It has been the strangest of times – the words: surreal, unimaginable and challenging don’t seem to describe what we in DCU and those teaching and learning in schools have had to cope with since the middle of March. We have all had concerns about health and safety, both personal and family, especially when distanced from loved ones. We have all had concerns over the wellbeing of students, colleagues and friends – these have weighed on us all. We remember those who have been ill or who have suffered bereavement during this time, particularly those linked with the Church of Ireland Centre. We especially sympathise with Geraldine O’Connor, Director of School Placement, whose mother died recently.

Teaching and learning have continued. You will read in this newsletter of online teaching and support for our students, and shortlived Erasmus experiences. We are at the early stages of planning for next semester, things will be different for us all.

Enormous thanks to those teachers and schools who contributed articles for this edition: Louise Gallagher, a recent graduate writes about her teaching experiences in Abu Dhabi; Fiona Masterson and Lucy Harris showcase their enterprising activity books for Lockdown, Claire Reidy provides insights into ways to get involved in educational work in a whole variety of ways, and Joyce Perdue encourages us to engage with the consultation documents from the NCCA on the new curriculum. Annemarie O’Donovan movingly describes life as a teaching principal at the moment. Two schools describe large school projects – Monasteroris NS developed a new school crest and Gartan NS completed a largescale project on St Colmcille.

Do please consider writing for this newsletter in the autumn – it is great to share news within our network of schools.

Stay safe and well.

Anne Lodge, Geraldine O’Connor, Jacqui Wilkinson & Olivia Guffroy (administrator) Church of Ireland Centre.
Initial Teacher Education in a time of pandemic - a view from the Church of Ireland Centre, DCU.

by Revd Prof. Anne Lodge

On March 12th 2020, we received an afternoon email from the DCU president announcing that, in line with a decision announced that day by Government, all places of education would be closed from that evening until permitted by Government to return. All staff and students were instructed to teach or study from home. Since 13th March we have moved all of our teaching online using a combination of Zoom (which was new to many of us) and using our online platform (Loop) for posting teaching and learning materials, and for uploading and marking assignments.

We have been keeping in touch with students, and with our colleagues, by email, by Zoom and by phone. Geraldine O’Connor, Jacqui Wilkinson and I held lectures and tutorials with students by Zoom and by phone. We all miss the direct interaction with our students – relationship is such a core part of teaching from pre-primary all the way to University and adult education. Virtual engagement is not the same for any of us but it is certainly a lot better than nothing. Blessedly, our students continue to produce high quality work showing that they persist in studying really diligently despite the current strange circumstances.

Our B.Ed students who were expecting to start School Placement in the weeks following the shutdown have had to take on additional assignments in place of teaching practice in schools. The final year group missed very little of their examined placement, having had the equivalent of almost a year out in schools already. Our 1st and 2nd years were the ones who missed out most but they will have time to catch up on work in schools in the coming few years of their programme.

We have also found ways to continue to support our final year students’ preparation for the world of work. On 19th May 2020 the head of the Irish Primary Principals Network, Mr. Pauric Clerkin, very generously did an online advisory session with the Church of Ireland Centre final year B.Ed students giving them tips on how to apply for primary teaching jobs and how to do well at interview (see a full report in this newsletter).

Sadly, some things had to be deferred. The Church of Ireland Centre students have a tradition of an end-of-year ball which is always a glamorous and enjoyable event. It should have taken place on the first Friday in May. This was the first year that they have had to defer it. However, there are lots of promises to ensure some kind of event takes place in the coming months to give everyone an excuse to dress up in their finery.

As the weeks go on, we have reminded ourselves that, in the words of Julian of Norwich, ‘all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well’.

(This article was first published in the Dublin and Glendalough Diocesan Review and in the June edition of the Church of Ireland Gazette)

Congratulations to BEd 2 student

Joanna Codd

Joanna was announced as the runner up Class Representative of the Year in the Institute of Education in April this year.
School Placement
by Geraldine O’Connor

We are indebted to all our partner schools, their principals, teachers and boards of management for all their enthusiasm and support in hosting students connected to the Church of Ireland Centre during their school placements over the last academic year. Placement in schools gives a student teacher a vital opportunity to experience and apply teaching, learning and educational theory in a real school environment during their four year BEd.

Placement also enables student teachers to work with children and teachers and to participate in school life in various settings and contexts in a way that is structured and supported by schools and the Institute of Education, DCU. Thank you for the attention and care you have given to the student teachers and for the courtesy and warmth extended to placement tutors during their visits to students in your school.

As a consequence of COVID-19, School Placements from March this year were cancelled to the particular disappointment of BEd students. They have instead engaged in studies associated with school placement away from the classroom and will be pleased to re-engage with their professional placements once they are enabled to do so.

We hope that you and your school community are doing well under the current circumstances. Please be assured that DCU is engaged in planning for the next academic year with regard to school placement. In doing so we will follow all guidance given to staff and school communities by the DES, HSE and Teaching Council. We will make whatever provision is needed to meet circumstances that emerge for schools locally and nationally as we reconnect with our partner placement schools. We will be in touch with you about future school placements as soon as we can. In the meantime, wishing good health to all staff, children and the wider school communities in partner schools of DCU Institute of Education and the Church of Ireland Centre within DCU.

Saying goodbye

Often at the end of this term in school there is an opportunity to say thank you and good bye to teachers who are finishing short term or temporary contracts, or are retiring.

It must be strange for teachers to finish work on a ‘screen’ and not to be able to properly meet with pupils and colleagues.

Hopefully occasions will be planned for the autumn which will give a chance for people to celebrate the work of colleagues.

We in the Church of Ireland Centre wish every blessing to all teachers who are leaving teaching positions in our network of protestant schools. Many of you have hosted student teachers in your schools or helped us in different ways. Thank you.

Schools with any placement queries can contact the Director of School Placement at the Church of Ireland Centre, DCU.

geraldine.oconnor@dcu.ie
Preparing the CIC graduates for the world of work
by Revd Prof. Anne Lodge

Despite the limitations imposed on us by lockdown, life has to go on. Our 4th year B.EDs have completed the last of their assignments and are now awaiting the results of their degree examinations in late June. They are beginning to apply for their first teaching posts. A key role for the Church of Ireland Centre is to support and link with the primary schools in the Protestant network. One of the many ways we do this is by ensuring our students are adequately prepared for their work as teachers, including the application and interview process.

On 19th May Pauric Clerkin, the CEO of the IPPN, ran an online session with all our 4th year B.EDs to advise them about how to fill out the application form for jobs in primary schools, how to prepare for interview, how to behave at interview and how to respond to an offer of their first teaching job. The session was very informative packed full of up-to-date information and really good, practical advice. Pauric very generously dealt with all of the questions they submitted in advance as well as the queries that emerged as we were online.

Students were really appreciative of the advisory session. Hannah McCabe talked about how helpful it was to get advice from someone with Pauric Clerkin’s level of expertise as a school principal and head of IPPN. Amy Jacob commented in an email after it that they got great advice on how to use educationposts.ie and how to register on subseeker. Kelly Caldbeck appreciated the advice not to learn off interview answers but to use a reflective notebook to develop and become clear in one’s own thinking about the various topics that tend to come up at interview. Kaitlyn Jay appreciated learning about all the different stages involved in seeking and getting a job. Victoria Forster really appreciated hearing that the interview panel wants each candidate to do well.

However, we in the Church of Ireland Centre wanted to do a little more than just provide a really effective online advisory session. We also sought the input of some of the very experienced principals in our own school network. They responded to a number of queries about the type of practical advice they would give to the newly qualified teachers seeking their first teaching jobs.

We are very grateful to the principals who made time in the midst of incredible additional busyness to respond to the queries Jacqui Wilkinson shared with them. We are also very grateful to Dr. Ken Fennelly, secretary to the General Synod Board of Education, who shared his insights with us for the booklet.

We wish all of you engaged in the recruitment process the very best of luck because we know what an onerous task it is. We look forward to engaging with many of you over the next few months as you seek to fill teaching posts and seek our views as referees.
Religious Education
by Jacqui Wilkinson

Those of us involved in university teaching have greatly missed our face-to-face interactions with our students. These past few months should have included lectures with students, visits to schools where students were on placement, CPD sessions in a number of primary schools, and two fifteen hour RE Certificate courses for practising teachers. Lecturing moved online, school placement was cancelled, as were planned sessions of CPD and the RE Certificate courses.

Over the school Easter break I reflected on the immense amount of work primary teachers were facing, returning to a future of extensive online teaching. I decided to offer RE lessons based on the Follow Me programme (which I edited a number of years ago), that could be included in packs for pupils, or made available on a school’s teaching platform. Having created a few samples, all schools were offered these on a weekly basis.

Now every Wednesday, three lesson packs are emailed to more than 80 schools to cover RE for the following week in school. The lessons are based on the Follow Me programme and include links to suitable online retellings of the key Bible stories. One week we even had a special guest puppet to read the story – Rev Eile told the story of the Good Samaritan to younger classes.

It has been wonderful to have connected with so many individual teachers from Tralee to Raphoe, Dublin to Waterford, Mullingar to Cavan, and Cork to Monaghan. Feedback from these teachers has been really helpful as I continue to work to develop the best possible approach to suit all class combinations and technological needs. As a response to some requests, a prayer sheet was included in the mailing and links to some music for the lessons.

There is no doubt that teachers are doing amazing jobs, working in a completely surreal context. One teacher emailed me this comment: ‘What a bizarre and difficult situation we all find ourselves in. I certainly never thought I would have to interact with a class like this’.

It is hard to see what the autumn will look like but I hope to be able to run the RE Cert courses and offer CPD again in the 2020/2021 school year.

Wishing you and your school community a healthy, safe and restful summer break.

RE Cert (Follow Me)

The planned RE Cert courses in April and May were cancelled due to Covid-19. I hope to be able to plan courses for teachers (ideally in the autumn) but maybe not till Spring 2021, depending on university guidelines, social distancing etc.

I have some teachers on a contact list for when courses are planned – do email me if you would like to know about the next course. The course is for practising teachers in protestant primary schools who did not train in CICE or through the BEd DC004 track linked with the Church of Ireland Centre in DCU – so do not have the Follow Me Cert. I am happy to share information about the course – just email me.

Hopefully CPD in RE will again be on offer next year. Do email me if you want me to add your school to the list for training. (1 hour session).
Erasmus Semesters 2020

This semester, three of our BEd 3 students headed off to Utrecht, Hasselt and Barcelona, little realising that their long-anticipated Erasmus experience would be cut short. They have written about their experiences, prior to having to get home to Ireland before flights ceased. John Galbraith was in Utrecht (Netherlands), Rachel Kidd was in Hasselt (Belgium) and Charlotte Hall was in Barcelona (Spain).

John: I spent my short-lived Erasmus semester in Utrecht, a city in the Netherlands situated just south of Amsterdam. It’s a really beautiful typical Dutch city full of really interesting little hidden gems and also some of the most famous canals in the world. It is a lively student city with loads to do. A bike is a must in the Netherlands and it was the first thing that I bought when I got there as it is the main form of transport used there. The college that I attended was called Marnix Academie which is a small teaching college just a ten-minute cycle from the city centre. I was in a class with 20 other international student teachers from all around Europe. We got the chance to spend one day a week on internship in a Dutch school teaching English to the children. There are lots that I miss about Utrecht including the hype of the city and new friends I made. Although I only got 7 weeks out there it is an experience that I won’t ever forget and I think that sometime in the near future I could see myself ending up living in Utrecht as there is so much more I want to see and experience.

Rachel: I travelled to a small Flemish city called Hasselt, in Belgium to complete my Erasmus experience. Hasselt is located approximately one hour east of Brussels, close to the Netherlands border. It is a very safe, clean, friendly and surprisingly quiet city, with three Universities. The University I attended was University College of Leuven-Limburg (UCLL), the teaching campus was small and separate from the main University which made it easy to find our way around. I met friends for life from many countries such as; Turkey, Greece, Spain, Italy and France. I was lucky enough to travel to cities such as Brussels, Liège and Leuven in Belgium. I also spent a few days in Paris, Amsterdam and Maastricht, travelling by bus for less than €15 per journey! Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, my Erasmus experience was cut short, but it was an extremely memorable 8 weeks. I enjoyed every second of my Erasmus and I would highly recommend the programme to anyone that gets the opportunity. This experience has informed me as a future teacher in diverse classrooms. I have become confident in teaching children where English is an additional language and I am more aware of different cultures, lifestyles and habits from all over the world. The benefits of an Erasmus are endless.

Charlotte: I was lucky enough to do my Erasmus experience in Barcelona. Unfortunately I was only there for a short five weeks due to covid-19. Although only five weeks, it was the most fantastic experience which I wouldn’t change for the world. The city of Barcelona is an absolute gem, the history and beauty of the Gothic Quarter and the fabulous beach. I found myself walking around the streets of Barcelona for days on end and constantly finding hidden treasures. I attended the UAB (Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona). I lived on campus, which was 30 minutes outside the city. There was a train stop on our doorstep and there were constantly trains into the city! I was very fortunate to do placement in a local primary school, which was completely project based. The course I did was called Empowering Education, it was fantastic and I’ve learnt excellent new strategies which I can implement in an Irish classroom. I couldn’t recommend doing an Erasmus more, the people you meet, the memories you make, the places you get to see is something you’ll never forget.
Incorporation Heritage Book

by Revd Prof. Anne Lodge

In the year leading up to the incorporation of CICE, Mater Dei and St. Patrick’s College Drumcondra into DCU, a cross-institutional heritage committee was established. One of the tasks this committee took on was the creation of an ambitious book celebrating the legacies of all four institutions.

The plan was that this book would tell the story of each institution in about 5,000 words apiece and that it would be full of photographs. These photographs, portraits and other images had to be located before selections could be made for the book itself. Many of the CICE materials are stored in the CICE archives now held in the DCU University library where they can be accessed in a secure environment guaranteeing they continue to be cared for and be available for a long time to come.

There was a huge amount of work for those of us putting the four chapters together to summarise very long stories into relatively few words and to find the best photographs and images to fill the pages of the book. The finished product is beautifully designed.

The CICE chapter opens the book. We have a few tasters of pages from that chapter here. These include the three different sites where the College and now the Centre continue work started in the middle of the 19th century.

It also includes a photograph of students from 1911 and those from over a century later in 2018 and 2019.

The printed heritage publication books are being delivered to the All Hallows’ campus during June 2020. Because of the current lockdown, we are planning a book launch by zoom rather than in person. This will happen in late June or early July and we will do a full report on the launch and the book itself. We also look forward to sharing the heritage book with as many of you as possible in the Autumn.
From our school
by Annemarie O’Donovan
St Michael’s NS,
Blackrock.

Thanks to Annemarie O’Donovan, teaching principal of St. Michael’s NS, Blackrock for sharing this article, first submitted to the Cork diocesan magazine. I’m sure it replicates the experiences of most schools in these challenging times. (JW).

Our physical classrooms are closed for now, but our school community most certainly is not. We all understand that keeping each other safe and well is the most important job.

We are thankful that technology has allowed us to continue to engage with our educational plans as much as possible and to continue with some of our projects. This has been a learning experience for all of us, and teachers have appreciated the support and patience of pupils and parents as we become familiar with this new way of working. I am proud of the teachers adapting so enthusiastically to this new reality. As my own pupils know well, I usually called on them to solve my tech issues at school!! IT support is lacking in my own house!

While it is not comparable to the fun and energy of a normal school day, teachers and SNA’s are all using these online platforms to support pupils and stay connected. When we can see faces and hear voices, we feel less lonely. We especially enjoy our whole school Zoom assembly on Friday morning with the rector - it is helpful to have some aspects of school life continue. As a parent myself, I am fully cognisant that this is a massive challenge for parents - balancing working from home, parenting, physical and mental health, as well as getting some ‘schooling’ done too. It is often simply too much, and family harmony and mental health should always be prioritised. Teachers are advising all families to do only what they can in their own situation. Parents are, after all, the primary educators of their children and there is a lot more to learning than what can be found in a book or on a screen! Many of our pupils are keeping super fit, learning new skills, helping with cooking, creating art, making movies, gardening and taking time to relax.

We have been so excited to receive emails, photos and letters telling us about all the activities our pupils have been doing at home. You can see some of our news on our website in our homeschool gallery

This has been a difficult and confusing time for most of our pupils and they have been amazingly resilient and positive - embracing all opportunities to connect. We are immensely proud of them all.

I feel for my wonderful 6th class who will miss out on so much they have been looking forward to in this last term - rites of passage in many ways. School tours, sports days and a planned musical have been cancelled. However, we will celebrate all the more when we can, and we will not forget how mature and understanding this group especially have been. If you know someone in 6th class in any school, please do something special for them.

We are hopeful for brighter days and a happy September return to the school we all love so much. Please keep our pupils, families and staff in your prayers.

Dear God, we thank you for guiding us through a memorable school year. Keep us and our loved ones safe during the holidays. We thank our teachers and members of our school community for everything they have done this year. We gather together at the end of the year to give thanks for all we have achieved and we look to the next step in our school lives. Amen.

The Great Isolation Lockdown Activity Book

by Fiona Masterson (Whitechurch NS), Lucy Harris (Kill o the Grange NS)

We are Fiona and Lucy, two primary school teachers from Dublin, Ireland. Between us, we have 10 years of teaching experience and are currently both teaching 6th Class. We’re passionate about fun, engaging lessons, as well as all things classroom décor and organisation, so we decided last year to set up a business in which we sell our teaching resources called Teacher Teacher. You can search @teacherteacher_ _ to find us on Instagram and you’ll also find a link to our online store from there.

Since schools closed in March, we have been working hard to facilitate remote learning for our students. We felt overwhelmed with the sheer amount of educational websites and resources being advertised to us, constantly trying to sift through and pick out the best for our own students. We were also increasingly aware that there needed to be a focus on well-being during this time, more so than education, and we wanted our students to have fun activities to do at home in order to make lockdown more enjoyable and memorable.

Therefore, we amalgamated all of our favourite ideas and came up with a lot of our own to create The Great Isolation Activity Book for Children, a 30 page printable booklet full of activities to suit the interests of all children. We offered this for free through our Instagram page and, after its success, decided to create a teen and adult version filled with activities that are practical, fun, and with a focus on self-care. We wanted children, teens and adults alike to enjoy using our books and even be able to keep them as a time capsule.

This time, we decided to ask for a small donation for Cystic Fibrosis Ireland in return for the download of the books, and you can still donate and download through this link: https://give.everydayhero.com/ie/the-great-isolation-activity-book-for-aualts.

So far, we have raised €6,000 for CF Ireland and are thrilled to hear of our books being used far and wide, from hospital wards to far-away continents!

Have you a school story to share in our next Newsletter which is sent to all schools linked to the Church of Ireland Centre, DCU? Contact Jacqui

jacqueline.wilkinson@dcu.ie
Teaching in Abu Dhabi
by Louise Gallagher

Following a year of teaching in Ireland, I had a desire to travel and experience other teaching styles before coming back to search of a permanent position in Ireland. Securing a mainstream class teacher position in a large academy in the United Arab Emirates in January 2019, I travelled to Abu Dhabi in August.

Teaching in Abu Dhabi differs between the many different schools throughout the Emirate. I was employed in an English academy which used the English National Curriculum which was an easy transition coming from Ireland. There was great support with an average of five teachers to each year group. This made team planning and teaching a necessity to have consistency. I was a Year 1 teacher with 26 pupils and a large majority with Arabic as their first language, so English was a relatively new concept.

Through the world pandemic, the UAE closed all schools very quickly in March of this year and we found ourselves becoming very familiar with Microsoft teams and Class Notebook. We are running smoothly now with daily live lessons, intervention groups and online activities for all curriculum areas and monitoring attendance through Teams. However, in the beginning it was a huge adjustment for the children and me. Completing tasks such as parent teacher meetings, staff meetings, corrections, and assessment of learning online was a choice however, it is now a functioning method of teaching and learning effectively across the world.

Overall, my year in the UAE it has been a once in a lifetime experience although it has ended in unusual circumstances. I have travelled, witnessed many different cultures working together and learned incredible teaching and learning strategies which I will bring home and use in my classrooms in Ireland.

We would love to feature stories from our graduates about their teaching experiences in other parts of the world in future newsletters. Do share your stories
jacqueline.wilkinson@dcu.ie
Working in Education: career opportunities

by Claire Reidy

2003 graduated from CICE in and is currently working as a District Inspector with the Department of Education and Skills. In this article she explores some of the different career opportunities within education.

Despite all of the challenges this period of lockdown is presenting, I think it is probably also giving us some time to reflect. When Jacqui kindly asked me to write this piece giving some insight into my experiences in different parts of the education system it struck me that it might be of value to graduates to see some of the alternative career opportunities within education and the value of becoming involved in different networks locally and nationally.

I graduated from CICE in 2003 and completed my 4th year in Trinity while working in Scoil Bhride Ranelagh. I then spent a year in Drumcondra National School (DNS) and was reminded again last year of how small our community is when I was working with Beryl Healy (Principal DNS) again, in her current role with the PDST STEM team!

I returned home to Cork after that year but took up a permanent position in Christ Church National School (CCNS) in Waterford a year later. They say Cork is a state of mind so although Waterford is now very much home and we enjoy all the advantages of beaches, mountains and woodlands in an easy commute from the city, I still cross the border bridge at Youghal regularly!

In 2008 I took a career break from CCNS to work in an International Baccalaureate school in Singapore. This was an incredible opportunity and allowed me to grow as a teacher, to travel and to enjoy the experience of living in a very different culture. I developed a deep appreciation for inquiry-based learning, and this has informed my practice and research since. My experience in Singapore also means that I have colleagues and friends all over the world who I am in regular contact with. It’s always interesting to hear about developments and trends in other jurisdictions. For anyone considering teaching overseas the International Baccalaureate schools tend to be well established, regularly inspected and offer significant opportunities for CPD.

When I moved back to Ireland, I became involved in my local education centre and this is another thing I would strongly recommend to anyone looking at becoming involved in other aspects of education. As well as the social connection with other professionals these centres offer great training, libraries and teaching resources. I served as deputy chairperson of the management committee as well as developing summer courses and resources for delivery locally and nationally.

Through the education centre I also worked as a facilitator and later an associate with the National Induction Program for Teachers. I have been so impressed by how quickly the Education Centre Network has adapted to providing a wide range of online supports during this Covid-19 emergency.

For me these years of my teaching career where I was increasingly aware of the opportunities that the curriculum affords for inquiry were particularly satisfying. Teaching in a multi-grade context is complex but it also lends itself well to student led inquiry. During this time, I also completed a Masters in Education Management and Leadership.

In 2017 I took up a secondment with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to work on the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework and contribute to the development of the new primary maths curriculum. This was an interesting time to be working with the NCCA and it was lovely to connect again with some Church of Ireland schools in the network of schools who contributed to this development work.

It was always a joy to connect with former mentors and colleagues at stakeholder seminars. We explored what a new curriculum should do and say about how children learn, and the types of learning experiences children should have. The draft curriculum is available at https://ncca.ie/en/resources/ncca-primary-curriculum-framework-2020pdf

In January this year as the draft framework went to consultation I was appointed as a district inspector with the Department of Education and Skills.

I have been full of admiration in recent months for how many schools have continued to support their communities in creative and authentic ways. For me during this time of transition to a new role I have been immensely grateful for technology and supportive colleagues. Hopefully, the Summer will allow everyone some time to rest and recover from the unprecedented challenges of recent months.

If anyone is looking for some education reads/podcasts in lockdown, I have enjoyed;

Books:

How learning happens: seminal works in educational psychology and what they mean in practice by Carl Hendrick and Paul Kirschner and

Teachers vs Tech by Daisy Christodoulou

Podcasts:

• Inside Education by Dr Seán Delaney
• Top Class from the OECD
Have your say- Be part of the NCCA Consultation process

by Joyce Perdue, Rathfarnham Parish NS

There are still some of us in the profession that remember when the complete curriculum was contained in two orange books. A bit like knowing where you were when you heard about John Lennon’s death, we also remember where we were when the truck trundled into the school yard to deliver the copies of the new 1999 curriculum! With its 23 books, strands and strand units, and specific aims and objectives that were numerous and ambitious, it was, to say the least, a bit of a change. Fast forward twenty years and the 1999 curriculum is well embedded in school practice. The general consensus is that much of it is still relevant today and it has served us well. Nevertheless, changing societal expectations and new initiatives have led to curriculum overload and we need to re-evaluate how the primary school curriculum will look for today’s children who are facing new challenges in the 21st century.

NCCA Schools Forum
Since 2011 the NCCA has been engaged in reviews and consultation on what a redeveloped curriculum might look like. As part of that work, a network of 43 schools was established, (37 primary, 3 preschools and 3 post-primary schools), to look at priorities for children’s learning and how a redeveloped curriculum should look. These schools represent a cross-section of schools throughout the country, reflecting a diversity of context, ethos and environment. When the NCCA invited schools to take part in a schools’ forum, we signed up. Like many other schools, we’ve felt the pressure of having to deliver many new initiatives alongside the original core curriculum, and trying to choose what to prioritise. We felt that the forum was a great opportunity to be involved in the process of curriculum review from an early stage.

The Schools Forum meets every four to six weeks and it has been a very engaging process, moving from big picture, research based thinking about education and how children learn, to the more practical aspect of what a redeveloped curriculum should look like.

Essentially, the work of the forum to date has focused on two key questions:
- What is the purpose of primary education for tomorrow’s children?
- What structure and components within a curriculum can support this?

Several members of our school staff have attended forum meetings, bringing different personal perspectives to the process. This in turn has fed back into staff meetings, focus groups and meetings for parents, where we have teased out and considered possible changes and how they might translate into practice. The child’s voice is also an important factor in these deliberations.

Draft Curriculum Framework
The result of this work is the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework which is available on https://ncca.ie/en/resources/ncca-primary-curriculum-framework-2020pdf
The framework sets out the proposed structure, purpose and content of the next curriculum for primary schools. It sees teachers and school leaders as ‘curriculum makers’, using broad learning outcomes alongside curriculum vision and principles to allow schools to devise a curriculum which is appropriate for their particular context and community.

The schools forum has placed teachers and schools at the centre of curriculum development. It is grounded in the reality of primary education in Ireland while still being aspirational. It has allowed us to collaborate with colleagues, share ideas and make suggestions. We also involve the wider community by promoting the work of the forum at local level with our boards of management, parents associations and other networks.

In our school we have taken time to explore important educational issues for children’s learning and examine our own attitudes and values. Meeting teachers and leaders from other school contexts regularly has encouraged us to consider issues that we would rarely encounter in our specific situation. During the past two years we have developed relationships and built a network which has enriched our experience of the forum.
Overall, our involvement has been a really positive experience and it has been a privilege to be so closely involved in this important work.

Where now?
The published framework (the new ‘red book!’) is available on the NCCA website and the public is encouraged to provide submissions - sign up for updates and submit feedback on the ‘have your say’ section of the NCCA website. This is an important document for everyone but specifically for teachers and anyone involved in education. Consultation is open until October 2020.
This is only the first chapter in this important work and we are looking forward to continuing to engage with the forum in the coming years.
Working on a new school logo in Monasteroris NS. Endenderry

by Yvonne Payne

The history of Monasteroris National school stems back as far as 1813. For many years our school has been providing primary school children with fantastic educational experiences, care and support. We pride ourselves on our inclusive and welcoming environment, where each and every one of our pupils is valued.

In September 2018, I became principal of Monasteroris National School and could instantly see and feel what a special little school it is. I had many conversations last year with my colleagues, our pupils and parents about our school. On a number of occasions, we had in-depth discussions about what represents us as a school, and what it is that makes or has made Monasteroris an important, enjoyable and special place in our lives.

These conversations, coupled with many interesting and insightful conversations with Jacqui Wilkinson and teachers from a number of different schools while completing the RE Cert course for teachers in DCU All Hallows Campus in 2019, inspired me to embark on a journey to create concrete symbols and visuals that would portray what it is Monasteroris provides to our pupils and community, and what it is we strive to represent. Consequently, with superb enthusiasm we decided to create a school crest as a visual representation of what we are and strive to be.

One crisp October morning, as we gathered for assembly in our PE hall, I shared with the pupils the idea of creating a school crest. There was a cheerful atmosphere at this announcement, followed by an endless amount of hands up to offer suggestions! The pupils were tasked with drawing symbols or writing about what they would like to have included on our crest. We had an infinite amount of fantastic contributions and many now take pride of place on our crest. Our pupils’ parents were then asked to suggest ideas, many of which were provided in the form of drawings, poetry and stories of their time in our school. They were a joy to read through and a testament to the happy life of our school.

With the suggestions gathered we contacted a graphic designer with whom we shared our vision. We were provided with many exciting options. These samples were examined and discussed by the staff, pupils and members of the board of management. It became quite clear however, that one particular option caught everyone’s attention. It was unique, modern, welcoming, visual, and symbolic of what it is we represent.

The open book represents the academic elements of Monasteroris National School, while also allowing our story to be told as the visuals pop up from the book. The girl reading represents academics and the enjoyment children experience through their education here. The music notes represent the musical aspects of school life and the children playing representing the sporting life of the school. The Oak Tree in the centre represents the meaning of Edenderry and our own Oak tree on our pitch. The Church of Ireland cross is then placed in the centre of all our activities. The dome shape around the image is there to represent a sense of belonging, caring and protection to all our students.

We are very proud of our new crest and feel it is a fitting tribute to the rounded education, support and care that all pupils receive in our school. We are looking forward to using it for many years to come.
A whole school project on St Colmcille

by Claire Murray

The year 2021 marks the 1,500th anniversary of the birth of St. Colmcille. The pupils at Gartan National school, Donegal, decided to embark on a project about the saint in preparation for next year’s celebrations. St. Colmcille was undoubtedly one of the most important figures in the story of Early Christianity in Ireland. He was born in Gartan in 521. We are so lucky that our little school lies in the heart of Gartan, overlooking the lake and the valleys that echo the enchanting tales and history of his footsteps here long ago.

Having thought I knew quite a lot about St. Colmcille having always had a keen interest in the saint, I shared my knowledge with the children. I only scratched the surface, that is what I love about teaching, every day is a learning opportunity and we teachers learn something new each day too! My inquisitive nature wanted to know more. I sought the help of local historian Cary Meehan. We planned a bus trip with all the children to the local heritage sites associated with St. Colmcille. We visited the following places; his birthplace in Leac na Cumha, Churchtown where his family lived, the Abbeys in Kilmacrennan and Gartan, the cemetery in Templedouglas where Colmcille was baptised, St. Eithne’s well in Termon and St. Colmcille’s footprints in Trenagh. At each of these stops we unravelled a little bit more about the life of St. Colmcille and his commitment to spreading the word of God.

Another class outing took us to Colmcille’s Heritage Centre in Gartan, we walked down the path from the school along the shores of Gartan Lake, ready to absorb the abundant knowledge of Martin Egan. We studied the National Folklore Commission’s collection of stories written by ancestors of the children at Gartan N.S, we struck gold! These evoked curiosity, imagination and awe in the children. One remarkable story told of St. Colmcille cutting rushes in the ‘Rappa’, a rush poked his eye and he prophesied that all the rushes in Gartan would have withered tops form then on! We later found out that the aforementioned ‘Rappa’ was the field adjacent to our classroom! The children were inspired to create drama scenes based on his prophesies and acted them out with such passion.

The secret powers of Gartan Clay were revealed by Jimmy Friel as he visited us one day. He is one of the members of ‘The Friel family’, the only privileged family allowed to gather the Gartan Clay. He brought clay for all families and told lots of stories about people who carried the clay and that avoided danger due to their faith in it. Children created ‘through the keyhole’ art scenes of St. Colmcille’s life and moulded clay tiles to explain various chapters in the life of St. Colmcille. Having learned to much, the last task was to compose a song about St. Colmcille. Local musician Maria Mc Cormack edited the song and helped us with the lyrics. We recorded it and hope it will be used for the celebrations next year!

It is very fitting that our school uniform bears the symbol of the dove, Colmcille means ‘dove of the church’, the dove is also a symbol of peace. The St. Colmcille project is now complete, all pieces of the jigsaw puzzle are together and in place and an audio-visual presentation is available for anyone who wishes to learn more about the Saint. Contact us at gartanns@live.com.

Our Clay Art

Colmcille means ‘Dove of the church’, the dove is a symbol of peace that appears on our school crest.

Psalm 34 was the last psalm copied by St. Colmcille, it states “For those that seek the Lord, lack no good thing”. We all should follow the word of God.

The symbol of peace was chosen as it represents two people shaking hands and is also an anti-war sign. We understand the importance of peace in our lives.

The Celtic cross symbolises Christianity, St. Colmcille set up monasteries in Ireland and throughout Britain where he spread the word of God.

St. Colmcille and twelve monks travelled in a coracle to the island of Iona in Scotland, he left Ireland following the battle of Cúl Dreimhne. This also represents our journey in life.

The White horse symbolises St. Colmcille’s final journey as the white horse appeared to him and cried on his lap before he died. He also prophesied that there will always be a white horse in Gartan.
Comhghairdeas le hÁine Ní Ghlinn

Comhghairdeas ó chroí le hÁine Ní Ghlinn as a bheith ainmnithe in a Laureate na nÓg. An chéad údar nach scríobhann ach i nGaeilge amháin a ceapadh sa ról seo. D'oibrigh Áine linn i CICE agus anois i DCU.

Irish language author Áine Ní Ghlinn was announced as the sixth Laureate na nÓg, Ireland’s Children’s Literature Laureate on 13 May. Áine will hold the title from now until 2022. Laureate na nÓg is an honour which was established in 2010 to engage young people with high quality literature and to underline the importance of children’s literature in our cultural and imaginative lives. It is an initiative of the Arts Council, administered by Children’s Books Ireland with the support of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Poetry Ireland.

Áine Ní Ghlinn is a children’s writer and poet. She has written over thirty books, including poetry collections and an array of books and novels for children and teenagers. Her ambition as Laureate is to lift the cloak of invisibility from Irish language authors and books, and to encourage children and young people to read for pleasure as Gaeilge.

You can read some of Áine’s thoughts on children reading as Gaeilge in this Irish Times article

https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/i-want-children-to-know-that-reading-as-gaeilge-isn-t-just-obair-bhaile-1.4247717

or listen to an interview on Arena from 13 May here


This Newsletter will be issued each school term. We hope it will keep our network of schools up to date with the work based in the Church of Ireland Centre, DCU.

Do remember to check our website for updates, like us on facebook and follow us on twitter for up to date news.


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Wishing all teachers a restful, safe and happy summer break