

# FOCUS



on

ST MARY & ST THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL  
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*'Together we strive for excellence, inspired by the joy of the Gospel'.*

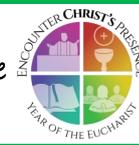


3rd December 2021



## Year of The Eucharist

Go out and serve the world through the nourishment of the Eucharist.



### Stella Lane - Road Closure

Please note that Stella Lane will be closed between 9.30 a.m. - 2.30 p.m. week beginning Monday 6th December until Friday 10th December. Essential work is being carried out.

### School events, Class Mass, and Parents/Carers attendance

Firstly, can we just thank you all for your patience and understanding during these challenging times. I appreciate how frustrating it must be for parents not being able to come into school and watch their child perform in an assembly or attend a Christmas Event, but please be re-assured that we are continuing to do our best to ensure all children partake in all the planned activities leading up to Christmas.

The Director of Public Health Gateshead has issued a letter to all schools, which has now been shared with parents and has strongly advised that parents and carers do not attend school events until further notice due to COVID-19 infections starting to increase.

This is very disappointing and now means that, as a school, we will have to review our planned events to which parents were invited.

However, in school we will still be going ahead with celebrating this wonderful time of year with the children. We will be creating a Nativity performance as planned and this will be released online during the last week of term. We also have planned, through the magic of technology, zoom calls with Father Christmas. As well as this, Christmas jumper day celebrations will still go ahead.

We apologise once again for any inconvenience this has caused. We hope you agree that it is important at this time of year to keep COVID-19 case numbers low and to minimise the risk to all in our community. We are working in conjunction with Gateshead Council and will continue to follow their advice to help reduce the risk for our children, staff, and wider community.



### Stella Christmas Mass Times

- Friday 24th Dec - 2.30 p.m. First Mass of Christmas - Children/Families;  
4.00 p.m. 2nd Mass of Christmas - Children/Families;  
5.30 p.m. Third Mass Of Christmas;  
7.00 p.m. Fourth Mass of Christmas.
- Saturday 25th Dec 10.00 a.m. Christmas Day Mass.  
\*\*\*No 5.00 p.m. VIGIL MASS TODAY!!\*\*\*
- Sunday 26th Dec - 10.00 a.m. Sunday Mass - The Holy Family;  
11.00 a.m. Sunday Mass - The Holy Family.

The early Christmas Eve Masses tend to be more orientated towards the children and families, with the children coming along in 'onesies' and often fancy dress too. They also do the readings and the Offertory Procession.

### Christmas Jumper Day

All children are encouraged to come into school on Friday 10th December wearing their Christmas jumpers. We ask each child for a 50p donation which will go to Brain Tumour North East Charity. Terry, the Viking on stilts will also be in school that day playing the Northumbrian Pipes. Inexpensive gifts will be on sale that day and all money raised will be given to Brain Tumour charity.

### Christmas Holidays

School will close at 3.15 p.m. on Friday 17th December for the Christmas Holidays and re-open again on Wednesday 5th January 2022.



## **Parental Consultation re. Academies**

Thank you to everyone who sent in their comments. All of the comments received were forwarded to the Bishop Wilkinson Trust. Mr Nick Hurn (CEO of Trust) has replied to the comments which are included in this weeks newsletter for you to read.

**Q \* In what way is the provision of Catholic education currently less than it might be? The breadth, depth and quantity of RE work during home-learning periods does not lead me to believe this element of children's education is going amiss somehow. In what way is it lessened by non-academy status?**

The main purpose of all schools joining the Trust is for all parties to collectively protect, secure and develop Catholic education in the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. Thus, ensuring that every school is within a mutually supportive structure and each and every child receives the very best educational opportunities possible. The development of Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust builds on the concept of families of schools. It will enable clear working relationships to be established between Catholic schools in order to assist with school improvement, leadership, succession, recruitment, formation, governance and co-operation thereby strengthening our Catholic mission. The whole concept of working together is not just about what the school can receive from the Trust but how the school can contribute to the Catholic education of all children in the Trust through collaboration.

Whilst partnership working has always been strong in our Diocese, and it is expected to continue. Working in a more formal relationship within a larger Trust will ensure that all schools are supported and are mutually dependent. Working within and between Trusts will open up more creative possibilities for sharing good practice, including Religious Education. Thus, further strengthening the Catholic family. A Catholic trust where every school has its place will mean that no individual school will be left isolated or vulnerable in a rapidly changing environment.

**Q \* A lot of support is given to the notion that non-academy schools are somehow hampered by local government involvement. But my understanding is that local government provides oversight on financial management - they supply two members of the board of governors - but neither they nor the council are in overall control. Additionally, I am aware that local government also provides support services that would be lost. If the Bishop Wilkinson Trust "provide strong and effective governance to all schools in the trust", in what way is the overall effect at once more liberating, but also stronger and more effective. Who is overseeing this governance and how can parents and carers effect change in any way?**

As a Diocesan school it is incorrect to assume that a maintained Catholic school has ever had full control of their own destiny. We all work for and are directed by the Bishop and in this instance the Trust is another part of the Bishops' plan. That said as part of the Bishop Wilkinson Trust the Local Governing Committee will still have almost identical levels of control and responsibility as they did prior to their conversion. The LGC and Head Teacher will still lead and control the key decisions within the school. With regard to the suggestion that services will be lost this is not entirely accurate as some will be retained but some will be replaced and enhanced by the Trust. The Bishop and Diocese still have overall responsibility for all of the governance in every Catholic school regardless of whether they are in a Trust or not. That hasn't changed meaning that the parents can still communicate with the LGC in the usual way.

**Q \* Do schools not already group together to share resources and best practice?**

Yes, but not at the same level as they are as part of the Trust. We currently have 32 Primary schools in our partnership and by 2022 we will have 43. Already we have created a Centre for Teaching which means we can provide dedicated CPD, support and Training for our schools. We provide Early Careers Training, a whole suite of National Professional Qualifications and School improvement services.

**Q \* What benefits? It mentions it will be better but how?**

Schools already part of the Trust have reported that clear working relationships have been established between the partner schools, Raising Achievement Team and the Trust in order to assist with school improvement, leadership, succession, recruitment, formation, governance and co-operation thereby strengthening our Catholic mission. This not only has help individual schools to improve but ultimately and more importantly this has led to better provision, experience and outcomes for the children. The whole concept of working together is not just about what the school can receive from the Trust but how the school can contribute to the Catholic education of all children in the Trust through collaboration.

**Q \* What is the timescale for changes to be made?**

Some aspects of the transition will be immediate for example work within Finance, Governance, HR, Buildings will automatically become part of the trust from the conversion date. School improvement changes all depends on the circumstances of each school. If a school is in difficulty then we would hope to help the school transform itself and improve their outcomes and provision fairly rapidly. If the school is performing well then there wouldn't need to be any major change indeed any changes will be gradual.

## Year 5 Mass

Children in Year 5 will be attending Mass in church on Thursday 9th December at 9.10 a.m.

## Reverse Advent Calendar

As a school, we have decided to continue to work together to help people in need in our local community through Gateshead Foodbank.

This year we will try a 'Reverse Advent Calendar'. The children are invited to bring into school, as often as possible, any food that they can. This will help those less fortunate who are struggling this Christmas time.

On Friday's it would be nice to try to bring in some Christmas themed chocolates for children who won't receive a treat this year. We will be running the Reverse Advent Calendar until Wednesday 15th December 2021.



## Vacancy for a Lunch-time Assistant at St Mary & St Thomas Aquinas Primary School

We have a vacancy for the above position starting in our school from Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

The post holder will work with our other Lunch-time Assistants who supervise and assist the children during their lunch breaks. The hours are 12noon – 1pm Monday to Friday (term-time only).

If you would like to become a member of our school team, applications forms and a full job description are available from the school office or by email from the School Business Manager at

[theresacostello@gateshead.gov.uk](mailto:theresacostello@gateshead.gov.uk). You are very welcome to call us or pop in to discuss the vacancy if you wish.

## Nursery Applications

The closing date for applications to our very popular Nursery school is 31st December 2021. Therefore, if you have a child who is eligible to start Nursery from September 2022 please submit your application before the 31st December deadline. Application forms can be obtained from the School Business Manager by emailing [theresacostello@gateshead.gov.uk](mailto:theresacostello@gateshead.gov.uk) or calling the school office on 0191 4143116.

J H C A E R P O J N H  
 E E P H E L P O E P G  
 S P P R E A C H S D D  
 U P R O P S G B T E E  
 S P R O P H E T V S T  
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## WEDNESDAY WORDSEARCH

SMARTSEARCHERS FIND THESE EIGHT WORDS EITHER ACROSS OR DOWN

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- 
- 
- 
- 

JOHN  
 PROPHET  
 LIVED  
 DESERT  
 PREACH  
 PEOPLE  
 PREPARE  
 JESUS

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SUPERSEARCHERS FIND THE WORDS BACKWARDS OR DIAGONALLY

Cross out the letters **i t m** in the jumbled words below to find 4 real words.

pemopilet Jothinm Jetsumsi piretparem

" \_\_\_\_\_ went out to baptise and to \_\_\_\_\_  
 the \_\_\_\_\_ for the coming of \_\_\_\_\_."

## Did someone say Christmas Party!

School will provide refreshments for the children throughout school. We ask that on your child's allocated party day that they come to school in their party clothes.

- December 13th - Years 1 and 2
- December 14th - Year 3 and 4
- December 15th - Nursery
- December 16th - Reception
- December 17th - Years 5 and 6



Advent is traditionally a time to do more good works. For ideas about what you can do to bring God's love to others this Christmas, see CAFOD's Advent Calendar at: [cafod.org.uk](http://cafod.org.uk)



Write a promise and then draw a big smile on Smiley

This week I will try my best to...

.....  
 .....



For more, see: [wednesdayword.org](http://wednesdayword.org) and [cbcew.org.uk](http://cbcew.org.uk)

November 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

### **COVID-19 – School events and Parent/Carer attendance**

I would like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to you and your family for all you have done and continue to do to help us reduce the risk of COVID-19 in Gateshead. I appreciate just how difficult it has been through all the different stages and challenges of this pandemic.

We all want to see as many of our children and young people in school as possible and having as 'normal' and positive a school experience as we can manage. Much as we would all like it to be, the pandemic is not over. Whilst it is clear that the vaccination programme is effective in preventing serious disease and deaths, the vaccine is never going to stop all transmission, and resultant harm, on its own.

Although cases in school age children across Gateshead had reduced, the number of COVID-19 infections in this age group has again started to increase in recent days following the return from half term. In the last four weeks just over 20% of infections were in those aged 5-14 years old and we are subsequently seeing cases transfer into older age groups. Therefore, we are still advising schools to remain cautious in their approaches to managing COVID 19 within the school setting.

Schools are not being asked to cancel events that take place in school, such as Christmas parties and concerts. Individual schools will make the decision whether these events can be safely managed within their school, in line with their individual unique risk assessment. However, we are advising that these, and other activities, do not currently take place as whole school events.

Since schools returned in September 2021, we have advised them to continue to limit visitors to the school to those who are classed as essential e.g., for educational/curriculum purposes, to support pupils, or where a virtual meeting is not practicable. This again would be for each individual school to decide whether a visitor is essential.

However, we have advised schools that parents/carers/other visitors are not invited to attend non-essential indoor events such as assemblies, concerts, and Christmas events, at this time. Whilst we understand that this is disappointing for parents/carers, our schools have a duty to protect all children and staff whilst attending their settings. Any advice given to schools is to try and minimise the risk of transmission within their setting as much as practicably possible. Although we know that many social settings are open to the public, we have a duty to reduce the risk for our children, staff and wider community.

We continue to closely monitor the number of COVID-19 infections and keep advice and guidance under review.

Yours sincerely



Alice Wiseman  
Director of Public Health