



STM Governing Board Newsletter – Autumn 2020

Our Mission Statement: Learning to love, live and celebrate as we grow in the knowledge and love of Christ
Our Vision: To provide an outstanding education, with Christ at the centre, underpinned by a Catholic, spiritual ethos

Christmas Greetings one and all and welcome to the Autumn newsletter! As we go into the festive period and look toward a new year we have found it a good time to reflect on 2020 and the extraordinary and challenging times we have all encountered. As always, but especially during a global pandemic, the Governing Board are exceptionally grateful to the dedicated staff at STM. They have put our students at the heart of everything and the commitment shown to creating a safe, secure and caring environment for the Childrens' return to school and learning has been commendable and is much appreciated.

It is, with sadness, time to thank our Vice Chair **Jan Davis** who leaves the Board this term. Jan has dedicated over ten years of service to the STM Governing Board, has served on both the Resources and Curriculum Committees, supported two Chair's, delivered and approved much paperwork and strategic documents, as well as being a great support to the SLT. Jan you will be hugely missed and we wish you well!

Going forward we have a new Staff Governor, **Eoin Power**, who we are very pleased to welcome to the board. We have also appointed new Chairs of Committees **Jo Cosgrove** as Chair, Resources Committee and **Leanne Butler** as Chair, Curriculum Committee. Lastly, we have appointed **Laura Connor** as Vice Chair of the Board. We will be working closely together to support one another in these new roles to provide a well rounded and effective Board for STM.

As always, we are thankful to our teaching faculty. This term we are very pleased to welcome new staff to STM:

Ms Claire Pinder - EYFS (Thurs & Fri)

Ms Lucie Stewart - TA

Ms Caitlin Carey who is completing Teacher Training with us

Parent View gives you the chance to tell Ofsted what you think about STM. The survey can be completed at any time; you don't have to wait until the school is being inspected Ofsted will use the information you provide when making decisions about which schools to inspect and when. See the STM website for the link or click on the link here:

<https://parentview.ofsted.gov.uk>

WHO WE ARE

David Swarbrick	Chair
Laura Connor	Vice Chair
Kathy Little	Head Teacher
Eoin Power	Staff Governor
Fr David Burke	Foundation Governor
Theresa Kelly	Foundation Governor
Leanne Butler	Foundation Governor
Jo Cosgrove	Foundation Governor
Gary Brine	Foundation Governor
Monica Murray	Parent Governor
Michelle Anderton	Associate Governor
Peter Fitzgerald	Associate Governor

All governors serve STM in a voluntary capacity

We would like to thank the STMSA who have worked tirelessly this term bringing together a number of very successful virtual and remote events. The fact that there has been a national lockdown has not stopped the ever creative team of finding new ways of bringing the STM community together to raise funds including a virtual Christmas Fayre, Remote Raffle, an Advent Trail and not one but two virtual quizzes!

We are very lucky to have such a hard working school association who consistently strive to both enhance the community life of the school whilst raising much needed funds.

Finance and Resources - from **Jan Davis**:

The Governors' Resources Committee is responsible for the school's financials and premises. Although Mrs Little has day-to-day responsibility for these, the Governors have strategic oversight – we challenge plans and provide a sounding board for the school's leadership. At the heart of all the decisions we make is our children – how to ensure their learning environment remains rich, supportive and safe.

At STM, our key concerns this year have been:

- Managing the budget in a period of rising costs, which have not been matched with proportionate increases in income.
- Ensuring the physical integrity and safety of the school site.

We have been able to maintain our staffing level in the classrooms so that our children continue to thrive. The school has also invested in Google Classroom – essential in this most unusual year. We have been very grateful for the support of the School Association in helping with the purchase of essential equipment, including class sets of laptops. Our thanks too to Colleen Duggan for her generosity in providing Forest School sessions for the children.

Mrs Little has also been successful in securing funding for fencing, CCTV and electronic gates, which will improve site safety and security, not to mention saving the shoe-leather of our office staff!

It has been a tough year in many ways. However, our children remain happy, motivated learners, which is a credit to our school leaders and staff.

Learn from Mistakes - from **Monica Murray**:

"Only a fool learns from his own mistakes. The wise man learns from the mistakes of others." Otto von Bismarck

The Prussian statesman and first Chancellor of Germany Bismarck's aphorism is as witty as it is, ostensibly, self-evident. Yet how much faith should we place in such thinking? No one likes to make mistakes never mind be blamed for one. As a result, mistakes are often denied or, worse, covered up. In the process we lose vital information that could be used to learn and generate solutions that would prevent future mistakes.

Moreover, we're often quick to blame others for their mistakes or we try to justify our own and act defensive. As a result, miss out on the opportunity to obtain the vital information we need in order to learn. Every one of us, sooner or later in life, will "commit" mistakes that can be fixed, but often we will adopt strategies to cover them up, blame others or, for example, reinterpret errors in a way that means the same mistakes re-occur. Psychologists call this a closed mindset. You ignore mistakes because you feel diminished by them; those with a growth mindset, on the other hand, are interested in their mistakes because they see errors differently. They believe they can develop their abilities through hard work and, ultimately, change for the better. Learning from mistakes is a discipline, nevertheless it's not easy to accept errors and to deal with them.

When your child has had a bad day at school, spelling marked terribly or trouble with math (I had a few of those as a little girl!), what is the best solution for us, as parents, to put in place? The easiest is to apportion blame. Yourself, the teacher, the child. However, this creates a negative spiral and perhaps an implicit belief that things will never get better. Now try to put things in another perspective: these are not failures. These are chances that you have to try again and, if not improve (this is not the sole point), to try do things differently. The key is to look for lessons in failure and keep moving forward. This can mean falling short again. The point is to keep trying.

Dr Kathy Weston, one of the UK's leading experts in Childrens lives and learning, points out the importance of the concept of "resilience" which, as parents and as teachers, we must inculcate in our kids; there is no doubt that mistakes have a key role to play in this. As Dr Weston says, children with a good level of resilience will be more ready for life: "No matter what comes their way, they will be prepared". Beneath the surface of all success, hidden from view, is the mountain of necessary failures. So, fail early, fail fast and fail often: it's usually not the end of the world when you do so, although it may seem so at the time. It will take you forward!

A note from **David Swarbrick** - Chair of Governors:

We have reached the end of the year and I am sure it has been a year that many of us would like to forget. We should remember, however amidst all the mayhem of lockdowns, social distancing, tiers of restrictions and so on there are some things for which I am sure we are grateful.

On behalf of the governors we are very grateful for the determination and professionalism shown by the staff at St Thomas More striving to maintain the best possible education for the children at the school in very trying circumstances. In fact, during this crisis they have developed new skills and capabilities, such as the ability to maintain learning at home through the use of Google Classroom and are, I understand, already receiving well-deserved compliments and plaudits from the families of children required to isolate.

I am also very grateful to my fellow governors for their efforts. Attending remote meetings and working collaboratively together without being able to meet is challenging, but all of the governors have worked together to the benefit of the school and its current and future children. In particular great progress has been made in improving the school's financial circumstances (which I wrote to you about last year) as well as making plans for the future. One example of these future planned activities is the new video presentation, available on the school website, encouraging parents/guardians to consider St Thomas More when they are considering school selection for their children.

So, undoubtedly it has been a difficult year. My thanks to all those who have helped the school make it through 2020 – staff, governors and parents whose positive comments have helped the staff cope at times in very difficult conditions and my apologies to those who feel that occasionally the school could have done better. I assure you they did their best in an unprecedented environment.

Let us all look forward to next year and pray that, after what may be a few difficult months, Easter will bring us new hope, not just from the miracle of the Resurrection but from the scientific wonder of an effective immunisation programme.

I wish you and yours the happiness and blessings of Christmas.

Early Years Reflection - from **Leanne Butler**:

I have served as a Foundation governor at our school since May 2018, but this term I also became a school parent as my son started in Nursery in the EYFS class. This year, the Early Years Foundation Stage at our school has undergone a change and has become a unit with Nursery and Reception together. As a teacher myself, I understand the monumental amount of organisation getting ready for this entailed and also the challenges faced by staff when the youngest school aged children start their education journey.

From my personal experience, my son has had a fantastic first term and has developed a love of learning. The exposure to extended learning opportunities and mixing with older peers has benefited him immensely. The interaction and solidarity that I have observed at drop off and collection between all of the children in the EYFS class is wonderful and shows strong relationships have developed between them. This is down to the incredible hard work of the EYFS staff. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them along with the School's leadership team for their passion and dedication to ensure that these children have had the best start to their school journey, especially during the very difficult challenges faced by COVID – 19.

A Prayer for a very different Christmas!

From **Fr David**

Heavenly Father, during this time of pandemic, We pray for joy in our hearts, hope in our God, love to forgive, and peace upon earth.

We ask for your blessings on our School Community of St Thomas More, and We in turn pray for your blessings on all people.

May there be bread for the hungry, love for the unlovable, healing for the sick, protection for our children, and wisdom for our youth.

We pray for the forgiveness of our sins and for the fullness of life in Christ. Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with your love.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

We wish you all a wonderful Christmas break and hope everybody is able to take some time to rest, relax and recharge. We look forward to seeing you in January and embracing the start of 2021

With thanks from the STM Governing Board

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