



Community NATIONAL SCHOOLS

OUR STORIES

A TERMLY NEWSLETTER FROM CNSS

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A Message from ETBI

CNS & ETB PATRONAGE DIRECTORATE

2020-2021 has been a tremendously difficult year for schools. The COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed our approaches to teaching and learning, leadership and communication. For a number of months, our schools lost the joyful hustle and bustle of the daily school routine. More than ever, we are conscious of the need for an increasing focus on wellbeing, equity and inclusion within our education system. In the midst of this unprecedented time, our schools continued to inspire us with their creativity, positivity, leadership and ongoing commitment to their local communities. This CNS newsletter, "Our Stories" aims to share just a few reflections from Community National Schools across the country this year on their journey so far as members of the CNS Network.



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Welcome to Our School! Broadmeadow CNS

BY JENNIFER ROBINSON (PRINCIPAL)

At Broadmeadow CNS we have started off our journey with joy, passion, respect and love for ourselves, each other and our community. Our Junior Infant children have started school with such positive spirits and we have used our GMGY curriculum to continue to encourage positive friendships, understanding of each other's opinion, likes, dislikes and beliefs to name but a few.

We started the year off with a celebration, using an 'Ourselves' display to share photographs of family, friends, and pictures from when our children were younger. This display is central to our class and the children enjoy looking at the pictures and sharing stories. Our 'Growth Tree' also displays all of the photographs taken so far in our school of our journey. This tree will grow and blossom with us as we continue through our school life.

Our Welcoming Ceremony took a different direction and was held over zoom, with parents, families and board members invited. This was a great celebration of all! We hope to continue our journey as a new and developing school whilst embedding our GMGY curriculum in all of our everyday life!

Our school ethos is so important to us and with the support of the GMGY curriculum and the ETB team we know we will succeed!

"We have started off our journey with joy, passion, respect and love for ourselves, each other and our community."



Principals' Corner

BY MICHAEL BYRNE
(CITYWEST AND SAGGART CNS)

My name is Mike Byrne and I am the principal in Citywest & Saggart CNS. I started as principal of this wonderful school in September 2019. After emigrating from the boithríns of Carlow in 2011, I spent eight wonderful years teaching in Scoil Ghráinne CNS in Dublin 15. I also spent a year on secondment to the NCCA as part of the project team leading the development of the Goodness Me, Goodness You! Curriculum.

I have particular interests in STEM and the arts. My opinion is that these areas are not exclusive of each other and I enjoy the creative thinking and practice that can be entwined in both. I am an avid painter and always tried to provide a creative outlet to my pupils while teaching.

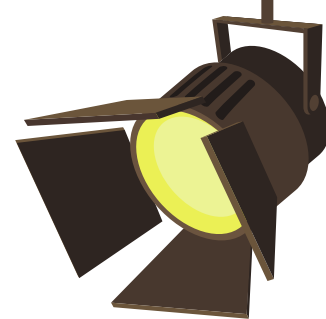
Citywest & Saggart CNS opened its doors in 2012 under the name Scoil Niamh CNS. It began in temporary accommodation in Citywest under the incredible leadership of Séamus Conboy and Orla Doherty. It has grown from an initial enrolment of 16 pupils to a population of 444 pupils, 40 members of staff and almost 300 close knit families. We were fortunate to make the move to a permanent, purpose built school in January 2020 and we are now looking forward to solidifying and continuing our excellent reputation in the local community.



Leading the development of a multi-denominational ethos can have its challenges. When you have many backgrounds, values and beliefs merging on one campus, it can prove difficult. However, successful leadership in this area should take these challenges and create opportunities for greater understanding, collaboration and sharing which will strengthen the schools policies and practice. When engagement with all parties takes place, this can enrich school experience for the entire community.

"Successful leadership in this area should take these challenges and create opportunities for greater understanding, collaboration and sharing which will strengthen the schools policies and practice"

The year we have just experienced has highlighted the need for close communication and partnership. The hard work and dedication of our staff in CSCNS made the leadership role during the school closures all the more manageable. I am incredibly lucky to have such an open and innovative staff who met the challenges of distance learning head on in such a proactive manner.



School Spotlight!

BY ASHBOURNE CNS

Ashbourne CNS (ACNS) opened in September 2019 with approximately 100 pupils from Junior Infants to 6th Class. We are proud to be a CNS with an ethos of inclusion, respect & holistic education under the patronage of LMETB. Ashbourne is a rapidly developing area and many families are new to the locality. As a CNS we embrace the expression of children's stories through GMGY and seek opportunities for this student voice to be expressed and heard.

The Creative Schools programme provides the perfect opportunity to channel student voice and record our early days as a CNS. We are delighted to be one of the 100 schools participating in this flagship initiative of Creative Ireland and the Arts Council as it aims to put the arts and creativity at the heart of the lives of children. The school will receive project funding and is matched with a 'Creative Associate' (an artist with a practice in education) who will help to lead us on our journey as a 'Creative School' across a two-year period. We are delighted to welcome Aisling Byrne in this role. Aisling has begun a whole school analysis of creativity at ACNS working with teachers, management and most importantly, our young people to explore creativity at our school.

"I am incredibly lucky to have such an open and innovative staff who met the challenges of distance learning head on in such a proactive manner. "

Though early on in my principal role, I will find it hard to beat the experience of welcoming the first children into our class for children with Autism. To see the new classroom and facilities being used by the first children filled me with a sense of pride and a thought that we were making a huge difference to families in our area. Our new classes opened in September 2020 and we are lucky to have welcomed 12 young pupils for whom we wish to provide a caring and nurturing environment in which to thrive.

Central to the Creative Schools model is 'the voice of the child' which aims to put children at the centre of decision-making processes in school life. At Ashbourne CNS, we hope to use this opportunity to canvas the student voice in respect of creative practice, to help us to further develop child-led decision-making processes across all aspects of our school community. This will build on work already done by our students, parents and teachers who were all involved in developing our core values of 'Courage, Collaboration, Creativity & Care' in January 2020.



As a Creative School we aim to develop a long term, sustainable whole-school plan for the arts. This might involve working with external artists and practitioners, exploring new ways of working or trying out new creative ideas - the only limit is our imagination (and possibly Covid but let's not dwell on that). We want to 'release the imagination' (Maxine Greene) of children and enable them to exercise their voices, feel at home and learn not only to cope but flourish in their new locality & Community National School.

"We hope to use this opportunity to canvas the student voice in respect of creative practice, to help us to further develop child-led decision-making processes across all aspects of our school community. "

Children at a CNS have a chance to be central to the journey of what the school becomes and parents have the opportunity to merge their experience of school with a modern multi-denominational ethos. As educational professionals, CNS provides a unique experience to be engaged in the development of educational values which reflect the current Irish educational and social landscape. Artistic and creative processes are a unifying force and we seek to support children & enable them to explore their rich, diverse histories; sharing their voices in creative ways. As a Creative School we will be enabled to unify as a new community & develop our collaborative culture as a Community National School.



GMGY - a Coordinator's Perspective

BY SINEAD DUNBAR
(NAAS CNS)



My name is Sinéad Dunbar. I have been working within the CNS network for the past 10 years in Naas CNS. I have worked in several class levels over this time and am currently teaching a wonderfully energetic Junior Infant class.

GMGY is central to our CNS ethos. It is a unique curriculum devised for our school model. It holds the child and their family at its heart. It encourages children to share their own beliefs, values, opinions and ideas in a way which is different to other methodologies present in Irish schools. This was one of the aspects that drew me to the role back in 2012.

As coordinator I have experienced first-hand the progression of GMGY from the initial programme to the multi belief and values-based curriculum we have today.

As a coordinator for the last 8 years I have been privileged to be personally involved in this progression and it has been very exciting to see some of my ideas, suggestions and opinions impact and create the current curriculum.

This progression was important for GMGY however it was challenging at times as a lot of change came within a short time frame. Teachers were asked to move from a structured click and go programme to a curriculum which required creation of lessons. This was not an easy task to ask of a teacher who was balancing an already busy workload. However, these challenges have helped inform the current implementation process which we are undertaking.

"It encourages children to share their own beliefs, values, opinions and ideas in a way which is different to other methodologies present in Irish schools. "

This new implementation process offers much needed support and encouragement for all teachers of CNS new and experienced alike. As a staff we have undertaken two online training sessions facilitated by the ETBI. These sessions were enjoyable and informative and really brought the new curriculum to life for all teachers . I look forward to attending our next one.

With the curriculum now complete and the implementation process set out clearly, I believe the school-led part of this process will really bring GMGY to life for both the teachers and students. Having committed teachers working together during the planning and reflection sessions I believe each school can create unique and interesting lessons for their own context. As every CNS school is going through the process, the time may be ripe to extend to a sharing platform within the CNS network.

"We are now entering a new phase along the journey which I believe will fully embed GMGY within each school and empower teachers and coordinators to continue positively on the ground-breaking journey we are on."

The past 8 years have been a bit of a rollercoaster where GMGY is concerned, there have been many changes, challenges and positive steps along the way. GMGY

coordinators were once described as the "Champions of GMGY" and I am fully committed to championing this curriculum going forward as both a teacher and coordinator.



Valuing Community in CNSs

BY JULIE O'CONNOR
(GLENROE CNS)

On the 27th of August 2020 the gates to the school in Glenroe opened to welcome 8 bright, energetic and enthusiastic pupils. From the very moment they walked onto the school grounds they have been a wonderful credit to their families and to the wider community in Glenroe, Ballyorgan, Co. Limerick.

Our pupils are at the centre of everything we do in Glenroe Community National School and they are involved in every element and aspect of school life. They have used their voice to help us design and create our school crest. We have tried to incorporate elements of different crests in our school community and have based our design on the previous primary school established in Glenroe "Scoil Mhuire."

Glenroe CNS welcomes the value of partnership with our school community. The collaborative practice already embedded in our school culture



allows pupils to experience the wide ranging skills and talents our school community has to offer. Thanks to our school working group and community council, Glenroe CNS has its very own fairy village and each pupil has added to this village this year. Our school, set in picturesque East Limerick, was recently gifted a beautiful bird house and feeding station. Our local community ensures that we are aware of the nature that surrounds us and affords us the opportunity to pause and notice our setting.

Rewards are plenty, establishing a rapport with pupils and parents, building relationships with the community and management from Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board has been a wonderful experience. Inviting parents to establish a Parents Council has been a very exciting opportunity as they are the prime educators and I welcome their expertise, diverse skills and talents. I am delighted to work with them to enhance the experience of Glenroe CNS for all our pupils.

Opening a New CNS! Dunshaughlin CNS

BY YVONNE SLEVIN (PRINCIPAL)

My name is Yvonne Slevin, Principal of Dunshaughlin Community National School (CNS). I had the privilege of being involved with Catherine Ward (SET) and LMETB personnel in the opening of our new school on the 26th of August 2020. Thirteen fresh-faced, excited pupils and their families were welcomed through the doors of the school in our temporary accommodation on the grounds of Dunshaughlin GAA. Dunshaughlin CNS joins three established and prospering Community National Schools: Ard Rí CNS, Ashbourne CNS and Faughart CNS under the patronage of Louth Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB).

The first day of school was an anxious occasion for all involved especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to our opening, we tried to communicate reassuringly with our parents that we would do everything possible to provide a safe learning environment for all. The expectations of tears on the first day of school did not materialise for us until the children were leaving for home when one child got upset that the school day was over already! We reassured everyone that they would be back again very soon!

When applying for the position of principal of Dunshaughlin CNS, I was earnestly interested in the opportunity of setting up a new school with an underlying vision of a high-quality, progressive,



inclusive school. In growing the school from its initial footings, we as a school community have the unique and positive opportunity to develop a culture that supports and maintains this vision. My initial challenges in setting up a school focused mainly on familiarising myself with the administrative procedures utilised by LMETB. LMETB were very aware of this and so provided both induction and mentoring to assist with these aspects. The role of Fiona Kindlon, Director of Schools was also an invaluable support.

As a new school, the development of our school ethos is very much dependent on the involvement of stakeholders in our community. In light of COVID-19, we were unfortunately unable to involve the parents as much as we had hoped in the opening of our school. We have tried as much as possible within the parameters of government restrictions to find ways of involving our parents and local organisations to date, including online Microsoft Teams' calls and GAA coaching. We will endeavour to include stakeholders as much as possible as we grow and develop over the next few years.

My favourite moment to date in Dunshaughlin CNS, was possibly the comment from the child leaving school on the first day of school that the school day was just too short! This comment was affirmation that the work in getting the school set up and opened, was very worthwhile especially for the most important individuals of our school community! The voice of the child is something that we as a school will always strive to be considerate of as we grow and develop!

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Transferring Patronage in Tallaght CNS

TADHG O'LIONAIRD (PRINCIPAL)

Tallaght Community National School is a small community of teachers and learners nestled at the foothills of the Dublin mountains in West Dublin. At inception in 1982, the four-classroom school served the Anglican community of St Maelruain's parish and evolved over time to become what is now, a reconfigured Community National School under the patronage of Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB).

When I joined the school, plans were already afoot to reconfigure the school and during the following two years in particular the various procedural and legal elements required were completed. That is not to say that the journey had ended as indeed it was essentially the beginning of the reconfiguration process in that we would now begin exploring and deepening our understanding of the Community

National School ecosystem while superimposing and harmonising that blueprint onto the substrata of our shared values and culture as a DEIS Band 1 primary school. To be able to do that is to know what all of that means. This is perhaps why schools that reconfigure occupy a unique organisational space in the educational sphere where their entities are fully formed albeit within another culture. The process of change then becomes more of an existential one, a calling or evocation to examine who we are and what, as a school, we want to become.

The process of reconfiguring a school essentially involves the transfer from one patronage to another. Transfer of school patronage to CNS is a transformative process which involves both cultural and systematic changes to school life (Community National Schools), and although it sounds fairly straightforward it is a process that involves both organisational change and cultural realignments.

Historically, notwithstanding the existence of the Project and Educate Together schools, Community National Schools were established by Minister Mary Hanafin in response to the emerging reality of pluralism in Ireland (Mullally, 2018). Initially a two-school pilot in 2008, under the patronage of the Minister of Education and Skills with the then Vocational Education Committees (VECs) acting as patrons designate (Coolahan and Hussey, 2012).

"Transfer of school patronage to CNS is a transformative process which involves both cultural and systematic changes to school life."



These were ground up, developing schools, a process that has since been replicated and repeated nationwide and is now functioning under the patronage of Education and Training Boards (ETBs).

Being part of a wider community of learners, teachers and innovators with the organisational prowess, educational expertise and structural support of the Education and Training Boards is what makes the Community National School model both attractive and worthwhile. Further to that is the reassurance one feels by the way in which its culture and ethos gives voice to inclusivity. '.... schools that welcome all children from the communities they serve' (Conboy, 2017, p.4). That inclusivity echoes throughout the patron's Goodness Me, Goodness You programme, developed in collaboration with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and which offers a comprehensive and all-encompassing multi-belief and values curriculum that supports the central philosophy of the CNS model. That philosophy is grounded in its four pillars: that of Excellence in education, Multidenominational, Equality-based and Community focused. Reflective, I would say, of a pluralistic, multi-ethnic 21st century Ireland.

"Being part of a wider community of learners, teachers and innovators with the organisational prowess, educational expertise and structural support of the Education and Training Boards is what makes the Community National School model both attractive and worthwhile."

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