



**Report of the Board of Management on the operation of St. Tola's N.S.
for the 2020/2021 School Year
www.tolasns.com**

Dear Parents/Guardians,

As the 2020/2021 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. This past school year saw us re-open on 31st Aug 2020 following the closure of schools on 12th March 2020. Term 1 was dominated by re-establishing school routines, getting used to all the COVID 19 measures - pods in classrooms, extra hygiene measures, keeping classes separate on the yard, staggered break times, new entrances and exits points, no visits to the school unless by appointment, school staff wearing face masks. Despite this new reality the rhythm of school life re-established itself in Term 1 and it was so lovely to welcome our pupils back and to have school on a face to face basis. Term 2 dawned with the news that because of the high level of Covid 19 schools had to move to online learning. We had prepared and had seesaw and Zoom ready to go. Thankfully in March we got back on a phased basis to face to face learning. Term 3 sees us all at school and working hard to support every pupil to progress. It certainly has been a year with unique challenges for everyone in our school community - pupils, parents/guardians and staff but by working together in new and innovative ways we have got through it.

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 know how difficult lockdown was for so many families with many parents trying to juggle working from home and supporting their children with online school. We wish you well for a safe and enjoyable summer holiday and we look forward to the new school year which begins on Monday 30th Aug 2021.

Yours sincerely,

P.J. Burke, Chairperson

Mary Dunlea Fitzgerald,

Board of Management 2020/2021

Chairperson.....P.J. Burke
Treasurer.....Richard Stapleton
Principal Teacher.....Mary Dunlea Fitzgerald
Teacher Nominee.....Lorraine Connolly
Parent Nominee.....Mike O' Brien
Parent Nominee.....AnneMarie Kelly
Community Nominee.....Cathy Colgan
Community Nominee.....Anne Germaine

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Covid 19 Response

The Department of Education and Skills published its COVID 19 guidelines for school at the end of July 2020 ahead of schools re-opening for the new school year. This was a long and detailed document covering areas such as social distancing, hygiene measures, advice re curriculum etc. August 2020 was spent devising our own Covid 19 response plan through consultation with staff on how best to implement the public health guidance in our own context. 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. It also meant to had to rethink the way we deliver some of the curriculum and how we minimise interactions with others in the school environment. Thank you to all staff who played a significant role in ensuring that the return to school went so well. 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. The Covid 19 response plan was updated again in March 2021 when we returned to in-person learning following the closure of schools for January and February 2021. As we look ahead to the next school year there will no doubt be some easing of the measures put in place but at all times the school will be governed by the latest public health advice. We await up to date advice in this regard from the Department of Education and Skills.

Curriculum Developments

Social, Personal and Health Education: Due to the extended lockdown in 2020 as a staff we were very aware that many pupils may struggle with the return to in person learning. A great emphasis was put on the subject of S.P.H.E in Term 1. All classes did a lot of work on managing and coping with emotions at the start of the year. Many classes opted to use the resource Weaving Wellbeing which deals with coping mechanisms at an age appropriate level for pupils in regulating their emotions and in their response to various situations. The feedback from those who used this resource was very positive so this programme is being adopted in every class for the school year 2021/22. As we had missed completing the Stay Safe programme in 2020 this programme was prioritised for Term 1 with all classes completing it before Christmas. For Term 3 the focus for all classes was to complete the Relationship and Sexuality programme for all classes before the end of the year. This has been achieved. For our School Self Evaluation Plan we have decided to prioritise Wellbeing for the school year 2021/22.

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 Literacy Lift Off could not be implemented in Senior Infants, 1st class and 2nd class this year due to Covid 19 restrictions. 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.

In the senior end of the school the focus is on enhancing pupils vocabulary through explicit teaching of vocabulary and through reading and writing activities. Guided reading has proven very effective in 3rd and 4th classes while 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 and the pupils have found it quite enjoyable.

In all classes a variety of writing genres have been taught with pupils making good progress in writing across the curriculum also. All teachers prioritised the teaching of literacy on the return to in person learning in March 2021.

Gaeilge: The focus this year has been on improving pupils' spoken Gaeilge. Juniors-4th classes use Bua na Cainte where the emphasis is on hearing and responding to stories, rhymes and songs. Teachers

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promote the use of Gaeilge throughout the day and integrate it where possible in other curricular areas e.g. art, P.E.

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 prioritised the teaching of maths on the return to school in March 2021.

Establishment of Special Classes: We are very proud that in the middle of a pandemic we were able to open a Special Class for pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorders in March 21. This class caters for 6 pupils and is now full. We were allocated 1 class teacher and 1 SNA from March 21 and have been granted a second SNA for Sept 21. The pupils have settled into their new class which we call the Solas class very well. These pupils are integrated into their mainstream classes for part of the day also. From Sept 21 we will open a second special class for pupils with Multiple Disabilities. We are delighted to have these two special classes in St. Tolas. It will be a learning curve for all staff as we get to know our new pupils. The Department of Education and Skills has approved the construction of a two classroom Special Education Needs extension to the school and planning is underway at present for this exciting development. It will take a number of years to complete.

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. It did mean that attendance levels have dropped slightly from other years but in the current context this is to be expected. We hope these will improve next year. There are still a small number of pupils for whom there are concerns with their attendance. 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: It has been difficult to celebrate our Catholic school ethos in the usual manner this year. We did not have our opening and end of school year Mass this year. We were however able to have our Carol service virtually and invite parents to attend via Zoom. We only received dates for Confirmation in early June. It will take place on 8th July this year. We still await dates for Communion which will take place at the start of the next school year. The preparation for the sacraments of Communion and Confirmation continued in school with teachers covering the Grow in Love programme. We did manage to have our Cruinniu every week via Zoom. The focus this year was on positivity and encouraging the pupils to be kind and try their best. While in lockdown it was lovely to connect with our school community virtually. We look forward to the day Cruinniu can return to the hall and all classes can share the space again in person.

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 are always available to help out and we urge all parents to support them. They organised a

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Christmas raffle and donated Easter eggs to be raffled free of charge to every class. The Principal liaised with the Parents' association when updating the Child Protection policy. We thank them most sincerely for their efforts.

Extra-Curricular Activities: Because of Covid 19 guidelines extra curricular activities did not take place this year as class bubbles could not mix. We look forward to the return of these activities in the near future.

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!

ICT in school: At the start of this school the staff put together a plan for remote learning in the event of lockdown. We opted to go with the seesaw platform and started using this in Term 1 so everyone could become familiar with it. When we moved to Term 2 and were teaching remotely it was good to have a reliable platform and get going straight away. We also loaned out all of the school laptops to families who needed a device to access remote learning. Teachers interacted daily via seesaw uploading teaching videos, resources and assignments for pupils. The level of engagement overall was very good and we sincerely thank all our parents who supported the remote learning. For pupils with SEN the Special Education teachers interacted using a variety of methods including zoom calls for these pupils. Class teachers had weekly zoom check ins with their classes and we had a weekly whole school Zoom cruinniu. Despite all this we were all glad to get back to school in March and have our pupils present in the school. We have invested in a set of 6 new Ipads which are available to all classes. We have also upgraded our network here in school to make it quicker and more reliable when whole classes are using it. We have also replaced some of our teacher laptops and pupil laptops and hope to continue this programme of investment in I.T with the help of Department of Education I.T grants.

It is almost the end of an 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 as a result of the pandemic. We look forward to better times 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 2021/22

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