

Loreto Secondary School, St Michael's

Student Council Annual Report, 2020-2021

The 2020-21 school year has been challenging for all. The outgoing Council held its first ever online meeting in September and naturally COVID-19 procedures and practices at St Michael's were top of the agenda. Members provided valuable information and observations to management on areas which were working well and on other areas which needed to be adjusted.

Ensuring that the voices of minorities within our school community were heard was also a priority. It was agreed that the Council's existing informal practice of "Open Door Meetings" on policy documents be extended to cover all meetings (once in-school meetings recommence). It was also agreed that if no one on the Council has direct experience of a matter of particular concern to such a group, then advisors to the Council from that group would be sought out.

The next challenge for outgoing Council was to seek management permission in order to run paper-free online elections for 2020-21. Nominations were submitted by Gmail and the ballot papers were designed by Didi Bashford using Google Forms. Secret ballot and proportional representation were maintained and vote counting involved only two election officers and 15 minutes of time! Nonetheless, the Council feels that the school should return to traditional paper elections next year or as soon as it is safe to do so. This serves to replicate wider election processes in Ireland and also creates a greater, involving "buzz" around the school. However, the Council proposes that ballot papers be reduced in size in order to reduce paper wastage and harm to the environment. Printing on recycled paper is already the practice of the Council.

And so the 2020-21 Student Representative Council was elected. The successful candidates were as follows:

6th Year Representatives:

- Katie Coen
- Orla Conlon
- Chisomaga Onwufaike

5th Year Representatives:

- Grace Brady
- Sarah Curtis
- Aoibhe McDermott

Transition Year Representatives:

- Enya Gleeson
- Charlotte Hayes
- Katie Wallace-Collier

3rd Year Representatives:

- Faith Akinbowale
- Michelle Byrne
- Ciara Ward

2nd Year Representatives:

- Alex Connor
- Natalia Czajka
- Ana Murphy

1st Year Representatives:

- Shauna Laverty
- Praise Olorunniwo
- Leah O'Toole

Another first (and hopefully last!) was the cancellation of the annual Loreto Schools' Training Seminar for Student Councils. Nonetheless, a helpful digital slide show was made available and used at our Council's own in-house training day.

The traditional hand-made retirement card and flower tribute were presented to Ms Fahy in late October and Ms Clarke was wished well in her new role as School Chaplain.

Comhairle na nÓg's Regional General Meeting was yet another virtual affair this year, and the Council organised St Michael's representation as usual.

In November, the Council's "Register to Vote" campaign got underway, encouraging all those soon to reach the age of majority.

The review of the Council's constitution and FAQ documents also began in November, and all amendments were ratified by the Board of Management early in the new year.

The Christmas noticeboard for 2020 was COVID-themed but still managed to look very striking indeed thanks to artists Sarah Curtis and Katie Wallace-Collier.

Christmas lunches for juniors and seniors could not go ahead but the Council agreed with Mr Kelly to a scaled-back, socially-distanced, super-safe "Very Curry Chipmas Christmas" for 6th Years only. It was all hands on deck for pre-ordering, venue decoration queue management and clean-up with both old and new council members working together.

Although we did not return to school in person in January, the new and old Council were still at work! Thanks to Jodie Christie, Didi Bashford, Caoimhe Bowens, Eve Harlin, Sophie Crowe, Grace Brady, Aoibhe McDermott and Sarah Curtis for their work with Mr McGuinness on "Subject Choice" voice recordings.

Next on the agenda was the new Council's work with Dr Darley on the school's "Internal Communications Policy" and on the "Social Media Policy". After lengthy Council meetings, excellently documented by Council Secretary Grace Brady, Policy Officers Sarah Curtis and Aoibhe McDermott submitted detailed "Policy Response" documents to both Dr Darley and management.

During this time, Chairperson Katie Coen also liaised with the Irish Second-Level Students' Union (ISSU) and with management in relation to the concerns of her fellow 6th Years about COVID-created circumstances, examinations and estimated grades.

Shortly after all year groups had returned to school, Sarah Curtis offered hope to all with her delightful "Better Days Ahead" ice cream themed noticeboard.

The last items on the Council's final term agenda were a review of the school's "Well-Being Policy" with Ms Cullen and the retirement of another Loreto legend, Mrs Cunningham.

And so the school year came to a close: a year where everyone at St Michael's pulled together, rose to the challenge and did their best to "Keep calm and carry on"!

