

Learning curve for new school

Amalgamation of Our Lady's College with St Mary's College due next September

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THE amalgamation of Our Lady's College with St Mary's College is on track for next September, with new technology, art and music rooms as well as upgraded general classrooms to be in place for the more than 600 girls and boys expected to be enrolled.

The school will be the only secondary school in the country to be governed by two patrons - the Bishop of Galway and CEIST (Catholic Education an Irish Schools' Trust).

A name, crest and uniform for the new school to be located in the imposing former boarding school on St Mary's Road, has yet to be decided by the amalgamation steering committee. This has been in place for the last year, chaired by Dr Joe O'Connell, an education leadership and management consultant and former director of the Limerick Education Centre.

The interim Board of Management of the new school will be



The new school will be located in the imposing former boarding school on St Mary's Road. PHOTOS: JOE O'SHAUGHNESSY.

appointed by the joint patrons by the end of this month and will include a teacher and parent nominee from each school. The board's first task will be to recruit

a principal. Bernard Keeley, chairperson of the Board of Directors at CEIST, said the biggest challenge in the amalgamation process was

managing staff.

"Covid has added to our challenges, but really the biggest challenge is getting staff on board to share the vision of what the new entity will bring and the huge benefits it will mean for students," he stated.

"Our Lady's College has gone through an amalgamation already with the Mercy and the Pres and there is a sense of loss there. When schools close, people who are working in them feel a sense of failure. But the reality is that schools in the inner city have less of a pool of students because of depopulation while schools on the outskirts are thriving, we see it also in Limerick.

"Staff need to be minded through the process and that's what we will do. There are a number of parents who have a preference for single-sex education but of our 107 schools that appears to be the minority view - nationally the preference is for co-ed settings and a broader curriculum and when you get the numbers, you get the teach-

ers and enhanced subject choices."

Mr Keeley was on the teaching staff of Scoil Éinde in Salthill when it decided to enrol girls. This co-ed school turns away well over 100 students each year due to being over-subscribed.

"We were told the sky would fall it and now it's one of the most successful schools in the Galway and that's no doubt due to it becoming co-educational," he said.

CEIST is currently overseeing the amalgamation of three schools in Dublin and two in Kilkenny.

St Mary's recently completed an upgrade of its woodwork room while a new technology, art and music room will be ready in time for the start the new school's first term.

The Department of Education is shortly expected to complete its technical report into the facilities and what works would be needed to accommodate up to 1,000 students over the next few years.

Staff from both schools have participated in a joint planning exercise to agree on a code of behaviour with working groups set up to address issues such as communications, curriculum and policy.

A virtual open evening for the new school will be held in early November and both schools are currently accepting applications for incoming first year students as well as other year groups.

"The establishment of this new school is a ground-breaking moment in the educational history of the city," said Bernard Keeley. "Bishop George Browne established St Mary's College and worked closely with the Presentation Sisters in their early years in Galway. He issued the invitation to the Mercy Sisters to come to Galway in 1840.

"In 2021, we will have the coming together of three historic and enduring traditions into a new Catholic co-educational secondary school which will serve the community of Galway for decades to come."

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