



St Thomas of Aquin's High School

In Focus Newsletter ~ October 2016



Message from the Acting Head Teacher

Dear Parent/Carer

I extend a warm welcome to all pupils, parents and staff to the October edition of In Focus.

It was a pleasure returning to the school in August to the exam results achieved by our pupils. The school exams results were very good. I am so happy for the many pupils at St Thomas' who achieved such outstanding results. I will be completing a school attainment report for the City of Edinburgh and this will be shared with the Parent Council in due course. I will ensure that a copy of this is placed on the school website.

All Scottish Secondary Schools are compared to a Virtual Comparator school. The virtual comparator consists of a sample group of 10 school leavers from schools in other local authorities who have similar characteristics to the school leavers from St Thomas'. The summary below shows that St Thomas' is outperforming its Virtual Comparator school in key measures in S4, S5, and S6. I extend my thanks to all staff who go above and beyond to support your children, our pupils, to ensure they achieve the very best results at St Thomas'.

St Thomas of Aquins	National 5
5 or more	55.47%
Virtual Comparator	
5 or more	53.28%

St Thomas of Aquins	Higher Level
5 or more	46.09%
Virtual Comparator	
5 or more	31.56%

St Thomas of Aquins	Adv. H Level
1 or more	54.29%
Virtual Comparator	
1 or more	39.52%

The school has started the 2016-17 session in very good health. A comprehensive improvement plan is in place with a full calendar of collegiate activity time and in-service days planned to support the school's forward momentum. Staff are actively leading working groups in the areas of positive behaviour, tracking and monitoring, learning and teaching, IT refresh, website design, and equalities policy development. There is a very positive, focussed approach to the work being completed in the school.

I was exceedingly impressed by the personnel involved in the 2016 S6 Leadership process. I am looking forward to working with James Rennie, Head boy; Sophie Drury, Head girl; Alice Francis-Freeman, Depute Head girl and Ittihad Ahmed, Depute Head boy, and the other members of the 2016 S6 leadership team which will build upon the very good work of last year. I would personally like to thank Sarah Wilson, Alistair Mitchell, Charlotte Lazarowicz, and Conal Mooney, the Heads and Deputes of last year for their drive and commitment to the school.

I am meeting with pupils every week in my Take 5 session. I invite 5 pupils from different year groups to meet with me every Thursday afternoon for 5-10 minutes. I ask them what they like about the school, what needs to be improved, and what do we need to do to make the school excellent. Pupils explain that what makes an excellent school is having an excellent teacher. A teacher who has planned a pupil-centred lesson that caters for and challenges all pupils. Pupils wish to have access to more activities, clubs, and computers – they are clear that an excellent school involves their opinions being heard and acted upon.

Ms Lukasz will be retiring from St Thomas' after 38 years at the school. I would like to extend my thanks on behalf of all pupils, parents, and staff for the exceptional contributions Ms Lukasz has made. The staff social committee are planning a farewell gathering to celebrate Ms Lukasz' time at the school.

Mr Pollard, temporary English Teacher, has been successful in gaining a permanent post in another council and we wish him all the best with his career. Congratulations to Ms Nicholson who was successful in becoming the permanent Curricular Leader of Social Subjects and Business Management at St Thomas'. I will be interviewing for permanent English and Geography with Modern Studies posts in late October. Recruitment for a permanent Religious Education teacher is close to being completed and I hope to be able to bring in a vibrant new teacher to the post by the end of December.

The school welcomes a three year working partnership with the counselling service, Place2Be. Place2Be's work in secondary schools helps S1-S3 pupils to achieve their full potential and deal positively with the difficulties they may face. They provide universal and targeted services for young people in schools, alongside support for parents and consultation and advice for school staff, this could involve:

- One-to-one counselling and shorter term solution focused sessions
- Place2Talk, a daily self-referral service run in break times
- Themed work with small groups (for example exam stress, self-harm) and supporting in-class topics

The new school website went live at the end of September; the website address is - www.st-thomas-of-aquins.org.uk. I would like to thank Ms Payne, Ms Wilson, Ms Quigley, and Mr. and Mrs. Ritchie for all their work and support in ensuring that the website was delivered on time. During the next coming months staff will be trained to ensure that each faculty can update their webpage for the benefit of pupils and parents. The school has a twitter account - @thomasofaquins – which has been live since June and will offer another approach to improving the school's communication with pupils and parents.

The 2016 Senior and Junior Awards ceremony have been a great success this year. I would like to thank Ms Gardner for her strategic leadership and management of the events along with the many other staff who were integral to the success: Ms C. Kelly, Ms Patrick, Mrs Gilroy, Ms Lukasz, Mrs Ritchie, Mr Lovett, Mr Rizza and the entire PE Staff. The school was very fortunate to welcome Nick Barley, Director of The Edinburgh International Book Festival and parent of the school, as the key note speaker to the Senior Awards evening. His speech was inspiring and I hope parents, pupils, and staff present at the evening enjoyed his vision of the school as much as I did. The school community welcomed back Mrs Lisa Armstrong who presented the Ellie and Cameron Armstrong Invictus Maneo award to Iona Henderson, S3. The community spirit of the school was very much in evidence during the presentation of this award. I was very impressed by the achievement of so many of our pupils in a variety of sporting, volunteering, charity, and attainment areas at both award events and I am looking forward to 2017 already.

Christopher Santini
Acting Head Teacher

Holidays

Thursday 22 December `16	Term ends
Tuesday 10 January 2017	Pupils Resume
Friday 10 February 2017	All break
Monday 20 February 2017	All Resume
Friday 31 March 2017	Term ends
Monday 17 April 2017	Spring Holiday school closed
Tuesday 18 April 2017	All Resume
Monday 1 May 2017	May Day school closed
Thursday 4 May 2017	In Service (pupil holiday)
Monday 22 May 2017	Victoria Day, school closed
Friday 30 June 2017	Term ends

Parent Council

The next meeting to take place will be on Wednesday 26 October at 6:45pm in the school. Other dates are:

Thursday 8 December 2016
Tuesday 31 January 2017
Wednesday 26 March 2017
Thursday 25 May 2017

RESIDENTIAL EXCURSIONS 2016/2017

Please find listed below the Residential Excursions for 2016/2017, for further information please contact the group leader:

Paris, for Higher and Advanced Higher French pupils
24 to 27 November 2016 for further details contact Miss Roberts, Modern Languages

Madrid, for Higher and Advanced Higher Spanish pupils
13 to 17 February 2017 for further details contact Miss Roberts, Modern Languages

Belgium Trip, Music for S2 to S6 pupils
24 to 29 June 2017 for further details contact Mrs Patrick

Lagganlia, for S1 pupils
26 to 29 June 2017 for further details contact Miss Whiffen, Social Subjects

Surf Trip, Dunbar for S2 to S6 pupils
26 to 29 June 2017 for further details contact Mrs Turner

Ski Trip to Switzerland, for S1 to S5 pupils
10 to 17 February 2018 for further details contact Mr Green, Science

Croatia Trip, STEM for S4 pupils
22 June to 5 July 2018 for further details contact Mr Linden

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award groups are underway for the new session with 38 S3 pupils doing Bronze and 20 S4 pupils starting Silver. Our current S5 Silver group successfully completed their practice expedition in September and will be going on their qualifying expedition in the Cairngorms at the start of the October break. Our current S6 Gold group of 5 have successfully completed their expeditions and should complete their Award this session.

Awards achieved last session: 42 Bronze, 7 Silver and 2 Gold.



Surgeons Hall and Zoo trips: Senior Biologists Higher – surgeons hall studying Mutations



Advanced Higher – 7 pupils were accepted into the RZSS Advanced Higher Biology investigation program to study animal behaviour (picture showing them inspecting the brand new tiger enclosure).



History

On a sunny September afternoon, Ms Whiffen's S3 History class made their way to Edinburgh Castle to take part in a workshop run by the National War Museum. Students got to handle artefacts from the Great War and David got kitted out in full Black Watch regalia. After our workshop, we visited the National War Memorial and had some free time to explore the castle grounds. All in all, it was a fantastic afternoon with great company.

The S3 History class has been studying the impact and experience of Scots on the Western Front of the Great War. With some influence from the Great British Bake Off, several members of the class planned and baked 'trench cakes' – models of cakes made entirely from edible goods. The Trench Cakes were extremely well designed and tasty too!

CREST awards



Sophie Drury and Anna Andrew were both awarded silver CREST awards by British Science Association for their research on the Asiatic Lions at Edinburgh Zoo over the summer.

Edinburgh Mini Trial

10 pupils from S4-S6 took part in the Edinburgh 'Mini Trial' Event at the Sheriff Court on Saturday 8th October. The event is organised by The Faculty of Advocates and are two simulated court cases: *Assault to severe injury* and *Possession with intent to supply*.



The pupils involved included our defence team (Maisie White, Natalia Rucka, Tasneem Azhar and Natalie Thomson), our prosecuting team (Lucy Sked, Myada Eltiraifi, Orla McDevitt, Margarita de Vera and Adele Pacitti), our jurors- Marietta De Vera, Rosa Williamson, and Khen Dungu our Clerk of Court.

All of the pupils participated enthusiastically and their skills were complemented by the lawyers involved. Unfortunately Natalie Thomson was found guilty, despite her innocent protestations, and will be spending time in prison!



Aviemore

In September 34 S5 and S6 pupils participated in the Geography trip to Aviemore where they gathered data for their Geography Assignment. The pupils stayed at the Aviemore Youth Hostel and also visited the Funicular Railway, the Green Lochan and Abernethy Nature Reserve. This is always a unique opportunity for pupils to experience the beauty of the Cairngorm National Park.

Well done to all pupils for participating in the event and for the exemplary behaviour.

Special thanks go to Austin Flynn and Daisy Mason for their superb quiz and to Mr Rafferty as a supporting staff member!



Music Department: we took advantage of the BBC Festival tent being on our doorstep this year and brought both S4 and S5/6 music technology classes to see some live shows being recorded.



The S4 class met R.J.Mitte, one of the stars from breaking bad and had a chat with him afterwards where he gave them tips on producing a radio show.



Thanks to the BBC for giving us guest passes!

Fair Trade

Thanks to everyone who helped us achieve our Accredited Status in August 2016



At the end of September The Fair Trade Group attended The Edinburgh Schools Fairtrade Conference which was hosted by The One World Shop. We joined with other schools from across Scotland to show our enthusiasm and commitment to Fairtrade.

Throughout the day we went to different workshops. We learned from Bala Sport how the company makes balls for a number of different sports and how the Fair Trade Premium makes a difference to the factory workers in Pakistan in ensuring health and safety regulations are kept, fair wages given and schooling provided. We also met Samuel, a young person from Ghana and he spoke about how Pa Pa Paa and Divine Chocolate makes a difference to his village life and supports him in going to school.

In the afternoon we met Vishwaraj who is a Managing Director of a textile company based in Mauritius which provides cotton t-shirts, hoodies and school uniforms and he spoke proudly of how Fairtrade makes a difference to the lives of his factory workers. Finally we heard about how tea growing in Kenya and how our daily Fairtrade cuppa makes a difference to so many plantation workers. All in all it was a really good event and everyone enjoyed being part of so many good news stories.



