

Report of the Board of Management on the operation of St. Tola's N.S.

for the 2021/2022 School Year

www.tolasns.com

Dear Parents/Guardians,

As the 2021/2022 school year comes to a close the Board of Management is pleased to publish its annual report on the operation of St. Tolas's. This report augments the weekly newsletters sent home over the course of the year which are available on www.tolasns.com

The last two school years have presented unique challenges for all of us in the school community and beyond as we had to get to grips with the effects on all aspects of our lives of living through the global pandemic of Covid-19. Term 1 was dominated by re establishing school routines, getting used to all the COVID 19 measures again - pods in classrooms, extra hygiene measures, keeping classes separate on the yard, staggered break times, separate entrances and exits points, no visits to the school unless by appointment, school staff wearing face masks and in Term 2 pupils from 3rd-6th class had to wear masks. . These measures had a knock on effect on school life but despite this we kept going. Terms 1 and 2 were marked by high levels of absenteeism as many pupils, parent/guardians and staff had to isolate given the strict measures in place at that time re preventing the spread of Covid-19. For many pupils the days missed were unavoidable and we all hope that for the coming year the levels of absenteeism will greatly decrease. Thankfully in term 3 all restrictions were lifted and we could return to one break and one lunchtime for all classes, no mask wearing requirement for pupils and relaxation of pod measures. We still keep up our strict cleaning regime , hand sanitising and making sure there is good ventilation throughout the school.

Term 3 also saw how small our world has become. We have welcomed a number of pupils fleeing from the war in Ukraine. We hope they will settle into St. Tolas and feel welcome. We also hope that the war in Ukraine will end soon and they can return to their friends and family.

The Board of Management is pleased that we were in a position to open our Aoibhneas special class last September for pupils with multiple disabilities. Our new specially designed prefab was opened in January 22. We faced some delays in opening this but are delighted with how it has turned out. This joins our Solas special class for pupils with Autism which was opened in March 21.

The Board of Management wishes to extend a sincere thanks to our teaching staff, Special Needs Assistants, secretary and caretaker for their trojan work over the past year and for all they have done for our pupils. We also extend our thanks to our parents and guardians for their wonderful support of the school staff in so many ways. We wish you well for a safe and enjoyable summer holiday and we look forward to the new school year which begins on Thursday 1st September 2022.

Yours sincerely,

P.J. Burke , Chairperson

Mary Dunlea Fitzgerald,

Board of Management 2021/2022

Chairperson.....P.J. Burke

Treasurer.....Richard Stapleton

Principal Teacher.....Mary Dunlea Fitzgerald

Teacher Nominee.....Lisa Hackett

Parent Nominee.....Mike O' Brien

Parent Nominee.....AnneMarie Kelly

Community Nominee.....Cathy Colgan

Community Nominee.....Anne Germaine

Covid 19 Response

The Department of Education and Skills COVID 19 guidelines were still in operation at the start of the current school year. This meant re-organising classrooms, working out how to operate so that each class was its own bubble and from 3rd-6th classes pupils were to remain in pods, having staggered break and lunchtimes and separate entrances and exits for many classes, increased cleaning throughout the school day, all pupils and staff washing and sanitising hands throughout the day and staff wearing masks when less than 2 m from pupils and other staff. Pupils from 3rd -6th classes were expected to wear masks in school for part of the year. We were all very conscious how challenging this was for many pupils but the pupils showed great resilience and fortitude in complying with this direction from public health and the Department of Education. Thank you to all staff who played a significant role in ensuring that some normality could return and we could get on with delivering the curriculum to our pupils. . Thank you also to parents/guardians who co-operated throughout the school year with all measures recommended by the school on foot of public health advice. Thankfully by Term 3 most of the restrictions were lifted and we could return to one break and lunch. It was so lovely for our pupils to see their siblings and friends in other classes and to feel like we were a school community connected with one another. While many of the restrictions are gone from our day to day lives Covid-19 is still with us. As we look to next year we hope that the incidence of infection will greatly reduce and not have the same consequences for normal school life.

Curriculum Developments

Social, Personal and Health Education : As a school staff it has become evident over the past few years that Wellbeing is an area that we need to focus on to best support our pupils. We took on the Weaving Wellbeing programme in every class this year. This is the first Irish designed positive mental health programme designed for primary aged pupils. One of the successes of the programme has been our gratitude flowers. Each Friday at Cruinniú (school assembly) each class chooses something they are grateful for this week and share it with the whole school. These are then displayed on the staffroom window and can be viewed from the yard. Some of the suggestions have been incredible and demonstrate the creativity and deep thinking of many of our pupils.

Literacy : We place great importance on literacy learning in St. Tola's as it is the bedrock on which so much learning across the curriculum is built. The Primary Language Curriculum is being implemented in all classes from Junior Infants to 6th class . We put a renewed focus in the early years on teaching “heart” words – words that are high frequency and phonetically decodable. If pupils can master these words in the emerging literacy stage it really helps their reading to develop. While Covid 19 did impact how we deliver our literacy teaching we were able to resume 6 week interventions for all pupils in 2nd and 1st classes. The pupils were broken up into small groups and the focus was on teaching and revising phonic sounds, practising these sounds in reading through the use of our new reading scheme – Red Squirrels, comprehension strategies and writing. We look forward to implementing this programme again next year. Guided reading did continue throughout the year in Senior Infants -4th class. We also had a number of pupils in Senior infants and 1st class benefit from Reading Recovery which is an individualised programme designed to support struggling readers before the gap between them and their peers becomes too wide. We are fortunate as we are one of the few schools in Clare to have two fully trained Reading Recovery teachers operating in the school. We also offer the Wilson programme for pupils with dyslexia type difficulties and this has benefitted some of our pupils this year also.

In the senior end of the school the focus is on enhancing pupils vocabulary through explicit teaching of vocabulary and through reading, comprehension and writing activities. Guided reading has proven very effective in 3rd and 4th classes. Meanwhile in the senior end of the school in 4th, 5th and 6th classes we have introduced book club where pupils work on a variety of novels and explore them through questioning, identifying new vocabulary and through using their comprehension strategies. This approach involves the pupils being active in their own learning Pupils from 3rd-6th class use the Accelerated Reading programme . and read novels at their own reading level and take online quizzes to determine their comprehension and understanding of what they have read. This programme can be very motivating as pupils keep track of the number of words read. We have several pupils who have read more than a million words this year!

In all classes a variety of writing genres have been taught with pupils making good progress in writing across the curriculum also.

Gaeilge: The focus this year has been on improving pupils' spoken Gaeilge. Juniors-5th classes use Bua na Cainte where the emphasis is on hearing and responding to stories, rhymes and songs. Teachers promote the use of Gaeilge throughout the day and integrate it where possible in other curricular areas e.g. art, P.E. We had our annual Seachtain na Gaeilge in March culminating in a fantastic Cruinniu where every class performs a song/poem as Gaeilge for the school. Each Friday at Cruinniu we also have our Frás na Seachtaine where all classes are introduced to an Irish phrase they can use throughout the coming week.

Numeracy: The focus in terms of Mathematics has been to continue to develop pupils' ability in all areas of the maths curriculum. In addition to the general teaching of Mathematics, we have continued a team-teaching approach using *Mata sa Rang* with our Infants, 1st and 2nd classes where the support teachers provide intensive, early intervention to the pupils alongside the class teacher. At the Senior end of the school teachers were very conscious of the fact that because of extended lockdowns and remote learning many aspects of the maths curriculum needed to be revisited and pupils given an opportunity to embed the skills and strategies required. Class teachers continues to prioritise the teaching of maths this school year.

Establishment of Special Classes : We are very proud that St. Tolas now has two special classes open and catering for pupils with additional needs. Our Solas class caters for pupils with Autism. It is full with six pupils enrolled and is staffed with one teacher and two SNAs. The pupils are integrated for part of the day in their mainstream class and attend Solas for individualised instruction.

Our Aoibhneas class caters for pupils with Multiple Disabilities. This class opened in September 21. We currently have four pupils attending and is staffed with one teacher and 1.5 SNAs. The Department of Education approved a temporary prefab for this class but due to unforeseen delays the prefab was not ready until January 22. We are now thankful that our Aoibhneas class has a purpose built space appropriate to the needs of the pupils. The Department of Education has approved a purpose built extension to house both of our special classes. This is in the planning stages and we hope to be ready to start construction in the next few months.

Reporting of Attainment Results: Standardised testing in Maths and English took place for pupils in 1st-6th classes in May. In English we use the Drumcondra reading test which gives the school data on vocabulary and comprehension which is very helpful in monitoring our School Self Evaluation Improvement plan. In Maths we use the Sigma T test and analyse the results across all the strands in the Maths curriculum to focus on areas that may need more attention at whole school level. The Department of Education and Skills obliges all schools to report on attainment results in English and Maths for all pupils in 2nd, 4th and 6th classes. St. Tola's reports the results to parents for all pupils from 1st to 6th classes and these will be made available by means of the annual summer reports.

Attendance: We thank all our parents/guardians who have informed us when pupils are absent this year. We are also grateful that parents did not send pupils to school if they had any Covid like symptoms and also complied with Public Health guidance on isolating which was in effect this school year also. This does mean that many pupils have missed quite a bit of time from school this year. The number of pupils who missed 20 school days or more is far in excess of what we would normally expect. The principal has been in touch with the Educational welfare officer and they will be understanding that many of these absences were as a result of Covid 19 directives and were unavoidable. While they will have to be reported to the Education Welfare Service there will be no need for parents to worry about this as the Education Welfare officer will take a practical view. We hope that the number of absences will greatly decrease next year. There are still a small number of pupils for whom there are concerns with their attendance apart from Covid related absences. The school has developed a good relationship with the Educational welfare officer and she will work with the school in supporting these pupils and their families to improve their attendance.

School Ethos: As a Catholic school it was wonderful that we got to celebrate the sacraments as usual this year. Our First Communion and Confirmation services were occasions of great joy and it was lovely to have the school choir back for our Confirmation service. We were very proud of all our pupils who took part in sacramental services this year.

Due to Covid 19 our weekly Cruinniu took place mainly over zoom. It was lovely to connect with every class and to share news and achievements throughout the year. In the last term we have had some of our weekly Cruinniu outside in the yard all together. The energy of the whole school together is special and it is lovely for pupils to see their siblings and friends from other classes.

Safety: The car park remains an area of concern for all in the school community. We urge all parents using the car park to do so with utmost caution and remember that small children can be hard to see. Parents should use the car park spaces if they are accompanying children into the school rather than parking in the middle of the car park and causing an obstruction. The Gardai have informed us that parents may park on the road as long as they do not cause an obstruction if there are no spaces available.

Parents' Association: The Parents' Association have provided great support to the school again this year. They organised Christmas and Easter raffles for every class. They also funded a treat bag for every First Communion child and treats for the whole school at holiday times. We thank them most sincerely for their efforts.

Extra-Curricular Activities: Homework Club restarted once Covid 19 restrictions were lifted. A soccer blitz took place involving pupils from 5th and 6th classes. In the summer term a soccer league was run for pupils in 4th, 5th and 6th classes who wished to participate.

Active Schools: All classes placed a great emphasis on getting outside and being active throughout the school year. Having the astro turf made this possible. Many classes completed laps every day. Teachers reported the positive effect this had on pupils' concentration levels and on their fitness levels too! The GAA provided a coach once a week for Junior Infants-2nd classes where they received instruction in fundamental movement skills in a fun and inclusive way.

ICT in school: We have invested again this year in a number of new laptops for the laptop trolley and we have also purchased a set of 6 IPADS which can be used in classes for group work. A number of school staff are on the Digital Learning committee and have put a plan in place to enhance the teaching and learning using ICT. We have continued to use the Seesaw platform to allow pupils to upload work from home and also, particularly in Infants, for teachers to send home guidance in a number of areas.

It is almost the end of another extraordinary year. The Board of Management extends its thanks to all in the school community - staff, parents and pupils for their flexibility, dedication and willingness to work together to overcome the many challenges faced by the school throughout the year. We look forward to a new school year ahead and are proud of all that was achieved this year.

We wish all our pupils in 6th class who are moving on to secondary school all the best for the future. They have displayed great resilience, patience and a can do attitude this year and we know it will stand them in good stead as they move onto secondary school. We hope that they will bring the two most important rules in St Tolas with them – Be Kind and Try your Best!

SCHOOL CALENDAR - Please see www.tolasns.com for a list of all dates for the school year 2022/23

Best wishes to all pupils, parents and staff for a happy, enjoyable and safe summer break.