

Report of the Board of Management on the operation of St. Tola's N.S.

for the 2023/2024 School Year

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Dear Parents/Guardians,

As the 2023/2024 school year comes to a close the Board of Management is pleased to publish its annual report on the operation of St. Tolas's N.S. This report augments the weekly newsletters sent home over the course of the year which are available on www.tolasns.com

This year was overshadowed by the terrible loss of our beloved pupil Dylan Coady Coleman in February. Our thoughts and prayers since then have been with Dylan's parents Laura and Gary, his sister Zoe and his baby brother Shane, his grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, his 4th class classmates and his wide circle of friends here in St Tolas and in the wider Shannon community. Dylan's sense of fun, his kindness to everyone he met and his lovely way will stay with us forever and he will be fondly remembered by both staff and pupils here in St Tolas. In a fitting tribute to Dylan this terrible tragedy saw the school community work together to support each other in the days and months since his loss and we are well aware that this work will need to continue into the next school year and beyond. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dilís.

The school began a major project as part of School Self Evaluation when we undertook surveys of pupils, parents and staff in relation to internet and technology use by our pupils of all ages. We are grateful to the large number of parents who filled in our survey and who attended a consultation meeting in relation to the findings and our draft Agree to Agree document. It is intended to finalise this document and have an official launch early in the next school year. While technology and the internet is a valuable resource and tool as parents and staff we need to ensure that our pupils are given the correct tools to manage their online lives in a safe and healthy way. Year on year this becomes increasingly challenging and by working together to put in ground rules around time spent online, the types of apps and games being consumed by our pupils and appropriate social media use the hope is that it will make it easier to ensure our pupils are protected from some of the dangers present online.

Another major development this school year was the introduction of free hot lunches for all pupils which began after Easter. Our lunch provider is the LunchBag and in general the lunches have been well received by the pupils. All lunches are healthy and nutrient dense to provide good sustenance to pupils during the school day. There are also lots of options to choose from and the menu changes frequently.

As a Board of Management we are concerned at the level of absenteeism for some of our pupils. We ask that pupils attend every day unless they are unwell. It is the duty of parents/guardians to provide a reason every day for your child's absence. We would also ask that parents/guardians schedule family holidays for times when the school is closed. Our school calendar for the 24/25 school year has been shared with parents/guardians already to assist you in planning for family events. Under the Education Welfare Act 2000 the principal is legally obliged to report all pupils who miss 20 days or more in a school year to the Education Welfare Service. To put it into perspective if a pupil were to miss 20 days a year for their eight years in primary school this would total 32 weeks and is almost a full school year. This level of absenteeism does have an effect on a child's academic and social development.

We wish to thank Newmarket-on-Fergus hall Committee who nominated our school as the beneficiary of their Bingo fundraiser. We would also like to thank the many staff, parents, grandparents and family members from our school community who travelled out to Newmarket-on-Fergus hall for what was a very enjoyable evening. We would also like to thank our many sponsors for their generosity in providing sponsorship for the bingo games and raffle prizes for the draw on the night. All money raised on the night went to the school. In the current challenging financial climate with costs increasing at an alarming rate this was most welcome.

The current Board of Management began its term on 1st December 2023 and this will run until 30th November 2027.

The Board of Management wishes to extend a sincere thanks to our teaching staff, Special Needs Assistants, secretary and caretaker for their trojan work over the past year and for all they have done for our pupils. We thank our Parents' Association for the work they carry out in behalf of the school. We also extend out thanks to our parents and guardians for their wonderful support of the school staff in so many ways. We want to thank in a special way our amazing pupils who make St Tolas a wonderful school. We are privileged to have such a wonderful and caring school community. We wish you well for a safe and enjoyable summer holiday and we look forward to the new school year which begins on Wednesday 28th August 2024.

Yours sincerely,

P.J. Burke , Chairperson

Mary Dunlea Fitzgerald , Principal

Board of Management 2024/2025

- Chairperson.....P.J. Burke
- Treasurer.....Richard Stapleton
- Principal Teacher.....Mary Dunlea Fitzgerald
- Teacher Nominee.....Gary Tyrrell
- Parent Nominee.....Mike O' Brien
- Parent Nominee.....Gillian Kirwan
- Community Nominee.....Cathy Colgan
- Community Nominee.....Anne Germaine

Curriculum Developments

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

Social, Personal and Health Education : As a school staff it has become evident over the past few years that Wellbeing is an area that we need to focus on to best support our pupils. We continued with the Weaving Wellbeing programme in every class this year. This is the first Irish designed positive mental health programme designed for primary aged pupils. This programme gives pupils tools to develop resilience and coping strategies to meet the everyday challenges of life. For a small number of pupils they require further intervention and we have some wellbeing groups running and being supported by members of the Special Education team. We also were grateful to have linked with the Children’s Grief centre this year and organised a workshop facilitated by a member of their team for pupils in 4th class to help them navigate and understand the emotions they are experiencing following the loss of their classmate Dylan.

Literacy : We place great importance on literacy learning in St. Tola’s as it is the bedrock on which so much learning across the curriculum is built. The Primary Language Curriculum is being implemented in all classes from Junior Infants to 6th class . We continue to place particular emphasis on teaching “heart” words – words that are high frequency and phonetically decodable. If pupils can master these words in the emerging literacy stage it really helps their reading to develop. Guided reading continued throughout the year in Senior Infants -6th class. We also had a number of pupils in Senior infants and 1st class benefit from Reading Recovery which is an individualised programme designed to support struggling readers before the gap between them and their peers becomes too wide. We also offer the Wilson programme for pupils with dyslexia type difficulties and this has benefitted some of our pupils this year also.

In the senior end of the school the focus is on enhancing pupils vocabulary through explicit teaching of vocabulary and through reading, comprehension and writing activities. Guided reading has proven very effective in the senior classes. We have a wide variety of novels and pupils at this age enjoy using a novel as a basis for their literacy learning. . Pupils from 3rd-6th class use the Accelerated Reading programme which allows them to read novels at their own reading level and take online quizzes to determine their comprehension and understanding of what they have read. This programme can be very motivating as pupils keep track of the number of words read. Over 52 million words have been read in total by the pupils in 3rd-6th classes inclusive. We also have a number of word millionaires and multi-millionaires in 3rd to 6th classes – pupils who have read a million or two million words since the start of the current school year. That is a great achievement.

In all classes a variety of writing genres have been taught with pupils making good progress in writing across the curriculum also. We have had a particular emphasis in the teaching of spellings too and in particular the transfer of spelling skills. Many pupils learn spelling in isolation with ease but when it comes to written work the spelling rules can be forgotten and this transfer of skills does not happen. This will continue to be a focus for the next school year also.

Gaeilge: The focus this year has been on improving pupils’ spoken Gaeilge. The emphasis is on hearing and responding to stories, rhymes and songs. Teachers promote the use of Gaeilge throughout the day and integrate it where possible in other curricular areas e.g. art, P.E. We had our annual Seachtain na Gaeilge in March culminating in a fantastic Cruinniú where every class performed a song/poem/dance as Gaeilge for the school. Each Friday at Cruinniú we also have our Frás na Seachtaine where all classes are introduced to an Irish phrase they can use throughout the coming week.

Numeracy: A new Mathematical curriculum will be introduced at all class levels in September 24. All teaching staff attended an inservice day earlier this year which was facilitated by a member of the Oide team which provides continuing professional development to teachers. We expect to have another training day in the next school year in relation to this new Maths curriculum. We continue to work hard at developing pupils’

mathematical abilities across all of the strands of the maths curriculum. The focus this year has been on developing mathematical language and problem solving abilities. In many of the classes we have developed maths cards for pupils to practise early mathematical concepts at home. Pupils are encouraged to learn their table facts also which aids with computation and problem solving. Our standardised testing results attest to the progress being made in this area of the curriculum.

Special Classes : We are very proud that St. Tolas now has two special classes open and catering for pupils with additional needs. Our Solas class caters for pupils with Autism. It is full with six pupils enrolled and is staffed with one teacher and two SNAs. The pupils are integrated for part of the day in their mainstream class and attend Solas for individualised instruction.

Our Aoibhneas class caters for pupils with Multiple Disabilities..This clas is also full with six pupils attending and the class is staffed with one teacher and 2.5 SNAs. The pupils in Aoibhneas also integrate into mainstream. . Our pupils in Aoibhneas particularly love joining the rest of the school for our weekly Cruinniu where they get a great welcome. Many of our pupils in mainstream classes have learned some Lámh signs to support their friends in Aoibhneas.

Pupils in both classes have access to our new sensory room which is a fantastic addition to the school. The new sensory garden was also completed and is now in use.

We are still in the planning stages for our extension to the school building which will house our two special classes We hope that the Department of Education can move the process along so that the building work can begin as soon as possible. It has been frustratingly slow with no progress made this year in moving the project along.

Student Council: Our Student Council is well up and running for a second school year. We have had two hotly contested elections this year and it is fantastic to see such a large number of pupils nominating themselves for election. Well done to all those who have put themselves forward even if they did not get elected. Two pupil nominees from 4th, 5th and 6th classes make up the Student Council. They meet regularly and have made some fantastic suggestions to improve the school for everyone. They were also consulted by the principal in relation to our Internet and technology use agreement, helped out at Grandparents Day and assisted with our bookfair to name some of the things they were involved in.

Reporting of Attainment Results: Standardised testing in Maths , English and Spelling took place for pupils in 1st-6th classes in May. In English we use the Drumcondra reading test which gives the school data on vocabulary and comprehension which is very helpful in monitoring our School Self Evaluation Improvement plan .In Maths we use the Sigma T test and analyse the results across all the strands in the Maths curriculum to focus on areas that may need more attention at whole school level. The Department of Education and Skills obliges all schools to report on attainment results in English and Maths for all pupils in 2nd, 4th and 6th classes. St. Tola's reports the results to parents for all pupils from 1st to 6th classes and these will be made available by means of the annual summer reports.It is important to remember that standardised test scores are a snapshot on a given day and that the class teacher's knowledge of a child's performance , motivation and ability over a year is much more insightful.

Attendance: We thank all our parents/guardians who have informed us when pupils are absent this year. There appeared to be a greater variety of illnesses circulating this year particularly in the winter months and naturally this resulted in absences for many pupils. However, the number of pupils missing many days has increased over the past number of years and we are concerned that this is having an impact on these pupils' learning, attainment and social skills. Under the Education Welfare Act 2000 the school is obliged to report to the Education Welfare Service all pupils who have missed 20 days or more for any reason in a school year. Our Education Welfare officer visits the school regularly to check in on attendance patterns and she may meet with parents/guardians to discuss how they can be supported in ensuring that their child is not missing too many days.

School Ethos: As we are a Catholic School all classes teach the Grow in Love programme. Our school is greatly enhanced by pupils from other faith traditions and none and we all benefit from having these pupils in our school. We celebrated Catholic Schools week at the end of January. The highlight of this week as usual was

Grandparents' Day. This year our grandparents from Senior Infants joined us for our celebration. All classes attended and performed lovely songs/poems for our grandparents. .

Our First Communion and Confirmation ceremonies took place in April and May. Both ceremonies were really special and we hope that the pupils, their parents and families enjoyed the celebrations. We welcomed Fr. Tom as our new school chaplain this year and it was great to have him visit our sacramental classes on a regular basis.

Christmas Performances: Our annual Christmas performances are always a highlight for both pupils, staff and parents. It is great to see every pupil on the stage with their class and we were so proud of all of them. We also held our annual Carol service before the Christmas holidays. This is always a lovely way to gather as a school community before the Christmas break. We love to hear Christmas/holiday greetings in all the languages that are spoken by pupils in our school!

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

Extra-Curricular Activities: Homework Club continued for pupils from 1st-6th classes who wished to attend. There was hurling/camogie and basketball training organised at lunchtimes for pupils from 3rd-6th. We thank our staff who facilitated these activities. We took part in the Marion Keane basketball tournament and for the first time in a long time both our boys and girls teams progressed to the next stage of the competition. We also took part in competitions with other Shannon schools in hurling, football and camogie in Wolfe Tones GAA club. We also participated in the Cumann na mBunscoil competitions. Our athletics team represented the school at the Clare Schools Cross Country competition at the start of the school year.

We were delighted that our school band continued this year. The pupils are from 3rd- 6th classes and meet every Thursday. We were fortunate to receive donations of some instruments including a violin, keyboards, concertina and guitar. Thank you to Newmarket-on-Fergus Community Brass Band for the donation of two clarinets and a saxophone. The pupils are getting the opportunity to try out the various instruments. We are grateful to Ms Hansbury and Ms Flynn who have given band members music lessons after school. The pupils are making terrific progress in learning various instruments. The school band has performed here in the school to great acclaim and this year enhanced both the First Communion and Confirmation ceremonies with their music and singing. We look forward to further performances in the future.

Active Schools: All classes placed a great emphasis on getting outside and being active throughout the school year. The astro turf is a great asset to have in the school and it means that we can have physical education outside for most of the school year. It is also used at all breaks and lunchtimes! Wolfe Tones GAA provided Caimin as a coach once a week for Junior Infants-3rd classes where pupils received instruction in fundamental movement skills in a fun and inclusive way. We wish Caimin every good wish as he moves to Australia and we will miss him here in St Tolas. Pupils from 2nd to 6th classes attended swimming lessons in Shannon Leisure Centre also as part of our Physical Education programme.

ICT in school: We continue to focus on technological learning with the use of laptops and IPADS to enhance teaching and learning. A number of school staff are on the Digital Learning committee and have put a plan in place to ensure there is progression across the school in using ICT. We had to carry out some works to our Comms system which have been completed. We have also bought additional IPADS, an IPAD trolley and additional laptops which greatly enhances our digital learning.

Building Upgrades: The school applied for and were successful in being granted solar panels. These were fitted recently and are now operational. We hope they will generate lots of electricity which will help offset some of our energy costs moving forward.

It is almost the end of another busy year. Each year brings changes and this year Ms. Edel Halliday has announced her decision to retire from her teaching position. Edel has served the pupils in St Tolas since 2007 working as both a mainstream teacher and an SET teacher. Her wisdom, kindness, sense of fun and her utter dedication to the pupils she works with will be greatly missed. For many years Edel was in charge of the school choir and shared her

fantastic knowledge of music and performance with so many pupils over the years. We thank Edel for her years of service and wish her and her family many years of health, happiness and new adventures in her retirement.

The Board of Management extends its thanks to all in the school community - staff, parents and pupils for their flexibility, dedication and willingness to work together to make our school a strong community working and learning together. We look forward to a new school year ahead and are proud of all that was achieved this year.

We wish all our pupils in 6th class who are moving on to secondary school all the best for the future. They have been a great 6th class and will be remembered fondly by all who knew them. It is a privilege to watch a class grow and mature as they pass through primary school. We know they are ready to move on to their secondary education. . We hope that they will bring the two most important rules in St Tolas with them – Be Kind and Try your Best!

SCHOOL CALENDAR - Please see www.tolasns.com for a list of all dates for the school year 2024/25

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