

Igniting imaginations - Pushkin Trust lights up young minds with 'The Spiking Heat of Inspiration'

by **Connie Duffy**
connie.duffy@tyronecon.co.uk

Nestled in the scenic beauty of Baronscourt Estate outside Newtownstewart, the Pushkin Trust has once again set young minds alight with its annual programme, this year themed 'The Spiking Heat of Inspiration'.

This powerful motif, inspired by Pearl Stewart's evocative chapter 'The Classroom Visit' from the Trust's book 'Voices', breathes fresh life into classrooms by celebrating creativity, imagination, and self-expression.

Stewart, the Trust's vice-chairperson, recounts how a simple workshop transformed her classroom into a vibrant space where ideas surged and "sloppy copies felt the weight and speed of ideas, memories and stories." Her reflections became the fuel behind this year's fiery theme, focusing on how inspiration - like fire - can energize young learners,

encouraging them to find their unique voice and sense of place through the arts.

For nearly four decades, the Pushkin Trust has been a creative force across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, building bridges through cross-curricular, cross-community, and cross-border engagement. Its mission has always been to awaken the creative voice of young people by blending environmental exploration with expressive arts.

This year's Pushkin Pathway Programme brought together pupils and teachers from Omagh's Christian Brothers Grammar School and Omagh High School, alongside visiting schools from as far away as County Wexford. Over a three-day immersive experience at Baronscourt, students rotated through a series of carefully crafted workshops: environmental walks in the morning and creative writing, dance, and media workshops in the afternoons.

A standout feature of the programme is its partnership with Derry's Nerve Centre, Ireland's leading creative media arts hub. This collaboration enables a seamless blend of nature, technology, and the arts - providing a familiar and engaging platform for modern students to express themselves.

"The classroom setting simply doesn't work for everyone," says Denise Mullan, director of the Pushkin Trust. "That's why the Trust is needed now more than ever. We're seeing transformations - students who are reluctant writers suddenly come alive with words in the log cabin during our creative writing sessions."

It's not just the children who are changed by the experience. Teachers too leave inspired. One shared: "I have two very reluctant writers, but I was totally amazed by their responses in the Creative Writing Sessions. I've become more aware of the environment in teaching - it's so much easier when kids are engaged and inspired."

This unique programme offers more than just educational enrichment - it provides a space for discovery. Pupils emerge from their Pathway Days not with recycled phrases or forced narratives, but with fresh, sensory-driven language drawn from deep connection with the natural world. Describing the sound of wind echoing through a redwood or the flicker of candlelight against log cabin walls, students craft expressions that are raw, vibrant, and entirely their own.

Founded in 1987 by the late Duchess of Abercorn, the Pushkin Trust continues to be a beacon of creativity and connection. As it fans the flames of inspiration in the hearts of young people, it reminds us that true education is not just about learning facts - it's about discovering voices, telling stories, and finding meaning in the world around us.

With 'The Spiking Heat of Inspiration', the Pushkin Trust isn't just warming classrooms - it's setting imaginations ablaze.



Christy Pendry, third from left, Hope for Yoputh NI, with Pushkin Trust officials, from left, David Bolton, trustee, Denise Mullan, director, Pearl Stewart, trustee, Lynn Greer, environmentalist and Celia Duncan, trustee. AN210825



Carmel Garvey, tutor, and pupils from Omagh High School and Omagh Christian Brothers Grammar School taking part in the movement workshop during the Pushkin Pathway Project at Baronscourt. AN211125



Pupils from Omagh High School and Omagh Christian Brothers Grammar School taking part in a coding workshop for gaming during the Pushkin Pathway Project. AN211025



Pupils from Omagh Christian Brothers Grammar School and Omagh High School who took part in the Pushkin Pathway Project at Baronscourt. AN210925