

Parents wanted:

When I think about this, I think about both sides of this statement.

Parents Wanted: Parents associations are crying out for parents to join. Free time is becoming harder to find. Surely time spent helping your teenager's education is not wasted.

Parents Wanted : 'Are parents associations equal partners in the schools, equal partners in education or are we just paying lip service to the education system. A true story comes to mind.

Last may a parent contacted me about a problem with his school he heard for the first time on a local radio show. His school was amalgamating with two another to form a new school the following September. He heard this new school would now be taught in Irish. This was a problem for him because his daughter could only speak English and had been taught in the school in English for the previous 3 years as was every other student in the whole school. This could hardly be true I thought? A school teaching in English now going to teach in Irish, there would be uproar; parents would not stand for this. Over the next few weeks we spoke a few times on the phone but he was the only parent who was worried about this. I was told other parents would ring me but nobody ever did. Was this a sign of a parents association not working? Was there a parents association at all or were they kept in the dark about how their new school would operate. Were Parents Wanted by this new school even before they opened their doors?

We can fast forward to the new school year in the newly amalgamated school. Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> September the new school opened and started teaching through Irish. Other Parents whose students were not fluent in Irish now had a problem. These parents now turned to the one parent who was fighting the school and education system on his own for the previous four months. He was one of the lucky ones. He had enrolled his daughter in another school where she would be taught through English. He had to drive thirty miles to do this but he had no option, his catchment area was now teaching through Irish. He rang the president of the National Parents Council post primary (NPCpp) Humphrey O'Riordan. Humphrey's advice was to organise parents to come to a meeting and he would attend to see how he could help. Approx. 200-300 parents attended that meeting. Where were all these parents when one lone parent was fighting for the previous four months? Lack of information and communication between the school and the parents. Most parents thought everything would be ok come September and the school would facilitate all the students. Humphrey spoke to the parents, members of the board of management and the department of education. A lot of good work was done by our ex-president and David Hegarty President of Catholic Schools Parents Association (CSPA) over the next few months.

In January this year I was reading the Irish Examiner and I saw a page taken out by the department of Education looking for parents in this particular school to fill in a form stating how and what language they would like to have their teenagers taught in. Was this the department of Education looking for parents help? Could I call it Parents Wanted by the department on this one occasion?

When I think about this story I think how one parent could not achieve anything by himself. No matter who he wrote to, or talked to he made no impression. Suddenly the whole school was working together and with the help of their National Executive and the National Parents Council the Department of Education started to take note. Could we see in time to come all parents association working together and with the help of their National Executive our voice could be heard. Then maybe we could work towards having an education system to be proud of.

Thank you very much and enjoy the conference.

Tommy Walshe

President