Principal’s Report

Dear Parents

In 2015, it is once again my great pleasure to commit our staff to providing high quality inclusive Catholic Education to the students at St Thomas’ School. I especially welcome all who have newly joined our school and parish community. As we begin this journey together, I pray that we all have a wonderful experience, and build new friendships and connections with those in our community.

At St Thomas’ we pride ourselves on being a child-centred Catholic faith community where there is excellence in teaching and learning and where staff, students and parents are committed to the ongoing development of the, ‘whole child.’ As faith community we live, love and learn each day, ‘In God’s hand’. Jesus is the inspiration for our vision and mission and we seek to develop a compassionate and just approach to learning, development and relationships.

Ours is a learning community with students who have varying talents and diverse needs. They come to school from a variety of backgrounds to; work together, give their best, face challenges and to learn from both success and failure. This learning is also about personal growth and our students are challenged to be the best they can be, to work hard and not to give up. They come to school not only to learn about reading, writing, speaking and listening, not only about maths and science and history, religion and the arts, but to learn about themselves and about others. We are proud to be developing considerate citizens who are learning the skills to make positive changes in their community and to hopefully make the world a kinder, more peaceful and helpful place.

Ours is a relational community, where all students are encouraged to see, hear, and notice the best in themselves and in others. We welcome one another, not just our friends, but all who join our community. We teach forgiveness, reconciliation, love and hope as fundamental elements of a Catholic Education.

STAFF NEWS:

This year we welcome staff who are new to our school:

- Mrs Michele Serravalli
- Miss Jenna Armour
- Mrs Nikolai Ballin

REMINDERS:

As we commence this new school year, I remind all families of a number of key aspects which need your support and will assist our school to run smoothly.

- As a school community, we anticipate the full commitment and support of all parents and students and for all parents to be active partners in the journey of educating your children. I encourage all families to find their ‘niche’ or area of interest, and become actively involved in our community in some way. Throughout the year, it is imperative that strong communication links are maintained with your child’s teacher and that contact details remain current and updated when changes occur.

- Communication is an important vehicle between the family and the school and I ask that you take the time to read the fortnightly newsletter and the correspondence sent home from your child’s teacher. These forms of communication are our main means of keeping you informed with what is happening around the school.

Emailing is certainly a convenient and timely communication method for both teaching staff and parents. We also acknowledge, however, the limitations of email and I am sure you understand the need to have some shared understandings about the use of email, and therefore regarding the use of email we would ask that parents using email:

- Be patient with the response times. We aim to have a quick reply but sometimes the volume of emails can restrict these time frames. If you send an email on Friday please wait till Monday as we all like to enjoy the weekend and/or if you send an email after 5pm, please don’t expect a reply until the next day; teachers also have their family to attend to.
- Please use email to briefly identify the issue, request or concern. Please leave extensive detail for a conversation or planned meeting. Using names of other students and parents should also be avoided.
- Assume mutual goodwill and keep the messages polite and positive (even when it is a concern).
- Please do not use email for urgent messages (eg; late pick up, lunch, homework) as teachers are in class and will not be able to receive or respond to the message during class time.
Teacher emails usually begin with the initial and then the surname of the teacher followed by @cns.catholic.edu.au suffix. eg; rpetersen@cns.catholic.edu.au

- **School Fees** are issued in Week 2 or Week 3 of each term and full payment of fees is required within 14 days of this account being issued; unless a direct debit arrangement in place which is calculated over the whole year. School fees fund the necessary operations within our school. In line with our enrolment policy, unpaid fees may result in term reports being withheld or enrolment being cancelled. Families who experience genuine hardship meeting fee commitments should contact me promptly to arrange a confidential meeting time to discuss payment arrangements.

- **Student Medical Details:** It is vital that we have current details if your child has a medical condition.

- **Student Medication:** If your child requires medication to be taken during school hours, parents will need to complete a ‘Medication Form’ which is available from the front office and on our website. (This includes those students who were on medication last year.) Medication is to be delivered to the School Office by the parent/guardian in an original pharmacy labelled container. Children cannot be responsible for delivery of prescribed medications to the school.

- **Visitors – sign in:** Schools have a ‘duty of care’ to students, staff, parents and visitors on the site. To fulfil our ‘duty of care’ to everyone on the school site, all visitors to the school are required to sign in at the Front Office. This will include parent helpers. Although this procedure may appear a burden it will ensure that the school can account for all individuals in the event of an emergency and it will help us increase our ability to protect any student, staff or parent on the site. The sign-in book is situated in the Front Office. (Please note however, that this does not apply to parents or carers when taking children to school in the morning or collecting them in the afternoon)

- **Student Absences:** As part of our ongoing commitment to improve our communication with parents and caregivers, the school will send SMS Messages to advise parents if their son or daughter is marked absent (unexplained) or are recorded as arriving late to school without explanation. In situations where a parent has informed the school of the absence there will be no SMS message sent. I encourage all parents to provide advice of the absence via Skoolbag app (Parent eForms), telephone or email at secretary.mareeba@cns.catholic.edu.au on the morning of the absence or in advance if the reason is known.

We appreciate the assistance of parents in following this process.

**ELECTRONIC ROLL MARKING:**

School at St Thomas’s commences at 8:40am. This will mean that if your child/ren arrives after this time, they must present at the front office so that front office staff can mark them as late-without penalty. Please note that if your child arrives after 9:30am they will be marked absent for half a day.

**PARENT INFORMATION EVENINGS:**

In the coming weeks teachers will be providing parents with an opportunity to attend a parent information session which will outline the expectations for your child in 2015. We consider these sessions to be an excellent opportunity for parents to meet with the child/ren’s class teacher(s) and to discuss the year ahead.

Parent information sessions have been organised as follows:

- **Prep** @ 5:30pm: Tuesday, 3rd February – Library
- **Year 1** @ 6.00pm: Tuesday 3rd February – Year 1 Classroom
- **Year 5** @ 5:30pm: Wednesday 4th February – Year 5 Classroom
- **Year 6** @ 6:00pm: Wednesday 4th February – Year 6 Classroom
- **Year 4** @ 5:30pm: Tuesday, 10th February – Year 4 Classroom
- **Year 4/5** @ 5:30pm: Tuesday, 10th February – Year 4 Classroom
- **Year 2** @ 5.30pm: Wednesday 11th February – Library
- **Year 2/3** @ 5.30pm: Wednesday 11th February – Library
- **Year 3** @ 5.30pm: Wednesday 11th February – Library

**SCHOOL UNIFORM:**

St Thomas’ School uniform is a public reflection of our school and should be worn neatly and tidily at all times. Please ensure your child arrives at school in the correct school uniform each day. School shoes should be totally black with no colour markings and should be worn with white socks. Sandals are not part of the St Thomas’ school uniform.

For Sun Safety, students are required to wear their school hat at all times while in the playground as well as on their way into school each morning and out of the school grounds at the end of the day. Please encourage your child with this rule to protect their young skin from the harmful rays of the sun. If at any time your child is unable to wear the correct uniform for some reason, please notify their teacher in writing.

**SWIMMING:**

This term will see the start of the swimming program for Years 4 – 6. On Thursdays, commencing in Week 2, all students will travel by bus to and from the swimming pool accompanied by classroom teachers. Swimming comprises one component of the Physical Education Program for students in Years 4 – 6 for the duration of Term 1 and as such is an assessed area of the
curriculum on which students will be reported at the conclusion of Semester 1.

Students are encouraged to bring sunscreen and a sunshirt is compulsory.

The main aim of the swimming program is water safety and awareness. It is an opportunity for students to develop water confidence, water safety, swimming and survival abilities.

Parental help is always welcomed to assist with the program. If you are able to help out in this capacity, please let us know.

Medical Forms will be sent home shortly. Please ensure that these forms are returned prior to the first day of swimming on Thursday, 5th February.

SEVERE WEATHER:

In the weeks to come, should there be a severe weather threat, the school will inform parents on closure of the school via radio station 4AM, St Thomas’ phone app and by SMS. School closure is generally decided by 6:30am so that school bus services and parents have enough time to respond.

Should a cyclone threat emerge unexpectedly during the day, parents will be advised at short notice, and we will ensure that appropriate supervisory and collection process occurs. If you have any concerns with flooding please feel free to contact the school with your concerns.

Where possible school staff at St Thomas’s will inform parents directly of early departure from school. Thank you to families who have updated emergency contact phone numbers. If your contact details are not current please call the office to update as a matter of urgency.

DATE CLAIMER:

SCHOOL OPENING MASS & COMMISSIONING CEREMONY: On Tuesday, 3rd February, at 10:00am the school will celebrate its first Eucharistic liturgy for 2015. This will be to celebrate the start of the new school year and to welcome all newcomers to our school community. Also during the mass, our school leaders will be commissioned. All families and friends are warmly invited to share in this special occasion.

SCHOOL FEES:

Term Tuition Fees will be issued shortly. Families experiencing financial difficulty may seek to obtain either a partial or total remission of fees by contacting myself. Any remission of fees is granted only on an annual basis and is subject to review at the commencement of each new school year.

A suggestion is that families use a payment plan. For example if your annual fees are $2416 you can opt to make 49 weekly payments of $49.31. By 31 December you will have a zero balance. Please come in if you’d like to discuss or set up a payment plan for the 2015 school year.

Fees may be paid on a weekly/fortnightly/monthly or term basis according to your financial situation.

Refusal to pay is simply not an option and, where deliberate and without due consultation with the school, will be acted upon in accordance with Diocesan procedures for fee recovery.

To avoid recovery procedures being initiated, those families with fees owing outside of the 14-day terms are urged to contact me personally.

Wishing everyone well for an enjoyable and productive year as we head forth together – partners in Catholic education.

Rita Petersen

News from APRE – Kathy Fleming

Parish Weekend Mass Times
St Thomas of Villanova – Mareeba – Saturday 6.00pm & Sunday 10.00am
St Christopher’s – Kuranda – Sunday 6.00pm
St Anthony’s – Dimbulah – Sunday 8.00am

Prayer for the Beginning of the New School Year

Dear Lord, as we begin this new school year, we gather once again as your community of believers.

We thank you for the energy and the spirit that you renewed in us through the summer months.

We thank you for the time to enjoy our family and friends and to reflect on what is important in our lives.

Let this year be marked by enthusiasm and love so that, with the inspiration of your Spirit, we may continue to grow in our faith.

Help us to fulfill Your hope for us with honest intentions and works of faith.

Let us be gentle with ourselves and bring laughter, joy and love to others.

We ask this in your name. Amen.

Welcome to the 2015 school year

We look forward to another wonderful year, sharing many opportunities for learning and growing together at St Thomas’s. We hope you will feel comfortable and involved with your child’s learning throughout the year. We welcome your presence at school, encourage you to become active partners in the faith life of our school community, and invite you to attend any of our masses and liturgies whenever it is possible.
Our school motto of ‘Walk in the Light’ reminds us as students, staff and parents that we are invited to journey with Jesus’ ‘the light of the world’ and we will never walk alone. The light of Christ brightens our way, warming our hearts, strengthening and guiding us.

Our first whole school celebration will be our Opening School Mass next Tuesday 3rd February at 10:00 a.m in the church. This mass includes a commissioning ceremony for our school leaders for 2015. Parents/guardians are welcome to join us on this occasion and for all school wide celebrations.

This year our parish welcomes a new Parish Priest, Fr John Sullivan, who arrives on 29 January. He is an Augustinian, who has been ministering in Korea for a number of years. Fr John, together with another new priest Fr Dipi will be serving our parish and school community this year.

To make special occasions in the Religious Life of our School Class Masses, liturgies and other RE events will be announced through our school newsletter.

### Learning Support

**Is your child ready for school?**

Good hearing and vision are essential for a child’s learning. Therefore it is recommended to have your child’s hearing and vision checked on a regular basis, approximately every two years. Vision, especially can deteriorate without the child realising that their vision isn’t normal.

For vision see your preferred optometrist and ask about eligibility for bulk billing.

To make an appointment for a free hearing test contact Community Health on 40929100.

### APA News

Welcome back to the new school year. A warm welcome to all new and existing families. I hope that over the break everyone was able to enjoy some family time together and replenish the energy levels for yet another rewarding and busy year ahead.

A big thank you to all families for the wonderful job you have done in making sure your child is dressed in the correct school uniform and is prepared for day one. This is no easy task and I thank you for the great effort you have gone to in ensuring your child is correctly dressed and stationery items have been purchased.

We are always asked about what type of footwear is acceptable at St Thomas’s. Shops these days are full of variations on the traditional black sneaker. Below are some examples of what footwear is appropriate here at St Thomas’s. If you are ever unsure please speak to your classroom teacher or approach me to clarify any questions you may have.

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If your child is unable to wear the school uniform for any reason a note or phone call to the office is greatly appreciated.

I look forward to meeting new faces this year as well as seeing many familiar ones from last year.

**Leonie McCormack**

### FLEXISCHOOLS PAYMENT SYSTEM

St Thomas’s is moving towards making virtually all of its activities, including functions, available through Flexischools. This is an online tool that requires you to create an account and fund that account using direct debit or credit card (Visa or Mastercard). Then, using the appropriate area within the Flexischools website, parents are able to order lunches from the tuckshop, pay for excursions, camps, chess, library bags and special events.

Whilst the school is trying to move away from cash based systems to provide better administrative and accountability function of our enterprises, accommodation will continue to be made for ‘walk up’ purchases. It’s also worth noting that we have a dedicated but small staff that takes care of our account management and this system also assists them to serve the school community in a more efficient manner.