



SLIGO GRAMMAR SCHOOL

SCHOOL COVID CHANGES

This year has been like no other

RETIREMENTS

This year Sligo Grammar School saw four retirements

STUDENT VOICE

Students talk about BLM movement and Mental Health



WINTER EDITION





CORONAVIRUS

COVID-19 CHANGES

This school year is guaranteed to be a year like no other, with COVID-19 there has been a myriad of substantial changes within Sligo Grammar School. While some of these changes may be trying, they are implemented to help in dealing with COVID-19. Wearing masks has proven to be one of the more challenging parts of this new school year both for students and teachers. From speaking to some teachers we discovered that being able to properly communicate with students has been particularly challenging, especially for the language teachers. Having teachers move from classroom to classroom instead of the students doing so, is strange for both students and teachers. Some teachers interviewed said they find the seating plans used for contact tracing useful for remembering students' names, while others find it difficult from a disciplinary perspective. One of the new changes which is reasonably easy to manage is the new one-way system, aside from the fact that sometimes it may take longer to get from one place to another. Some more of the changes we have had to get used to in the school include the classroom windows being left open for ventilation, sanitising our hands and desks after class, shorter lunch breaks and an earlier finish to the school day. With all of these new adjustments in motion, it's inevitable a few students or staff might forget some of the new requirements, but it's important that we do our best. What matters is that we as a whole unit, work together to overcome the COVID challenges and keep each other safe.



VIRTUAL OPEN DAY

This year Sligo Grammar School decided to do something alternative for our Annual Open Day. Open day is an important day for incoming students and their parents. Traditionally on this day, sixth class pupils and their families visit the school to see what's on offer. This year, in order to comply with COVID guidelines, Sligo Grammar School presented the tour online as a virtual guided tour of the school. The virtual open day was a huge success and we look forward to welcoming the new students next year! The video is available to watch on the school website and on our Facebook page.

BOARDING HOUSE

There was a lot of work to be done during the Summer in the Boarding Houses in order to prepare them for the return to school. Alan and Harry had to tear down walls in order to make extra room for the students. They had to section the dormitories into pods so that only small groups of students were living in the same areas. This meant that Alan, Harry and Michael had to paint the interiors of the dorms and move the furniture and fittings into new positions. Boarders dinner time must be restricted



as well to so that there are two different time slots. This is so that they won't be mixing with others outside their pods.



PREPARATION

Principals and school managers spent the summer break working towards a safe return to school in September and Sligo Grammar was no different. A huge effort kicked in to ensure that the school was deep-cleaned. A one-way system was implemented and school desks were arranged to maximise physical distance between all. Maintenance and cleaning staff worked hard to have the school buildings and grounds set up for the students in September. Staff were provided with their own PPE. Face coverings and hand sanitiser is available for all to access throughout the school day from matron and in the hallways. Additional cleaning takes place throughout the school day to ensure that frequent touch points and classrooms are kept sanitised. The biggest challenge in preparing the school for the new year was organising the timetable, changing the duration of breaks and staggering them for different classes, according to the Vice Principal, Mr. Staunton. "Changing breaks from 40 to 20 minutes was one of the biggest changes but probably one of the most effective," he added. This change ensures that students are limiting their contact with other students for very short periods outside of their core class groups.



SPORT

20 x 20 CAMPAIGN



During the first term of this school year, SGS took part in the National 20x20 Campaign. The aims of this campaign focus on women and girls in sport, striving to achieve a 20% increase in participation, media coverage and attendance in this area by the end of 2020. These goals are represented by this motivational motto: "if she can't see it, she can't be it." "I became aware of the programme because I am involved in girls' sport both in SGS and in

the community and I thought it was a really good idea," stated P.E. teacher Ms McDermott, who was heavily involved in the 20x20 campaign in SGS. "I wanted to let everybody in SGS know about the variety of sports we have both inside and outside of school, and also to let people know about girls who are involved in sport outside of school which perhaps they wouldn't have known about otherwise." Within our school, Ms McDermott believes that girls' participation is the most important element of the campaign. She also feels that the best ways to get and keep young girls involved in sport are you make it fun, to offer a wide variety of sports, to encourage team co-operation and you have plenty of team trips! "I think that the 20x20 campaign was very successful," Ms McDermott added. "I do know



that it has absolutely increased participation, attendance and media coverage, so I think that it was a great start to something that we need to keep working on." This year in SGS, more than one third of the girls attending our school are involved in hockey. Ms McDermott says that this is the result of a lot of hard work, but also of a growing interest in sport for women.



RUGBY

Six SGS senior rugby players had an eventful summer by making the Connacht Schools team.

Matthew O'Hara, Kacper Palamarczuk, Eddie Coyle and Mark McGlynn were chosen for Connacht, while Adam Hunter made the U18 squad and Hubert Gilvarry was selected for the Sub Academy of the Connacht professional team. Well done to all the boys on making the team and to their coaches for all their hard work.



PE

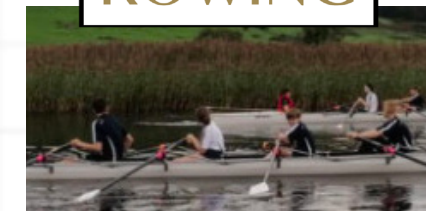
We asked Ms McDermott about changes that had to be made to PE classes in order to allow us to continue PE as one of the few schools doing so this year. Students must wear masks while changing and each student has their own area in the changing room which they must clean before and after changing. Contact sports are no longer allowed, and students cannot touch any equipment, which adds a huge amount of work for the PE teachers. Ms McDermott said that while the new restrictions did add to her workload, her priority is making sure that the students have an opportunity to exercise.



HOCKEY

When asked about hockey, Ms McDermott stated that the restrictions are much the same as those in place for PE. All the school leagues have been cancelled in 2020, which means there were no matches for any of our hockey team this term. Seven girls from third and fourth year got trials for the U16 Connacht InterProvincial Squad. Maebh McLoughlin, Lara Swann and Méabh Gillmor made the squad! Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 the InterProvincial tournament has been postponed until next year, hopefully taking place during the February midterm or the Easter break.

ROWING



The rowing club in SGS meets every Friday in the Old Gym, where the students work out on the rowing machines. SGS rowers have been enjoying some great rowing at the weekends with Sligo Rowing Club, under the instruction of coach Ronan Ivers with help from teacher Máire Hynes.

NEWS

GEOGRAPHY TRIP

This term the sixth-year geography students went on their field trip, organised by Ms O'Neill and Ms Moore. They observed the process of river erosion along the river Diffreen in Co. Leitrim. They recorded information from both the upper and lower courses of the river and learned new skills, including how to use different recording instruments. The field trip will account for 20% of their Leaving Certificate Geography exam.



REMEMBRANCE DAY

On the 20th November we had a virtual Remembrance Day, to remember the young people from Sligo Grammar School that fought and died in the First and Second World Wars. The members of the Garda Síochanna, the Irish defence force and frontline personnels were all attendees. Names of young soldiers that died were



read aloud by Deputy Head Boy and Girl. Wreaths of poppies were laid on wooden stands in memory. Chief Superintendent laid a wreath in honour of Gardai who died on duty and Captain Miles Gallaher layed a wreath in memory of the late members of the Irish defence forces. The beautiful service is available to watch on the Grammar School website.

LCPE

2020 has been a year of historical events. In SGS, history was made in our PE department - Leaving Certificate Physical Education has become a subject available in the school. The subject will be examined for the first time in June 2022, there are twenty-four current fifth year students studying the new LCPE course. The course is being taught by Mr Cradock, who is delighted that PE is finally available as a Leaving Cert subject.

In TY, Mr Cradock teaches a LCPE choice module available as a trial of the new exam subject. There are currently 22 TYs taking the module to get a taste of the subject in preparation for 5th year.

Students will study different areas related to physical activity and performance, such as the role of technology, gender and business in the world of sport.



KAYAKING



Kayaking, like many of our other extra curriculars in the school, has continued for all years. The kayaking club is open to everyone in the school and ventures out on the waters on Tuesdays and Thursdays year-round. Thankfully, the school's kayakers can physically distance on the water and in the changing rooms. Certain changes had to be made still, for example, there are two beginner groups that kayak on alternating Tuesdays and only 15 people are allowed on the water at a time, excluding instructors. A special congratulations to Alana Guckian-Walton, Darragh Leakey and Almha Walsh for achieving their level two River Skills Award. Well done to all!

NEWS

DEBATING

This year the SGS debating club met weekly, under the new authority of 6th year student Adam Henry and Ms Hall, who have taken over from Ms Hynes. Debating is open to all year groups and takes place every Monday in the library. Unfortunately, lunchtime debates can't take place this year due to COVID restrictions, but weekly debates can still go ahead. Thankfully, many competitions were still able to take place online such as the annual Soap Box competition and the European Youth Parliament. These events took place over zoom. Well done to all who took part!



FANCY DRESS

On the 22nd of October, the TY YSI (young social innovators) class organised a Halloween costume day in aid of pieta house, all years were involved, including teachers, with prizes for best dressed in the junior school, senior school and a separate prize for best dressed teacher. The idea behind the day was to "dress up as something that will make you and your friends smile and laugh" supporting the Ty's project topic of mental health. The school raised €1,105. Thank you to all the students and teachers that took part and donated.



CHRISTIAN UNION

Every Friday after school the Christian Union meets in the library. They play mini games, watch music videos, read Bible passages and discuss their Christian faith. This is organised by Cannon Patrick Bamber and Carla Marin, who has come this year from Chile to talk about her experiences. Going forward, there will be confirmation to those who want to commit themselves to Christ. Confirmation begins in January for 2nd years.



RETIREMENTS

This year Sligo Grammar School saw four retirements, those of Ms O'Donnell, Mr Gavin, Mr Potter and Ms Lipsett.

Ms. Fidelma Lipsett- Ms Lipsett has taught business studies for the past 35 years in the school. She was the driving force behind many successful and prize-winning TY mini companies, many of them reaching the Student Enterprise finals in Dublin.



Her students described her as "caring, kind and friendly" and "always willing to help".

Mrs. Collette O'Donnell- Mrs O'Donnell has been an Irish and Business Studies teacher here in the school for 33 years, semi-retiring in 2017 but continuing in a part time basis until August 2020. Ms O'Donnell, like Ms Lipsett has been an incredible guide to many of those who entered mini-company competitions and was heavily involved with TY fundraising and managing finances. She also ran the annual Seachtain na Gaeilge in SGS.



Mr. James Gavin- Mr Gavin has been a popular Irish teacher and rugby coach in Sligo Grammar

for the past 20 years. In his time as rugby coach, he has seen his teams win four Senior Connacht School league titles, and two Junior Cup wins. Luckily Mr. Gavin is going into semi-retirement and will still be teaching a few classes and coaching the rugby teams.

Mr. Alfred Potter- Mr Potter has been a French teacher, a German teacher, senior co-ordinator, Houseparent in the boys and girls boarding houses and organist in the school for the past 35 years. He has been heavily involved with the school choir since he joined the school, and brought many choirs up to RTÉ studios where they sang for church and carol services. Mr Potter was responsible for many successful prize days, remembrance services and whole school assemblies. He also directed two very successful productions of "Joseph and his Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat" for the school. They will be missed by students and staff alike, and we wish them the best of luck in their retirement!

BT YOUNG SCIENTIST



Mia Sawai Brandon,
Anushka Pathak

The BT young scientist award is a nationwide competition that showcases the best and brightest minds of Irish youth. It centres around showing the new and innovative ideas of our young people in biological, technological, psychological and physical sciences. The virtual 2021 event will comply with COVID guidelines, the projects will be presented

on a livestream using pre-recorded videos and live video interviews. We interviewed Anushka Pathak and Mia Sawai-Brandon, one of this year's groups. "We chose this class because we thought it sounded like fun!! Ms. Higgins approached us to enter YS in the summer, and we said that we had nothing to lose by entering, so here we are! This is the first time either of us have entered a science competition. Our project is

about the gap in understanding between the adults and teenagers when it comes to the topic of mental health. We want to find out why this gap in understanding exists, and how to bridge it. Both adults and teenagers want to solve the issues of mental health, but there seems to be a gap in understanding when it comes to how both parties want to solve these problems. We thought it would be interesting to investigate this gap in understanding and try to come to a tangible solution that would help both parties to communicate better in the future." When asked what they thought of the new format of the competition, they said that they were disappointed that they couldn't go up to Dublin and experience the exhibition in person, but would rather do it online than not do it at all. Some



HAUS
Lewis Murphy, Cormac Shannon, Rory Carr

of our other teams include Lara Swann, Francesca Reddington and Louise Casey, who are designing an app to help the elderly communicate better with friends and family and log daily reminders. Lewis Murphy, Cormac Shannon and Rory Carr are researching how



TECH TAP
Francesca Reddington, Louise Casey, Lara Swann

sensors can be used to turn on, off and save electricity. We wish the best of luck to all of this year's competitors!

FUNDRAISING

SAOIRSE'S WALK



Over the quarantine period, TY student Saoirse O'Donovan decided to put her free time to good use and raise funds for Pieta House.

Saoirse walked 10km every day of the month of May to collect money. By May 31st, Saoirse had walked 317.9km and raised €1,000 for the charity. The AIB Bank in Sligo also were doing a project to double people's earnings for charities at the time. AIB Bank matched Saoirse's €1,000 to €2,000. Well done Saoirse for all your hard work!

FOOD APPEAL

Since 2017, Sligo Grammar School has taken part in an annual food appeal in aid of the Sligo social services. This year we should all be more aware of those in need, as COVID has had such a devastating effect on many families. Students donated non-perishable foods and toiletries to the appeal, such as tinned beans, toothbrushes, cereal and pasta. Thank you to everyone who donated, your generosity is greatly appreciated!





BONDING TRIP

This year's TY students will have a drastically different TY experience compared to previous years. Many overnight trips, projects and activities have unfortunately been cancelled this year due to COVID-19.

Without fail, SGS TY students have always enjoyed a customary, overnight bonding excursion to start off their action-packed year. Although this year's TYs were not given this same opportunity, they were able to embark on a miniature hike up our local Knocknarea Hill: followed by all students enjoying a delicious pizza in the Strand Bar! Overall, the TY students had a wonderful bonding trip!



TY ACTIVITIES

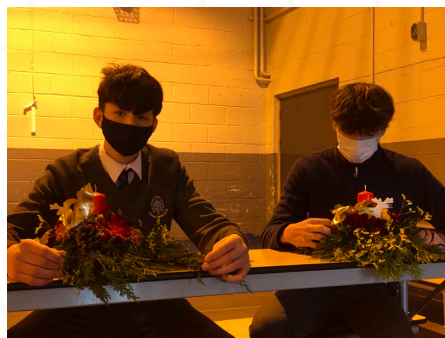
SUSTAINABLE LIVING

Ms McIntyre runs the TY Sustainable Living module within the school. This class encourages students to think about their impact on the environment. Ms McIntyre organised for a guest speaker from Birdwatch Ireland, Michael Bell, to give the class a talk about the natural wildlife in the area. Students also took a walk around the school where he pointed out wildlife and its natural habitats. Ms McIntyre also got in touch with Mary Naughton of the Sligo County Council's Tidy Towns project. She organised a litter collection at the hospital accompanied by a hand hygiene course for the class to take before litter picking. This event took place on the 22nd of October and the class had a great time. The hospital grounds are now much more clean and tidy for patients and for the hardworking frontline staff.



CHRISTMAS CRAFTS

Leading up to the Christmas break, the TY students participated in a lovely Christmas craft workshop. This workshop was run by Lorraine from Crazy Daisy Florist in Sligo town beside Sligo Abbey. Lorraine taught the students how to make beautiful candle display wreaths. The separate classes spent the afternoon making the wreaths. They were made using real leaves and pine and were easy and fun to make according to students! The TYs thoroughly enjoyed themselves and were delighted with their new, handmade Christmas decorations.



FIRST AID COURSE

This year's TY students were the first to participate in a First Aid and safety course! This First aid course encompassed a myriad of safety precautions and solutions. The students learned vital skills including what to do if someone has been found unconscious on the road, the steps to complete a proper heimlich maneuver and CPR. Aidan Gallagher, a trained paramedic with over 20 years of experience, instructed the course. From speaking to several of the students who completed the First Aid safety course, the TYs largely enjoyed and benefited from this experience.



SURFING

This year's TY surfing thankfully went ahead. All classes completed four surfing sessions in September and October. Social distancing measures were kept in place on the school bus. The team at Strandhill Surf School were able to respect COVID guidelines while also giving TYs a great surfing experience. Everyone enjoyed their time surfing. A special thank you to Mr. Cradock for taking the time to make TY surfing a top priority for the first term back.





Student Voice is a section in the magazine devoted to voicing issues we feel are prevalent in our society and our school environment. The magazine committee took it upon themselves to interview a diverse group of students. We discussed two relevant topics in the world today, the Black Lives Matter movement and the issue of mental health.

STUDENT VOICE

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health has become an extremely prevalent topic, especially with the increasing presence of social media in our lives as we venture further into the digital age. We interviewed a wide range of students from different year groups about mental health services in school and nationwide. We also had help from Anushka Pathak and Mia Brandon, as they are carrying out a fascinating research project on mental health for the BT Young Scientist competition. We focused on the services and environment within Sligo Grammar School and mental health education nationwide.

We first questioned if the services in the school were adequate and beneficial for our students. The students we interviewed felt that the school was doing enough, but that there is always room for improvement. Many students felt that a counsellor who was unrelated to the school should be made available. It surprised us that many students were not aware that Mike Yewlett, an independent counsellor is available to students in the school and is an alternative counsellor to our in-school guidance counsellor, Ms McGuinness. To resolve this issue, we feel more information regarding the counselling services available in the school is vital.

We next spoke about mental health education. We asked if the curriculums, in SPHE, CSPE etc. were sufficient. The overwhelming response was negative. We felt that



current education on mental health is focused on the prevention of mental health issues, but does not deal enough with how to cope with the mental health issues that all of us may face at some point of our lives. These coping skills might include how to deal with panic attacks, depressive episodes and mood swings. We also think more education about mental illness; for example, BPD, Anorexia, Bipolar Disorder, Anxiety would be valuable. Education about healthy relationships would also be beneficial.

We believe lessons in identifying toxic behavior and how to help a friend struggling with mental illness are necessary life skills that should be taught in secondary schools. While speaking to students I observed the way students spoke about mental health and whether the stigma surrounding mental health was still present in our generation. I found it was just as prevalent as ever. The majority of students said they would not attend the services in the school as they would be fearful of judgement from their peers. A second year student explains, "when you see someone who is open about their struggles you always hear people saying they're attention seeking." We were extremely disappointed to hear this from such a young student and this statement made it very apparent that the mental health stigma in our society prevents people, especial-

ly in our generation, from seeking the necessary help to look after their mental well-being.

We also researched whether the students felt the school's atmosphere encourages positive mental health. We were delighted to hear the feedback was predominantly positive. "Compared to other schools I've been in, the Grammar has a really welcoming atmosphere and makes you feel like you're in a big family" (TY student).

This was a fantastic response and we completely agree. In order to combat the issues we have raised, mental health stigma must be eliminated completely. Mental health needs to be spoken about in an inclusive and open manner to counter suicide and mental illness rates, both nationally and globally. After these interviews we are positive we can accomplish this.

If you ever feel like you need to talk to someone about your mental health, Ms McGuinness is always available in her office, Mr Bamber is also available and Mike Yewlett visits the school on Mondays. Form teachers are also there to talk to if you need them.

Helplines:

-HSE-1850 241 850

-Pieta House-1800 247 247





STUDENT VOICE

BLM MOVEMENT

We asked students about their views on the protests that were happening across the world during lockdown. We asked students how seeing videos and clips of this movement online made them feel.

'I found it incredibly sad and disturbing watching what was happening to innocent protesters in America'

'When the video of George Floyd was being shared around, I felt heartbroken for the family and it made me angry that nothing had been done about systematic racism sooner'

'I felt like this issue hit very close to home for a lot of us here'

Students were then asked whether they think Ireland has an internalised racist culture.

'I think Irish people have improved a lot and gotten rid of a lot of the racist culture here, it's definitely not solved or gone, there's still racism and hate in most parts of the world, but being more aware of what we say and how that can offend people is the way forward'

'Ireland is a very diverse place nowadays compared to what it was like years ago. Irish people have also experienced prejudice in the past which I think makes this a very close to home topic for people of Irish heritage, but I also believe a lot of people are scared to discuss this kind of topic, being more open about this is the best way to improve our society'

Students were then presented with the question, 'If you saw a student from a different heritage or culture experiencing racism, what would you do?' All of the students agreed that seeing this in our school is a rare occurrence, but can still happen on occasion.

'I think some people think making fun of someone for their race or culture is funny or just a laugh, but it really isn't, so I would definitely stand up for someone experiencing racism, even if that meant having to tell off one of my close friends.'



We then discussed whether there is anything that the school can do to spread awareness on racism within our community. All students interviewed said that they would be interested in having a module or a few classes dedicated to learning about different cultures from across the globe and on the topic of racial slurs and the history and meaning behind them. In the past, SGS has held diversity weeks and incorporated cultural appreciation, so going forward students feel that it is important that we continue to celebrate the variety of cultures within our school.

