

Address to Conference 2006 – Humphrey O’Riordan, President, PACCS.

Good morning fellow parents, guests, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to Roscrea to our 22nd annual delegate conference. It doesn’t seem that long since I was last trying to write my President’s address and to tell you the truth it hasn’t got any easier and I didn’t get any better at writing it.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome our esteemed guests who are staying with us for the weekend especially:

I would like to thank our standing orders committee, Catherine, Mary, Pat and Pat. It is great to see people who have gone through the system willing to come back and give us the benefit of their experience. I would like to thank the people who gave the workshops, Kate, Pricilla and Tom. I would also like to thank Pat Herlihy who will be speaking to us on health and safety in schools

from the outdoor concept company

from steer clear

from FEACH

A very special word of thanks to Sean McCann of A.C.C.S who is our keynote speaker.

I also wish to thank the P.A.C.C.S national executive. They are an excellent hardworking and dedicated group of people. I would like to invite each one of them to come to the podium with me because the president wouldn’t be much good on his own and everything we do, we do as a team. We have Valerie, Teresa, Jim, Noreen, Marion, Mary and Grace from Dublin. We have Pat, Mary and Gretta from the southern region. From the mid-west we have Ann, Theresa, Mary and Tommy. We have Breda and Margaret from the west. From the south-east we have the two Margarets. In the north-east we have another Margaret. In Donegal we have Seán and Christopher and last but not least we have our general secretary Connie.

Parents are the first and most significant influence in a child’s development and learning. As every parent knows the most critical stages in the development and learning process begins when a child is born, long before they start school. When our children do go to school it is vital that the school teaches the skills they need to be responsible citizens. As parents we need to step back and look at the direction our children are taking. Every week in the news we hear of elderly people being beaten and robbed by youths. It is our duty to instil in our children their responsibilities not just to their school but to the community as a whole. There’s a program running in some schools which is called “Living scenes”. The idea is simple, retired people come into the school to learn skills alongside transition year students. There is a special bond between younger and older people. One offers experience and wisdom, the other enthusiasm and expectation. The old and young share more common ground than one might expect. Both have to deal with society’s perception of them. Teens are viewed as trouble, the elderly are barely noticed at all. Through this program in my own school the attitude of one to the other has totally changed for the better. It is these types of programmes that help shape a better future.

The loss of teacher contact time is still a huge issue in our schools. We have spoken at length to our management body and with the teacher unions on this issue. The Department of Education and science is still resisting the fact that most in-service training could be carried out during mid-terms and school holidays and pay teachers accordingly. If a solution is simple and achievable without huge cost, the department shows no interest.

After many years we have finally got parents onto the Boards of Management on most Comprehensive Schools but I mean most. There are still a few Protestant ethos Comprehensive Schools that are not yet finalised. It has been an extremely long struggle but the end is finally in sight.

Last year I spoke on the future of the N.P.Cpp (National Parents Council post primary), since then our own PRO Jim Jackman was elected president of the N.P.Cpp. Since then he has attended numerous meetings and functions. He has already stamped his unique approach on N.P.Cpp. His main attribute is his honesty and everyone knows that everything he does is in the best interest of the children. The theme of our conference "struggling with the juggling" is very apt because there is such pressure on the modern parent that the amount of time they can dedicate on a voluntary basis is getting smaller and smaller. With that in mind we need a full time staff in the N.P.Cpp office to support the voluntary sector.

The task force on student behaviour was set up in early 2005 to consider and report on the issue of student behaviour in second level schools. The chairperson of this task force is Maeve Martin who was our keynote speaker at our Limerick conference in 2002. All partners in education were invited to make submissions to this task force. As parents we have the right to expect a good quality education for our children without constant interruption from a very small percentage of disruptive students. It is very demoralising for a teacher to encounter an atmosphere of indifference and protestation on a daily basis. If a very small group is constantly disrupting a teacher then the rest of that class are losing out as the teacher is not allowed to do what they do best and that is to teach. Parents in general try to instil in their children norms of respect and positive attitudes to authority figures. Parent groups need to act as advocates to bring as many parents as possible on to ways of collaborating with schools to help translate their expectations into realities. If there is a good working relationship between the school and the parents then it is much easier to solve any problems that may arise. If we look at the results of any surveys or enquiries released over the last number of years they all point to the fact that the parents are an extremely important partner in our education system. It is up to us to make sure that the parent's voice will always be heard.

Thank you and enjoy the rest of the conference.

4th March, 2006.

Racket Hall Hotel, Roscrea.