

Christmas 2020 Thanks to St Mary's School Community from the Board of Management

It would be very unwise to in any way underestimate the difficulties that all schools, including ourselves, faced when the government decided to reopen them. Irish schools have class sizes that are reputedly among the largest in Europe and "close contact" was, from the beginning of the Corona Virus, identified as the chief threat to all. Directives and possible support from the Department of Education were later in coming than we had hoped. Accordingly, long before that support arrived, much needed to be done to see if it was possible, within reasonable safety standards, to fit the numbers enrolled into the space available in our school. The list of other issues that needed to be addressed urgently seemed to get longer by the day. Applying the "Social Distancing" principle dictated the need for staggered arrival and departure times for our students; staggered closely supervised recreation breaks etc. "Safe Distancing" also had to be applied to activities within the classroom and safe usage of corridors for students and teachers. And yet, the main function of St. Mary's is to provide an excellent quality of education for children. For this to occur effectively, a huge degree of awareness, good will and cooperation was essential between parents, students and school. Exceptionally high standards had to be set and maintained by all people concerned at all times. The Corona Virus was and is an unprecedented threat; information about it is still quite limited; possible outcomes were of the worst kind imaginable.

Now that we have arrived safely, thank The Lord, at the end of school term we can only offer our warmest heart-felt thanks to our Principal, Mrs O'Callaghan, and our leadership and management team, Ms. Fitzgerald, Ms. McElhinney, Mrs. Lane, Ms. O'Mahony and Ms. Greally who generously devoted so much of their summer holiday time working in the school, planning, coordinating and implementing all the structural, organisational and daily use changes that were necessary, with the constant worry of whether what was being done would be sufficient to combat the virus and keep our children safe.

We wish to thank each and every member of staff, for being so committed to their educational endeavours while, at the same time, being so wonderfully vigilant for every minute of every day to ensure the safety of all. Very especially we wish to thank the parents of our students for their understanding of the need for the necessary changes to the normal daily routine and for the extra effort it has taken to abide by changes regarding the bringing and collecting of their children to and from school and for their unwavering sense of awareness and support. Last, but certainly not least, we wish to thank the children. They showed an awareness of what was necessary with a maturity and generosity of spirit that belied their ages.

I wish I could say that the threat of the Corona Virus is at an end. Vaccines are being approved. We will not know their effectiveness for some time. We need to continue schooling with the same vigilance as before. In the meantime, we can share the satisfaction of having done exceptionally well under extraordinarily difficult and threatening circumstances. To date, our team of parents, children and school has been very successful with a proven track record. We know that a hurling or football match is not won by half-time. However, we can now face the future with hard-earned confidence gleaned from our very successful experiences over the past months.

May you all have a safe Christmas that is filled with Love, Peace and Joy. May you enjoy your wonderful children to the full and, if it is not a contradiction in terms, may you all have a fully satisfying, hard earned and well deserved rest.

With sincere thanks to one and all

On behalf of the Board of Management,