St Thomas Aquinas
Catholic Primary School
Bowral

Annual School Report
2008
About This Report

St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School, Bowral is registered by the Board of Studies (NSW) and managed by the Catholic Education Office (CEO), Wollongong, the ‘approved authority’ for the Registration System formed under Section 39 of the NSW Education Act 1990.

The Annual School Report provides the school community with fair, reliable and objective information about school performance measures and policies, as determined by the Minister for Education. The Report also outlines information about initiatives and developments of major interest and importance to the school community during the year and the achievements arising from the implementation of the School’s Annual Action Plan. Following its submission to the Board of Studies, the Report will be available on the school’s website by 30 June 2009.

The Report demonstrates accountability to regulatory bodies, the school community and the Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Wollongong. This Report has been approved by the Director of Schools to ensure compliance with all NSW Board of Studies requirements for Registration.

Further information about the school or this report may be obtained by contacting the school:

St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School
Bundaroo Street
BOWRAL NSW 2576
Ph: (02) 4861 1768
Fax: (02) 4862 1941
Email: info@sta.woll.catholic.edu.au

Parish Priest: Fr Sean Cullen

Principal: Gary Norris
Date: 12 December 2008
Vision Statement

St Thomas Aquinas will be an authentically Catholic Parish Primary School, a learning community where every individual is valued and encouraged to achieve their greatest potential in every aspect of life.

Message from Key School Bodies

Principal’s Message

Once again the academic year is drawing to a rapid conclusion and all involved with our community are looking forward to a well deserved break.

As always it has been an extremely busy year both within and outside the classroom and the many achievements of our students are testimony to the vibrant community, which we have continued to develop over the years.

I take this opportunity to thank all those involved with our school. I thank the Parish Priest for his continual support, I thank the staff who work tirelessly for the benefit of the students in their care, the Parents & Friends Association who continue their amazing efforts in providing the many resources needed and I thank the students who take such pride in their school.

The Parish community and the wider community all support our school in many ways and we are, as always, very appreciative for the role that they play.

Parent Involvement

The parent body of St Thomas Aquinas is a highly valued part of our school community. They are encouraged to be actively involved in the life of the school and participate in classroom, stage and school activities. Parents are invited to join us for assemblies, performances and liturgies throughout the year.

We are very fortunate to have some wonderfully energetic members of our P & F Association who have raised extra funds to assist the school in purchasing additional resources to supplement the school’s budget. This year we have been able to improve the Infant’s playground with turf and garden edging; buy additional computers, Literacy resources; and improve the facilities generally. Our school Fete this year was an enormous success financially as well as being a tremendous day for us as a community.

Parents and Friends Association, President

Student Leadership

It was an honour being elected School Captains in 2008. We have enjoyed representing our school in many ways. With the support of our teachers we carried out our leadership roles. Some of the responsibilities we had during 2008 were leadership days to Chevalier and
Riverview. We also co-ordinated the peacekeepers, played parts at the assemblies and raised the flag each day. Our favourite part was coming to school each day and knowing we are role models to the younger students and hopefully have given them something to strive for in the future. We would like to thank you for your support throughout the year. We hope that next year the captains will enjoy being leaders of St Thomas Aquinas as much as we did.

School Captains

School Profile

St Thomas Aquinas Primary School was established in 1903 by the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

The school is an integral part of the Bowral Parish. The aim is to create an educating community in which children, staff, parents and the Parish Priest support each other in pursuing the highest quality of education, and the development of life long learning for each individual within the community.

The school is in a central location in Bowral, across the road from the Church grounds. The campus enjoys spacious grounds which typify the local area, and there is considerable open space for the playground and shade trees. It is a two stream co-educational school with students drawn predominately from Bowral.

Student Enrolments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Enrolment Policy and Procedures can be found on the Catholic Education Website: www.ceowoll.catholic.edu.au then go to the link Policies.

Student Attendance for 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>89.1%</td>
<td>88.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Staffing Profile

There are a total of 24 teachers at St Thomas Aquinas Primary School.

School Leadership

Principal, Assistant Principal, Religious Education Co-ordinator, 3 x Middle Leaders.

Specialist Teachers

Teacher/Librarian, Reading Recovery Teacher, 14 x Classroom Teachers.

Administrative Staff

Senior School Support Officer, 7 x School Support Officers.

Teaching Staff Experience

St Thomas Aquinas School has a total teaching staff of 18 FTE. Of this total there are 14 classroom teachers, 1 Reading Recovery teacher, 0.8 Librarian, 0.4 Music and 1.75 Executive Relief. The Principal is assisted by an Executive team which comprises Assistant Principal, Religious Education Coordinator, and three 2 point Middle Leaders. To further assist in the school we are supported by School Support Officers, 2 of whom work mainly in the School Office and 5 support teachers in classrooms.

Teacher experience varies from those in their early years of teaching to a substantial group of experienced teachers with between 15 and 25 years experience. Post graduate qualifications are held by 13 staff members consisting of 11 B.Ed degrees, 3 Graduate Diplomas and 2 Masters of Education.

Teacher Standards

Teacher qualifications fall into 1 of 3 categories for all teaching staff responsible for delivering the curriculum:

| Teaching qualifications from a higher education institution within Australia or as recognised by AEI - NOOSR* | 100% |
| Have qualifications as a graduate from a higher education institution within Australia within AEI-NOOSR* guidelines but lack formal teacher qualifications | 0% |
| Do not have qualifications as above but have relevant successful teaching experience or appropriate knowledge relevant to the teaching context | 0% |

*Australian Education Institution – National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition Staff Retention
Staff Attendance
The average daily staff attendance rate for 2008 was 97.28%.
The staff retention rate is high at St Thomas Aquinas Primary School with 100% of the teaching staff remaining for the 2008 School Year.

Professional Learning
Professional learning opportunities are highly valued and sought by all members of St Thomas Aquinas Primary School staff. During 2008 school personnel undertook a range of professional learning activities related to improving student outcomes.

These included:
• David Langford conference “Quality Learning” in Melbourne;
• Learning & Teaching Framework;
• School Review & Improvement;
• Literacy & Numeracy Forum. Special Education Forum; and
• Interactive Whiteboard Conference

School based expenditure on professional learning in 2008 was $9,224. This is in addition to expenditure on professional learning opportunities provided by the Catholic Education Office (CEO).

Culture of the Catholic School
St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School was founded by the Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart and their traditions and values are still reflected in daily activities. Morning Prayer and celebration of feast days continue the spirit and rituals of the Sisters. There are many signs and symbols throughout the school that give witness to Catholic culture. The foyer of the school has a stained glass depiction of St Thomas Aquinas and Catholic artefacts throughout the school allow children, parents and visitors to be immersed in Catholic faith.

The school is very fortunate to be able to participate in wonderfully rich and vibrant liturgies celebrated by Fr Sean Cullen. Liturgy group provides beautiful music and singing, with children from Years 3-6 given the opportunity to join this group. Liturgical movement has been introduced this year to expose the children to another form of prayer.

Throughout the year St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School (STA) strives to focus the student’s attention on those less fortunate and have a variety of fundraising activities to support many charities and worthwhile causes. STA has had many guest speakers from different groups requiring support at assemblies, to highlight for the children how fortunate they are living in the Southern Highlands in Australia. Emphasis on social justice issues is very much a part of Religious Education program and the culture of the catholic school. As a school community STA supports those within the community who are experiencing difficulties through prayer, fundraising and practical assistance.
**Student Welfare**

At St Thomas Aquinas there is a strong emphasis on the welfare of individuals within the school. Staff, students, and parents are encouraged to live the Gospel values and treat each other with care and respect. A Buddy system has been established to support the younger children, as they are welcomed into school. Kindergarten is given a Year 6 buddy and Year 1 children have a Year 5 buddy. This support network is highly valued by the children and the whole community.

The Year 6 Peacekeepers were introduced last year to support students in the playground and this has been an excellent initiative. The older students welcome the opportunity for a leadership role in the school and they are a wonderful assistance to teachers out on duty.

The school has a positive reinforcement approach aimed at encouraging appropriate behaviour through a sticker book system. This is linked to the Principal’s Merit Awards handed out at assemblies. Each class teacher also awards a Merit Certificate that acknowledges student’s effort and achievements.

**Financial Summary**

The school has been fortunate in a number of significant grants received this year. The Federal Government Water Grant of $50,000 enabled the school to install a 100,000 litre underground water tank, as well as updating toilet facilities to a dual flush system. STA also received the second instalment of the Investing in our School grant of $23,000. This combined with P & F funds has enabled STA to purchase $53,000 of new technology including 30 new laptop computers.

Major expenditure has been on resourcing classrooms particularly with new reading materials, continuing the refurbishment of the rooms and the new construction of a storage shed.

The following graphs reflect the aggregated income and expenditure for St Thomas Aquinas for the year ended 31 December 2008. This data is taken from the 2008 financial return to the Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

**Income**
Introduction

St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School is continually developing new ways of educating students and assisting them to develop the skills of life-long learners. The Inquiry Model has been further enhanced this year and teachers are working together to provide students with challenging and exciting experiences to engage each of them in their learning. Our Learning Communities project has provided opportunities for professional sharing and dialogue. STA has a K-6 approach and teachers are working across grades and stages.

Curriculum & Pedagogy

The scope and sequences for each Key Learning Area (KLA) have been updated for 2008 to map the student’s learning throughout the year. Teachers have focused on developing specific assessment tasks to provide them with information regarding how well each student demonstrates the outcomes. Students have a Literacy Block each morning from 9.00-11.00am; a Religious Education lesson and a Mathematics Block for one hour each day. Units of work integrate the KLAs wherever possible.

Assessment has been a major area of focus this year and teachers have been working on providing a diverse range of assessment tasks, allowing students to demonstrate their learning. STA has developed an Assessment Policy to provide a whole school approach and teachers are utilising assessment data to plan for the needs of their students.

The first National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) implementation was in May this year and a high proportion of the students achieved excellent results. This national testing has provided valuable data that will be used to inform the teaching across the school.
A new school report format was developed this year through a process of discussion groups and a close look at the Foundation Statements for each KLA. Additional areas were included in the new report with a comment for English and Mathematics, as well as a grading for student effort.

Teachers have been working this year on further developing the Inquiry Model of learning and integrating KLAs. As part of the Learning Communities project, teachers have been provided with release time to plan units of work with the Assistant Principal. These have been based on the ‘Rocket’ approach and students are provided with scaffolds for learning and ‘Thinking Tools’ to organise their investigations. This will continue to be an area for focus next year as STA develops a spiral curriculum, building on student skills each year.

The use of technology is incorporated into the Inquiry Model and students are exposed to the many ways of researching and presenting their work. Students from Years 4-6 are utilising their own thumb drives as a way of saving their own work.

**Cross Curriculum**

The whole school is committed to the morning Literacy Block and students are covering the full range of Literacy skills. The text types are being explicitly taught and are integrated across the curriculum. NAPLAN and the University of NSW English competition reinforce assessment data to show students are achieving excellent results in Literacy. The STA exceptional Library has supported the students and teachers in the development of Literacy standards through providing an extensive range of literature and resources. The teacher/librarian has a scope & sequence from Kindergarten to Year 6 for supporting Literacy across the curriculum.

The 2008 Scope and Sequence document has been developed to specify the content and assessment tasks for each outcome in Mathematics. The resource room has been organised to allow for easy access to Numeracy materials. There has been a stock-take of equipment and additional resources have been ordered for strands lacking appropriate materials. Generally, students achieve excellent results in Numeracy assessments. Group work across Stage 2 has been introduced this year and this has allowed for students to be catered for according to their ability in each sub strand. Further development of group work across the stages will be our focus for 2009.

**Meeting the Needs of All Students**

In 2008 a new position of Enrichment Teacher has been introduced to support teachers in their work catering for the huge range of student needs within the classroom. This will be further developed in 2009 with additional staffing allowing for a part-time teacher to work within each stage. Individual and group work will cater for students with special needs and provide extension work for students who have achieved the outcomes.
Enrichment classes each Friday have provided for gifted and talented students allowing them to extend their thinking using Gardners’ Multiple intelligences and Bloom’s contract work. A Drama Club has been introduced on Fridays during lunch-time for any student Years 2-6 wishing to participate in activities, plays and skits.

The School Support Officers are working with particular stages and are supporting students individually and within group work activities. They particularly focus on special education needs and assist students who need additional time to achieve an outcome.

Teachers have been working in the Inquiry model of learning and offer many opportunities for self directed learning. Students are provided with ‘Thinking Skills’ which promotes individualised learning.

**Expanding Learning Opportunities**

The students have many and varied opportunities to enter competitions, activities and competitions include public speaking; Chess Tournament; Art/Craft Exhibitions; University of NSW International English and Mathematics Competitions. The children participate in local shows and community events, including the Moss Vale Show exhibits and the Bowral Tulip Time competitions.

Musical opportunities are exceptional with a variety of groups performing at the various levels, within the school and parish and to Eisteddfods in Wollongong and Goulburn. Children can join the Liturgy Group from year 3 and STA has a Boy’s Choir; Guitar Group; School Ensemble; and the X-Ray School rock band.

Every child in the Primary years has an opportunity to participate in one of the Sporting Gala Days on offer throughout the year. Students are also involved in cricket and football training sessions offered by visiting coaches. Students participate in Swimming, Cross Country and Athletics Carnivals and many children compete at the various regional and Diocesan levels. STA also has a large group of students participating in the Heart Foundation’s Super Skippers Program. These children perform throughout the local area.

**Professional Learning**

This year STA received a grant for a Learning Community Project for the development of the Inquiry approach to quality learning. Teachers have been released with their grade partners to plan units of work following an Inquiry Framework. This has allowed for professional dialogue and the implementation of a more consistent approach across K-6.
**Student Achievement**

The school uses a variety of assessment strategies at key points in the learning framework. These include teacher observation, projects and presentations. The school also participates in the NAPLAN for the purposes of diagnosing individual learning needs and reviewing whole class teaching programs. Information on student progress is communicated on a regular basis and external assessment results are discussed with parents on an individual basis annually.

**Religious Literacy Assessment**

The Religious Literacy Assessment program for Year 4 students was successfully implemented within our school in 2008.

The school cohort consisted of 52 Year 4 students who sat the Religious Literacy Assessment Workbook (Part A) on 1 September and 57 completed the Extended Task (Part B). The Extended Task is based on the Unit *One With God’s Creation* and was completed during the first half of Term 3.

The performance of each student was described as developing, achieving or extending.

Students showed a high level of performance in their knowledge of the religious tradition. This high level of performance was particularly noticeable in their:

- ability to identify key symbols, signs and rituals of the Catholic tradition;
- knowledge of the Ten Commandments;
- understanding of the Creation Story from Genesis; and
- knowledge of the Scriptures.

The students’ responses showed a need for them to develop their capacity to work with and apply the religious tradition especially in their ability to:

- recall that Advent is the beginning of the Church’s year; and
- identify the Angelus prayer.

Students in Part B displayed a very clear understanding of the Creation Story from Genesis and the significance of this to their lives today. Students appreciated that God created them and they have a responsibility to care for all of creation.

For Part A 15.7% of students were placed in the developing level, 49% in the achieving level and 35.3% were in the extending level.

For Part B 7.7% of students were placed in the developing level, 78.8% in the achieving level and 13.5% were in the extending level.

Combining Parts A and B, 13.0% of students were placed in the developing level, 60.9% in the achieving level and 26.1% were in the extending level for Religious Literacy.
NAPLAN

The National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is a national assessment of students’ knowledge and skills in particular aspects of Literacy and Numeracy. Students in Years 3 and 5 in primary school completed the tests in May this year. Parents and teachers have been provided with data to measure students’ achievements against the National Statements of Learning. Students were tested in Reading, Writing and Language Conventions (Spelling, Grammar and Punctuation) and Numeracy.

Literacy and Numeracy results were a very high standard this year with many children achieving exceptional results. The areas of particularly high achievement were Reading, Language Conventions and Year 3 Numeracy. Many children were in the high bands for Numeracy and Literacy and only a small percentage were in Bands 1 and 2. These children are already identified and receiving additional assistance.

The results have also looked at the learning gain for Year 5 students. The data compares the student’s results in Year 3 (their Basic Skills Results during this changeover period) to their results this year in NAPLAN. In Literacy there has been significant gain for the cohort of students and they have all achieved the expected gain over the two years, except for those students with learning difficulties. Some aspects of Year 5 Numeracy will need to be a focus next year particularly: Fractions & Decimals; Chance; and areas in Measurement and Space.

Teachers have been provided with excellent data to inform our future planning and teaching. This will be incorporated into our programming for 2009.
St Thomas Aquinas Primary School, Bowral
Student Achievement 2008
National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy

Student Achievement in Bands

The National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) was introduced for students in Years 3 and 5 in May this year. NAPLAN replaces the previous State-based Basic Skills Test and the results provide valuable information about student achievements in Literacy and Numeracy. Analysis of the results is used at school level to support the enhancement of literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students. Year 3 results are reported in Bands 1 to 6 with Band 6 representing the highest achievement and Year 5 results are reported in Bands 3 to 8 with Band 8 representing the highest achievement. Please Note: Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAPLAN 2008: % in Bands</th>
<th>YEAR 3</th>
<th>YEAR 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bands 1 and 2</td>
<td>Bands 3 and 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar &amp; Punctuation</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Achievement of National Minimum Standard

The lowest Band for each year (Band 1 in Year 3 and Band 3 in Year 5) represents students who are achieving BELOW the National Minimum Standard (NMS) in each aspect of NAPLAN. Students in the second Band for each year (Band 2 in Year 3 and Band 4 in Year 5) represents students who are achieving AT the NMS. Students in all other Bands are achieving ABOVE the NMS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAPLAN 2008: % AT or ABOVE NMS</th>
<th>YEAR 3</th>
<th>YEAR 5</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>National</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>School</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar &amp; Punctuation</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
<td>97%</td>
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</table>
Parent, Student & Staff Satisfaction

At the end of the 2008 School Year parents, students and staff were asked to complete an anonymous survey to indicate the level of satisfaction they had for the school. This survey is a way for the school to gauge how well they have achieved their goals for the year and it also gives important feedback to assist with planning for the future.

Summary of Parent Satisfaction Findings

All 270 families in the school were asked to comment on each of 9 questions relating to their satisfaction on various aspects of school life. There were 72 families who responded to this survey, which indicates that families are satisfied with the way that the school is operating in relation to their children.

One hundred percent of parents strongly agreed that the school helped their children develop their knowledge and understandings about the Catholic faith. It was agreed also that the school provided many opportunities for the parents to become involved in the education of their children, however with the number of families in which both parents are working, it was not always feasible for them to take up these offers.

On the whole most families agreed that the school challenged their children in order to maximise their learning outcomes. There was general consensus that the school also strived to meet the individual learning needs of the students in most cases. Overwhelmingly parents agreed that the school provided a safe and supportive environment and that the new reporting system adopted in 2008 gave more information to parents.

Summary of Staff Satisfaction Findings

Of the 20 staff in the school there were 15 who responded to this survey and all agreed that they were more than happy to come to work each day. There was also general agreement that they made a difference in the lives of the children whom they taught and that students were challenged to meet their full potential.

In the area of reporting to parents staff felt that the reporting system adopted by the school in 2008 was rigorous and that there were many opportunities for parents to come to the school to speak with them regarding their child’s progress.

Summary of Student Satisfaction Findings

All 60 senior students at the school were surveyed and it was satisfying to note that there was an overwhelming response of agreement for what the school is achieving. There were seven questions asked, ranging from their pride in the school, the achievement of Religious Faith and being encouraged to produce their best, feeling safe in the school environment, having someone to whom they could talk if they had the need and sporting activities provided. Students responded positively in all areas with a special request for more sporting activities to be provided at school.
School Review and Improvement

School Review and Improvement is an ongoing process of self-evaluation measured against a commonly agreed set of criteria. By the end of 2008 all schools have begun the transition to the new School Review and Improvement process.

School Review and Improvement components reviewed in 2008:

- 1.2 Religious Education
- 2.3 Reporting Student Achievement
- 3.2 Provision for the diverse needs of learners
- 3.3 Teaching Practices
- 3.5 Assessment
- 5.3 Environmental Stewardship
- 6.2 Reporting to the community

School Review and Improvement components to be reviewed in 2009:

- 1.2 Religious Education
- 2.4 Integration of Information & Communication Technology
- 5.1 ICT Resources
- 3.2 Provision for the diverse needs of learners
- 3.7 Professional Learning
- 6.1 Parent Involvement