

Emmanuella-Victor's presentation (with slides)

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Today, I would like to share with you my journey of transitioning from a Nigerian school to a Scottish Catholic comprehensive school. This experience, while intimidating at first, has profoundly shaped my perspective on diversity, inclusion, and the power of community.

I grew up in Nigeria, where the education system is quite structured and rooted in a mix of cultural and academic rigor. My school life there was familiar, predictable, and centered around shared traditions. However, when my family decided to move to Scotland, I knew that my world was about to change in ways I couldn't fully anticipate.

When I arrived in Scotland, I was confronted with the typical anxieties of a young man venturing into the unknown: would I fit in? Would I be understood? Would my differences isolate me? These questions weighed heavily as I prepared to enter a Catholic comprehensive school. But from my first day, I was greeted with a warmth and open-mindedness that put an end to many of those fears.

The school community went above and beyond to make me feel welcome. The teachers took the time to understand my background and encouraged me to share my culture with my classmates. It wasn't just an acknowledgement of my differences; it was an invitation to celebrate them. My peers also embraced me with kindness.

From helping me navigate the nuances of the Scottish accent to explaining classroom practices I'm unfamiliar with, their support has made the transition much easier than I had imagined. Our calendar of celebrations, to which students, staff, parents and caregivers have contributed, is a daily visual reminder of the rich backgrounds, cultures and religions that our school has embraced.

The school's Catholic ethos has also played an important role in promoting this sense of belonging. The emphasis on compassion, respect and shared values created a welcoming environment where everyone, regardless of background, felt part of the community. This trip taught me a lot. I've learned that while it can be intimidating to venture into the unknown, it's often in these moments of discomfort that we grow the most. I also realized that inclusivity is not only about adapting to differences, but also about celebrating them.

Looking back, I am grateful for the kindness and understanding I received. The transition from my Nigerian school to a Scottish Catholic school was not only about adjusting to a new education system, but also about discovering a community that welcomed me wholeheartedly and helped me thrive. I also learn that together with other young "newcomers to Scotland" from Nigeria,

Ukraine, Ghana, Poland and the Philippines, I am able to share some of our traditions, values and aspirations with my new school friends.