

Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh
Board of Management's End of Year Report
2014-2015

The 2014-2015 school year was a very memorable one for Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh as we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the school's foundation by the Presentation Brothers in September 1964. During the course of the year, a series of events was organised to mark the year, the most notable of which were the Jubilee Mass in October, the Students Day of Celebration held on Presentation Day in November, the Open Day for past pupils and the local community in March, the Jubilee Dinner (also in March) and the Dinner hosted by the Presentation Brothers in Mount St Joseph in May. The Jubilee Mass was generally acknowledged to have been one of the most impressive and, in many respects, moving events organised in the 50 year history of the school and will live long in the memory of those in attendance. The Jubilee Dinner in the Clarion Hotel which brought together hundreds of past pupils, distinguished guests and past and present staff was also a very memorable event. For students, the Day of Celebration – or Student Fun Day as it came to be known – was almost certainly the highlight and the horrendous weather on the day did nothing to dampen the spirits. The Board of Management was delighted to accept two beautiful gifts to mark the year: a beautiful depiction of the last supper presented by the Presentation Brothers and a ceramic depiction of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove commissioned by the Parents' Association. Both have been given pride of place at prominent locations in the school.

The year began very positively with the issuing of another outstanding set of Leaving Certificate examination results. Out of the 102 students who sat the Leaving Certificate, 2 (Kevin Holland and Michael O'Donovan) scored a maximum 625 points, while 5% of candidates achieved 600 points or above. 28% of students achieved 500 points or above and 56% got above 400 points. The average for the entire group was 407 points.

This was followed up by our students' success in being awarded no fewer than six UCC Entrance Scholarships. CSN students have thus been awarded more university scholarships over the last three years than students from any other school in Munster.

Kevin Holland also received the IAMTA Gold Medal for Applied Maths and the IOP Award for Physics. Michael O'Donovan was also the recipient of a JP McManus All-Ireland Scholarship. All of our top-performing were recognised at the annual Academic Awards Ceremony held in November at which past-pupil, Sean Gillane S.C., was the guest speaker.

Enrolment remains very healthy with 706 pupils enrolled in the school for the year– the highest number ever recorded on the school's roll book. As was stated last year, this figure is likely to remain steady over the next two years before falling back somewhat as the current 'bulge year' in 5th year works its way out. There were more than 180 applicants for the 120 places available in 1st Year and this oversubscription is likely to be repeated this coming year - though the vagaries of the application system mean that we can never be certain that all 120 available places will be filled. I averted previously to the unfortunate situation where we 'lose' students whose first choice is to come to CSN because they are 'forced' to take up an offer in another school rather than take the risk of waiting for a 2nd round offer that they can't be certain will come. I have written to the CEO of the PBST to alert him to this situation and to ask his advice on whether we, like some other non fee-paying schools, might impose a deposit system to deter applicants from accepting places that they are very likely to subsequently give up when they get an offer from another school – thus 'blocking' other genuine applicants. This might create space for genuine applicants who currently accept offers from fee-paying schools because they are afraid to take a chance on waiting for a second-round offer from CSN.

A number of staff became entitled (a little unexpectedly) to CIDs this year under the terms of the Ward Report. So far, we have been able to absorb these teachers from within our allocation without resort to redeployment but, with the expected drop in numbers in two years' time, the prospect of redeployment becomes increasingly likely. The redeployment of a teacher *into* the school at the beginning of last year exacerbated the situation and, should some of our current job-sharers decide to return to full-time work, redeployment will become a near certainty. Only retirements would prevent this from becoming a reality. This too could cause problems as we could find ourselves with faced with a subjects mismatch as the subjects of a retiring teacher would not necessarily match those of teachers who have recently been granted CIDs.

It was another very busy year in terms of Teaching and Learning with a lot of work going on the various initiatives being introduced by the DES. Our Literacy Initiative is progressing extremely well and testing carried out towards the end of the school year indicates that we are on course to achieve many of the ambitious targets we set. Investment in the library is already paying off in terms of markedly more positive attitudes towards reading and the numbers of books being borrowed has increased enormously. The purchase of a large number of age-appropriate fiction books and the success of projects such as lunchtime Book Club, *Cloud of Think*, Reading Week and Readathon have all contributed to the success of the initiative. The employment of a part-time librarian has also had a very positive impact. The OLAM initiative to improve standards of written work is also working well with test results showing a quite dramatic increase in the numbers of students who are excelling on our in-house test of written literacy. The standard of assessed written literacy among weaker remains stubbornly low in this test however. Progress made on our numeracy initiative this year was rather slower than might have been hoped for. While a numeracy co-ordinator was appointed and a considerable amount of testing was administered during the final term, the busyness of the Jubilee Year meant that the initiative didn't get the degree of attention it deserved. While a numeracy plan was put in place at the end of the year, it is very much a draft plan and there is a recognition that it will need to be redrafted. A new co-ordinator will take responsibility for the initiative and a core team involving a number of maths teachers is to be formed to drive the plan forward. Both initiatives (Literacy and Numeracy) operate within the context of School Self-Evaluation and the appointment earlier in the year of a new Assistant Principal with responsibility for School Planning and the implementation of the SSE process should be of great advantage to the school.

Progress on the introduction of the new Junior Cycle Student Award effectively came to a standstill during the year as a result of the industrial action which prohibited teachers from engaging in any planning relating to the programme. The programme is however already being implemented in one subject area – English. At the time of writing, negotiations are continuing between the DES and the teaching unions and there are indications that a resolution may be in sight to the vexed question of assessment which is at the heart of the dispute. Time will tell.

The school has made very significant progress on the implementation of the recommendations of the DES Inspectorate contained in the WSE-MLL (Whole School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning) report. After much debate and considerable planning, we have moved to implement the key recommendation to introduce subject sampling in Transition Year. A Strategic Planning Team has been established and had a very productive year's work. The current focus of the team is the realignment of our middle management structures with our long term strategic goals. This is a major task and will require a lot of thought. While there is a recognition that the current assignment of duties to post holders does not always result in an equal distribution of workload and that it is not necessarily the most effective way of running a complex institution such as a school, it is also appreciated that the current system is one that has evolved over time and can only be changed with the cooperation of existing post holders. Reform in this area has the potential to create a genuinely distributive leadership structure within the school, empowering teachers and providing them with the opportunity to demonstrate leadership at all levels. Much work has also been done to encourage new teaching methodologies and, in particular, Assessment for Learning strategies. Teacher-led inputs were a feature of almost all staff meetings last year and were very well received. In keeping with the recommendation that student-led approaches to learning be encouraged, it is proposed that the third strand of our School Self-Evaluation (after literacy and numeracy) will be in the area of students 'learning to learn'. This work will take place during the coming year.

A DES inspection of Music took place during the year and the report was extremely positive about the place of music in the school and the way in which it has developed over the last number of years. A number of school policies were reviewed during the year including *Transition of Students from Primary to Secondary* and *The Pastoral Care Development Plan* – though the Board recommended aspects of the plan's presentation and use of language be re-examined prior to ratification by the Board. The school's Safety Statement was also reviewed during the year and a final report is due to be issued very shortly. Work has also begun on developing a Data Protection Policy for the school. The new Anti-Bullying Procedures have been introduced on a statutory basis

and all members of staff have received extensive instruction on the implementation of the new procedures.

The school's finances remain very healthy, thanks in large part to the generosity of our parents who continue to make voluntary contributions to the school. The Board has continued to invest in the maintenance and upgrading of the school building and school facilities. Further work was carried out to upgrade the landscaping around the school and the school was looking exceptionally well – both inside and out – for the Jubilee celebrations. A new polytunnel has been built for a Transition Year horticultural module and a new 'kitchen' unit is due to be fitted very shortly in Room 4 to allow for a cookery module. The prayer room will also be extensively upgraded this summer and the Board has set aside a sum of money for this purpose. It is anticipated that some upgrading of electrics will have to be carried this summer as some of the wiring dates from the late 1960s when the school was built and is now seriously outdated and no-longer fit for purpose or even in keeping with modern safety regulations. It was disappointing that the Board's Emergency Works application to the DES for funding to replace the ring main was turned down. The Board is now faced with a big decision on whether it should now go ahead with this project using its own resources or apply under a future Summer Works scheme. It is also the case that many of the schools drains are in very poor condition and will require repair or replacement. Ideally, this work should probably be carried out at the same time as the replacement of the water main as both projects will involve excavation in broadly the same area. On a more positive note, the school has recently received a grant which will provide about 80% of the funding required to replace all the computers in the Technical Graphics/DCG Room. The Board has put in place an Infrastructural Development Plan and a number of major works are due to go ahead in the coming years. The most significant of these are the improvement of the school's sports field and the development of a student lunchtime facility in the area of the existing 'old' toilets.

A very wide range of extra-curricular continues to be offered by teachers on an entirely voluntary basis. Inter-class leagues again proved very popular especially with the younger students, while school teams and individuals representing the school participated in competitions in hurling, football, soccer, basketball, debating, chess, athletics and robotics among others. The senior hurlers and footballers reached the semi-finals in their

respective provincial competitions and both were considered extremely unlucky not to reach the final – with the hurlers particularly unfortunate, losing out by a point in extra-time. Soccer and basketball teams had very active years with the under 16 basketballers winning the Munster South Competition. Entrepreneurial activities such as mini-company and build-a-bank go from strength to strength, while non-competitive activities such as hill walking and creative writing continue to be very popular. The library is a hive of activity at lunchtimes as younger students in particular gather to read and play a wide range of board games. Transition Year students were particularly active being involved in projects such as promoting internet safety with 1st and 2nd Year students, Green Schools, and managing teams in the various 1st Year leagues.

The school remains conscious of its mission as a member of the Presentation Brothers Schools Trust network of schools and there were a number of PBST gatherings involving both staff and students during the year. Luke Monaghan facilitated a staff seminar in the school where teachers were encouraged to examine the pastoral work of the school and many students – particularly those in Transition Year - involved themselves in community work, in charitable activities and in the area of social justice. Of particular note was the participation of our students in the Edmund Rice Action (ERA) Camp for primary school children from disadvantaged backgrounds which is based here in the school during the summer months. Some students also participated in an ERA camp which operated in another PBST school in Cobh. Older CSN students who had previously worked as ERA camp leaders along with two staff members travelled to work as volunteers on a pilgrimage to Lourdes. Others still were involved in advocacy through the Cork Edmund Rice Schools Interactive Network 2015 celebrations or worked at the SHARE day care centre.

The drive to improve communications both within the school and between school and home saw further advances this year. The setting up of VShare, our new school administration software package, has made it considerably easier to provide staff with all sorts of data. Teachers now have instant access to class lists, exam results, attendance records, students' medical and SEN information and a wide range of other types of information and important messages can be passed rapidly to staff using dashboard notifications. The new-look school website (www.csncork.ie) is very much established

and is actively updated with news and images and there is also a school Facebook page. An edition of *Spiorad Signals*, the school newsletter, was published at the end of each term.

The Parents' Association was very active and along with organising various fund-raising activities (including a *Night at the Dogs*), arranged meetings and information sessions for parents on a variety of topics. Particularly successful this year was a series of talks on parenting for dads. The Student Council met regularly and, under its newly appointed staff co-ordinator, is attempting to redefine its role and to establish itself as a voice of the student body. Past pupils took part in a careers day where they spoke to current TY pupils about their work and careers, and plans are afoot to further engage this section of our school community which turned up in such large numbers at our Jubilee celebrations.

The coming year will, inevitably, present new challenges to the Board and to the school as a whole. As we begin our second half century, we are, I believe, in a good place. Relationships between staff and students remain exceptionally good and temporary staff and visitors frequently comment on the great atmosphere about the place. The unexpected death in November of fifth year student, Evan Kidney, was a considerable blow to the entire school community but, in a somewhat perverse way, the tragedy seemed to bring the school together in a very moving and impressive way. Staff morale remains high in spite of the ever-increasing demands and workload and the school is, I believe, a happy place and a good place in which to work and learn. We can, I think, look forward to another good year in 2015-16.

Michael Sexton

Secretary to the Board of Management

30th June 2015