



St Thomas of Aquin's High School

In Focus Newsletter ~ January 2017



Message from the Acting Head Teacher

Dear Parent/Carer

I extend a warm welcome to all pupils, parents, and staff to the January edition of InFocus. I hope that all pupils, parents, and staff have enjoyed a peaceful and restful Christmas holiday with their family and friends and also hope that 2017 is a very successful year for the community of St Thomas'.

Since the last InFocus newsletter in October the school has continued its positive implementation of the 2016-17 Improvement Plan. A new Better relationship, Better behaviour, Better learning policy has been drafted and shared with staff and the Pupil Council. Plans to share the work with the Parent Council are in place. I hope the new positive behaviour policy can be rolled out to all pupils in assemblies before Easter. I would like to thank the impressive work of Ms Whiffen and Ms Quigley in leading the positive behaviour working group.

The school's new curriculum structure is entering its third year of implementation. The success of November's S2 and December's S4 straw polls have allowed the school to draft a timetable for the 2017-18 session. I am confident that the new S3 structure will allow pupils to continue to experience a broad range of subjects whilst allowing for personalisation and choice. I would like to thank the work of the Pupil Support Leaders and Mrs Greene for their continued support and work in this area. The school is planning for its Key Adult programme for session 2017-18.

Key Adult time ensures that all pupils should have frequent opportunities to discuss their learning with an adult who can act as a mentor, helping them to set appropriate goals for the next stages in learning. Schools across Scotland have been developing the role of a member of staff, other than the promoted pastoral specialist, who knows the pupil well and where universal support meets pupil needs. The Key Adult role should work within a framework of staged intervention managed by promoted pastoral/pupil support staff, which ensures that additional support is offered by specialist staff as and when required. Ms Jean-Pierre is leading strategy in this area and has already liaised with schools across Edinburgh to understand the good practice which already exists in the city.

Finally, I would like to thank Mr Green and his tracking and monitoring group for the work they have produced over the last two terms. Due to the work of Mr Green and his team, all staff have access to S1-S6 tracking spreadsheets which allows for teachers, Pupil Support Leaders, and Depute Heads to support pupils' progress as well as plan for intervention strategies where needed.

The 2017 prelim examinations will be starting on Monday 23rd of January. Ms Gardner has ensured that all S4-6 pupils were given the 2017 prelim timetable in the last week of term in December and copies can be obtained from Ms Gardner as

well as found on the school's website. I wish all S4-6 pupils sitting prelims the very best. These examinations are very

important in assessing where pupils are in terms of progress in their subjects and I hope the balance of enjoying the Christmas holiday whilst ensuring quality revision took place has not been too difficult for pupils. Good luck to all pupils, or as they say in Italy "in bocca al lupo!"

I have been exceedingly impressed by the S6 Leadership Team's Syria Relief charity work. In November, the S6 leadership team organised assemblies and a series of breaktime and lunchtime events which helped raised over £1200 for their chosen charity, Syria Relief. I am very happy that through their leadership, the school community has once again exemplified how important it is to care for and serve others.

On the 1st of December, the Parent Council held a St Thomas' Christmas Fayre. This was an excellent night in which the school community came together to enjoy and experience a large and varied amount of stalls, pupil performances, and to bid on some very impressive pieces of S6 Art. The Parent Council raised over £1600 for the school and it is my intention to use these funds to enhance the school's ICT provision. The silent Art auction raised over £1700 and these funds will support the experience of all pupils in Art and Design over the coming years.

On the 12th December the school's annual Christmas Concert was held and I was exceedingly impressed with the playing and singing of our pupils. I would like to extend my thanks to Mr Lovett, Ms Patrick, and instrumental staff in all that they do to support pupils at St Thomas'.

Ms Whiffen and her Modern Studies class organised a very successful 'bring a can to school' event to support the Trussle Trust charity. The school community brought in over 700 cans of food and we enjoyed a Christmas Jumper Day along with an extended break on Friday 16th which was made even more enjoyable by a staff flash mob – thanks to Ms Quigley for organising this.

At the end of December, the school said goodbye to Ms Susan Brown in the English Faculty. Ms Brown is retiring from the school and we wish her all the best. I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for the dedication, compassion, and high standards she exemplified in her teaching career at St Thomas'. Mr Hamish Davidson, Temporary Maths Teacher, was successful in interview at Gracemount High School and we wish him all the best in his new school as Mrs Melissa Ross returns to her substantive Maths teaching post after her maternity leave. I can formally welcome Ms Lucie Yavruturk to the school as temporary Teacher of Drama and Ms Emma Gammack to the school as temporary Support for Learning Teacher.

I would like to compliment the many hundreds of pupils who attend St Thomas' wearing full school uniform. I extend my thanks to parents in supporting the school with its continued high standards in the wearing of a white shirt and school tie, black trousers (not denims) or skirts, and black shoes. I would like to ask all parents to continue to support the school's uniform policy with a specific appeal to ensure black trousers and black shoes are worn to school. I would also like to see more pupils wearing the school blazer as I do believe it adds an extra dimension to the school uniform. Thank you all for your continued support, it is very much appreciated.

Christopher Santini
Acting Head Teacher

Christmas Celebration 2016

On Monday December 12th we held our annual Christmas Celebration Concert with contributions from all the different ensembles led by both instrumental and school staff; School Orchestra, Wind Band, String Ensemble, Guitar Ensemble, Jazz Band, Ceilidh Band, Junior choir, Brass Ensemble, Clarsach Ensemble and Clarinet Ensemble.



It was a wonderful night where our students could perform together and show off their musical talents. Highlights included the fantastic Christmas Medley performed by the Guitar Ensemble and the finale Leroy Anderson's 'Christmas Festival' played by our very impressive (70+) school orchestra.



Many thanks to all our instrumental staff without whose hard work and dedication this wonderful night of music would be impossible to achieve.

Some of our S1 and S2 girls have been doing excellent work spreading Christmas Cheer by carol singing for various groups in the community including Lauriston and Eye Pavilion Hospitals and the Sacred Heart Community Lunch Group (pictured).



Food Drive

Pupils in the Senior Modern Studies class organised a Food Drive for the local Trussell Trust food bank as a part of St Thomas' Advent season charity work. Students held a 'Bake and Can Swap' in the hall as well as a Christmas Jumper Day in order to raise awareness and non-perishable donations for the food bank. A whopping 800 items were collected between 12-16 December and volunteers at the Trussell Trust were very impressed by the volume of donations.



GEOGRAPHY

Advanced Higher Geography pupils have been very busy this term gathering data for their Geographical Study.



This has included a day trip to Glasgow where pupils gathered data on the traffic, environmental quality and noise.

We also had a trip to Arthur's Seat for soil and slope analysis as well as a fantastic couple of days studying the Water of Leith.



The pupils as always were exemplary and a credit to the school. Well done!

Duke of Edinburgh's Award

Our S3 Bronze group took part in a very successful navigation training exercise in Holyrood Park at the end of October. The support of the many volunteers who made this experience possible is very much appreciated.



In November our Silver and Gold groups gave very good presentations following the

successful completion of their qualifying expeditions. Congratulations to Erin Curran, Daniel Dunn, Natalia Rucka, Sinead Thin and Armida Valera-Valdes who have now achieved their Silver D of E Award.

Here is a message from our Gold group consisting of Joanna Thomson, Lauren Stephenson, Lydia Dowling-Clarke, Matthew Deponio and Ittihad Ahmed. 'This year we did our Gold Duke of Edinburgh expedition around Loch Marie in the North West Highlands for 4 days and 3 nights. We battled through horrific weather conditions including 85 mph winds and snow, making our expedition extremely memorable. Our expedition challenged us physically, mentally and emotionally and tested our teamwork. At the time we didn't think much of the expedition and couldn't wait to get home. Now looking back, we have so many memories and appreciate the experience more. Our four days away were some of the toughest and worst but best experiences of our lives.'



Google Expedition

On Friday 9th December Google Expeditions allowed us to take St Thomas pupils on a series of virtual field trips. Using Google Cardboard, the app is loaded onto the iPhones that slot in to the cardboard. We then selected expeditions linked to our current studies and took the pupils on a virtual tour of exciting places all over the world. Google Expeditions lets students experience 360-degree views of places like Machu Picchu, outer space, and the Great Wall of China. Students are free to explore the immersive environments independently, but using a tablet screen as a guided tour interface, teachers can point out important things in each scene, add notes to the VR experience, and see an overlay that shows them where each student is looking.



'Google Cardboard may not be a high-octane experience like Oculus Rift, but there's a special kind of magic behind the VR platform's low-cost, accessible ways.'

S1s were whisked to Hadrian's Wall, S2s under water on an ocean safari. Advanced Higher historians were walked over the Gettysburg battlefield by University lecturer, David Silkenat – the battlefield was virtual, the lecturer real enough! Pupils loved the experience, and the teachers enjoyed themselves too...

To read more about Google Expeditions, please visit – <https://www.google.co.uk/edu/expeditions/>

Library

It has been a busy time in the Library with pupils participating in the Kids' Lit Quiz, meeting authors and participating in national literacy events.

The East of Scotland round of the Kids' Lit Quiz took place at Liberton HS at the end of October. St Thomas' was represented by 8 pupils –Francesca Lee, Patrick McEvoy, Fran Keane, Madeline Skelly, Aoife Joyce, Emma Guiat and Alex Boardman. They formed two teams, and although they did not have overall success there were several individual prizes. It was an intense afternoon, but good fun and enjoyed by all.

In October some staff and Advanced Higher English pupils attended a talk by Margaret Atwood at the King's Theatre. This was an interesting session, with the author talking of her new book 'Hag-seed', a re-telling of Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'. Credit goes to S6 pupil Hannah Sasaki for questioning the author in front of a very large audience!

Mrs Macdonald's S2 pupils also met an author – Keith Gray, who visited school at the end of November to discuss his books and 'what makes a piece of writing stand out'. It was a lively session, with Keith sharing his own experiences and answering many questions from pupils afterwards.



Keith's visit was part of our Book Week Scotland celebrations. There was also a quiz for S1/2 pupils, author research / poster-making by an S5 group and the school benefitting from a donation of free books. Several copies of 'Secrets and Confessions' are still

available (suitable for age 14+); please contact the Library if you'd like one.

Reading for enjoyment thrives at St Thomas'. Our pupils continue to review books for Teen Titles magazine and there have been regular meetings of the staff bookgroup, discussing titles as varied as 'Freakonomics' and 'The Slap'. The S6 'Book to Film' club also meets regularly, with 'Gone' as their current title.

Other events in the Library have included activities to promote Black History Month, Dyslexia Awareness Week and visits for S6 pupils to the National Library of Scotland. Ms Laverick's S5 group have even added some festive cheer to the library with their construction of two book-based Christmas trees!

Fair Trade – Friday 28 October 2016



On Friday 28 October St Thomas held its famous S2 Trade Fair. As part of their Business Education curriculum, S2 pupils organised a trade fair and built on their entrepreneurial skills to raise money for the charities of their choice. Pupils and staff had a great time going round the stalls and were invited to take part in a range of activities including henna and nail painting, tombolas, games of skills and tarot reading!! Another successful event at St Thomas. Congratulations to the S2s, Mrs Turner, Miss Thomson, Mrs Devlin and Mrs Moore and all the staff who supported the event.





Mandarin language in St Thomas

Every Monday, a group of students devote their lunch time to learn Mandarin. We gather in Room 3.30 at Mr. Montenegro's class to learn and meet a lot of students from different year groups. Having Mandarin during lunch is fun, it is not just an ordinary club but it is an extraordinary club where you can experience a lot of things we have never done before such as The Chinese New Year parade, Chinese calligraphy, how to use chopsticks and not only that but also we prepared dumpling for everyone. We are so lucky that we even have Chinese language assistant, Xiufen, who is very enthusiastic and patient. If you happen to be interesting just come along on Monday at lunch time as we are already organising the Chinese New Year for 2017.

Margarita De Vera



This summer I travelled to china for two weeks and embraced the culture and the language of the country. Since the trip I was offered a chance to apply for a mandarin scholarship to study mandarin full time in China for a year in 2017-2018. I completed and application and got through to the interview stage. Here I was questioned by a panel and talked about myself, my experiences in languages and my future aspirations. I was successful and was chosen as one of 23 school pupils my age across the U.K. to travel to china for a year after my S6 studies. I am extremely excited to have this opportunity but this would not have been possible without the work and support particularly from the Modern Languages Department at school, guidance and senior management. The mandarin club has played an important part as I have attended for over three and a half years, sparking my interest in mandarin and Chinese culture. This opportunity should continue to be open to other pupils my age in the future in Scotland and within St Thomas'. Pupils should continue to study

languages in the school, and the mandarin club specifically, to open doors to their future careers and pursue their passion for all the opportunities we can do further afield.

James Rennie



English

Short Story Winner

Jennifer Main (S2) won a story writing competition run by City of Edinburgh Tours. Her challenge was to write a spooky story in fewer than 50 words. The winning entries will have their stories published in a book entitled *Ghostly Tales from Edinburgh Schools* which will be available from the Writers' Museum. Jennifer also read her story on the STV news.

National Theatre's King Lear

On Oct 12 the Advanced Higher English class went to see the national Theatre's production of *King Lear* at the cinema. Lucy Sked writes: "The performance itself managed to encapsulate the pessimism and inner turmoil of Lear's life and his state of mind. The opening scene and storm scene in particular were staged effectively so that the symbolism and impact of the scene was fully explored. The actors portraying each of the roles were capable of fully embodying the true nature of the characters and the interactions were a useful insight into the nature of the relationship between the characters. The streaming was also enjoyable as we were given a backstage insight into the costumes and development of the characters themselves. This meant my understanding of the play was deeper and it ignited my imagination for reading the play itself."

Jodi Picoult

Some S4 pupils were given the opportunity to see author Jodi Picoult talk about her new novel "Small Great Things" at the Festival Theatre on 26th November. They were also received signed copies of the book.

Mama Mia

S4 pupils had a night out with the English department to see *Mama Mia* at the Edinburgh Playhouse on 19th December. The event was enjoyed by both staff and pupils.

Key Dates

Parent Council Meetings

The next meeting to take place will be on Tuesday 31 January 6:45pm in school.

Other dates are:

Wednesday 26 March 2017

Thursday 25 May 2017

Reporting Calendar

S1	Parents Evening Full Report	9 March 2017 9 June 2017
S2	Tracking Report	2 May 2017
S3	Tracking Report Full Report Parents Evening	24 March 2017 12 May 2017 24 May 2017
S4	Parents Evening Tracking Report	21 February 2017 20 March 2017
S5/6	Full Report	7 March 2017

Holidays

Friday 10 February 2017	All break
Monday 20 February 2017	All resume
Friday 31 March 2017	Term ends
Monday 17 April 2017	Spring Holiday
Tuesday 18 April 2017	All resume
Monday 1 May 2017	May Day Holiday
Thursday 4 May 2017	In Service
Monday 22 May 2017	Victoria Day Holiday
Friday 30 June 2017	Term ends

Exam Dates

S4/5/6 Prelims 23-30 January 2017

SQA Exams 2 May – 2 June 2017