



## STM Governing Board Newsletter – Autumn 2021

**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

Merry Christmas and welcome to the Autumn Newsletter. 2021 has been another interesting year for us all to navigate and one in which we can proudly remember as a time where our school community, parents, staff and most of all the children have shown the utmost resilience and strength. We conducted a number of stakeholder surveys over the past year and we thank those parents and carers that engaged with them. At our recent Governors Information evening in October we were able to share those findings and for those who were unable to attend you can find them further down.

We are fortunate to welcome **Marie Capes** to the Board this term as a Foundation Governor. You can find out a little more about Marie below. We also wish to say a big **THANK YOU** Foundation Governor, **Leanne Butler** who leaves the Board this term. Leanne, you will be missed and we wish you well!

As always, we are thankful to our teaching faculty. This term we are sad to be saying a very fond farewell to much loved colleagues, we thank you for all you have done for our school community:

**Mrs Garraway** - TA  
**Mrs Loria** - SEND/Inco  
**Mrs Spice** - School Office Finance Administrator

We are very pleased to welcome new and returning members of staff:

**Ms McNabb** - TA  
**Ms Rodgers** - TA  
**Mrs Parker** - School Office Finance Administrator  
**Ms Trent** - TA (starting in January)

### WHO WE ARE

David Swarbrick	Chair
Laura Connor	Vice Chair
Kathy Little	Executive Head
Eoin Power	Staff Governor
Fr Sean Thornton	Foundation Governor
Marie Capes	Foundation Governor
Jo Cosgrove	Foundation Governor
Gary Brine	Foundation Governor
Monica Murray	LA Governor
Michelle Anderton	Head of School

**All governors serve STM in a voluntary capacity**

**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>

### School Finance - **Jo Cosgrove**

I am pleased to report that the School's financial outlook is on plan despite the continuing challenges that the pandemic presents. We thank Mrs Little and Mrs Anderton for continuing to closely monitor the School's finances to ensure that the School not only has a surplus for the year, but eliminates the brought forward deficit, as per the 2021-22 budget.

May God bless you, your families and loved ones in this joyful Christmas season and keep you safe and well.

## A note from our Chair of Governors **David Swarbrick**

At the start of this term in September the school, in common with everyone else in the country were looking at a situation that was difficult but manageable and looking forward to an improvement during the term. Unfortunately this proved not to be quite the case and as the term progressed the situation gradually worsened with the number of Covid cases increasing, local outbreaks occurring, new Covid variants appearing and restrictions (such as visitor access and mask wearing requirements) increasingly imposed by the local education authority. As Governors we saw the impact of these restrictions; in September we were able to hold our first meeting in person, in October we held a briefing for parents at which we were able to report that finances at the school were improving and that the school roll was gradually increasing (if you want to read more detail of the presentation it is available on the school website), but by November we were once again meeting remotely.

Against this background staff at the school have worked very hard to try and maintain a 'sense of normality' allowing the children to resume their education and helping to close the gaps that have occurred inevitably during 'lockdown' year. We are very grateful to them for their efforts and I am sure they are looking forward to a well-earned rest during the Christmas holiday.. To try and maintain this sense of normality the staff as usual developed a programme of Christmas events that the children always enjoy and is such an important part of their education. Unlike some other schools the staff decided to attempt to make these events accessible to parents but the Covid requirements meant that compromises had to be made and numbers allowed at the events had to be somewhat limited and restricted. These limitations and compromises will have disappointed some. However, I feel that we should thank and congratulate The Executive Head teacher, the Head of School and all the staff for their strenuous efforts, in very difficult circumstances, to allow the children as well as many of their parents to enjoy those productions that have become such an integral part of Christmas, a pleasure denied to us all only a year ago.

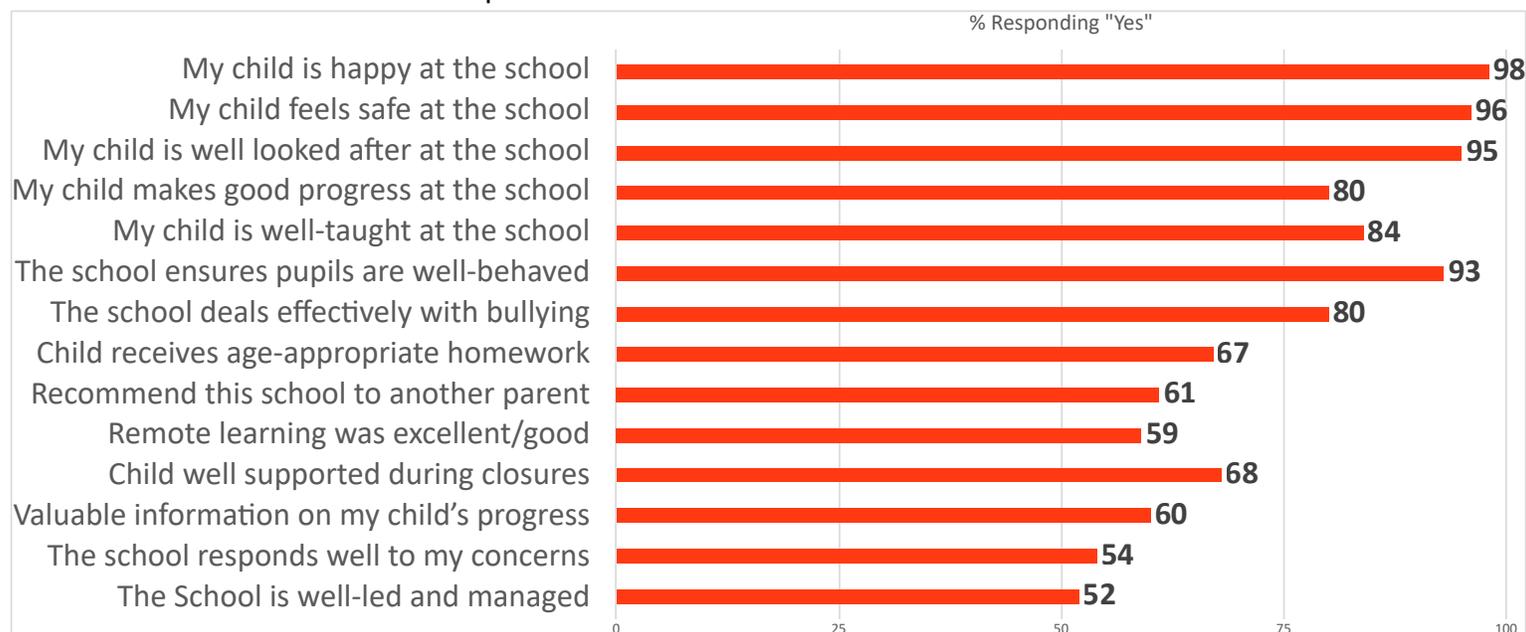
So, let us all hope and pray that next year the longed-for normality that we have all looked forward to throughout this year will finally return and that we will be able to enjoy a festive season without any restrictions. Until then I wish everyone involved with the school; children, staff, parents and carers and Governors a happy and peaceful Christmas and a happy (and hopefully less restrictive) New Year.



**St Thomas More**  
Catholic Primary School

## Parent Survey May 2021

56 responses



## Introduction from **Marie Capes**

I have been a parishioner of Sacred Heart Church for over 20 years and a member of the Parish Finance Committee there. Originally from Workington in Cumbria, I grew up in a close Catholic family. I was educated in catholic schools from very early years until "A" level. A loving family life and a very good Catholic education helped my personal faith journey and created a strong foundation for my devotion to the Catholic faith.

I moved South to study at the LSE and then to train and work as a chartered accountant. Following qualification as an accountant, I worked in the media industry, including over 30 years at WPP plc, where I was the Director of Finance & Administration in the London Headquarters and the plc's Company Secretary. In 2020, I moved to a part time role enabling me to develop other interests and expertise.

As a Foundation Governor, I look forward to working with the other Governors, the Senior Leadership team and the staff to continue the excellent ethos that St Thomas More School is known for. I hope that my life experience and knowledge can be a benefit to all the school community that is there to ensure our children enjoy their education "Learning to love, live and celebrate as we grow in the knowledge and love of Christ".

## St Thomas More School Association - **Gary Brine**

As we all know, Christmas is a very busy time of year for all of us so let us spare a thought and say a massive thank you to the wonderful PTA team. In addition to preparing their own Christmases, the STMSA have been super busy organising a series of events this Christmas. This has included the always very successful wreath making evening (raising over £800 despite being virtual!), Christmas cards designed by the children (raised £420) and a combination of virtual and in school Christmas fair events including a raffle, silent auction, lucky jars, secret gift rooms and more! So far the Christmas fair events have raised over £1,700!! Members of the STMSA and a few of the Governors also helped out with the ever popular Berkhamsted Rotary Club Santa's Sleigh event, for which the STMSA will receive a share of all donations. We are pleased to report that the team received some generous donations from some existing and previous members of the governing board.....

It is not just Christmas of course, at the beginning of term the STMSA organised an outdoor welcome tea and uniform sale, raising funds for both the school and Macmillan cancer, as well as organising a clean-up day which really smartened up the entrance area to the school. Ongoing fund-raising includes the Supermarket vouchers scheme and 100 Club which is available to the whole school community for anyone who wishes to join.

Thanks again and Happy Christmas to the STMSA team! The Governors and the whole of the STM community really appreciate everything you do for the school and our children!

It takes a village to raise a child... and a church! **Monica Murray**

Being Italian I have always had a great sense of community and family, despite the fact of living in a big city as Rome. It didn't occur to me, until I moved to UK, that that sense of community was given to me by my own culture as a Catholic and a Christian.

Thousands of years ago, people lived in communities for safety, socialisation, and for sharing resources. From the earliest days of humanity our brains have been programmed to live near one to another, to share food and tools, to protect each other, exchange ideas, to socialise.

But the past century has drastically changed the concept of community, no matter if you live in a rural area or an urban metropolis. Families no longer co-habit intergenerationally as they once did, especially as the appeal of the nuclear family began to increase. The move from rural living to urban lifestyles and back to rural, has meant that extended families often fracture and live further and further apart. We are often caught up in the reality of constant "busy-ness" that we don't take the time to get to know our neighbours. And social media doesn't help as it has redefined "connection" and "friendship," leaving us staring at screens more than engaging with the people around us.

The impact of this is apparent on parents and children. The adage "it takes a village to raise a child" is still true. But somewhere along the way, we've lost the "village". We need to raise kids in nurturing, creative, and safe ways. And as a result, families are missing out on crucial learning experiences and much needed support systems. In the end, many parents feel isolated and alone in their struggles, and kids don't have the opportunity to engage with a diverse group of people and personalities.

And this has been subject of a very interesting study by the journalist Michaeleen Doucleff in her amazing book "Hunt, Gather, Parent" where she underlines how many "old" cultures like the Mayan or the Inuits living in Alaska for example, still live and trust the "old" parenting models: a model which apparently wins! On the other side, our occidental societies, somewhere along the way, lost completely "the village" and what goes with it, even because of newest "theories" about growing up a child in a completely different way from the past. A past which was a millenary baggage of experiences.

Healthy parents lead to healthy families. Not just physical health but emotional health too. However, "going it alone" doesn't lend to positive mental health - no matter what Instagram says! Parents feel stressed, overworked, judged, and inadequate. And this is real, but without a community around to validate those feelings, that pain will feel as unique.

So where and how do we create a community?

The most obvious place to start is with existing family and friends. Asking grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins for help can make them feel included and provide your children with more access to family relationships and its history. Even if families don't live nearby, we can set up regular family calls online, so everyone feels more connected, although it's not ideal.

Friends are another great place to begin, although many parents feel pressure to look "perfect" on the outside, so it can be hard to imagine that it's a different story at home.

But, as a Catholic community, we are very lucky as we have a church around us, where we can be close to each other: our church is our village, anchored to what is good in our past and our routes, leading our children through all their lives with strength, confidence, compassion, love, and, moreover, all together. A solid rock which will never let them down.

It happens through the sacraments - Baptism, Communion and Confirmation. But best of all is our collective act of worship each Saturday or Sunday. When we come together in the sight of God as a community, we create an invisible thread for our children that connects us all to one another and can last a lifetime.

**We wish you all a wonderful Christmas break and look forward to seeing you in January for the start of a new term and new year!**