

12TH ANNUAL

BLACKBOARD AWARDS 2024

Scoth na Scoile

LIGHTING AN EDUCATIONAL FIRE

Guest Speaker: Professor Daniel Muijs

Head of the School of Social Sciences,
Educational and Social Work

Guest of Honour: Ryan Murphy, Lord Mayor of Belfast

PREMIER PARTNER



QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST

Riddel Hall,
Queen's University,
Belfast



EVENT PARTNERS



St Mary's
University College
Belfast
A College of Queen's University

The 2024 Blackboard Awards

Teachers, pupils worse-off than peers in these islands

The annual Blackboard Awards gala has been told teachers here are paid less than their counterparts across these islands.

And to make matters worse the investment per pupil in the North also lags behind the expenditure in the Republic of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England.

Professor Daniel Muijs spelt out the stark reality of educational budgets in an address to teachers from all sectors at the awards ceremony in Riddel Hall, Queen's University Belfast, on Friday past.

And he said the key element mitigating the impact of underfunding was the excellence of our teaching staff.

"Both as a former teacher myself and through the vital work of this university, I know the transformative power education can have on children and the profound impact a great teacher can have on a child's life," said Prof Muijs.

"Since moving here, I have been impressed by the quality of teachers and leaders in schools in Belfast and beyond," added the Belgium native. "International studies show that NI performs as well or better than England, Wales, Scotland or (Republic of) Ireland. This is actually quite surprising as funding per pupil is significantly lower than in those comparator countries, our curriculum is average, our society suffers from high levels of poverty and disadvantage, not to mention intergenerational trauma, and educational policymaking can be hard when half the time there isn't a government to make policy in the first place. So why do we do so well? All the data I have looked at shows one clear answer: It is the quality of our teachers and leaders."

Prof Muijs, Head of the School of Social Sciences, Educational and Social Work, renewed calls by Queen's for additional funding by the Executive for education. "While we do, of course, welcome the return of

the Executive and having ministers to oversee the Education and Higher Education portfolios, we recognise that there are still many unanswered questions and uncertainty for schools not only across Belfast but right across Northern Ireland/the North of Ireland. The biggest issue we face, of course, is funding. We have made it clear, in no uncertain terms, that it is crucial that the Executive makes a meaningful investment in children and young people and their education now, today, to reap the long-term benefits in future. We simply cannot afford not to."

"Both as a former teacher myself and through the vital work of this university, I know the transformative power education can have on children and the profound impact a great teacher can have on a child's life."

– Prof Muijs

28 teachers were recognised at the Blackboard Awards for their standout commitment to excellence in education. You can see a full list of the 2024 honourees and view photos from the gala presentation evening in our supplement this week.

Sponsors of the 2024 Blackboard Awards were led by Queen's University Belfast and included H&J Martin builders, Flynn construction, Newington Housing Association and St Mary's University College.



AWARDEES: With sponsor Aidan Flynn of Flynn & Sons are Fiona McKinley of Hazelwood Integrated College, Maria Collins of St Oliver Plunkett Primary School., Sean Kavanagh of St Bernard's Primary School and Siobhan Loughran of Wellington College



TEAMWORK: Award-winner Niall Gribbon from Our Lady Queen of Peace with colleagues

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We're flying high with George Best Airport

Initiative ties in with sponsor's commitment

George Best Belfast City Airport is proud to be one of the event partners for this year's awards which align with the airport's commitment to the development of young people, schools and teachers across the Belfast area.

Michelle Hatfield, Belfast City Airport's Director of Corporate Services, said George Best Belfast City Airport was delighted once more to be partnering with Belfast Media for this year's Blackboard Awards, to take the opportunity to showcase and celebrate what the best of the city's teachers have to offer.

George Best Belfast City Airport have a strong commitment to helping young people realise their potential and support their development through the IGNITE programme which launched in 2019.

Michelle said: "IGNITE launched in 2019 and its aim is to change the lives of 100 young people, aged 16 to 18, over a five year period. The programme provides participants with opportunities to enhance their personal skills, establish networks and business connections, and

empowers them to pursue their dreams.

"Students who complete the programme also benefit from achieving an NLP Diploma in Personal and Career Development.

"Throughout the year-long programme of events, which concludes with a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Los Angeles, IGNITE partners with youth organisations, foundations, charities, and businesses in the private sector in addition to recognised names in the field of sports, film and politics.

"Driven by Belfast City Airport's commitment to supporting the development of young people, schools, and teachers across Belfast and North Down, IGNITE is the only business-to-arts initiative of its kind in Northern Ireland and its meaningful impact is evident.

"Its vision of creating prosperity for its community through its support and advocacy of education has resulted in a ripple effect of positive social impact, with a plethora of schools actively participating throughout the duration of the programme.

"We are delighted to be partnering with Belfast Media Group to help celebrate those who are at the forefront of helping to develop our young people and their futures."



AWARDS: Michelle Hatfield, Belfast City Airport's Director of Corporate Services, and Belfast Media's Joe McCann

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Queen's University premier partners for 2024 annual Blackboard Awards

Schools are the spine of a successful Belfast — and in no small part that is down to the unstinting commitment of our teachers to ensure that every pupil reaches his or her full potential. In the classrooms of Belfast, every child is a champion — and every teacher is a leader, encouraging each of their charges to set their sights ever-higher.

Dr Ryan Feeny, Vice-President Strategic Engagement and External Affairs at QUB, says the university is delighted to be hosting this year's awards.

"Queen's University is delighted to be partnering with Belfast Media on the Blackboard Awards again this year – taking the opportunity to showcase and celebrate what the very best teachers in Belfast have to offer," he said.

"Supporting these awards highlights Queen's commitment to recognising the truly invaluable contributions of teachers, demonstrating our dedication to shaping a better world by recognising those who help us do it.

"Most of the students that pass through our doors are the result of incredible support and guidance from their teachers, so we are grateful to be a part of the Blackboard Awards here in Belfast."

As a former teacher himself, Ryan knows all

too well how important the work of teachers is. "As a former teacher, I know the transformative power education can have on children and the profound impact a great teacher can have on a child's life," he added.

"As a university with its own incredible teaching staff, we know teachers are not just educators; they also mentor and inspire young minds, encouraging young people to reach their full potential and consider paths they may not have before.

"At Queen's, we are proud to link closely with local schools and support teachers in any way we can.

"With the uncertainty of our political instability, and looming education funding cuts, it is more important than ever that we take time out to acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of our teachers.

"We need to be clear about the important role teachers play in helping foster a knowledgeable and compassionate society, enriching the lives of children across this city and beyond."

Ryan would like to extend his thanks and congratulations to all teachers nominated and shortlisted. "To be recognised among your peers as being the top in your field is no mean feat and we, as a university, are delighted to be part of these valuable awards that



PARTNERS: Dr Ryan Feeny from Queen's University Belfast and Conor McParland from Belfast Media recognise your work. "Your dedication to your pupils and passion for education are truly inspiring and your work is changing lives. Best of luck to all the nominees and we look forward to celebrating with you on the night."

The 2024 Blackboard Award Winners



Joanne Darragh

Subject or Primary school year: Principal

Your place of birth: Belfast

Studied at: Stranmillis University College, Belfast

First job: Sales

What it taught me: The importance of good communication.

Family/status: Married, Mum of two boys, aged 13 and 9.

Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: I would advise anyone thinking of a career in teaching that there will be good days, bad days and some overwhelming days, but it can also be extremely rewarding. I would encourage them to always remember that it can take just one single teacher to turn a child's life around. There may be days that some children will look forward to coming to school because you are their teacher. Spend time building a relationship with your pupils, you can achieve so much more once you have done so.

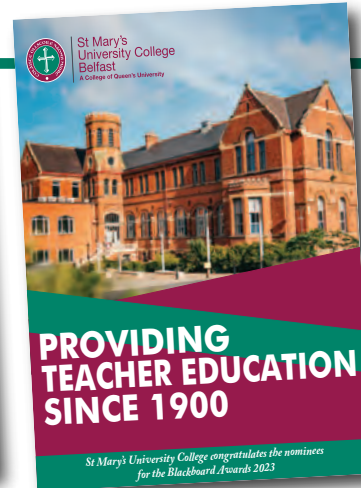
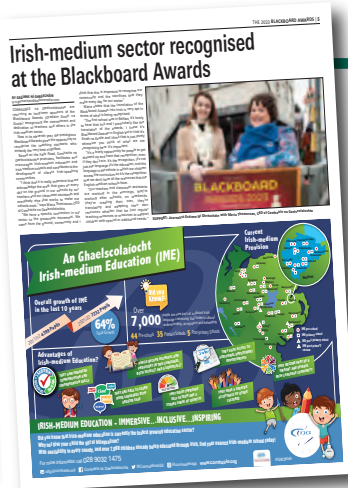
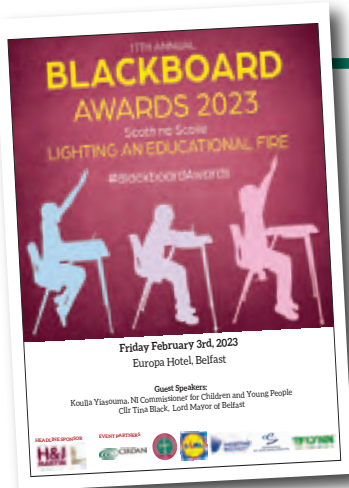


I know it is a cliché, but teaching will forever be one of the great loves of my life! I am passionate about education and making a difference in the lives of children. I have had a lifelong love of working with children. As a young Girl Guide, I assisted in our church creche and from then on, I knew I would work with children in some capacity.

Whilst at Belfast High School I completed my work experience in the primary school I attended. I was placed with my own P7 teacher, to say I adored this lady is an understatement. She was a bright and vibrant teacher and a true inspiration to me. This lady made my final year at primary school and work experience memorable. From 2000, I attended Stranmillis University College, graduating with a Bachelor of Education in 2004.

My teaching career includes a six-month period in Whiteabbey Primary School, seventeen years in Earlview Primary School and for the last two years I have been Principal of Lowwood Primary School & Nursery Unit. No two days in education are ever the same and I look forward to what the future holds.

<https://www.lowwoodprimary.co.uk/>



View this supplement online at <https://belfastmedia.com/events/blackboard-awards>

belfastmedia.com

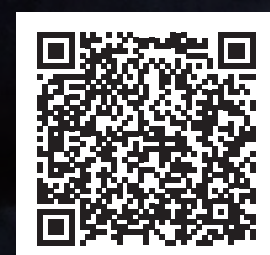


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PROGRAMME**

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Widening participation makes a difference

The 2024 Blackboard Award Winners

Sean Kavanagh

Subject or primary school year: Primary.

Your place of birth: Belfast.

Studied at: Queen's University Belfast and Liverpool Hope.

First job: Off-licence sales assistant

What it taught me: The world is difficult, everyone is fighting their own battle, so just be kind to each other.

Family/status: Married with two children.

Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: I would highly recommend a career in teaching. If you are interested in teaching, get as much experience working with young people before applying. Every day is different, every day is challenging, there will be highs and there will be lows. Most of all you will have a great sense of pride and achievement, knowing that you have had a positive impact on the lives of the young people in your care.

I have been working in St Bernard's PS and NU Glengormley since 2008. I have had many different roles, Year 6 and 7 teacher, Numeracy and ICT Coordinator, Designated Teacher for Child Protection, Vice Principal and now Acting Principal. In my role, I am responsible for leading the school community in the implementation of our shared vision for St Bernard's PS and NU. Our children are at the heart of everything we do. Through hard work and dedication we have collectively created a unique culture in



St Bernard's, focusing on respect, reflection, equality and excellence.

We have a holistic approach to each child's development and we provide a child-centred, nurturing, inclusive learning environment. Rather than viewing the recent school budget cuts as a restraint, we have used it as an opportunity to innovate and find new creative ways to provide the best opportunities for our children. This year we have introduced a self-funded Nurture Group, The Nest, to meet the wellbeing needs of our children. The first term has been extremely successful and now as we enter term 2 we have further developed the Nurture provision to ensure more children can benefit from this provision.

www.stbernardspsglengormley.com

Siobhán Loughran

Subject or primary school year: Biology/Science.

Your place of birth: Belfast.

Studied at: QUB.

First job: Video rental store.

What it taught me: Self-reliance and initiative as a solo worker on a late shift.

Family/status: Married with children.

Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: Continually assess the impact of workload. Advances in both education and technology mean that what could potentially be achieved has grown exponentially, while our capacity both physically and emotionally as human beings has limits. Simply do your best, your pupils will recognise it and can ask no more. Maximise learning through practical work where possible – no-one likes to be lectured to and thankfully science is the art of discovery. Release your inner nerd – genuine enthusiasm is both obvious and contagious.

I obtained my BSc Hons in Biological Sciences from QUB in 2011 and graduated with a PGCE in 2012. I have been fortunate enough to have been teaching Science and Biology to A-Level since then and am passionate about promoting the uptake of STEM subjects and addressing gender inequalities in this field. Science education delivered through subject specialists ensures that pupils leave school equipped with the critical thinking



skills and capabilities to allow them to engage meaningfully as workers, researchers and global citizens. As such, it is essential that teaching remains an attractive option for our best and brightest and that the current recruitment issues are addressed.

www.wellingtoncollegebelfast.org



Pamela Allen

Subject or primary school year: Business Studies.

Your place of birth: Northern Ireland.

Studied at: Stranmillis University College.

First job: Teacher at Wellington College.

What it taught me: The fast pace of teaching when delivering a full timetable.

Family/status: Married.

Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: Engage in a range of experiences working with children to see if you wish to pursue a career in this area. In the classroom, be welcoming and encouraging to students. Be passionate about lessons, set high expectations and be consistent. Enjoy what you do – teaching is an adventure that will provide you with many challenges and great rewards.

Having taught for over 20 years, I have developed a passion for education. As a Business Studies teacher and business enthusiast, I love imparting my knowledge to students and pride myself on being a highly organised leader and teacher. I aim to create an ethos of aspiration and high achievement and I see the importance of inspiring students to develop their skills and qualities. As a Head of Department for over 15 years, I have overseen the running of the department and seek to drive improvement in all areas of my work. Through my role as Careers Assistant, I enjoy supporting students as they embark on their own career journey. I am committed to



providing opportunities beyond the classroom for students and encourage them to engage in such experiences. In addition, I enjoy liaising with stakeholders to forge links and improve my professional competency. Aside from spending time with family, sport and music are my main interests and I can be frequently spotted at the side of a pitch or on a golf course. I am equally happy when singing.

Stephen Baine

Subject or primary school year: School Principal.

Your place of birth: Belfast.

Studied at: St. Mary's College of Education Belfast.

First job: Part-time bar staff, Belfast Empire.

What it taught me: The importance of team and shared purpose.

Family/status: Married.

Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: Do not underestimate the responsibility that you have been given. You must embrace, cherish and invest in this responsibility. To be trusted to care for, nurture and guide young people for any period of time is a privilege and honour. The great teachers who invested in me when I was young helped, alongside my parents, to shape me into the person I am today. Do your utmost to help children demonstrate the very best version of themselves – it will be worth it.

I have been the Principal of St Colman's PS, Lambeg since 2016. I have the honour of leading a wonderfully committed and dynamic staff team in supporting nearly 400 children. Our children are mannerly, hard-working and have bags of character, which we love. Our school is proud of the warm, embracing ethos and very strong sense of family. Something happens each day that fills me with pride.

I graduated in 1996 with a degree in Physical Education from St Mary's College and worked as a teacher in Holy Trinity PS, Good Shepherd PS and



St. Joseph's PS, Carryduff. I became a VP in 2007 in St Malachy's PS before becoming Principal of St Brigid's PS, Brocagh in 2010. I have enjoyed every posting I have had and learned so much from them all. I remember children from every

class I have taken and many of the adventures we had. I am very humbled to receive this Blackboard nomination and owe it to the children and staff who have helped, guided and supported me. I thank them most sincerely.

www.stcolmanslambeg.com





Damian O'Neill

Subject or primary school year: Key Stage 2.
Your place of birth: Omagh Co. Tyrone.
Studied at: St. Mary's University College.
First job: Part-time storeman in the Co-Op in Omagh.
What it taught me: The importance of treating people in a respectful manner and the value of working as a team.
Family/status: Married with three children.
Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: Teaching is a wonderful vocation but you need to know that is right for you, so building up a range of experiences in school settings is therefore essential. Very soon you will experience both the joy and the demands of the role and be assured that you are on the correct pathway to a career in teaching.



I began working in Holy Child PS in Andersonstown immediately after finishing college and despite being from Omagh I have spent my entire career working in schools across the West Belfast and Colin areas. I was appointed as Principal of Good Shepherd P.S. in 2015 where I am now surrounded by a wonderful team of dedicated people who make every effort to ensure that our children receive the best educational experience possible. I really enjoy the atmosphere created in and around the school and the children feed off this positivity every day. I also love that our children engage in so many other aspects of school life, particularly sport and music, as they are passions of mine which I was fortunate to develop throughout my own educational journey.

I still enjoy music and have occasionally shared a song with the children at assemblies. I still try to kick a football around weekly – but only because teachers and coaches invested in me many years ago when I was very young. I feel deeply privileged to lead the staff of TGood Shepherd P.S. where the commitment to doing the best for our children is evident in the words and actions of staff, parents and governors alike. It really is a truly inspirational place to work.

www.thegoodshepherdps.com

Michael Magee

Subject or primary school year: Vice Principal/P7 teacher.
Your place of birth: Belfast.
Studied at: Stranmillis College Belfast.
First job: Retail.
What it taught me: The importance of developing strong relationships and communication skills.
Family/status: In a relationship. Two children: Eoin (6) and Aodhán (9 months).
Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: The main priority when you have your own class is to form strong relationships with the children, find out what makes

them tick and build your learning from there. If the children trust you then they will work for you. Don't forget to have fun, though, because kids deserve an excited adult who is able to teach them in fun and interesting ways. Be prepared to teach differently, think outside the box and enjoy yourself. The children might not always remember what you taught them, but they will always remember how you made them feel.

I studied History and Politics in Queen's before moving on to complete my teaching degree in Stranmillis College. From there, I moved to England where I taught P5 and P7 for three years before moving back home. I taught in Bloomfield Primary School (Bangor) for seven years before taking up my current Vice Principal post in Cavehill Primary School this year while teaching P7. I have been extremely fortunate to have worked alongside so many amazing teachers, classroom assistants and staff in all my schools who have helped me develop as both a teacher and a person. It has been... interesting, to say the least, being involved in teaching over the past 15 years, so it is exciting to see what the next 15 has in store!



www.cavehillps.co.uk



St Bernard's Primary School and Nursery Unit

Congratulates
Sean Kavanagh
 and all the 2024
 Blackboard
 Award Winners



St Bernard's Primary School
 and Nursery Unit
 Elmfield Road
 Newtownabbey,
 Glengormley BT36 6DW

Tel: 028 9084 4634



THE GOOD SHEPHERD PRIMARY SCHOOL

9 Good Shepherd Road, Poleglass



Well done to our Principal
 Damian O'Neill on his
 nomination for a
 Blackboard Award

"The Good Shepherd Primary School now has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interests of all learners."
 Education & Training Inspectorate Team, June 2022

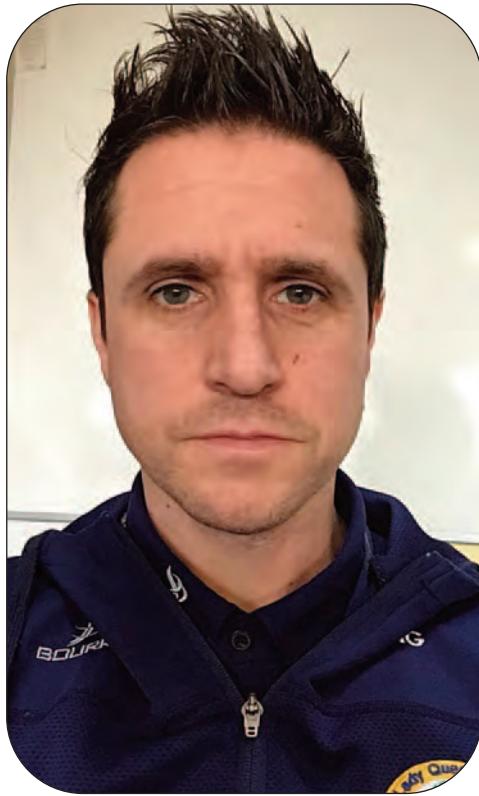


The 2024 Blackboard Award Winners

Niall Gribbin

Subject or primary school year: Primary 7.
Your place of birth: Belfast.
Studied at: QUB (PGCE at CPTT).
First job: Paper boy.
What it taught me: Life is going to be hard!
Family/status: Married happily to Jenny with three kids.
Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career:

A very rewarding job but think carefully before deciding to train. Despite what most non-teachers think, it can be challenging. Teaching isn't just about 'teaching'. As we all know, it involves so much more.



education: Are the children safe? Are the children happy? Are the children learning? So long as I can put my hand on my heart at the end of day knowing that I've stood by these three questions I can leave happy.

I have been extremely lucky as a teacher. Since qualifying, I've never been without work and now I teach happily in my local school. I live and work in the parish, so I do carry a lot of pride in what I do. Each day I try to remember three rules that I've always had whilst working in

Gerard Doak

Subject or primary school year: Primary 7.
Your place of birth: Belfast.
Studied at: St Mary's University College Belfast.
First job: Cleaner.
What it taught me: Perseverance and attention to detail.
Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: I would say to anyone thinking of a teaching career to go for it! It is the most rewarding job in the world. Helping children achieve their goals, whether it be academically, socially or emotionally, is beyond rewarding. Be patient and be kind.

I have to thank my amazing teachers at St Aidan's Primary School (now John Paul II Primary) in West Belfast for inspiring and encouraging me towards a path into teaching. I am fortunate to have amazing parents who guided and helped me along the way. I studied at St Mary's University College in Belfast as well as Cumbria for my teaching degree. From then I have been fortunate to teach in many schools in and around Belfast. I have taught P1 to P7, whether that be in specialist provision, mainstream or EAL classes. What I take from that experience is that each child has their own journey and path to go on and it is my job to help guide and nurture them towards their goals. I am currently working with an



amazing group of people at Belvoir Park Primary School who provide a fun and interactive learning experience for all the children. I'm excited to see where my career takes me in the years ahead.

www.belvoirparkps.co.uk

Michael McGuigan

Subject or primary school year: Technology and Design.
Your place of birth: Craigavon.
Studied at: St. Mary's University College Belfast.
First job: St. Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh.
What it taught me: Don't take it personally.
Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: "Fail early, fail often, but always fail forward." (John C. Maxwell.) Do not be afraid to make mistakes, own your mistakes and ask for help. Even the most experienced teachers make mistakes and need help.

I am a Technology and Design teacher. I am a Year 13 form tutor, and I am the joint Head of Technology and Design in St Louise's Comprehensive College, Belfast. I aspire to become an effective leader for my colleagues and, most importantly, my students. I want to provide my students with the best possible chance of achieving their full potential. I am a keen sportsman, having played hurling and Gaelic football from a young age.

However, it has been through triathlon that I have realised my potential, having completed my first Ironman distance triathlon in Copenhagen in 2022 in a time of 10:42:19. I am currently completing a Master's in Education Leadership through Queen's University Belfast. I have a passion for what I do, and I work to share that passion with young people, whether it be through coaching sports teams in school, at my local club, St Mary's Granemore, or teaching in the classroom.

<https://www.stlouises.org.uk>



www.stlouises.org.uk



The Board of Governors, Principal, Staff, Students and Parents of St Louise's Comprehensive College wish to congratulate our Honouree
Michael McGuigan

Flynn Construction build on experience

A POLEGLASS-based company is delighted to return as Event Partner for the Blackboard Awards.

Flynn Construction have supported the awards for the past seven years and once again backed our educational heroes at the prestigious ceremony.

The awards were hosted at Queen's University's beautiful Riddel Hall with a gala dinner on Friday 1 March, when we recognised the teaching heroes who embody the very best of Belfast and change hundreds of young lives each year. Based in Springbank Industrial Estate, Flynn Construction was founded in 1974 and have established themselves as the leading building and maintenance business in the UK and Ireland.

As main contractors, they have delivered quality new-build and refurbishment projects in the health, education, housing, hospitality, commercial and retail sectors.

The family-run business is celebrating 50 years this year after being founded by Maurice Flynn. It is now headed up by his son Aidan who is the current Managing

Director.

"Schools are a big part in the work that we do. Children are at the core of why we do it," explained Aidan. "We maintain over 500 nursery, primary and secondary schools across the North.

"We have sponsored the Blackboard Awards for several years now because of the special needs sector. I think the children and the teachers are the most special in the community but they aren't given the recognition that they should be.

"I also have a disabled niece and I understand how vital her school and teachers are in her day-to-day life.

"In my opinion, teachers are the unsung heroes. The challenges they have to face every day, especially in the special needs sector, are huge. Credit where credit is due.

"It is all about giving something back and the Blackboard Awards is one way of doing that."

Aidan has a simple message for everyone nominated for this year's awards.

"Everybody is a winner at the Blackboard Awards. To be recognised is fantastic, congratulations to everyone," he added.



BLACKBOARD AWARDS: Aidan Flynn (Managing Director Flynn Construction) with Conor McParland from Belfast Media



FLYNN has proudly supported our brilliant local educators for more than 50 years. In 2022 we gratefully received the CEF Excellence in Partnering Award for our work in schools.

With the help of teachers and staff, we'll continue to create engaging environments which promote meaningful learning experiences.

The Blackboard Awards allow us an opportunity to show our appreciation of the commitment, courage and compassion of local teaching staff as we continue to build a better future for our children.



Saunders House, Springbank Industrial Estate, 2 Springbank Road, Belfast BT17 0QL
T: 028 9030 3800 – E: business@mauriceflynn.com – www.mauriceflynn.com



The 2024 Blackboard Award Winners



Meryl Spiers

Subject or primary school year: Classroom Assistant Year 12.
Your place of birth: Belfast.
Studied at: Lisnasharragh High/Castlereagh College.
First job: Lisnasharragh PS.
What it taught me: That I was capable of more than I thought.
Family/status: Married with two children.
Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: If you are thinking of becoming a classroom assistant and think, I could never do that, just go for it, be yourself and establish a good relationship with your child/young person. You will be of more value than you will ever know.

I started with Brooke when she was in P3 at Lisnasharragh PS. This was my first job as a CA, although I had been known to the school as both a parent and as a Volunteer Reading Partner for many years. I fully got into the way of the school and soon built up a good relationship with Brooke. This continued throughout primary school and her mum asked if I could follow on into Ashfield with her. Going to a high school I knew would be different, but Ashfield made it happen and I am so glad I came with Brooke. I have watched her grow as a young person and she has worked so hard. We have an excellent relationship and I know I support her in so many ways, not just academically. I am proud to be her classroom assistant and proud of myself for 'giving it a go' all those years ago.



www.ashfieldgirls.org



Fiona Johnston

Subject or primary school year: P1 teaching assistant.
Your place of birth: Belfast.
Studied at: St. Rose's High School.
First job: Broomhall Day Care.
What it taught me: How much I enjoy working with children.
Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: It is a very rewarding job, some days can be difficult but when you see how much the children grow and learn in their environment and you are part of that it makes the hard days worth it.

I have lived in Clonard, West Belfast most of my life. I always knew I wanted to work with children from an early age. I left school at 17 and went on to further education, completing NVQs to give me the qualifications needed. I worked in various day cares over the years before coming to Holy Rosary Primary School. I am currently working with the Primary 1 children and have done the past four years. I have a great interest in reading and love to travel. I also enjoy spending time with my nieces and nephews and other family and friends.



holyroarypsbelfast.com



Dearbhla Farrelly

Subject or primary school year: Primary 3.
Your place of birth: Belfast.
Studied at: St Mary's University College.
First job: Glen Parent Youth Club.
What it taught me: Working in the youth club taught me how to work with children and young adults effectively and it gave me the perfect platform in preparation for a career in teaching.
Family/status: Single.
Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: With every job you have good days and bad days and ultimately you have a unique opportunity to have a significant impact in the lives of many. Whilst the journey is very challenging and you have to overcome a lot of obstacles on the way, the satisfaction that you experience playing a role in the development of the future generation is so worthwhile and rewarding.

I studied at St. Mary's University College and I have always had a passion for working with children since my first job as a youth worker. Outside of work, I have a keen interest in Gaelic football and have captained my local club Patrick Sarsfield's for the past couple of years. I also coach a couple of the younger teams at the club and think it is amazing how the sport has evolved, and young girls now have the same opportunities as boys, which I never experienced as a young player.



www.eani.org.uk/

belfastmedia.com

Congratulates

our 2024 Blackboard Award Winners

Newington Housing backing this year's awards

Schools play positive role in our local communities

Based in North Belfast, Newington Housing Association is much more than just a housing provider.

Newington currently manages 720 homes within North Belfast and have delivered in excess of 350 additional new homes since 2014, but tenant participation, community engagement and community investment are really important to the organisation.

As part of this commitment, Newington Housing Association was delighted to sponsor the 'Community Impact Award' at this year's Blackboard Awards.

Chief Executive Anthony Kerr said it was a "real privilege" to be involved.

"Although we are a Housing Association, we are also a community organisation who are working in partnership with others to improve the quality of life and create

opportunities for the people in the communities where we work," he said.

"In my experience schools and teachers can have such a positive impact in creating thriving and vibrant communities.

"The work of teachers is hugely important and they have the opportunity to help guide and mentor our young people and enable children to fulfil their potential.

"Teachers, like most public sector workers are underpaid and work in a sector that is underfunded. I know personally the amount of additional hours teachers will work each week without pay and that demonstrates their commitment to their profession and the kids that they teach.

"These awards recognise how important schools and teachers are in the lives of individuals and the wider community.

"On behalf of Newington Housing Association, I would like to thank all our teachers and schools for the fantastic work they do and congratulate and wish good luck to all the teachers who have been nominated for awards," he added.



RECOGNITION: Anthony Kerr (Chief Executive of Newington Housing Association) with Conor McParland (Belfast Media) and Danielle O'Neill (Newington Housing Association)

Newington
Housing Association

NEWINGTON HOUSING ASSOCIATION BACK THIS YEAR'S BLACKBOARD AWARDS

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Big Enough to Deliver
& Small Enough to Care



The 2024 Blackboard Award Winners

Maria Collins

Subject or primary school year: Primary 3.

Your place of birth: Belfast.

Studied at: Edge Hill University.

First job: St Oliver Plunkett Primary School.

What it taught me: How every day in teaching is different. All children are unique and learn in different ways, at their own pace. The importance of relationship between teacher and pupil, and creating a safe, positive and stimulating learning environment.

Family/status: Single.

Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: Being a teacher is the most rewarding journey. We have a unique opportunity that allows us inspire and empower the minds of our communities young children. We look to create a positive learning environment which will give them a space where they can feel confident and comfortable to learn. I believe that every child has the ability to do amazing things, to become the best version of themselves and as a teacher I aim to motivate all children to recognise their self-worth and full potential.

We need to encourage them to see the world in all of its flaws and inspire them to be a catalyst of change. Becoming a teacher involves patience, creativity, a nurturing nature and a genuine passion for promoting a real love for learning. Over time I have learned that my role goes beyond just the academic side. We play a crucial role in nurturing the social, emotional and physical development of each individual child to build the foundations for life-long learning. Each pupil is unique, they will have their preferred learning styles, so be creative. Tailor your approach and encourage your pupils to interact by bringing the curriculum to life. Allow children to explore, experiment and take a leading role in their learning. Provide a holistic environment that excites and engages children of all backgrounds and abilities.



Be a reflective practitioner, continuously assessing your practice to make improvements and raise standards. One thing that I have learned is don't be afraid to ask for help. Teaching is a collaborative approach, so build effective relationships with your colleagues and parents to provide a supportive network that will enable each of you to make every day in educating and nurturing children count. Teaching is not just a profession, it is a vocation.

Throughout my adult life I have always had a passion for working with children. As a teenager I worked in child care before moving into the education sector as a nursery school classroom assistant which confirmed for me my aspirations of becoming a teacher. I enrolled at St Mary's University College where I attained a Bachelors in Business Studies before pursuing my passion with a PGCE in Early Years from Liverpool Edge Hill.

After becoming a qualified teacher, I have been lucky enough to work as a teacher for the amazing St Oliver Plunkett Primary School from January 2020. Over this time, I have had the opportunity to gain experience teaching P1, P2, P3 and P7, which I feel has benefited me in my approach and view of each school level. The staff have both supported and believed in me, helping to widen my skillset and continue to develop each year from a confidence aspect as well as the technical side. I have loved my career to this point and feel rewarded each day. I am looking forward to continuing on this path to have a meaningful impact on the education and life of each pupil.

www.stoliverplunkettprimary.org/



Deborah O'Rawe

Subject or primary school year: Head of Science.

Your place of birth: Belfast.

Studied at: Queen's University Belfast.

First job: Floor staff at the Bot.

What it taught me: The importance of a smile and good communication.

Family/status: Engaged – getting married to Rory in June.

Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: Be the best you can because every day is different. Be kind and supportive to all pupils and colleagues and have high expectations. Our young people are the future, and it is important to support them individually to achieve their best.

From a young age, I always wanted to be part of the teaching profession. I went to St Louise's Comprehensive College and I did work experience at some local primary schools, and from this I knew teaching was for me. I have an enthusiasm for Science, especially Physics, so my route was influenced by this. After graduating with a degree in Physics, I went on to gain my PGCE in Science, both from QUB, and I went into teaching in 2005. My first teaching post was a temporary role at Little Flower Girls' School and in 2006 I secured a permanent position at Corpus Christi College (which amalgamated to form All Saints College in 2019) where I have been happily working ever since.

I currently have responsibility of Head of Science and have previously been an Exams Officer. Our school is an amazing place to work; from my first day being introduced to all the staff I knew this was where I wanted to spend my teaching career. We are a family, and we work together to ensure our wide and diverse range of students achieve their best. Our students inspire me daily to be the best possible teacher and person that I can be. Outside of school, I love spending



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Congratulations to
DEBORAH O'RAWE
who has been
nominated for a
Blackboard Award.
From all at
All Saints College



time with my fiancé, two future stepsons, the two dogs, Bailey and Ruadh, and our families. I enjoy spending time cooking, trialling new recipes and getting very honest opinions back.

www.allsaintscollege.co.uk

Alison Guilar

I am a classroom assistant at Sacred Heart Primary School. I am very enthusiastic and proud of my school community, and I have worked there since 2011. My journey has been fuelled by a profound passion for aiding children, particularly those navigating the spectrum of autism. I work alongside a wonderful team in the Autism Specialist Classroom, drawing from my personal experience of supporting my own son, who faced challenges with autism during his school years.

In my role, I have a firm commitment to providing children, especially those with autism, with scaffolded support, encouragement, nurture, love, and diverse opportunities for growth. Beyond my work commitments, I find solace and joy in the simple pleasures of reading, watching crime shows and spending quality time with my cherished family. Family holds a special place in my heart, and I am greatly influenced by my own experiences, the good and the not so good and the journey of understanding and embracing differences.

Throughout my life, I have taken

immense satisfaction in witnessing the growth and progress of children with autism. My work extends beyond the classroom, fostering understanding and happiness within families, as they navigate the unique challenges and joys of supporting children with autism. I have a real dedication and passion for each and every little child with I work with and can only hope I leave a lasting impact on them. If they remember how much they were cared for and valued then I consider that a job well done.



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Congratulations to

Alison Guilar

on her nomination for this year's Blackboard Awards



St. Oliver Plunkett Primary congratulates **Miss Collins** and all the Blackboard Award Winners.



Contact us on 02890 806777

or info@stoliveryplunkettbelfast.ni.sch.uk



The 2024 Blackboard Award Winners



Fiona McKinley

Subject or primary school year: AEN Department.
Your place of birth: Co. Antrim.
Studied at: Queen's University.
First job: My uncle's newsagents in Ballycastle, age 15.
What it taught me: Good mental maths skill was essential so as not to keep the customers waiting.
Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: When considering a job in education, remember each student has their own little story and you get to play a part in the next chapter. I think that's pretty special.



When I think back to being a student myself, I often recall the positive relationships I had with my teachers and I do believe this influenced my career path into education. I am fortunate to surround myself every day with the most amazing students at Hazelwood Integrated College in the role of Learning Mentor for Year 8 and Year 11. On a daily basis, I line-manage a fantastic bunch of classroom assistants and I also lead interventions, supporting students academically and emotionally throughout their Hazelwood journey.

Why do I do it? Because I love it and can't imagine being anywhere else, to be honest. Each morning, I put on a pair of my favourite heels, have my daily to-do list at the ready, intending to smash the day ahead. Does it always go to plan? No, but that's half the fun! Every child seeks something different and I'm privileged to be able to offer what they need.

I'm very proud of the work that the AEN team do to ensure the needs of our students are met, but most importantly, so students feel safe, valued and part of the Hazelwood community.

www.hazelwoodcollege.co.uk



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Blackboard Awards fit in perfectly with H&J Martin's business ethos

(Right) Kieron Millar, MD of H&J Martin, with Anthony Neeson, Belfast Media Group, ahead of the Blackboard Awards

Schools vital to staffing needs, says firm's boss

H&J Martin has been synonymous with the Belfast construction trade for over 150 years.

Looking around the city, the firm has built many of our landmark buildings including Belfast City Hall and the Grand Opera House, as well as Dublin's famous Arnott's department store. Recently the company's fit-out side of the business also completed a multi-million pound contract at Harrods in London.

And H&J Martin came on board for the Blackboard Awards when we recognised our teaching heroes who are changing hundreds of young lives for the better every year and who are using their own unique skills to forge a brighter future for our young people throughout the city.

On Friday March 1 we hosted a gala dinner and awards night at Queen's University's stunning Riddel Hall as a special recognition to those who work tirelessly within our schools.

H&J Martin have 270 employees, of which 138 are tradespeople. The firm is based on the Sydenham Road in Belfast, with offices in Portadown, Blanchardstown in Dublin, Livingston in Scotland and a significant workshop in Cookstown. Kieron Millar, MD of H&J Martin, was present on the fit in perfectly with the company's ethos.

"We have continual resourcing needs to bring apprenticeships in and pivotal to that is schools and the teachers at the schools who enable those kids to eventually come through and work for us," he said.

"We work on a lot of Trust projects and have been awarded the Lot 3 Western Region of Northern Ireland

Pan Government Management Framework contract – which we are currently recruiting for – which is for all government buildings in the west side of Northern Ireland. Our fit-out business is primarily retail. We have worked with Harrods, Waterstones and H&M. That side of the business is more fit-out in terms of refurbishment or new builds for retail clients. We recently completed a project in Harrods in Knightsbridge on the third floor, which was a £2.5million project."

"We have continual resourcing needs to bring apprenticeships in and pivotal to that is schools and the teachers at the schools who enable those kids to eventually come through and work for us."

Regarding its association with the Blackboard Awards, Kieron added: "Obviously from a corporate, social responsibility element it is important, but also I came up through an apprenticeship route. I finished school, did my apprenticeship, and then did my exams etcetera. But it does genuinely start in those later school years when people decide what they want to do as a career and I feel quite strongly about it because that's the path that I took and that's why the teachers who are teaching the kids at that level are doing a great job and why I feel – and the business feels – it is important sponsoring the Blackboard Awards."







Facilities Management & Fit Out

 <p>About Us</p> <p>H&J Martin is one of UK & Ireland's longest established operating companies, having been trading for over 175 years. Operating in two main sectors, Facilities Management & Fit-Out, we have diversified, grown and developed in order to meet the ever evolving needs of our clients across the built environment with focus on sustainability, compliance and asset protection.</p>	 <p>Services</p> <p>H&J Martin are based in Belfast with offices in Dublin, Edinburgh, Magherafelt, Cookstown & Portadown.</p> <p>Our Services cross all trades and specialisms such as: Electrical, Build, Mechanical, HVAC, Fire & Security, Automation, Cleaning, Bespoke Joinery & Telecommunications.</p>	 <p>Collaboration</p> <p>With our continued focus on actively recruiting new apprentices and graduates into the Company, we launched H&J Martin Academy in 2023. The Academy allows us to expand our offerings of apprenticeships, graduate programmes and placement opportunities within H&J Martin.</p>
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MORE INFORMATION

 Managing Director
Kieron Millar

 028 9045 5531

 kieron.millar@hjmartin.co.uk

 Head of Sales
John McConnell

 028 9045 5531

 john.mcconnell@hjmartin.co.uk

The 2024 Blackboard Award Winners

Christopher Perry



Subject or primary school year: Year 4.
Your place of birth: Downpatrick.
Studied at: St Mary's University College Belfast.
First job: Labourer for Micwall Developments.
What it taught me: A sense of humour can get you through the cold and rainy days.
Family/status: In a relationship with my wonderful partner Anna and we have three beautiful daughters.
Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: Be open-minded and work to build sincere relationships. Children need to know that you are going to support them through every up and down on their educational journey. It's our responsibility to try to offer them the best possible opportunities and experiences to help them grow. Most importantly, smile! Sometimes all anyone is looking for is a friendly face.

After graduating from St Mary's University College, I was fortunate to have taught in some fantastic schools in the Downpatrick area. One major highlight from this time was working alongside teachers who had unknowingly inspired me to follow them on this career path. To develop my experience, I found myself in



West Belfast. Though the move seemed daunting, from the moment I stepped through the door of St Joseph's Slate Street, I felt at home. I have been teaching in St Joseph's for almost ten years now and am currently the school's ICT coordinator.

In my time here, I have encountered some of the most hardworking and dedicated staff who aim to provide our young people with the best opportunities to achieve their potential. I will forever be grateful to all families that have made me feel welcome and that have allowed me help guide their children on this stage of their educational journey.

www.stjosephsslatestreet.co.uk

Amara Jawaid



Subject or primary school year: GCSE RE Islam.
Your place of birth: Pakistan.
Studied at: Karachi University, Pakistan.
First job: Product Development Assistant.
What it taught me: Team working and importance of communication.
Family/status: Married with two children.
Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: Be the person you want to be, but with dedication, passion and knowledge.

I have a rather unconventional non-teaching background with a Bachelors in Home Economics and a Masters Degree in Clothing/Textile Design in Pakistan. Living in NI since 2007, I noticed a significant lack of teaching facilities available for pupils wishing to take GCSE RE (Islam) which the vast majority of schools don't even teach. I am working in a voluntary capacity in NIMFA, providing those services for over seven years.

Part of the role is to coordinate with schools to discuss subject choices with their RE staff and the examination requirements. Pupils attend from a diverse background and from a range of schools from all over NI to attend their weekend classes. The unique composition of my cohorts over the years enables healthy and active discussion within the class, given their cultural and personal life experiences. Teaching such a diverse class is rather satisfying and rewarding and I always look forward to it.

Students receive personalised feedback and one-on-one support after each internal assessment so they know their strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to achieve very high scores with over 50% of the class consistently getting 100% marks over the years, which is really remarkable given the theoretical nature of the subject.



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The 2024 Blackboard Award Winners

Ciar Nic Giolla Cheara

Subject or primary school year: Primary 4/5.

Your place of birth: Belfast.

Studied at: Queen's and St Mary's University College.

First job: Classroom assistant at Gaelscoil na bhFál.

What it taught me: I went into the job of a classroom assistant with the aim of gaining experience before applying for my PGCE. My experience working as a one-on-one classroom assistant was so positive and rewarding and it paved the way for my teaching journey.

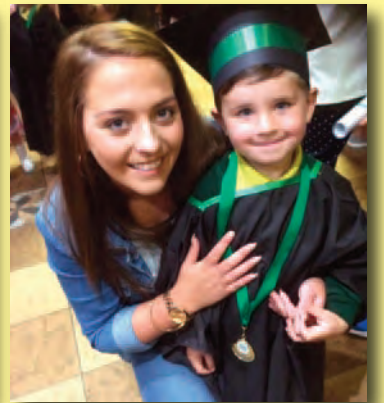
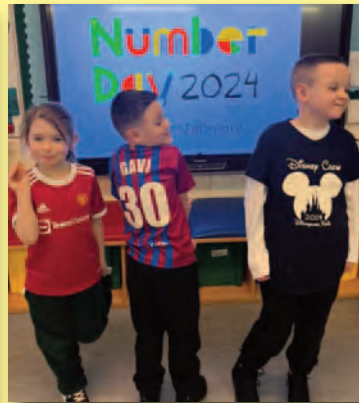
Family/status: Single.

Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career:

Be prepared, be reflective, adaptive and explore the different styles of teaching. Develop positive relationships with your students. Remember, you are the greatest resource in the classroom, never stop finding new ways to help every child reach their potential.

I was educated myself through Irish medium from primary school at Scoil na Fuisseoige and went on to St Dominic's where I decided early that I wanted to be a teacher. I completed my Irish degree at Queen's and then worked as a CA before going on to complete my PGCE at St Mary's University. For three years of my teaching career I was working in two schools, one job share as a class teacher at Gaelscoil na Móna and working with small groups or one-on-one with the Engage programme at Scoil na Fuisseoige. I have also had some subbing experience in other great schools. I have loved being full time in the classroom, this year at Gaelscoil na Móna and making it my own. I have undertaken the ICT Co-ordinator role for the year, which has been a great learning experience. I love being part of the whole school network between staff, pupils and parents and I am extremely grateful to be in this career, guiding children in their learning journey.

Gaelscoilnamona.com



Ba mhaith leis na páistí, na tuismitheoirí, an fhoireann agus na gobharnóirí comhghairdeas a dhéanamh le Ciar Nic Giolla Cheara as gradam Scoth na Scoile a bhuachaint.

Pupils, parents, staff & governors of Gaelscoil na Móna would like to congratulate

Ciar Nic Giolla Cheara

on receiving her Scoth na Scoile / Blackboard Award.

Gaelscoil na Móna is a vibrant and successful Irish Medium Primary School situated on the outskirts of Turf Lodge and has pupils from all parts of the city and beyond. Our small class sizes and high staff-pupil ratios attract parents and the high level of education attained here is excellent in all areas of the curriculum.

Pupils from Gaelscoil na Móna go on to Coláiste Feirste or the post-primary school or Grammar school of their choice.

Phone 02890-611588 or email info@gaelscoilnamona.belfast.ni.sch.uk
or gaelscoilnamona@gmail.com or visit our website www.gaelscoilnamona.com
or visit Gaelscoil na Móna Facebook page for all the latest events & photos.



The 2024 Blackboard Award Winners

Sonyia Carleton

Subject or primary school year: Nursery school.

Your place of birth: Belfast.

Studied at: Belfast Met.

First job: Childcare Coordinator (longest serving job).

What it taught me: That every child matters, every child has a voice, every child is unique. Parents are the primary advocates for their children. It's vital to actively listen to parents in order to gain the best insight on how to support a child's development.

Family/status: Two daughters.

Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: To think of it as a vocation and not simply a job. You'll never work a day in your life if you truly enjoy what you are doing.

Accomplished playwork and childcare professional with over 30 years' experience and proven ability to adopt to various settings and responsibilities who has achieved numerous qualifications and trainings. Strong passion for encouraging children to learn through play and to enhance children's confidence, self-esteem and self-worth. Continually learning through interactions with children and other childcare professionals. Working with children can be a challenging responsibility, but it's highly rewarding, which motivates me on a daily basis



St. Theresa's Nursery



Deirdre Nuttall

Subject or primary school year: Nursery.

Your place of birth: Belfast.

Studied at: College (Newtownards Road) NNEB Diploma.

First job: SEN Assistant (1 year).

What it taught me: Teamwork, to observe and learn from those with more experience, resilience and understanding that I had chosen the right career for me.

Family/status: Married, 2 children, Sarah 18 and Eoin 14.

Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: Follow your heart and give it your all! I believe that working with children is one of life's greatest privileges. It is both hard work and rewarding. Always be open minded to new ideas and training offered which will help you within your own role/job. Working in education is a journey within itself, especially with the ever-changing needs of the children in our care. Teamwork is so important, together as staff and team we can provide amazing teaching and learning opportunities for all the children that have been entrusted to us each and every year. Get down to the children's level and try to see the world through their eyes. By doing this we will be able to provide the endless learning opportunities they need every day.

that I wanted to work with children. I absolutely love my job and believe working with young children is such a rewarding and fulfilling vocation.

I love the fact that no two days are ever the same in nursery. You need to be always open minded and take time to listen to each other, both the adults we work with, but most importantly the children. Follow their lead, have fun, be present, you have to be able to give 100% of yourself.

Always be willing and ready to ask for help when you need it, that is what makes a great team. My own journey within St Maria Goretti NS has gone full circle as I now have the children of my past pupils in my class – yes, I know I'm getting old! To see these families returning year after year to us is amazing.

I am so lucky to be part of the best team ever. Four member of our staff came to us firstly as parents who then went back to college, joined us as students and are now members of staff. Our parents, community, parish and Board of Governors are so supportive and this helps us to do the best for our children. I have excepted my nomination on behalf of all the amazing nursery/classroom assistants I have worked with.

We all learn from and support each other so much. Most importantly, thank you to all the children that I have had the privilege to work with over the past 28 years, for all the wee smiling faces, laughter and joy that you bring to school in bucket loads every day.

I have been a Nursery Assistant in St Maria Goretti Nursery School for just over 28 years. I knew from a very young age



St Maria Goretti Nursery School

www.stmariagorettinursery.co.uk



Ciarán Ó Dochartaigh

Subject or primary school year: Teaching Irish to kids with additional/special educational/social/personnel needs, motor vehicle studies, occupational studies.

Your place of birth: Belfast.

Studied at: Ulster University Coleraine, St Mary's University College Belfast.

First job: Substitute teacher at Coláiste Feirste.

What it taught me: Ní bhíonn an rath, ach mar a mbíonn an smacht.

Family/status: Engaged with two beautiful daughters, Aida (5) and Radha (8 months).

Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: Ensure you are passionate about working with children and young people. Working in a school environment with young people is so rewarding and enriching and each day brings its own challenges.

You will experience highs and lows, good days and not so good days. But understand that a teaching career isn't just about



Coláiste Feirste

teaching a curriculum in a classroom. It's about building positive relationships with young people, taking time to learn about their interests, their worries, their loves, and also understanding the challenges they face in their lives. Finally, prioritise pupils' learning and be willing to go the extra mile in order to help them succeed inside and outside the classroom.

As a child I attended Bunscoil Phobal Feirste and to develop my interest in the Irish language I moved on to Coláiste Feirste, which was a really positive experience. I played Gaelic football and hurling for Pádraig Sairséil CLG and the school before moving to Coleraine University where I obtained a degree in Irish Language and Literature.

Following the successful completion of my PGCE at St Mary's, I obtained a teaching post in the Learning Support Unit in Coláiste Feirste where I have been teaching for this past nine years. Outside of teaching, I take many of the school Gaelic football sides and recently managed Laochra Loch Lao Senior Ladies' Footballers. I have also been coaching the Sarsfields Under-6 girls' footballers for this past two years.

I feel very fortunate to have received an enriching Irish medium educational experience and I am grateful to have the opportunity to work in such an enriching and thriving environment every day.

www.colaiستهirste.org





Jenny Lendrum

Role: Principal.
Your place of birth: Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.
Studied at: Queen's University Belfast.
First job: English teacher.
What it taught me: That I had chosen the right career and knew I would love it for the rest of my life.
Family/status: Married to Nick, mum to daughter Tilly.
Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: Teaching is an amazing job. To have the opportunity to make a difference to the lives of others is an absolute privilege but then to have your own life enriched by those around you makes it the best job in the world.



Following the completion of my A-Levels I went to Queen's University and completed an English degree followed by a PGCE in English. My first permanent job was in Foyle College where I taught for two years before being appointed to Grosvenor Grammar School. During my 11 years in Grosvenor I was afforded the opportunity to lead in various different positions, including Senior Teacher for six years.

During that time, I completed a Masters Degree in Education and the Professional Qualification for Headship (NI) qualification. This further professional development as well as my experience prepared me for my appointment to Vice Principal (Curriculum) in Antrim Grammar School in 2014. Three years later I became Principal of Antrim Grammar School and enjoyed leading the school for a further five years. In 2022 I was appointed as Principal of Methodist College Belfast.

I absolutely love my job and am thankful to all those who continue to inspire me in my leadership.
www.methody.org

Amanda Barr

Subject or Primary school year: English teacher
Your place of birth: West Belfast
Studied at: Queen's University, Belfast
First job: Supermarket
What it taught me: Positivity and kindness go a long way.
Family/status: Married. Proud mother of 4 - 2 daughters and 2 sons and recently became grandmother to Codhán.
Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: Never lose sight of the fact it is a privilege to work with young people and to be immersed in their lives. Be prepared to keep learning and to be inspired by your students.



Relationships are the foundation all that we do in education.

It was always my career aspiration to teach. Having qualified from Queen's University in 2000, I embarked upon a PGCE in English. At the beginning of my career, I worked in St Patrick's Banbridge, and took on the posts of Literacy Co-ordinator, Year Head and then Head of English.

In 2007 I moved to Malone College, Belfast and in 2011 was appointed Head of English in St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School, Glen Road, Belfast. In 2017 I was appointed as Learning Support Co-ordinator and took on a Senior Management role. As Learning Support Co-ordinator, I am privileged to lead a team committed to removing barriers, celebrating diversity and promoting inclusion.

This nomination recognises a large team of staff who advocate for our young men and who work tirelessly to enhance the life chances of our pupils. As SENCO, you are invited into the lives of young people and their families, and it is a humbling post which brings challenges and rewards. I thank those who have nominated me for trusting us in St Mary's Christian Brothers' Grammar School to do the very best by their son and for allowing us to be a part of their journey.

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The 2024 Blackboard Award Winners

Caoimhe Calpin

Subject or primary school year: Head of Foundation/ Key Stage One/ Language and Literacy/ P2 teacher.

Your place of birth: Donegal.

Studied at: NUI Galway/ University of Ulster Coleraine.

First job: A summer job as a childminder of five children under the age of 10.

What it taught me: Expect the unexpected! Working with five children age ranging from 0 to 9 taught me to perfect my skills of patience and negotiation. It showed me I really wanted to work with children in the future and was perfect preparation for this.

Family/status: Single.

Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: Try to remember those little incredible lightning moments of joy when you're having a challenging day. Make sure you have a good work/life balance and enjoy your downtime and hobbies. You are then able to bring the best version of yourself into the classroom, making a difference to the learners in front of you. Be adaptive and realise there is more than one pathway to your desired learning outcomes. The children in front of you determine the pathway you take. Always remember the holistic picture of the children

walking into your classroom every day, we don't always know what is going on outside school for them so choose to improve their day. Being involved in the education of future generations is an honour; the impact you can have is the greatest responsibility in teaching, but also the greatest gift.

I studied English, Geography, Sociology and Politics in NUI Galway and went on to pursue a PGCE at the University of Ulster Coleraine. I have been teaching for 14 years, I have been in St Teresa's Primary School for nine of those. There, I have been embraced by a wonderful school community and I am blessed to work alongside and learn from an incredible staff team and Principal. Over the past nine years I have been lucky enough to build a career and embrace a range of leadership roles within St Teresa's including Leader of Language and Literacy, Head of Foundation Stage, Head of Key Stage One and Leader of Staff Wellbeing. I have enjoyed being at the forefront of school development and have introduced a range of initiatives to enhance the already wonderful experience the children of St Teresa's PS have. This has only been possible through the support of a strong staff team and the guidance and coaching of a strong Principal and



senior leadership team. Despite the challenges in the education sector at present, I am constantly inspired and driven by the shared approach of all teachers to ensure children receive the best care and

education possible. I am inspired daily by the children of St Teresa's who represent our school and their families in such an incredible manner. They make me proud to be a part of our wonderful school community and I count myself lucky to spend my days with them. In my downtime I enjoy travelling, going to the gym, going out for a nice dinner with friends and family, and I have recently taken up kick boxing. Anyone who knows me, knows my favourite thing to do is to chill out with my little dog Brucey!

<https://stteresasprimary.org>



Andrea Fryers

Subject or primary school year: Drama.

Your place of birth: Belfast.

Studied at: Queen's University Belfast.

First job: St Gemma's High School.

What it taught me: The importance of valuing people as individuals and the importance of having good relationships with others, both pupils and staff.

Family/status: Married to John and mother of two sons, Corey and Caiden.

Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: I know it is an old cliché that teaching is not just a job but a vocation, however this is honestly the truth! It is the best job and every day is a new adventure. Teaching requires you to give your heart and soul but the rewards you get back are priceless. It is such a privilege working with young people. I absolutely love the pupils, they make every day so special.

My advice to a new teacher would be to spend

time showing the kids how much care and love them. Remember, just as you have a story and a history, so do they and they need us to be their safe place to come to when things aren't going well. And they need us to be their cheerleader when they achieve success.

I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. I was lucky to have great role models in my own teachers in Mercy College, because I now teach in the school I went to. There was one teacher in particular who showed me how being kind, caring and loving is as much a part of the job as other skills you learn in university. I was lucky enough to go on and work alongside her. I was a Mercy girl and now that I work here I feel I have 'come home'. That's what Mercy College is to me, a second home with my extended Mercy family.

I studied at QUB where I completed a BA Hons in Sociology and a PGCE and have been teaching ever since. It is definitely my calling in life, I love



my job and I love my school. As a Drama teacher I get so much satisfaction seeing the confidence of some pupils grow and nurturing the talent of those pupils destined for stardom.

The Drama department has a key role in the life of the school and I really enjoy hosting our Halloween Hullabaloo and our school shows. I work hard to make

school as much of a memorable place for our pupils as it was for me, so they leave feeling loved, respected and full of happy memories, knowing that they are a special individual who has a special place in my story. I don't think there is another job like teaching and getting to improve the lives of young people on a daily basis makes the more stressful times worthwhile.

<https://www.mercycollegebelfast.com>



Marie-Louise Boyle

Subject or primary school year: Nursery school.

Your place of birth: Belfast.

Studied at: St Mary's University Belfast

First job: St Francis de Sales Speech and Language Special School in Beechmount.

What it taught me: Working with children with additional learning needs is such a rewarding job; to help nurture the learning and meet the needs of these children where they are on their journey is a privilege.

Best advice you could give someone thinking of a teaching career: I think teaching is one of the most fulfilling careers anyone can do. To help foster the learning and help children on their journey to meet their potential is so special. To work in a job that you are happy to go in to every day is unique; each day you are learning, you get to witness something you have taught spark with a child, you get the laughter and smiles and sometimes the tears, but



each thing is such a privilege to share. Education opens the world to children, and to be part of children's educational journey is a blessing.

I have been lucky to have been educated in amazing educational settings in West Belfast. My amazing and supportive parents have always been great supporters of their children, all have the best educational opportunities that time and circumstance prevented them from availing of. I started in Holy Child Primary School before moving on to St Dominic's and then next door to St Mary's University.

From an early age I have always wanted to be a teacher and was lucky to have been taught and mentored by inspirational teachers in all the schools I attended. Once I graduated I worked in a number of schools across Belfast and in all of these jobs worked with supportive staff and leaders who always encouraged professional development and my career. I was appointed as the Principal of St Martin's Nursery School in 2016 and the people of Turf Lodge have welcomed me with open arms. It is such an honour to work within my own community and to help make a difference to these children's future.

www.stmartinsnurseryschoolbelfast.com



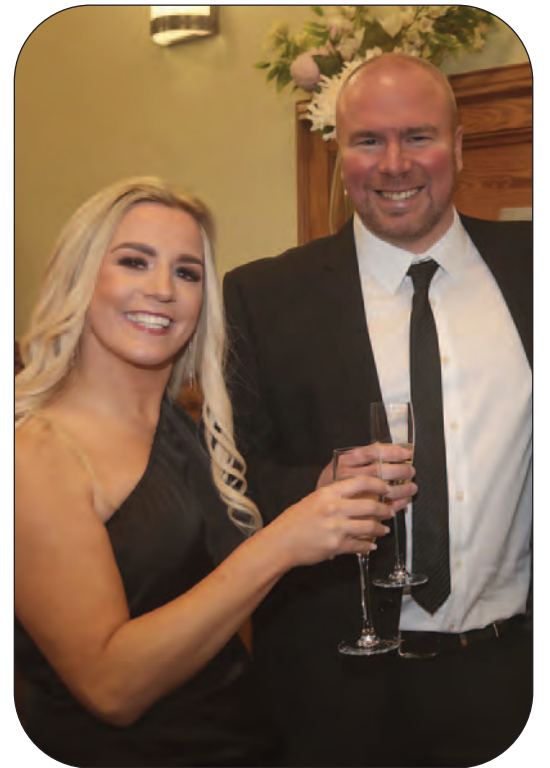
The 2024 Blackboard Awards Gallery



Mercy College



Siobhán Loughran and Darren Loughran



Andrea Fryers, John Lyttle (Mercy College)



Sonya Carleton, Joanne Carleton, Mairead Carleton



Gerard Dock (holding prop), Pamela Jones, Claire Baxter, Ellie Sterling and Nicola McCann



Anthony Kerr and Leanne Vincent



Fiona McKinley, Patricia Gallagher, Michaela McElroy



Joanne Darragh and Phil Massey



Lena Quigley, Alison Guilar, Maura Lyttle, Rebecca Morris (Sacred Heart)

The 2024 Blackboard Awards Gallery



Andrea Fryers, Gerard Dock, Dr Seán Mac Corraidh, Michael McGuigan and Ciara Nic Giolla Cheara



Gradam Scoth na Scoile Ollscoil Choláiste Mhuire: Ciarán Ó Dochartaigh (Coláiste Feirste) with Dr Seán Mac Corraidh (Ollscoil Choláiste Mhuire)



Amara Jawaid, Joanne Darragh, Deirdre Nuttall, Damian O'Neill and Anthony Kerr



Community Impact Award: Niall Gribbin (Our Lady Queen of Peace) and Anthony Kerr (NHA)



Chris Perry, Fiona Johnston, Sonya Carleton, Kieron Millar, Marie Louise Boyle and Amanda Barr



Pamela Allen (Building Future Leaders Award, Wellington College) and Kieron Millar (H&J Martin)

The 2024 Blackboard Awards Gallery



Principal of the Year: Jenny Lendrum (Methodist College) and Daniel Muijs (Queen's University)



Alison Guilar, Joanne Smyth, Kerri McDonnell, Ciara Graham, Jennifer Curley



Sean Kavanagh, Siobhán Loughran, Aidan Flynn, Maria Collins and Fiona McKinley



Teaching Hero Award: Alison Guilar (Sacred Heart Boys Primary School) and Aidan Flynn (Flynn Construction)



Dearbhla Farrelly, Deborah O'Rawe, Paul Courtney, Caoimhe Calpin and Stephen Baine



Ignite Ambassador Award: Meryl Spiers (Ashfield Girls School) and Paul Courtney (Belfast City Airport)



St Mary's
University College
Belfast

A College of Queen's University



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*St Mary's University College congratulates the nominees
for the Blackboard Awards 2024*