

The kids love to be able to show...

their culture, their food, their traditional dress, and their music

by Peter Stones

STUDENTS attending Coláiste Chiaráin Community School in Lexlip had the opportunity to showcase how their school embraces diversity and inclusion on Friday, 6th December, as they celebrated their third Annual Culture Day.

It's an event that is growing year-on-year and much-loved by all the students and school staff. It's also an event that was attended by some VIP guests, with the Liffey Champion being lucky enough to interview these VIP's on the importance of our children celebrating diversity and inclusion.

Coláiste Chiaráin's Diversity Community Coordinator and organiser of Annual Culture Day, Mairead McDonnell was enthusiastic about the event.

"This is the third year we have hosted our Annual Culture Day at the school and the kids love to be able to show their culture, their food, their traditional dress, and their music to everybody and it's a really fantastic way of allowing them to do that."

The event opened early, with the school principal, Mark Neville, providing everybody with a warm welcome at 9:30a.m.

Following Mr Neville's kind words, the exhibition started at 10am, and around 30 stands opened as students began offering both food and insightful information on their national culture to the grateful attendees.

Alongside students who were showcasing their nationalities' fantastic cuisine and rich culture, were students from other minority groups, an aspect of the event that Ms McDonnell said was crucial during the preparations.

"We've also included not just nationalities but other minority groups and we also have disability dolls at the event too."

"When we started our preparations, it was really important to us that we included everybody as the event is about inclusion and our school being a welcoming and safe place for everybody who is a part of the community."

"When we set this event up, the last thing we wanted to do was to leave people out and the more people we have involved from minority groups within the school, the better off we are."

The school is certainly achieving their goal of becoming a more diverse community as in its first year, Annual Culture Day supported 13 stands, whereas this year, there was between 30 and 35 stands celebrating minority groups and nationalities from around the world.

Aishah Akorede, who was crowned Miss Universe Ireland in 2023 and is also former past

pupil at Coláiste Chiaráin, was invited back to the school as a VIP guest for the second consecutive year.

Speaking to Liffey Champion, Ms Akorede reminisced of the fond memories she made while studying at Coláiste Chiaráin and why she thinks that Annual Culture Day is a fantastic event for the school to run annually.

"It's so amazing to see how many people have come together to support Annual Culture Day. It's important for both kids and adults to have a space where they feel comfortable and I feel that Ireland is a place of understanding due to its own history of migration."

"So, I think Annual Culture Day here at Coláiste Chiaráin is a great way of showcasing the manner in which the Irish people are very accepting and are always moving towards becoming a more and more diverse country as time goes on."

Another VIP guest that came down to the school is newly elected TD for Kildare North and lover of the sweetbread at the Moldovan stand, Joe Neville.

Deputy Neville is also a former past pupil of the school and lauded current students for the help they provided one another throughout the event.

"It's not just about individuals today," he said.

"It's about students from different cultures and minority groups helping each other at stands so that they can come together and learn from one another."

Wider community

Alongside his appreciation for the students taking part in the event, Deputy Neville also spoke about how the children's positive experience from today will be seen within the wider community.

"What we see here at Coláiste Chiaráin today is to be reflected in the wider-community and extracurricular activities that the kids take part in."

"We are all going live in this community together and we want children mixing with one another as much as possible and doing this with your friends in the local community is as good as any way to start."

The event most definitely succeeded in bringing the wider-community together as although the official celebrations didn't begin until school hours, last-minute preparations for the day begun much earlier with parents delivering trays of delicious food before joining a large crowd outside to watch a group of students parade around the school in their traditional dress.

Primary school students from the neighbouring Lexlip Educate Together National School also paid a visit and relished in the delights and fun that was on

offer. Students from both schools also had the opportunity to meet with author, Brianna Fitzsimons. Ms Fitzsimons' published her book *Black and Irish: Legends, Trailblazers and Everyday Heroes* in October 2023.

Coláiste Chiaráin also gave a warm welcome to VIP guest and Ombudsman for Children, Dr Niall Muldoon.

"Celebrating days like Annual Culture Day is hugely important for children's rights," he told Liffey Champion.

"It's the children's ability to express themselves on a day like this is what's hugely important". Dr Muldoon then went onto reference his positive experiences when visiting schools all around Ireland and how accepting they are of different nationalities and minority groups.

"I travel to schools all around the country and there is probably no school now that doesn't have multiple nationalities and minority groups attending, primary and secondary, and every one of them are proud and accepting of that."

Dr Muldoon also took the time to discuss how children might react to negativity on social media.

"Children must challenge this type of behaviour by countering it with kindness and respect," said Dr Muldoon.

"For adults to have these conversations with our children as they grow up at each appropriate stage and acknowledge that it happens."

"We don't need to say, don't listen to it, it's not there. We need to acknowledge that it will happen, children will come across it, and they should feel free to talk to an adult about it."

Following a very successful afternoon, the VIP guests took to the school intercom and congratulated each and every student for contributing to the celebrations and making them feel very welcome throughout the day.

Coláiste Chiaráin principal, Mr Neville also issued a heartfelt statement in which he thanked each and every guest for attending and congratulated his students on the wonderful environment of openness, collaboration, and support that they have created.

However, Mr Neville refused to be the final speaker and passed the intercom over to the organiser of Annual Culture Day, Mairead McDonnell.

Ms McDonnell extended her greatest thanks to everybody within the school community for making the day such a big success and that she now looks forward to the fourth Annual Culture Day which will take place around the same time next year.

Gender-balancing campaign fails in County Kildare

by Andrew Smullen

COUNTY Kildare went into the 2024 General Election with three women as TDs and five men.

And despite a campaign to return a gender-balanced representation in the next Dáil, the county, between its two constituencies, returned just two women as TDs.

It was not until the election of Catherine Murphy in 2005 that the county first sent a woman to Dáil Éireann.

Aine Brady (FF), Fiona O'Loughlin (FF), Reada Cronin (SF) and Patricia Ryan (SF) followed, the latter two in the 2020 election.

Catherine Murphy did not seek election this time, but her party, the Social Democrats elected to run a man — Adrian Farrelly — to take her place.

He performed brilliantly and is now an elected TD.

Sinn Féin's Reada Cronin was re-elected while Patricia Ryan, having left the party, ran unsuccessfully for re-election in Kildare South.

However, the party did return a female candidate, namely Shónagh Ní Raghallaigh who has taken Ryan's seat.

However, Kildare had an extra seat — in Kildare North — raising the county's total from eight to nine.

This leaves Kildare's percentage of female representation in the next Dáil at 22.2%, well short of the 50% gender balance sought.

Between the two constituencies, 14 women sought election, seven in each of the two constituencies. It was a record of sorts, and in light of that the outcome appears quite disappointing for the champions of gender-balancing.

The nine TDs elected to the 34th Dáil were (Kildare North) James Lawless (FF), Aidan Farrelly (SD), Reada Cronin (SF), Joe Neville (FG) and Naoise Ó Cearúil (FF); (Kildare South) Martin Heydon (FG), Shónagh Ní Raghallaigh (SF), Mark Wall (Lab) and Seán Ó Fearghail (FF).

Ó Fearghail, as the outgoing Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Éireann, was re-elected automatically.



Sinn Féin duo Reada Cronin (Kildare North) (TOP) and Shónagh Ní Raghallaigh (Kildare South) (ABOVE) are Kildare's only female representation in the 34th Dáil.

'We need the infrastructure to support new housing development' — Ó Cearúil

"IT IS time to build the infrastructure to support our growing communities," Naoise Ó Cearúil (FF) has stated.

"The need for comprehensive public services has never been more critical."

New housing developments are springing up across in such towns as Leixlip, Celbridge, Maynooth, Kilcock, Sallins, Naas, Clane, Kill, Johnstownbridge, and Broadford.

The infrastructure must be there to support this rush to build houses.

The newly elected TD wants to see immediate investment in social and physical infrastructure.

"Kildare North has seen tremendous progress in addressing the housing crisis," said Deputy Ó Cearúil.

"We're fortunate to have the new housing developments that have been built in recent years."

"As a homeowner in one of these new areas, I know first-hand how this growth has benefited our community."

"But while we've addressed some aspects of

the housing crisis, the supporting infrastructure has failed to keep pace."

He pointed to several urgent areas where infrastructure is critically lacking, such as in access to healthcare access, and the challenges faced by residents to find a GP, childcare services, or a place in a creche.

He said basic amenities like playgrounds in towns such as Leixlip, Celbridge, Maynooth, Kilcock, Clane, Naas and Kill are insufficient, and the few that exist are in desperate need of upgrades.

With education, he said there is a growing need for additional school places, particularly in special education.

Cllr Ó Cearúil has said he is committed to championing the social and physical infrastructure needs of Kildare North.

"This region has been overlooked for far too long compared to other parts of Kildare and Ireland," added Deputy Ó Cearúil.

"We need leadership that will prioritise investment in Kildare North's future."