

**Niamh O'Dowd**  
**FCJ Secondary School, Bunclody**  
**News - 3<sup>rd</sup> Place**

## **Tea for Thought**

*6<sup>th</sup> Year Tea Room Turns up Trumps, Despite Facing Major Challenges*

**E**xam stress and CAO forms definitely have not stopped the sixth year students at FCJ Secondary School in Bunclody. Despite the increased workload and fast approaching exams, these young adults have created a wonderful facility for everyone in their close-knit year group to enjoy. This novel amenity is, in fact, a tea room.

'Ha!' I hear you scoff, 'Anybody could set out a few cups and saucers'. Perhaps, but the Tea Committee at FCJ ran into a couple of much greater challenges. Mark Curran, chairperson of the committee outlined some of these issues to me. 'First of all,' he explained, 'we actually had to attain a room in which to run the tea room. We approached a number of teachers before Ms. Larkin very kindly offered us the use of her classroom.' However, a room alone was not enough. Basic electrical appliances had to be bought, and therefore money was needed. The students tackled this issue head on and within a few weeks a raffle was organised, tickets were sold, hampers were won, and essentially, kettles, toasters and microwaves were obtained.

The tea room currently opens three days a week during the lunch hour. There are countless benefits linked to the project. To begin with, the tea room offers Leaving Cert students a sanctuary where they can relax and switch off. The tea room also encourages shy and introverted students to socialise and mingle with their peer group. These days, soggy sandwiches and deflated packets of crisps are distant memories. The current trend setters are none other than a crispy cheese toasty, a fresh, aromatic vegetable soup and of course not forgetting a delicious bag of butter popcorn. Senior Prefect Laura Kehoe (18) spoke to me about the tea room and asserted that, 'having the facilities to make a wholesome and hot meal at lunchtime has unquestionably improved my diet. Consequently my concentration and energy levels have soared!'. This happy, healthy environment undeniably nurtures positive mental health within students.

Running a tea room presents a host of challenges. However, the fruits of the students' toil have made it all worthwhile. The founders of the tea room have shown awe inspiring persistence and determination. The tea room offers a welcoming sense of community and is a huge asset for the sixth year students at FCJ.

The school in question, FCJ, is currently undergoing a series of extensions which will provide the school with four extra classrooms. Perhaps the new space could give younger year groups the chance to run their own tea rooms. Transition Year student Katie Harris

(16) commented, 'I feel that this initiative should be implemented right across the school, from first to sixth year. You would not believe the difference a cup of tea can make to your day.' I also approached Vice Principal Brendan Daly on the subject. He agreed that while 'the tea room runs in accordance with the school's Healthy Eating and Positive Mental Health policies,' he 'had concerns regarding the safety of junior students in relation to electrical appliances and boiling water.'

Perhaps tea rooms are the way forward for secondary school students in Ireland. These cosy little hubs may very well hold the key to the physical and mental health of our teenagers. Who knows, but it is certainly Tea for Thought.

### **Judges Citation:**

A good story is about something the audience decides is interesting or important. A great story often does both by using storytelling to make important news interesting.

By taking a colourful and descriptive approach to an otherwise ordinary event, this author brings the subject matter to life, culminating in an article that both informs and entertains.

For her engaging report on the opening of a school tea room, the third place award in the news category goes to Niamh O'Dowd, FCJ Secondary School, Bunclody