



School Aims

As a Catholic School we aim:

- to promote Gospel values of love, understanding and respect through all our activities and at all times.
- to develop all members of our community spiritually, morally, intellectually, socially and physically.
- to provide the highest possible standards of learning and teaching.
- to develop in our young people awareness of and respect for different cultures and an understanding of our social responsibilities.
- to nurture in our young people creativity and aesthetic appreciation.
- to provide a safe, stimulating and welcoming environment.
- to work in close partnership with parents, the Church and the wider community.
- to provide opportunities for the personal and professional development of staff.



Message from the Head Teacher

Dear Parent/Guardian

With another term drawing to a close the school is preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ through prayer, liturgical celebration, opportunities for personal reflection and charitable acts. It is during Advent that we take the opportunity as a Community of Faith and Learning to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas. We reflect on our values as a school and strive to ensure we follow the example of Christ through our service to others.

It is because we are a Community of Faith and Learning that we can all take encouragement from, not just the high quality learning and teaching which has occurred in the past few months but particularly, the outstanding commitment of our young people. We know that as a Catholic School it is vital that through our academic results, our charitable giving and our day to day interactions we show ourselves to be a community which places our Gospel values at the centre of all we do.

We promote our values through every aspect of school life. Pupils are challenged not only to know our values of Community, Love, Equality, Achievement and Respect but to put them in practice in their day to day interactions with each other. I am proud to say that almost every young person in Saint Matthew's Academy is committed to these values.

Christmas is the ideal time for us all to consider the purpose of our Catholic school and the role we play in each other's lives. We are committed in Saint Matthew's Academy to providing our young people with an understanding of the role they can play in sharing the true message of Christmas – a message of love, peace and joy. A message that the world needs to hear today more than ever.

This is a message that has been shared throughout the past twelve months. It has been an exciting time for Catholic Education as 2018 has been the year when we mark the centenary of the 1918 Education Act (Scotland). This Act brought Catholic education into the state system and enshrined the rights of the Catholic community to an education which was appropriately funded and resourced.

Throughout the past year Saint Matthew's Academy has participated in a number of events which marked this centenary. The most recent of which is featured in the photograph above. Our Depute Head Girl Lucy and Depute Head Boy Liam represented all students at a formal Scottish Government gathering in Edinburgh Castle in November following an invite from Depute First Minister John Swinney.

Parents can be reassured that Saint Matthew's Academy will continue to place Faith at the heart of all we undertake within the school. In the pages that follow you will see but a snapshot of the daily work of the school but hopefully you will be proud of the achievements of the young people featured.

On behalf of all staff in the School can I take this opportunity to wish all parents, pupils and students a Happy and Holy Christmas with the very best wishes for a prosperous and successful 2019.

Finally, can I remind all members of our School Community that we will return on Monday 7th January 2019.

Yours sincerely

S Colligan

Head Teacher



Mock Exam Diet

As in previous years, January will see S4 – S6 student participating in a programme of exam practice designed to support their preparation for the May SQA examinations.

Staff have been working closely with pupils to support them at this important point in their learning journey and it is essential that all students prepare carefully as the mock exams approach.

Supported Study has been available in almost every subject. In order to ensure pupils who require transport to and from the school are not denied the opportunity to attend Supported Study we have used Pupil Equity funding to provide late night buses to key areas in our catchment.

The Mock Exam Diet is an intense fortnight beginning 9th January which pupils can find demanding. In line with Scottish Government expectations we do not allow pupils study leave. However, normal S4-S6 classes are suspended and students are given the opportunity to study in class prior to each exam.

It is essential that young people make effective use of this study time – all should come to class well prepared with a variety of learning materials. Class teachers are available throughout this time to offer advice and support in order to ensure the best possible academic outcome.

Pupils have been reminded that Pastoral Support is always available should they require it. We recognise that this is a challenging time for students and we wish to ease as much anxiety as possible.

Pupils should see these Mock Exams as part of the learning process and while we wish them to achieve their potential it is important that they understand that the outcomes of these mock exams are merely a guide to the next stage in their studies.

The first day of Mock Exams will involve History, Modern Studies, Music and Art. Good luck to all students.



Recognising 100 Years of the Education Act (Scotland)

Parents will know from previous newsletters that 2018 has been a particularly important year in the history of Catholic Education in Scotland. Throughout the past twelve months we marked the centenary of the 1918 Education Act through a variety of special events and celebrations.

To mark the conclusion of the year, the Scottish Catholic Education Service (SCES) took the decision to move Education Week from its traditional slot of just prior to Ash Wednesday into a new point on the Liturgical calendar. From this year on our celebration of Catholic Education will take place across the final two weeks of November. Clusters have the option as to which week they would prefer to use. This year the Saint Matthew's Cluster celebrated in the final week of November and a number of events took place here in the school and beyond.

Our Blessed Oscar Romero House Group formally recognised their name change to Saint Oscar Romero following the canonisation ceremony in October. The House Captains, Ellie and Eva, organised a mass of celebration involving all pupils in the house group. This was a wonderful event which allowed pupils from S1 through to S6 to come together to mark the canonisation of their House patron. Mass was followed by some light refreshments and a party in the Auditorium. Huge praise must go to all pupils and students for ensuring this event was such a success and enjoyed by all.

All schools in the Diocese participated in mass at the Cathedral and Saint Matthew's Academy were invited to lead the congregation in song through our excellent Liturgical Choir. The choir has become a key feature of all liturgical celebrations here in the school and it was an honour to be invited by Bishop Nolan to participate in this mass in this fashion. However it does mean that we can barely be spotted in Choir Loft in the image above...

During the school week we were joined by Cabinet members and local councillors to recognise this important anniversary. The Joint Cabinet gave our young people the opportunity to put questions and suggestions to the leader of the council, elected officials, council employees and officers from Police Scotland.

Red Wednesday is an increasingly important part of our school year. This is the day when we show our support for Aid to the Church in need. This organisation is devoted to recognising and supporting those across the world who are victimised for their faith. We held workshops and a prayer service for all suffering from oppression in Syria.

On Thursday our HCPT group presented to all staff members on the important fundraising work they carry out and their hopes for the coming session.

Finally, our S3 pupils participated in our annual Catholic Citizenship Day. This day is an opportunity for all young people to reflect on our Gospel values and how they can implement them in their daily life. We challenge our pupils to live up to the vision of our school – one in which all use their gifts and abilities to best support the common good. Pupils took part in workshops relating to our Malawi partnership, the refugee crisis, prayer, and environmental issues. In the afternoon we were fortunate to be joined by MSPs and MPs from the local area who shared their values and the way they put them into practice.

Pupil Information

To ensure the school continues to meet the needs of all our young people it is important that up to date information on all our pupils and students is maintained. Consequently I would ask all parents to ensure the school office is informed of any changes to personal details. Particular attention should be paid to any changes in the following areas:

- Home address and/or telephone number
- Emergency contact telephone numbers
- Information relating to health issues, including any regular medication
- Changes in domestic circumstances which may impact upon learning.

Information can be passed to our school office staff or to the relevant Guidance Teacher.

Valuables

I feel it is important that we once again remind all parents that North Ayrshire Council generally cannot be held responsible for the loss of valuables in schools. A number of pupils have informed me of the wide variety of gifts they hope to receive this Christmas and while I am sure they will be keen to show these gifts to friends I would ask that they are not brought into school in the new term.

All expensive items of jewellery, head phones, phones, tablet computers etc should be left at home for use at more appropriate times. Every effort is made in school to safeguard personal belongings but it is important that parents and pupils alike are aware that this cannot be guaranteed. Pupils and students are also encouraged not to leave bags unattended in and around the school. Lockers are available and should be used.



Education Scotland Visit

Parents and carers will be aware that we had expected a visit to the school from representatives of Education Scotland prior to October Week. This visit was postponed due to bereavement in our S3 Year Group. This decision was one which all members of the school community could understand as it would not have been appropriate to visit the school during this difficult time.

However, it is essential that Education Scotland make time to visit the school and review the work which is ongoing. As such a new date has been arranged. On the week beginning 14th January we will be joined by representatives from Education Scotland. During the following three days they will visit classes, meet with pupils, parents and staff, and review the impact of our Improvement Plan on the attainment and achievements of our young people.

This is an excellent opportunity to celebrate the work of our school and the successes we have shared in. The staff will ensure that all aspects of our school are made available to our guests. The support of our parents and local parishes is sure to be recognised as a notable feature of our community. Ultimately, it is our young people who continue to be our greatest asset and we can be very confident that Education Scotland will see this.

Wellbeing Week – Building Good Mental Health

At the start of November we held our first Wellbeing Week. This was a week of events designed to promote and support good mental health. All pupils and staff participated in a variety of different activities designed to spread positivity, encourage resilience and build effective self-care for all. With the Mock Exams being only a few short months away senior students were a key focus of the week and all participated in Growth Mindset training. This seminar was led by Doctor John Paul Fitzpatrick and encouraged students to consider the benefits of adopting a Growth Mindset in order to build resilience and increase their appetite for and engagement with learning. Feedback from the students was very positive and we will continue our mindset work with S4 mentors working to support S1 pupils in the weeks ahead.

We also encouraged young people to be active through the adoption of a one off "Daily Mile". Parents may be aware that the daily mile is a familiar feature of our associate primary schools and is designed to young people to see the benefits of an active lifestyle. All members of staff and pupils enjoyed taking part and despite the time of year the weather was relatively kind.

Our Kindness Day is now in its fourth year and continues to be an enjoyable event for all. On Kindness Day we encourage all members of our school community to consider how best to show small acts of kindness to those around them. We ask all to consider the positive impact we can have on the lives of our fellow pupils and staff members through a kind work or a caring gesture. We recognise that small steps can have a significant effect on those we care for. We were also pleased to welcome representatives from Breathing Space who spoke to young people regarding managing stress and anxiety.

Underlying all the events above, and the many others which took place, is an understanding that we must support all members of our school community to connect with each other, to be active, to stop and take notice of the world around them, to be willing to give and, of course to be committed to learning. These are the steps which lead to good mental health and as a school we are committed to promoting wellbeing for all.

Better Attendance Leads to Better Learning

Considerable effort is put in to ensure as high a level of attendance as possible is achieved by all pupils in the school so as to establish good habits for future years. While there are always individual incidents of absence which cannot be avoided it is important that all pupils have the best attendance possible. For example, parents are discouraged from taking term time holidays as this can have a hugely detrimental impact upon attainment. Over 750 school days have already been lost due to term time holidays since August.

Our target level for attendance is 91%. The table below highlights the current pattern of attendance (as of December 14th 2018):-

Attendance level (%)	Number	% of Roll
100	163	14%
96 or better	525	44%
91 or better	910	76%
80-90	150	12%
Less than 80	144	12%

I would like to congratulate the clear majority of our pupils who are working hard and attending at and beyond expected levels.

However, a significant number of pupils are below the attendance target which has serious implications for learning and teaching and eventual levels of achievement. An attendance of below 90% is the equivalent of at least one day of absence a fortnight. It is impossible for a child to reach their full potential with such a pattern of attendance. I must ask parents of those whose attendance has to be improved now to make every effort to support the school in encouraging and maintaining high levels of attendance throughout the session and particularly when we return for the new term on the 7th of January.

Parent Council

A vital element of the success of our Catholic Community is the work of our Parent Body.

The Parent Council plays a key role in the ongoing improvement agenda of our school. Through participation in our Quality Assurance programme the Parent Council helps identify our school priorities,

In the past year the Parent Council participated in our Quality Assurance programme through their engagement in Reflective Questions. Their responses are used by our Improvement Planning and Quality Assurance committee to inform school priorities for the following session. Our 18/19 priorities can be found in the documents section of our school website.

The next meeting will take place here at the school at 7pm on 21st January. All parents are invited to attend as part of the Parent Forum.

Emotional Wellbeing – Support Agencies

We have delivered a variety of supports to our young people, parents and staff over the past session. All events are designed to support good mental health. We are aware that for many this can be a challenging time of year. It is important that everyone in our school community knows that support for emotional wellbeing is available and can be accessed when required. However, some may prefer to talk with external agencies and a list of recommended groups is published below.

For Information and Support

The 'see me' website www.seemescotland.org.uk has information as well as fact sheets.

Also www.youngminds.org.uk has information and advice about young people and emotional wellbeing-for parents and for young people themselves. www.samh.org.uk provides a range of information on mental health issues

- ChildLine - 0800 11 11
www.childline.org.uk provides confidential advice and support to children and young people using their free telephone service. The organisation also publishes factsheets online through their comprehensive website.
- Breathing Space -0800 83 85 87
www.breathingspacescotland.org provides a free confidential listening service, offering advice, guidance and support. Advisors can also provide a signposting service to other agencies. Available Mon-Thurs 6pm to 2am and Fri-Mon 6pm to 6am.
- Samaritans - 116 123
www.samaritans.org.uk provides a 24 hour listening service to people in crisis or despair. You can also contact them anonymously by email: jo@samaritans.org
- Parentline - 0808 028 22 33
www.children1st.org.uk/services/46/parentline-scotland provides a confidential helpline to give parents an opportunity to 'offload' and be pointed in the right direction for information and support.
- Papyrus Hopeline - 08000 68 41 41
www.papyrus-uk.org provides information and support about prevention of young suicide.

Saint Matthew's Academy – Your Catholic Secondary School

End of Term Activities

Our Christmas Concert will take place here at the school on 17th December at 7pm. We are fortunate to benefit from a very strong level of support for all our evening events here at the school and I am confident that our Christmas Concert will once again be a sell out. Parents and members of the community who have attended previous musical events within the school will confirm that the standard of musical performance in Saint Matthew's Academy is second to none and I would invite all to join us at what is sure to be another excellent evening. Tickets are available from our school office and are priced £6 for adults and £4 concessions.

Our Talent Show will take place on 19 December during the school day. This annual event allows all pupils to show the wide variety of talent that exists within our school. One of the highlights of the afternoon is the enthusiasm and support shown to all performers by our appreciative audience. The last few weeks have seen rehearsals and auditions from which a number of acts from all year groups have been selected to perform. The key to this event is the commitment and drive of our S6 students who have been central to this event and deserve to be congratulated for all their efforts. All proceeds from our talent show will go to our Charities Campaign. Well done to all involved in organising, performing and supporting this superb community event.



The last day of term will be Friday 21 December. This is always a busy day which begins with Christmas Service, led by Father Mark Kelly our School Chaplain. Our service affords us the opportunity to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas in our Catholic School: a message of peace, joy and God's overwhelming love for us all. It is when we consider what truly matters at this time of year. It is the time to come together and consider the nature and purpose of our school – sharing the message of God's love for us all.

Following this we will celebrate our school community through a Christmas singalong and our traditional Christmas Ceilidh. Pupils know that this is a day not to be missed.

All our events are designed to ensure pupils can enjoy this special time of year in an environment where they know they are supported and respected. These events are opportunities for pupils and staff to come together and celebrate all that is good about our school.