St Thomas Aquinas
Catholic Primary School
Bowral

Annual School Report
2009
About This Report

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

The Annual School Report to the Community for this year provides the school community with fair, reliable and objective information about school performance measures and policies, as determined by the Minister for Education and Training.

The Report also outlines information regarding School Review & Improvement 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.

Accordingly, the Report demonstrates accountability to regulatory bodies, the school community and the Catholic Education Office (CEO). This Report has been approved by Wollongong CEO to ensure compliance with all NSW Board of Studies requirements for Registration and Accreditation.

This Report complements and is supplementary to school newsletters and other regular communications. Following its submission to the NSW Board of Studies, the Report will be presented to the Parent Body and be available on the school’s website by 30 June 2010.

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

St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School
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Fax: (02) 4862 1941
Email: info@stabdow.woll.catholic.edu.au
Website: www.stabdow.woll.catholic.edu.au

Parish Priest: Fr Sean Cullen

Principal: Mr Gary Norris
Date: 18 December 2009
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 their life.

Message from Key School Bodies

Principal’s Message

It is with pleasure that I present this annual report for the 2009 academic year at St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School. The students have performed particularly well in many areas and are to be congratulated on their achievements in the classroom, on the sporting fields and in the arts. St Thomas Aquinas has an enviable reputation within the community for the standard of achievement which is evident throughout the school.

A particular challenge during the year was brought about through the foresight of the Federal Government who injected millions of dollars, for which we are truly grateful, to help bring our school facilities into the 21st Century, and provide our students with much needed equipment. This challenge will be ongoing during 2010 and beyond, and will see the school with refurbished toilets and student amenities as well as a new school hall.

Parent Involvement

The Parents and Friends Association at St. Thomas Aquinas is lead by a small number of energetic parents who attend meetings once per term to share ideas and opinions and to co-ordinate social functions and fundraising events. This small group are well supported in the wider school community by other parents who support and assist with the activities organised throughout the year.

The events organised by the Parents and Friends Association are designed to develop positive relationships within the school and Parish community to further enhance the local Catholic Church. This year the meeting schedule was reduced to one per term which has lead to a slight increase in attendance. The meetings are an important forum for parents to share ideas and opinions and to meet other parents. The Parents and Friends Association receives ongoing support from the Parish Priest, Fr Sean Cullen, as well as the Principal Mr Gary Norris and the staff.

Parents and Friends Association, President

Student Leadership

It has been a great honour to have been elected school captains at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School for 2009. During the year we have had the opportunity to represent the students on a number of occasions. Our duties have included welcoming and thanking guests to our school, leading the Anzac Day March, presenting awards at our assemblies and
leading the school at various sporting carnivals. Our leadership role has been shared by all of our classmates in Year 6 and it has been an opportunity we will never forget.

School Captains

School Profile

School Context

St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School is a Catholic Systemic co-educational school located in Bowral. The school caters for students in Years K-6 and has a current enrolment of 414. The school was originally established by the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH) in 1903.

The school is centrally located in Bowral across the road from the Parish Church. The school has been fully refurbished in recent years, and the campus enjoys spacious grounds. St Thomas Aquinas is a full two stream school which draws predominantly from the Bowral Parish.

Student Enrolments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2009</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Indigenous</th>
<th>LBOTE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>199</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Diocesan Enrolment Policy and Procedures exist to assist schools in the equitable prioritising of enrolment applications and in order to ensure that the requirements of State and Commonwealth legislation are met. This documentation can be found on the Catholic Education Office website: www.dow.catholic.edu.au then go to the link Policies. No changes were made to this Diocesan Policy in 2009.

Student Attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2009</th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
<th>Year 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>94.4%</td>
<td>92.5%</td>
<td>93.2%</td>
<td>92.1%</td>
<td>93.2%</td>
<td>94.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each term an “Unknown Absence Report” is printed for each class showing the date range for the term. A copy of this report is sent to the teacher for their information. Individual “Student Absence Detail” reports are then printed with a notation requesting an explanation and signature from the parents for all unknown absences. When these reports are returned by the parents the rolls are marked accordingly and paperwork is filed.
**Staffing Profile**

There are a total of 24 teachers and 7 support staff at St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School. This number includes 15 full-time, 9 part-time teachers.

**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

**Teacher Attendance and Retention**

The average daily teacher attendance rate for 2009 was 97.21%. This does not include planned leave such as maternity or long service leave. The teacher retention rate from 2008 to 2009 was 100%.

**Professional Learning**

Professional learning opportunities are highly valued and sought by all members of St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School staff. During 2009 school personnel undertook a range of professional learning activities related to improving student outcomes.

These included:

- David Langford *Quality Learning* conference in Melbourne;
- Diocesan Learning & Teaching Framework coding in-service;
- Literacy & Numeracy Course;
- Special Education Course;
- Technology Network; and
- ACER Assessment conference in Perth.

School based expenditure on professional learning in 2009 was $22,749. This is in addition to expenditure on professional learning opportunities provided by the Catholic Education Office.
Catholic Life & Religious Education

St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School was founded by the Daughters 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 artifacts throughout the school allow children, parents and visitors to be immersed in Catholic Faith.

School liturgies are a highlight throughout the year and are meaningful Eucharistic celebrations of the Catholic faith on which the school is based. The school community is grateful to Fr Sean Cullen, the Parish Priest, for the support he gives to the school and for the close ties that have been established with the Parish. The school is fortunate to have a highly talented Liturgy group, who provide 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.

The school has a strong social justice focus, so that activities are organised to support many charities and worthwhile causes. Guest speakers from different charities speak to the children at assemblies to highlight how fortunate they are living in the Southern Highlands in Australia. Emphasis on social justice issues is very much a part of the Religious Education Program and the culture of the Catholic school. As a school community St Thomas Aquinas supports those within the community, who are experiencing difficulties through prayer, fund-raising and practical assistance.

Religious Literacy Assessment

The Religious Literacy Assessment program for Year 4 students was successfully implemented within schools across the diocese in 2009. In 2009 the school cohort consisted of Year 4 students who sat the Religious Literacy Assessment Workbook (Part A) on 31 August 2009 and 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:

• Knowledge of the Liturgical year and the church’s seasons;
• Ability to identify key symbols, signs and rituals of the Catholic Tradition;
• Understanding of the importance of the celebration of the Eucharist; and
• Appreciation of the Creation Story.

For Part A 9.6% of students were placed in the developing level, 61.5% in the achieving level and 28.8% were in the extending level.
For Part B 16.1% of students were placed in the developing level, 64.5% in the achieving level and 19.4% were in the extending level.

Combining Parts A and B, 15.4% of students were placed in the developing level, 63.5% in the achieving level and 21.2% were in the extending level for Religious Literacy.

**Financial Summary**

As with all schools throughout Australia 2009 was financially beneficial to St Thomas Aquinas School, with the announcement of the ‘Building the Education Revolution’ grants. This grant has enabled the school to refurbish the toilet block, painting of both the interior and exterior of the school, as well as putting plans in place to establish a multi purpose school hall. It is hoped that the construction will be completed in February 2011.

The Parents and Friends along with funds from the Parish School Enhancement and Debt Servicing Obligation (SEDSO) account have contributed to the updating of our technology throughout the school as well as completing the installation of reverse cycle air-conditioning in all classrooms.

The following graphs reflect the aggregated income and expenditure for St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School for the year ended 31 December 2009. This data is taken from the 2009 financial return to the Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.
Student Welfare

Introduction
St Thomas Aquinas has a strong emphasis on the welfare of students, parents and teachers. All are encouraged to live the Gospel values and treat each other with care and respect.

Pastoral Care
The Pastoral Care Program at St. Thomas Aquinas is working well. Evidence gathered from the playground safety survey indicates that the number of students reporting incidents of bullying is on the decline. Year 4 is still the area where this behaviour peaks. There has been a need to intervene more fully in a small number of cases that have been particularly identified.

The playground books support this with a minimal amount of incidents recorded by staff (Approximately 20 across all 3 areas).

The school counsellor has been working with many individual children and also a small group who are experiencing ongoing problems. This intervention has helped this group with these problems.

During the year there have been several families suffering with severe illness. The school community responded by providing meals were appropriate, and any other assistance to help with financial burdens.

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Wollongong are committed to a safe and supportive environment. The principles, guidelines and procedures set out in the Policy documents *Maintaining Right Relationships* and *Safe Work Environment* are the framework for school leaders, students, staff, parents and the wider community to develop a safe and supportive environment. The Diocesan *Complaints Handling Procedures* forms an important element in the Diocese’s commitment to ensuring safe and supportive environments for school communities. These documents can be found on the Catholic Education Office website: www.dow.catholic.edu.au then go to the link Policies. No changes were made to these Diocesan documents in 2009.

In compliance with the *NSW Reform Act 1990*, Corporal Punishment is banned in all schools within the Diocese of Wollongong.

Access to all policies and guidelines can be obtained by contacting the school office.

Learning and Teaching

Introduction
St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School has focused on the Inquiry Model of learning over the last few years. The school has had a focus on developing children’s thinking skills and the teachers have been working with students in the processes involved in following different lines of inquiry. This is the second year of the Learning Communities Project that has provided release time for teachers to develop Inquiry units that will challenge the student’s thinking. In
2009 more than half the teachers attend a conference presented by David Langford in Melbourne on *Quality Learning*. This has provided a framework for assisting with the implementation of improving the learning and teaching in the school. Langford has provided strategies and “tools” to maintain the focus on quality learning.

**Curriculum & Pedagogy**

In 2009 there has been a concentration on meeting the diverse needs of all learners as part of the School Review and Improvement Plan. The school has spent time as a staff working on pedagogies to ensure learning experiences are providing a range of opportunities for the many different abilities within each classroom. The scope and sequences for each Key Learning Area (KLA) are continually updated each term at the teacher’s planning days. The school is moving away from the focus on units to be taught, to a greater emphasis on the Foundation Statements and outcomes. Assessment is also being reviewed regularly, so that pedagogies reflect the learning/teaching cycle with assessment driving learning and teaching. This will continue to be a focus in the next few years.

**Cross Curriculum**

The school is continually developing integrated approach across all KLAs, and examining ways of working with a very crowded curriculum. In taking planning back to the Foundation Statements links are being made between the KLAs to develop Inquiry Units that cover many outcomes.

Literacy is always a cross curriculum area, and the topics of the Inquiry Units give a focus for working with text type writing and all sub-strands of English. The Library is a very vibrant part of the school and all Information Literacy work in Library lessons very much supports the work being studied in the classrooms.

**Meeting the needs of all students**

This year the school established a new Enrichment Team, with teachers working three mornings per week in each stage assisting students having difficulties. This team has developed procedures for testing, monitoring and tracking students to ensure they are able to access the curriculum. Meetings have been held with the class teacher, parents and the Enrichment teacher to develop Individual Education Plans and these are followed up throughout the year.

School Support Officers are employed to work with students to ensure each child’s individual needs are catered for and they assist the teacher with group work and one-to-one support.

**Expanding Learning Opportunities**

Children have had many opportunities to develop their gifts and talents particularly in:

- Music with a specialist teacher providing Liturgy Group; Boy’s Choir; Combined Choir in the Wollongong Eisteddfod; Guitar Group and the diverse experiences in the Music lessons;
- Sport with the opportunities to participate in the different levels of competition from school to Diocesan and State; Gala Days and STA Sports Days;
• Chess competitions between local schools in the Highlands;
• Art/Craft through competitions and the entries into the Moss Vale Show and Art exhibitions;
• Super Skippers organised by the Heart Foundation;
• Public Speaking competition; and
• University of NSW competitions in English and Mathematics.

Professional Learning

The school is committed to David Langford’s Quality Learning approach and professional development has been based on his philosophy. This will continue to be the focus for professional development with planning for more staff members to participate in his conferences.

In 2010 the Diocese of Wollongong is hosting such a conference and the remainder of the school’s teachers will be attending. This will provide the school with a K-6 focus for quality learning for students and teachers. This approach supports the work being carried out at the school with regard to The Diocesan School Review and Improvement (SRI) process, and the Diocesan Learning and Teaching Framework (DLTF).

The school’s special Learning Communities Project has encouraged professional dialogue amongst teachers while working and planning together in an Inquiry Model focused on the “Rocket”. Planning Days and staff development days have continued this focus.

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 National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (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.

NAPLAN

The NAPLAN was introduced for students in Years 3 and 5 in May 2008. 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.

Students have achieved excellent results in the NAPLAN testing for 2009 with a high proportion of the students in the higher bands. The areas of particularly high achievement are Reading, Year 3 Writing, Grammar and Punctuation, and Numeracy. Children in the lower bands are mainly those identified as having particular learning needs and these are being closely monitored by the school’s Enrichment Team.
Student Achievement in Bands

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 2009: % in Bands</th>
<th>YEAR 3</th>
<th></th>
<th>YEAR 5</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bands 1 and 2</td>
<td>Bands 3 and 4</td>
<td>Bands 5 and 6</td>
<td>Bands 3 and 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>School 2% 23% 76%</td>
<td>6% 31% 62%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National 15% 40% 42%</td>
<td>20% 46% 34%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>School 0% 18% 83%</td>
<td>13% 62% 24%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National 9% 45% 45%</td>
<td>18% 58% 24%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>School 5% 29% 66%</td>
<td>17% 55% 28%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National 15% 44% 39%</td>
<td>19% 52% 28%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar &amp; Punctuation</td>
<td>School 0% 18% 82%</td>
<td>4% 31% 66%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National 15% 35% 49%</td>
<td>17% 46% 36%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>School 5% 34% 61%</td>
<td>10% 47% 44%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National 16% 50% 32%</td>
<td>18% 55% 25%</td>
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</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) represent students who are achieving AT the NMS. Students in all other Bands are achieving ABOVE the NMS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAPLAN 2009: % AT or ABOVE NMS</th>
<th>YEAR 3</th>
<th>YEAR 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>School 100% 97%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National 96% 93%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>School 100% 97%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National 97% 94%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>School 100% 95%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National 94% 94%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar &amp; Punctuation</td>
<td>School 100% 98%</td>
<td>98%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National 94% 94%</td>
<td>94%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>School 100% 97%</td>
<td>97%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National 96% 96%</td>
<td>96%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Parent, Student and Staff Satisfaction

During the course of the year parents and students have been offered several opportunities to make comments about the policies and procedures the school has in place at St Thomas Aquinas with a view to identifying those which could need modifying, or changing altogether.

Of particular note here, was the survey sent home during Term 2 where parents were asked for comment on homework, spelling and the end of year award ceremony. It had been noted by staff that these particular areas were ones which received a considerable amount of concern when they met with parents during parent/teacher meetings.

The comments received from parents as well as students endorsed the changes which took place throughout the year in these particular areas. Parents and students, along with the staff of St Thomas Aquinas, have commented favourably on these changes that have been put in place, with a particular reference to the end of the year ceremony. Comments received regarding the award ceremony indicated that the changes made were an innovative approach to a system which had become antiquated, and that they gave a renewed enthusiasm to all students by identifying and naming areas of success for each individual.

Many families have recorded written notes of thanks and praise for the way in which the school is responding to the ever-changing needs of students and families. With these comments in mind, St Thomas Aquinas embarked on a series of forums and workshops during Term 4 this year in which recurring concerns regarding family and school issues were discussed in open workshop formats. The overwhelming response to this initiative will see these forums and workshops continue in 2010. Parents and students will again be asked to put forward their main concerns for dialogue and discussion, and where appropriate, changes to the school routine and policies will take place.

Surveys are conducted with students on a bi-annual basis to assess how each individual feels about their school both in the playground and in the classroom. These surveys have indicated a noticeable decline in the incidence of bullying, and the general behaviour of students has improved dramatically.

Students comment that they feel safe at school and enjoy the learning environment as well as all the extra-curricular activities which the school provides.

Regular whole staff meetings are held throughout each term so that the staff members are given an opportunity to discuss issues of concern. David Langford “tools” are used to advantage at these meetings, particularly the “Harvest Hub” to identify problems, suggest solutions and celebrate achievements. All staff members feel that their voices are being heard and that they have a real say in the direction that the school is heading. The results of the staff satisfaction survey, which was conducted by the CEO during Term 3, indicated an overwhelming support for the School Leadership Team and the school community spirit which is continually evolving.
The school recognises the need not to become complacent at any stage and to continue to look forward for new opportunities for growth. St Thomas Aquinas is continually guided by its Vision and Mission Statement which stands at the forefront of all that is happening in the school.

**School Review and Improvement**

School Review and Improvement is an ongoing process of self evaluation measured against a commonly agreed set of criteria. It informs action planning at the school level to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement. Above all, Catholic schools must be good schools with a strong learning orientation and a strong sense of purpose. In all aspects of improving and developing, schools should be learning-centred, constantly striving for excellence and have the student as their primary focus.

**School Review and Improvement components reviewed and rated in 2009:**

- **Key Area 1: Catholic Life and Religious Education**
  - 1.1 Vision and Mission
- **Key Area 2: Students and their Learning**
  - 2.1 Educational Potential
- **Key Area 3: Pedagogy**
  - 3.2 Provision for the Diverse Needs of Learners
- **Key Area 4: Human Resources Leadership and Management**
  - 4.3 An Ethical Workplace Culture
- **Key Area 6: Parents, Partnership, Consultation and Communication**
  - 6.1 Parent Involvement

**School Review and Improvement components to be reviewed and rated in 2010:**

- **Key Area 2: Students and their Learning**
  - 2.4 Integration of Information & Communication Technology (ICT)
- **Key Area 3: Pedagogy**
  - 3.3 Teaching Practices
  - 3.4 Planning, Programming and Evaluation
- **Key Area 4: Human Resources Leadership and Management**
  - 4.2 Professional Development of Staff
- **Key Area 6: Parents, Partnership, Consultation and Communication**
  - 6.1 Parent Involvement