



# Mount St. Michael is the first Irish school to receive funding for a Wellbeing Professional

Ciarán Ryan

**M**ount St Michael Secondary School, Claremorris, Mayo, is the first school in Ireland to receive three-year salary funding for a dedicated Wellbeing Professional to be placed in our school by the charity **md**educational foundation.

Mount St Michael, a Convent of Mercy under the trusteeship of Ceist, is underpinned by the core value of inclusion providing a caring, child-centred school community with the wellbeing of each student as our greatest priority.

With this funding, we will be able to kickstart our long-term wellbeing strategy and take pioneering steps to improve the wellbeing of our students. This funding will allow us to significantly enhance our existing pastoral care and wellbeing systems.

Soon after I was appointed Principal, I was contacted by a former pupil of our school, Miriam Dervan, who was involved in philanthropy and a trustee and co-founder of **md**educational foundation. Miriam shared fond memories of her time at Mount Saint Michael. Following this



**md**educational foundation

conversation, we applied for funding in order to place a Wellbeing Lead in our school.

The charity's co-founders, Miriam Dervan and Tarquin Scadding-Hunt, created **md**educational foundation after identifying a gap in wellbeing supports for senior students. They believed that there should be a stronger focus on a more well-rounded holistic education, with a vision is to ensure that every student had access to timely wellbeing support that they needed.

My knowledge of **md**educational foundation was non-existent in advance of our first conversation. However, they brought to the table the personal touch of our former student Miriam Dervan. What sets them apart is that they convinced us through their personal experiences and through our interactions that they cared deeply about their mission and purpose.

**md**educational foundation had successfully trialled the programme in schools in the UK and wanted to continue to support more schools across all regions, including Ireland.

While we have our curriculum, our extracurricular and co-curricular curriculum, this development provides something different – somewhere for students to go, feel safe, have space and navigate a pathway for themselves.

Initially, some in our school community thought that this



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opportunity was too good to be true. Yet here we are, actively improving student wellbeing with a fully funded, newly appointed Wellbeing Lead and a brand-new Wellbeing Hub. We are very pleased to see the wellbeing needs of our students being supported in such a unique way.

We consider ourselves to be one of the most progressive schools in the West of Ireland and I think this puts us on the map for pioneering a collaborative approach to wellbeing provision. We are now responsible to make sure the funding is well spent, that it works for our young people and that it supports our existing pastoral care system.

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Last month, we hosted a launch event to celebrate Ireland's first Wellbeing Lead placement and the opening of our



brand-new Wellbeing Hub. At the launch, Leah Iles, **mdeducational** foundation's CEO, spoke about wanting to put student wellbeing at the forefront of education: *"we're very happy to have started our collaboration with Mount St Michael, Ireland's first school to receive salary funding for the placement of a dedicated Wellbeing Lead"*.

She added: *"mdeducational foundation will continue our mission to make all senior cycle/ post-16 students feel supported in every aspect of their wellbeing, helping them on their journey to a brighter future. We will continue to provide salary funding for the placement of qualified Wellbeing Leads into educational settings in Ireland and across the UK"*.

We were honoured to receive a message from Sabina Higgins, wife of President Higgins, and a Mount St Michael alumnus - *"I want to extend my heartfelt congratulations and well wishes to all involved in this wonderful organisation. The work that the mdeducational foundation does, providing much-needed wellbeing support in schools speaks volumes about the organisation's commitment to the health of young people"*.

One of our guest speakers, Minister Dara Calleary, encouraged our students to support one another and look after their wellbeing needs. He added: *"while mental health is something that we haven't dealt with very well in Ireland, you're really privileged to have the army of support and the army of love that will come with this programme"*.



**SCAN ME**

Learn more at [www.mdeducationalfoundation.org](http://www.mdeducationalfoundation.org).



**Ciarán Ryan** was appointed Principal of Mount St Michael Secondary School in Claremorris, Mayo.