

RETREAT PROGRAMMES FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

WALSINGHAM HOUSE AT ABBOTSWICK 2026-2027



Welcome and Introduction

Thank you for your interest in booking a retreat with the Walsingham House Team. We have always endeavoured to provide enlightening and engaging programmes that bring our shared Catholic faith alive for young people in all schools of the Diocese. In

2025, following some years of limited activity after the Covid-19 pandemic, the Walsingham House Retreat Manager and Programme Leader Team developed new retreat programmes to keep things fresh and exciting for the thousands of young people we welcome on retreat at Walsingham House and on Outreach in your schools.

Our focus is to offer retreats which are enjoyable for young people, whilst also providing accessible catechesis and appropriate opportunities to explore spirituality in order to present all retreatants with the chance of growing closer to God.

This document is for chaplains and teachers and aims to describe and explain what we are able to offer. We have always tried to accommodate consider any particular requests you have, but we have learnt that for us to be the most effective in leading retreats, we needed to create cohesive programmes and sessions that are not repeated in different year groups. Therefore, please take some time to browse the retreats and decide which would suit your school's particular wishes at this time.

Due to conflicts with exams and limited demand for Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 retreats, we generally offer a combined programme for Years 10s & 11 and likewise for Years 12 & 13. Therefore, if you would like retreats for these year groups, please prioritise one over the other. We also offer a programme designed for Leadership Teams (Head Students/Chaplaincy Prefects/House Captains etc.) which may interest you. These retreats currently represent the majority of our work with Key Stage 5 students.

We find that retreats work best with a class/form of roughly 30 young people, therefore most of our programmes are designed with that model in mind. This allows us to allocate a ratio of at least 1:10 and allows for a more personal retreat experience. We can accept an absolute maximum of 40 retreatants, sometimes less for residential retreats depending on room allocations.

We continually reassess our Risk Assessments and Policies in order to keep everyone safe. We have been exceptionally blessed by support from so many schools, teachers, chaplains, catechists, clergy and many other people throughout the past few years. Notwithstanding operational challenges, we are confident that our retreats offer an excellent experience for young people and our feedback strongly reflects this.

We look forward to welcoming you to Walsingham House.

Why come on Retreat to Walsingham House?

Retreats at Walsingham House are an excellent opportunity for young people of all ages to learn more about themselves, to take a step closer to God and to have some well-deserved fun. These retreats, whilst short experiences, aim to assist schools in their task of nurturing and developing the whole young person- spiritually as well as emotionally and intellectually. Our retreats are designed to incorporate

- times of catechesis relevant to the Year-specific curriculum, delivered in an engaging and dialogical manner
- times of prayer and reflection, often involving Mass or Eucharistic Adoration
- plenty of opportunities for team-building games and activities.

Several of our partner schools use retreats as evidence in their CSI portfolios, always with positive effect. Some feedback from school staff and young people taken over 2025-26 are as follows:

“An awesome experience in which God was at the heart of all the sessions. Wonderful to witness the students deepen their faith.” – School chaplain, Essex

“Very easy to get immersed in prayer.” – Year 13 student

“It allowed me to learn more about Catholicism. I felt content and connected.” – Year 13 student

“It was a really inclusive and calming experience.” – Year 13 student

“The Year 9 retreats were a resounding success, proving that when you set the bar high, our young people will rise to meet it. I don’t believe this would have been as good a mission if located in the school.” – School chaplain, Essex

“All sessions for the Year 10 retreat were great. We feel the time in the chapel was an excellent opportunity for reflection on God’s requirements and allowed students to draw nearer to God. The students seemed engaged in all the activities.” – RE teacher, London

“Students enjoyed the experience and spoke very positively about both the activities and the atmosphere throughout the retreat. Year 9s certainly needed a retreat like this. You have an amazing team who helped make the experience engaging and memorable for our students. We look forward to working with you again in the future.” – School chaplain, London

What we offer:

Year 7 – Journeying with Jesus

Discipleship is the key theme of our Year 7 retreat. RED tells us that for Year 7, “The focus of the entire year is God’s revelation.” Revelation is presented as relation and

Year 7s, beginning their new stage of life in secondary school, are inspired and encouraged to maintain friendship with Jesus throughout their ‘journey’. The retreat offers young people an opportunity to share aspects of their own ‘story’ whilst working in fun, team-based activities to learn more about the inspirational young saint, Carlo Acutis. We also expect to implement a brand-new activity developed by CAFOD on peacebuilding, given that action to promote Catholic Social Teaching is a key component of discipleship and an area in which young people often excel.

Key retreat components:

- a) CAFOD peacebuilding game
- b) ‘Show and tell’ opportunity for personal sharing
- c) Where in the world? Team investigation activity
- d) meditation on the Road to Emmaus, catechesis on the Eucharist and time for quiet prayer in the chapel

Year 8- God prefers the long way

Our Year 8 retreat shares with young people the true story of salvation history, looking at how God put in place a beautiful and exciting plan to repair humanity’s fallen state, eschewing ‘shortcuts’. The RED for Year 8 focusses on the Fall and human nature and our retreat experiences offers a fun and informative way to deepen students’ understanding in this area. Retreatants are challenged to remember that the definition of happiness is trusting in God and following His plan, rather than simply following our own desires. This retreat features a mixture of interactive, high-energy games and more reflective periods such as arts and crafts rosary-making activity.

Key retreat components:

- a) The game of life choices
- b) Treasure hunt
- c) The story of Mary and rosary-making craft activity
- d) catechesis on the Eucharist and short, guided period of Adoration

Year 9 - 'You were made for greatness!'

RED tells us that “The whole of year 9 deals with the mystery of the human person.”

Learning outcomes include understanding the dignity of every human person, marriage as the foundation of society and the Blessed Virgin Mary’s unique role in salvation history.

All of these components are touched on in our Year 9 retreats, the theme of which is taken from Pope Benedict XVI’s exhortation to the young pilgrims at World Youth Day some years ago – “The world promises you comfort, but you were not made for comfort. You were made for greatness!”. Retreatants and team members alike are challenged to reflect on what makes a person truly great, on how we are all called to greatness no matter who we are or what work we do, and to ask whether our focus and priorities should be on achievements for ourselves or on acts of service for others.

Key retreat components:

- a) Fruits of the Holy Spirit/ ‘signs of greatness’ auction
- b) teambuilding ‘rocket launch’ competition
- c) ‘Dragons’ Den’ creative pitch activity
- d) catechesis on the Eucharist and guided period of Adoration

Years 10 &11 (Key Stage 4) – ‘Lord, You have searched me and You know me.’

The theme of the Year 10/11 Retreat is ‘Lord, you have searched me and you know me.’ (Psalm 139:1.) The retreat will give the young people an opportunity to reflect on their own identity and who they really are, growing in self-knowledge by seeing themselves through the lens of God. God’s love for each of us will be presented as the key to our identity and the answer to life’s meaning. Relationship with God is presented as the foundation and security of peace and happiness. Young people will also be encouraged to see themselves as others see them, learning that God often chooses to work for us through others, building each other up in mutual encouragement, support and love.

Key retreat components:

- a) Portraits in pairs/ caricature
- b) ‘the story of my life’ reflection
- c) ‘Crack the case’ whodunnit challenge
- d) arts and crafts option
- e) learning to see myself as others see me
- f) catechesis on the Eucharist and guided period of Adoration

Chaplaincy Teams – Catholic Life Ambassadors

We are often asked to work with chaplaincy teams from some schools, which are sometimes referred to as 'Catholic Life Ambassadors'. This title provided the inspiration for the overall theme for these retreats, highlighting the three significances these terms bring. 'Catholic' reminds us of our relationship with God and our home within His Church, 'Life' (of the school) highlights retreatants' opportunities to positively influence the communities of their schools, and 'Ambassadors' encourages us to see ourselves as God's representatives to those around us.

This retreat includes teambuilding exercises to get the young people to identify and use each others' skills, brainstorming and creative discussions to generate new ideas for their roles, quiet periods of prayer and Eucharistic Adoration, and specialised training on how to read at Mass.

Leadership Retreats - Servant Leadership

Designed for Year 10/11 or Year 12/13 Leadership/Chaplaincy/Prefect Teams, this more bespoke retreat is designed at helping a leadership team that has responsibilities within the school to bond with each other, formulate plans for the year upcoming and delve deeper into their own personal faith. Focussed around sessions and games that help young people consider how others look to them to set an example and how our best example of servant leadership is found in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We find these retreats can be exceptionally profound for the students and the Walsingham House Team and are mutually beneficial, as it is from these particular groups of young people that we often receive applications for Walsingham House volunteer team members for years to come.

Key retreat components:

- a) Ignatian-style imaginative prayer – 'I am sending you out'
- b) Construction/ role play. A chance to work on building and acting skills alike and a harsh lesson on managing difficult situations...or characters!
- c) Walsingham House of Games – a wacky game show like activity designed to foster teambuilding and competitive spirit
- d) Time for the leadership team & teachers/chaplains to plan ahead for the year. 'Speed-dating' style chats to encourage getting to know others, reflective Emmaus walks and intentional working lunches/ planning meetings.
- e) catechesis on the Eucharist and Adoration

Notes for Residential Retreats

Please see below some polite requests to ensure we can be as accommodating as possible.

- *We understand the costs for schools to bring young people on residential trips is exacerbated by the cost of travel via coach and the cost of cover for those staff members attending. However, we truly believe that residential retreats are always the most profound experiences for young people and therefore are always preferable to Day retreats and Outreach provision.*
- *We therefore always do our best to keep our costs as low as possible to ensure our retreats are accessible for all schools and young people.*
- *Walsingham House can accommodate up to a maximum of 39 young people + 2 leaders, depending on the gender split of the group.*
- *Residential retreat prices vary depending on arrival and departure times because of meal provision. We can accommodate groups to arrive at 10am or 2/3pm Day 1 and depart at 2/3pm on the final Day. Please confirm with us which of these you are planning when booking.*
- *Every group receives two free places for staff members to attend with the group. We can normally accommodate more staff members at your request, but it always depends on the size of the group and the gender split. For mixed gender groups of young people, one staff member must be female and one male.*

Notes for Day Retreats at Walsingham House:

Please see below some polite requests to ensure we can be as accommodating as possible.

- *To keep costs low, we do not currently provide catering services for Day Retreats and all retreatants are therefore required to bring a packed lunch. We ask that nut products are not brought on-site.*
- *With day retreats each schools arrival and departure times differ depending on their travel times, therefore please confirm with us the rough time you intend to arrive and depart when booking your retreat.*

Other Opportunities for your Students

Open Retreats

Open Year 13 Retreat: October at Walsingham House.

- An opportunity for any Year 13 student to visit Walsingham House and get to know others from across the Diocese. A challenging mystery-game throughout the whole Retreat provides the opportunity to have fun whilst learning new and surprising stories from the world of Faith and Christian discipleship.

Advent Retreat: Mid-December at Walsingham House.

- A chance for your students to enter into the spirit of Advent and prepare for Christmas with fun, festive and faith-filled activities.

Lent Revision Retreat: Lent (March/April) at Walsingham House.

- An opportunity for students to take advantage of our beautiful house for some time to revise with help and assistance from our Team, as well as Lenten themed sessions & prayers to help relax in such a stressful period.

Other Events

Monthly Youth Mass: First Thursday of the month at Brentwood Cathedral. Years 7+

Youth Gather: October, venue TBD. Years 7+

Summer Lourdes: July, Lourdes, France. Years 10-13