



St Thomas of Aquin's High School

December 2015



Welcome to the Christmas Edition of In Focus.

Message from the Head Teacher

Dear Parent/Carer

Welcome to our Christmas edition of In Focus. Our first term has seen a number of changes in staffing here at St Thomas'. We have said goodbye and congratulations to Mr K Brown (PE), Ms S Carnegie (BIS), Mr D Robertson and Mr A Bryce (both from Maths) who have all been promoted to the post of Curriculum Leader/Principal Teacher at other schools. They have made a wonderful contribution to St Thomas' in their time here and will, we are sure, have a fantastic impact on their new schools. We also had to say goodbye to Dr Staines as acting DHT due to his secondment coming to an end and we extremely grateful for his contribution to the school in his time with us.

We have extended a very warm welcome to the following members of staff who have joined us this term: Mr J Hare and Mr L Murray and Miss A Jackson (temp) (PE), Mr N Martinez and Miss K Main (Modern Languages), Mr M Wilson and Mrs G Johnson (Science). In January we welcome Ms Elsy Rodrigues (Modern Languages) and Jennifer Cairns and Liam Rafferty (Maths).

We have appointed Ms R Roberts, formerly teacher of Modern Languages in the school, to the post of Curriculum Leader, Modern Languages and Ms L Wilson, formerly teacher of Art in the school, to the post of Curriculum Leader, Technologies.

I have been informed by Miss Marshall that she has decided to return to school from her secondment to Education Scotland and she will re-join us on 6th January and will resume her duties as DHT in charge of S1 – S3.

I would like to thank Mme Jean Pierre for her tremendous work during her short time as acting DHT and also Mrs Carolyn Bendall for her work as acting CL Support for Learning.

There are many activities that take place over the course of a term in school and they can't all be captured in this edition, but you will get a flavour of

some of the many activities that our young people are engaged in here in St Thomas' which is a testament to their enthusiasm, and the hard work and commitment of the staff.

SQA Results

This year we have seen extremely positive results in our SQA exams, especially in this second year of the new National 5 exams. Below you will see a table of our results and how these results compare with our Virtual Comparator School against which we are benchmarked. As you will see it presents a very positive picture. This reflects the hard work of our young people, but it is a particular testament to the outstanding work of our staff here in St Thomas' and I am grateful to them for all they do for our young people.

	'National 5' School	'National 5' Comparator	'Higher' School	'Higher' Comparator
1 or more	92.31%	92.69%	76.15%	69.31%
3 or more	84.62%	80.54%	56.92%	49.77%
5 or more	75.38%	65.38%	30.00%	27.85%
7 or more	53.85%	38.00%		

School Web Site

We will be launching a new school website in the New Year. Although our current website is relatively new, we have not had the level of service and support that we would have expected and so we have informed our present provider that we will be terminating our arrangements with them, but asked them to continue until we are in a position to give them a date for the change over.

Ms Jenny Payne, with a small group of staff and with input from senior pupils have been planning our new site and liaising with the new provider to ensure that we have a website that meets our needs and the needs of parents/carers. We will let you know when our new site is about to be launch

Ms Jacquie McCloskey R.I.P.

As you will now be aware from the letter I sent out, we received the very distressing news of Ms McCloskey's untimely death on Thursday 10th December. We were honoured to welcome her mum, dad and sister to the school on Monday 14th December and they joined us to celebrate Mass for the repose of Jacquie's soul in the Oratory. They were able to see the floral and written tributes left by pupils and to see her classroom. They have drawn great comfort and support from their visit and I have assured them of our continuing support and prayers for them.

A sincere thank you to everyone who has contacted us to offer their sympathies and prayers at this very distressing time. It is very much appreciated.

Eternal rest grant unto her O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her. May she rest in peace.

Advent/Christmas

We are now in the season of Advent and preparing for the great feast of Christmas and with the assistance of Art and Technical, our pupils have set up our nativity scene in the foyer of the school. We will round our term off with Advent services on the last day of term and as we do this it is worth reflecting on these words which go to the heart of what we are preparing to celebrate:

"God's sign is his humility. God's sign is that he makes himself small; he becomes a child; he lets us touch him and he asks for our love. How we would prefer a different sign, an imposing, irresistible sign of God's power and greatness! But his sign summons us to faith and love, and thus it gives us hope: this is what God is like. He has power, he is Goodness itself. He invites us to become like him. Yes indeed, we become like God if we allow ourselves to be shaped by this sign; if we ourselves learn humility and hence true greatness; if we renounce violence and use only the weapons of truth and love."

Pope Benedict XVI 24th December 2009

I wish you and your loved ones the blessings and joys of Christmas and peace and happiness in 2016.

T Hughes (Head Teacher)

Hospitality News

Our Cake Craft class have been working hard this term and have finished the year out by making their delicious rich fruit Christmas cake.



Geography Fieldwork

The Advanced Higher Geography pupils carried out their annual fieldwork trip to Kindrogan Outdoor Centre at the end of September. Pupils completed a 3 day course to help develop skills in gathering and processing geographical information. Pupils carried out soil sampling activities and measured river features. The experience was made even better by some unseasonable warm, sunny weather.



S5/6 Geography classes took part in their 2 day fieldwork trip to Aviemore. Pupils were gathering information to help them complete their SQA assessed Assignment. Pupils carried out techniques to find out the environmental quality of the area and the impact of tourism.



Library

This has been a busy term in the Library, with celebrations of Roald Dahl Day in September, Black History Month and European Languages Day in October and Book Week Scotland later in the year. Many senior pupils participated in visits to Edinburgh University & Moray House libraries and other activities have included -

- Edinburgh Book Festival visits: some S2 pupils learnt about 'gripping stories' with author Sophie McKenzie ; Matt Whyman talked to an S3 class about 'alternative realities'; some S5 pupils had the opportunity to explore the works of poet, Don Paterson, and other S5s heard Cathy MacPhail talk about 'devils and stars' and had the opportunity to meet (and get their photos taken !) with her afterwards.
- European Day of Languages: we held our annual celebration of this in October. Senior Modern Languages pupils presented their heritage languages and countries to S1-S3 pupils and staff. In addition, visitors had a chance to taste traditional food from those countries.
- KLQ: our school was well-represented in the East of Scotland round of the Kids' Lit Quiz by Chloe Kiely S1, Jamie Lawlor S1, Luca Miele S2 and Beau Duffield S2. Although not victorious overall, they did win individual and team prizes and had great fun participating in the event.
- Author visits: members of S1-3 bookgroup had a trip to Merchiston Castle school, to meet new author Michael Byrne, who was discussing his first novel, Lottery Boy. There were also in-school visits from authors Lari Don, Lucy Ribchester and Alex Nye.



Lari Don & Pupils

- Teen Titles: our pupils continue to be enthusiastic reviewers for 'Teen Titles' magazine . An added bonus this term was a visit from Alex Nye. She has just published her latest book Darker Ends and spoke to Mrs Brown's S2 class about it, and about her life as a writer. This lively session was followed by a Q&A interview with pupils Jake McGuinness, Alex Lizier, Evie Gordon and Ruby Mardon, which will be published in TT64.



Alex Nye & Pupils

- Bibliotherapy: two S5 pupils, Emily Harkin and Claire Wong, participated, with pupils and Librarians from other schools, in the creation of a bibliotherapy tool-kit - a reading list and advice source for those suffering from health issues, bullying, bereavement, etc.
- National Poetry Day: this year's theme was 'light'. All S1/2 pupils listened to poems on that theme and were then asked to compose their own poems or words about 'light' or 'darkness'. These were then displayed in the Library on a 'pillar of poetry'. An extra treat for Mrs Cunningham's S2 class was a visit by Lari Don, who discussed the theme of 'light' in her novels and provided a highly entertaining, enjoyable and interactive session.



Pillar of Poetry

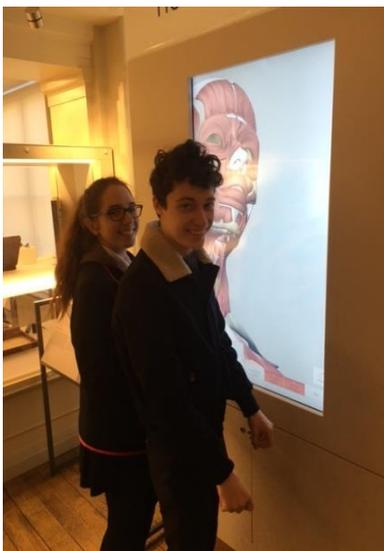
- Bookgroups have continued to thrive. S1-3 bookgroup are currently shadowing titles nominated for the Scottish Children's Book Award and staff bookgroup have read a variety of titles by African and American authors.

Nuffield Placement

Chloe Ellis, S6, has completed her research placement at Heriot-Watt University, where she worked with leading scientists studying micro-plastics and their effect on oceans around the world. Chloe was recently awarded the Gold Crest Award by the British Science Association for her contribution.

Royal College of Surgeon's Trip

Mr. Linden's Advanced Higher and Higher Biology class have visited the Surgeon's Hall museum to study different types of mutations, including cancers.



Aishah Qureshi (S6) said that "it was fascinating seeing real life examples of mutations and the history of Medicine, which I hope to go on and study at University."

Higher Biology and Art Interdisciplinary learning

Mr. Linden's Higher Biology class are developing their dissection skills this year and have dissected fish, chickens and mice. They are studying the differences between mammal and fish respiratory and circulatory systems.



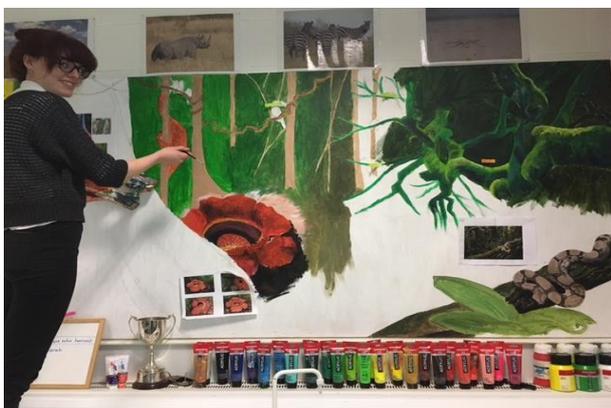
National 5 Biology

S4 Biology students recently visited the zoo where they were given a tour of the endangered species, as well as looking at how animals are adapted to their environment – they even got to see the Pandas!



Art/Biology Project

Rachel Nicholson (S6) is half way through an Art/Biology project, where she is painting a mural on the wall in a Science lab. She has decided to focus on a jungle theme and is including lots of colourful animals and plants. Callum Simpson, an S3 pupil who uses the room the painting is in, said "it's really cool and it gives a nice atmosphere in class!"



Mass of Remembrance

On Monday 9 November the school community gathered to remember our deceased family and friends, led by Fr. Peter from Sacred Heart. Our senior pupils led the mass: setting up the hall; welcoming guests; doing readings; reading out names; lighting candles; serving tea, coffee and cakes. As usual it was a heart-warming and emotional evening. Thank you to all family who came to celebrate with us.



Sale of Revision Books

The second hand revision book sale run by S5/6 pupils raised £147 with half the proceeds going to Fresh Start and the other half to the African Interest Group.

Swish Event

On Thursday 3 December the S5 and S6 hosted a charity Swish Event for all pupils, parents and staff. Swishing refers to swapping clothing with friends and colleagues.

A Big 'Thank You' to everyone who donated and bought in for the event.

£215.00 was raised which will be shared between 2 charities. Diabetes Scotland and The Society of St Vincent de Paul.



Dates to Remember

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| 7 January: | Pupils return |
| 11 January: | S2 Parents Evening |
| 11-22 January: | Prelim Exams S4-6 |
| 9 February: | S4 Parents Evening |

Youth Achievement Awards and Saltire Awards

Our S5 pupils Emily Harkin, Euan Loftus Brown and Lucy Sked have received the Youth Achievement Awards and Saltire Awards for having taken part in the "Pack Up Your Troubles Project: Kit Bag" project. This was a Creative Learning and Global Citizenship project funded by Heritage Lottery money and delivered by the City of Edinburgh Council, Edinburgh Libraries and Historic Scotland. Our pupils who were studying History in S4 volunteered a huge amount of their own time and effort to be part of the group with pupils from three other Edinburgh secondary schools. The WW1 Kit Bags they developed are available as resources for all Edinburgh schools to borrow and use in their teaching of World War One.

Mrs Teasdale and Miss Whiffen went along to the Celebration and Awards Ceremony in October. Both were very impressed and proud of all the work they had done, the achievements made and the team effort shown by all of the young people in the group.



Well done to our Historians of the future.

Cinema Trips

S5/6 Business Management pupils attended a screening of the film 'Steve Jobs' last month as part of their studies. The pupils learned about the entrepreneur himself and his successes and failures in product design and advertisement.

S4-6 History pupils attended a screening of the film 'Suffragette' as part of their studies into Britain's political issues. Having learned about the suffragette movement in class, pupils were still shocked to see the conditions and treatment that many women received.

Blood Minerals

All of our S4 Social Subjects pupils and some of the S3 RME classes attended a talk given by Bandi Mbubi of Congo Calling in November.



Congo Calling is an organisation that advocates the production of Fairtrade electronics, with particular focus on the Congo due to the mineral deposits in the country. Bandi came to the UK as a refugee from the war in the Congo 22 years ago and established Congo Calling to raise awareness of these issues which he hopes can be tackled by addressing the ethical concerns in the industry that fuels the violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. His talk was in association with the Scottish Fair Trade Forum.

Bandi's talk was well received and gave all of those present plenty to think about next time they upgrade their mobile phone. If you too want to upgrade with a conscience more information can be found at www.congocalling.org

BBC Radio Scotland Referendum

The Advanced Higher Modern Studies class were asked to take part in a debate broadcast on Radio Scotland. The broadcast was to look at the events which had happened one year after the Referendum on Scottish Independence. Maili Raven-Adams asked the first question of the debate, which included representatives from the four main Scottish political parties.



Congratulations to the following pupils who have achieved their Duke of Edinburgh Award so far this session.

Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award

Erin Curran, Fiona Denvir, Jude Diab, Lydia Dowling-Clarke, Daniel Dunn, Jenna Fleming, Anna Flynn, Emily Ireland, Iftekharul Islam, Joseph Jarvis, Millie Jeyes, Molly Keenan, Neave Keenan, Anna Kuryluk, Madeleine Lagneau, Peter Lazarowicz, Anna Lopez, Patrick McGroarty, Stephen Messer, Jennifer Milne, Keany Morey, Clodagh Mullan, Euan Pinto, Galloway, Lewis Raeburn, Tessa Richardson, Santo Sartore, Alice Saville, Emma Simpson, Sinead Thin, Lauren Thomson, Armida Valera-Valdes, Orla Williamson, Maisie White, Ivan Yergiyev

Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award

Matthew McNairney, Alasdair Mitchell, Maili Raven-Adams



D of E Groups update –

We continue to have large numbers in all our groups, currently the total is more than 100 pupils involved across all three levels.

Gold – 3 S6 and 2 former pupils have almost completed and another 9 S5 pupils are just starting.

Silver - 17 S5s are almost finished and 14 S4s are just starting.

Bronze – 18 S4 pupils have still to complete and we have 43 keen S3s who started this session.

Watch this space for an update on how they get on.

Some pictures from the recent Silver Qualifying Expedition.



Well done Matthew, Ittihad, Austin, Euan, Neil, Lauren S, Lauren T, Emma, Joanna, Maeve, Fiona, Lydia, Neave, Ruth, Orla, Maddy and Lucy.



Mathematics Masterclasses

S2 pupils Lucy Kennedy, Ivan Alapiki, Lukah Connolly Sams, George Gray and Jovan Polese-Abramowicz were given the opportunity to attend Mathematics University Masterclasses on Saturday mornings from September to November. These masterclasses were on a variety of challenging but also very interesting topics and the pupils were, as always, a credit to our school.