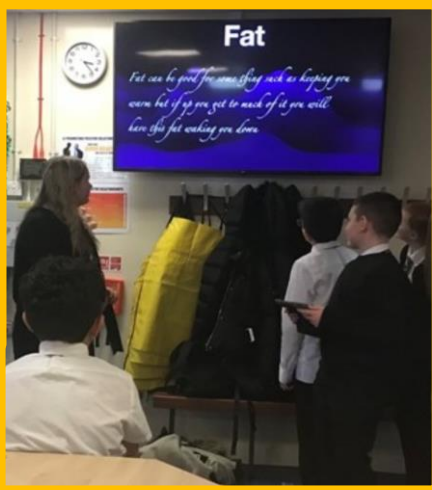


# ST THOMAS AQUINAS

## RC SECONDARY



# LEARNING & TEACHING



# Learning and Teaching Policy

January 2023 (draft)

## ■ RATIONALE

Learning and teaching is the core business of St Thomas Aquinas RC Secondary. A coherent and consistent approach to learning and teaching is fundamental to what we do. A relentless focus on high quality learning and teaching approaches is essential if we are to deliver learner entitlements and the four contexts for learning within Curriculum for Excellence.

The commitment by all staff to recognise and accept that their practice must continually evolve underpinned by meaningful career long professional learning will ensure the needs of all learners are met and that staff are challenged and supported to be rigorous, creative and imaginative in their pedagogical approaches.

This policy considers GTCS professional standards, national guidance documents and current educational research.

## ■ SCHOOL VALUES AND AIMS

We aim to equip our learners with the skills needed to prepare them to achieve everything they are capable of within life, learning and work at this moment in time, and in the future. As a Catholic school all of our work is centred on the teachings of Christ; our vision is as follows:

We are a culturally inclusive Roman Catholic school where there is a deep commitment to each young person in our care. Every person in our community – pupils, staff, parents/ carers & partners – is listened to, included and valued. By honouring the teachings of Christ, we will ensure that all our young people are witnesses who are equipped to promote healthy mental and physical well-being whilst developing their spirituality and discovering and exploiting their God-given talents to achieve excellence emotionally, morally and intellectually.

Our Values and Aims underpin all of our work at St Thomas Aquinas RC Secondary. Our Values and Aims are:



## ■ AIMS OF THE POLICY

The aim of this policy document is to lay out in a very clear manner the strategy approach St Thomas Aquinas RC Secondary will take to achieve a consistently high-quality learning experience for all. This policy document will provide a high-level overview of the agreed stages which can help achieve this but will be complemented by our STA Learning and Teaching Toolkit which will share good practice and offer strategies for teachers to employ or try at each stage of the learning process.

## ■ HIGH QUALITY LEARNING AND TEACHING WITHIN OUR SCHOOL

Within St Thomas Aquinas RC Secondary we believe that the delivery of high-quality learning and teaching is an integral part of our ability to help our learners develop skills for their current and future learning, life and work; high quality learning and teaching facilitates improved outcomes for all.

We have identified seven mechanisms which are essential in the planning and delivery of consistent, high quality teaching and learning. Each of these mechanisms must however be underpinned by:

- The continual professional development and learning of our staff which is based in clear research and evidence including learning about the importance of metacognition in the successful delivery and consolidation of learning
- A culture which nurtures and encourages staff to be creative and unafraid to take measured risks in their continual drive for improvement in the delivery learning and teaching
- A dedication to continue to enhance learning and teaching strategies with the meaningful use of digital technologies including the continued promotion and development of our school as a recognised Apple Distinguished School
- A commitment to delivering and promoting excellent learning experiences for learners by ensuring our learning environments are attractive places to learn whilst celebrating the successes and achievements of our learners.

The features which will ensure a consistent approach to the delivery of high-quality learning and teaching are listed below.

- Relationships
- Learning routines
- Quality of instruction
- Questioning
- Engagement
- Assessment
- Feedback



Our Teaching and Learning Toolkit which accompanies this policy will be organised into each individual feature.

## ■ RELATIONSHIPS



STA is committed to placing relationships at the heart of our work; our learners have a right to be well-known, respected and loved. We expect all staff to be aware of and adopt a nurturing approach to working with all learners as detailed within our Promoting Positive Relationships policy.

All learning environments should contain our whole school nurture target for the month, a Nurture Nook accessible to anyone who needs it and the opportunity to reflect and learn how to positively understand, regulate and articulate their emotions by using common language indicated within Emotion Thermometer posters. Learning within St Thomas Aquinas should not only focus on the dissemination and assimilation of knowledge but also on the growth of every facet of the whole person.

## ■ LEARNING ROUTINES

For good learning and teaching to occur the conditions for learning must be correct. We expect all staff to create calm, purposeful learning routines within their learning environments which are consistent across the school especially in preparation for times of transition, for example, the beginning and end of a period.

Learning routines are a powerful tool to support good learning because they support the direction of attention for learners. Consistent routines allow the brain to focus on the planned learning for the period as it reduces the volume of information the brain needs to process and assess by allowing other actions to become automatic.



***“Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit”***

(Durant, discussing the writing of Aristotle, 1926)

## ■ QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION

All teaching staff within STA are expected to have excellent subject knowledge; evidence shows this directly correlates to the quality of teaching and learning which occurs. However, teaching staff must also have the ability to plan how they will model and offer instructions to learners to ensure that their needs are met and they achieve the success criteria set.

Teaching staff must plan lessons well to ensure that they are clear in the manner in which they will introduce new concepts to their classes and scaffold the learning appropriately to ensure their learners can understand the concept whilst also begin to appreciate how this links to other learning from within and across the curriculum. Teaching staff should also consider how they will support learners to use their learning in new and unfamiliar contexts.

Teaching staff must also plan to ensure that lessons tasks are well thought out to ensure differentiation, participation and engagement. The meaningful use of digital technologies should be used to support the achievement of this.

## ■ QUESTIONING

Effective questioning is an important and fundamental part of the teaching and learning process. Effective questioning can open conversations, encourage higher order thinking and inspire deeper intellectual thought. When planning what questions to ask to promote learning focusing on eliciting information on the process, the “why” and “how” may be more beneficial than concentrating on the detail, or the “what”.

There is a place within lessons for both open and closed questions to be used and both can be used for different purposes however teaching staff should plan to vary their questions and questioning technique. Teaching staff should also consider how follow up questions can enrich the dialogue and learning within class and consider how they can train learners to ask insightful and meaningful questions; a skill which everyone needs in life.

How we deal with the responses to questions is also important. Every contribution should be treated as being valuable, even if not correct or what you are looking for. Effective use of questioning following on from an incorrect answer can often facilitate even better learning experiences.

## ■ ENGAGEMENT

Learner engagement is a measure which reflects the quality and quantity of a learner’s participation in their learning. Engagement is not just reflected in the amount of work completed in a jotter but is also reflected in their co-operation with others, eagerness to participate, motivation and willingness to meet challenges positively.



Research indicates that teachers should aim to engage learners across three levels: cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally as if a learner is only engaged in one level then their performance and knowledge retention will suffer.

## ■ ASSESSMENT

Teaching staff should approach assessment as part of the learning process. Assessment should occur in a variety of forms and allow learners to both experience success whilst also plan for next steps in learning.

Teaching staff should create and moderate robust assessments which meet the criteria laid out within Building the Curriculum 5 to ensure that learners and their families have robust and reliable information on their progress in learning.

## ■ FEEDBACK

Meaningful feedback cannot be underestimated. Done well it can support learner progress, build further and future learning, address misunderstanding and close the gap between where learners are and where the teacher wants them to be.

Teaching staff must work with learners to lay the foundations for feedback to ensure learners know the purpose of it. Teachers must plan for how and when learners will receive feedback and what they should do once they have it. When considering how to give feedback teachers should strongly consider the method used, the use of digital technology can have a significantly positive impact on reducing workload here.

Feedback must be delivered in a timely manner and focus on moving the learning forward.

## ■ EVERYONE LEARNS

High quality learning and teaching does not happen by chance or through the actions of one group of stakeholders. To achieve our aim of a consistent, high quality experience for learners all staff, parents/carers and partners must be involved, consulted and supported to ensure they are clear in our approach and have the necessary skills to support and deliver learning.

## ■ LEARNERS

Learning cannot be done to our young people; they must be consulted, listened to and skilled regarding their role within each of the features required for high quality learning and teaching. We will work with learners to help them understand and manage their emotions surrounding learning and equip them with the skills to know which strategies help them learn well and how to use feedback from their teachers effectively.

Learner voice is fundamental to ensuring teaching strategies are meeting the needs of learners and for on-going evaluation for improvement.

## ■ TEACHING STAFF

Teaching staff are committed to their own professional learning and will continue to engage in meaningful career long professional learning which will have a positive impact on outcomes for learners. Teaching staff recognise that teaching is an evolving art form and will continue to hone and update their pedagogy for all learners including their understanding and skills to ensure they create a nurturing environment, provide differentiation and challenge and successfully integrate digital technology into learning experiences and teaching delivery.

Teaching staff work collegiate to support and challenge each other to ensure pedagogical approaches which work best for our community are shared and developed. This can be achieved via engagement and delivery of our in-house CLPL programmes like Course and a Cuppa and Elf of the Shelf. Self and peer evaluation is on-going informally and formally recognised via our Mirror, Mirror and Pedagogy Pals programmes.

## ■ SUPPORT STAFF

Support staff are committed to contributing to the achievement of our school ethos and culture and irrespective of their role they are valued for the contribution they make to the positive attainment, achievement and outcomes of learners.

Our support for learning and health and well-being workers, as a particular group, are essential in supporting the delivery of high-quality learning and teaching and work in partnership with teaching staff to deliver excellence within learning environments. Their work in delivering universal and targeted support to some of our most vulnerable learners is planned, responsive to needs and evaluated.

## ■ PARTNERS

Within St Thomas Aquinas we work with a significant number of partners to improve experiences and outcomes for learners directly and indirectly. All partners are aware of our school vision and values and contribute to the achievement, development and celebration of this.

Our partnership with Osiris Educational and specifically our school trainer, Carmel Bones, has been transformative for our teaching staff and our thinking about pedagogy especially pedagogical approaches to engagement, challenge and feedback. By the end of session 2023/24 all teaching staff

will have undertaken the “Outstanding Teaching Intervention” programme which is the biggest individual investment in the delivery of high-quality learning teaching for almost all staff since their initial teaching training.

## ■ PARENTS/ CARERS

As a Catholic school we believe that parents and carers are the first educators within our community. We will work with parents/ carers to provide them with relevant information on the progress of their child and then work with them to provide advice and strategies that they can use at home to support the learning of their child. We will do this via universal supports in the form of in-person and online information evenings, regular tracking and attainment data and through the use of our social media accounts and the show my homework app. Following on from learner and parental feedback Microsoft TEAMS is the software used throughout our school to support learning digitally. Targeted support for parents/ carers to support learning may include one-2-one interventions from pastoral care staff and/ or members of the senior leadership team, invitations to attend a coffee morning for a specific group of parents/ carers or referrals to our Family Engagement Officer however this is not an exhaustive list.

We will continue to work in partnership with our parent council and the wider parent forum to access information on their views and opinions at regular intervals as valued contributors to our on-going evaluation for improvement journey.

## ■ TEACHING AND LEARNING: LIFE’S JOURNEY

As a school community we recognise that our journey for improvement to achieve consistency and excellence in teaching and learning will never cease. We will strive to achieve excellence in every classroom and in every lesson by:

- **Looking inward** – we will employ robust self-evaluation strategies and procedures to recognise and highlight good practice within our school and to challenge anything which falls below our expectations. We will work collegiately to support and nurture each other to deliver our shared vision of excellence in learning and teaching.
- **Looking outward** – we will engage with current educational research from across Scotland and beyond, we will work with other schools and partners to challenge our thinking and work. We are committed to serving all our current and future learners and families in the best way we can.
- **Looking skyward** - we will strive to challenge ourselves and our learners to achieve everything they are capable of throughout their lives. We will plan and ensure our vision allows us to teach our learners to achieve today, and tomorrow, as they grow to become citizens of the future who are **curious** about life, **loving** to all they meet, dedicated to ensuring **equality** for all, **aspirational** for themselves, their friends and their family and are **respected** and respectful of others.