**Our Alpha Course Blurb**

St. Mary’s is known for its dedication to helping girls deepen their Christian faith as they grow during secondary school. The **Alpha Course** was proposed by **Ballina Churches Together, with the support of our Transition Year Coordinator,** as a wonderful opportunity to encourage our students to explore their faith and meaning of life. In our school, this is all-important. 70 of our Transition Year students signed up to the course and 20 of them volunteered to be student leaders in the peer-led discussions!

On the 14th of September, the 20 student leaders were joined by Gerard Hanley who is the director of Alpha Youth Ireland. Gerard led a fun-filled training day for the student leaders and the Ballina Churches Together volunteers.

Starting on Thursday, September 21st the Alpha course took place from 9am to 10.15am in the school library for 6 weeks. Each session, the girls were met with cakes and treats, ice-breaker games and a space to explore their faith through watching the alpha video and discussing the topics with their discussion groups! This was done by asking a question related to the topic in the video and letting everyone freely share their thoughts, opinions and any questions of their own.

**The topics over the six weeks included;**

* **Week 1 –** Life: Is this it?
* **Week 2 –** Jesus: Who is Jesus?
* **Week 3 –** Cross: Why did Jesus die?
* **Week 4 –** Faith: How can I have Faith?
* **Week 5 –** Prayer: Why and how do I pray?
* **Week 6 –** Word: Why and how do I read the Bible?

All our fellow students shared delightful feedback on the Alpha Course. Many of them said that they perceived it as a **‘safe space to talk about things they felt weren’t spoke about enough’**. It was described by many girls as inviting, comforting, a kind and calming atmosphere and an open way of talking about Christianity and faith.

In many cases, the people who took part of the course said that they felt it was a ‘non-pressurising’ way of exploring Christianity, which was the goal of the Alpha Course. The girls loved the games and snacks to get everyone comfortable, as well as the team Kahoot's!

The Alpha leaders encouraged our student leaders to involve everyone as well as having a positive and encouraging attitude to the people in their small groups. Each week the discussions grew deeper and more meaningful as the girls became more comfortable in their groups!

We would like to thank our Ballina Churches Together volunteers; **Marian, Keila, Caroline** and **Deloris.** These courageous women spread kindness and always made the girls feel understood and heard. We intend on organising a retreat for the Transition Year students during the springtime to further encourage them to dive into their faith journey!

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