



St Thomas of Aquin's High School In Focus Newsletter ~ May 2017



Dear Parent/Carer

Message from the Acting Head Teacher

I extend a warm welcome to the Spring edition of InFocus. The previous term and the start of this term has been demanding for staff and pupils as we all work towards the conclusion of practical and internal assessments as well as folio pieces. Now that the Easter Holidays have finished, on behalf of the whole school community I extend our best wishes to all of our pupils sitting their National Exams and indeed to those pupils who have already sat their practical exams in Music and Drama. The school has bid farewell to all of our S6 pupils and some S5 and S4 pupils on Friday 28 April, and we wish them every success and happiness as they leave St Thomas'. On Wednesday 26 April, I enjoyed the Leavers Mass for St Thomas' pupils at The Sacred Heart and afterwards the Ceilidh organised by The Parent Council.

There have been a few changes to staffing since our last edition of InFocus. Mrs Callion, Teacher of Chemistry, is returning from her maternity leave. We say goodbye and good luck to Ms Shona Cammack who has been successful in gaining a permanent position at George Watsons College.

On Friday 29 January St Thomas' welcomed Archbishop Cushley back to the school for the celebration of our Patronal Feast. After Mass in Sacred Heart, he joined the S1 and S2 pupils in the conference room to discuss their thoughts about St Thomas'. Afterwards the S1, S2, and S3 pupils enjoyed a variety of short films made by their peers based around the St Thomas' quote on the importance of friendship. My deep thanks goes to Mr Whyte and Ms Henderson for planning this great event.

The season of Lent and our Easter celebrations have come to an end this year and on behalf of the community of St Thomas' I hope you and your loved ones had a very happy and joyful Easter. With the start of the new term already underway and the May exams now in progress the school community begins a period of reflection on what has gone well this year and what we will focus on next year. I will be completing the final update on the 2016-17 school improvement plan and completing the draft of the 2017-18 school improvement plan in May. I will share both pieces of work with the school community via the school website. I will also be sharing with the school community how St Thomas' plans to use the £45,000 that will be given to the school directly from The Scottish Government to support Pupil Equity. This funding is targeted at closing the poverty related attainment gap.

Christopher Santini

SQA Exams

The first SQA exam for pupils starts on Tuesday 2 May and the last finishes on Thursday 1 June. The last day for the majority of S4, S5, and S6 pupils is Friday 28 April.

Study leave starts for all pupils in S4/S5/S6 on Tuesday 2 May. If candidates are studying predominantly National 4 in S4, where there is no final examination, there is an expectation that they will be in school following an amended meaningful timetable.

Exam Timetables

Individual timetables and last-minute information about the exam arrangements for 2017 have been handed out to pupils. Candidates can register with the SQA before 18 July to receive their result by text or email. The SQA have produced a leaflet entitled *relaxaminations* which details information for pupils and parents regarding the 2017 exam diet and can be found on the SQA website. All Pupils will receive their results on Tuesday 8 August. Mr Santini and Ms Gardner will be school on 9, 10 and 11 August to meet with pupils to discuss their results. Candidates should ensure that if there has been any change in name, address or personal details they should notify the school immediately.

Exceptional Circumstances Consideration

If there arises a medical condition, bereavement or domestic circumstance that interferes with a candidate's ability to access an exam, or whose performance has been fundamentally affected as a result, they may be eligible for exceptional circumstances consideration. By its very definition any medical situation that affects a candidate's performance on the day has to be exceptional or serious. Minor ailments such as headaches, colds and sickness would not fall into this category. The deadline for a request submission is 10 working days after the examination in question.

Senior Lockers (S4, S5 & S6)

Lockers will remain in operation until pupils have sat their last exam.

Lockers should be emptied of anything not required and used primarily for holding jackets and bags on exam days. Pupils should hand in their key to the office on the day of their last exam.

Once lockers have been inspected deposits will be returned week commencing 6 June.

Deposits will not be returned if lockers not emptied.

Key Dates

- In-service Day Thursday 4 May
- S3 reports due to parents w/b 15 May
- S3 Parents' Evening Wednesday 24 May
- New Timetable begins Monday 5 June
- S1 reports due to parent week beginning 5 June
- P& 3-day visit 20-22 June

“Witch Experience” – History Department

On the 25 January 2017, S2 pupils had a fantastic time on a ‘Witch Experience’ afternoon with some Edinburgh Dungeon actors. It tied in with the Early Modern Period, the topic all S2s are covering in History. We toured the school in our practical groups for two periods learning about witches and the Early Modern Period.



In Music (with Mr Lovett), we explored the use of spooky music and how music can portray different themes or eras. We then went to Drama (with Miss Yavruturk) where we used tableaux to depict what a witch trial would’ve looked like; we were learning how we can use drama to convey powerful themes and how we can teach people through drama. After that we went to History where Ms Hunter had used characteristics associated with witches to create a “Who’s the Witch” game. This involved about five “witch hunters” coming in and finding out which of the suspects were lonely widows or who had strange marks and black cats! Our final stop was in the Library where we met with the actors. We saw them in their gory witch costumes, very convincing!

They gave us a sheet of paper detailing the life of the suspected witch, Agnes Finnie. They also gave us an insight into the work these actors do; we



were given a few minutes to try and memorize as many facts as we could, a very difficult task! It was a very exciting afternoon that furthered our knowledge on witches and the Early Modern Period. Dearbhla Murphy interviewed different pupils on their thoughts of the event. It was a fun and educational experience for all S2s, Georgia Gill said that “I am enjoying learning about this specific period of time, when there was such a fear but also a belief in witches. Today was truly awesome!”. The afternoon led to many students eager to come to History and find out more about the Early Modern Period, Caitlin Mallon said: “I am very excited to now learn more about this topic and time in our History lessons”.



St Thomas Film Festival 2017

Each year St Thomas’ Feast Day is 27 January. This year we celebrated mass with Archbishop Leo Cushley at the Sacred Heart in Lauriston.

In addition, the Chaplaincy team hosted a Film Festival to mark the occasion.

In November all pupils were invited to create a film based on the quote from St Thomas: **“There is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship”**.

The pupils showed great interest and 9 of the 11 films shown were made entirely by pupils being creative with their thoughts on the quote. It was a great success and the “cinema audience” were all very supportive of each film.

Several of the films by pupils have been entered into the Edinburgh and Lothians Schools Film Competition 2017 (run by the Edinburgh Film Festival) and we look forward to seeing if any are award winners! Some will also be available on the school website in the future.



Invictus Maneo Fund

Angela and Paul Armstrong have decided to fund raise in memory of Ellie and Cameron Armstrong. The money they hope to raise will go towards the Ellie and Cameron Armstrong INVICTUS MANEO Fund. The fund aims to encourage children who may excel in sports to partake in projects outwith the school and their community. But also to encourage children who face adversity to be recognised and supported in ways that necessarily may not be available to them without financial support. This lasting legacy is solely funded by donations. Angela along with her colleagues Amanda Carrie and Katie Gibb all from Hair by Angela Jane will undertake a Skydive on May 1 May.



Paul meanwhile recently ran the London Marathon on 23 April. Paul managed to complete the marathon in a fantastic 4 hours and 50 minutes. Everyone at the school would like to extend their congratulations to Paul, Angela, Amanda and Katie for this magnificent achievement. All are hoping to raise money for the fund set up at St Thomas’ in honour of Ellie and Cameron

Library

It has been a busy time in the Library with displays and activities to support Burns Night, Fairtrade Fortnight, International Women's Day and International Mother Languages Day.

In February, the Library worked jointly with Place2Be to promote Mental Health Awareness Week – pupils from all year-groups came to the Library from PSE to read up on issues such as stress, anxiety and depression, to reflect on what some of the issues meant to them and to discuss what could be offered in terms of support and understanding.

Library and Support for Learning staff worked together in March to promote World Autism Awareness Week to S1 & S2 pupils. During Library visits, pupils were able to read about autism and two S2 pupils spoke to the classes about how autism had affected them.

World Book Day

This year's World Book Day was celebrated with a quiz for S1/2 pupils and a 'dress as your favourite book character' day. This was fun, with pupils and staff going to great lengths to turn out in costumes linked to Where's Wally, the Wizard of Oz, Anne of Green Gables ... and Harry Potter, of course.



On the 'literary' front, Mr McNally's S1 English class had a great session with author, Lari Don, who came into school to talk about her books and her inspiration for writing them. It was a lively and worthwhile session; the pupils took part enthusiastically and many went off to read her books afterwards.

St Thomas' pupils have continued to contribute to Teen Titles magazine - 9 pupils appeared in issue 67 –and the latest batch of books are currently being read by our enthusiastic reviewers. Senior pupils have been reading Michael Grant's 'Gone' during meetings of the Book-to-Film club and titles discussed by Staff book group have ranged from the graphic novel 'Kick Ass' to the short stories of Alice Munro.

Spring Concert

Thanks to all who performed in the Spring Concert on 13 March.

The Wind band (Mr Callaghan) the String Orchestra (Miss Aydin) the Ceilidh Band (Mrs Patrick) and the Guitar Ensemble (Mr Linfoot) all participated as well as some excellent solo performances from Killian Willis-Cleary, Jack Stephenson, Lachlan Morrison, Michael Duffy and Anna Morrow.

La Boheme

The S3 music class will be attending the opera unwrapped performance of 'La Boheme' from Scottish Opera on 1 June. This free performance is a wonderful introduction to Opera for our music students and allows them to hear highlights from the Opera as well as learning some interesting background information and insight into lighting and staging techniques.

BBC Music Day 9 June

The Music Department will be participating in this event with the orchestra performing Bizet's Habanera. Details are yet to be finalised but 'Habanera' is one of the 'Ten Pieces' (10 pieces of music chosen each year to provide a stimulus for creative responses in Literature, Art and the Expressive Arts). We are hoping to record this performance and upload it to the BBC website for participation on the day.

Computing Science

Five S4 girls from Mrs Greene's National 5 Computing Science attended the Heriot-Watt University's 50th Anniversary of Computing Science Open Day for Girls on 22 February. The day focused on the important role of women in Computing Science, on the increased use of artificial intelligence to enhance our lives and on the ease of creating and designing simple apps.





RUTS (Rural and Urban Training Scheme)

A group of S4 pupils recently started a 6 week RUTS programme and are looking forward to future sessions during our Meaningful May programme. RUTS aims to help young people develop key skills and confidence through a range of motorcycle and bicycle based activities. This experience can also help break down barriers to employment and support the development of self-belief and motivation.

Madrid Trip

During the February break, a group of Higher and Advanced Higher Spanish pupils went on an immersion trip to Madrid.



It was an action packed and fun filled itinerary, taking in all the sights and putting their language skills to the test. Pupils attended language classes at the Inlingua school in the morning and enjoyed many afternoon and evening activities including some boating on the lake at the Retiro park and a flamenco show at the Villa Rosa.



The pupils really made the most of their time to develop their language skills and learn more about the history and culture of Spain. As always, the pupils were exemplary ambassadors for St Thomas'.



Senior Girls Basketball Team Scottish Cup Final

Commiserations to our Senior Girls Basketball team who came up short against Portobello High School, being beaten 87-75, in an enthralling cup final at Heriot Watt University's Oriam. The girls performed admirably and everyone at the school are immensely proud of them. A special thanks to Paul Storie, who provided the shooting shirts for the girls. Here are a few pictures of the girls on the day. Go Sharks!



St Thomas of Aquin's Ceilidh Band

We would like to extend an invitation to parents, grandparents, older siblings and other members of our community to join the Ceilidh Band. Dust off those fiddles, accordions, mouthies, flutes and guitars! Many years ago this used to be a community ceilidh band and we would like to see if it is possible to re-establish again with a view to participation in the Christmas and Spring concerts initially. Rehearsals would be arranged accordingly to facilitate parental participation. Please email marianne.patrick@st-thomasaquins.edin.sch.uk if you are interested or for further information. Grade 3 level standard of playing would be desirable but not essential

World Book Day 2 March 2017

Both pupils and staff were encouraged to dress up as a character from a book to celebrate World Book Day this year. Many faculties adopted a themed approach with Social Subjects travelling to the Wizard of Oz, Science experimenting with Treasure Island, Maths working out what Mr Men and Little Misses they were and some in the English department played literary detectives.



Pupils were asked to bring in a pound to support the Ellie and Cameron Armstrong Invictus Maneo fund and managed

to raise over £300. In the week leading up to World Book Day there was a Guess the Author quiz in the Library and pupils were given £1 book vouchers.



Trip to the Five Sisters Zoo

Mrs Macdonald's S5 'Life and Skills' class took a trip place on 15 March that fulfilled a course requirement. The pupils prepare, organise and plan a trip themselves which they then carry out. It was a great success and completely financed by the pupils and their fundraising.

The Five Sister's Zoo Reviews: Wednesday 15 March



Devon

"My favourite part of the visit was seeing the arctic wolves beautifully lounging in their enclosure."



"The train journey was delightful and we enjoyed the scenery outside."



Lauren

"My favourite animals were the lion, the arctic wolves and the giant Norwegian rabbit."

Hannah

"My favourite animals were the rabbits and the lions and I enjoyed this zoo more than the one in Edinburgh."

I appreciated that the zoo organised a mini bus for us."



Alfie

"I had a great day. I enjoyed the wolves and the lions and the morning bug count."

Damian

"The staff were very helpful and it was nice to see the animals happy and well looked after. The zoo was well maintained and trash free, thanks to the many bins."

Fraser

"Even though the weather was cloudy I had a great day."

By Alexander Boardman



Place2Be - Making a lifetime of difference to children in schools

Place2Be - a national charity working in schools to improve the confidence and wellbeing of children and young people - has now been in St Thomas' for two terms. Alexia and a team of volunteers, use a dedicated room in the school where young people can go to express themselves and think about their worries through talking and creative work. The aim is that young people can find new ways of coping with difficulties so they don't get in the way of friendships and learning.

Since August, a number of young people have attended the service, either for regular sessions or drop-ins, exploring issues such as bullying, panic attacks, social anxiety, self-esteem and friendships.

Last term, St Thomas' embraced children's' mental health week. Alexia worked together with the school librarian and over a period of two weeks, the students had the opportunity to read about mental health. They also created posters of their ideas of mental health. Also, a small group of S2 students concluded a wall art mural, which will be displayed outside the Place2Be rooms and the dining hall.

Duke of Edinburgh's Award

It's been a busy time for our D of E groups with the Silver bothy training weekends in March, Gold practice and qualifying expeditions in March/April and finally the Bronze expeditions in April/May.

Here's an update.

Well done to our **Gold** teams who successfully completed a demanding Gold qualifying expedition in the Torridon Hills last month.

- Millie Jeyes, Joe Jarvis, Erin Curran, Peter Lazarowicz
- Natalia Rucka, Sinead Thin, Daniel Dunn, Maisie White



Our **Silver** group of 20 pupils will have their expeditions in September and October.



34 S3 pupils completed their **Bronze** practice expedition in April and will be back in the Pentland Hills for their qualifying expedition in May.



Look out for the next update to see who has achieved their Bronze Award.

RZSS Edinburgh Zoo Summer School Programme

S4 pupils India Lloyd and Kirstie Cronin were accepted onto the RZSS Edinburgh Zoo summer school program and will be working toward a CREST award during the summer with researchers at the zoo.

The education officers at Edinburgh Zoo said that they were impressed with the applications of both girls and could not possibly pick between the two! Congratulations to them both!

The Big Bang Science Fair and 'Talent 2030' Engineering Competition Short List

The Science Department are very proud of our third year students Eva Murray and Jessica Donegan. The girls entered the 'Talent 2030' National Engineering Competition and did incredibly well. They were short listed from over 700 entries and got the opportunity to take part in the 'Big Bang Fair' in Birmingham. We have asked Eva and Jessica to describe the experience in their own words:



Eva : My Experience at the Big Bang Fair 2017

On the 17 March, I attended the Big Bang Fair at the NEC in Birmingham with my friend Jessica. It is the largest science fair in Europe with over 70,000 visitors in 2016. We were given the opportunity to take part as we entered the '2030 Engineering Competition for Girls', and were shortlisted in the top ten finalists with our idea (there were over 700 entries from around the UK). We were then invited to present our entry at a stall on the final day of the fair.

Our idea was a piezoelectric shoe, which can charge electronic devices from the shoe after gathering energy you have generated yourself. The challenge of the competition was to come up with an idea to help solve the problems of the 21st century. Our aim was to help solve issues relating to overuse of energy, like climate change. Our prototype shoe demonstrated capturing energy to charge a phone, but could be used on bigger projects. It is also hopefully going to help encourage people to get out there and do more sports.

Our experience at the Big Bang fair was amazing too. The NEC is really huge. We arrived at nine to get a good look round, and it was really interesting seeing some of the ideas big companies had. we presented at our stall from twelve till three which was a really interesting experience. The other finalists were around us, so it was really cool seeing their ideas. We got to talk to heaps of visitors to the event about our idea, it was really interesting hearing other people's thoughts and opinions on our project. At the end of the day, we were really tired, but we enjoyed the overall experience.

Jessica: Big Bang Fair 2017

Previously in March this year I attended the Big Bang Fair in Birmingham to present a creative and innovative stall to the public. This stall was to show the entry that was sent into the National Engineering competition for Girls in which we were placed in the top 10 of the UK. The Big Bang Fair was an extraordinary and fascinating experience which enabled me to practice my speaking skills and benefitted my knowledge in Science. The numerous other stalls surrounding us were fantastic and gave me insight into how I can use something that I am passionate about as my future career.

