

# Rathfeigh National School from Seamus Tansley

## Sixth Class Graduation

The last few months have been very tough for everyone in the Education sector. The issues regarding the Leaving Certificate dragged on for a considerable time before clarity was reached in May with the Leaving Certificate being effectively cancelled and being replaced by predictive grades. In primary schools our younger children had to adapt to working from home through distance learning and “Zoom”. This was tough on everyone – parents/guardians, teachers and of course the children. It’s difficult, at this stage, to determine the extent that the long absence from school will have on the children in educational and well-being terms. The children will have missed out on so much which is impossible to quantify. I have mentioned on numerous occasions that it would be very upsetting for our sixth class pupils if they weren’t able to say goodbye properly to their classmates or have a proper graduation ceremony. We were obviously, and understandably, constrained in having a graduation as a result of government guidelines. Despite giving assurances to our sixth class pupils on Zoom that we would have a graduation ceremony when it was safe to do so (either in July, August or even September) I’m sure some of them thought it wasn’t going to happen. The good news is that we have just been notified by our insurance provider that graduation ceremonies can be held from June 29<sup>th</sup> provided the following guidelines are adhered to:

- HSE Guidelines including social distancing
- Government road-map restrictions regarding numbers in attendance
- Return to work safety protocols

I will be discussing with our Board of Management the best options available to us in order to have a safe environment for the graduation – using the school hall or even outside at the back of the school (weather permitting). I will let all parents/guardians know by “textaparent” the date/time of the ceremony. This has given me and I’m sure the whole Rathfeigh school community a great boost and we are really looking forward to this very special evening. I’m sure some people’s patience on this matter has been tested but as the 18<sup>th</sup> century writer George Horne said **“Patience strengthens the spirit, sweetens the temper, stifles anger, extinguishes envy, subdues pride, bridles the tongue, restrains the hand and tramples upon temptation”**. Our patience has paid off and the sixth class pupils will be getting their graduation in the school building that they thoroughly deserve!

## First Confession

Father Thomas has provisionally set September 12<sup>th</sup> for the First Communion. This is subject to change depending on the evolving state of the virus. Hopefully, the children will get the big day that they deserve.

## **Well-being**

The mental health of our children has been seriously challenged over the last few months. The following article from the INTO is worth reading and may be helpful to us all!!

“There was no memo at the start of 2020 to inform us of what was to come this year, but teachers, as always, stepped up to the mark and delivered. Much praise has been extended to our frontline workers and their trojan work during the current crisis. Teachers are among the heroes, without whom the education of our future generation could not have carried on. Teachers’ creativity and compassion for their pupils knows no boundaries – to quote An Taoiseach Leo Varadkar “*the limit does not exist!*”.

Schools play a vital role in the promotion of wellbeing through a broad spectrum of activities and approaches that support not alone the academic achievement of pupils but physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual development. Through this most turbulent time, teachers have continued to provide learning opportunities for the children in their care, whilst promoting and nurturing wellbeing. The last few months have seen a sudden change in methodologies, ways of working and ways of living and teachers have invested a considerable amount of time adjusting to new modes of teaching and communicating with pupils. Stress and anxiety come hand in hand with change and uncertainty. Teachers are renowned for their caring nature and volunteerism and looking after themselves may not always feature high on their agenda. However, it should! Our mental health is critical and through a healthy mind comes a healthy body.

Follow these **Ten Commandments** and keep the sunny side up.

### 1. *Stay Safe (and wash your hands!)*

As the summer season approaches, teachers cover many safety topics with their pupils including lessons on water safety, farm safety, sun safety etc. but don’t forget that these apply to you too! Summer months with long bright evenings and warmer weather are ideal for outdoor gatherings and adventures. Do ensure that you heed safety measures whilst adhering to social distancing guidelines (and make sure that those burgers at the barbecue are cooked thoroughly!).

### 2. *“Eat what nourishes your body. Do what nourishes your soul.”*

There are many known links between exercise and mental health, and an added benefit to exercise in green, open spaces. The nature of our environment can impact on our feelings of well-being and happiness, so peaceful, scenic surroundings will positively influence our mood. Stressful situations or a significant change in routine can cause disruption and when we tend to snack more, often turning to convenience foods and this in turn can result in feelings of lethargy. By eating plenty of fresh, wholesome food we will feel better in both body and mind. Utilise those improved culinary skills to prepare homemade dishes and home-baked goodies which be healthier and more nutritious than processed, packaged foods.

### 3. *Make sure to get your Vitamins!*

As well as being essential for bone and muscle health, Vitamin D is important in the prevention of acute respiratory infections and research has suggested that it will be of benefit in the COVID-19 pandemic. Vitamin D is produced in the skin from 10-15 minutes of sun exposure per day – so that’s another good reason to get outside and about to catch some rays (but don’t forget the sunscreen!).

If you are lucky enough to be near water, you can stock up on some Vitamin ‘Sea’! The therapeutic properties of sea water are widely documented.

#### ***4. Get creative, try a new skill***

Creative juices have been flowing for those who have been working from home or on reduced schedules. Many people have unearthed new passions for cooking, needlework, painting, and writing. Across the country we have seen top-class penalty takers, brilliant banana-bread-bakers, and magnificent music-makers. (There will be fierce competition in the next series of Super-Garden as those with green fingers had a chance to spend time tending to their surroundings creating meticulously manicured lawns and gardens!). Continue to tap into your creativity for their your own benefit, and perhaps even develop a new talent!

#### ***5. Slow down, lessen the pace***

The nature of the online word is instant and intense. Resources and information can be accessed at the press of a button. No sooner are emails sent than messages come flooding back. The last three months have been a challenge for everyone with strict lockdown measures enforced. Now that much of our normal routine is returning (as evident from significant increase in traffic in the last couple of weeks) and the finish line is in sight, it is important not to get too caught up in the hustle and bustle, stresses and strains of our regular fast-paced society. Take the time to cool down. Just like our bodies need time to recover after exercise, so too do our minds. Do not set timeframes that are overly ambitious, don’t put pressure on yourself but savour the opportunity to slow down to a leisurely pace “*what is this life if full of care we have no time to stand and stare*” (W.H. Davies).

#### ***6. Enjoy the journey – not just the destination***

Remember those initial days of lockdown when we were confined to within 2 kilometres of our home. We yearned to go for a drive, wished for a walk through the forest, longed for a breath of sea air or even to just go that extra mile! Now that restrictions have been lifted go do all those great ordinary things. Take in the beauty around you as you travel, whether it’s the cows in the lush green grass, the birds singing, the flora and fauna – appreciate mother nature!

#### ***7. Keep it simple and no need to spend too much!***

Whilst some of us may rue a missed opportunity for a trip abroad, use summer 2020 to explore the Emerald Isle.

Music enthusiasts will be disappointed that concerts have been cancelled and festival goers will have a vacuum in their summer schedule. Sports fans too will feel deprived, as their wait

for tournaments such as Tokyo Olympics and Euro 2020 is extended and match days in Croker are a little while away yet!

Covid-19 lockdown has taught us all that often the best things in life come free. Without fine dining in lavish restaurants, hotel stays, expensive entrance fees to events, shopping sprees or trips to the cinema we found other sources of entertainment and ways of connecting with friends. Those for whom gym sessions were a staple of their daily routine realised the unparalleled joy that can be found in the great outdoors!

#### 8. *“Write it down and treasure the memory forever”*

Courtesy of An Post, another common practice in recent months has been reverting to the trusted pen and paper! Whilst technology has served us well, allowing work to continue and people to connect with family and friends, sometimes the simple art of letter writing, or personal diaries is lost. A good idea is to keep a journal of positive thoughts. Choosing uplifting quotes, songs or even taking note of a special moment can boost our mood. Articulating an inner thought (either verbally or in writing) reinforces it and makes it more effective. This will be a valuable resource to refer to and look back on when this time passes.

Another interesting idea is to get involved in the [Covid-19 Oral history project](#) co-ordinated by DCU. This initiative is led by Professor Theo Lynn and Caitríona Ní Cassaithe who is a former primary school teacher now working in the role of lecturer in history education at DCU Institute of Education. The project aims to create a repository of oral and written histories about COVID-19 that will be made available to researchers, historians and the public as an open source digital archive.

#### 9. *“Distance means so little when someone means so much”*

For many, the Covid-19 lockdown encouraged us to communicate with friends or extended family members who we had not been in contact with for some time. In times of need, the support of others is invaluable and reminiscing on happy memories and sharing stories helped to escape from the stresses and strains of a difficult situation. Over the coming months, try to keep in touch with those who may have reached out to you in our time of crisis.

#### 10. *Stay informed*

With public health advice changing in line with research and developments, keep your finger on the pulse and be aware of the guidelines, but stay away from unreliable articles. Only read information and advice from reputable sources. Social media most certainly has its merits, but often the dissemination of inaccurate information leads to untold damage and exacerbates the stress levels of those who are already fearful. Avoid unfounded reports and articles and do not share links with others that you cannot confirm to be true.

...agus ná déan dearmad do lámha a ní!

As the curtain falls on another academic year, teachers should ensure that self-care features in their fortnightly plan and the learning outcomes should be a knowledge, understanding and appreciation for life and its simple pleasures.

Early on in this pandemic, An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar promised us as a nation that if we made temporary sacrifices and abided by rules, we would return to somewhat normal living. As we continue to fight against the Coronavirus, we must remember to obey public health advice, maintain strict hand hygiene, keep the distance, and wear face coverings when necessary. Together we can weather the storm and in the words of Seamus Heaney, *“if we can winter this out, we can summer anywhere”*.

### **Summer Holidays**

This week should have been totally different. The children would, in normal circumstances, be counting down the days to Friday for the summer holidays. We would have had huge excitement around the school – signing of school jumpers, unhealthy lunches, toys, extra play and many, many more.

Every child in Rathfeigh deserves enormous credit in the way they have dealt with the last few months. I am really proud of every one of them. More so than ever I wish all the children a very safe and enjoyable Summer. They DESERVE it. Here’s hoping to see everyone safe and well back in school at the end of August!

Also, I wish all our staff a great Summer. Once again this year I thank them all for their dedication and commitment to our school. We won’t have Ms Ward in Rathfeigh in September. She’s going on to “pastures new”. Aimee was a fantastic addition to our school and we will miss her greatly. We hope to see her back to unveil our Amber Flag in September!!