**Buddy Bench**

The 'Light Up the Night Tractor Run' took place in Castlecomer on New Year's Eve to raise awareness about suicide. One of the projects being funded by this initiative is the 'Buddy Bench' programme. We were delighted to be nominated for inclusion in this programme by one of our parents and Light Up The Night committee member Mr. John Farrell.

An experienced leader came to our school on Wednesday March 14th to deliver an age appropriate Buddy Bench Aware programme to each class. A physical Buddy Bench was used as a visual tool alongside the Buddy Bench Aware programmes to help instil much needed lifelong coping skills and core competencies needed for success and happiness in life. Positive mental well being, friendship, inclusion and empathy is promoted and encouraged amongst children.

The motto is 'Look up, look around and look out for each other'.

The younger children took delight in a story, told with the help of four furry animal friends who interact with a bench and a child. Each animal represents a thought, a feeling or an emotion and they discussed how to recognise and cope with these.

For the older students the Buddy Bench is used as a symbolic visual tool to teach them how to identify and express their feelings.  The programme releases the stigma of asking for help and celebrates the children who act with compassion, kindness and empathy.

The school was presented with a beautiful wooden 'Buddy Bench' which will be put in an appropriate position in the school grounds.