

'It's the taking part that counts' – Celebrating Ireland's School Choirs and the *Feis Ceoil*, 1897 – 2017

Helen Doyle is a secondary school music teacher and choral conductor at Wesley College in Dublin, as well as a mentor and teaching practice tutor in Trinity College's School of Education. Helen is currently working as a researcher in the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama, where she is running an initiative to get Ireland's schools singing, and to highlight the benefits attached to such activity for our country's young people.

As part of this project, Helen is organising an event in **The Mansion House** on **Wednesday, 13th December 2017**. This Christmas-themed event, entitled '*It's the Taking Part that Counts*', will feature prize-winning Irish school choirs alongside a community outreach school choir formed 'from scratch' specially for this project. This 'scratch choir' involves one of Ireland's DEIS schools - **St. Vincent's GNS, North William Street, Dublin 1** - and is being trained by Helen for their debut in the Mansion House concert, and beyond. The 'scratch choir' will be joined by *Feis Ceoil* prize-winning school choirs in The Mansion House, along with members of two of Ireland's leading professional choirs.

Additional choirs 'from scratch' will attend the event as they begin their year-long journey, culminating in the celebration of Christmas in their own schools in 2018. The programme will include regular musician-led rehearsals, the completion of a choral singing exam, possible participation in a music festival/competition where appropriate, in-school performances and the school-based Christmas celebration.

The main objective of this project is to celebrate school-based choral activity while demonstrating its powerfully transformative effects on school communities, thus encouraging every school in Ireland to get involved in choral singing.

RTÉ's *Morning Ireland* has picked up the story, and a piece went out recently as part of National Choral Singing Week, which focused on the mental health benefits of being in a choir. *Morning Ireland* will be picking up the story once again with the DEIS 'scratch choir', and will visit the girls of St. Vincent's National School as they prepare for their Mansion House debut.

In addition to this, **The Irish Times** is following the DEIS 'scratch choir' on their journey to the December concert in The Mansion House, and beyond. For example, The Irish Times visited the first rehearsal of the DEIS choir this week, and will make a return visit to the choir before their debut performance in The Mansion House on 13th December 2017.

The Mansion House event, '*It's the Taking Part that Counts*', takes place on Wednesday, 13th December at 2.30pm. Please lend your **support** to this project and **attend** this choral celebration of our school choirs. Find us on **Facebook** @schoolchoirs120 & **request your tickets** from schoolchoirs120@gmail.com



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