

PACCS NEWS May 2004

Letter from the New President of PACCS To the Parents' Associations of Community & Comprehensive Schools.

Dear Parents,

My name is Humphrey O'Riordan and I was elected President of PACCS at our 20th Annual Conference in Limerick in March, 2004.

I am married to Eileen and we have two children, our son John Joe is presently a student in Waterford Institute of Technology and Annmarie is a fifteen-year-old Junior Certificate Student at Millstreet Community School.

I joined my local Parent Association in 1996 and like most first year parents I felt rather lost. When people spoke at meetings they seemed to speak in abbreviations making it even more difficult to follow. At this stage I did not know who or what PACCS was, not to mention NPCpp or ACCS but I persevered and actually began to enjoy the whole experience.

In 1997, Millstreet Community School Parents' Association hosted the Annual Delegate Conference of PACCS and I was nominated as the Millstreet delegate. From then on, I was totally hooked. The one thing that will always remain with me was the genuine welcome everyone attending conference receives, particularly the new members.

As your President I intend to ensure that this initial welcome will always be there and that nobody will ever be afraid to make a point or ask a question. We were all new at one stage and the only foolish question is the one that someone is afraid to ask.

An encouraging feature of last year was the increase in schools affiliating to PACCS, particularly 'first time parents' associations'. This is something I feel we must acknowledge and in doing so promise to deliver support and assistance in so far as it is possible but to do this we need your continued support and feedback.

I am particularly looking forward to the coming year in PACCS. Most of our National Executive members I already know and have worked with over the past year and a half. They are a fantastic group of dedicated, hardworking parents who have generously given their time to help

improve our education system for everyone. To the new members I would like to extend a warm welcome and I am looking forward to working with them and I hope they will enjoy the experience.

I am also looking forward to continued good working relations with all the educational partners.

Yours sincerely,

**Humphrey O'Riordan,
President, PACCS.**

Department Picking on One of Our Members.

Greendale Community School Parents Association were informed recently of the proposed closure of their school in Dublin North East. There is shock and anger in the area and at a meeting on the 10th May organised by the Parents Association of Greendale, a campaign committee was formed to fight the proposed closure. Schools in the PACCS sector of the Irish Education system should sit up and take note of this most recent development. The National Executive of PACCS would ask all parents, students, teachers in the community school sector to give their support to the community of Greendale in their hour of need. Further news will follow in relation to this very serious issue.

Information, Anna Bent
Secretary Greendale C.S. Parents Association, 01 8397308 /086 1545385
75 Phornville Road, Kilbarrack, D 5
Greendale have a very good website:
www.greendalecommunityschool.ie
See Article from Greendale on next page.

Talk on Dyslexia

Wynn Mc Cormack recently gave a very informative and interesting presentation, on the many differing forms of dyslexia. The wide range of difficulties the student may experience include: Reading, Spelling, Handwriting, Note-taking, Verbal or Written Expression, Maths, Sequencing, Directional Confusion, Lack of Confidence.

Early Diagnosis: Wynn stressed the importance of early diagnosis and

assessment, as the results of an early assessment may be vital for exemptions from languages, grammar etc. at secondary and third level. A student with serious dyslexia can apply to be exempt from the NUI third language requirement. The DES allows some students an exemption from Irish if they function intellectually at average or above average level, but have a specific learning difficulty of such degree of severity that they fail to achieve expected levels of attainment in basic language skills. If the child is exempt from Irish for these reasons he is also exempt from the third language requirement for NUI.

Exam Time Resources: The parents were also informed of the many resources available at exam time: the provision of a reader, use of a tape recorder, use of word processor and the exemption from the spelling and grammar elements of the exam in language subjects. It is necessary to practise the various methods before exams.

Experienced: As a mother with three children with dyslexia and a resource teacher Wynn spoke from the heart and with great knowledge. She urged parents who had children with dyslexia to get them involved in activities that would boost their self-esteem and confidence. (Sports etc)

Report on workshop 'Health Matters For Teenagers'. PACCS 2004 Conference.

18 delegates attended the workshop where lively interaction and discussion on facts relating to teenage health took place. Each participant was given a handout of the factual issues covered. They were encouraged to check that 5 - 6 timetable periods in the year were assigned to R.S.E. (relationship and sexuality education) which is an aspect of S.P.H.E. (social personal and health education). Topics discussed were Acne, Head-lice, Food/Exercise (focusing on the food pyramid and any type of physical activity), Immunisation, Sexual Health and Teenage Attitudes to Alcohol.

Participants were given a written drugs quiz to complete to help them establish facts about drug use/abuse. Participants were encouraged to leave the health

promotion leaflets given out, in the home where their teenagers will read them, so making them aware of the same information as their parents.

Greendale Community School is situated right in the heart of the community of Kilbarrack on Dublin's North Side. It opened in 1975 and has been a focal point in the community ever since. It is a state of the art building in beautiful landscaped gardens in which the students grow flowers and vegetables. The atmosphere in Greendale is unusually welcoming. The interaction between students and teachers is characterised by a warm friendliness and by mutual respect that has been carefully nurtured over the years. Apart from the academic development of the students, high priority is given to the personal, spiritual and social development of all students through its pastoral care programme. Greendale Community School also offers a range of initiatives not on offer in other schools in the area, such as:

- Home/School/Community Liaison
- School Completion Programme
- Leaving Certificate Applied and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
- A very committed Parents' Association
- Trinity Access Programme
- Special Education Programme

There is also a flourishing night school in which upwards of 1,000 people enrol annually and a "Back to Education" programme for adults during the day. **Proposed Closure:** Now this excellent school faces proposed closure. The people of Kilbarrack are shocked and saddened at this development – particularly as they were never involved in any consultation process. They realise that low enrolment, due to the age profile in the area, is a major factor. However, they are confident that this will change and that Greendale Community School, with their continued support and the good will of the Department of Education and Science will continue to be viable for a long time to come. Long after the doors have been locked and the lights turned off in neighbouring schools on the long winter evenings, the light burns brightly in Greendale Community School as adults and students enjoy the benefits of night school and after school activities respectively. May this light burn

brightly in the community for many years to come.

Self-esteem and Parents

Perhaps the most commonly used term in relation to teenagers today is self-esteem. When we hear it as parents we wonder how our children are doing in the self-esteem stakes. Self-esteem reflects the value we have of ourselves, the judgement we make of ourselves and the value we place on ourselves as people. Seen in that way self esteem is important.

Crucial Role of Parents: There is no doubt that parents have a very crucial role in helping their children to develop self-esteem. There is no blue-print to being a perfect parent but it is possible to avoid certain traps. The main thing is to be yourself. Your children love you for the person that you are. Being aware of the following may help: Begin by listening. Give them a chance to give their side of the story and to experience understanding. The underlying needs and interests usually surface in this way.

"I" Messages: Try to use "I" messages rather "You" messages. For example "I would rather you telephoned me to collect you, rather than you walk home on your own because I worry that something might happen you on your own as opposed to "you are immature and irresponsible walking on your own and something will happen to you".

Poor Opinion of ones self: Low self-esteem means having a poor opinion of oneself and our children internalise the messages they receive from their parents, be they positive or negative. Praise the efforts they make rather than the grades they are awarded. Encourage them to get involved in activities both inside and outside the school. It does not really matter what the activity is. The intention should be to get them to meet as many different personalities as possible in as many different situations as possible. Young people do take up and drop a lot of activities but they eventually may find one they really love and this can be so important for developing social skills and confidence.

Feel Good Factor: Help them to feel good about their appearance. Look at any of the advertisements directed at young people nowadays and you will see the pressure on young people to look a certain way. They look to us to confirm that they are OK. Remember how our parents affected our confidence or lack of , in this area. Finally I would say love

them for who they are, with all their unique qualities, gifts and weaknesses.

Dr Brendan Byrne is author of a number of books/publications on Bullying and is Pastoral Counsellor in Coolmine

Filling out the CAO Form

Defend yourself against serious mistakes through thorough preparation. Research your course and college choices carefully. Remember, there is no such thing as the better college or the best course, only the college or course that best suits you.. Never assume that courses with high points are quality courses. There are many medium and low points courses with better employment prospects. Try to avoid "college snobbery". Gaining entry to a particular college is not necessarily a passport to contentment. The course that maximises your potential and matches your capabilities might not necessarily be in a university. Entertain the idea of leaving the country for the course that you want. It is expensive and daunting, but with some real preparation , perfectly possible. Have a safety net! If everything goes wrong on the day, have some traditionally low points courses to fall back on. Remember students have a tendency to only research their top three choices, this is a mistake. Every course choice on your CAO form must be a real option for you

David Oates, Career Guidance Teacher, Coolmine

Dublin Region PACCS

At a regional meeting held recently, participating schools gave an outline of how their parent associations spend and receive funding:

St Tiernan's spent 500 euro on a table tennis competition when students had to travel to Germany. They also ran a musical evening "Dissolving boundaries through music" and provided a present for the raffle.

Newpark spent funds upgrading their canteen, which is used by pupils and teachers. They bought new electricals. They are running a competition for the design of a new uniform crest. They sold soap at Christmas (pupils) at 5 euro a bar and made 2,000 euro.

St Kilians had a non-uniform day for funds to support the Year Book for the Leaving Cert students.

Tallaght CS don't fundraise. They pay expenses from the student registration fees

Ballinteer CS. They fund a social night or quiz with the teachers and contribute to Pupil of the Year and to PE expenses.

East Glendalough fund half a teacher, thus reducing class size. They fund the canteen, trips to places of interest for students and the yearbook.

Pobailscoil Neasain 500 euro was used for prizes for a Drugs Awareness campaign. They were considering recycling facilities but found it too expensive.

Old Bawn CS runs a lotto. They give scholarships for the Gaeltacht and subsidise students going to Germany and France. They also gave funding to the library.

Cabinteely CS uses the registration money. They fund a computer and lunchtime club. They fund PE gear and had the grounds cleaned up. They subsidise pupils going to the Gaeltacht. They gave a prize for a writing competition. They are running a competition for a school motto. They ran a drugs course and a course for offending behaviour.

Coolmine CS fund talks for parents and prizes for Student of the Year. They are looking into buying a new bus for the school. They are considering a prize for Teacher of the Year and some discussion took place on how it could be done.

Palmerstown CS Cleaned up the school grounds. They also funded a book scheme, which cost between 2,000 and 3,000 euro. They subsidise bus fares for trips and subsidised a D.J. course for some of the students who run discos. They are presently fund-raising to refurbish the school.

PACCS 20TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE-Limerick 2004

The 20th annual PACCS conference took place Friday and Saturday 5th and 6th March 2004 in the Two Mile Inn Hotel in Limerick. Delegates from all over the country attended. Jan O'Sullivan, Labour spokesperson on education, officially opened the Conference. Jan spoke about schools "cherry picking" and that all schools should be open to access. She said she would be delighted to represent us in the Dail. Gerard Horgan then spoke about the NEPPS survey. 65% of survey returns were unsatisfied with the National Psychological Service system.

There were 4 different workshops from which to choose. Health Matters for Teenagers by Kate Fahey was very informative. It covered behaviour, acne, head lice, drink, drugs, food/exercise and sexual health. Many of the publications

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on these can be found on the Health Board website.

Listening Skills by Mary Murtagh was also very worthwhile.

Special Needs-a parents prospective by Grace Mooney took many who attended by surprise. Many people did not realise that children who need special help in Primary School have to apply all over again when applying for 2nd level school. Parents' regaining their influence by Jim Jackman was an interactive and interesting workshop for parents dealing with teenagers in the modern world.

Gerard Horgan the President then gave the address. He spoke on the achievements last year and the challenges for the future. He thanked his colleagues on the executive committee for all their efforts during the year. There were 31 motions from all round the country.

Father Harry Bohan gave the keynote address in which he spoke about the speed of change in our world. Traditional structures are crumbling. We have become more powerful but we should ask ourselves "What are my values?" There are many types of families today but the quality of parenting is what is important.

The conference ended with the election of a new president. The evening ended with a gala dinner and lots of fun.

St. Colmcille's Community School, Knocklyon, Dublin 16

The School has been extremely busy with sporting activities such as Table Tennis, basketball, hurling, badminton. One of the badminton teams captured the Leinster Championship title recently. Also the school has won the much coveted 'Green' School Flag .

St. Colmcille's has also been engaged in a French Exchange Programme with students from 2nd year, which went off really well. So too, did Seachtain na Gaeilge in March, where we had debates, quizzes, songs and stories in our native language.

The Parents Association's Website is up and running. Approval is now being sought for an All Weather Facility at the school.

Colaiste Chiarain, Leixlip - School Principal Mr Seamus Cummins retiring. He will be missed by the Parents Council. Principal/vice-principal attend our monthly meeting and keep us informed of the running of the school. The school refurbishment has been completed and we are pleased that the pre-fab buildings are now not in use for

student classes. Two parent council reps on the BOM plus the BOM chairperson is an ex-parent council chairperson. She has been in office for a number of years now.

Parents Regaining their Influence- A Conference Report

The title of this workshop, initially titled parents under stress was changed to the more positive one, parents regaining their influence. The intention of the facilitator was to initiate a debate rather than lecture to attendees. Conscious of the fact that a lot of the conference would involve people listening, this was the one opportunity that people could actively participate.

An overall view expressed was that the discussion had really only started when time was up, such was the involvement and participation by all present.

In an attempt to put some structure on the workshop, five questions were suggested that people could express views on.

1. First off, do people here today, believe that parents have lost some or all of their influence.
2. If so, why do you feel this has happened.
3. What proposals/suggestions might we offer to parents that might in some way reverse the process and help parents to regain the influence that was once their domain.
4. Is there a role that Parent Associations could play in helping to improve the situation?

Agreement: In response to the first question there was little doubt in peoples minds that parents had lost some or all of their influence.

Reasons suggested: Materialism, both parents working, not enough thought given to childminders, peer influences, television, Internet, mobile phones and parents giving children what they did not have themselves were given has part of the reason for this decline in parental power.

Improving Situation: Suggestions for improving the situation included: saying "no" to children where appropriate, restricting pocket money, giving good example yourself, limiting viewing time and setting watersheds, knowing their friends and where possible their friends parents, listen more and dictate less, praise and reward effort and forgive faults. Ideally starting at an early age, when you say no, you mean no. Being consistent, both parents on the same

level and behaving the way they would like their children to behave.

Role of Parent Associations: There was a general feeling that parents associations could help to improve the situation. Parenting workshops, lists of speakers to be circulated to all parent associations, preferably parents with knowledge, experience and **solutions** to problems encountered in key areas concerning teenagers and younger children alike.

Bullying- A New Initiative in Birmingham, Source Vivette O'Donnell, Campaign against Bullying

Birmingham pupils are increasingly being taught a new core skill alongside literacy and numeracy - how to read emotions. Lessons in emotional literacy - which involve learning how to listen, connect with other people and deal with inner emotions, already feature at many schools in the city. City education chiefs are now calling on the Government to make the skill a part of the National Curriculum to ensure pupils learn how to interact with each other in a civil manner. They believe emotional literacy, which is sometimes referred to as emotional intelligence, will help reduce bullying and be influential in raising attainment. Birmingham City Council's head of education Tony Howell said: "It is about teaching children how to understand their feelings and connect with their own emotions or those of other pupils. "Some of our children who are from extremely challenging backgrounds are very good at talking about their feelings and the feelings of others. "Emotional literacy involves connecting with one's own feelings and behaviour and how to interact with other people's behaviour. Sometimes it is just learning how to talk about these things, but also it is about how to approach other people. "We want it promoted as one of the things that should be part of the

National Curriculum." Emotional literacy is a relatively new concept in the education world. The Southampton Emotional Literacy Interest Group (SELIG) defines it as: "The ability to recognise, understand, handle and appropriately express emotions". Educational psychologists say children who have been taught such skills are: * Are more likely to recognise and understand their feelings and

therefore become more adept at handling and expressing themselves * Less stressed, and are able to manage competing demands more effectively * Better listeners and more likely to see the other person's point of view * An increased attention span * Better able to form and maintain relationships * Less likely to be involved in crime, particularly those crimes involving violence * More likely to become better parents Emotional intelligence lessons was identified as one of the ways to crack down on bullying during a Government conference held at Birmingham's Aston Villa Stadium yesterday Hundreds of head-teachers and educationalists gathered at the event organised by the Department for Education and Skills. Schools Minister Ivan Lewis, who was himself bullied at school, said research showed about half of pupils at both primary and secondary level identify bullying as a major problem in their school.

TV presenter Esther Rantzen, founder and chair of children's charity ChildLine, said: "It is the biggest single problem people ring us about. "Last year we had 22,000 calls about bullying. Children suffer long- term damage if they are the target of persistent bullying. "It is no good schools having an anti-bullying policy, that is there on the shelf to be pointed to if the inspector calls - **it has to be active and effective.**"

COLAISTE CHOLMCILLE Ballyshannon

The Parents' Association is as busy as ever. The Transition Year Students recently produced the musical "Fame". The show ran in the recently refurbished Abbey Centre in Ballyshannon for three successive nights. The association assisted by providing ushers, tickets sellers and other matters. It was an excellent production and well done to the YT Class, the teachers and everyone associated with it.

The PA hosted a talk for the parents, entitled "Understanding and Parenting Teenagers". It was presented by Ms Karen Gillen, a Psychologist with the North Western Health Board. It was a very informative evening for those who attended. It certainly allayed many of the concerns parents have with regard to the difficulties of adolescence and the teenage years. The school, as part of its adult and community education programme, ran a ten week course last year, entitled "Living with Teenagers" and it is planned to have this an annual event.

Since the last newsletter, the PA ran a successful "Race Night" as part of its ongoing fundraising activities to meet its own administration needs and to support a number of extra curricular activities for the school. A notable support to the school was to fund the travel costs of a group of 12 students undertaking a first year in school Personal Development Programme. This programme is run in association with the Ballyshannon/Bundoran Neighbourhood Youth Project.

The school is preparing a policy document on the RSE Programme. Two members of the PA committee were invited as part of a working group, representing BOM, staff and parents. This is the first of a number of policy documents that will be prepared over the coming months and in which the PA will have an input, prior to final adoption by the Board of Management.

PACCS Executive 2004-05

Dublin:

Valerie Burke – Ballinteer
Jim Jackman, Vice President and Joint PRO – Coolmine

Grace Mooney – Palmerstown
Teresa Byrne – Hon. Sec. – Rosmini
Joyce Timms – St. Killian's

Southern:

Humphrey O'Riordan – President – Millstreet
Pat Murphy – Boherbue
Catherine O'Donovan – Bishopstown
Mary Shannon – Carrigaline

Mid- West:

Ann Leamy – Cashel
Teresa McDonagh – St. Patrick's Shannon

West:

Teresa McDaid – Kiltimagh
Mary Duffy – Kiltimagh

South East:

Margaret Molloy – Treasurer and Joint PRO – Gorey
Margaret Donohue – Assist. Treasurer – Gorey

Donagal:

Sean Staunton – Ballyshannon
Christopher Taitt – Carndonagh
Hon. Gen. Secretary – Connie Carolan

Glenamaddy Community School

We wish all the best to the new parents association that has been set up. You have our full support. (PACCS Exec)

Ardee Community School: Held a very successful race night recently. Also a new state of the art computer room is being built. Best wishes go to all students sitting exams next month.