

PTA Annual General Meeting Headmasters Report 2020-21

Zoom and Teams have become the new norm for communications and events.

Zoom meeting with parents – over 7 hours to reassure parents/guardians of the school's protocols

Estimated Grades Process 19-20 was completed. A break from the traditional and complete new learning curve. The results breakdown by calculated grade in 2020 indicated similarities to the national averages. This was particularly the case across the core subjects and some of the sciences. The Higher-Level uptake continued to be a source of strength within DGS's results. On average, DGS students sat 5.1 Higher Level papers. 2020 saw average points achieved return to 400 plus. There was an increase in the number of H1s achieved from 23 to 56. There was one failure recorded at higher level, a drop of 6 from 2019.

Destination Report: 98% of the class of 2020 went onto further and higher education. 72% Level 8 Honours Degrees, 10% Level 7 Ordinary Level Degrees, 17% Level 5 Post Leaving Certificate Course and 1% apprenticeships. The vast majority, 70 students, continued their studies in Ireland while a number are in the UK, Poland, The Netherlands and the USA.

August 2020 Covid-19 – School Reopening: DGS' Covid-19 Response Plan was published in late August with implementation during August/September and some of the issues that the school faced included:

- Setting up of the school
- Major issues with the timetable - 4 versions were developed
- Creating bubbles/ breaks/ lunches
- Layouts of classrooms
- Corridors/ spaces
- Rooms repurposed – study hall, Fynamore Hall, Day Canteen, Staffrooms
- Signage and 64 sanitising stations
- Junior School setup
- Adapting TY programme to meet needs of Covid-19
- Wellbeing – reconnecting – CSPE, HM on Office365, tutor class
- Boarding and boarding canteen new layout
- Day Canteen – opening two hatches to reduce interaction at break and lunchtimes
- Supervision issues at breaks and lunchtimes
- Funding from the DES
- ECA (sports bodies guidelines, IRFU, FAI, Hockey Ireland, Basketball Ireland etc.)
- Parent Teacher Meetings replaced by reports 6th Year Progress Reports replaced PTM
- Music practice

The Safe Return to DGS document was published online.

Inspection/Inspection Report: On Wednesday 16th December DGS had an inspection from the DES under the heading of *Supporting the Safe Provision of Schooling*. The inspection lasted just over one hour. The Inspector, Ms Noreen McMorrow, spoke with the HM, DP, Facilities Manager, Medical Officer, LWR (Lead Worker Representative) Mr Alan Norton and 8 randomly chosen members of various staff. She also conducted a walk-through inspection of the school. The inspector checked DGS's protocols in relation to Covid19 and the school was fully compliant in all aspects of the inspection criteria.

Cultural and other events Academic Year 2020/21:

Geography Field Trip: On Thursday 10th September Geography Field Trip – Dundalk – HSE guidelines followed.

1st Yr Carlingford Trip: On Wednesday 23rd September 1st Year Carlingford Trip for a team building event– HSE guidelines followed. HM thanks the Year Head, Mr Declan Hynes and the form tutors for facilitating the event in the current circumstances.

TY Trip to Causey Farm: On Monday 28th September 2020 TY trip to Causey Farm – buses and Covid-19 guidelines followed. HM thanks Mr David Symmons for planning the event. A great day was had by all.

Friendship Week: From Monday 28th September – Friday 2nd October DGS held its Annual Friendship Week. HM thanks Ms Helen Christmas and Mr Alan Norton for organising the events held during the week.

Archbishop Visit to DGS: On Tuesday 29th September Most Reverend John McDowell Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland had a very positive visit to the school where he met members of the Board of Governors and the HM.

Maths Academy: Maths Academy starting the week beginning Monday 5th October 2020 and carried on when the school was open.

Virtual Prize Day: On Friday 16th October, Dundalk Grammar School held its annual Awards Ceremony virtually, due to current Covid-19 restrictions. The event was broadcast live within the school to the students, to the parents/guardians

watching at home, as well as the clergy and members of the DGS Board. The awards were simultaneously distributed in each class. Various presentations were distributed over a range of subjects, major awards for distinction were, The Irene Reburn Trophy for Mathematics, The Alan Gray Trophy for History, The Valerie Meagher Trophy in Performing Arts, The Primate Trophy for contribution to Church Music, The Beanmhi Travers Award, the Senior Shield and awards from the PTA in Irish, Art, Debating as well as Gaisce, The President's Awards. There were also awards in excellence for the 2020 Leaving Certificate students.

Reverend Captain Geoffrey Walmsley: DGS bid farewell to Reverend Walmsley on Friday 13th November with his final assembly. DGS staff presented Geoffrey with a gift at breaktime to thank him for his work and teaching over the past several years. Dr Laurence Swan, on behalf of the Board of Governors, also made a presentation to Geoffrey. All socially distanced of course. Geoffrey will be missed by students and staff alike, not to mention the Parish. We all wish him well in his new Parish on the banks of Lough Neagh.

GCSE PE: On Friday 13th November HM congratulated 13 DGS students who successfully completed their GCSE PE over the past 3 years. This is the first group of students to achieve this award that was introduced to the curriculum three years ago. HM thanked the PE Department for their endeavours in getting the students through this particularly difficult time and achieving the certification.

Junior School Virtual Prize Day was held on Wednesday 18th November with awards in sports, music, and art as well as others. HM thanked the teachers in Junior School, Principal, Ms Elaine Lait, Ms Helen Reynolds, Ms Carolyn Ferris, Mr Ciaran Callan and Ms Pamela O'Connor-Moneley for organising this special event.

DGS Amber Flag: On Thursday 19th November DGS hoisted its second Amber Flag for promoting Positive Mental Health. Special thanks to Ms Helen Christmas and Mr Alan Norton for their support of the students in gaining this recognition, particularly considering the Covid-19 lockdowns.

Vex Robotics Coding: On Thursday 26th November TY students enjoyed learning the intricacies of Vex Robotics with DkIT students on their computing science course, held remotely.

Gaeilge Friday 27th November: HM congratulated TY and 5th Yr students who, in October received a Certificate of Participation in the COMHRA20. This live streamed event in Gaeilge, spanned over 90,000km worldwide, with teams from as far away as Washington DC and New Zealand. HM thanked the Irish Department for planning and organising this international event.

Well-being and Christmas in DGS was promoted extensively for the month of December. Several events were organised for staff and students. HM thanks all those involved from the Student Council, caretaking staff, Facilities Manager, the Art and HE Department as well as all other staff for their Christmas spirit. For example, DGS senior cycle boarders had a gingerbread house competition organised by Ms Stephen Begley and Ms Hannah Martin. The staff enjoyed a well-earned coffee and treat from Rocksalt, organised by Mr Murphy. Students in both the Junior & Senior school received an ice cream on Thursday 17th December from Smiths Ice cream for their endeavours in keeping the school safe over the autumn term, to name but a few. The school library displayed one of the best Christmas trees in the school, constructed from books. HM thanked Mr Francis Foyle for his support as well as students, Mollie McDowell, Oge Enwerem, Woodley Nicholson, Lucy O'Rourke, Floyd Balogun and Koko Iso-Idemudia.

Charity: On Tuesday 15th December, TY student Grace Kenneally presented €500 to North Louth Hospice, proceeds raised from a cake sale she held in school in early December.

Junior School Art: On Thursday 17th December two students, Poppy Veale and Paula McElroy were winners in the Junior School Amnesty International Art competition. Special thanks go to their teacher Ms Binks for all her help and support.

Simon Community Food Appeal: DGS Student Council thanked all those who generously contributed food to this year's annual food appeal.

Virtual Assembly: Friday 18th December, DGS Christmas Assembly was held virtually in the school. The Student Council, PTA, and the Home Economics (HE) Department awarded several prizes to students. The Student Council raised over €1,200 for two charities, The Mark Pollock Trust and the Louth LSPCA. A cheque for €2021 was sent to the Mark Pollock Trust after a donation from the Board of Governors. Mr Mark Pollock made a short video thanking the Student Council for raising the money via its annual non-uniform day on Tuesday 15th December.

Virtual Christmas Cake Competition: Also, on Friday 18th December, the HE Department awarded prizes to Sophie Malone, Holly Hughes, and Lauren MacMahon. A very special word of thanks to award-winning chef Neven Maguire, who cheered on our students from his base, Mac Nean House in Co. Cavan. He very generously donated a signed copy of one of his many cookbooks 'Home Economics for Life' as well as a signed apron for the deserving

winners. Neven sent all the students a message of congratulations and emphasised the importance of the life skill of Home Economics in his heartwarming and encouraging video.

PTA: The PTA Christmas Hamper draw also took place during the virtual school assembly in conjunction with the Student Council. They also promoted the sale of the PTA 'Taste the Difference' Cookery Book.

On Thursday 6th May the PTA held an Anti-bullying talk at 7pm via Zoom. Mr Colm Canning from the National Anti-Bullying Research Centre in DCU gave a very informative talk which was well received by those in attendance.

Virtual Carol Service: On Monday 21st December DGS posted a pre-recorded Carol Service. It has been viewed over 400 times. Special thanks to all those who participated but especially Mr Ian Moore, the school Chaplain, for producing the video.

DGS Green Flag Monday 21st December: The Green Schools Group held a small ceremony to celebrate receiving two donations from An Taisce. The first was two Young Irish Sapling Trees for planting in the school grounds. The second was a cheque of €200 for investing in a green facility of their choice in the school. The Green Schools Group has increased to 36 members, which also comprises of the busy TY YSI Group who have been raising the issue of recycling and composting. The Green Schools Group has made great strides in a short period to push the Green message back on the agenda, and to re-awaken the consciousness of all at DGS to the protection of the environment.

TY Soccer Competition: On Tuesday 8th December medals and a trophy were presented to VIERI XI Team captained by Yadah Usoh. Each Wednesday over 50 TY boys and girls had been taking part in a 7-a-side soccer tournament. VIERI XI are the autumn winners. It was planned that this tournament will continue in the winter term. Special thanks to Mr David Symmons for organising and running the event.

TY Hockey: HM congratulated the 24 TY students who successfully completed their TY Young Leaders Hockey Course. HM thanked all those involved as well as the PE Department, Ms Nicola Clements, Mr Jonny Gregg and Mr Andrew Shekleton.

Reopening of school: On Thursday 7th January, it was announced that the proposed return to school for 6th Yr students would be postponed until January 31st. It had been agreed that LC students would return 3 day per week. However, due to the increased number of Covid-19 cases in the country, this was delayed.

DGS Distance Learning Protocols: Following input from staff, students and parents, the school produced a Distance Learning Protocols document to support staff and students with engagement on distance learning.

Wellness: Wednesday 10th February 2021 'Apart but Together': 'On Wednesday the 10th of February students and staff closed their books, opened their minds, and looked after their wellbeing together in a series of Form Class events.' It was to be a day away from on-line learning and a day to reconnect with their form class and form teacher. Each Form Class took on challenges to accumulate as many points as possible and compete for the star prize of a pizza party. Participation rates amongst the students was very high. For example, activities included:

5km Run, Steps Challenge, Alphabet challenge, Create or recite a limerick, Form Class Jerusalema Dance,

Snowman challenge, (it snowed thankfully), Photograph challenge, Form class photograph collage, Create and complete a homemade obstacle course, Lip Sync to a song, Ms O'Reilly's Riverdance Challenge, Staff baby photos.

A brilliant day was had by all with some memorable snowmen, form class pictures and lip sync challenges. The staff also recorded a Teacher Sea Shanty – *Soon May the Covid Go* written and produced by Jonathan Farrar and edited with the help of Ian Moore.

Return to school - phased basis: 6th Year students returned to school on Monday 1st March and are back to their normal timetabled classes. Attendance was high. 5th Year Students due to return on Monday the 15th March with all years due to start on Monday 12th April 2021, HSE and DES notwithstanding.

On-line T&L: Staff continue to provide a very high standard of T&L on-line with some opting to teach directly from school. Mr Charles Treadwell, Chairperson of the Board of Management, expressed his gratitude and thanks to all teachers particularly as they move from home to school regularly. Ms Odharnait O'Reilly was complimentary of the school's ICT infrastructure and the CPD received by teachers.

Accredited / LC 2021: HM, DP and Guidance Counsellor successfully hosted a 6th Year Parent/Guardian Information Evening on Tuesday 2nd March 2021 - PowerPoint presentation slides. (held via Zoom) Essentially students can opt for both, i.e. Accredited Grades, the Traditional LC, or a combination of both. This added a lot of extra work for teachers on top of their normal timetables, reporting and assessment.

DGS A Safe Return to School Protocols – updates: HM highlighted changes made - cloth face coverings, visors, ventilation and CO2 monitors, reconnecting, and wellbeing. An updated version of DGS A Safe Return to School Protocols is available on the school website as all students returned to school on 12th April.

The Student Council Virtual Talent Show Video is now available on the school website. HM thanked the student Council – Ashik Prasad, Isabelle Janssen and Max McCaldin and all the teachers involved in the judging.

Sports Day: On Tuesday 4th May and Wednesday 5th May 2021 DGS held a slimmed down version of its annual Sports day. It was a very positive event that promoted physical health and mental wellbeing. HM thanked the PE Department for organising and running the event

Valedictory Service: The 6th Yr Valedictory Service will be held on Friday 21st May 2021 as an outdoor event in accordance to HSE guidelines. It was very well received even though we did have some minor technical problems. An edited version was made available on the website. It was followed by a BBQ for the students.

The Organ Scholarship video and application process was launched for the academic year 2021/22. The application process was instigated, and two students were chosen as the first ever recipients.

Outdoor covering: It is hoped that the covered area in Gray Court will be completed over the summer with the PTA contributing €5,000 towards its installation after years of fund raising. HM thanked the PTA for all their efforts in this very worthwhile project. This is entering its final stages.

Boarding refurbishment: over the past number of years the boarding house is being upgraded. Firstly with new bathrooms, hallways and now a number of bedrooms. This worked continued, although scaled back because of Covid-19. During the school year the outside windows of the Louth Hospital repainted and repaired.

Maths Inspection Report: It was noted that the Department of Education final Maths Inspection Report was received, and the agreed response is outlined below:

The Board of Management wishes to acknowledge the instances of highly effective practices that were highlighted during the mathematics inspection on Thursday 12th March 2020.

The Board further recognises the exceptional quality of the teachers in their assessment to support learning in mathematics and in instilling an enjoyment of their subject.

The Board expressed their congratulations to the Maths Department for an outstanding report and expressed their gratitude for their effort and commitment to Mathematics in the school.

Accredited Grades process 2021 was completed by Thursday 3rd June when all the grades were submitted to the SEC.

Junior Cycle Assessment: The Junior Cycle process in DGS is a school-based assessments/ reporting will be given by the teachers based on previous results as well as class-based exams.

New Policies and changes: There were changes made to DGS's *Code of Behaviour* regarding the wearing of the correct footwear as well as several changes were made to the Antibullying Policy.

New Admissions Policy: HM informed the Board of Management that the Board of Governors have now ratified DGS's new Admissions Policy in accordance with the Admissions Act 2018 which came into force in 2020. A copy of the Admissions Policy and DGS Annual Admissions is available in the DGS website.

Child Protection and Safeguarding Statement Review: The Board of Management of Dundalk Grammar School held its annual review of the Child Protection and Safeguarding Statement 9th March 2021. The Board having reviewed the schools risk assessment and checklist under section 11 (8) of the *Child Protection Procedures for Child Protection for Primary and Post Primary Schools 2017* adopted without modification the reviewed Child Protection and Safeguarding Statement. A revised copy of the Child Safeguarding Statement will be displayed within the school and posted on DGS's website.

Proposed new Astroturf is scheduled to be completed by the end of October 2021.

***Headmasters Report
October 2021***