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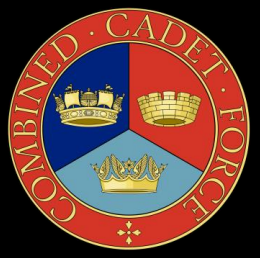
REMEMBRANCE 2026



LEST WE FORGET

We honour the fallen.
We remember those who served.
We strive for a peaceful future.

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REMEMBRANCE DAY PARADE

Wednesday 11 November 2026

Westbourne Academy CCF
Marlow Road
Private Aaron McClure Memorial Wall

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Address by Sergeant Wilsdon Contingent Commander

Today, we gather to remember those who have given their lives in the service of our country. We remember those who never returned home, those whose lives were cut short by conflict, and the families, friends and communities who have lived with their loss. But I want us to think about something today.

What does it really mean to remember?

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It is easy to remember a date. It is easy to wear a poppy. It is easy to stand in silence for two minutes each November. But remembrance must mean more than a date in the calendar or a ceremony we attend once a year. Because behind every name on a memorial was a person. Someone who laughed, who had hopes for the future, who was loved by others, and who had a life that stretched out ahead of them. They were someone's son or daughter, someone's friend, someone's colleague. They were people with futures that should have been theirs to live. And that is what makes remembrance so important. We are not simply remembering how people died. We are remembering that they lived.

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Today, here at Westbourne Academy that message has a particularly personal meaning. We stand before the memorial to Aaron McClure, a former student of this school who lost his life in Afghanistan.

Aaron was once part of this community. He was once a student in this school, surrounded by the ordinary routines of school life, with a future ahead of him. Today, we remember him not simply as a name engraved on a memorial, but as a member of our school community whose life and loss will always be part of its history. For those of us standing here today, particularly our cadets, Aaron's memorial reminds us that the people we remember are not distant figures from history. They are connected to the places we live, the communities we belong to, and the lives we lead. His name gives remembrance a face. His story brings it closer to home. And so, as we stand here today, we should remember not only Aaron, but all those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in conflicts past and present, and all those who continue to live with the consequences of war.

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Those we remember cannot grow older. They cannot return to their families or fulfil the ambitions they once held. Time cannot give them back the years they lost. But we can ensure that the memory of their lives does not fade with time.

As members of the school community, we do that by keeping their stories alive. As citizens, we do it by recognising the cost of conflict and never taking peace for granted. And as cadets, we do it by living up to the values that the Cadet Forces seek to develop: discipline, respect, integrity, courage and service to others. Being a cadet is not simply about learning to march, wear a uniform or follow orders. It is also about understanding what that uniform represents: commitment, responsibility, teamwork and service beyond ourselves.

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Remembrance asks something of all of us, whether we wear a uniform or not. It asks us to be grateful for the freedoms we enjoy, to show compassion towards those who have suffered, to support those who serve and those who have served, and to understand that peace is something to value, not something to take for granted. And perhaps, most importantly, it asks us to recognise the humanity in every life affected by war.

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Today, as we look at Aaron's memorial, I would like us to think about the future he did not get to see, and the future that all of us standing here still have the opportunity to shape. // We cannot change the past. We cannot undo the sacrifices that have been made. But we can choose how we respond to them. We can choose to remember. We can choose to serve our communities. We can choose to treat others with dignity and respect. And we can choose to build a future in which the sacrifices of those who came before us are never regarded as insignificant or forgotten.

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For some of our cadets, remembrance has taken on an even deeper meaning following their experiences in London this weekend, attending the Festival of Remembrance and the Cenotaph parade. To stand among thousands of silent people, to see veterans who have served our country, and to witness the respect shown to them was an incredibly moving experience.

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Behind every uniform, every medal and every face was a story: a story of service, courage, sacrifice and, in many cases, loss. For our cadets, hearing those stories and seeing first-hand the emotion that remembrance brings to those who have lived through conflict was a powerful reminder that history is not simply something we read about in books. It is something carried by real people, by families and by generations.

I hope those cadets will carry what they witnessed this weekend with them for the rest of their lives, because it is one thing to learn about remembrance, but quite another to stand among those who have lived it. And perhaps that is when we truly begin to understand its importance.

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It is a privilege to stand with you today in this act of remembrance. I hope that, as we leave this parade, we carry its meaning with us beyond this memorial, beyond this school and beyond this eleventh day of November. Because remembrance is not simply about looking back. It is about what we choose to do with the lives, the freedoms and the opportunities that have been entrusted to us. Aaron McClure will always be remembered as part of the history of this school.

Today, we honour his memory, alongside all those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. And as we do so, let us remember that the truest tribute we can offer the fallen is not simply to speak their names, but to ensure that their lives, their service and their sacrifice are never forgotten.

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