

“Loving Sister Earth” Comes to Thornhill College



On Thursday 23rd February 2017 we were privileged at a Thornhill College to receive a visit from Sister Helen and Elaine O'Leary to speak to us about their work as part of the group "Loving Sister Earth." Both Sister Helen and Elaine shared with a group of our students, Miss Hamilton (Principal) and Mr McSorley (Head of Geography), the vision of their mission, to foster prayer for the care of our common home rooted in the ground and served by our people. Their work is a beautiful fusion of care of the earth, its environments and inhabitants and the deep sense of spirituality, healing and well-being which we can all gain from this connection with each other and the earth. It is an admirable goal, which struck a poignant chord with our students given our schools recent celebrations of Catholic Schools Week during which we continued with our journey "Learning with Pope Francis to care for our common home" and our on-going participation in the Eco-Schools project.

During our discussions, our students, representing our schools KS3 Eco-Prefects, Year 13 Fair Trade Group and Year 14 John Muir Award enrichment group outlined the wide array of projects they have been engaged in within our school and wider community, to contribute in a positive manner to our common home. Such work included:

- Participation in the Eco-Schools Award (within which we have been awarded the Bronze and Silver Award and are working towards the Green Flag Award).
- Our whole school recycling initiative - recycling paper, card, plastics, stationery, clothes, jewellery and composting, working towards our goal of zero waste.

- Our tree native tree planting and wild flower planting initiative to encourage further biodiversity within our school grounds.

- The completion of biodiversity, habitat health, air quality and water quality surveys within our school grounds to contribute to the O.P.A.L. (Open Air Laboratories) national surveys.

- Year 8 workshops with organisations such as 'Green Up Your Act', building bug hotels and bird houses for our school grounds.

- The establishment of our Fairtrade Group within the school to raise awareness of the importance of fairtrade issues. For example this group runs a weekly fairtrade tuck shop selling trade craft produce to play a proactive role in supporting producers in LEDC's, as well as running events to celebrate Fairtrade Fortnight. As a Fairtrade school we have achieved the prestigious FairAware and FairActive Awards from the Fairtrade Foundation and have currently applied for the FairAchievers Award.

- The 3rd World Group and St Vincent de Paul Group within the school community.

- Enrichment programmes such as Faith Friends.

- And an exploration of environmental themes and humanitarian issues examined in a cross curricular manner across the disciplines of Geography, Religious Education, Science and Home Economics.

Our students therefore identified how caring for our common home is a cause intrinsic to life in our school community, embedded within our distinctive catholic ethos. Indeed with the reflections of Sister Helen and Elaine our eyes were opened to a greater appreciation of how, by connecting with holy places such as the many Holy Wells in Ireland, we can develop a more harmonious relationship with our world and are re-energised in our spirituality and in taking a greater responsibility and care of our environment and thus each other.