



# St Thomas Aquinas School Norlane

## 2020 Annual Report to the School Community



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## Minimum Standards Attestation

I, Rodney Sims, attest that St Thomas Aquinas School is compliant with:

- All of the requirements for the minimum standards and other requirements for the registration of schools as specified in *the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)* and the *Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Vic)*, except where the school has been granted an exemption from any of these requirements by the VRQA
- Australian Government accountability requirements related to the 2020 school year under the *Australian Education Act 2013 (Cth)* and the *Australian Education Regulations 2013 (Cth)*
- The Child Safe Standards prescribed in Ministerial Order No.870 - Child Safe Standards, Managing Risk of Child Abuse in School.

14/05/2021

**NOTE:** The School's financial performance information has been provided to the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) and will be available for the community to access from their website at [www.acnc.gov.au](http://www.acnc.gov.au)

## Our School Vision

At St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Primary School, we aim to empower children in their learning for life and to develop skills necessary to face challenges with hope, faith and resilience.

We journey together as a faith community valuing our Catholic identity.

Children are the heart of our community, and we support parents to become actively involved in their children's learning.

We value opportunities for learning and reflection that challenge us to aspire to individual excellence.

## School Overview

St Thomas Aquinas Primary School is the Catholic primary school in the parish of Norlane. Norlane is a northern suburb of Geelong that faces many challenges. Unemployment and under-employment, social and addiction issues make life difficult for many in the area. The St Thomas Aquinas community is not immune to these issues.

Many families at St Thomas Aquinas face significant challenges. With this in mind, the school community works tirelessly to be as inclusive as it can be and to provide connections between families and services within the community. St Thomas Aquinas School prides itself on its outreach work with the families of the school. With welfare being an important part of children's social and emotional wellbeing, the school, through its arrangements with various agencies, provides a range of services to support families in need.

St Thomas Aquinas strives to provide a safe and secure environment for our children and families. We offer a comprehensive Catholic education through offering rich experiences and opportunities that may not otherwise be accessible to our families.

We are now seeing an increasing evangelization within our school community. St Thomas Aquinas has a diverse student population and celebrates the things that make us similar and the things that make us different. The school values the cultures and the experiences of its community and seeks to build strong relationships with all in its community.

The school has recently upgraded facilities that enable contemporary learning and teaching to take place. The school community takes pride in the school's physical environment and utilizes all areas to support learning for its children. The school is committed to providing the children of Norlane with the support they need and opportunities in learning, wellbeing and faith development to ensure that they are successful participants in society. The school is committed to working in partnership with families and the wider community to provide outstanding learning opportunities for its students.

## Principal's Report

Dear Parents and Friends of St Thomas Aquinas Primary School, Norlane,

I am pleased to present the 2020 Annual Report to the School Community. St Thomas Aquinas is a wonderfully dynamic school community which is well-supported by you all.

I acknowledge the Wadawurrung people, the traditional custodians of the land on which St Thomas Aquinas rests and pay my respects to their elders - past, present and future.

2020 was certainly a year unlike any other we have experienced. And I hope we never get to experience it again. The COVID-19 pandemic and the periods of remote learning and lockdown certainly challenged us all. The school community responded to that challenge with strength and compassion.

I acknowledge the professional, dedicated staff members who work tirelessly to provide excellent learning opportunities for your children, both onsite and through periods of remote learning. The professionalism of the teaching staff, supported by caring learning support officers, has created a community where learning is central and each child is valued.

I am thankful for the support of our parent community. The partnership the school has with its families is without peer. The trust parents place in the school and the way parents take pride in their children's school is exemplary. Your commitment to your child's education during a difficult year was outstanding.

I wish to thank our Parish Priest, Fr Ray Zammit MSSP, and the wider parish community for their support of Catholic education within Norlane. We have worked to build authentic connections between the school and parish communities and I see this as an important development within our community.

I am grateful for the support of Catholic Education Melbourne, both the Western Region Office and the Central Office, and the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria in supporting St Thomas Aquinas in our unique mission within the Church. I value the professionalism and support of staff, particularly those in the Western Region Office.

Finally, I want to thank the wonderful children we have the pleasure to work with. It isn't always easy but you are the reason we are all here. I thank you for your learning, your care for each other and your respect for our staff.

This annual report reports on the five dimensions of Catholic education. The rest of this report covers these areas. I ask you to read through and come forward if you have any questions.

Rodney Sims

Principal

## Education in Faith

### Goals & Intended Outcomes

#### Goal

At St Thomas Aquinas we believe in a culture of high expectations which embodies the school values of Respect, Compassion, Justice and Service which makes our Catholic Identity visible in our thinking, words and actions.

#### Intended Outcome

That student interactions will demonstrate deeper commitment to Gospel values, social justice and the Christian call to service.

### Achievements

The true essence of Education in Faith is community, the complexities of 2020 made the opportunity to share our faith in community very difficult.

With our teaching community still able to engage our families with rich learning opportunities in a virtual space, our Religious Education Learning and Teaching program was still able to be delivered in a meaningful way.

With St Thomas Aquinas classrooms structured in a multi-age setting, it was important to ensure the Religious Education Curriculum was taught as we rotate through an 'A and B cycle' to make certain the entire Religious Education framework is covered.

One of our achievements in 2020 was the successful delivery of the 'A Cycle' of our Religious Education framework.

Another area of success was our ability to still carry out our Sacramental program in 2020. The constant restrictions towards gathering in places of worship made it an unlikely event in 2020. Though, with our ability to come together at short notice and still deliver a Sacramental Program that saw Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation celebrated in 2020 was a significant milestone.

The highlight of our church calendar was the End of Year Mass that saw a difficult learning year acknowledged as well as our Graduating Class of 2020 celebrated in a meaningful liturgy.

#### VALUE ADDED

- Religious Education units of work, planned in teams with the assistance and input of the Religious Education Leader.
- Professional Learning Development still added through Facilitated Planning opportunities done through Virtual meetings
- Strengthening meditation and mindfulness to be an accepted part of the culture of the school
- The learning program for those students in their Sacramental Journey still implemented

- The Sacramental Program still carried out with candidates still able to celebrate their Reconciliation, First Eucharist and Confirmation in meaningful ways.



## Learning & Teaching

### Goals & Intended Outcomes

#### Goal

- To develop a shared vision for learning and teaching in our school
- To be a place of safety that promotes conditions for wellbeing, learning and connection

#### Intended Outcomes

- High expectations of each member of the community through trust, respect and collaboration
- A consistent approach with student support across learning, wellbeing, behaviour
- Empowering teachers to support students with learning, wellbeing, behaviour

### Achievements

In 2020, the school appointed some experienced teacher leaders to support student learning and staff professional capacity. They included:

- F-2 Learning Leader
- 3-6 Learning Leader
- Learning Diversity Leader
- Speech Pathologist
- Religious Education Leader
- Student Wellbeing Leader
- Family School Community Partnership Leader

We also continued initiatives such as:

- Sustaining of the St Thomas Aquinas Mentoring Program (STAMPS) to our junior children. This is an individual literacy assistance and early intervention program using volunteers from our parent body and community three mornings a week. Unfortunately, the volunteer program stopped during the first lock down period and did not resume for the year. Many of our volunteers are older and felt unsure about being at school in person.
- Continued implementation of LLI (Levelled Literacy Intervention). This program is aimed at years 2, 3 and 4 students who require additional literacy assistance.
- Extensive program of support for children who require further support in their learning.

Ongoing explicit and facilitated planning has lifted the quality of teaching and learning within the school. Teachers plan for a day per week, led by leaders of learning and teaching. These facilitated planning sessions were vital during the two periods of COVID-19 lock down and remote learning. Learning and teaching leaders, teachers and learning support officers continued to provide lessons and intervention support via Zoom.

## STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

St Thomas Aquinas School has an extensive schedule of assessing student learning. With a focus on assessment for learning, the staff are able to quickly and flexibly plan for student learning. During the periods of remote learning, we continued our learning programs for all students and continued our intervention program.

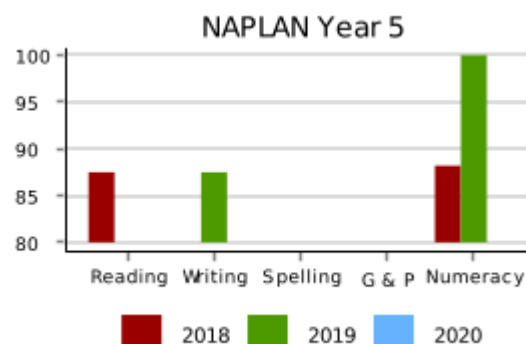
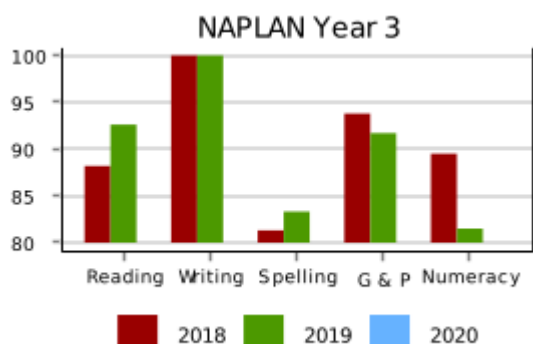
Teachers reported that all children continued to make improvements in their learning over the period of the year. They recognised that remote learning had a negative impact upon some of our most vulnerable children.

PROPORTION OF STUDENTS MEETING THE MINIMUM STANDARDS					
NAPLAN TESTS	2018	2019	2018 – 2019	2020	2019 – 2020
	%	%	Changes	%	Changes
			%	*	*
YR 03 Grammar & Punctuation	93.8	91.7	-2.1		
YR 03 Numeracy	89.5	81.5	-8.0		
YR 03 Reading	88.2	92.6	4.4		
YR 03 Spelling	81.3	83.3	2.0		
YR 03 Writing	100.0	100.0	0.0		
YR 05 Grammar & Punctuation	64.3	80.0	15.7		
YR 05 Numeracy	88.2	100.0	11.8		
YR 05 Reading	87.5	75.0	-12.5		
YR 05 Spelling	78.6	80.0	1.4		
YR 05 Writing	71.4	87.5	16.1		

\* There are no NAPLAN results to report in 2020 as the Australian Government decided that due to the COVID-19 pandemic NAPLAN Assessments would not take place.

\*\* Data cannot be reported for this year as the number of students that sat the test was below 5 and the data has been suppressed for privacy reasons in accordance with the ACARA NAPLAN data reporting provisions.

\*\*\* No students sat the NAPLAN tests in this year level and in one or both of the relevant years.



## Student Wellbeing

### Goals & Intended Outcomes

At the end of 2019 the leadership team worked collaboratively and prioritised Wellbeing as stated:

At St Thomas Aquinas we believe we are a place of safety that promotes conditions for wellbeing, learning and connection. We hold high expectations of each member of the community through trust, respect and collaboration. We strive for a consistent approach with student support that empowers teachers to support students holistically. Our whole community is supportive of and enacts the school's commitment to child safety and success.

In Wellbeing this is lived out when:

- A consistent approach to student behaviour is visible across the school community.
- Teachers, students and families feel safe and supported in the school environment.

### Achievements

At St Thomas Aquinas School we believe that the best relationships are respectful ones. During the 2020 school year the wellbeing of all our students and their families was paramount.

The challenging COVID lock downs and associated home learning periods provided an opportunity for all to reflect on the importance of wellbeing. The learning and teaching was centred around the social and emotional needs of all students and their families. Families at risk were provided additional support through regular home visits and telephone calls. On -site supervision was provided for students of essential workers and 'at-risk' students.

Throughout the 2020 school year we endeavoured to build a strong sense of understanding and empathy in what was a very 'different' learning environment for all.

Our school is also a lead school in helping educate students on the importance of Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships. We recognise that all students have individual strengths and challenges. Additional support is provided for students whose day to day learning is influenced by the existence of one or more challenges. In implementing Social and Emotional Learning our school strives to build a respectful culture and develop practices enhancing the knowledge of healthy relationships, respect and equality for all individuals of the community.

Social and Emotional learning and teaching highlights the importance of individuals having awareness of their own emotions and the impact these emotions can have on themselves and others. Behaviours of individuals can affect the emotions of self and others.

#### VALUE ADDED

During 2020 the focus on Social Emotional Learning was paramount. Through Social and Emotional Learning students recognise the importance of individuals having awareness of their own emotions and the impact these emotions can have on themselves and others. They understand that behaviours can affect the emotions of self and others. We endeavoured to build up a strong sense of understanding and empathy by encouraging our students to make

responsible choices about personal and social behaviour. Our school is also a lead school in helping educate students on the importance of Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships.

Many of the planned incursions and excursions which were centred around student wellbeing were unable to occur or were offered in a modified form due to the COVID lock-downs throughout the year.

## STUDENT SATISFACTION

Students reported that they liked some elements of remote learning during the COVID-19 lock down but really missed the in person contact with their peers and educators. They enjoyed being able to have more voice in their learning and being able to complete learning at their own pace. They reported that there were many technical issues with remote learning. With this feedback, the second period of remote learning had less class lessons over Zoom. Teachers and learning support officers were proactive in contacting children who may have missed lessons. Families appreciated the support in this area.

## STUDENT ATTENDANCE

Student attendance was recorded daily during 2020; including the COVID lock down periods. It was recorded on individual student files on nforma and also on student wellbeing documented notes. Daily absenteeism was followed up by home group teachers. When necessary (e.g. if a student had not presented for 3 days this was followed up by a member of the leadership team). This was managed in an empathetic manner with consideration for the individual circumstances of the family. At times throughout the 2020 year home visits from Principal, Deputy Principal or Family School Partnerships Liaison Convenor were necessitated to ensure the safety of the student and/or wellbeing of the family.

AVERAGE STUDENT ATTENDANCE RATE BY YEAR LEVEL	
Y01	77.7%
Y02	81.4%
Y03	77.1%
Y04	77.8%
Y05	84.6%
Y06	76.1%
Overall average attendance	79.1%

## Child Safe Standards

### Goals & Intended Outcomes

St Thomas Aquinas takes Child Safety seriously and recognises that some people in our community have challenges managing their behaviour. This foundation has carried through into 2020.

### Achievements

As a school, we have close working relationships with agencies that support children and families in our community such as DHHS, Child Protection and Barwon Child Youth and Family. All staff members are required to undertake training in mandatory reporting and are encouraged to make formal reports and inquiries. Staff are supported throughout the reporting process. Extensive notes are taken and filed with the student's information.

During remote learning in 2020, teachers and learning support officers conducted lessons via Zoom. Staff undertook professional learning sessions about child safety and online learning. All sessions either had two or more staff members online in the same virtual classroom or online lessons were recorded. Parents were encouraged to be present during all online lessons.

The school has developed a Child Safe Policy and Code of Conduct for Staff, Volunteers and Contractors. This is revisited regularly with these groups to ensure compliance and safety of children.

The school has a Code of Conduct for Students that emphasises the need for safety. Parents and carers are also subject to a Code of Conduct that regulates unacceptable behaviour from adults in our community.

Human resource practices ensure that employment processes are consistent with the Child Safe Standards and recommendations of CEM. References of prospective employees are checked and any areas of concern are flagged. Given the challenges many of our children face, the employment of the right staff is essential.

Our response to the Child Safe Standards are in line with our obligation under the law, our commitment to our communities and are designed to minimise the risk of harm to our children.

The school recognises its ongoing commitment to promoting the safety and wellbeing of children in the immediate school community and in the greater community.

School staff are familiar with the issue of Reportable Conduct and take proactive steps to ensure they are always in safe situations.

## Leadership & Management

### Goals & Intended Outcomes

#### Goal

To develop a shared vision for learning and teaching in our school

#### Intended Outcomes

- Rigour and standards for high expectations around growth for all students
- Structures and processes that ensure clarity and consistency and create and enhance conditions for learning
- Professional learning pathways for all staff that are aligned to the school's vision and school improvement plan
- A culture that welcomes coaching and mentoring for all

#### Achievements

Because of our belief in personalising the learning of all our students, we allocated five hours each week to planning in teams. This planning is facilitated by the F- 2 Learning & Teaching Leader and the 3-6 Learning & Teaching Leader and focuses on the use of data collected in the areas of Literacy, Numeracy and Inquiry to plan the future learning of the students. The Learning Diversity, F-2 L&T and 3-6 L&T leaders, Student Wellbeing Leader and School Community Partnerships Leader worked cooperatively to lead and manage learning across the school.

Keeping up to date professionally is important for our staff. Therefore, we encourage each member of staff to attend relevant Professional Development activities. Our staff models our belief of being life-long learners through continuously improving our knowledge and skills in education. Teachers have been encouraged to set goals relating to AITSL standards, aimed at refining their practice. These goals are reviewed at annual review meetings and new goals set or existing goals refined.

The school is extremely supportive of staff who are undertaking formal, post-graduate study. In 2020, six teachers were undertaking accreditation studies through CEM. A further two teachers were undertaking the Master of Student Wellbeing course, sponsored by the school and CEM/MACS at ACU.

With changes in school leadership and staff, the leadership team recognized that having clear role descriptions and expectations of colleagues, students and parents will assist with lifting the performance of the school. These clear roles and expectations have had a positive impact on the school, learning and teaching and the community.

Professional learning throughout the year has been focused on building staff capacity in teaching and in developing knowledge and skills in data analysis. Teaching staff meet each week in powerful facilitated planning, following Sharratt and Fullan's Putting Faces on the Data model. Other professional learning during the year included Berry Street Trauma Informed Positive Education, Respectful Relationships.



**EXPENDITURE AND TEACHER PARTICIPATION IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

Description of Professional Learning undertaken in 2020

- Facilitated Planning
- Professional Learning Communities
- STEM for Humanity: Designing Solutions for the Common Good
- Western Beginning Teachers' Network
- Agile Leadership
- Respectful Relationships
- Empowering Students within Respectful Relationships for Teachers
- PROTECT
- Geelong Zone Principal Network
- Geelong Zone Deputy Principals Network
- Supporting and Engaging Families During COVID19
- First Aid training
- WRO Leading Improvement for Learning
- ICON training for Admin and Principal
- Support for Staff studying for accreditation (6 staff members), Master of Student Wellbeing (2 staff members)

Number of teachers who participated in PL in 2020	30
Average expenditure per teacher for PL	\$350

**TEACHER SATISFACTION**

Staff found 2020 a challenging experience. They were proud of the work that they achieved, particularly during the periods of remote learning. In reflecting after the second period on lock down, staff noted:

*Miss working face to face with the children, sometimes it's difficult to explain a topic or provide information to some students that have additional learning needs over a screen.*

**Challenging to stay motivated for both students and teachers.**

*(It was great) Seeing students and families grow together. Seeing a different side to the student.*

**Without constant feedback and interaction from staff or parents, some students have lacked motivation and will power to continue with or take responsibility for their own learning.**

*Conversations with parents and children to just 'check in' and build community. Parents appreciation this focus and began to open up and communicate more.*

*Realisation that some students and families really struggle with change*

*This highlights the critical aspect of school as a safe place, of community and of unconditional positive regard.*

***Reframes public perceptions about teachers in a positive way. This could never have been achieved via other means.***

The experience of lock down, remote learning and working from home certainly had an impact upon staff. They appreciated the opportunity to be back at school and working side by side with colleagues and students.

**TEACHING STAFF ATTENDANCE RATE**

Teaching Staff Attendance Rate	88.6%
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**ALL STAFF RETENTION RATE**

Staff Retention Rate	88.4%
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**TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS**

Doctorate	0.0%
Masters	14.3%
Graduate	28.6%
Graduate Certificate	4.8%
Bachelor Degree	71.4%
Advanced Diploma	14.3%
No Qualifications Listed	4.8%

STAFF COMPOSITION	
Principal Class (Headcount)	4.0
Teaching Staff (Headcount)	31.0
Teaching Staff (FTE)	23.3
Non-Teaching Staff (Headcount)	19.0
Non-Teaching Staff (FTE)	21.3
Indigenous Teaching Staff (Headcount)	0.0

## School Community

### Goals & Intended Outcomes

To engage parents as active partners in their child's Learning - School Review 2019 recommendation.

### Achievements

Achievements:

- Families feeling safe and connected to the school
- New Community partnerships formed to ensure equity for learning
- Continuity of Learning
- Zoom Parent Community conversations
- St. Thomas Aquinas shared good practice Australia wide presenting at a Family-School-Partnership Webinar for Deakin University
- New Learnings captured

Our priority during the crisis phase of the Covid-19 lock down was to keep our students and families feeling **safe and connected** to the school. Therefore, we began the journey to actively seek effective interactions with our families by providing timely, explicit, and "real-time" information as official updates were received from Catholic Education Melbourne. We used various platforms, including social media, care monkey, emails, SMS, and personal

phone calls home, to ensure all families were reached and received accurate information to minimise anxiety about the unknown. In addition, family-school support systems were developed for our most vulnerable families.

To ensure the **continuity of learning**, we created a whole school online learning environment. A Google survey provided us with information on our family's technology needs. To no surprise, we found the gap was significant. To ensure **equity and access** to learning for our students, technology, WI-FI, and tech support were provided to every student/family in need.

We sourced new community partnerships to support resourcing for home learning. These partnerships provided stationery and paper resources for every student, including technology for families in need through the local Lions Club. These partnerships are still active in varying capacities.

Remote Learning 2.0 allowed us to **cleanse** and refine our whole school remote learning practice. We **waved** our new learnings into an adjusted model for student learning and parent engagement. During remote learning 2.0, we emphasized the value of synchronized learning alongside our synchronous program and parents as ongoing educators. These changes included real-time and recorded parent-friendly videos on particular learning strategies that provided the

opportunity for parents to interact with teachers. In addition, the junior community had parents/carers participating in guided reading and intervention classes alongside the children.

## PARENT SATISFACTION

There is no doubt that the 'home-school' experience drew students, families, and teachers into a stronger collaborative partnership around learning. Qualitative evidence collected through Zoom Community conversations, wellbeing/learning data, family communication logs, and real-time family engagement in zoom classes, particularly in the junior grades, provided us with a picture to **capture new beliefs and good practice**. At the very least, there was an evident appreciation for 'the other' in our family-school partnership goal.

Quotes drawn from Community Conversations during remote learning 1.0:

1. "I am finding out more now than when she was at actual school" - Grade 4 parent
2. "I feel like I know the teacher better now, and we have a better relationship because of all the talking" - Grade 2 parent
3. "If I needed a bit of support, I could email Miss S, and if she wasn't available straight away, we did a bit of what I call everywhere learning" - Grade 3 Parent
4. "J (Child) and I struggle a lot communicating with each other, but we bonded a lot having to learn together at home" - Grade 2 parent

The FSP school leader presented for Deakin University's webinar on 'Building Family-School Partnerships in an online learning environment.' This opportunity provided a wide-reaching platform to share good practices, new learnings and amplify our parent voice Australia-wide.

## Future Directions

At St Thomas Aquinas, we believe in a culture of rigour and standards with high expectations around growth for all students. Teachers offer a differentiated program that is reflective of individual student needs. At St Thomas Aquinas, we encourage teachers and students to be reflective in their learning, thinking and actions.

Over the next four years, we want to develop collective teacher efficacy to ensure consistency in all areas of the school. We will refine structures and processes to enhance a high-performance culture that is built on respect, trust and collaboration.

***We will develop a shared vision for teaching and learning in our school through having:***

- Structures and processes that ensure clarity and consistency and create and enhance conditions for learning
- Rigour and standards for high expectations around growth for all students
- Professional learning pathways for all staff that are aligned to the school's vision and school improvement plan

***We will develop a culture in which the school values of respect, compassion, justice and service are lived out in our daily life through having:***

- A culture of high expectations, respect, trust and collaboration
- A school that is a place of safety for all
- Our Catholic identity visible in our thinking, words and actions

***We will be a place of safety that promotes conditions for wellbeing, learning and connection through having:***

- High expectations of each member of the community
- A consistent approach to student support across learning, wellbeing and behaviour
- A culture which empowers teachers and support staff to support students with learning, wellbeing and behaviour