

RATHMORE



June
2021

ALUMNI AND FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

*We are standing on
the shoulders of the
ones who came
before us...*

In September 2009,
33 years after she was first
appointed as a newly
qualified teacher,
Mrs Thérèse Hamilton made
history as she was
appointed the first 'lay
principal' of Rathmore.

Building upon the strong
foundations of her
predecessors, especially
Sister Ursula Canavan and
Sister Joan Lynam, who led
the school during her own
time as a teacher, Mrs
Hamilton assumed
responsibility for carrying
on their legacy to inspire the
school and live out its
Mission.

Mrs Hamilton will be best
remembered for her love
and care for the pupils,
especially the particular
affection she held for the
Year 8 pupils.



*We are stronger for their courage and
wiser for their words...*

Inside this issue

Principal's Retirement

Future Focused

Past Pupil Virtual Choir

NHS Heroes

Wellbeing in Sport



FAREWELL

As the saying goes, "If you love what you are doing, you will never work a day in your life." Mrs Hamilton, who announced her intention to retire last year but agreed at the request of the Board of Governors to continue as principal for an additional year to guide the school through the pandemic, certainly loved every minute of her role. She will be remembered as a principal whose passion for learning was second only to her commitment to pupil and staff wellbeing.

Mrs Hamilton put the needs of pupils before everything else. She could be found early in the morning greeting pupils as they arrived and every afternoon, come hail, rain or snow, supervising the pupils at the crossing to ensure they got home safely.

Regardless of how many demands were made on the principal's time, she made a point of being around the school and always available to the pupils. Whether serving cookies in the canteen at break and lunch or supervising in the library after school to ensure every pupil had a space to study, Mrs Hamilton was relentless in guaranteeing that our pupils had every opportunity to succeed.

It is fitting, therefore, in the first issue of our Alumni and Friends newsletter that it should be the voices and questions of the youngest members in our Rathmore community who met with the principal during the last weeks of term.



A CONVERSATION WITH THE PRINCIPAL BY YEAR 8 PUPILS

Mrs Hamilton can always be found looking after the Year 8 pupils at lunchtime. They get to know her so well and enjoy the conversations all about the school and what awaits them in the years ahead. There could be no better joy than allowing our Year 8 pupils to enjoy a full chat about their school and their principal. What is published here is their recollection of the conversation.

What will you miss most about Rathmore?

"I will miss the pupils who are the life of the school. I will also miss the rhythm of the school - the feeling of coming back on a Monday morning and getting back into the rhythm of school life. In general, I'll miss the excitement and energy of the school."

Our pupils presented a hand-crafted book filled with selected writings and quotations from some of Mrs Hamilton's favourite books.

The pupils illustrated and scribed with tremendous care and exquisite artistry to produce the most wonderful keepsake that will forever remind Mrs Hamilton of the influence and lasting impression she has made on the minds and attitudes of the young people in her care.



Who was your idol and biggest inspiration?

"I have no single idol or one biggest inspiration but over my life I have had many inspirations like my family, especially my mother and father. Father John McAlonan was my teaching inspiration and Eamon Hamill, he was VP at one point, but also younger teachers showing me new things and who are excellent for their age."

Who and what has influenced you most in life?

"My biggest influence in life would be my mother. As you get older you realise that more. My mother was a very strict lady but yet a kind and generous one too. She would have always wanted you to be honest and that was very important to her."

What encouraged and inspired you to become principal?

"It kind of happened because I was VP, and I was happy with that position and would be forever because I could help the school and teach at the same time but when the opportunity came around, I took it because I thought I could change things.

So I was never encouraged or inspired, it just happened."

What was it like when you first started as principal of Rathmore?

"At first it was terrifying. I remember when the former principal left in July and I took control of the office. At first I refused to sit in the chair, because it felt uncomfortable and unusual for me. It was a strange feeling being in control of the school, and when things went wrong you had to take responsibility for them. However, after a while I settled into the school and now I enjoy it."



A group of past teachers together on a staff outing. Some recognisable faces including Mrs Colette Flanagan (RE), Mrs Hamilton (Principal), Mr Eamon Hamill (VP) and Mr Terry Donaghy (VP).

What is your greatest gift?

"I would say I tend to see the most in people. To see the best part in people. I tend to be able to understand people well and how they grow and develop."

What are your favourite moments from your career?

There are lots of magical moments from the school such as: school trips, Trócaire campaigns and mainly just seeing my students be successful and happy. I enjoy seeing my less academic students achieve high grades. I am also proud of times when our pupils were showcasing our school. For example, one time we went and won a debate at Stormont led by Mrs McCullagh. These are some of my proudest moments."



Mrs Hamilton presenting the inaugural '*Thérèse Hamilton Award for Outstanding Reader*' to Joe Logan in Year 8.

In recognition of Mrs Hamilton's love for reading and her efforts to inspire and pass on a passion for reading to our pupils, this annual award will recognise one exceptional Year 8 pupil who has made a significant commitment to reading.

What qualities do you think you need in a good leader?

"In a good leader I think you need to be a good people person and understand how people grow and develop and that people may have off days. You need a vision and you need to have your mind set on what you want for your school."

What's your favourite thing about being principal?

"I enjoy being able to use my position to make a difference and to be able to shoulder some of the weight and lift some of the pressure from staff. I also enjoy being able to help the students and the staff. I enjoy changing the school for the better and that students come to me for any advice or queries."

What do you hope for the future of Rathmore?

"I suppose my hope for the school is to continue to uphold its expectations, help its pupils and meet their needs and that the curriculum always improves and gets better to help our pupils be prepared for the future. I hope that students are encouraged to do what they enjoy and want to do with their life. Not simply to study or do tests for the sake of it but for pupils themselves to want to improve and to succeed."

What will you miss when you leave?

"Everything. I will miss everything about our school. I'm very lucky that I've had this job and I will really miss it when I leave. When it comes to Upper Sixth and you have to choose what you want to do, I recommend that you choose something you love. If you do something you love then you will work hard at it. I will miss the school. I don't really like to think about leaving. I will like having some more time to do things but I normally just put my head down and work hard so I don't need to think about leaving. I will miss it."

What things are you hoping to do in your retirement?

"I would just love to have time. Time to do more things. I would love to go to New York. I love New York City. I would love to go there for maybe about a month or six weeks and rent a Brown stone house. I love Brown stone houses, I think I must have seen them in a movie when I was younger or something. New York has something for everyone! So I would have a great time there. But basically, just time. I will love having more time to do things!"

Thank you to our enthusiastic Year 8 pupils who spent time in conversation with Mrs Hamilton.

**Eileen O'Doherty, Jamie Flynn, Joe Logan,
Seagh McEwan and Olivia Morgan.**

A MESSAGE FROM OUR GOVERNORS

On behalf of the Board of Governors I would like to express our profound gratitude to Mrs Hamilton for her leadership of Rathmore since she became principal in 2009 and for her years of devoted service since she started teaching here in 1976.

Irrespective of the innumerable daily challenges she faced, the students were always her first interest and their welfare was of paramount importance to her. The American educationalist Booker T Washington once said that "excellence is to do a common thing in an uncommon way" and Mrs Hamilton excelled as principal, working with a quiet, calm efficiency and with kindness. The school has thrived under her guidance.

Mrs Hamilton was due to retire last year but, true to her calling, she remained in post to guide Rathmore through the Covid pandemic. She did so without persuasion or complaint but simply out of her sense of duty. It has been a most difficult time for everyone but the school could have been in no better hands and I am truly grateful to her for this.

The future of Rathmore is bright. It will go from strength to strength and will continue to provide a first class and enriching education for its students. It will do this in no small measure as a result of the foundations built by Mrs Hamilton.

We wish her a much deserved, happy and fulfilling retirement.

**Mr John Morrissey,
Chairperson of the Board of
Governors**

FUTURE FOCUSED

Appointed as Bursar to Rathmore in 2018
Donna Magee, a past pupil, has led the school
to develop an ambitious development strategy
to ensure the school is future-ready and best
positioned to ensure every pupil can reach their
full potential.

Over the past year we have had to adapt to a very different way of working and school life experience. It has been a challenging period but it also presented us with an opportunity to reflect on just how unpredictable the future might be.

With our vision “that they may have life and live it to the full” always central to our plans we wanted to put in place a foundation for our priorities over the next five years, not only to outline how we plan to grow our teaching and learning ambitions, but also to show how we will maximise our resources and networks in a whole-school way to optimise the individual potential of every child.

Our Development Strategy has pupil impact as the centre of its focus. We will consolidate key achievements in the last few years but also go further in challenging ourselves to invest in a wider strategic approach that considers whole-school operations and recognises how important agility, flexibility and a strong technology infrastructure are as we plan for the future.

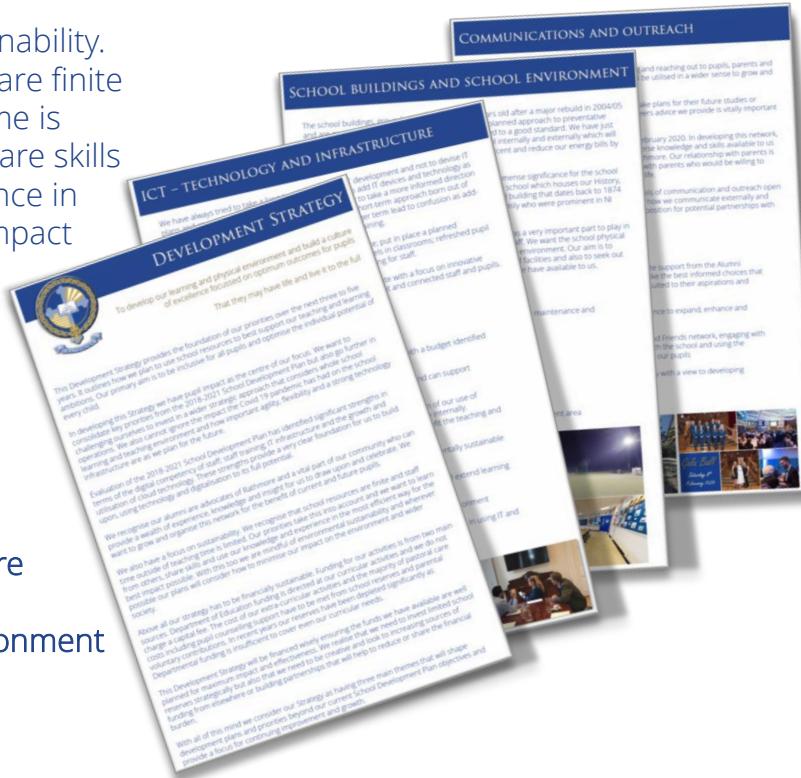
We have made significant strides in terms of the digital competency of staff; staff training; IT infrastructure and the growth and utilisation of cloud technology. We will use these strengths to provide a very clear foundation to build upon.

We recognise our alumni and friends are advocates of Rathmore and a vital part of our community who can provide a wealth of experience, knowledge and insight for us to draw upon and celebrate. We will grow and organise this network for the benefit of current and future pupils.

We must also have a focus on sustainability. We recognise that school resources are finite and staff time outside of teaching time is limited. We will learn from others, share skills and use our knowledge and experience in the most efficient way for the best impact possible.

Our Strategy has three main themes that will shape development plans and priorities –

- ICT – technology and infrastructure
 - School buildings and school environment
 - Communications and outreach



We look forward to updating you as our plan progresses.

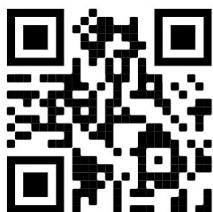
VIRTUAL CHOIR



A Clare Benediction –
Virtual Choir



Carol Service



The nostalgia of carol services, school Masses and opportunities to sing in the choir marked out the rhythm of school life and evokes strong memories.

As the school sought creative ways to celebrate our liturgies, the most recent carol service presented an opportune moment to create a virtual choir of pupils and staff.

It was fitting that, given the restrictions on choral music at the time of the principal's farewell Mass, so many of our Alumni would take up the invitation from Mrs Agnew to form a virtual choir and sing A Clare Benediction in her honour.

The ensemble of current and past pupils, together with staff, created a perfect moment during the Mass, that brought together generations of our community in a fitting tribute to the principal.

NHS Tribute

Many past pupils and Alumni have chosen a vocation in which they care and look after those in our community. At home and abroad, past pupils from Rathmore have made significant contributions to the field of healthcare. It was fitting, in our last assembly of the year, that we could pay tribute to all of our past pupils and Alumni who care for those in need.

Our whole school community is indebted to all the efforts and sacrifices that all key workers and especially those in healthcare and the NHS do to protect us and care for our loved ones in the community. We hope that through this small tribute the next generation will continue to be inspired by your care and commitment to those in need.



*View our NHS Tribute
again by scanning this QR
code with your smart phone*

WELLBEING IN SPORT

Rathmore's focus on pupil and staff health and wellbeing over recent years has continued to shape the school's planning during the recent pandemic.

Following on from the very successful whole-school 'Wellbeing Walks' initiative, launched online during the most recent lockdown, the PE department were keen to lead the school body in getting active upon our return to school after the Easter holidays.

The good weather helped sustain organised lunchtime activities for each year group and the reintroduction of after-school activities.

As an alternative to Sports Day each year group enjoyed a series of interclass competitions and blitzes in football, gaelic, netball, basketball and rounders.

This was a tremendous effort from the PE department to organise so many purposeful and fun activities and our pupils really enjoyed the chance to socialise with their class and year group during the afternoons dedicated to getting active.

The pupils were able to benefit fully from the enhanced facilities that enable such a vibrant programme of fitness and enrichment including our 4G pitch, the sand-based and grass pitches and our tennis and basketball courts.

We look forward to our pupils being able to use our newly refurbished state-of-the-art fitness suite again.

The investment of over £35,000, funded by Sport NI and the school, will continue to ensure that our senior athletes and sports students can avail of the very best of facilities to enhance their success and continue to foster the excellent opportunities for elite success in sport at Rathmore.

