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## NEWSLETTER

Volume 7 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/>. We plan to have a new website in place before the end of the year which we look forward to.

### Attendance

Our attendance figures for the first term are as follows: September 92.1%, October 91%, November 91.6%, and December 86.8%. Our attendance levels have improved considerably with November this year, up 2.5% on last year. Overall, for the year, we have improved our attendance rate by over 1.5%. We have 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 if parents have given reasons on Aladdin or informed the teacher. 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 particularly important.



### Numbers on Roll

We currently have 163 pupils on roll, an increase on last year's figures. Because of this, we will comfortably retain our sixth mainstream teacher for September 2025. As mentioned previously, it

is hoped that we will reach the threshold for seventh and eight mainstream teachers in the next five years. For this to happen, we would need to have 164 pupils on roll in September '25. (169 for eighth teacher) 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, first, etc.) would be single streamed meaning the teacher would solely focus on the work programme for that level.

## **ASD Class**

Our pupils in our ASD classes continue to make great strides. Mrs. Quinn joined us this year and has formed a great bond with her pupils already. All the pupils are progressing very well both academically and socially. They have completed blocks of physical therapy, cycling, swimming and horse riding this year already, which they really do enjoy. The boys also take part in all the other activities throughout the term.

## **Tractor Run**

On Saturday evening, December 14<sup>th</sup>, a tractor run was organised to raise funds for our ASD Unit. Over fifty 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, particularly Colin and Aisling, 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 therapies and activities for the pupils for the remainder of this year and into the next academic year.



## **Building Works**

We hope to move to the tendering stage of our building project in 2025. There are still some details required by the DE before they assess our application. We would still be hopeful that construction could commence before the end of 2025. This will of course cause considerable inconvenience; however, the end product will have lasting benefits, not just for the pupils of our ASD classes, but for the school as a whole. We will of course keep you closely updated.

## **Charitable Donations**

Already this year, we have raised close to €1000 for worthwhile charities. We raised €222 for GOAL through our Jersey Day in October while €250 was collected for CHF in early December through our Christmas Jumper Day. We also held a 'Wear What You want Day' in aid of the

Make a Wish Foundation and raised €292. We collected shoeboxes as part of the Christmas Shoebox Appeal. Locally, we held a raffle on the final day which heavily involved our Student Council will raised €310 for SVP locally. 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, GAA, and Boxercise**

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, we did not make it to the knockout stage, but we certainly were more competitive this year. We also had boxercise classes in November and December with Boris. This was a new activity for all our pupils. It was quite intensive but was very worthwhile. Boris certainly stressed the importance of discipline and hard work which are attributes needed not just in sport but in life as a whole.

## **Walkway and Playground Equipment**

While we are very lucky to have playground equipment in our junior and senior yards for our pupils to utilise, unfortunately on wet days, our junior pupils could not use due to access. We had work completed during the mid-term which now enables the pupils to use the equipment throughout the year without getting covered in mud! We thank our P.A for supporting this.

## **Science Show, Bread Making and Reptile Zoo**

We welcomed Lucy Forde in September who taught all our pupils about how brown bread is made. All classes got to make (AND EAT!) the bread when it came out of the oven. To celebrate Science Week, we had two workshops which all pupils got to engage in. They learnt many interesting things, including the science behind slime! Also, we welcomed a reptile zoo to our school for the very first time. We had snakes and some were scary spiders in the hall, but these were all thankfully under the control of reptile specialist, Dr. John Dunbar.



## Swimming

Swimming returned in the first term for seven weeks. We had a high level of participation, which is wonderful considering how important swimming is as a life skill. Our ASD classes went swimming in Longford this term, while our remaining classes will have their opportunity to receive lessons in May.



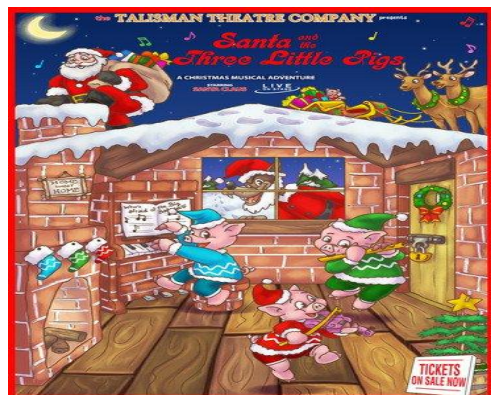
## Halloween Witch Walk

Our Witch Walk was a tremendous success again this year with over €2800 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 money raised funded new goal posts for the pitch, improving the surface around the infant playground equipment as well as financing bus transport for the Christmas trips.



## School Trips

Both our ASD classes and first class took a trip 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, 'Santa and the Three Little Pigs.' Our two senior classes went ice-skating in Mullingar which they thoroughly enjoyed. These trips were just rewards 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 and third are in discussions with a trip planned between now and the end of spring.



## **Student Council and Children's Rights**

Our Student Council is up and running and has had greater involvement in school matters this year. They chose the date for our Christmas Jumper Day so that it would coincide with the Toy Show. They have organised charitable events and advertised each. They created 'Sweet boxes' for our Christmas raffle in aid of our local SVP. They spoke at assembly and met with Mr. Renahan. We are delighted with their efforts and enthusiasm. Strongly associated with this are children's rights and the need to hear what children have to say. Our fifth and sixth class attended a workshop in the Office of the Ombudsman in early December where they learnt all about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.



## **Santa's Visit and the End of Term**

Santa made a welcome return to school this year. He was joined by the Grinch who didn't get up to as much mischief as he did last year! He had his baby with him and was hoping to enroll in junior infants next year! 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. Cian O'Reilly 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.

