



St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School

Parent Handbook

Mission Statement

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School is a grade 5 through grade 8 community rooted in the risen Jesus. We embrace the gospel in a learning environment permeated with faith. St. Thomas inspires us to integrate faith and reason in developing students who are fully alive human beings.



Faith Theme

Each school year Evergreen Catholic School Division identifies a faith theme for all of our schools to focus on. This theme becomes woven into the tapestry of our identity as a Catholic school. As a school division, we work to bring our faith theme to life through liturgies, celebrations, social justice projects and acts of service. This year's faith theme is **Listen to God's Word with Joy.**

I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

~John 15.11

St. Thomas Aquinas Prayer

Grant us,
O Lord our God,
Minds to know you,
Hearts to see you,
Wisdom to find you,
Conduct pleasing to you,
Faithful perseverance in waiting for you,
and a hope of finally embracing you.
Amen.

Principal Message

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School is a community of learners deeply committed to Catholic education. Our primary goal is to put our faith life into action within the context of authentic and meaningful learning. The tapestry of quality education at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School is tightly knitted to a Christ-centered environment where our Catholic faith is celebrated. We are committed to creating a learning environment where children's curiosity is woven together with a process of exploration and inquiry and academic excellence is nurtured and attained. Our committed teachers, enthusiastic parents, and a wealth of rich learning experiences ensure that our students meet daily challenges of mind, body, and spirit through critical-thinking and problem-solving activities, and realization of spiritual awareness.

We are a partnership where home, school, community and Church come together to nurture and teach our children to become caring, responsible, lifelong learners. Included in our journey and school community is our parish, Holy Trinity. Under the guidance of Father Jan and Father Joselito, staff and students will have many opportunities to grow and learn in our Faith. This partnership is strengthened through our common desire to deepen and live our Catholic Faith. Your child is at the center of our commitment.

Mr. Shawn Murdoch

Communication

Consistent communication between home and school is an important component for student success. There are three reporting periods in the school year. Two of these include scheduled Parent-Teacher-Student conferences. Parents are encouraged to meet with teachers or administration at any time in the year.

Our weekly email from Mr. Murdoch is sent each Monday. This message will keep families informed about events and projects happening at the school. In the event that you do not have email access, please call the office to make alternate arrangements for this important message.

School Website

There is much information on our school website www.stacs.ca including our staff directory, calendar, documents, programs and services, and link to our parish, Holy Trinity Catholic Church. You will also be able to link to our school division's website www.ecsrd.ca.



Twitter

For anyone who uses this social media site, we encourage you to follow us **@STA_ECSR**. Here you will be able to see pictures of school activities as well as other information and current events from both educational and faith perspectives. Our Athletics department also has a Twitter account **@STAthunder**.

Newsletter

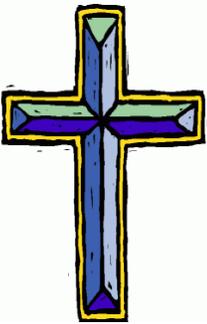
A school newsletter is published each month of the school year to inform families of school activities and important dates. In our attempt to reduce paper, we email this to parents and post it on our website at www.stacs.ca. If you are not receiving these emails, please contact the school with your email address and you will be added to our distribution list.

Maplewood, ConnectEd

Parents are able to access information regarding their child's progress, assignments and grades through this on-line site. Information and passwords are provided at the beginning of the year.

- **Student Agendas** are used in grades five and six for regular communication between home and school. These are most effective when used daily. Parents are welcome to use student agendas to forward a quick message to teachers.

Our Faith



Parish Information

Our school community is connected and supported by Holy Trinity Catholic Church, 200 Boundary Road, Spruce Grove. Our pastor, Fr. Jan Sobkowicz, along with our Associate pastor Fr. Joselito Cantal, serve our school community with masses and sacrament celebrations throughout the year. More information can be found on their website www.trinitycatholic.net or by calling the parish office at 780-960-0135.

Religion Program

Our faith permeates all that we do at St. Thomas Aquinas and our religious education program is an essential component to the life and culture of our Catholic school. Each day provides students with opportunities to pray, share intentions, and rejoice in our faith. Our students are invited to develop the knowledge, beliefs, skills, values and attitudes of a Christian, and to contribute their gifts and talents to our community.

Liturgical Celebrations

Recognizing the liturgical seasons, we will celebrate our faith through various celebrations, including mass, liturgies, retreats and social justice projects. Families are always welcome and encouraged to attend many of these celebrations.

General Information

Supervision

Our morning supervision begins at 8:20.

At dismissal we have supervisors on duty until 3:20.

We ask students to use their assigned doors when entering and leaving school.

Students are expected to wait in our "pit area" just outside the office until 8:15 at which time they can head to their lockers to prepare for their morning. This is also where students are to wait after school if they are being picked up.



School Visitors

For the safety and security of our building, we ask that all visitors enter through our front doors and sign in at the office upon their arrival. Guests are welcome and we ask that parents and visitors make appointments with the classroom teacher or administration ahead of time.

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement has a positive impact on student achievement and school culture. We appreciate having our parents and families support us throughout the year. We encourage parents to be involved at home helping with homework, talking about what is going on at school and ensuring that students are rested and nourished, ready for the day. In the event that a situation of concern arises, we ask parents to first initiate a discussion with the teacher to arrive at a solution. If an issue cannot be resolved in this way, school administration will be happy to support.

Volunteers

We would like to match your skills and available time with our needs.

- **Criminal Records Checks** are a requirement for our volunteers and need to be updated each year.
- **Confidentiality** is of the utmost importance when working with students, and we expect all volunteers to respect this. If a situation of concern is observed, please discuss this with a staff member in a confidential manner. Volunteers are gently reminded that they are not to discipline students.

Please notify our office staff if you are interested in volunteering.

School Council and Fundraising Committee

School Council is an advisory council consisting of parents, school administration and teachers for the purpose of enhancing communication between our school and our community. All parents are welcome and encouraged to attend our meetings throughout the year. We are grateful for the continued support provided to us through these committees and the great time and effort parents extend on our behalf.

Recess Breaks

Students in grades five and six are expected to enjoy the outdoors for their three recess breaks. Occasionally there are requests for a student to remain inside for recess due to illness. While there may be situations that warrant this, we prefer students to go outside. Students are encouraged to stay home when they are unwell.

If weather conditions are severe, indoor arrangements will be made to keep all students inside.

Students in grades seven and eight have a lunch recess only. With signed parent permission, they can leave school grounds during this time.

Drop Off/Pick Up/Parking

Our parking lot, combined with our neighboring school, St. Marguerite, is very busy both in the morning and at dismissal time. Safety of all is our priority, and so procedures for dropping off and picking up students are made with this in mind:

- ✓ **Please use marked crosswalks.**
- ✓ There is **no parking along the curb in front of the school**, however vehicles can pull up to the curb to drop off students.
- ✓ Parking will be in the front (north) parking lot of St. Thomas Aquinas.

We appreciate your cooperation to ensure student safety and efficient movement of traffic.

Busing

All bus services for our students is provided through **Parkland Transportation**.

Evergreen Catholic School's website has a link for Bus Status on their home page www.ecsrd.ca

Additional inquiries regarding bus passes or potential bus cancellations are easily accessed through the Parkland School Division website www.psd70.ab.ca or by calling **780-963-8452**.

Student Information

Student Expectations

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School operates on the philosophy that all students are created in the image and likeness of God. All students have the right to feel safe, and to learn in an environment that celebrates their unique gifts. We believe that this can best be accomplished by establishing a setting where learning, achievement, service to others and a sense of belonging are valued and established.

We also believe that school and family partnerships are essential in achieving the greatest possible growth for all of our students. We ask that staff, students and families be committed to high expectations which encourage accountability for individual's actions. We expect behavior where students **demonstrate respect for self, others and property**. Any behavior which encroaches on, or detracts from, the rights of others will be dealt with on an individual basis. We believe this positively impacts student learning and achievement.

Student Rights:

- Belong in a faith-filled community
- Feel safe
- Be respected
- Be heard
- Succeed academically

Student Responsibilities:

- Respect all individuals and property
- Represent themselves and St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School in an outstanding manner
- Follow expectations and directions of school and staff members
- Come to school prepared to participate to the best of their ability, and seek help when needed

Attendance

Consistent attendance is vital for student achievement at school. We ask families to help form positive attendance and punctuality habits, ensuring that students arrive to school on time. When possible, we ask families to communicate any anticipated absences in a timely manner so that teachers may prepare students for what they will miss. It is a student's responsibility to catch up on school work completed in their absence.

Absentees

In an effort to ensure student safety, we will contact home if a student is absent. To help us with this, we ask that parents contact the school office if their child will be away for any reason.

- ✓ **You may call 780-962-1585** (Leaving a message is an option if it is outside of office hours. Please include student name, grade, teacher and reason for absence.)
- ✓ **You may email knachtigal@ecsrd.ca** communicating the above information.

Arriving Late

When arriving late, students need to check in at the office. Students will receive a “late slip” which will help to keep our attendance records accurate, and also inform the classroom teacher that the office staff are aware that they have arrived. Students arriving late will need to use our front doors.



Bring Your Own Device

We are implementing a school-wide BYOD model this year. Students are encouraged to have a device, such as a Chromebook, to provide continuous access to alternative methods of learning. For students that do not have a device, there will be one made available for them while at school. For additional information, please see corresponding documents posted on our school’s website.

Cell Phones

Students are welcome to use their cell phones before school, during morning and lunch recesses and after school. Teachers reserve the right to determine the use of cell phones during class time. Without teacher permission, students are expected to keep these devices out of sight during class time. Students who do not follow these expectations may have their cell phone confiscated for a period of time, based on the repetitive nature of the behavior. In some cases, parents will be asked to pick up the cell phone from the office. Please be aware that the school takes no responsibility for the safekeeping of students’ personal items.

Appropriate Use Agreement

Evergreen School Division does have an **Appropriate Use Agreement** contract in place. All students and parents sign this document at the start of each school year. Without this signed document, students will lose their access to the Internet and WIFI, regardless of the device being utilized.

It is necessary for our students to recognize and understand that accessing technology requires responsible and safe use. We will continue to provide guidance and expectations regarding digital citizenship and safety in a variety of ways, including the involvement of our RCMP liaison.

Lockers

Each student is assigned a locker and a lock for the school year. Students are required to ensure that the lock is kept on their locker at all times. We ask students to not share their combinations with others. Lockers are the property of the school and our school administration has the right to perform a locker search at any time.

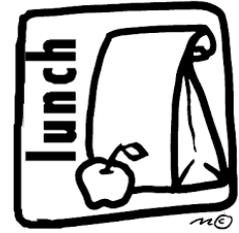
Dress Regulations

Students are expected to wear clothing in good taste in order to promote positive attitudes and atmosphere in our building. At the discretion of staff members, students may be asked to change to ensure that appropriate clothing is worn. Hats are not to be worn in the school.

- Footwear
Shoes need to be worn at all times for both safety reasons as well as the cleanliness and maintenance of our building.
- Physical Education
Students are asked to change for gym class and wear appropriate footwear for both their safety and the maintenance of our gymnasium floors.

Lunch

Students in grades five and six eat lunch in their classroom with supervision provided. Junior High students eat in our cafeteria, also with supervision. We offer an optional hot lunch program which is organized and delivered by an outside vendor, *Servings*. These are nutritious and affordable lunches that are available two days per week. Families can order and pay online at www.servings.ca. Please note that on snow days, when buses are not running, there will be no hot lunch service.



Lost & Found

Please ensure that all belongings are marked with your child's name in permanent marker. We do have a Lost and Found bin located in our grade five and six hallway. Unclaimed items are donated to charity on a regular basis.

Bicycles, Scooters, Skateboards

Students who bring these items to school do so at their own risk. All bicycles and scooters should be locked individually in the bicycle racks that are at the north and east sides of the school. For safety reasons, students may not use these while on school grounds.

Students who leave the school grounds at lunch may use these items to travel home or to a nearby store.

School Highlights

Core Classes

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School provides students with a strong foundation in all core subject areas. We expect all students to develop an understanding of content, competencies and attitudes in each of their classes.

The Alberta Education website can provide much information regarding all Programs of Study.

<https://education.alberta.ca/programs-of-study/>

There is also a website that can be a resource for families: *My Child's Learning: A Parent Resource*

<https://www.learnalberta.ca/content/mychildslearning/>

Students can access support with homework online at Alberta Education website: www.LearnAlberta.ca User ID LA16 Password 3746



Complementary Courses

Students in junior high have many complementary (option) courses to choose from. These courses are designed to provide students with the opportunity to explore and learn about a variety of subjects and areas of interest. The majority of these courses run for one term, with the exception of French and Band.

Extra-curricular, Co-curricular

Our staff spend a great amount of time outside of the classroom to provide students with a diverse amount of extra-curricular opportunities. These often change in any given year, dependent on staff availability and student interest. Some of these clubs and programs require additional funding, and students may be asked to make a monetary contribution. We do not want this to hinder any student from participating. Please see a school administrator if student fees or activity fees are a concern.

In the past we have been able to offer clubs and programs such as:

Art Club
Board Games
Choir
Drama Production Tech Team
Guidance and Counseling Programs
School-wide Assemblies

Athletics

Our Thunder teams include cross-country running, volleyball, basketball, soccer, badminton, track & field. Athletes commit to after-school practices, games and tournaments, representing our school community in keeping with our expectation of all students. There are fees incurred when participating on any of our Thunder teams. This covers costs including tournament fees, referees, and uniforms.

Intramurals

Our Intramural sports program is intended to develop skill in sport while maximizing student participation. The focus of these activities is to have fun and develop good sportsmanship. These lunch hour activities vary throughout the year.



Field Trips

Field trips provide students with unique experiences that enhance their understanding of various curriculum. Signed parental permission is required for any excursion off school grounds. On occasion, additional funding may be required. If this hinders a student from participating, please see a school administrator.

Student Council and Leadership

Student leadership is an important part of our school community. At the start of each school year, homeroom classes select a representative to serve on our student council. This role includes acting as part of the student government, sponsoring activities and special theme days, and being of service to others.

Student Services

Embedded within our teaching staff we have a Counselor, an Inclusive Education Coordinator and an Instructional Coach. Each of these positions are enabled to provide supports to staff, students, and families to positively impact student success.

Library Learning Commons

We are blessed with a lovely Library Learning Commons space. Students will visit the library with their class on a weekly basis. Students are able to borrow up to four books at a time and keep them for two weeks, with the option of renewal. Students are welcome before and after school as well as at recess, with classroom teacher permission.

Parents are also welcome to borrow library materials.

Outdoor Classroom

The vision for our outdoor classroom was to create a location on our school grounds to enhance a student's ability to meet curricular outcomes and increase self-fulfillment through the use of naturalized outdoor learning grounds.

This space was created in the spring of 2016 with support from our parent Fundraising Committee as well as grant monies. With established work stations and rocks placed amongst a wide variety of trees and shrubs native to Alberta, students are able to deepen their understanding of many learning outcomes. This space also provides inspiration through nature and allow us to get closer to God and the beauty of creation by visiting a naturalized environment.

Student Awards

We recognize the accomplishments and achievements of our students. Year End awards include:

Good Shepherd Award	Peer-selected recognition of classmate who displays Christian attitude and caring nature, promotes school spirit, helps others, acts as a motivator, sets a positive tone.
Christian Leadership Award	Student who shares gift of faith and exemplifies ideals of Catholic education.
Exemplary Service Award	Student who distinguishes themselves through their service to the school.
Citizenship Award	Student who works to their potential, participates in school activities, displays a Christian attitude and is self-motivated.
Excellent Attendance	Student who has no more than one excusable absence throughout the year.
Most Improved Student Award	Student who has worked to the best of their ability, showing tremendous improvement in academic, spiritual and social development.
Academic Honourable Mention	Junior High Students who have a final average of 75% in four core subjects and no mark less than 65% in any subject (Based on final marks).
Honour Roll	Junior High Students who have an 80% in four core subjects and no mark less than 70% in any subject (Based on final marks).
Honour Roll with Distinction	Junior High Students who have 90% in four core subjects and no mark less than 75% in any subject (Based on final marks).
Highest Academic Achievement Award	Junior High Student with highest average in four core subjects and no mark less than 75%. (Based on final marks).

Health Services

We have many staff trained in First Aid, which is administered to any student who experiences an injury. Minor scratches and bumps may simply warrant some ice, band-aids, and TLC. In these situations, parents are often not notified. When an injury or illness is of greater concern, parents or guardians are contacted, and in some cases will be asked to come to pick up their child. It is important that we have up-to-date contact information for all families.

All accidents are recorded in accordance with Evergreen Division Policy.

Medication

It is the responsibility of parents or guardians to administer medications for their child. If special circumstances arise that require medication to be taken at school, our staff may assist, with the following guidelines and procedures:

- Parents have provided a signed request indicating the type of medication, required dose, along with any action to be taken in the event of a side effect. We have these request forms available at our office
- Discussion of this request with the classroom teacher

School Nurse

We do access the support of our public health nurse through Westview Health Centre in Stony Plain for a variety of needs including grade five immunization.

Emergency Response

Fire Drills Evacuations Drills Lock Down Drills

There are scheduled and unscheduled fire drills and emergency evacuations. It is mandatory for everyone to leave the building immediately when the fire alarm sounds. It is each teacher's responsibility to show the students where their emergency exit is. There will also be exit routes posted in the classrooms.

Violent Threat & Risk Assessment (VTRA)

We believe there is a shared community responsibility to respond and support all children and youth. As a school division, and in cooperation with local school divisions, government, RCMP and community partners, we have completed intensive safety training through the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment and Trauma Response (VTRA). We do have administrative procedure that calls for "risk assessment" if the need arises. This information is shared through email at the beginning of the school year. More information can be found at <http://www.ecsrd.ca/Programs/vtra/Pages/default.aspx>

Extreme Weather

Whenever extreme or hazardous conditions prevail, creating doubt as to whether schools will be closed or open, the school website www.stacs.ca and division website www.ecsrd.ca will have up-to-date information.

Additionally, announcements may be made on various local radio stations.

Parental Discretion

When possible, the school will remain open in extreme weather conditions, even if busing has been canceled. Please do not feel obligated to send your children when you feel it is dangerous to do so, as their absence will certainly be understood. Again, a reminder to contact the school should your child be absent.

Dress for Weather

It is extremely important for students to dress for the weather and be prepared to go outside for recess. Even though students may get a ride to school, they should be prepared for any road emergency, vehicle breakdown or possible school emergency requiring quick evacuation.