

Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh
Board of Management's End of Year Report
2015-2016

The 2015-2016 school year was a somewhat quieter one than the year previously when Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh celebrated the 50th anniversary of its foundation by the Presentation Brothers in 1964. The year began in earnest with the publication of the Leaving Certificate examination results in mid-August. Results were a little down on the outstanding results of the previous two years. 2% of our students received 600 points or more (down on previous years but still four times the national average) while 27% scored 500 or above (very much in line with previous years and almost three times the national average). 51% of all who sat the exam got 400 or more points. The average for the group was 389 points which was a noticeable reduction on the previous year – though it must be said that the results in four of the previous five years had been quite exceptional and that remarkable run had to come to an end sometime. We did, however, receive some extremely positive coverage in the media when the various national newspapers published their annual ‘league tables’. While we all view these league tables with a somewhat jaundiced eye, the fact that the Irish Independent rated Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh as the top-performing non-fee paying boys’ school in Munster (based on third-level entry over the last seven years) – and second in Ireland - certainly did us no harm at all in terms of public perception.

CSN students were awarded three UCC Entrance Scholarships this year and, as a result, we have been the most honoured school in Munster over the last three years. Junior Certificate results were also very satisfactory with two of our boys achieving 10 A grade results. All of our top-performing were recognised at the annual Academic Awards Ceremony held later in the year at which eminent medic and past-pupil, Mícheál Ó Ríordáin, was the guest speaker.

With 716 pupils on the school register, enrolment was at an all-time highpoint. This figure is likely to fall back somewhat in the next year or two as the current ‘bulge year’ in 5th Year year works its way out. There were 190 applicants for the 120 places available in 1st Year this year (even higher than the previous year) and this

oversubscription is likely to be repeated this coming year. While Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh remains very much a school in demand, it is, I feel, important that we continue to highlight our ‘product’ to primary school parents and pupils and to the local community in general. This is best done by putting on a quality Open Night each year, by producing good quality promotional material (the mini-prospectus which is delivered to 5th class pupils in the feeder primary schools in May each year is, I believe, invaluable) and through promoting the successes of the school in local news media. The use of social media (particularly the school’s Facebook page which is maintained by Lisa O’Sullivan, our librarian) has also been very effective. The school website (which was re-launched in time for the Jubilee celebrations) and the rebranding of *Spiorad Signals* have also played their part. The Board of Management will probably need to consider producing a new Prospectus this coming year as copies of the existing one are running low and the information in the Prospectus is fast becoming outdated. This will involve a considerable expense as we have always set out to provide prospective pupils with a professionally produced top-quality product which is reflective of the standards associated with the school. One area where I feel we could do more would be in getting current CSN news into the local print media. While the *Irish Examiner* tends to shy away from anything other than stories with a national angle, the *Evening Echo* and the *Bishopstown News* are more than happy to print good news stories from the local schools.

It was another busy year in terms of Teaching and Learning with a lot of work going on behind the scenes on the various initiatives being introduced by the DES. The School Development Plan for Literacy is coming to the end of its three year cycle and, overall, has been a success. The drive to encourage more reading and the OLAM written language initiative have been perceived by teachers as a success overall – though the data on students’ own perceptions have been somewhat mixed. The investment in the library (much of it funded by the Parents’ Association) has been very worthwhile and the library is now a vibrant, busy place each lunchtime where before it was drab and largely unused. Again, much of the credit for this goes to our librarian and to our SNAs who run a very successful lunchtime club for junior students in the library. Progress on our School Development Plan for Numeracy has been somewhat slower than anticipated. While we were fortunate that a staff member (Mr Philip O’Sullivan) volunteered to take on the job

of co-ordinator, numeracy hasn't yet managed to develop the same whole-school traction that literacy did. To counter this, it has been decided to reduce the number of target areas from an ambitious four to a more realistic one – so hopefully more significant progress can be made in the year ahead. The challenge will be to work on the chosen numeracy target area (reducing negative perceptions towards numeracy) at a whole-school level across all the subject disciplines without reducing the initiative to a few token interventions. A start has also been made on the third strand of our School Self-Evaluation process. Under the direction of Mr Steven O'Connor, School Planning co-ordinator, data has been collected on how 5th Year students 'learn to learn'. This has been formulated into a School Improvement Plan for this strand and a number of interventions will be implemented this coming year – most likely a series of focused study seminars and the development of on-line study resources.

Regrettably, there has been very little progress on the introduction of the new Junior Cycle Student Award. Owing to the entrenched positions of both the DES and the ASTI, we are at something of a standstill. While the English programme was introduced two years ago and Science and Business programmes are to be introduced this coming September, our teachers (unlike their TUI counterparts) have not attended inservice training and great uncertainty remains over how the assessment of the English programme will be administered. At the time of writing, the situation remains far from resolved and there is the very definite prospect of further and more intense industrial action in the new school year.

The DES Inspectorate carried out a WSE-MLL (Whole School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning) Follow-Through Inspection in November. As the name implies, the purpose of this inspection was to assess the progress the school has made in implementing the recommendations made in the original WSE-MLL Inspection of 2013. It was very encouraging for all involved that the inspectors commented so favourably on our progress:

Management and staff have responded readily to the recommendations arising from the evaluation in a highly pro-active and constructive manner. The outcome of wide consultation and effective whole-school collaboration in driving change has led to significant success in areas such as whole-school guidance and TY reform. Similarly, actions taken to date in support of progressing other areas

for development are very encouraging and the school is urged to continue advancing its innovative change agenda.

While great progress has undoubtedly taken place, there is still some distance to go in terms of curriculum innovation. While curricular change at junior level will occur largely as a result of DES-imposed innovation, at senior level we will need to look at how we can introduce RSE (which is currently available only in 5th Year) and PE (which isn't available at all). I would suggest that we consider introducing some form of *Wellness* programme in senior cycle that would incorporate elements of PE and RE, along with RSE and Guidance. It might also include such things as yoga, mindfulness, nutrition, meditation etc. We have no shortage of staff who would, I think, be only too happy to become involved in these areas. Our Trustees have already consented to reducing 'traditional' RE from two periods to one to accommodate such a programme. Through the work of the Strategic Planning Team on Transition Year, we have shown ourselves to be adept at curriculum design so it should not be beyond us to come up with something that will satisfy DES regulations while also improving the curriculum we offer our older students.

We will also need to do further work on bringing our Posts of Responsibility structure into line with the current needs of the school. While some discussion on the realignment of duties did take place at Strategic Planning Team level (a dialogue that also involved the Assistant Principals), more work remains to be done in this area. Given the fact that any new posts will be awarded under the new competitive structure, it would be as well that we would have a schedule of duties worked out in advance of any competition. Ideally, we would undertake a thorough revamp of the whole structure and the duties attached but that may prove difficult given the lack of time available at the moment for such a process.

School policies are largely up to date with revisions having taken place to key policies such as admissions and mobile phone use during the course of the year. One policy that is currently available only in draft form is Data Protection. Consequently, the Board intends to draw up a policy in this area this coming year.

The school's finances remain on a sound footing, thanks in large part to the generosity of our parents who continue to make voluntary contributions to the school. It

should be stressed, however, that given the DES's inadequate funding of voluntary schools (30% less than that given to 'state' schools), such voluntary contributions remain essential if the school is to continue to operate as it currently does. The new Board has continued to invest in the maintenance and upgrading of the school building and school facilities and progress has been made on provision of a lunchtime facility for junior pupils. A very significant investment took place on the installation of a proper drainage system on the school sportsfield that should make it playable throughout the year. The old ball-catcher netting is also to be replaced by new more extensive and better quality netting at both ends of the field. This should also have the effect of lessening the risk of damage to cars and buildings in the consultants' clinic premises. A request made to the clinic's owners to share the cost of this improvement is currently under consideration by their Board.

The extra-curricular programme provided by the school's teachers remains varied and very active with large numbers of students participating regularly in hurling, football, soccer, basketball, chess, hill-walking, debating, robotics, computers, yoga, creative writing and traditional music. Co-curricular programmes such as Build a Bank, Enterprise, Maths Circles, An Seomra Caidrimh and Young Scientist also thrive. It should be emphasised that unlike in other schools where paid coaches are brought in, all of the above-named activities are run entirely free-of-charge by our own teaching staff. We are also fortunate to have an extremely dedicated Transition Year Co-ordinator (Ms Cleary) who gives so freely of her time to run an extraordinary range of activities and programmes along with the Edmund Rice Action Summer Camp for less privileged primary school students. A very successful ski trip for second year students was also organised again this year by our PE teachers, Mr Fagan and Mr O'Sullivan.

Information management has improved greatly at all levels within the school over the last year. VSWare, our new Data Management System, is now firmly embedded and is a significant improvement on the old Admin system. It is far more user friendly and offers much greater 'functionality'. All teachers now receive regular information updates using the notifications feature on VSWare, while email is extensively used to deliver documentation. The school's website which was upgraded last year by a very active staff committee also provides extensive information while the Facebook page has become

extremely popular with parents and past pupils. The text-a-parent service continues to provide instant communication to parents while the new-look *Spiorad Signals* edited by Ms Moriarty allows for more thoughtful discussion of issues and for reviewing of events.

The Parents' Association chaired this year by Mrs Goretti Walls continues to be very active and, along with organising various fund-raising activities, arranged meetings and information sessions for parents and students on a variety of topics. One such event involved linking up with the Parents' Associations of two other schools to defray the costs of a speaker who travelled from Dublin to speak about the transition to third-level. The Student Council met regularly under the guidance of its staff co-ordinator, Mr Steven O'Connor. There is undoubtedly scope for further development of this body in the years ahead and it would be great if they were to actively involve themselves in fundraising (perhaps through student-driven no uniform days) for the new student lunch facility.

The new school year sees the appointment of a new school senior management team as I take up my secondment posting with our Trustees, the Presentation Brothers Schools Trust. While I am excited by the challenge that my new role offers, I will leave CSN after 36 years as a student and teacher with a very heavy heart. I owe Coláiste Spioraid Naomh so much more than an education and a career. It is a place where I have always been happy and where I have made so many friends. In passing on the baton, I have no doubt that Michael Foley and Brenda Moriarty will do a marvellous job in leading the school over the course of the next year and perhaps beyond. The school continues to be a vibrant, happy place where, in spite of all the pressures that are being brought to bear on schools such as ours, staff morale remains very high and the quality of the relationships between staff and pupils is a particularly noteworthy feature of the school. I have been particularly fortunate to have been involved in leading the school at a time in the years immediately before and after our Jubilee celebrations when we were able to reflect on the successes of the first 50 years and look forward with confidence to the challenges of the next. I owe a special debt to Michael Foley who has been the most dedicated, efficient and capable of Deputy Principals and a loyal and trustworthy colleague and friend. CSN is lucky to have a man of his calibre to lead the school forward. I will finish by saying that it has been a privilege as Principal and Secretary to the Board to have worked with three Boards of Management made up of exceptional people –

parents, teachers and Trustee representatives – who always put the best interests of Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh first and foremost, and never once, to my recollection, acted out of any sectional or self-interest. I wish the current Board, led so ably by Mr Sean Culhane, continued success in the remaining two years of its term of office.

Michael Sexton

Secretary to the Board of Management

28th June 2016