



Coláiste an Spioraid Naoimh
Board of Management's End of Year Report
2018-2019

The school endeavours to provide a holistic education that caters for the academic, physical, mental and spiritual development of our students. It does so by focussing on the work of the classroom, the pastoral care of our students and on the extra-curricular.

In 2018-2019 there was plenty to celebrate academically and on the extra-curricular front.

Academic Results

The year began in earnest with the publication of the Leaving Certificate examination results in mid-August. The exam results at Leaving Cert were very good with almost 20% receiving 500 points or better (the national average is around 12%). There were almost 50% on 400 points or better (the national average is 37%). Our top 20 students averaged 573 points. It is the highest average result we have achieved since we began doing a detailed analysis in 2003. Our less academic students did well at all points levels, but it was really in the upper half that our students did particularly well in 2018.

CSN students were awarded two UCC Entrance Quercus Scholarships, a Trinity Naughton scholarship, a Mary Immaculate Entrance Scholarship, a University of Limerick McManus scholarship and a Trinity College Entrance Exhibition Award this year.

The Junior Cert. results this year show a significant year on year improvement with the number of grades at Higher/Common level increasing from 85% to 88%. Within that category, the % of 'A' grades increased from 12% to 16%; the number of B grades from 28% to 33%. This is, I think, a testament to the work of teachers, students and the continued fostering of a culture of academic achievement. It may also be due to in part to the group being a better academic group than the previous year's – only time will tell if that is the case.

All of our top performing students were recognised at the annual Academic Awards Ceremony held later in the year at which Gordon Hardie, President, Food & Ingredients at Bunge Limited, past-pupil and current school Board member, was the guest speaker.

Admissions

As predicted the previous year, enrolment fell back by eight students to 698 students due to the ‘bulge’ year of previous 6th Years working its way through the school. It was to be hoped, however, that the figure would increase for 2019-20, which has, indeed, proven to be the case as the school now has 710 students.

There were 148 applicants for the 120 places available in 1st Year this 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 important that we continue to highlight our school 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 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 and the rebranding of *Spiorad Signals* have also played their part. There is also a comprehensive information booklet published annually now for prospective students and their parents.

Building and Infrastructural Projects

It has been a very busy year between building projects realised and others in the pipeline:

- The long-awaited Lunchroom became a reality as it opened its doors at the beginning of this school year. It has been a significant addition, particularly aimed at the 1st Year students who are required to stay in school at lunchtime. This also included a modernisation of the former gear room and old shop which transformed the area into a new Caretaker’s area, Gear Room and 1st Yr. Bag room.
- A second computer room, the Digital Learning Centre, was added during the Summer to cater for the increased use of computers in 1st, 2nd and 3rd years.
- The replacement of the Ring main and the foul water system was given the green light by the DES and the work was completed this Summer.
- The student toilet facilities were overhauled, conveniences added and the area brought up to a standard that befits our students and our school.
- An energy audit was completed by Crowley Carbon and a list of initiatives including changing to gas, installing solar panels and improving the efficiency of our heating system have been proposed and costed; the proposals will be considered by the Board of Management early in the new school year.

Teaching and Learning

SSE (School Self-Evaluation) Initiatives

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 has come to the end of its three year cycle and

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 and we will continue to encourage its use in 1st and 2nd Year homework and exams. 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, to our SNAs and PME students who run a very successful lunchtime club for junior students in the library. The School Development Plan for Numeracy is also past its development period and is now considered to be embedded. Thanks to Ray Cooney and Philip O'Sullivan for leading those two initiatives.

The third strand of our School Self-Evaluation process, *Learning to Learn*, is also well established. Under the direction of 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 have been implemented last year – a study manual was created, study resources were added to the school website and a series of focused study seminars were conducted for 5th Years on two different days last year.

A further two strands are currently active. The first of these – promoting a Growth Mindset is being spearheaded by Siobhán Cahalane and is entering its third year. In Growth Mindset students believe their abilities and intelligence can be developed and improved with effort, learning, and persistence. This can have a significant effect on students' outcomes, academic and otherwise.

The second strand is an exploration of the efficacy of using digital strategies and self-directed learning vis-à-vis the use of more traditional teaching methods and the outcomes of these different methodologies. This strand is being led by Diarmaid Shortall.

Junior Certificate

The new Junior Cycle Student Award is almost completely implemented, in so far as the introduction of new specifications is concerned. This represents a profound change in where the focus is in terms of learning – on learning *processes* as opposed to *memorising* and *rote learning*. It also has huge implications for how teaching is done, with an emphasis on collaborative learning and on student participation in their own learning. It means the role of the classroom teacher is changing significantly from one who imparts information to one who facilitates learning. It is different and it is challenging, but teachers are open to the challenge and willing to explore the new possibilities.

We have decided on the format our new Junior Cycle programme is going to take. In deciding what form it should take, we were conscious of the need to deliver an academically-based curriculum that would accord with the traditions of the school and the wishes of our parent body. To that end, the academic programme was maintained. History and Geography also maintained their position as integral parts of the curriculum we deliver. A programme that would ignore where we have come from

and the environment we exist in, it seems to me, would be diminished educationally and unacceptable.

We have not, however, just maintained the status quo. Part of the discussion about the new JC related to the need to give our students the necessary digital skills with which to capitalise on the new specifications for the different subjects. It was felt that leaving the thrust of digital learning until Transition Year was too late. To this end, Computer Studies will now have two periods in each of 1st, 2nd and 3rd Year. The Digital Learning Centre was created to service the increased demand. It is also to be hoped that Computer Science to Leaving Cert. may be offered as an option subject in the future as well.

School Middle Management Review

The Posts of Responsibility have been reviewed and repurposed for the needs of the school as they currently exist. The moratorium on posts was lifted last year and new posts have been filled using the new competency model that was part of the new process. It means that seniority has become a small part of the consideration for posts and will disappear altogether from the 2019-20 school year onwards. It is hoped that the review and re-assignment of posts will help in the management of very busy schools such as our own.

Finances

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 some of these projects are detailed under building projects above.

Extra-Curricular Activities

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, An Seomra Caidrimh, Young Scientist and Scifest also thrive.

It is testament to the culture of an extended education that seeks to involve students outside the classroom as well as within that so much success takes place in sporting and academic competitions. I believe it is impossible to overstate the benefits that extra-curricular activities give to the students who participate. It helps to fulfil our philosophy of providing as holistic an education as possible. It also builds connections between students and teachers and students and the school that cannot be replicated easily elsewhere. As a teacher who was involved in providing extra-curricular opportunities for many years, I also think it is very rewarding for the teachers who give so generously of their time.

It should be emphasised that unlike some other schools where paid coaches are brought in, all of the above-named activities are run entirely voluntarily by our own teaching staff. We are also fortunate to have an extremely dedicated Transition Year Co-ordinator (Anne 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 number of these programmes are focused on encouraging the leadership abilities of our 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. To all of the teachers who give of their time, we owe a great debt of gratitude.

Online Payment System

The ability to pay school charges for activities using credit/debit cards online became a major focus of our digital strategy, which also includes VShare, this year. The process of identifying the best processors to partner with was an arduous one. This project was delivered, from inception to activation, by our administrative assistant/Librarian, Lisa O'Sullivan. It means now that parents can have the convenience of paying various charges online, which has become, for many of us, the preferred way to pay our bills. It also makes for a more secure environment as the school no longer carries significant amounts of cash.

Communication

The school's website which was upgraded a number of years ago 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 *Sporad Signals* edited by Ms. Hazel and Mr Kerins allows for more thoughtful discussion of issues and for review of events.

Parent and Student Associations

The Parents' Association, chaired this year by Vicky Lane, continues to be a very important source of fundraising for the school and has raised considerable amounts over the years to fund facilities for the betterment of students and the school.

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 remains to be seen how that will manifest itself.

Bidding Farewell

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the school's debt to three of our colleagues who are leaving us this year. Ailín Casey, Lorna Drinan and Lisa O'Sullivan have each contributed so much to the school, to colleagues and to students. They have embodied a great deal of the culture and the dynamism of CSN in their contribution to the school. We wish them well for the future and thank them for all they have done.

As I am also retiring this year, I would like to thank you all for your support:

It has been a difficult time to be a teacher with the amount of change that is being asked of us all. I know that our staff will embrace the good, while not forgetting the skills they already have as successful practitioners. Our staff is a very talented, effective group and I know they will navigate the sometimes bewildering changes that are happening in education successfully. I particularly want to thank staff for supporting me through the changes that have been introduced in the last few years.

I would like to thank our parents who have trusted us to do the best we can for their sons. I know from many interactions with parents that the trust is real and it is very much appreciated – it is a great compliment to the staff and the job they do that that trust is there.

I want to thank our students for supporting the school ethos, for doing us proud whenever there is an occasion where they are in the limelight. It is heartening to be able to talk to students where there is a difference of opinion or something has happened, to be met with a response that is respectful and honest and where we try to find common ground to resolve difficulties. After all the talk about what a school is or isn't, it is our students who best exemplify what we stand for and, I believe, they do it wonderfully well.

I would like to thank the Board of Management for their support during my three years as principal. Their collective and individual wisdom and experience has been a great help to me in my job. Special thanks go to Seán Culhane, Chairperson of the Board, for his peerless help and support during that time.

A principal cannot function effectively without the support of a deputy principal. We were very fortunate to be given a second deputy two years ago. I could not ask for the support of two more capable, loyal deputies than Brenda Moriarty and Andrew O'Reilly. They have been magnificent. It is also comforting to know that I leave the school in very capable hands as Brenda steps into the principal's role and Andrew continues in his role as deputy.

This school is a community that prospers. I am very proud to have been associated with that community, helping to deliver the finest education, in the broadest sense, that we can for our young men.

Michael Foley
Secretary to the Board of Management
late August 2019