

St Thomas' Church of England Maintained Primary School - Celebrating our history as we look towards a new beginning

The Diocese of Sodor and Man welcomes the announcement from the Department of Education and Children offering a new chapter in the life of the only Church of England Maintained School on the Isle of Man.

St Thomas' School has served the population of Douglas and the wider Island since it first opened in 1870, first in a former schoolroom, and from its present site since 1875. Then, it was one of a pioneering group of Church of England Parochial Schools that led the way in establishing the principle of free education for all, here on the Island and in England and Wales. Now, it remains a distinctive member of a wider family of schools serving our Island's children.

After almost 150 years in a tightly restricted site in central Douglas, we recognise that the time has come to grasp the opportunity for growth and development in a new location. Working with the Department of Education and Children, we look forward to a new chapter where a Maintained School with a distinctive Church of England ethos and character offers greater opportunity of choice to more families who would like their children to be part of a faith school. We believe that this will continue to compliment and expand the varied and highly successful range of schools on the Isle of Man.

As a period of consultation and planning continues, the Diocese is excited about the possibility of being part of a campus in which two distinct schools happily and boldly co-exist; where difference is celebrated, hospitality is shared and where learning from each other might affirm self-identity and confidence, with secure and genuine friendship and integrity. The young people in our schools today need to be prepared for a life where they go beyond tolerating difference to celebrating it, living and working in authentic generosity where their own identity is something to be proud of. We hope this example of schools operating in creative harmony will provide an inspiration to others and a resource to those wishing to develop understanding of faith in educational activities across the island.

In England, over 4900 schools of all phases have a Church of England Foundation. The Diocese of Sodor and Man looks forward to our school joining this wider network of increasingly successful and outstanding schools, whilst remaining distinctive as the only Manx school in this family. Our unique context on the Isle of Man means that we will seek to embed the very best of the Church of England's policy, research and resources in our school whilst adapting this to fit with our Island life and culture.

The Church of England Vision for Education, *Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good*, published in the autumn of 2016, seeks to embed four basic elements of *Wisdom, Hope, Community and Dignity* as foundational cornerstones of school ethos and identity. As a Church of England school, our foundation finds its roots in scripture, in our inherited tradition and also in our experience of shared human life today. This foundational trinity of scripture, tradition and experience has been part of our expression of Christianity since the Reformation. So whilst we recognise the authority of scripture, the Anglican way is one in which open conversation is held, and in which our current understanding of humanity rightly shapes our response to the world and all its peoples. A Church of England school for 2018 and beyond will be one where all are welcome to enter into a journey of shared learning, where the importance is placed on that great message of being able to live 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10). This desire for human flourishing goes beyond any difference of gender, sexuality, social background or ability as we seek to live in a community of equals working toward the greater good.

We recognize change can be unsettling so we will work with the schools and with the Department to make the period of consultation and transition as swift and as comfortable as possible for students, parents and staff as the many details continue to be worked out. Over the coming months we will look for opportunities to celebrate the education experienced by hundreds of our Island's residents over many generations, as we work toward creating a new chapter that better serves our Island population now and in the generations to come.

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Reverend James McGowan MA., BA., BA., PGCE.
Diocesan School's Officer – The Diocese of Sodor and Man
Chair Of The Governing Body – St Thomas Church of England Primary School
Vicar – The Parish of Malew and Santan

Notes

The report *Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good* can be downloaded from goo.gl/88iWiz

Questions regarding

1. Admissions should be sent in the first instance to the Admissions Panel care of St Thomas School
2. Foundation, Character, Identity and Governance to The Chair of Governors and Diocesan School's Officer – (education@sodorandman.im. 07624 488008) or to the Department of Education and Children
3. Timescale, logistics and transition to The Department of Education and Children