

Mr Neill Cahill



Vyners School, September 2017 to February 2023

Tribute read by Mrs Harvey at Mr Cahill's Requiem Mass

To write this tribute, I have collated memories from many colleagues - but it has been impossible to fit everything in as everyone has so many fond memories of this amazing man. I can't believe that I will never again see him walking purposefully down the corridor, with his tupperware and his coffee cup or hear his strong baritone voice singing an Irish ballad.

Neill made a huge impression on everyone he met and had a heart of gold - caring for everyone before himself. School life can be extremely stressful and turbulent but Neill always had time to listen and was a source of strength. He showed a genuine interest in others' lives and cultures; empathising in times of hardship and crying with happiness when hearing about a longed for pregnancy. When it came to his own beloved family, he relished impersonating them to make a story engaging and often hilarious.

He threw himself fully into school life, from dressing up as Ace Ventura for a charity day, to participating in a silent disco - although where music was concerned he was rarely silent! His entry into the Masked Singer was a real testament to his talents. On a department night out, a karaoke session turned into us all giving Neill requests and just enjoying listening to his amazing renditions of some favourite tunes - I must admit this turned into a bit of an Irish Hooley - we all loved it!

During Covid he set up and managed our testing centre and was instrumental in the process of keeping our school as safe as it could be. The English Department would wake up to a daily video of camaraderie and encouragement - making us feel less isolated in those strange times. During lockdown, his love of the Eurovision Song Contest led him to host the amazingly entertaining 'Coronavision Song Contest' - a remote competition which was an equal mix of talent and hilarity - bringing together Vyners staff and Neill's amazing friends and family.

Everything he tackled he did with gusto - complete commitment and passion - from delivering an assembly or managing a school project to winning a limerick competition at a department social. He could be incredibly serious but had a real sense of fun. When leading an A Level session on the context of a Brian Friel play, he surprised everyone by bursting into a ballad about Irish woes during the 19th century - students were bemused but mesmerised. We will always remember his deep belly laughs, his good humour and his cool, collected air - he really was a pillar of the school community.

As head of English, Neill worked tirelessly to create a department that was collaborative and supportive and which has become one of the most successful in the school.

Just knowing that Neill was in the building was a reassurance to so many of us. There wasn't a challenge he couldn't overcome, no obstacle he couldn't steer around with his intelligence, wit and knowledge. As a valued member of the senior team, Neill led on the Supercurriculum and Learning Journey and as the school leader responsible for transition, supported some of our youngest students as they made the leap from primary to secondary school. He was admired and respected by staff and students alike, continuing to teach fantastic lessons as he worked on whole school strategies - always with real attention to detail - a perfectionist!

When given an office without a window, he simply drew one - overlooking the Irish countryside - which changed with the seasons. Over the last week I have found many members of staff looking at this picture and taking a photo of it to add to their memories of Neill. I know the scene he drew and which he described to me many times, is similar to his final resting place and I can't think of anywhere more perfect.

A collective view is that Neill often reminded us of what was truly important in life and the importance of looking after ourselves and others.

We have been sent so many messages by parents of students all sharing their own view of Neill's compassion and humanity. We learnt from these, the extent to which Neill supported students. One parent wrote; ***I am so sad to hear of Mr Cahill's passing, he was such a wonderful kind person. He wrote my son a beautiful poem when we lost my mum during Covid and I will always remember him for that.***

Neill wrote a poignant message to last year's school leavers and I think it sums up his philosophy - the love he had for his work, his colleagues and students and for life itself. His ambition was to run his own school and it is an enormous shame that he did not get this opportunity he would have run the best school - one that many of us here this evening would have loved to work in. I will leave you with part of Neill's heartfelt message to his students:

'Remember the values you have been taught at Vyners. Care for yourself and those around you. Aspire to great things, but be realistic about the marathon ahead. The road is long - take a step each day and rest easy knowing you've done your best that day to progress.'

Neill was a man of purpose who always did his best to enrich the lives of those around him. May he 'rest easy' knowing somehow the extent to which he will be missed by everyone whose lives he has touched.

Rest in peace and God Bless you Neill – a fantastic teacher, gentleman and human being and someone I am proud to have called my friend.