Week 2026



[Children's Mental Health Week 2026](#)

Monday 9th – Friday 13th February

Theme: "This is My Place" 

Monday 9th February marks the beginning of **Children's Mental Health Week 2026**, and at St. Mary's on the Hill P.S., the wellbeing of our pupils is always at the heart of everything we do. This year's theme, "**This is My Place**", invites children to explore the spaces—both physical and emotional—where they feel safe, valued, and understood.

[Why Empowerment Matters](#)

Empowering children and young people has a lasting impact on their wellbeing. Research shows that children who feel their **voices are heard** — and that what they say really matters — often show:

Higher self-esteem

→ **Improved self-belief and confidence**

→ **Stronger emotional resilience**

→ **A deeper sense of belonging within their community**

When children feel empowered, they are more willing to share their ideas, support others, and work together to make positive changes in their school and community. At St. Mary's on the Hill, we want every pupil to feel that school is their place too.

 **Creating a Sense of Place at St. Mary's**

As a school community, we continue to build an environment where every child knows:

- *They are welcome*
- *They are important*
- *They can grow and succeed*

We want St. Mary's on the Hill to be a place where children feel confident to be themselves, take risks in their learning, and understand the value they bring to their school family.

Autism Awareness in St. Mary's on the Hill P.S.



[*¶ Autism Awareness at St Mary's on the Hill P.S.*](#)

*At St Mary's on the Hill P.S., we are committed to creating a school environment where every child feels understood, supported, and valued. As part of our ongoing work in promoting inclusion and understanding, we want to share important information about **Autism** and how we can support pupils and families within our community.*

[*¶ What Is Autism?*](#)

*Autism is a **lifelong developmental difference** that affects how a person:*

- understands and communicates with others*
- experiences the world around them*
- processes sensory information*
- responds to social situations and routines*

*It is sometimes described as a difference in the **social and communication centre of the brain**, influencing how individuals relate to people, activities, and their environment.*

2 A Spectrum Condition

*Autism is a **spectrum**, which means:*

- *every autistic person is unique*
- *strengths, challenges, and needs vary from one individual to another*
- *some people may require significant support, while others may manage independently*

*Understanding each child's individuality helps us provide **personalised support** that meets them where they are.*

While every autistic person is different, there are two main areas of difficulty shared by all:

1 Social Communication & Social Interaction

This may include:

- *difficulty interpreting facial expressions or body language*
- *challenges with back-and-forth conversation*
- *finding social situations overwhelming*
- *needing extra time to understand and respond*

2 Restricted, Repetitive & Inflexible Patterns of Behaviour

*Often accompanied by **sensory processing differences**, such as:*

- *sensitivity to lights, sounds, textures, or smells*

- *preference for routines and predictability*
- *repetitive movements or interests that help regulate emotions*
- *difficulty coping with unexpected changes*

These differences are not problems—they are simply part of how autistic individuals experience the world.

Sensory Processing Differences

Many autistic children and adults experience everyday sensory information in a more intense or reduced way. This can affect:

-  **sound**
-  **light**
-  **touch**
-  **taste**
-  **smell**

Understanding a child's sensory profile helps us create calm, comfortable learning environments where they feel safe and ready to learn.

Our Commitment in St Mary's on the Hill P.S.

We aim to:

- *recognise each child's strengths*
- *understand their individual needs*
- *adapt teaching approaches and environments*

- *celebrate neurodiversity*
- *work closely with families and professionals*
- *promote acceptance and empathy among peers*

*Every child deserves to feel that they **belong**, and we are dedicated to fostering that sense of belonging in every classroom.*

[!\[\]\(8eea8123f1ff17b34a241558959dccb7_img.jpg\) Further Support & Information](#)

If you would like additional resources, advice, or guidance on supporting someone with Autism, you can contact:

[!\[\]\(b6881bb8a2cac446d428dbf28b90cf77_img.jpg\) Autism NI Helpline](#)

028 90 401 729 (Option 1)

The team can provide expert information, helpful strategies, and signposting to further support services.

Dinner Menu 2026

EAT SMART WEEK THE LUNCH BUNCH



WEEK BEGINNING	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
16th February 16th March 13th April 11th May 8th June	Baked Fish Goujons with Lemon Mayo Steamed Broccoli & Baked Beans Chipped Potatoes & Baked Potato Selection of Fruit Yoghurt Pots	Homemade Beef Bolognese Baton Carrots & Green Beans Fusilli Pasta & Fresh Seasonal Salad Mandarin Orange Sponge with Custard	Lunch Bunch Chicken Curry & Mini Naan Bread Garden Peas & Fresh Seasonal Salad Steamed Rice & Oven Roast Wedges Peach & Raspberry Traybake Trifle	Roast Pork with Stuffing and Rich Gravy Steamed Broccoli & Cauliflower Mashed Potatoes & Oven Roast Potatoes Chocolate and Pear Sponge Cake	Hot Dog with Tomato Ketchup Garden Peas & Mini Corn on the Cob Chipped Potatoes & Baked Potato Vanilla Ice Cream with Sliced Pears
23rd February 23rd March 20th April 18th May 15th June	Golden Baked Cod Bites Steamed Broccoli & Baked Beans Chipped Potatoes & Baked Potato Frozen Strawberry Yoghurt and Fruit Tub	Mild Beef Chilli Sweetcorn, Fresh Seasonal Salad & Coleslaw Steamed Rice & Oven Roast Wedges Homemade Apple Sponge with Custard	Lunch Bunch Chicken Curry & Mini Naan Bread Garden Peas & Diced Carrots Steamed Rice & Mashed Potatoes Fresh Fruit Salad with Strawberry Yoghurt	Roast Turkey with Stuffing and Rich Gravy Roast Carrots & Spring Cabbage Mashed Potatoes & Oven Roast Potatoes Fruit Muffin and Milkshake	Cheeseburger with Tomato Ketchup Mini Corn on the Cob & Crunchy Veggie Sticks Chipped Potatoes & Baby Potatoes Oatmeal Biscuit with Orange Wedges
2nd March 30th March 27th April 25th May 22nd June	Golden Crumbed Fish Fingers Garden Peas & Spaghetti Hoops Chipped Potatoes & Mashed Potatoes Banana-flavoured Mousse	Homemade Beef Bolognese Steamed Broccoli & Fresh Seasonal Salad Fusilli Pasta & Herbed Baby Potatoes Summer Fruit Sponge Finger	Lunch Bunch Chicken Curry & Mini Naan Bread Green Beans & Baton Carrots Steamed Rice & Oven Roast Wedges Blueberry and Lemon Sponge with Custard	Roast Gammon with Stuffing and Rich Gravy Cauliflower & Roast Butternut Squash Mashed Potatoes & Oven Roast Potatoes Jelly Whip with Mandarin Oranges	Baked Pork Sausages Sweetcorn & Baked Beans Chipped Potatoes & Mashed Potatoes Frozen Vanilla Yoghurt with Melon Wedge
9th March 6th April 4th May 1st June 29th June	Homemade Beef Bolognese Baton Carrots & Steamed Broccoli Fusilli Pasta & Oven Roast Wedges Melon, Mandarin and Pineapple Pot	Ham and Cheese Pizza Sweetcorn & Coleslaw Chipped Potatoes & Baby Potatoes Raspberry Jelly with Two Fruits	Lunch Bunch Chicken Curry & Mini Naan Bread Garden Peas & Roast Butternut Squash Steamed Rice & Potato Salad Pineapple Upside Down Cake with Custard	Roast Beef with Yorkshire Pudding, Stuffing and Rich Gravy Or Baked Salmon and Tomato Pasta Roast Carrot & Cauliflower Mashed Potatoes & Oven Roast Potatoes Chocolate-flavoured Mousse with Chopped Fruit	Oven Baked Chicken Goujons Garden Peas & Baked Beans Chipped Potatoes, Baked Potato & Fresh Seasonal Salad Homemade Flakemeal Biscuit with Melon Wedge

MILK, WATER, BREAD AND FRESH FRUIT AVAILABLE DAILY

MENU SUBJECT TO PRODUCT AVAILABILITY

IF YOU REQUIRE ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON ALLERGENS OR SPECIAL DIETS PLEASE CONTACT YOUR SCHOOL

The attached menu will be used from Monday 16th February 2026.

After School Activities



After School Activities will renew for term 2 after mid-term. A timetable will be sent to parents this week. Clubs will commence on Monday 16th February and will end week beginning Monday 23rd March 2026.

Road Safety Quiz 2026



Well done to our road safety quiz team who did extremely well last month. Congratulations to Lauren, Daniel, Ciara and Conor!

Gaelic Football Tournaments

GAEPLIC FOOTBALL



Well done to both our boys and girls Gaelic Football teams. The boys and girls played extremely well in their tournaments and did our school and themselves proud. Well done everyone.

Inclement Weather



Unfortunately, this time of year always holds the possibility of a school closure due to inclement weather. The decision to close a school is not taken lightly. As with previous years we will do all in our power to keep the school open however, I do need to consider the Health and Safety implications for pupils, parents and staff. Following a risk assessment, if a decision to close the school is made, we will inform every one of the closures by text message between 7.30am—8.30am. It is vitally important you inform the school office of any changes to contact numbers to ensure you receive this information. Closure information will also be displayed on the school's website.

Facebook



*Please visit, like and share our Facebook page. It continues to be used to promote the school in the wider community. We will celebrate and mark events throughout the school year. **If you have not already done so please give our page a like.***

The school will continue to communicate and update parents via email and text. Facebook will not be used to send messages to parents and we would ask that parents do not use Facebook to contact the school.

Click on the link below and please share with anyone you think would be interested or has a connection to our school - <https://www.facebook.com/StMarysOnTheHillPS/>

Promoting Healthy Eating



Here at St. Mary's on the Hill Primary School we promote Healthy Eating across the school. We encourage children to choose a healthy snack for their break as well as making healthy choices in what they eat and drink.

Free School Meals



The application process for free school meals/uniform has commenced. Parents who are currently eligible to apply for free meals/uniform should now complete their application. **Please note that entitlement to free school meals will attract funding to the school's budget.** Whether your child wishes to partake of a meal or not is down to individual choice. We would like to encourage parents who fall into this category to **please make an application** as soon as possible. Application forms may

be obtained via the Education Authority website – www.eani.org.uk or alternatively by contacting Free School Meals Section on 028 2566 1350. Should you have any further queries regarding this, please contact the school office.

Car Parking



CHURCH CAR PARK: I would like to gently remind everyone of the difficulties and dangers around drop-off and collection of your child/ren. I am asking that all parents exercise extreme caution. To alleviate the difficulty of congestion we are asking all parents to make a **LEFT TURN** when exiting the car park. **Please use the designated parking spaces or drop off zone.**

WAITING AT THE GATE: Thank you all for your support and cooperation in the mornings whilst leaving your children to school. **We would ask parents not to wait at the gate once they have left their child to school.** By leaving your child off and moving off-site you are freeing up limited parking spaces. It can be difficult for children to enter through the gate when parents are gathered there.

As the gate is in close proximity to the entrance of the car park we want to make every effort to ensure no accidents occur. We would appreciate your cooperation in this matter as the safety of our children is our primary concern. Please pass this information on to anyone who will be responsible for leaving or collecting your child.

Allergy Awareness

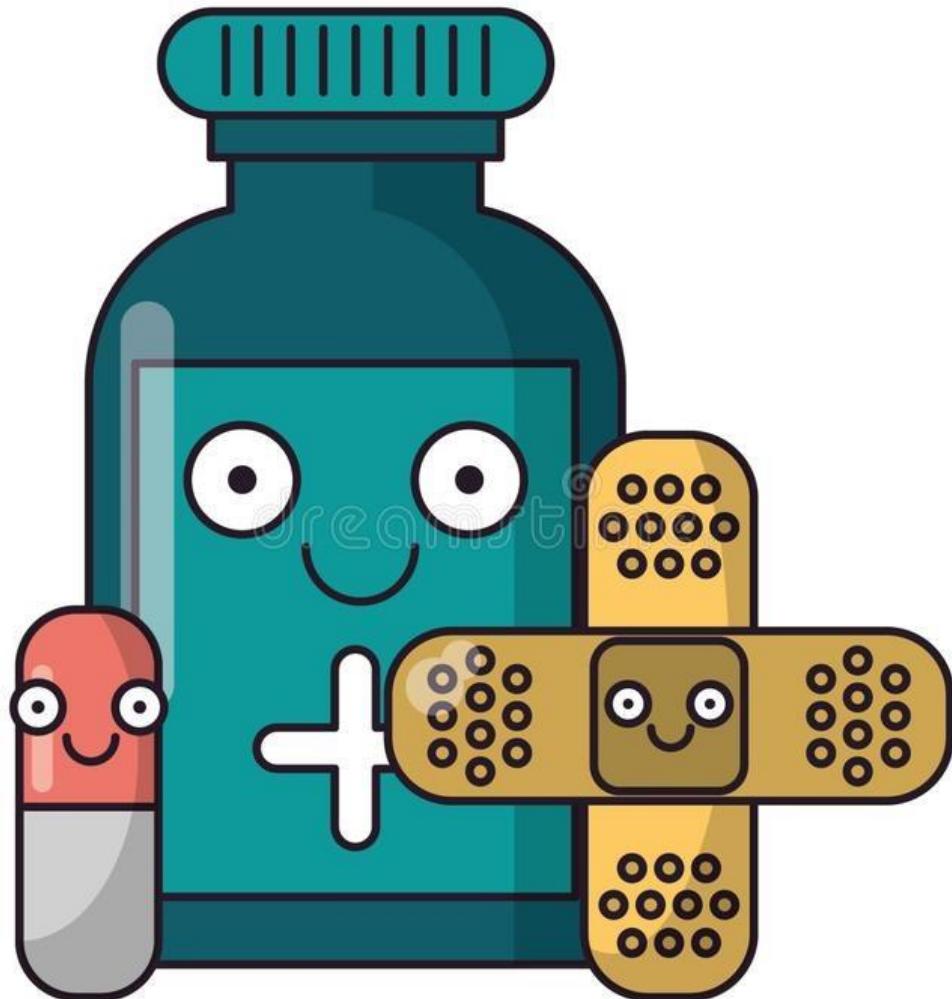


We have a number of children who suffer from allergies, which can result in potentially serious consequences. I would therefore ask that these children are not exposed to danger and that you are mindful of any children in your child's class who may have an allergy. We continue to be a Nut Free School, please do not send in anything which contains nuts.

Parents of children with diagnosed allergies are asked to provide the school with 2 Epipens (with valid dates) and any other necessary medication as soon as possible.

Please continue to support our 'Healthy Eating Policy' and provide your child with a piece of fruit and water or milk for break.

Administration of Medicine



Please visit the school office if your child requires medication to be administered whilst at school. Parents need to sign and complete an 'Administration of Medication' form (available from the school office) before the school will administer the medicine. All medication should have the child's name on it and the dosage clearly labelled. Please do not send any medication with your child – it must be handed into the school office by an adult. Thank You.

Contact Details



- *There are some contacts in school which do not appear to be working, perhaps due to a change of number or email address. If your address, telephone number or email address has changed please contact the office to ensure we have up to date information should we have a need to contact you.*
