

Report of PACCS 23rd Annual Conference which was held in Roscrea on 2nd and 3rd March, 2007.

Theme: 'Learning for Life.'

Tommy Walshe introduces Olwyn Enright, T.D. who opened Conference and addressed the delegates. She referred to the publication of an annual school report where parents would have full access to the information they require regarding ethos, catchment areas and application forms.

The importance of parents as full partners was also addressed. The School plan, suspensions, expulsions, clarity on all school issues and the importance of student councils in all schools were also covered.

In the area of special needs, she said that not all schools are taking 'their fair share' but went on to say that the Community and Comprehensive sector were very proactive in this area and this is a positive rather than a negative.

On the issue of bullying Ms. Enright said that this can have an effect for up to three generations and that there was a need for a National anti bullying strategy.

She concluded by saying that we were a knowledge based society and we must prepare our children to compete for jobs worldwide.

Questions followed.

Humphrey O'Riordan, President then opened Conference Business.

The Minutes of Conference 2006 were read by Connie Carolan. They were then proposed for adoption by Grace Mooney, seconded by Margaret Molloy and signed by the President.

The Treasurer's Report was then given. After a short discussion this was proposed for adoption by Sean Staunton and seconded by Teresa Byrne.

Connie Carolan then read the Secretary's Report.

Tommy Walshe, P.R.O. then gave his report on PACCS for the past year.

Roll call was taken. Standing Orders were proposed for adoption by Noreen Duggan and seconded by Seamus Rourke..

Tellers were appointed. John Murphy and Kay Herlihy would act as tellers for the duration of Conference.

Constitutional motions were taken as per our time table and all were carried.

This concluded the evening session. A buffet followed.

Grace Mooney, PACCS Vice President opened the Saturday session by welcoming everyone to Roscrea and introduced Martin Fitzgerald, Tipperary Institute who would deliver the Keynote Address.

He asked us to reflect on what Learning for Life means – is it a preparation for life – formal and informal or a motivational attitude driven by the journey itself and is ongoing. He referred to the White Paper 2000 and the core Principles of Lifelong learning – Lifelong Learning as a systematic approach, Equality and Inter-Culturalism.

He questioned what does learning mean, is it instrumental or communicative and what type of learning is currently taking place in our schools. There is the traditional Junior and Leaving Certificates and we have CSPE, SPHE, Transition Year Option, Leaving Certificate Applied and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

He then queried why this change had become necessary and what should schools be doing about learning, Traditional or Alternative?

What do we need to do? Is the Junior Certificate Necessary in its current form and what direction does the Leaving Certificate need to take? He spoke of the CAO system, The Points system, Parents' expectations and whether the educational system was doing enough to help our children cope in a very different and radically unknowable world?

He spoke of the school as a community and said the essential prerequisite for any school to develop relationships successfully with its communities is that it should aim to be a coherent community itself.

He spoke of the challenges facing PACCS into the future and asked what we can do to support/lead change in the school and community? What immediate actions can we take to promote these values both locally and nationally as an association? Are we clear on the values we want to promote? What long term actions can we take and what further skills and training do we need?

Martin opened his address with a quotation from Socrates “Children today are tyrants. They contradict their parents, gobble their food and tyrannize their teachers” and he concluded with two final thoughts – “If there is anything that we wish to change in the child, we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that could be better changed in ourselves” – Carl Jung and “Vision without actions is a dream. Action without vision is a waste of time. Vision with action can change the world” – Nelson Mandela.

Roll call and motions followed.

The conference was then addressed by Stephen Minton – He spoke on the causes, effects and perhaps the solutions to bullying. A DVD entitled ‘Silent Witness’ was launched last year and was shown at the end of the Conference.

Conference broke into three groups for workshops:-

Special Needs – Discussion Group – Teresa Byrne, Teresa McSweeney and Grace Mooney

Student Mentoring – Sean McCann

Tipperary Drugs Initiative – Tom Needham

Lunch Followed.

After lunch the three workshops were repeated.

The President, Humphrey O’Riordan, then gave his keynote address. He welcomed everyone to conference with a special welcome to our past presidents. He said they were always there for advice and any help we require.

He thanked PACCS Executive and said that everything that we do during the year, we do as a team and his address was a continuation of this team work.

In referring to the theme of the conference he said it was very suitable because of the huge changes in our education system over the past number of years and the even bigger changes that are yet to come. He referred to the rising number of students from non English speaking cultures attending our schools and while this is a good thing we must have the resources to deal with this change. While there had been a slight improvement in the number of teachers being allocated it was still far from satisfactory.

He went on to say that the role of the school is to provide the highest possible standard of education for all our students. A stable, secure learning environment is an essential requirement to achieve this goal. Bullying behaviour undermines the quality of education and imposes psychological damage. It is vital that the entire school community is involved in dealing with this behaviour. Bullying not only affects those immediately involved, it affects the entire class room and home life. He then referred to a workshop which had taken place looking at the affects of bullying. He outlined a new form of bullying which had recently begun and this was in the form of ghost texts which were texts being sent to children purporting to come from someone who had died.

He spoke of the Whole School

Evaluation, The Report of the Task force on Student Behaviour in Second Level Schools and National Parents’ Council – post Primary. He asked that the delegates would look at the ‘Code of Courtesy’ which was included in their folders. This was an initiative of the parents, teachers and students in Kenmare Community School. He also referred to ‘Living Scenes’ which is a very successful project in his own school in Millstreet. Humphrey concluded by saying that his term of office as President was coming to a close and it was time to hand over the rein to somebody else. Over the past three years he had met many people in the education sector and in general found them to be helpful and understanding towards parents. He had made many genuine friends through PACCS and again thanked the National Executive who had always made his job as President very enjoyable.

Sean McCann, Education Consultant in Marino Institute of Education then addressed conference on Partnership in our schools.

He said for partnership to work we must know the education system and the law and application to schools, The Education Act outlining the functions of the inspectorate, Boards of Management, Appeals, Education Welfare Act and the National Education Welfare Board. Codes of Behaviour and Policy Development were other areas which parents should know about.

He went on to speak about School planning, partnership, evaluation, Teaching and Learning and curriculum. He also spoke of parent responsibilities and student

responsibilities, the Students' Council, Mentoring, volunteerism, partnership and Leadership.

He concluded by asking what successes had our schools had over the past year in promoting a partnership culture in the school?

What are the challenges in implementing this culture of partnership in the school?

And any practical suggestions to help further a partnership approach?

The remainder of the motions were then taken. There were 15 motions. Twelve were carried. One withdrawn and one fell due to non attendance and one noted as already PACCS Policy.

The incoming executive for 2007/2008 was ratified as follows:-

Dublin: Teresa McSweeney, Rosmini
Grace Mooney, Palmerstown
David Medbury – St. Colmcille's, Rathlyon
3 to be advised

Southern: Gretta O'Connor, Beara
Patti Cotter, Bishopstown
Maria Hanley, Ballincollig

South East: Margaret Molloy, Gorey
I to be advised

North East: Margaret Moore, Ashbourne
Carole Trodden, Ashbourne

West: Margaret Waters Finnegan, Castlerea
Breda Hanly, Castlerea

Mid West: Tommy Walsh, Moate
Ann Leamy, Cashel
Catherine Sides, Gort

Donegal: Sean Staunton, Ballyshannon
1 to be advised

The ratification of the incoming executive was proposed by Tommy Walsh, Moate and seconded by Teresa Byrne, Rosmini.

Tommy Walshe of the Mid-West Region was then elected President. He was proposed by Margaret Molloy and seconded by Ann Leamy.

Tommy Walshe, Public Relations Officer of NPCpp then addressed conference. He referred to the Restructuring plans which were being worked on by the Council with the assistance of an outside agency. He also referred to the Jack O'Brien report and Whole School Evaluation. He said that the parents' voice was getting stronger and concluded by hoping that soon every school in the country would have a parents association.

Humphrey O'Riordan closed conference by thanking delegates, observers and guests for their attendance and in doing so hoped that we would all meet again at Conference 2007.

The reception and banquet were held in the hotel, where PACCS were joined by their guests. Presentations were made to retiring members and the evening concluded with music and dancing.