

Welcome everyone to this our 25th Anniversary. I hope you have a very enjoyable weekend and that you get some new ideas to take home to your own parents associations. Most important I hope you get to talk to other parents from different schools and make new friends. Every year I have made new friends and I hope this year will be no different.

Our website has 24 years of conferences and when you get a chance, they are worth looking at, the website is www.paccs.ie, it is for all parents and if you think we are missing information on any topic that parents may need to help them through second level education please let us know. We will do all the work.

There is a myth that the national executive of PACCS get paid. We are a voluntary body and we are not paid. However, we do get travelling expenses to the value of 40 cent per mile. How does this compare to other organisations, for example, NPCpp get 85 cent per mile and the Department of Education get 120 cent or more depending on car size.

We are thankful to have the use of the offices of the National Parents Council post primary (NPCpp) for our meetings, which are held on a Saturday every four to six weeks. We get involved for the greater good of the students in the community and comprehensive schools.

To let you know who we are and what we are trying to achieve I will outline how PACCS came about:-

The Parents' Associations of the Community and Comprehensive Schools was formed in 1984 to act as the National organisation for the Parents' Associations of the Community and Comprehensive Schools (PACCS) in the country.

At the first Conference there were 56 schools in attendance and over 50,000 parents represented. The sector has now grown to 91 schools and over 100,000 parents represented. We promote the role of parents as the primary educators of their children as enshrined in Article 42 of the Constitution of Ireland. An extract from the democratic programme presented to Dail Eireann on 21st January 1919 will let you know what the government promised:-

“It shall be the first duty of the government of the Republic to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the children to secure that no child shall suffer hunger or cold from lack of food, clothing or shelter, but that all shall be provided with the means and facilities requisite for their proper education and training as citizens of a free and Gaelic Ireland”.

So have the Government delivered?

According to the latest figures from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in 1995 we spent 5.2% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education. By 2005 that had fallen to 4.6%.

A report from the organisation also shows that just two countries, Greece and the Slovak

Republic, spend a smaller proportion of their GDP on education than Ireland does! Not the end of the scales we want to be at.

With the introduction of Budget 2009, our education system was set back about 10 years. The abolition of the Book rental scheme will lead to more financial problems for parents in these hard times. With the increase in the pupil-teacher ratio, bigger classes will lead to teachers unable to give any extra help to students who really need help.

The changes in substitution cover for teachers will lead to students in the class without a teacher and covering the course becomes more difficult.

The abolition of grants towards the Junior Certificate Schools Programme, Leaving Certificate Applied, LCVP and Transition Year programmes leave schools unable to offer these programmes.

The problem with the above cuts is that, the student who would get 500/600 points will still be ok. The student who has some special educational needs will still get the help he/she needs, I hope, but with the recent announcement of withdrawal of special needs teachers in the primary sector nothing is taken for granted especially as the minister did say in the budget that he wouldn't touch special needs.

The student who will suffer is the one who just needs a small helping hand now and again. That is the average student who needs the smaller class, who needs the subject teacher day after day to cover the course and most important are the students who will take the LCA or LCVP courses in order to get a chance to go to college. These students only get the one chance to go through second level education, are we doing what we can to ensure this is the best education they can receive?

Over the last few months I have seen trade unions with the backing of their workers, negotiating for better deals and in some cases just to keep their members in jobs. Is it not time for parents to get behind their committees, parents associations and voluntary national executive, to start working on getting the government to reverse these cutbacks to ensure that we spend nearer the 8.4% GDP Denmark spend than the 4.6% we spend. The next 25 years of PACCS will be very busy indeed.

To finish I would like to thank all our members of the National Executive for their hard work over the last year and all our regional members for travelling long distances and attending meetings even in some very bad weather like we have had over the winter months.

Enjoy the conference and I hope I get a chance to speak to all our new members over the weekend.

Thank you