



Students focus on a world without racism in Columban competition

THE annual schools media competition organised by the Missionary Society of St Columban reliably attracts a high standard of entries, reflecting the passion and maturity students bring to subjects including climate change and migration, writes **William Scholes**.

This year's competition, which I had the privilege of helping to judge, arguably raised the bar higher than ever as the 14 to 18-year-olds addressed the theme 'Let's create a world without racism'.

The entries demonstrated a longing that people should be seen as equals, with personal testimonies emphasising that racism can have visceral consequences.

Ella Fleming of St Dominic's Grammar School, Belfast emerged as the winner for her piece 'The Real World'.

We have reproduced Ella's article, described by judges as "fantastically brave", "profoundly moving" and "a poignant piece that draws attention to the dangers and impact on a life that experiences racism".

"I can't put into words how grateful I am to receive this award from this amazing organisation," said Ella. "It is great to see people acknowledging racism and educating themselves on this topic."

"Hopefully more people will read these articles and see how serious racism is."

Conn Fyfe of St Louis Grammar School in Ballymena was second. "The past year has highlighted the ubiquity of racism in society and the pressing need for a solution," he said.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has placed all of our lives on hold and similarly, the pandemic of racism continues to divide us."

Victory Isijola of St Louis Secondary School, Dundalk, Co Louth was third in the writing competition.

"It is great to see that our voices



WRITER: Victory Isijola of St Louis Secondary School, Dundalk, Co Louth was awarded third in the writing section of the Columban Media competition

are finally being acknowledged and hopefully, with time, patience and empathy, we truly will create a world without racism," she said.

The competition's image category attracted a high calibre of thought-provoking entries on the anti-racism theme.

First place went to Emily Grimes of St Oliver's Community College, Drogheda for what judges said was a "very simple but effective image that showed a lot of originality and technique".

Emily said her artwork "focused on a problem that must no longer be accepted or ignored".

"I am proud that I was able to capture this in my image," she said.

Runners up were Caoimhe Collins of Colaiste Choilm, Ballincollig, Co Cork, and Caragh Cochrane of St

IMAGERY: Conn Fyfe of St Louis Grammar School in Ballymena was second in the writing competition. His submission was aimed at highlighting the 'pandemic of racism'

Louis Grammar School, Ballymena. Caragh said the competition dealt with "such an important subject".

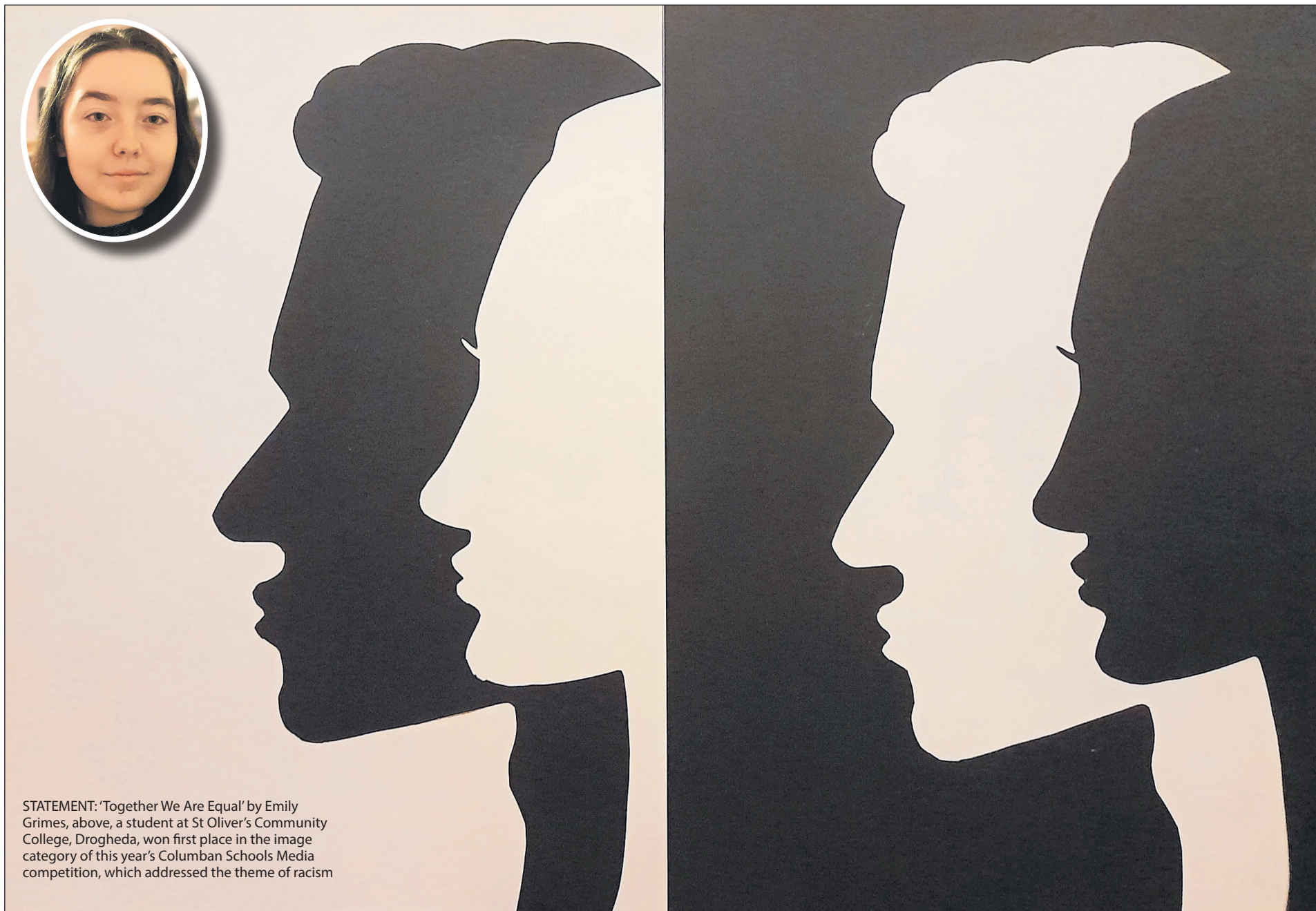
"Competitions like this really help to spread awareness especially for younger generations," she said.

James Trewby, Columban education worker in Britain, said he had been amazed at the energy and thoughtfulness of the competition entries.

"Discussion of overt and covert racism, structural challenges to micro-aggression, and images to force anyone to stop and think, brought passion, experience, and hope to an important issue," he said..

■ To find out more about the Columban Schools Media competition, visit www.columbancompetition.com.

Ella Fleming, St Dominic's Grammar School



STATEMENT: 'Together We Are Equal' by Emily Grimes, above, a student at St Oliver's Community College, Drogheda, won first place in the image category of this year's Columban Schools Media competition, which addressed the theme of racism



CHANGE: 'Make a Start Changing the World,' by Caragh Cochrane, Caragh of St Louis Grammar School, Ballymena was third in the image section of the Columban Schools Media competition. "Competitions like this really help to spread awareness," she said



BUILDING WORKS: 'We Are All Made of the Same Bricks,' by Caoimhe Collins, Caoimhe, of Colaiste Choilm, Ballincollig, Co Cork, was runner-up in the image section



The 2021 Columban Schools Media Competition challenged students to address the theme of 'Let's create a world without racism'. The winning entry is this powerful piece, entitled 'The Real World', by Ella Fleming from St Dominic's Grammar School in Belfast

'We should all be equals, no matter the colour of our skin'

I WAKE. I get up and do everything that any other person does. Get dressed, brush my teeth, and eat breakfast. But then the time comes, the time that I fear the most... Walking outside alone. I take one last breath as my sweaty hands reach for the cold, silver door handle and before I know it the crisp air is filling my lungs. I walk. Make sure your hood is down, hands out of pockets and don't look anyone in the eye, I remind myself as I walk along the grey pavement. My eyes observe the street. My brain knows the drill. Is there anyone on the other side of that street that could feel threatened? Don't make eye contact with the lady who is clenching her handbag so tightly that I don't think the strongest man in the world could take it from her. I'll take the 'scenic route' today because there are lots of people around. A family are walking towards me, but as I walk closer to them, they are practically walking in the middle of the road. The parents whisper to their daughter and immediately she looks at me and points at me. The mother clenches her daughter's wrist and quickly walks across the street, as if I am an animal about to attack its prey. I try to get used to it but every time it happens, I relapse, I feel bad for myself and make myself wonder what I did wrong. As I walk along a path around the back of a cul-de-sac of houses, I notice a group of older boys ahead, and my eyes instantly drop to the ground and my heart starts beating rapidly. As I get closer to them, they start to notice me. My heart still beating, rapidly. Boom boom. Boom boom. Boom boom. Boom boom. Suddenly I reach them. My eyes still looking down to the ground, I try and get past them. But I cannot. They start to shout. They start to shout all sorts of things that I can't even process. Then, it started. One boy pushes me to the ground and spits in my face. Another kicks me in the stomach and it feels like a thousand knives stabbed me all at once. I try to scream for my mummy, but no-one would hear. It turns out they were only starting. Punches came from everywhere; kicks came from left, right and centre. I couldn't see anything. I felt like I was slowly

starting to drown in my own blood. Suddenly, it stopped. I lay there for hours. I cried so much I had no more tears left. I was experiencing so much pain that I went numb. I closed my eyes and dreamt of my family, I kept trying to remind myself that they would be all right if I wasn't here. But I kept imagining what would happen to them. My baby sister would grow up without me being there to protect her from the world. My mummy wouldn't have anyone to help her wash the dishes when she is feeling down, or to put my sister to bed when she is working late. It felt like I had just lost everything - including my faith in humanity. Then everything went black. That was the last thing I remembered from that day. I wake. I couldn't get up; I couldn't brush my teeth and I couldn't get dressed. I wanted to eat but it felt impossible. The time that I feared the most every morning was

"I lay there for hours. I cried so much I had no more tears left. I was experiencing so much pain that I went numb"

different, but I wasn't scared of it this time... I was petrified. I couldn't leave my room for three weeks, I was petrified of what lay outside of my house, more than ever. That was four years ago, and I still know that story like the back of my hand. My physical injuries were not fatal, but mentally it scarred me. The lady who found me lying on the once-grey pavement was a lady who didn't see skin colour, all she saw was a hurt child who would never see the world the same again. And I didn't.

I used to see the world as a bad place, where you didn't know what or who is around each corner.

But now I see the world as an awful place, a place where more and more deaths keep happening just because of someone's skin colour. A place where if someone doesn't look like 'your kind' then they are dangerous. A place where we have to explain to our own children why their dad was attacked yesterday or why their mummy isn't here anymore. And it should not have to be like that.

Our population is growing and growing, it is time that we started to educate others. And make them understand that we should all be equals no matter what colour of skin you have. Our faith in humanity could change if you let it. This is the real world, make it better while we still have the chance.