



AQUINAS
DIOCESAN
GRAMMAR SCHOOL

P R O S P E C T U S





“No man can reveal to you anything but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge.”



Welcome to Aquinas.

We hope that you enjoy reading this prospectus and that it gives you a real flavour of what life is like in our school.

We are an inclusive school whose aim is to provide opportunities for all our pupils, enabling them to realise their true potential, academically, socially, spiritually and personally. We seek to foster a spirit of respect and understanding in each child in an environment which in turn is secure, supportive and caring, in which our pupils feel valued and esteemed. We are a learning school where the learning experience is effective, enjoyable and empowering and where our students are encouraged to aim high and to work hard. Their time here will, we believe, enable them to go out into the world as confident, mature young adults, well prepared for all the challenges of the 21st century. We are committed to working in partnership with our parents, constantly aware of the value of their support and the importance of their role.

Above all we are a school which recognises the uniqueness of each child, the wonder of each child and their potential for greatness.



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Principal: Mrs Geraldine Gibson
Vice-Principal: Mr Peter Dobbin

Chairman of the Board of Governors:
The Most Reverend Donal McKeown DD
Auxiliary Bishop to the
Bishop of Down and Connor



As a Catholic Grammar School we have as our patron, Saint Thomas Aquinas, a saint whose intellectual brilliance resulted in his becoming a renowned doctor of the Church.

Our pupils are taught and nurtured with dedication and sensitivity and are in their turn expected to learn and study well, to develop their talents and give of their best in all their undertakings. Christ's definitive commandment to love God and our neighbour as ourselves is evident not only in the atmosphere of respect and dignity that permeates all daily life in the school but in the generosity of the pupils. They look beyond themselves and reach out to help others who are less fortunate, both here at home and further afield. In doing so they come to a full realisation of how much they have to celebrate in their own lives and gain valuable insight into the effects of poverty, injustice and the misfortunes of ill health and natural catastrophes. The reality of the school motto "**Veritas Liberabit**" is alive for them.

The Aquinas Caring Campaign provides toys, food and financial help to many local families at Christmas through St Vincent de Paul and Bryson House. Shoeboxes are filled each October to go to needy children in other European countries while money is always generously donated in response to sudden natural disasters. Our big Coffee Morning raises much needed funds each year for Macmillan Cancer Care. Each year our Trocaire Lenten Appeal sees pupils' creativity at its best as they raise money for this just cause.

In school we have a purpose built Chaplaincy and we are fortunate in that we have, as our Chaplain, a priest of the diocese of Down and Connor. Mass is thus celebrated every day and staff, students and parents are welcome to attend. We celebrate special liturgies which occur throughout the school year: class Masses, end of year Masses, Christmas and Penitential Services and Year Assemblies. Our Chaplain fulfills a vital role within our school, supporting staff and pupils as a pastoral and spiritual advisor, as a colleague and as a teacher.







Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School is a Catholic school community within which both staff and students work in the pursuit of all aspects of spiritual, educational and personal excellence.

To achieve this we have the following aims:

- ⦿ **To promote the spiritual welfare of every member of the school community.**
- ⦿ **To foster to the highest possible degree the academic development of each student.**
- ⦿ **To establish a creative and secure educational partnership between the school, the parents and the wider community.**
- ⦿ **To provide a Pastoral Care System to meet the needs of all students throughout their school career.**
- ⦿ **To seek to promote a sense of continuity, coherence and achievement in each student's educational experience.**
- ⦿ **To develop attitudes and opportunities through which our students may become responsible members of society.**
- ⦿ **To prepare our students for a rapidly changing adult world of work, leisure and responsibility.**
- ⦿ **To foster within the school community respect for the personal and intellectual integrity of each and every individual.**

We firmly believe that pupils have a much better chance of reaching their full potential and developing their many talents in a caring and supportive environment, when they are able to look forward to coming to school and where expectations are not only high but achievable for each individual.







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Thomas Aquinas

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Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School is a community built on a foundation of Christian values of care and respect for the individual. At the heart of this school community lies the individual child who benefits from and contributes to this community.

The aims of the Pastoral Care System in Aquinas are:

- ⊙ to help all students participate as fully as possible in the learning experiences in school.
- ⊙ to contribute to the personal growth and development of each student.
- ⊙ to help students relate positively and with respect for others, both within and outside the school community..

In general these aims will find expression in the good relationships established between all members of the school community. Each student in the school belongs to a Tutor Group. The Tutor Group meets with the Tutor for 10 minutes at the start of the school day and also for one form period per week.

The Tutor has primary responsibility for the pastoral and academic welfare of the students and is thus in an excellent position to liaise with each student's subject teachers and with parents. They are the first point of contact for parents and are, in turn, supported by the Year Head and the Senior Leadership Team.





To enable our new students to adjust to their new school experience, the tutorial programme aims to:

- ◉ **Promote a sense of security and establish a feeling of belonging.**
- ◉ **Develop the skills of social interaction and a positive self image.**
- ◉ **Establish a caring community within the Tutor Group.**
- ◉ **Lay the foundations for study skills.**
- ◉ **Encourage the student to review progress.**

We understand the emotional and intellectual challenges that the transition from Primary to Grammar school poses for our Year Eight students. And so it is for this reason that the Tutors and Year Head, with the support of the staff as a whole, aim to help the new students adapt with ease. Practical guidance is offered on how to cope with the demands of new subjects, to organise books and personal equipment, to adjust to different types of homework, and to find a comfortable niche in Aquinas life.

Year 8 parents are invited to an Induction Evening at the end of September. The purpose of this is to provide advice and support, to give them a flavour of the different experiences their children are enjoying in the school and to allow them to meet the Year 8 Tutors in an informal setting. Year 8 pupils also have two Study Skills mornings during which they have a variety of different workshops, talks and activities, all aimed at improving the pupil's understanding of how to learn and work successfully. This programme now extends to Year 11 students to help them understand and meet the demands of their new courses and subjects. These Induction days are also preceded by a meeting with parents to inform them not only of the rigours of the courses undertaken but also of any curricular or pastoral changes which may affect their young people.

The Tutorial Programme followed by the students is intended to address relevant personal, social and academic issues in their formative years. Such areas are dealt with and discussed in a safe and trusting environment and include: friendships and social interaction, attitudes to bullying, cyberbullying, study skills, and health education. The weekly tutorial period is also an ideal time and forum for class and individual concerns to be raised. The Tutor plays a key role in helping the students to absorb the ethos of Aquinas where high standards of behaviour, honesty and application are encouraged and respected.







We want our students to be prepared for the world beyond school.

Our curriculum provides opportunities to enable our students to develop as responsible people with a broad and balanced approach to life. The student is at the centre of everything we do. We know that young people learn best when their experiences are relevant and enjoyable. We focus on developing skills and capabilities, especially their thinking skills and their ability to work and communicate with others.

To allow the student the ability to develop these skills we aim to create an effective learning environment; one in which they are provided with a wide variety of learning opportunities: our teachers use many strategies to stimulate and motivate our students. Team teaching, group work, brainstorming, hot seating and pupils demonstrating, are only some of the techniques used by teachers in our 'state of the art' facilities.

Both teachers and students are able to benefit from our superb educational technology facilities.

We want our students to develop a love for learning that leads to independence in their learning. To assist this, we monitor the progress of our students in formal and informal ways. We have a parent teacher evening for each year group when progress and application to work by students are discussed. Formal reports are issued at least once per year. The Tutor and Year Head review students' work regularly and invite parents to discuss their progress when required.

Key Stage 3

In Year 8, 9 and 10 students study the following subjects:

Art and Design, Drama, English, Geography, History, Home Economics, ICT, Languages (two from a choice of French, Irish and Spanish). Learning for Life and Work, Mathematics, Music, Physical Education, Religious Studies, Science, Technology. In Year 10 pupils study Business Studies

Additional support in Mathematics, Study Skills and Organisation is offered to students in Years 8 - 12 who have particular needs.

Key Stage 4

The following subjects are offered to students in Year 11 and 12.

Additional Mathematics, Art & Design, Biology, Business Studies, Chemistry, Design & Technology, Drama, English, English Literature, French, Geography, History, Home Economics, ICT, Irish, Journalism, Learning for Life and Work, Mathematics, Music, P.E., Physics, Religious Studies, Science (Double Award), Spanish.







AS and A2 (A Level)

The following subjects are offered at AS and A2 level:

Art & Design, Biology, Business Studies, Chemistry, ICT, Design & Technology, English Literature, French, Geography, German, History, Home Economics, Irish, Mathematics, Music, Physical Education, Physics, Politics, Religious Studies, Sociology, Spanish, Theatre Studies.

Critical Thinking and Psychology are both offered at AS Level only.

Students may take 3 or 4 of the above subjects at AS Level and may then proceed to A2 with 3 or 4 subjects.

All students have classes in Religious Studies, Careers Education and Personal and Social Education. Students may participate in a Physical Education programme, especially designed to encourage fitness and healthy living. Students are encouraged to engage in the Community Link Programme which involves links with several local Primary Schools, or a Special School where our students are involved in many of the projects undertaken by the pupils there. In Nazareth Care Village year 13 and 14 students visit the elderly, organise a Christmas Concert for them and a St Patrick's Day ceili. Aquinas pupils also help out in many of the local charity shops and in school they undertake an extensive recycling programme in conjunction with Bryson House.

We are concerned that our students make an effective transition from GCSE to A Level study. We support them in this with a special induction Evening and a day devoted to strategies for effective learning. A mentoring programme is in place to support students who require assistance.

Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) is the continuing educational process which is concerned with helping students to acquire the skills, attitudes and aptitudes they will need to chart their path through life with confidence, and to be effective citizens in a variety of roles and spheres of life.

The aims of the CEIAG Programme are to stimulate, encourage and develop within each student:

- ⦿ **Understanding of the stages within the personal career planning process.**
- ⦿ **Knowledge of the wide variety of careers information available and the skills required to utilise these effectively in the personal planning process.**
- ⦿ **Awareness of the options open to them in the context of a changing labour market and associated changing career patterns.**

In Year 13 students are invited to participate in a week's work experience programme. This allows each student to see at first hand what goes on in the particular work environment which interests them. Year 14 students, in turn, are guided carefully through the process involved in applying to University and College Admissions Service (UCAS) and Central Applications Office (CAO) for university admission. Students will receive advice and help should they wish to take a gap year, enter employment or pursue a vocational route in further education.

Personal Guidance for students also includes access to learning support and behaviour management while Education Guidance is provided by planning and managing learning or making use of our mentoring system. A recently set up Learning Guidance Forum administers all aspects of guidance for students.

A particular focus has been placed on the development of additional applied subjects, designed specifically for delivery within the context of the Entitlement Framework, which stipulates that young people should have the choice of at least one third applied courses at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School is an active member of the South Belfast Area Learning Community (SBALC) which comprises 14 schools and colleges within the South Belfast area. The SBALC is a voluntary coalition of providers, which is a valuable forum for planning collaboration to meet the needs of pupils in the area and for focusing on quality and the sharing of good practice.





We are confident there is something for everyone to join and enjoy. We aim to provide ongoing opportunities for our students to maximise their varied talents and gifts, be they cultural, intellectual or physical.

There are many sports for our students to participate in. We recognise that continued achievement and progress in physical performance enhances the student's self image and gives a clear understanding of the importance of regular exercise in everyday life. Our senior pupils participate in the coaching and mentoring of a group of students from Glenveagh Special School as part of Special Olympics Ireland. This has not only brought sporting success to the Glenveagh students but has provided challenges and fulfillment to those of our own pupils who coached and encouraged them.

The musical experiences offered to our students are many and varied. Tuition in a wide range of musical instruments is offered and support supplied by peripatetic music tutors. We have an already accomplished choir, orchestra, folk group and liturgy group.

In the Creative & Expressive arena our annual Shakespeare Festival continues to be a great success. Aquinas continues to go from strength to strength in its own productions of dramatic and musical performances. These draw widely on the talent and dedication of students from all year groups and provide exciting entertainment and fond memories for all involved. Students have enjoyed working alongside the Art and Design teachers in creating scenery and props for the musical and theatrical productions.

As a school we are in no doubt that our extra curricular programme develops strong relationships between students and teachers, the wider community and other schools. It contributes in a major way to developing pupils and students who are self-confident and articulate. They understand the importance of team work and are sensitive to the needs of others. In all of this they are striving to realise their full potential.



...something for everyone





We have high expectations for our students and we firmly believe in the establishment of a secure educational partnership between the school, parents and the wider community.

We want our students to become effective citizens of the 21st century. We provide many opportunities for them to learn about the world beyond school. The following are some of the opportunities available.

- ⊙ Links with schools in Belfast, Germany, France, Spain, South of Ireland
- ⊙ Visits to our partner schools in Barcelona, Lille and Dinslaken
- ⊙ Pope John Paul II Award
- ⊙ Bar Mock Trial
- ⊙ Work experience schemes
- ⊙ Community link programmes
- ⊙ Careers education
- ⊙ Environmental awareness projects
- ⊙ Dissolving Boundaries Through Technology
- ⊙ Young Enterprise
- ⊙ Aspire Leadership
- ⊙ Video conference links
- ⊙ Third World awareness and fund-raising groups
- ⊙ Saphara Project, India
- ⊙ Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.
- ⊙ The Ulster Project
- ⊙ Participation in competitions which range from Young Innovators to sporting tournaments and art competitions.

“The one who sows courtesy reaps friendship
and the one who plants kindness gathers love.”



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