



St Thomas More

Catholic Primary School

STM Governing Board Newsletter – Autumn 2023

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

Welcome to the Autumn newsletter, the end of term and the end of 2023! As another year goes by we give thanks once again for our dedicated staff and all of the wonderfully resilient students that attend St Thomas More.

We are very pleased to extend a warm welcome to our new staff governor, **Kate Addison**. Welcome Kate, we are very much looking forward to working with you. As noted at the end of last term the STM governing board is now running a full complement of members. We have recently been notified that we are the only school within ASCAT who have no vacancies on their board. We are thankful that recruitment efforts have paid off and we are in a strong position as a board going forward.

As always, we are thankful to our wonderful staff. This term we are sad to be saying a very fond farewell to **Mrs McCloskey** - KS2 French. We thank you for all you have done for our school community.

We are also very pleased to welcome **Mrs Florkova** (Year 4 & Nursery TA) to the STM community

WHO WE ARE

David Swarbrick	Chair
Marie Capes	Vice Chair
Jo Cosgrove	Foundation Governor
Fr Joseph Okoro	Foundation Governor
Ed Murray	Foundation Governor
Cecilia Cinquina	Foundation Governor
Margaret Atwill	Foundation Governor
Monica Murray	LA Governor
Laura Connor	Parent Governor
Chris Hammond	Parent Governor
Kate Addison	Staff Governor
Marian Lally	Assistant Head Teacher
Kathy Little	Executive Head

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>

The Other Face of Christmas - **Monica Murray**

Christmas is a joyful period: magical, full of things to do, of friends and family to see, of twinkling lights, colourful decorations, shop windows dressed festively and places to visit, new experiences to experience, happy expectations, goodwill, mince pie and delicious food. But there is another side to Christmas.

The two aspects of the festive period are present in two beautiful books by the same author, Charles Dickens: "A Christmas Carol", magical and fantastical, and "The Haunted Man", a powerful and deeply personal story, written following the premature death of the author's sister. The main character of the latter book is Stephen Redlaw, a successful and famous artist who, exactly like Dickens, is grieving, in this case over the death of his sister. The pain left Redlaw disillusioned, but, unlike Scrooge, he is still a kind man. Like Scrooge, he encounters a ghost who, in a way, does the opposite of what Scrooge's ghost does: he transforms a lovely man into someone miserable. Without spoiling the story of this beautiful novel, we gain a powerful insight into Dickens's state of mind, who was struggling with grief and depression, after losing a loved one. Although we used to think mental health is a solely a modern subject, Dickens in particular, was acutely aware of how devastating it can be, especially during a period like Christmas, where we are surrounded by happiness and joy.

And it is true: Christmas is always a time for joy; but also for remembrance. Christmas is also a time when our lost loved ones should be present not absent; where that space around our beautiful festive table shouldn't be empty, the sound of their voice lost in the house, a room too empty, too cold. When you feel that, when the rest of the world seems to rejoice while your heart feels the loneliness, the desolation and the anger of missing, deeply, someone who is no longer there. Christmas is a reflection of our love for others, but it should also be also an occasion to grow, to deal with our pain so that we can start to love and be at peace again.

Yet, all around us we see scenes of tragedy played out on our television screens: in many parts of the world and, in particular, in the Holy Land, awful conflicts taking places, with families completely destroyed, with thousands of children dying and the number growing daily. Personally, I cannot even begin to imagine the pain of those mothers and fathers, or the children left without a family. There is little we can do to stop tragedy happening, but we can, at least, try to control how we deal with it. All we can do is hold onto hope, and not lose our minds. The choice is there: keep hold of faith or let yourself fall into an ocean of sorrow and pain, lost forever, drowning in a dark sea of overwhelming feelings.

As Catholics and Christians, we have a source of strength which can be as solid as a rock if we allow it to be so: we know that our loved ones are never too far, they are there, out of our sight, but still in that festive room, with us, holding our hands, laughing with us, looking after us, free and happy in God's hands. And they are waiting for us.

Even in Christmas, when everyone else around us seems to be happy, even in the darkest places of our human nature, deep inside our hearts and souls, somehow, somewhere, there is that light of Hope that comes from God and returns to God. We must hold onto it.

"...I say to you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy...I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take ever again your joy away from you" (John, 16:20,22).

A note from the Chair - **David Swarbrick**

As we head towards the end of 2023 (it seems only yesterday that we were welcoming the arrival of 2023!) it is worth reflecting on the significant events of 2023 and what they mean for our school.

Undoubtedly this year's main area of focus has been the 'Ofsted Recovery Programme'. I have written to you separately detailing the progress the school has made but it is worth re-iterating that a recent inspection by our 'Special Education Advisor' confirmed this progress – our thanks to all the school staff who have worked hard to implement these improvements

In June we joined the ASCAT trust. The transition proceeded very smoothly and we are just beginning to see some of the benefits of ASCAT membership. As a Governing Body we are receiving more training opportunities as well as advice on how we can best meet our objectives. Also the school leadership are planning a new approach to improve school play opportunities (which I believe you have already been informed about) that should have major benefits for the children at our school. I am sure that the benefits of ASCAT membership will become more apparent in the coming years.

The number of children attending St Thomas More school continues to increase (in line with our strategic objectives) so that in this financial year we have been able to increase our teaching resource whilst still showing a modest financial surplus.

Finally, January brought the arrival of Ms Marian Lally as Assistant Head Teacher. Ms Lally has worked very hard during her first year to get to know the school, understanding the role that she can play, as well as taking a major part in driving through some of the required Ofsted improvements. The Governing Body are very grateful to Ms Lally for her efforts and look forward to her playing a significant role in the school leadership in the years to come.

Can I conclude by wishing everyone involved with St Thomas More School – the staff, children, parents and carers a happy and peaceful Christmas. We look forward to seeing you all in The New Year when we can do it all again but until then have a good rest.

We wish you all a joyous and peaceful Christmas break and look forward to seeing you in January for the start of 2024 and new term.

With thanks from the STM Governing Board