

F.C.J. Cycle Promoting Positive Mental Health

The F.C.J. Secondary School, Bunclody 60k cycle promoting positive mental health took 16 students and 5 teachers out the gates of the school towards Shillelagh for our first stop, onwards to Rathwood for lunch before continuing to Tullow, Clonegal and home to base. The day began with angry black clouds chasing across grey skies on the back of a strong wind, not the weather for a cycle, nor was it what one would expect for mid May.

Never-the-less we arrived in school all geared up and, undeterred by the weather, eager to get on the road. After a quick bike check to make sure everything was in working order, a safety talk from Ms. Emily-Anne Doyle and being introduced to our two sweepers Paul and Eamonn we saddled up and set off. We rolled out the gates looking forward to a successful trip, falling into an easy rhythm of a well-practised and synchronised team, effortlessly responding to the shouts of 'car down' and 'water ahead' from the lead riders. We averaged an excellent pace of 26 km/hr for the first leg without any problems. After a chance to drink and eat in Shillelagh we remounted and pedalled on, in fine spirits despite the elements.

This next 10 km was going to be a challenge, uphill for half the journey, but we stuck together and kept a steady pace with the front riders slowing down when needed. This leg was the first time we had mechanical issues but no worse than a chain falling off. Each of these was dealt with very efficiently. The cyclist called 'mechanical', two of the sweepers would stay behind to fix the problem while the remainder of the group cycled on at a slow pace until we all caught up again. We reached the crest of the hill jubilant and let the downhill do the work for us to arrive in Rathwood for lunch.

We arrived in Rathwood like drowned rats; we had completed 30 km much faster than expected and no real problems to speak of. After changing into dry clothes we warmed up with cups of Hot Chocolate (Thanks to The Chocolate Garden), Tea and Coffee and sandwiches the staff had prepared for us. We rested for a while and chatted and had a mental health talk from Joe Dixon. It was great to see some parents were able to take the time to be there, proud of their children considering what we had accomplished in such conditions.

We saddled up yet again, now for the journey home. The weather had deteriorated from rain to a deluge while we pulled out but failed to kill the mood. We got the full send off with flags and cheering parents taking pictures and videos that will become invaluable in years to come. We journeyed to Tullow with a strong wind in our faces but ploughed ahead and in no time we were at our final stop in Ardattin.

The rain had finally stopped and the sun burst through the clouds, warming us and renewing our motivation. The lead cyclists picked up the pace and we sped down the hill into Clonegal where we had a quick stop to regroup before we headed homeward at a smart pace.

The team wheeled through the gates at F.C.J. to a hero's welcome, a guard of honour with balloons and loud cheers. Inside our fellow students had prepared a feast of soup, brown bread and sweet treats. Cyclists, parents and teachers were in mutual appreciation of the work, dedication, teamwork and camaraderie that made our cycle such a success.

Our cycle was a great achievement overall and it had such a lesson behind it; Life is like riding a bike, to keep your balance you have to keep going. The cycle had a massive feel good factor to it and we had a great day. Everyone loved the training sessions and we would all do it again in a heartbeat.

Thanks must be extended to all who helped us achieve our goal of promoting positive mental health in our school from all those who sponsored our cycle to those who kept us safe on the road and who facilitated in the day taking place. If only we could have organised the weather!

TY Students, FCJ Bunclody