

# utu NEWS

The journal of the Ulster Teachers' Union





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## FOREWORD FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

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# PRESIDENTIAL COMMENT

## UNITING TOGETHER



**A**t this time of writing I am officially still the President but also back in my role as a classroom teacher! Little did I know that I would be back in the classroom without a full classroom of children to teach. As we find ourselves in this bizarre situation with the dreaded Covid-19 attacking our globe, our communities and even closer our family members, I urge you to support those around you. As teachers we are equipped with skills that enable us to care for, consider others and share compassion. We always embrace change and we will succeed and give of our best in everything that we strive to do. No one could have written this into the book of 2020.

Regardless of what position we find our country in, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to you all as UTU members for entrusting me with the chain of office over the last twelve months. It has been a great privilege and honour to serve as your President and I have gained **SO** much knowledge about education from the outside in.

I have seen the tireless and often thankless roles that the union officials play in serving us, the teaching workforce. It has been an anxious time for all as we have been involved with settling a pay deal which now, after endless hours of negotiations, we can say we have made progress with. It certainly would not be described as the perfect end, however it is a huge step in the right direction towards what is right for the teachers of today.

We are united within our schools, we are united within our communities and we are united within our unions.

Over the past year I had my own exceptional experience of unity and solidarity when I travelled with our General Secretary Jacque White to Bangkok. We both witnessed first hand the challenges and discrimination that is happening throughout the globe and within teaching in general. We heard about pay imbalance, sexual harassment cases, children being prevented from a right to free education, teachers going above and beyond their contracts to provide quality education for those in their care.

This year also led to the commencement of the joint board, which again highlighted our aim for unity. UTU along with INTO and NEU met and planned actions for the future of our members. Working together provides more for our members and proves that what we have engaged in is clear and strong.....and **UNITED!**

We are persevering to deliver to you the members what is just and what you deserve. An understanding that teachers deserve to have professional development opportunities, resourceful classrooms to adequately teach those practical subjects, the pay that is reflective of the work, reflective of the commitment and reflective of the responsibilities and accountability that we are held to.

**ONLY THROUGH UNITING DO WE REAP REWARDS!!**

As President I have accompanied our General Secretary, Jacque White, to the negotiating tables with management side, other unions, Education Committee and other conferences around the globe. I acknowledge the vast understanding and knowledge that Jacque has gained. I would like to personally thank Jacque for her patience and commitment in all areas of union life. It is reassuring to know staff welfare and union membership are high on her priority list.

I want to acknowledge all the UTU staff at head quarters, they all work exceptionally hard to ensure we, the members, receive the support we deserve. Whether that is a telephone conversation to calm and reassure a member at the end of a long exhausting day or whether it is constant correspondence with a member over a grievance case, our staff at UTU are worth their weight in gold tripled!

I am sure there are more challenges ahead of us and it may be an unsettling time for all as we work through demanding new obstacles. It is a time when we as teachers need to be united and know that we are only human, but we can provide for children on alternative platforms and with our determination and perseverance we can unite with colleagues and share good practice and support one another for the benefit of our young people, the citizens of the future!

Finally, I want to sincerely wish every UTU member a safe and healthy future. I expect we will be living day by day, week by week and adhering to government guidance. We are living in extreme testing of times for us all. Although health and our collective efforts to fight this virus must be our priority, I urge you all to remember each other, be kind and help others in any way that you can.

*S. Thompson*

SUSAN THOMPSON  
**PRESIDENT**





# GENERAL SECRETARY FOREWORD

## Colleagues

**W**e bring this edition of UTU News to you in unprecedented times. It seems like much longer than 3 months ago that our lives changed so dramatically and we moved into a period of education such as has not been seen before.

I wish to begin by commending you all on how you have risen to the demands of the crisis. Whether you have been on rotas in schools, supporting remote learning – or both – I can assure you that your efforts to continue to support the children in your care have been highly valued and appreciated by the majority in our society, despite some media suggestions to the contrary. They have been particularly appreciated by all of those within the education system from the Minister for Education to the employers to the parents and children who have received a level of service which we wouldn't have deemed possible if we had

had time to think about it. Your professionalism and your care have carried our children through and will continue to stand you in good stead as we move into the next phase of this crisis.

Discussion about the return to school has caused very understandable concern because, despite the desire to get back to doing the job for which we were trained, the health and safety concerns are foremost in everyone's mind. The immediate task of keeping everyone safe is compounded by a range of anxieties around issues such as accessing funding to provide the relevant resources, managing social distancing, providing teaching and learning in a context where the children are in different places and all of the day-

to-day activities such as toileting, hand-washing, meals and transport. The list is endless. For each problem which arises there seem to be several more waiting underneath.

We thank you for keeping us abreast of the concerns which you are facing. Many of you responded to the survey issued and many others have contacted us directly with new concerns as they arise. It is important that you continue to bring the issues forward as this allows us to raise them within the on-going consultations and provide you with responses and support.

The range of issues around school re-opening is currently under consultation. A multi-layered process involving the Department of Education, the employing authorities and the teaching and non-teaching unions is actively engaging on a very regular basis. UTU is, of course, involved in this process and continues to work with our colleagues in the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council towards common outcomes. UTU has also engaged directly with the Minister, relevant employers and political representatives where issues have required. It is imperative for the good of our teachers, and our children, that we con-

tinue to work together and we trust that as we move forward it will be their best interests which remain as fundamental to decisions made.

Work also continues on the rolling out of the pay and workload agreement. The back-pay arising from the agreement will be with you shortly and regular meetings are taking place between NITC and Management Side to establish the transitional arrangements and the processes necessary to carry out the reviews. You will, of course, be kept updated.

So please enjoy this edition of the UTU News. It will remind you of education as we remember it, consider the current situation and perhaps give some hope for the future to come. You are not alone in this journey and help and support is there should you need it. Our Officers, our Central Executive Committee, our Field Officers and our UTU staff are on hand and information is available on the website, on updates and by contacting [office@utu.edu](mailto:office@utu.edu).

**Just keep doing what you do best!!**

*J. E. White*



# COVID-19

## SCHOOL CLOSURES IMPACT TEACHERS AND PUPILS

**T**he closure of schools across the Province on 23 March due to the COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented challenges for everyone involved, from the students themselves to their teachers and their parents.

In the days before closure, some school leaders were making strategic decisions, planning and preparing for what resources their school pupils and parents would need. For some in the post-primary sector, planning was prioritised for their examination classes, only for an announcement of no external examination and coursework to be made a week into lockdown.

For many parents and pupils, the adjustment to home-learning has brought its own challenges. There is undoubtedly a social-economic division and the COVID-19 pandemic shows the wide divisions between the rich and the poor, the engaged and disengaged, the haves and the have-nots.

Education across the province, we would all agree, has been under-funded. Class sizes have increased, teacher workload has increased, professional development for staff has declined and provision for pupils' resources has declined. These cuts don't heal.

However, any return to normal schooling can only be based on the safety of pupils and staff. Jacquie White states that *"in order for that to happen, not only must the medical evidence be beyond doubt, but parents too must be convinced their children will be safe. A continuation of lockdown would allow more time for schools to plot their exit strategy and for dialogue with parents to ensure they are assured of their child's safety - otherwise we risk schools opening and children being kept at home."*

However, as the lockdown continues teachers are increasingly concerned for vulnerable children. Schools are about more than just learning, as this present crisis has shown, when it's become

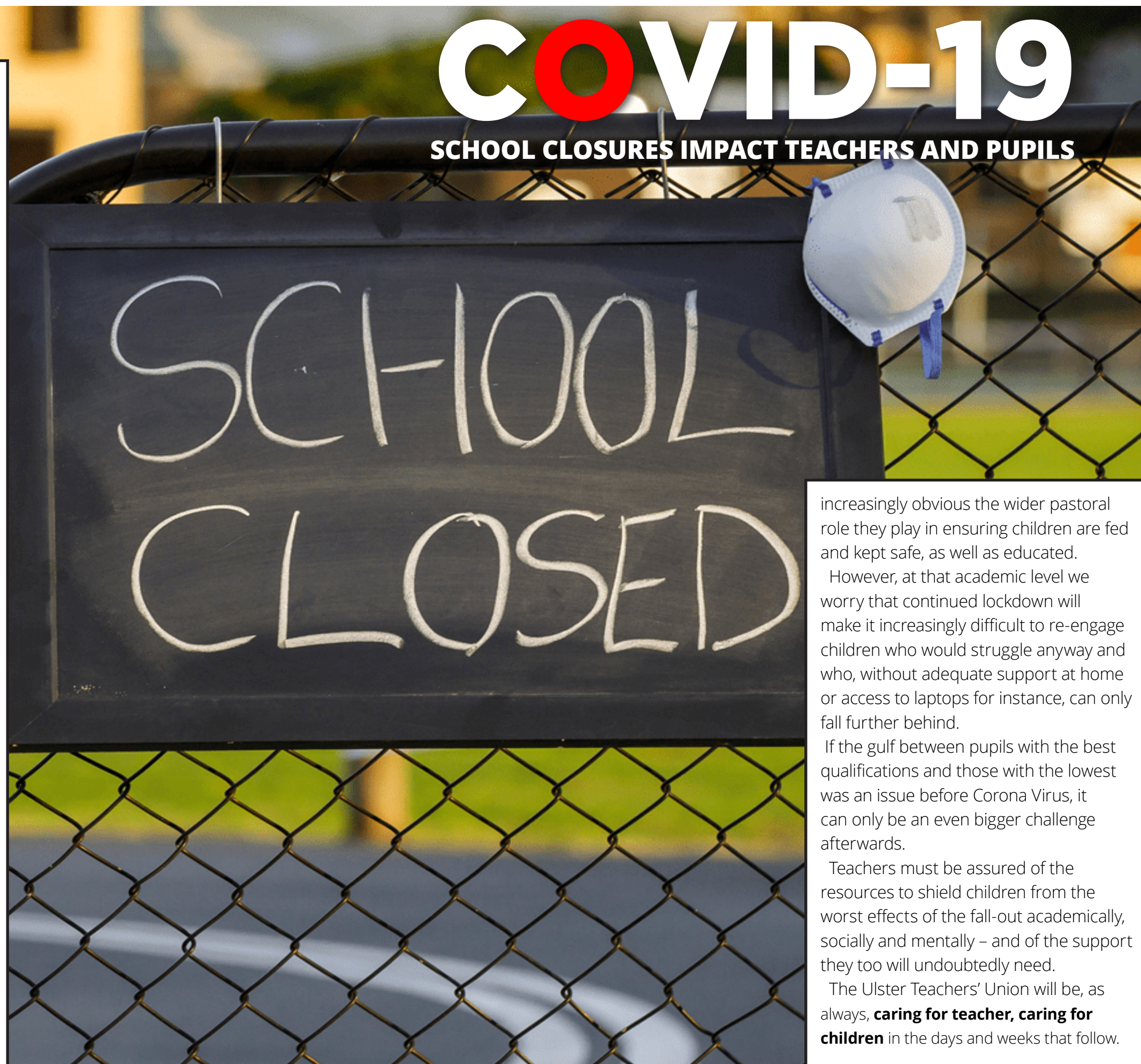
increasingly obvious the wider pastoral role they play in ensuring children are fed and kept safe, as well as educated.

However, at that academic level we worry that continued lockdown will make it increasingly difficult to re-engage children who would struggle anyway and who, without adequate support at home or access to laptops for instance, can only fall further behind.

If the gulf between pupils with the best qualifications and those with the lowest was an issue before Corona Virus, it can only be an even bigger challenge afterwards.

Teachers must be assured of the resources to shield children from the worst effects of the fall-out academically, socially and mentally – and of the support they too will undoubtedly need.

The Ulster Teachers' Union will be, as always, **caring for teacher, caring for children** in the days and weeks that follow.





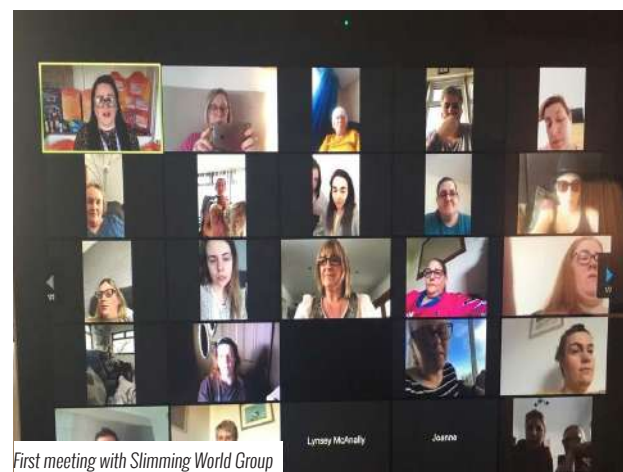
# NEED A NEW QUARANTINE HOBBY? THERE'S A ZOOM FOR THAT!

BY LEIGH MCKAY (BALLYCLARE SECONDARY AND NEAA CEC)

Since lockdown on 23rd March due to the Coronavirus Pandemic crisis across the globe, we've all been existing in this surreal, often stressful, sometimes pleasurable world at home and not following our daily routine of heading to school. Unprecedented times. I have a strong fear of the outside world at present but as an extrovert, it pains me to be denied social interaction with others outside of my family of husband and two teenage girls (who I am convinced simply tolerate my ramblings). If there's a PTA to volunteer for, a committee to join or a communal gathering for any occasion, I'm 'yer woman' so what was one to do when missing all my weekly connections both in and outside of school? Bring on Zoom!

Before this period, I'd tried grainy, disconnected Skype calls with family on the other side of the world and had often hit the 'video' button instead of 'call' on Whatsapp ending up awkwardly face to face when totally unexpected so I had a definitive hatred of this form of interaction. When my local Slimming World

consultant said that she was going to have her Saturday morning gatherings via Zoom, I cynically thought, "Well, let's see how this goes with more than 4 people!" To my discredit, I was proved completely wrong and the meeting, with more than



First meeting with Slimming World Group



April CEC meeting via Zoom

25 members, was strange and long and often painful but was easy to use and also

meant that I could keep my PJ bottoms on unbeknownst to the rest of the group. There were struggles: "Can you see me?"; "I can hear you but can't see you!"; "Let me try headphones."; "Could you just mute yourself Joan? We can't hear anything over the dog barking!"; "Sheila, could you eat your apple not so close to the mic please?"; "It's so lovely to see wee Bobby right up on the screen but can we talk to you John?!" but the meetings since then have been much more smoothly run.

The next foray into another Zoom Room was for the Union Central Executive meeting hosted by Stephen McCord and this was an all together much more



UTU members playing games on Zoom



Some facetime with friends and family

organised affair. The monthly meetings

at union headquarters are held in the Boardroom at an oval table so, depending on your decision about where to sit, you don't get to see everyone's face easily when they are speaking but the Zoom layout 'Gallery view' meant that you could see everyone.

I was now hooked and since these two initial apprehensive ventures into the unknown, I have been at quizzes, celebrated birthday parties, held department meetings for school, connected with friends and kept in touch with family both local and living abroad. To be honest, I think that I am connecting more than I have in a number of years, having the time to organise now that we are off the hamster's wheel for a bit.

We're all now zooming, a verb as opposed to a noun much like googling or hoovering and it's as if we have always been doing it. I'm now at my specifically timed entrances, choosing to be the host so that you have 'muting power' as well as avoiding the awkward goodbyes as people try to find the 'leave meeting' button, using a theme specific virtual background and making sure everyone is ready for the enforced timed exit after 40 minutes.

I'm now dreading the time when I have to go to a meeting and wear anything other than elasticated trousers but conversing and debating and discussing face to face is something that I am hungry for. Thank you to Zoom or Google Duo or Whatsapp or Facetime or any other app that has allowed you to survive in this lockdown period. I hope your experience is as positive as mine.

So for now: **'Leave Meeting'** 🙌🙌🙌



# KIDS ZONE

## EDUCATIONAL APPS FOR CHILDREN

From Audio books, to ed-tech platforms, here are the popular platforms that parents can vouch for and keep their kids engaged.

**T**he pandemic has brought the world to a standstill. Working remotely from home is the new work trend across the sectors globally. Working from home is a daunting task for anyone and managing kids at the same time is another challenge as a parent. These days people are trying to cope up with the lockdown situation in numerous ways and trying to deal with work life balance while managing both office tasks and kids together. Considering the current situation, managing and home schooling is the new added chores for parents these days.

From Audio books, to ed-tech platforms, here are the popular platforms that parents can vouch for and keep their kids engaged

**Brainly:** is the world's largest online learning platform, uniting over 200 million students, parents, and teachers around the world, and over 22 million across India, in solving their homework problems and test preparation. Students connect to their peers to help strengthen their skills, from math to science, history and beyond. The platform essentially acts as the online equivalent of a real-life study group and can help kids solve their queries.

**Kids Craft Ideas:** Craft making is a great hobby for children to practise when you want them to use their imagination to

create something meaningful. This crafts app lets your youngster do that and much more. Moreover, this free craft app will also come to your rescue when your child has to put up a craft project in school and you are at your wit's end as to how to help him. This craft app is simple to use as it has different types of craft ideas which your child can take inspiration from. For example craft based on animal themes such as fish and bunny; occasions such as Christmas, Halloween; and seasons like summer and spring. These are all unique DIY crafts, which anyone can do.

**Spotify:** Originally known for just music, recently launched Spotify Kids, entering a new genre altogether. What is exciting is the fact, they not only have audiobooks and exciting additions like jokes, riddles, silly songs to keep them jolly all the time but they also read. They also read out to kids on good and bad habits. It's an apt app for growth, fun, learning and more.

**Google Play Books:** How about studies and fun together? Google Play Book brings the best of both worlds. Choose stories that will make them enjoy, develop their cognitive skills and also audio textbooks to help them complete their syllabus.



**Bedtime Math:** This app manages to make learning maths as fun as a bedtime story, using everything from electric eels to rollercoasters to help children figure their way through tricky problems. Ranging from 'Wee Ones' to 'Big Kids', Bedtime Math offers 1,600 exercises to suit kids from nursery through to primary school. The free app even has a 'Sky's the Limit' challenge the mode, which will even test grown-ups. A peer-reviewed study from 2015 showed this app gave pupils the equivalent of a three-month advantage over their peers over the course of a school year, while also helping parents with their own "math anxiety".

**Erase All Kittens:** The best learning tools are the ones that teach children vital skills without them even realising it. Erase All Kittens fits this exactly, introducing children aged 8-13 how to code through an epic kitten-saving adventure. The multi-award winning game is designed to teach professional programming skills, with a particular emphasis on inspiring girls to code.

**Diary Zapp:** This interactive journaling app helps children develop their literacy skills while also engaging their imagination and creativity.

**Caterpillar Creative Play:** All parents will be familiar with Eric Carle's much-

loved Very Hungry Caterpillar book, from which this artistic app takes its inspiration. Caterpillar Creative Play encourages children to draw, paint, colour, design and create using a range of templates, textures and canvases.

**Professor Astro Cat's Solar System:** Based on the popular Professor Astro Cat book series, this app allows children to explore the solar system with the help of a jet-propelled cat. Fascinating space facts are woven into a fun storyline that feels a lot like reading a book. It can be as entertaining for adults as it is for children, featuring illustrations, animations and even quizzes to test how much you've learned along the way.

**Gus on the Go:** Gus on the Go takes users on a "language learning adventure" with the help of a cartoon owl called – you guessed it – Gus. Available in 30 different languages, the app uses engaging graphics and animations to teach children basic words and phrases. Various games and challenges let players earn trophies along the way to keep them incentivised and motivated. The app has even begun offering users the chance to learn endangered languages, beginning with Ingush.



BY DIANE CUSICK

I came to Zambia in 2016, having spent the previous 20 years in Malawi. I am the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Co-ordinator for the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Synod of Zambia, where I coordinate the training activities for the teachers in our Primary schools, Community Schools, and in our church based ECD centres.

Education was introduced to Zambia through the early missionaries and so today many of our churches have primary schools which are also supported by the government who provide teachers. However, due to a lack of primary schools in rural areas, community schools were set up by local communities. These were not government supported and teachers came from the community, often without having completed secondary school themselves. In 2014 the Government of Zambia decided that every primary school should have an ECE (Early Childhood Education) class which would feed into the primary school.



# FROM WRITING TO PLAY....

Diane Cusick - Early Childhood Development Co-ordinator for the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Synod of Zambia

No provision was given to train more teachers or to provide infrastructure or learning materials. This is where I come in. Even the teachers who have a certificate or diploma in ECE are very much education centred and concentrate on children aged 3-6 years sitting at desks! My approach has been a challenge to these teachers

as, using the Zambian ECE syllabus, I am helping them to understand that children can learn and complete the syllabus through a play-based approach using locally available materials (or rubbish)! This makes sure that it can be sustainable as the materials can be found locally and cost nothing.

It is exciting when you see the teachers' eyes light up

when they realise a concept they were trying to teach the child in a very difficult way, is something the child can teach themselves through play! In turn, it is exciting to see the children's eyes light up when they realise they are now allowed to have some hands on activities!



The donation that I receive from UTU has contributed to training these teachers, which takes place all over Zambia. Thank you so much for your continued support over the years. The teachers are

“THE DONATION THAT I RECEIVE FROM UTU HAS CONTRIBUTED TO TRAINING THESE TEACHERS WHICH TAKES PLACE ALL OVER ZAMBIA.”



blessed with the knowledge they receive and this in turn blesses the children, and it's all because of you.

## SUPPORT AROUND THE GLOBE



WORLDVISION

UTU have made a valuable contribution to Loul, Senegal, West Africa. Here the UTU sponsor a child called Astou Ndiaye, she is nine years old and is currently studying grade one in education. Over the past year Astou has participated in Cultural Celebrations, how to look after and respect her friends, family and community. She has learned about caring for and protecting younger children. She is learning about the rights of children and child protection in her community.



UNESCO RAY OF HOPE

A charity that supports over 50 initiatives in over 10 countries. In 2019 it provided children and schools in Africa and Asia with workshops, skills days, activity sessions around language skills, health and hygiene, domestic science, art and craft, computing and internet skills. New libraries were instituted in India and Nepal. Other projects included library books, classroom furniture, school uniforms and fresh water supply to schools in the Philippines.



DISABILITY ACTION

Disability Action has taken lead from Disability Aid Abroad and is a Northern Ireland charity established to change the lives of people with a disability living in a developing country. This current programme is with the Tibetan Administration in Northern India and aims to promote inclusive education for disabled children in the exiled Tibetan community.



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND

Diane Cusick works for this charity to support training teachers in Zambia. She is very grateful for the long standing relationship and sponsorship UTU have provided and would like to thank UTU members for the contributions they have made to stationery, running water and practical resources for the children.



THE STEVE SINNOTT FOUNDATION

UK based registered charity named after Steve Sinnott, the late General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, UK. This charity works to provide educational opportunities for children from poor and disadvantaged communities across the world and particularly promote Education 2030 aims.



HOPE AND FUTURE

Northern Irish based charity working to provide access to Education. Over the past year it has been funding a new youth centre and fully equipped disability centre for children in Africa. Christine is our UTU link to this charity work and will provide a more comprehensive account in the next UTU News edition 2020.



JENGANA

This is a Christian based charity in Northern Ireland, that seeks to reach out to children living in very desperate situations in slums of Nairobi in Kenya. On the most recent visit summer 2019, the team experienced the feeding programme at the primary school that gives the children their only meal for the day and met with the older sponsored kids who were encouraged to make the most of the opportunities that the school provides.





# AUGHER'S COMMUNITY MUGA PITCH

It was a momentous occasion on Friday 20 September for the village of Augher, with the opening of a community multi use games area (MUGA) pitch to be shared between Augher Central Primary School, Augher Playing Fields Association and Augher Stars.



*Official Guests at the Grand Opening of Augher's Community Muga Pitch*

**F**riday 20th September saw a momentous occasion for the village of Augher with the opening of a community MUGA pitch to be shared between Augher Central Primary School, Augher Playing Fields Association and Augher Stars. 'Your Club, Your School' Joint Working Group includes Department for Communities, Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, District Councils, Department for Education (DE), Education Authority (EA) and Sport

Northern Ireland. The group's aim is to promote community use of school sports facilities through the opening of the school sports estate to the community and local clubs which in turn will have a major impact on the provision of sports facilities throughout Northern Ireland. Augher CPS in partnership with Augher Stars and Augher Playing Fields Association were one of the successful groups who have seen the benefits of this project through the completion of the MUGA Pitch in July.

Augher CPS hosted a Community Fun Night to celebrate the occasion and held a 5-a-side Football Tournament along with Augher Stars to promote the MUGA pitch and showcase the fantastic new facilities to the wider Clogher Valley Community. Children and Young People from across the community enjoyed bouncy castles, face painting, toddler events, live music and performances from Augher CPS Highland Dance Group and Irish Dancing performances from school pupils throughout the evening.

Roughan Silver Band, under conductor Stephen Crooks, provided music for the audience to sit back and listen to while enjoying a BBQ organised by the PTFA to help fundraise for the school. Chair of BOG and local minister Rev Olie Downey welcomed the community, local Principals from other schools in the Shared Education partnership and special guests. School Principal, Andrea Sawyers, who set the scene and explained how the MUGA pitch and extension to the school playground came about, while paying tribute to Andy Brunt whose vision and passion had begun the process. Andrea thanked members of EA for leading the project and for their support and help over the last nine years as the school has completed four different minor works proposals, doubling its physical size and pupil enrolment. Mrs Sawyers also paid tribute to the members of the BOG, past and present, and school staff were also paid tribute to for their continuing vision, hard work and dedication, which provides outstanding educational opportunities and facilities for the children from the Clogher Valley Area. Paul Donnelly, Director of DAERA, spoke on behalf of all the government departments involved, sharing how this project showcased the best of the local area, how people worked together to create a lasting legacy and commented on the fantastic achievement of all the different departments



*Primary Seven girls from Augher CPS preparing to compete in the 5-a-side football competition at the Official Opening of Augher's Community MUGA Pitch*



*Zara Wright from Augher CPS who performed a selection of Irish Dancing for the audience at Augher CPS Family Fun Night and Opening of the Community MUGA Pitch*

who worked together to deliver the project and took the time to come along to the opening. Paul congratulated Andrea, the PTFA and the school team on such a tremendous event and wished all the groups involved every success in the future. Glenda Hall from Education Authority brought greetings from Sara Long and shared the aims of EA and how the project had epitomised everything that EA represented and aspired to be since bringing together the five education and library boards. Glenda thanked her team and all the parties involved who had made the project possible. The evening ended with a vote of thanks from School Principal Andrea Sawyers and presentation of gifts by P7 pupils to all the invited guests.

Nigel Trotter speaking on behalf of the Playing Fields Association paid tribute to Andy Brunt, who during his time as Chair of BOG and member of the Association, had begun the process alongside school Principal Andrea Sawyers, members of the Education Authority and governors to plan and apply for funding for a Com-

munity facility that could be used by the school and all members of the local community for a variety of sporting activities and events. Nigel also thanked members of the Association and also to Adrian Millar who had been a faithful community advocate over many years. Local P7 pupils Chloe Ferguson spoke about what the MUGA pitch meant to her and the possibilities which it opens up for the children and young people from the area.

Roy Carroll presented awards for the Football winners from Augher Stars and St Macartan's and Burns Skills School sponsored medals for all the participants in the Primary School Sections. The event was a tremendous success, one that will be remembered by the Community of Augher for many years and a real opportunity to showcase the MUGA pitch which will be available for various groups to hire and will offer coaching facilities and summer schemes for the entire community.



# MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

Most people know that engaging in physical activity is not only important for our physical health, but also for our mental wellbeing.

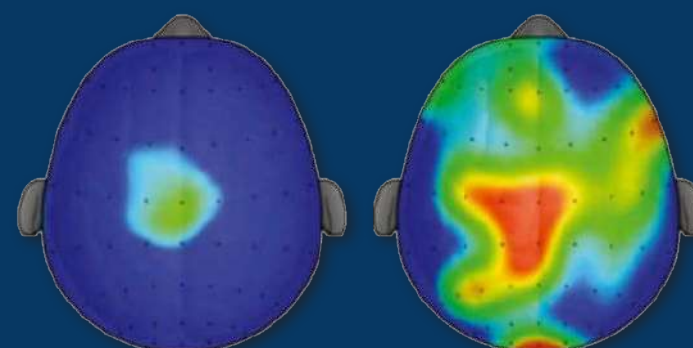
**T**he relationship between physical activity and mental health appears to work both ways, with increased physical activity resulting in better mental health and vice versa. Not surprisingly, then, those with severe mental health problems are less likely to engage in physical activity and are more likely to be physically unwell.

The evidence for the positive effects of exercise on a range of mental health problems is growing, with studies demonstrating that exercise can improve the lives of people with schizophrenia. Despite this, exercise interventions are often neglected in mental health care and the mortality gap for people with serious mental health problems continues to widen. Mental health problems can no longer be ignored, and innovative,

creative approaches and solutions should be explored.

At this current time of lockdown in Northern Ireland and across the globe what better time to engage in some fitness regimes, either in your own home, with family for walks, cycles, a run or playing with the children! It all helps the mind and body. If we have ever needed a time for exercise it happens to be now with Covid-19 on our doorsteps.

The brain on the left shows an EEG image of the neuroelectrical brain



NO EXERCISE

EXERCISE

activity after 20 minutes of sitting. The blue area suggests a dip in neural resources devoted to focus. The same brain on the right shows more red after 20 minutes of walking, indicating heightened attention and faster information processing.

## EXERCISE YOUR BRAIN



**INCREASES PRODUCTION OF NEUROCHEMICALS THAT PROMOTE BRAIN CELL REPAIR**

**IMPROVES MEMORY AND ATTENTION SPAN**

**PROMPTS GROWTH OF NEW NERVE CELLS AND BLOOD VESSELS**

**GOOD FOR CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH. A HEALTHY HEART IS BETTER FOR PUMPING BLOOD AND OXYGEN TO THE BRAIN**

**EXERCISE IMPROVES YOUR QUALITY OF SLEEP AND OVERALL MENTAL WELLBEING**

**BOOSTS MOOD AND IMPROVES SELF CONFIDENCE**



Pick your exercise of choice! Go walking, running, swimming, hiking, or biking. Enjoy the fresh air. Get in touch with nature. And reap the many health benefits of exercise—both physical and mental.

### PE WITH JOE WICKS



Daily lessons not only for kids of school age, but also for adults of all ages to activate the mind with his challenging quizzes alongside some physical challenges which will have even those athletes among us in pain from muscle usage that we didn't even know existed!!



BY PAUL MOORE

I am a final year student at Stranmillis University College studying Post-Primary Mathematics and Science with Education. As part of the degree in the second term we undertook a 2-week work placement in an alternate environment linked to the field of education from the 13th to the 24th of January 2020. The purpose of this aspect of the degree is so that the students will have the chance to experience work opportunities outside the traditional idea of education.

The options of the organisations we could choose from were varied and all seemed very interesting. However, I decided on UTU over the other options available as I thought it would be a great opportunity to see what exactly a union did and see exactly what it was that the people who support teachers did. As someone who is on the verge of entering the teaching profession I wanted to gain a better understanding and gain more expertise into the workings of the union and how they represent teachers.

Over the last two weeks, it has given me a great insight into the role that the UTU has within the education system and predominantly the careers of teachers. Through being involved in the UTU I was able to learn about some areas they are involved in, for example, giving teachers advice and support with issues in their schools.

During my two weeks with the UTU I had the opportunity to sit in on meetings with different people and organisations, includ-

# POSITIVE PLACEMENT AT UTU



Fourth year Stranmillis Student, Paul Moore, gives his insight into what it is like working within the union for 2 weeks.



ing NITC, a DUP representative and CEC. I was also able to attend the F.I.T. conference as well as a couple of training seminars with the LRA and the ICTU. The ICTU seminar was an introduction into the disability discrimination act through the seminar I was shown how unions should adapt a cautious and caring approach with all members in order

to provide adequate support. With the seminar provided by the LRA I was enlightened on the "Early Conciliation" approach to solving workplace disputes and the legislation associated with this. The meeting with the NITC was very interesting as it gave me an understanding of the different trade unions in Northern Ireland, the issues that they discuss and the amount of deliberation they have to do to ensure the needs of all the members are met.

Within the first week I was involved in a meeting with a representative from the DUP. This was a particularly interesting and informative meeting as I was able to observe how the union discuss topics with the parties in government. Through the meeting I was also able to learn a number of things about

the current position of the education system and how the union proposes issues in the system should be addressed so that both students and teachers are best accommodated for. At the end of the first week I was able to attend the F.I.T. conference in the Malone Lodge which was a great experience this allowed me to meet a number of recently-qualified teachers and principals from a number of different schools and through this learn and develop my own teaching. During the last week in the UTU I was given the opportunity to visit a school and talk to the principal and see what their school was doing, and how they were managing a school in the current education environment.

Throughout my alternative placement at the UTU, I've learnt a large amount from what I have seen in particular organisational skills. I have been given a thorough insight into the amount of help and support that the UTU provides teachers in many different areas of the teaching profession. I think the experiences will benefit me by providing me with skills that will be an asset to me as I continue moving forward. Through these two weeks I have developed a firm appreciation for the work that the UTU does and feel that they function as a great representative for teachers giving them a voice.

I thank UTU and the other organisations for giving me the opportunity to partake in meetings and increase my awareness of the work of the unions.

# LIFE AS A NEW SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AT MOYALLON PRIMARY SCHOOL

BY AARON DAVIDSON

Like P1 pupils across the country, I started my new school in September. A new school, a new job, a new title – Principal. The first day, in any context, is often a nervous occasion and mine was no different. All eyes watch discretely, silences linger and people greet you politely throughout the day. On my first day at Moyallon Primary School, I shut my office door, daunted by the mysterious task of being a Principal and running a school. The work that followed this moment has been fast-paced, exciting, varied, challenging, rewarding, fulfilling and all-consuming.

The question that I've been asked the most since I took up my new post is, what do you do all day in the office? A relatively simple question, but one that, no doubt, differs in every school. I now appreciate that this answer couldn't possibly be summed up in one sentence. There are so many things packed into my day with each task highly important to the person that brings it to you, whether it's an email from the finance department or a child who needs you to make a phone call home. The common thread that connects all that I do is the people. As teachers we are used to working with people and indeed children, but as Principal, you soon realise how many more people you have to work with than before. Adjusting to this new way of life has been interesting. A classroom full of children is vastly different to an office with a swivel chair and a computer. The role brings job satisfaction in unfamiliar ways. It offers a new perspective, fresh challenges, opportunities.

Up until March, my first year as a Principal had been going smoothly. I had settled into my new school, the Carol Service was fantastic, new initiatives were flourishing, the roof stopped leaking and a new school development plan was emerging. What followed, as you all will know, was a worldwide crisis; the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders at all levels have encountered unprecedented challenges and we have seen society pull together in some of the most amazing ways. Schools continue to play their part by providing childcare for key workers and by facilitating learning through online platforms. I pay tribute to the dedication and commitment shown by the teaching workforce at such a momentous time and look forward to the day when we return to our classrooms.

For now, my first third term as a Principal has been deferred but aside from the COVID-19 crisis, my year so far has been everything I hoped it would be. My job role is different, but I still strive to provide the memorable school experiences for children and opportunities for them to develop to the best of their ability.



## BUSHFIRE BAKEOFF AT CARROWDORE PRIMARY

Primary Five in Carrowdore Primary School were inspired to raise money for the animals injured during the recent bushfires in Australia. The class baked lots of love-



ly buns for the pupils and staff and sold them on Friday 31st January. It all started when Primary Five read a news article about an injured koala bear during their topic work on Australia. Robyn, a Primary Five pupil wrote to the Principal to ask if the children could organise a fundraiser to help the poor animals they had been reading about.



Primary Five designed posters to advertise their event and baked a selection of treats including some dairy free options so everyone could be involved. The children set up the school hall and took it in turns to man the stall. The bun sale raised a staggering £122.81 which will be added to the school's weekly charity collection and sent off to Australia!



# FIT CONFERENCE 2020

## The future is looking bright after a successful Residential Seminar

The F.I.T. Residential Conference this year took place on the 17th and 18th of January in the Malone Lodge Hotel, Belfast. The conference had a relaxed atmosphere

and served as a time during which recently qualified teachers and students had the opportunity to meet, build connections with principals and other more experienced teachers and gain more insight into particular topics in education. On the Friday afternoon we

held a panel on Special Educational Needs, with the panellists Susan Thompson, current President of UTU and Vice Principal/SENCo at Hart Memorial Primary School, Stephen Cumper, Principal at Harding Memorial Primary School, Ashley Knox, SENCo and senior teacher at Larne High School. Through the panel, the panellists were able to give an insight into their experience in teaching and dealing with pupils with SEN. They shared perspectives from different roles in the school, from principal and vice-principal to SENCo and classroom teacher. The panel-

lists also gave the attendees valuable tips and advice on methods they use to deal with pupils with SEN. The Saturday morning commenced with table-top discussion headed by Carney Cumper, Ex-President of UTU and Vice Principal at Killyleagh Integrated Primary, Stephen McCord, Vice-President of UTU and Senior Teacher at Larne High School, Callum Hannigan, Vice-Principal of Millstrand Integrated Primary. The topic of discussion was "interviews and the application process" alongside discussions on "dealing with your first few years as a beginning teacher and completing the NQT induction, highlighting to everyone in attendance the importance

of developing your interview techniques and to keeping NQT induction ongoing as it is crucial for further development. With another F.I.T. Residential Conference behind us, we look forward to continuing to bolster our recently qualified teachers with skills and knowledge that will be of use to them in their careers and are keen to get more recently qualified teachers involved with the work that is done by the Ulster Teachers' Union. Information on the F.I.T. Group can be found on social media, our website, or by contacting the UTU Office. We eagerly anticipate hearing from our members and will soon disperse information for the next event.



## THANK YOU AARON

The 2020 FIT Conference saw our Chairperson **Aaron Davidson** bid farewell as he concentrates on his new role as Principal of Moyallon Primary School. Aaron has been a member of the FIT Group since qualifying as a teacher and has been a key figure in driving the group forward.

On behalf of the Union I would like to extend my thanks to Aaron and wish him all the best for the future.

A. Shields,  
Vice Chair  
FIT Group





**T**he Joint Leadership Conference 2020 organised by INTO/ NEU and UTU was very well attended by both Vice-Principal and Principal members across all three unions. The event took place at The Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown. The areas presented to our leaders were an update on the current pay dispute in relation to industrial action, special educational needs, update from EA Head of Special Education and Inclusion, and Equality and Disability Action NI.

There were opportunities for questions from our school leaders on several aspects of the agenda. Leaders were welcomed and listened to and supported in all areas of difficulties that are present in our current climate and resulting in educational burdens.

An opportunity to engage further with colleagues was held over a lovely lunch which gave time to recharge those batteries before the return to school for the afternoon. I look forward to next year already and would encourage all leaders in the UTU to make the most of this facility and view it as a chance to network and develop as a school leader.

# LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE 2020



The Joint Leadership Conference brought together Principals and Vice-Principals from the 3 unions to discuss hot topics facing School Leaders

**KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR NEXT YEAR'S DATE**

## KING'S PARK PRIMARY & NURSERY SCHOOL

### VIRTUAL CONCERT

**T**he pupils from King's Park Primary School in Lurgan had been working hard to prepare for their annual summer concert, to be held on 7th May. They were very disappointed when the Covid-19 pandemic put these plans in jeopardy but instead of cancelling the event, the music co-ordinator suggested to move the event online and held the school's first ever virtual concert. Pupils recorded their performances at home, which included clarinet, guitar, drums, trombone, cornet, piano and vocal performances. A number of pupils also recited a poem. The performances were put together in a 2-part presentation which was premiered on the school website. As well as the music, pupils from the school showed off their creative talents by creating some fantastic artwork to display alongside the musical accompaniment. The concert ended with a poem written for the occasion by the school's music coordinator and event organiser, Shelley Spiers, and a message from the school staff to all the pupils. Staff, pupils and parents were delighted

that technology provided them with the means to showcase the hard work of the musicians throughout the year and they all look forward to the day when we can once again hear them play in person!

The concert can be viewed at: <https://www.kingsparklurgan.com/virtual-concert/>



**Virtual Concert**



## KING'S PARK PS LURGAN CROSS COUNTRY TEAM DOES IT AGAIN!

**C**ongratulations to King's Park Primary Girls' Cross Country Team who are The Flahavan's Cross Country Northern Ireland Champions once again. Victory was sewn up by a comfortable margin of points at Mallusk on 22nd January. Three runners finished in the top ten, which was a remarkable achievement at this level. This is the Girls' third Northern Ireland title in the last 4 years, finishing runners up last season. Top placings were **Leah Balfour 6th**, **Alex Kerr 9th** and **Casey Cousins 10th**.

Team featured with Olympic Runner Kerry O'Flaherty.

(L to R) Kirsty Fong, Alex Kerr, Leah Balfour, Bethany Greer (Sub), Abi Cherry, Anaya Patterson and Casey Cousins.



# MAKE WAY FOR THE DONKEY

In association with Learning in Harmony with Donkeys Programme

BY ANNE BROWN (AREA REP FOR NI REGION)

**M**y name is Anne Brown and I am based in Northern Ireland. I work as a Primary teacher within the Foundation Stage at Killinchy Primary School. I'm an active member of the Donkey Breed Society with my family of donkeys. I have a committee role within the society's Education and Youth Committee UK and Secretary and Area-Rep for the Northern Ireland region.

So, what is 'Learning in Harmony with Donkeys?' Learning in Harmony with Donkeys is a programme which came about through my passion and love for donkeys, experiencing first hand the significant role and positive impact they play in supporting children with their learning. I have found that emerging my mutual love for donkeys and primary teaching has had massive benefits for both the animals and the children.

Furthermore, 'Learning in Harmony with Donkeys' is a programme geared towards educating and helping children to gain an understanding of donkey welfare and management, building and forming positive relationships resulting in confidence-building, raising self-esteem, developing communication skills, developing knowledge and understanding whilst making new friends with 'real' donkeys as their learning tool. Furthermore, children participate in a fun, practical and gentle approach through shared experiences and self motivation with donkeys.

The programme has been introduced in local schools



as an After School Club but has grown into a private, external, learning opportunity. The programme was recognised by the Senior Management team of Killinchy Primary school as having the potential of being part of the Foundation Stage Curriculum. Therefore, the Primary 2 team put their heads together to draw up long term, medium term and weekly planners based on the topic, 'Make Way for the Donkey.' This has resulted in a whole new scheme of work within Primary 2 and it has been implemented in Term 1b as part of the Foundation Stage Curriculum, a first of its kind within Northern Ireland! From the off, the children were engrossed in the topic and were keen to share their thoughts, ideas and ask comprehensive questions. Through the activities, the children were transferring the knowledge and understanding they had gained through their class and play-based learning across all areas of learning within the curriculum. To name a few, Small-world Play, Numeracy and Literacy Activities, Art and Craft and Outdoor Play were emerged within the topic bringing the outside learning in and the inside learning out, thus involving children in a cohesive approach to learning within the topic, **'Make Way for the Donkey.'**

The topic included having a visit from a Vet, Farrier and Harness maker which provided a

very 'real' experience for the children. Also, all the children took part in learning the art of weaving willow known as 'wattling', a traditional skill used in years gone by. The children made their own donkey hurdles by weaving real willow for the role-play area incase 'Spike', the pretend donkey, decided to escape! Children took care of and handled 'Rosie' and 'Tilly', two real donkeys, at the end of each week to secure the learning and knowledge they had gained through their play-based and activity based learning.

Primary 2 have successfully completed their learning programme as part of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and it was thoroughly enjoyed by all. Both Primary 2 classes consisting of 48 children completed their Introductory Certificate in accordance with The Donkey Breed Society Award. This included the children demonstrating how to approach a donkey in a safe and calm manner, fit a head collar and attach a lead rope, choose and name items of a donkey grooming kit, brush the donkey, lead and stop the donkey in a safe manner. All 48 Primary 2 children received a rosette and a certificate in recognition of their learning and hard work. Well done P2, this is a massive achievement!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank The Donkey Breed Society Education Committee for being extremely supportive throughout the development of this programme. Also, I would like to warmly thank the staff at Killinchy Primary School for enabling the implementation of the programme and to have such a supportive P2 team who believed in it, shared my vision and made it happen.

If you would like further information or you would like to find out more please email: [ann16@hotmail.com](mailto:ann16@hotmail.com) visit [www.donkeybreedsociety.uk](http://www.donkeybreedsociety.uk) or alternatively search for 'Learning in Harmony with Donkeys.'





# STEM-SPIRATION IN PORTSTEWART

Promoting STEM in Portstewart Primary and Nursery Unit whilst engaging with the local community

**P**ortstewart Primary School and Nursery Unit held a week long STEM event across the whole school, which was very successful. All pupils from Nursery through to Primary 7 were involved in the STEM activities and challenges. STEM focuses on developing pupils' science, technology, engineering and maths skills. Sphero challenges were held across each year group. Pupils had to program Sphero or a programmable device to move through a specified angle, follow a course, draw a 2D shape, change colour and even navigate through a maze.

Pupils from Nursery to Primary 7 took part in various demonstrations and science experiments throughout the day. Primary 7 pupils were also able to interview those who worked in the science industry and found out more about careers within the STEM industry.

Pupils took part in experiments to explore characteristics of solids and liquids.



They also took part in water quality testing and explored water treatment techniques used in most water treatment plants. Pupils also attempted to use wood shavings to purify a dye.

In conjunction with the University of Ulster, pupils also explored the food groups, healthy eating and the amount of sugar contained within various foods. They examined various foods and guessed how much sugar they contain. The children examined acids and alkalis and determined the pH of

common substances using litmus paper. They got to witness a reaction between an acid and an alkali and watched the carbon dioxide generated blow up a balloon.

The children worked with students from a local post-primary school (Dominican College) to separate different coloured inks into their constituent colours using chromatography. Pupils also got to experiment with forces at work and the

**“IT WAS A BRILLIANT CELEBRATION OF SCIENCE WE HOPE THAT IT INSPIRED IN YOUNG MINDS”**

effect of friction on movement of materials.

As a link to the beautiful coastal area in Portstewart, pupils learnt about the plant and animal life, how the ocean supports these environments and how currents can carry materials huge distances, making the human impact on our oceans harmful at a global scale.

Pupils learnt about water stratification. They explored how the density of water



changes with salinity and temperature. They attempted to recreate this stratification using saltwater, tap water and food colouring.

We wish to thank the organising committee, staff, W5 (Belfast), University of Ulster representatives, Dominican College students and local STEM business representatives for helping us put on the event. Mrs

Taylor, the new principal of Portstewart Primary School and Nursery Unit, said, “it has been a hugely successful event which our children have thoroughly enjoyed. It was a brilliant celebration of science and we hope that it has inspired in young minds a sense of enjoyment and curiosity about science.”

**BRAIDSIDE  
INTEGRATED  
PRIMARY  
AND  
NURSERY SCHOOL  
CELEBRATING 30 YEARS  
OF INTEGRATION**

**B**raidside Integrated Primary School in Ballymena will celebrate 30 years since first opening in September 1989, during this academic



year. Founded by a group of farsighted parents who wanted their children to grow up and be educated. Together, the school has grown from small numbers in 1989 to maintain an enrolment of 300 pupils. Principal, Ms Julie McAuley, and the staff at Braidside endeavour to build a vibrant and enthusiastic school community, where every child has the opportunity to meet their personal

and academic potential within a culture of mutual respect. To mark the 30th anniversary milestone, a variety of events and activities for the children are planned for this school year. However, most significantly, the school community look forward to moving into their new, purpose-built school on Fry's Road during this year. An exciting and celebratory year lies ahead for Braidside!



# LONDON CALLING

## FOR DRELINCOURT

INTO FILM AWARDS 2020 Nominated

The Drelincourt School

BY SHARON WALKER

In January we were delighted to find out that we were nominated for Into Film Club of the Year 2020 and have been invited to attend an awards ceremony in Leicester Square, London, on 18th March. We are one of three schools in the UK to be chosen as a nominee in the Into Film Club of the Year 11 and under category, sponsored by MGM Studios. This event will be hosted by David Walliams OBE with many other celebrities in attendance. This is an amazing opportunity for our young children, who are only P3 and one they will never forget. We were introduced to Into Film Club in 2014 through the Extended Schools programme. Our Film Club used to be simply choosing, ordering and showing our film with a few reviews and sweets along the way. But we asked ourselves could we make this better? Could we really embed this into the curriculum? We did, and the results were far beyond



what we imagined.

The children have now taken ownership of their club: A corner of our hall transformed into a box office, film Poster showing what is screening this week, children checking membership cards, recording details in grids and charts, writing and reading reviews, selling tickets, managing real money in their bank and making and selling popcorn. Into Film highlighted our club in November 2019, which led to national press coverage and a visit from the BBC John Toal Show. Considering our multi-national makeup, we are amazed at how our children are responding to film with greater imagination and creativity, growing in confidence and developing communication skills.



When we evaluate all the activities linked with our Into Film Club now, we see real breadth of cross curricular skills being developed: literacy, numeracy particularly, financial capability, World Around Us, The Arts and PDMU. The children have produced excellent reviews through art and design – from charcoal black and white pictures to recreate vintage Laurel and Hardy to oil pastel 3D collage pictures for the Best Of Dr Seuss. For us, this is no longer an add-on to a Friday afternoon but a fully integrated teaching and learning tool that is allowing us to excite and guide our children through the wonderful world of film - films that cover every genre from Disney to Vintage black and white.





# DRUMRANE PRIMARY SCHOOL LOVES TO SING!



The Hills are alive with the sound of Drumrane Primary School P4 to P7 students



**A**ny members who attended the Centenary Concert in the Ulster Hall in January 2019 will remember the opening item – a super choir that came from Drumrane PS near Dungiven in their **“Mary Poppins”** costumes and performed a wonderful medley of songs from the musical. They also provided the entertainment at the Western Area **“Afternoon Tea”** to mark the retirement of Mrs Avril Hall Callaghan.



One year on, all the P4-P7 pupils at Drumrane Primary School transported their families and friends to the hills of Austria in their recent performance of The Sound of Music. Certainly for Mrs Alison Steen, the principal (and our vice-president elect) The Sound of Music is one of

her “favourite things”. Following a summer holiday in Vienna and Salzburg last year, which included The Sound of Music Tour, Mrs Steen put pen to paper and adapted the story for the Drumrane stage.

Maria, Captain von Trapp, the von Trapp children, Mother Abbess, the Baroness, narrators, servants, Max, Rolfe, Herr Zeller, nuns, puppets, soldiers and dancers, all excelled themselves in learning lines, songs and choreography in a very short space of time! Every child had a part to play in bringing the story to life. The singing of the main characters

was inspirational and familiar solos were truly memorable – How do You Solve a Problem Like Maria? Climb Every Mountain, The Hills are Alive, I Have Confidence, My Favourite

Things, I am Sixteen and Edelweiss. The von Trapp children received a rousing reception with Do-Re-Mi and So Long, Farewell.

This production realised the principal’s dream of putting The Sound of Music on a school stage. In eight days mountains were climbed and the children took to the stage in superb costumes. The hard work by children and staff under the direction of Mrs Steen the producer certainly paid off and delighted all who attended the performances. A DVD provides a lasting momento that will be treasured by the school family, always.

In February 2020 Drumrane P.S. entered the Coleraine Music Festival and the children won 20 first prizes, 20 second prizes, 16 third prizes, 7 individual special awards and a bursary given to the School with the overall best performances at the Festival. They loved performing solos, duets, playing the recorder, dressing up for Musical Theatre and playing the piano. We hope that the children are still singing their way through these days of lockdown and music is bringing them happiness. As Hans Christian Anderson once said, **“Where words fail, music speaks.”**





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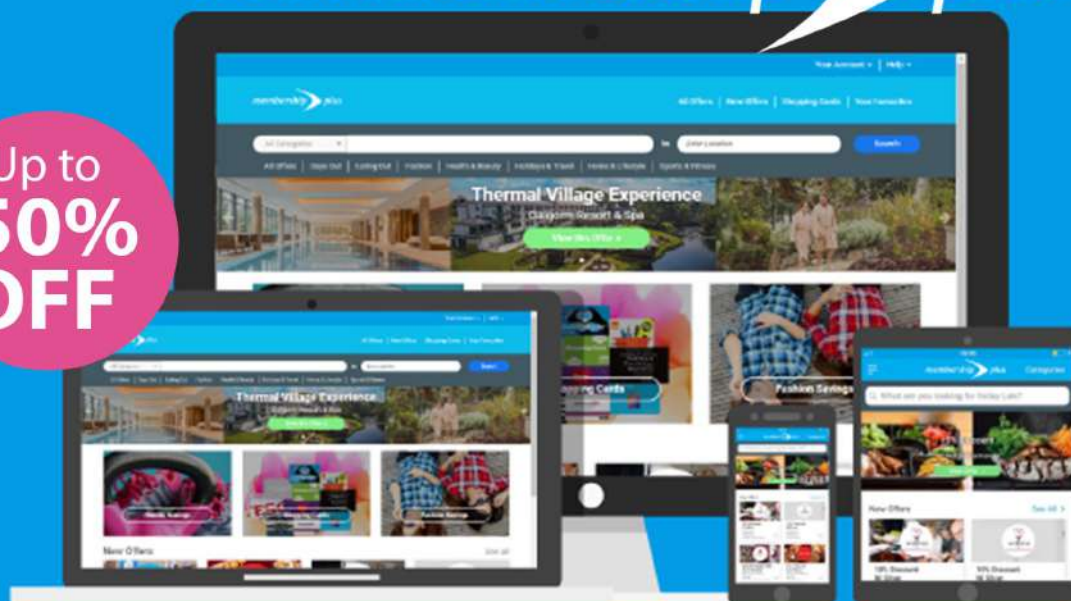
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