

**Report of the Board of Management on the operation of St. Tola's N.S.**  
**for the 2022/2023 School Year**  
**www.tolasns.com**

Dear Parents/Guardians,

As the 2022/2023 school year comes to a close the Board of Management is pleased to publish its annual report on the operation of St. Tolas's N.S. This report augments the weekly newsletters sent home over the course of the year which are available on [www.tolasns.com](http://www.tolasns.com)

We were delighted that the past school year saw us return more to a school life similar to pre-pandemic times. We saw a return to inter-school sporting activities, blitzes and competitions, swimming lessons for pupils from 2<sup>nd</sup> class to 6<sup>th</sup> class, trips and visits to local amenities and school tours venturing further afield. One of the highlights of the year was our return to Peace Proms in the University of Limerick where pupils from 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> classes joined with schools from all over the mid-west to perform with the Cross Border Orchestra of Ireland. It was a truly memorable evening of song and music and one we hope will live on in the memories of the pupils who were there.

The year was not without its challenges though as there did seem to be an increase this year in coughs, colds and minor illnesses. We are still seeing some attendance issues for some pupils. We would be very concerned at the level of absenteeism for some pupils and the knock on effect this is having on their learning and attainment. We hope that the next school year will see a decrease in the number of absences.

In relation to our two special classes we are now at capacity for both classes. We are very thankful to all in the school community and beyond who supported our fundraising drive through GoFundMe earlier in the school year. We raised enough funds to fully kit out our new sensory room and we have now started work on a sensory garden which will be beside the prefab which houses our Aoibhneas class. This will be completed soon and will be a great addition to the school. We are still waiting to progress our extension which will permanently house both Solas and Aoibhneas classes. We sincerely hope the build will begin during the next school year.

The current term of the Board of Management will end on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023. Elections for parent nominees and teacher nominees will be held early in the new school year.

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 want to thank in a special way our wonderful pupils who make St Tolas a wonderful school. We are privileged to have such a wonderful and caring school community. We wish you well for a safe and enjoyable summer holiday and we look forward to the new school year which begins on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> August 2023.

Yours sincerely,

***P.J. Burke , Chairperson***

***Mary Dunlea Fitzgerald,***

**Board of Management 2023/2024**

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

## Curriculum Developments

The Department of Education recently published a new Curriculum Framework for primary schools. The curriculum for all subjects is currently being reviewed and updated. From Juniors to 2<sup>nd</sup> class there is greater integration across subject areas. For all class levels there is a focus on thematic learning. The curriculum is presented in five broad curriculum areas which are Language( English and Irish) , Science, technology, Engineering and Mathematics Education , Social and Environmental Education( History and Geography), Wellbeing ( Social, Personal and Health Education and Physical Education), Arts Education ( Art, Music, Drama)and Religious Education

**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 continued with the Weaving Wellbeing programme in every class this year. This is the first Irish designed positive mental health programme designed for primary aged pupils. This programme gives pupils tools to develop resilience and coping strategies to meet the everyday challenges of life. For a small number of pupils they require further intervention and we have some wellbeing groups running and being supported by members of the Special Education team. All staff attended a workshop in school on developing playskills in a school setting to enhance pupil wellbeing.

**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 6<sup>th</sup> class . The teaching staff continue to upskill in this area and we had a number of inservice webinars over the course of the year on the Primary Language Curriculum. We continue to place particular emphasis 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. Guided reading continued throughout the year in Senior Infants -6<sup>th</sup> class. We also had a number of pupils in Senior infants and 1<sup>st</sup> 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 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 the senior classes. We have a wide variety of novels and pupils at this age enjoy using a novel as a basis for their literacy learning. . Pupils from 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> 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 expect that by the end of this year that over 50 million words have been read in total by the pupils in 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> classes inclusive. That is a great achievement.

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. In all classes we 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 performed a song/poem/dance 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:** We continue to work hard at developing pupils' mathematical abilities across all of the strands of the maths curriculum. The focus this year has been on developing mathematical language and problem solving abilities. In many of the classes we have developed maths cards for pupils to practise early mathematical concepts at home. Pupils are encouraged to learn their table facts also which aids with computation and problem solving.

**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.. We currently have five pupils attending and the class is staffed with one teacher and 1.5 SNAs. The pupils in Aoibhneas also integrate into mainstream. We expect this class to be full for the school year 23/24. Our pupils in Aoibhneas particularly love joining the rest of the school for our weekly Cruinniu where they get a great welcome. Many of our pupils in mainstream classes have learned some Lámh signs to support their friends in Aoibhneas.

Pupils in both classes have access to our new sensory room which is a fantastic addition to the school. The new sensory garden will be completed shortly . We are looking forward to having this space for the school year 23/24.

We are still in the planning stages for our extension to the school building which will house our two special classes We hope that the Department of Education can move the process along so that the building work can begin as soon as possible.

**Student Council:** The newly established Student Council was established this school year following hotly contested elections . Two pupil nominees from 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> classes make up the Student Council. They meet regularly and have made some fantastic suggestions to improve the school for everyone.

**Reporting of Attainment Results:** Standardised testing in Maths , English and Spelling took place for pupils in 1<sup>st</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> 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. This year we administered the Drumcondra Spelling test for the first time so that we could gather data on attainment in spelling across the school. The Department of Education and Skills obliges all schools to report on attainment results in English and Maths for all pupils in 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> classes. St. Tola's reports the results to parents for all pupils from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> 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. There appeared to be a greater variety of illnesses circulating this year particularly in the winter months and naturally this resulted in absences for many pupils. However, the number of pupils missing many days has increased over the past number of years and we are concerned that this is having an impact on these pupils' learning, attainment and social skills. Under the Education Welfare Act 2000 the school is obliged to report to the Education Welfare Service all pupils who have missed 20 days or more for any reason in a school year. Our Education Welfare officer visits the school regularly to check in on attendance patterns and she may meet with parents/guardians to discuss how they can be supported in ensuring that their child is not missing too many days.

**School Ethos:** As we are a Catholic School all classes teach the Grow in Love programme. Our school is greatly enhanced by pupils from other faith traditions and none and we all benefit from having these pupils in our school. We celebrated Catholic Schools week at the end of January. The highlight of this week was Grandparents' Day. This year our grandparents from Senior Infants joined us for our celebration. All classes attended and performed lovely songs/poems for our grandparents. .

Our First Communion and Confirmation ceremonies took place in April and May. Both ceremonies were really special and we hope that the pupils, their parents and families enjoyed the celebrations. We were delighted that Bishop Fintan Monahan was able to confirm our 6<sup>th</sup> class pupils this year.

**Chrsitmas Performances:** Our Christmas performances returned this year and it was wonderful to have parents/guardians attend in person. It is great to see every pupil on the stage with their class and we were so proud of all of them. We also held our annual Carol service before the Christmas holidays. This is always a lovely way to gather as a school community before the Christmas break. We love to hear Christmas/holiday greetings in all the languages that are spoken by pupils in our school!

**Parents' Association:** The Parents' Association have provided great support to the school again this year. They organised two cake sales much to the delight of the pupils in the school. They also organised a Christmas and Easter raffle to raise funds for the school. The Parents' Association were consulted in relation to the review of the Homework Policy and Child Safeguarding Statement.

**Extra-Curricular Activities:** Homework Club continued for pupils from 1<sup>st</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> classes who wished to attend. There was hurling/camogie and basketball training organised at lunchtimes for pupils from 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup>. We thank our staff who facilitated these activities. We took part in the Marion Keane basketball tournament and in competitions with other Shannon schools in hurling, football and camogie in Wolfe Tones GAA club. We also participated in the Cumann na mBunscoil competitions.

We were delighted that a school band was formed this year. The pupils are from 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> classes and meet every Thursday facilitated by Ms Hansbury and Ms Flynn. We were fortunate to receive donations of some instruments including a violin, keyboards, concertina and guitar. Thank you to Newmarket-on-Fergus Community Brass Band for the donation of two clarinets and a saxophone. The pupils are getting the opportunity to try out the various instruments. The school band has performed here in the school to great acclaim and we look forward to further performances in the future.

**Active Schools:** All classes placed a great emphasis on getting outside and being active throughout the school year. The astro turf is a great asset to have in the school and it means that we can have physical education outside for most of the school year. It is also used at all breaks and lunchtimes! Wolfe Tones GAA provided a coach once a week for Junior Infants-3<sup>rd</sup> classes where pupils received instruction in fundamental movement skills in a fun and inclusive way.

**ICT in school:** We continue to focus on technological learning with the use of laptops and IPADS to enhance teaching and learning. A number of school staff are on the Digital Learning committee and have put a plan in place to ensure there is progression across the school in 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 busy 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 make our school a strong community working and learning together. 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 6<sup>th</sup> class who are moving on to secondary school all the best for the future. They have been a great 6<sup>th</sup> class and will be remembered fondly by all who knew them. We know they are ready to move on to their secondary education. 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](http://www.tolasns.com) for a list of all dates for the school year 2023/24

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