

## 2019 WINNER OF THE FRED O'CONNELL – NPC INNOVATION AWARD

### **Kilshanroe National School Parents' Association, Kilshanroe, Enfield, Co. Kildare with their project**

'To clarify the role and purpose of the Parents' Association to school staff, school children and to parents, to form a collective vision for the school, and utilise the Parents' Association to achieve that vision'

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#### **Purpose of the project:**

Participation rates within the Parents' Association were low, interest was waning and the Parents' Association was seen only as a fundraiser. The PA's impact on children's day to day education and development at school was minimal. The Parents' Association decided it was time to change things by clarifying the role and purpose of the Parents' Association, by forming a collective vision for the school and by using the PA to achieve that vision.

#### **Who needs to be involved?**

The Parents' Association Committee, parents, children and the Principal and school staff.

#### **How to implement in your school?**

Kilshanroe National School Parents' Association used a 3 phased approach when developing their project, with a further ongoing 4<sup>th</sup> phase, this could be followed by other Parents' Associations.

#### **Phase 1 – Information gathering & Communication:**

- Members of the Parents' Association attended NPC talks and information sessions. They learned about initiatives other PAs had undertaken, especially other NPC Innovation Award winners. They learned of the benefits to children, staff and parents of collaboration, learning communities and listening to children themselves.
- The PA surveyed teachers and children in the school, and parents, on what they wanted the PA to be and do.
- The PA improved communication, by communicating often, on a dedicated PA section on the app, Facebook page and appointed a member to manage 'PR'.
- Noticeboards were erected for further communication especially for those not comfortable using the App. During this time frame the PA listened to new members' ideas and gave them support to implement them.
- An information flier was issued showing all the PA committee members, their interests and contact details to allow parents to contact the members.

#### **Phase 2 – Analysing and addressing feedback**

- The main feedback from students was simply they wanted parents to be more involved in school, especially to play games with them, and support new games. There were also some academic suggestions.
- Parents overwhelmingly stated the role of the PA should not be just fundraising, but also supporting the whole school community's academic and non-academic objectives. The results were shared at the AGM.

- Parents also wanted the PA to do more parent community events. The main event was a Fun Day in June. For this event the children were surveyed as to what suggestions they would like to see in the Obstacle Course.

### Phase 3 – Outcomes

- A Parents' Association calendar was developed, to help parents plan more participation in PA and school activities. Events ranged from discos, to crafts, to baking etc.
- A Fun Day in June was organised.
- The PA contributed more to policy formation in the school. A parent initiated and is collaborating with the principal on an inclusion policy.
- Each year the PA produce an annual report of the PA's work throughout the previous year
- The PA along with the principal codified the purpose of the PA around four main themes:
  - Academic Support,
  - Health and Wellbeing,
  - Parents and Guardians Engagements, and
  - School Development Plan.

This put an overall shape and purpose to the role and purpose of the PA. It helped prioritise and explain activities to children, staff and parents. For example, it clarified why so much was being invested in the computer training programme. Children in secondary schools, who had received the computer training whilst in Kilshanroe NS, were asked how it helped them transition better into secondary school IT lessons. Through consultations the principal aligned the computer programme more with the national digital strategy for primary schools, and introduced more modern aspects i.e. coding.

The PA Developed a Health and Wellbeing programme and in 2018 the school collaborated to achieve the \* Amber Flag Award.

- The PA sourced and supported a local yoga teacher do yoga in the school.
- The PA sponsored an Emotional Intelligence workshop for 6<sup>th</sup> class. This theme will develop as the PA learns what works and what is needed for parents, teachers and children. The parent's enthusiasm has to be matched with the practical implementation by staff in the school. Essentially the principal's main ask was for the PA to support the teachers to teach. For example the PA suggested more outdoor games and gym equipment. The teachers wanted more social play and support with teachers initiatives. From this arose the literacy programme. The children are given reading targets bespoke to their ability and age. The parents are informed of the targets and can log onto a software programme to see their children's progress, and support reading at home, asking questions on the books etc.

\*The Amber Flag is a mental health initiative designed to help schools and clubs promote positive mental health within the educational system.

The three main goals for the Amber Flag are :

1. To promote mental health and well-being for all.
2. Preventing mental health problems through increased awareness, social support, reducing risk factors such as racism, bullying and isolation.
3. Improve the quality of life for students with mental health problems by promoting recovery through awareness and education.

- A teacher in the school formed a garden committee to design a garden plan. The PA formed a sub group of parents to advise and help construct the children's garden. Local community grants were availed of. This garden can be used by everyone in the local community. Local landscapers are being asked to give talks on plants, and involve the children in showing the community what they have achieved.
- Through surveys and engaging parents and children, the PA outlined some development aspirations to the board of management. A local parent produced outline plans for various schemes requested by parents, from an internal remodelling project to form a resource area, to community walkway, to an all-weather pitch, to a school hall. Some of these project may never materialise. But by forming the vision of what may be, the PA can focus the imagination and passion of the board and parents. By having plans in place the PA are best placed to avail of grants and investment if it arises. In 2018 the PA got a community grant for a community walkway around the school. There were extensive discussions with the principal, Chair of the Board, parents, teachers and children on the design and material of the walkway. It is funded by the grant, PA and the school board. The PA has scheduled all the NPC training sessions for 2020, and are inviting local primary schools to these sessions.

**Phase 4 - Ongoing phase:**

The PA will continue to work in partnership with the board, teachers, children and parents in building a school community.

The PA are discussing a plan to become involved in the NPC Partnership Schools Ireland initiative in the school.

The PA have commenced a process to review their constitution.

All initiatives will be aligned with the four main themes of the PA. The PA believe the health and wellbeing of children (and staff and parents) will become a major theme over the coming years.

**Elements of the project which could be replicated in other schools:**

- Survey template and concept, as a practical way to listen to children, school staff and parents
- Annual calendar is a practical way for PA committees to focus and plan their activities over the year, communicate to the wider school community.
- Articulating the role and purpose of the PA in a set of common objectives to prioritise the PAs activities. Setting an annual budget and plan based on these core objectives which is agreed at the AGM and sense checked throughout the year.
- A collective development plan, driven by the board & staff, parents, community and children
- Parent driven approach to generating policies i.e. a practical example of collaboration with the school principal.