Parent News

Newsletter of Coolmine Community School Parents' Association **June 2021**

A Year Like No Other

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I trust this edition of Parent News finds all our families well. Hopefully, the rollout of the vaccination programme means that we can be more positive about the future ahead.

This has been the most challenging year ever in the history of education. Keeping our community of over 1,100 people safe while providing meaningful education has been a task that we have had to work on continuously together. I would like to thank all parents / guardians for their co-operation with public health guidelines and their support for the school during this time.

The death of Ms. Heather Nolan in January has been a great loss to us all. Traditionally, Ms. Nolan was a central figure in our end of year celebrations. We miss her kindness, her thoughtfulness, her sense of fun and her commitment to generating happiness and wellbeing.

The next challenge we face together is to take all steps necessary to keep our sixth years safe and well so that the Leaving Certificate can proceed as planned. Senior cycle for our sixth years has been very different from that experienced by other graduates. If there is a recipe for building resilience, then I think studying for your Leaving Certificate in the middle of a pandemic qualifies. I have no doubt that this unique experience, is its own preparation for life for our sixth years. The resilience built in these times will sustain and support them in the years ahead. In line with advice from the Department of Education we have taught our sixth years right up to 28th May, and held an in-school ceremony with them on that date, with an online graduation that took place on Saturday, 29th May. We thank all parents of sixth years for sharing your sons and daughters with us. It has been a privilege. We are very proud of their achievements both personally and academically and wish them every success in their lives ahead.

It has been a busy end of term for our Transition Year (TY) students. The TY Masterchef competition and accompanying ceremony took place on Wednesday, 26th May. On Thursday, 27th May the presentation of awards and certificates took place. This followed a busy week of discussion and interviews on the TY portfolios. This experience allowed students to reflect meaningfully on their learning during the unique experiences of this academic year.

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Monday, 24th May was a day of team building for our first years. Taking advantage of the better weather, Teamworks provided activities for our first years to experience the opportunity to work collaboratively in teams. Our first years were impressive in how effectively they performed together. These experiences provide memories for the future and hopefully this day afforded an opportunity for them to get to know eachother better.

I would like to thank the members of the Parents Association who are working hard behind the scenes with us and helping us to prepare for next year. Most particularly, I would like to thank the teams organising the Pre-Loved Uniform Sale, the Book Rental and the editors of Parent News for this edition keeping all parents informed about life in Coolmine Community School.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish all our families a healthy summer ahead, stay safe and keep in touch.

Patricia Mc Phillips

Principal

Parents' Association Update

You may ask what it is we do as a Parents Association? If you visit coolminecs.ie/about-us/parents-page/ this will bring you to the official page on the website and give you the full run down. In reality we are really a group of very ordinary parents with different skills and backgrounds who are actively working to safeguard the rights and legitimate aspirations and interests of parents and students of Coolmine Community School. We have some laughs and some heated debates at every meeting all in the best interests of our children. Currently we are lucky to have a parent representative from every year group and this we believe gives an excellent gauge upon which we can ask questions and offer valuable contributions to our children's education.

As the curtain closes on this academic year, I would like to acknowledge and commend my fellow committee members on their commitment and valuable contributions this year. They have generously given their time and experience as we continued to meet every month. Principal, Ms McPhillips and Deputy Principal Ms Connolly both also attend each meeting and we thank them for taking this time, often late on a Monday evening, to present us with updates from the school and listening to our concerns and thoughts.

I would like to outline briefly what we as voluntary representatives of the whole parent body have done this year and reflect on what we have achieved as a Parents Association (PA).

When COVID-19 closed the school doors we actively monitored the remote teaching and learning. Our feedback was generously received by the school management, and we assisted the school in every way we could. We had PA members involved with the gathering and processing of data from the School Survey sent out in relation to remote learning. We helped with working on improvements based on the data and continue to offer assistance in relation to this. We saw great growth and understanding of different forms of learning as the lockdown was extended into months rather than weeks. This was particularly true in relation to remote / blended learning. We were also fully informed of the challenges faced by many teachers and pupils alike and offered our support.

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We continue to offer monthly feedback and constructive development ideas on the new VSWare system. We believe the communication of essential information should be efficient, easy to access and constantly improving. Ms Connolly should be commended for her work in this area.

The school is still working on a digital strategy that will shape the future of learning, and we have a representative from the PA working with this team.

We are working with the school Guidance Department on creating a database of contacts that will help us to help our children make important life choices in relation to their future careers. You will all have received an email in relation to this.

Our Pre-loved Uniform event took place on Saturday, 29 May 2021. We were delighted with how well supported and well received the event was and hope to develop this initiative further in the future. It is a Green initiative as well as a fundraising one. The PA Uniform subcommittee also work with the Board of Management in relation to any improvements or changes to the uniforms during the year.

As lockdown in March 2020 did not allow for the sixth year commemorative hoodies to be arranged by the school, we had a subcommittee who actively pursued this and successfully presented the Class of 2020 with their hoodies in November 2020.

The Debs Committee were very sad to have to cancel last year Debs, but we are very optimistic that we will have a great night this September.

The Book Rental Scheme is run smoothly and effectively by a tireless Parents Association subcommittee from March to August. This is not an easy undertaking and requires a lot of time, effort, and diligence and I commend this team on all their efforts.

We plan to hold a talk for parents at our EGM. We have found useful links for parents and shared them on the school website. These links included live webinars, practical resources and so on. We are affiliated with the National Parents Council Post Primary (NPCPP), and we share a lot of useful information from them.

We had representatives look at and provide input on policies such Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Anti Bullying.

We publish regular *Parent News* updates which we try to keep positive and informative. We thank Dermot Kinane and Selina Bonnie, both PA members, for editing this copy. Along with Ms. Manek and Ms. Mc Phillips for their assistance, we thank all our writers for their contributions.

We had our Parent Nominee on the Board of Management take on the role of Chairperson of the School Board and we congratulate Dermot O'Mara on a job well done.

We will have a Parent EGM on Monday, 14 June 2021. Please see Page 5 for further details.

Our Annual AGM will be held in October and we welcome new members to sign up and enjoy the experience. More information will be sent out closer to the time.

We wish our leaving Certificate and LCA students the best of luck. We hope that all members of our Coolmine family have a lovely Summer. We send our condolences to those who have lost loved ones during the last year. Stay safe and well and we will see you all September.

Janet Mitten
Chairperson Coolmine Parents Association

In Memory of Ms Heather Nolan

by Ms Brady



Ms Heather Nolan joined the Coolmine Community School in 2006. She was the first Special Needs Assistant (SNA) to be employed by the School and she certainly embodied the true spirit of an SNA. She was committed to all aspects of school life and to the care and development of the students she worked with.

Heather embodied all that an SNA should be, caring, loyal, supportive, and reliable. She saw her role as a vocation and she aspired to support and care for all students, not just those with whom she worked with. She was committed to self-improvement and strived to develop her knowledge further. In September 2020 she began a four-year degree in Counselling and Psychotherapy.

Music was central in Heather's life. She used her musical talents to inspire others and she always wanted to pass on her love of music to our students. That love of music, saw her directing the school talent show along with Mr Tully for the last 15 years and indeed the Talent Show is synonymous with Heather. She committed wholeheartedly to the show and took huge pride in the students who performed in it. In 2009/2010 she created and directed the gospel choir. This was born out of her recognition of the talent and musical potential she saw in the students of Coolmine.

In 2019 she created a dance troupe, here she coached students in dance and theatre and sacrificed many lunchtimes to train, support and encourage them to reach their potential. She recognised that students could excel in other areas of school not just academically.

Heather coached boys' and girls' basketball throughout her time in the school. She coached the senior girls' team to achieve a regional title in 2008 and most recently in 2017 she brought the under 16 boys' team to All Ireland level. She always encouraged staff and students to support and promote the love of sport in our school and she made us all feel immense pride in celebrating all their successes.

Heather was an integral part of the Coolmine Community School spirit. She was always finding and promoting ways to improve and support wellbeing in our school. In December she initiated an Advent Calendar event to boost staff morale during these difficult times. She was an active member of the social committee and was always front and centre when it came to providing fun and entertainment amongst the staff. She played, coached, and refereed the infamous Teachers versus Students basketball game at the end of each school year.

There are no words to summarise the loss of Heather on our students and staff, but her vibrancy, sense of fairness, love of life, and her commitment to education will always be felt and remembered here in the School by her friends, colleagues, and students alike.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam

Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting

Dear Parents / Guardians

The Parents Executive and Board of Management of Coolmine Community School would like to invite you to attend an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) on Monday, 14th June 2021 @ 7.30 p.m. Via Zoom (Details to follow by VSMail).

The Agenda for this meeting is as follows:

- The election of proposed nominees to the Coolmine Community School Board of Management.
- Financial / Account Changes Ratification. See VSWare email for further details on appendix 1 & 2.
- Parents Information talk from D15 CAT (Community Addiction Team).

On the night the election format will be as follows;
If there are more nominations than positions, a vote will be taken, 1st nominee, 2nd nominee and so on. If only one mother is part of the nominations, she will be deemed elected on the first vote, as one of the positions must be a mother. The term of office is for 3 years. All parents/guardians who have a child attending the school can go forward for election and they don't have to be current members of Coolmine Parents' Association, but we would ask that they consider becoming members going forward.

We ask for those who are interested in putting their name forward for nomination, to e-mail the Chairperson of the Parents Association on janet.lee.33@hotmail.com by 5.00 p.m. on Monday, 7th June 2021 so that we can have an indication if a vote will need to be arranged i.e. if we have more than 2 mothers or fathers going forward for election.

Comhairle na nÓg

Comhairle na nÓg are child and youth councils in each of the local authorities around the country, which give children and young people the opportunity to be involved in the development of local services and policies.

In light of the fact that Comhairle na nÓg is for young people under the age of 18 and who, therefore, have no other voting mechanism to have their voice heard, Comhairle na nÓg is designed to enable young people to have a voice on the services, policies and issues that affect them in their local area.

Comhairle na nÓg
Young Voices. Local Issues.

Katie Byrne (2nd Year) was elected to Comhairle na nÓg in 2019 and represents Coolmine Community School. It is possible for anyone who attends the Comhairle na nÓg AGM to put themselves forward for election, where, if successful, they will be part of a 22 member youth council who will advocate for young people.

Global Citizenship

It has been a school year like no other but despite the pandemic, we have continued to promote the theme of Global Citizenship in our school.

In a recent virtual talk with TY students, Ella Mooney Long (TCD Zoology student) stressed the urgency of all of us to take better care of the environment. She referenced the fact that some experts and scientists believe that climate change has led to an increase in the emergence of Zoonotic diseases (diseases transmitted from animal to human). An example of such a disease is the Coronavirus. Climate change has caused habitat loss, and this has put humans in closer contact with animals. According to the World Health Organisation, climate change is the greatest single threat to human health in the 21st century. Climate is causing higher temperatures and increased rainfall which also influences the survival and spread of such diseases.

The pandemic has made us more aware of how delicate our environment is and against this background we have focused in recent weeks on establishing and protecting biodiversity in our school. Wildflower gardens play an important role in attracting pollinators who in turn are essential for food production. Pollinators generate €53 million for the Irish economy.

Mr Kinlon with the help of Mr Kingston have identified good sun traps and have been busy planting wildflower gardens. Also, with the help of Miss Moloney and Miss McIntyre, classes were busy making seed bombs. This is a mix of moss peat and pollinator-friendly plants. These have been planted in the grounds of the school. Miss McIntyre has shown students how to plant fruits like tomatoes and strawberries. This should encourage students to plant their own in the future. Under the guidance of Mr Kinlon, some students have potted sunflower seeds. They have brought these home where they will monitor their progress over the summer months and report back in September with photographs. So, we should see lots of colour and bloom over the coming months in Dublin 15. Students should be very proud of their work and it has allowed them to support Earth Day which was celebrated on April 22nd.



The United Nations designated May 20th as World Bee Day. This was to raise awareness of the importance of pollinators but also the fact that they are facing extinction. In Ireland, a third of our bees could be extinct by 2030. Students have learnt lots of interesting facts about bees through an interactive display outside. Do you know that male bees are kicked out of the hive during winter because they are no longer needed? Also, bees have their own dance called the Waggle Dance. This is their way of telling other bees that there is food nearby. The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan gives guidance on what we can all do to help the bees survive.





Second year students have completed their "Geography in the News" CBAs in recent weeks. Global issues featured heavily with students showing a great understanding and awareness of issues like deforestation and how it is a major cause of Global Warming and in turn how Global Warming is partly responsible for causing the forest fires that have impacted many different parts of the world in recent years. Also, we learned that Tuvalu is an island in the Pacific Ocean, and it is under threat of disappearing due to rising sea levels. This was chosen by one of our students because her grandad lives on a small island too and it could face a similar fate. Global issues can be very personal and real for some students. The humanitarian crisis in Yemen was chosen as a topic because of the tragedy of war and the impact it has on the lives of ordinary people.

Miss O'Connor and her Eco Studies Class have conducted litter picks on the school grounds and explored the problem of litter in Blanchardstown. They reported on this by entering the Young Reporters for the Environment competition run by An Taisce. They also monitored air pollution through a traffic survey and entered their presentation in the Globe Ireland Air Quality Campaign. Reducing our energy consumption was explored for the 'One Good Idea' competition.

Global Goal 16, 'Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions' was the theme adopted by Transition Year students this year. This coincides with Ireland having a received a seat as a non-permanent member on the security council of the UN. Their work culminated with a virtual talk with two Defence Forces personnel. Corporal O'Brien has served three missions in the Lebanon and Syria. Students were given a very insightful account of the tensions that exist between Israelis and Palestinians. His account gave students an appreciation of the important role Irish peacekeepers play, 87 of whom have sacrificed their lives for the cause of peace.

Some of our students are global citizens outside the classroom. Grainne Glynn is involved with her local Fóroige club and they have met with Roderic O'Gorman TD on the issue of Racism and Discrimination.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the support and funding we receive from WorldWise Global Schools. Also, we would like to thank management and all the teachers and students who have engaged with us during the course of this difficult year.

As we head into the summer, we would encourage all our students to be respectful of their environment and to be aware that sustainability is the key to a better future. We wish everyone a happy, enjoyable, and nature – filled summer!

Trudy O 'Hora and the Global Citizenship Team, Mr Kinlon, Miss McMahon, Miss Moloney, Miss O'Connor, Miss McIntyre, Miss Keogh, Mr Flynn.





First Year News Flash

Debating Club

Our new debating club has been set up for first years. It has had a great start with over 20 members in the club. The ability to speak in front of an audience is a very important life skill. The aim of our debating club is to help students improve their confidence and public speaking skills while having fun at the same time. The students met every Tuesday at lunch time with Ms Daly, Mr Deegan, Ms McCourt and Mr Owens.

Teamworks Sessions

On Monday, 24 May, our first years got to experience outdoor team building sessions with a company called Teamworks. It was a great opportunity for first years to interact with one another in this way as they have not had much opportunity to do this since they began as students of Coolmine Community School last September. Teamworks have already visited the school to do these sessions with our Transition Year students and it was a great success.

Fun Summer Activities for Teens

By Denise Mooney (PA)

Take an online photography course: Now is the time to learn a new skill, and surprisingly there are tons of photography courses online. Ideally they'll need a DSLR camera but there are also courses in smartphone photography that focus on capturing interesting angles and concepts, and using natural light.

Learn to code: The CoderDojo movement believes that an understanding of programming languages is increasingly important in the modern world, that it's both better and easier to learn these skills early, and that nobody should be denied the opportunity to do so.

Start a podcast: If your teenager fancies having a YouTube channel but is too shy to put themself out there, a podcast might be a good alternative. It's super easy to get started, and podcasting is really taking off right now. There are lots of podcast hosting platforms, and most of them have really good guides to explain how to do it.

Watch a TedED: From the makers of TED talks TedED offers brilliant educational talks, as well as a daily email of lesson plans for any age group.

Learn a language: Try a new language on Duolingo.

Headspace: Why not try *Headspace* and learn the essentials of meditation and mindfulness.

Do a virtual dive or space trip: Watch 3D underwater videos or space exploration on YouTube for a bit of escapism.

Visit a museum: art galleries and museums are putting some of their collections online, so there's an unprecedented amount of things you can now see up close without the queues!

Learn a musical instrument: Ukuleles or harmonicas are inexpensive or give them spoons and put in your ear plugs, and they can start to learn online.

Foróige

Foróige is a leading youth organisation in Ireland and has been working with young people since 1952. Their purpose is to enable young people to involve themselves consciously and actively in their development and in the development of society.

They work with over 50,000 young people aged 10-18 each year through volunteer-led Clubs and staff-led Youth Projects. Foróige currently operates in 26 counties in Ireland, with more than 600 Foróige Clubs, 150 Youth Projects, the Big Brother Big Sister mentoring programme, the Foróige Youth Entrepreneurship programme, our Youth Citizenship and Youth Leadership programmes.

There are a number of Foróige resources in our area. For more information why not visit their website?

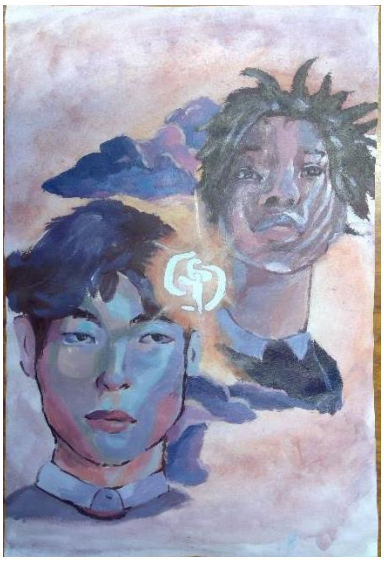
Student Journal Artwork Competition

1st & 2nd Year students were invited to design the front cover of the student journal for 2021/2022. Some fabulous work was submitted, so much so that we had to pick a 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th place. Well done all!

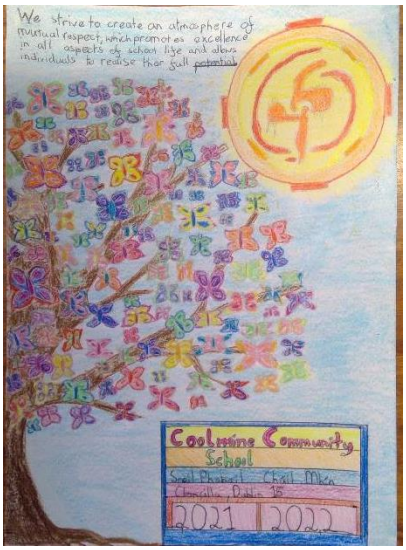
Congratulations to our winner Ajla Ejubovic (1 Heaney)



2nd place: John Carlo Ungos (2 Chandra)



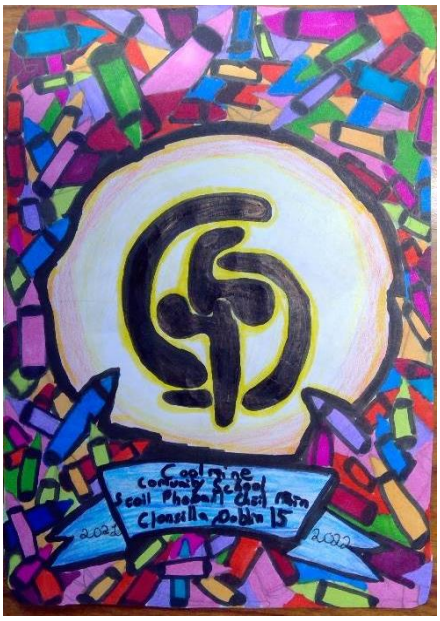
3rd Place: Miruna Maria Rabusapca (1 Heaney)



4th place: Vincel Caliguia (2 Chandra)



5th place: Deea Anastasia Pulber (1 Enright)



Transition Year Horticulture

By Mr Kinlon

This years' group had to work extra hard to get the school garden back into shape. Much endeavour, skill and hard work was shown by the TY class since September as the garden had gone through an extended period of wilding due to Covid. The TY group were involved in planting the schools wild flower garden, adding to the sensory garden with household herbs and planting shrubs to attract butterflies.



International Cookery Competition

By Ms Murphy

Over the past 6 weeks, Transition Year students have finessed their knowledge of international cuisine by cooking dishes from all around the world. This week, the students finished the module with a high-stakes competition! Students were tasked with selecting a country and preparing, cooking and serving a dish that represented that country. Cuisine from countries such as Japan, Belgium, Italy, Canada and China meant that D corridor was an oasis of delicious aromas – with many members of staff coming down to investigate! 1st place went to Anna Huysmans who made a stunning prawn ramen dish from Japan. 2nd place was awarded to Gavin Curtis for his mussels and chips from Belgium. Last but not least, 3rd place went to Adam Giffney, who got bonus points for his gorgeous presentation of his creamy lemon pasta dish! Well done to all TYs for making such a great effort over the past 6 weeks.



2nd Place – Gavin Curtis



1st Place – Anna Huysmans



3rd Place – Adam Giffney

Debs 2021

by Linda Osborne (PA)

Plans for this years Debutantes Ball are still in place and we have some positive and encouraging news from the event organizers. After some concerns were raised by the students, I have been in touch with Debs Ireland to get their advice on the matter.

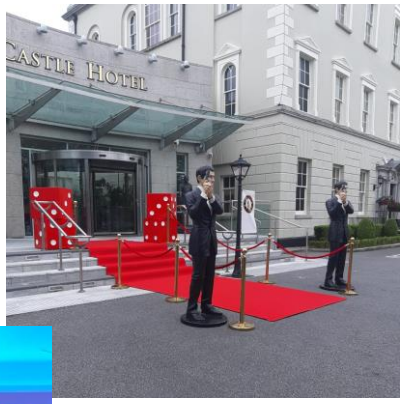
They have outlined that the positive roll out of vaccines is having a huge impact on the chances of mass gatherings going ahead this year; and with the recent positive news from Government all indicators at the moment seem good for us.

Tickets are €85, with an additional 5% online fee, and are purchased through the Debs Ireland website only (debsireland.ie). They can be paid in €20 instalments from now until the night before the event. Debs forms must be returned to Ms O'Donnell and signed and approved before anyone can attend. So, with all this in mind, our event looks set to be on track and we hope this gives you some excitement and encouragement for September 3rd 2021.

We will continue to work closely with our event organizers in the coming months and we will keep you updated through our social media platforms and the reps.

On behalf of the PA, we would like to wish all students the very best in their exams and hope to see you all on September 3rd. It has been a very unusually tough year for you all, so we want this event for you more than anything.







Leaving Cert Applied Enterprise Task Project

As part of the 5th year LCA Enterprise task, our class with the help of Mr. Kinlon prepared beautiful flower pots which were raffled off at the end of the school year. The students involved showed great imagination and detail in their creations.



Pre-loved Uniform Sale & Collection Date

The Uniform sub-committee of the Parents' Association organised a pre-loved uniform sale for the school community. On Saturday, 29th May uniform items including jumpers, skirts, trousers, polos shirts, track suits, and school jackets went on sale at a vastly-reduced rate. The day was greatly supported by parents and all funds raised will go towards services for pupils of the school. A big shout out in particular to PA members Denise Mooney and Glen Phelan for organising the day.

Based on the success of this inaugural event and feedback from parents in attendance, we will hold another sale in the coming months. But before we do, WE NEED YOUR HELP…

THINKING OF DOING A CLEAR OUT OF YOUR UNWANTED SCHOOL UNIFORM ITEMS??? then please consider donating the following to the Parents Association: Coolmine trousers, skirts, junior and senior jumpers, "crested" blue and red polo shirts, tracksuit tops and bottoms.

When: Saturday, 3rd July 2021 between 10am to 12pm
Where: Coolmine School Carpark

Please note: NO SOILED OR POOR CONDITION ITEMS WILL BE ACCEPTED. NO UNIFORM ITEMS WILL BE ACCEPTED BY THE SCHOOL OUTSIDE OF THE ABOVE DATE AND TIME.







Olympic Hopeful Gerda Meistininkaite

Leaving Certificate student Gerda Meistininkaite is currently training in Lithuania as part of the Lithuanian Senior team. Gerda joined the Clonsilla Taekwondo Club when she was just ten years old. To date she has won a European Gold medal at under 16 and a silver medal in the G1 competition in France. Gerda trained daily, only taking a break on Saturdays. Despite this she was a diligent student who continued to progress in her studies. We wish Gerda the best of the luck in the Olympics and her future career as a professional athlete.





Retirement of Ms Phil Horan

By Ms McPhillips (Principal)

Ms Phil Horan, Senior Clerical Officer, in the Front Office recently retired after 29 years of service. Ms Horan is herself a graduate of Coolmine Community School having completed the secretarial course here in the late 1970s. In 1992 she was approached by the then Principal Mr. O'Beachain to assist with work in the Adult Education Office in the school. At that stage Ms Horan was the mother of students in the school and could not have anticipated the long-term commitment involved!

When a vacancy arose in the front office, she was a natural candidate for the position. Having worked previously in the Allied Irish Bank in Phibsborough she had the necessary interpersonal skills and accounts experience for the role.

Ms Horan was always courteous and friendly if you visited the school or had a telephone query. For those of us who worked with her, she was a fabulous colleague and friend. She was dedicated, hardworking, diplomatic, and skilful while being light- hearted and upbeat whatever the task.

Over her years of dedicated service, she has been instrumental in providing continuity through three changes of Principal. She had an in-depth knowledge of the school's ethos, procedures and history. As the person who administered the enrolment process for all incoming first years and a native of the area she knew our Coolmine families very well.

Phil shared her family with us when her three daughters and son attended the school. It is a source of pride to us all, that her Granddaughter and Grandson currently attend Coolmine.

As Phil takes her leave of Coolmine, we wish her good health to enjoy the next stage of her life with her husband John and their family. We hope that retirement provides Phil with opportunities to travel, good weather to enjoy golf and time to pursue her many other interests. We will miss Phil very much, it has been a privilege and a joy to work with her.

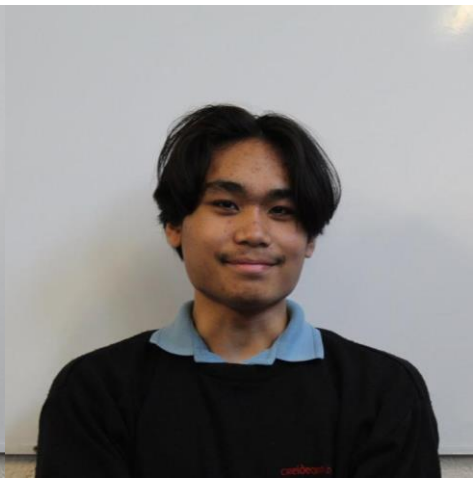
6th Year Students of the Year Awards

Each year students are nominated by their teachers for this award. The awards for Students of the Year 2021 went to Cathal Barker Berry, Hannah Holohan, and James Capellan.

These students showed commitment to their work, were involved in school life, always pleasant and cooperative. They excelled in different areas of school life and stood out as an example for other students by demonstrating great strengths and resilience in a difficult year.

Congratulations to all three students on receiving their awards.





In addition, awards for Student of the Year as nominated by their peers were Halana Curry and Dominykas Valionis.

These students embodied the spirit of Coolmine. They were friendly and cooperative and positive, a quality appreciated by their peers throughout the year.




Our Digital Journey

By Ms Connolly (Deputy Principal)

On Thursday, March 12th 2020, our world in education changed rapidly when then Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar announced that due to the COVID 19 pandemic, schools would be closed until the end of that month. At the time schools were asked to, where possible, provide for remote teaching and learning and to be conscious of students who may not have access to technology at home. Subsequently, schools were closed until the end of the academic year 2020. Our school staff mobilised quickly and with no prior planning for remote learning, began to engage in teaching and learning from home in an emergency situation.
Our school was in a fortunate position in that all staff had a school device and were operating from one platform, Microsoft 365. Prior to the school closure, our staff and students were familiar with the use of apps on the platform, mainly OneNote and Teams.

We had invested in training for teachers and our digital team had also developed a robust digital learning plan, which included digital learning targets for our whole school community. However, like many organisations, finding a new way to work together remotely was a challenge for us all. This was particularly pertinent in a school where connections with students are fundamental to the delivery of a quality education. As a school, we were very focused on the care and wellbeing of our students as they were plunged into this new world. There were endless *Teams* meetings to plan for teaching and learning across many groups in the school. The commitment from staff, students and their families to this new way of teaching and learning was unparalleled.

Fast forward to September 2020, following a very busy summer of reconfiguring our school building and putting safety measures in place, we successfully opened our doors to students again. This was a welcome relief and it was wonderful to reconnect with students again. We had reflected on our experience of school closure and decided to move forward with a series of actions that would prepare us for another potential school closure event and also serve to move forward our digital learning plan. Part of this was to develop a remote / blended learning policy and we commenced this work with the digital team. When the '*Guidance on Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning in a COVID-19 Context*' was released by the Department of Education in November 2020, this was welcome. Although we hoped that a period of school closure would not reoccur, sadly this was the reality when the Minister for Education, Norma Foley, announced another period of school closure for our students in January 2021.

This time staff and students were better equipped using the knowledge of the previous school closure. We were able to issue guidance to parents, students and staff quickly using Department of Education guidelines. Engagement from students improved, we listened to our students and what worked and didn't work for them. Actions to continue with our digital learning policy planning and the development continued in the background. Although they are too numerous to detail here, a timeline summary is provided on the next page:

- October 2020 Digital Team Meetings (Draft Policy Development).
- November 2020 – Guidance on Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning in a COVID-19 Context.
- 7th/11th January 2021 – Remote Learning Guidance from teacher unions.
- 11th January 2021 – Presentation on DES Guidance and Circular 74/2020 to school staff and guidance issued to students and teachers.
- January/February 2021 – School devices loaned to students who did not have access to technology at home.
- February 2021 Digital Team Meetings continue.
- February 2021 Teacher, student and parent Surveys on remote education.
- February 8th 2021 – Policy shared with teachers. Teachers invited to read and contribute to the policy based on experience.
- March 2021 – Focus Group with Digital Team (3 members) and 3 parents discussed and analysed data from the parent survey.
- May 2021 – Focus Group with students who had a range of remote learning experiences.
- Summer/Autumn 2021 – Development of new Digital Learning Plan 2021/2022.

In May 2021 we conducted a focus group with students centred around their experiences during the school closure periods. The students were very insightful. A number of key points emerged from the group, which we will use to set new targets for our digital plan in conjunction with other data gathered. Mainly the fact that students want to continue to use Microsoft Teams to enhance teaching and learning, whether they are in or out of school. They demonstrated a good knowledge of the blended approach in education, noting that whilst nothing replaces the connections with peers and teachers in schools, technology has a place in supporting learning and can prepare them for life beyond school and in the workplace.

When we reflect on the targets set prior to the pandemic in our digital plan for the period 2015-2020, it is clear that the emergency remote learning context led to us reaching these targets and many more. It has certainly been an interesting digital journey, with many twists and turns, but we know now that by working together as a school community we can come through the hardest of times and emerge stronger with a clear roadmap for the future of digital learning in Coolmine.

Congratulations

The Parents' Association were delighted to award €25 One4All gift vouchers to each of the following recipients who submitted entries to the Christmas crossword competition. All winners were chosen at random from the correct entries received.

Johann Jinesh (1st Year)
Lucy Sweeney (2nd Year)
Noah Rodgers (2nd Year)
Aoife Monaghan (5th Year)
Binta Barry (5th Year)

