



*St Michael's National School
Water Street, Castlepollard,
Co Westmeath*



T: 044 9661865

F: 044 9661875

cpns3h@gmail.com

Roll No: 05513H

Date: 22nd December 2023

NEWSLETTER

Volume 6 Edition 1

Introduction

Welcome to the latest edition of our school newsletter, our way of keeping you informed of what is happening in our school this year. Again, we remind you that our website is active and may be accessed by following this link: <http://stmichaelscastlepollard.scoilnet.ie/blog/>

Attendance

Our attendance figures for the first term are as follows: September 92%, October 91.3%, November 88.3% and December 86.4%. These figures are roughly on par with 2022/2023 figures. (90%) There has been a significant improvement on December's figures compared to last year. December was a month we identified from previous years where levels dipped. We put in place additional awards and incentives this December to bring about improvements. Like last year, we have been calling parents once pupils are absent in excess of three consecutive days as a means of checking in with families. This is not done when we have been informed already by parents of imminent absences. It is particularly important to contact the school if you are aware your child will be off school for a substantial period. We also ask you to record reasons for all absences through Aladdin at the earliest opportunity and give details where appropriate. As part of our DEIS planning, we are trying to reduce the number of unexplained absences, so explanations are very important.



Numbers on Roll

We currently have 158 pupils on roll, a slight increase on last year's figures. Because of this, we have no doubt that we will comfortably retain our sixth mainstream teacher for September 2024. As mentioned previously, it is hoped that we will reach the threshold for a seventh and eighth mainstream teachers in the next five years. For this to happen, we would need to enroll an

additional 10 pupils throughout the school while maintaining our current numbers. Reductions to pupil-teacher ratios at government level would also bring us closer to these thresholds. The main benefit of this would be that each class level (J.I, S.I, 1st, etc.) would be single streamed meaning the teacher would solely focus on the work programme for that level.

ASD Class

Our pupils are now well settled in their new home which was completed last May. The boys continue to make great progress under the care of their teachers and SNA's who work with them every day. It is great to witness their successes and see them become more independent. We have continued to place a strong emphasis on getting out and about this year. The group took part in swimming lessons before the mid-term while they spent the weeks leading up to Christmas engaged in therapeutic horse riding. They also visited the cinema at the end of November and have gone on short trips around the town.

Tractor Run

On Saturday evening, December 16th, a tractor run was organised to raise funds for our ASD Unit. 80 vehicles consisting of tractors, trucks and buses lit up and set off from the Hurling Club. It was a fantastic evening which took a huge amount of organisation. We sincerely thank the parents of the ASD classes, Townspark Vintage Club, Castlepollard Hurling Club, those who sponsored prizes or made donations and all those who assisted in any way. It really emphasised the true meaning of community and we sincerely thank everyone. The money raised will benefit the classes hugely and enable us to provide additional services and activities for the pupils.



Building Works

We had only officially opened our new modular building last June when we received notification from the DE that approval was given to move to the next stage of our permanent building project. Since September, a great deal of work has gone into the preparation of a planning application. This application was submitted to Westmeath County Council early in December and we hope to hear back from them early in the spring. We hope if this process goes well that we can go back to the DE for approval to move to the next stage of the process. While the next stage will bring its own challenges, particularly the disruption to the school and loss of space, the benefits come the end will benefit the entire school community.

Charitable Donations

Already this year, we have raised almost €500 for worthwhile charities. We raised €234 for GOAL through our Jersey Day in October while €260 was collected for CHF last week through

our Christmas Jumper Day. We also collected 22 shoeboxes as part of the Christmas Shoebox Appeal. We thank everyone who took part in these activities. We believe it is important that pupils are keenly aware of the need to give to others less fortunate.

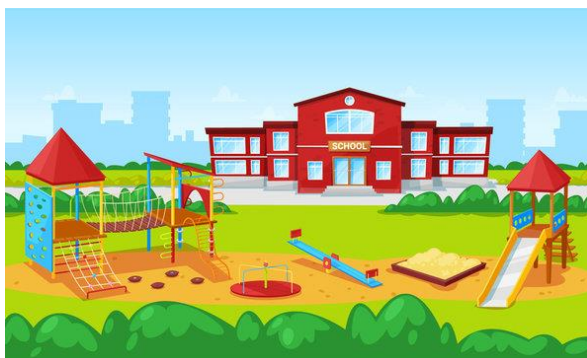


Tennis and GAA

Colm Murphy was back with us in September for tennis lessons while we took part in the Cumann na mBunscol football competition for boys and girls in term one. Unfortunately, there will be no celebrations or final appearances this year for our pupils. They did perform admirably, and we are hopeful of our younger pupils who really did improve throughout the competitions.

Walkway and Playground Equipment

A huge amount of work has gone in since the summer to create additional facilities for the outside environment which benefit the pupils, particularly their wellbeing. Two activity centres were purchased for the junior infant yard while a centre for the older pupils was purchased in November. We also completed our walkway around the hurling field. We thank our PA for supporting these projects as well as Russell Mellett who made a very generous donation which allowed us to complete the walkway and part fund the activity centre for our senior pupils. These additions have really made a huge difference to the pupils and provide them with lots of options at breaks.



Brickz4Kidz

We welcomed back the crew from Brickz4Kidz in mid-November. They worked with each class and assisted the pupils as they completed various projects using Lego. This is a very worthwhile activity and links well with STEM education where the focus of learning is on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

Swimming

Swimming returned in the first term for seven weeks. We had a very high level of participation which is wonderful considering how important swimming is as a life skill. As mentioned, our

ASD classes went swimming in Longford, while our remaining classes will have their opportunity in May.

Halloween Witch Walk

Our Witch Walk was a tremendous success again this year with €3500 raised. This was a massive sum, and we sincerely thank everyone who contributed. We again pay special thanks to our PA who collected on behalf of the school outside Tesco that day. The Christmas Sensory Disco which was a great hit last year will not take place this Christmas due to the Tractor Run, however, a disco is being planned around St. Valentine's Day instead.



School Trips

Both our ASD classes and first class took a trip with their classmates to the cinema in Mullingar as a Christmas reward while our infants visited the Tuar Ard Theatre in Moate where they enjoyed the Christmas pantomime, 'Elfie saves Christmas'. These trips were just reward for the pupils' great work over the term. PA monies and DEIS funding were used to make these trips affordable at what is an expensive time of year for families. Classes second to sixth are not being forgotten about as an outing for each group will be organised before May.

Christmas Activities

A local artist, Rachel Coyne worked with classes first to sixth for four weeks prior to Christmas and created some wonderful collages based on the story, 'The Night before Christmas'. These were on show in the corridors and in the hall – leading up to the holidays. Our infant classes performed the Nativity for the school and their parents. It was great to see the return of live performances to the school after some difficult years. As is traditional, we sang carols under the tree at the beginning of December to mark the start of the festive season in our town while we also were present for carol singing at the blessing of the crib on the square earlier this week. We took part in CHF's Christmas Jumper Day initiative and the Team Hope Christmas Shoebox Appeal.

Santa's Visit and the End of Term

Santa made a welcome return to the school this year. There was also an unexpected guest who caused confusion and excitement in equal quantities! An Garda Síochána had to be called unfortunately to remove the unwanted visitor from the premises! We thank members of our Parent's Association members who decorated the hall, put together the grotto, organised the gifts as well as tidying up afterwards! A huge amount of work was put in this year again and this is one Christmas experience our pupils are sure not to forget!

We also held our Christmas raffle on the final day of term. Mason Hughes from Junior Infants was the winner and he received a hamper full of goodies given to us by Glanmore Foods.

Finally, we thank you for your continued support and wish all members of our school community a very happy Christmas.

