

Good morning fellow parents, guests, ladies and gentlemen, Welcome to Roscrea to our 23rd Annual Delegate Conference. Writing or giving speeches was never my strong point as you will appreciate by the time I finish.

I would like to welcome our guests who have joined us for the weekend. A very special welcome to our past presidents. It is important that we are able to fall back on our past presidents for any advice or help we may require.

Last year I invited the members of our National Executive to join me at the podium. This year I think it is very important that I do the same. We have Teresa, Theresa, Noreen, and Grace from Dublin. We have Mary and Gretta and Marie from the southern region. From the mid-west we have Ann, Catherine and Tommy. We have Margaret, Breda and Veronica from the west. From the north-east we have Margaret and Carole. In the south-east we have Margaret and Margaret. In Donegal we have Seán and finally we have our general secretary Connie. Everything we do during the year we do as a team and the President's address is a continuation of team work.

Our theme this year "Learning for Life" is 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. A short time ago all students in the majority of classes were born in the locality but now it is totally different. The number of students from non-english speaking cultures attending our schools are rising rapidly. At a recent "Multicultural Evening" held at my own school in Millstreet we were welcomed by students in nine different languages, An integration by foreign students may be good for breaking down barriers and helping our children learn about different cultures but is also creating huge problems in our classrooms. It is tough on teachers who are trying to teach students who may have a very poor understanding of the English language. The majority of students are losing out because of a small minority. In recent weeks our Minister for Education, Minister Hanafin announced the appointment of 200 additional language support teachers to help newcomer children in our schools. That 200 is divided between primary and post primary schools. This may be a start but it is only the tip of the iceberg of what is needed. At the moment if you have between 3 and 13 non national students your school is entitled to apply for a grant to pay for a part time teacher.

14 to 27 students are entitled to one teacher

28 to 43 students are entitled to two teachers

and with over 43 non national students the school is then entitled to three teachers. At present it is possible to have 42 non English speaking students in your school and only two extra teachers which can't possibly work. As we are in an election year it is a good time to bring our education frustrations to our politicians.

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 effects those immediately involved, it affects the entire classroom and home life. We have a workshop today on special needs and as we know anyone who is slightly different to the norm is a possible target for bullying. We have a workshop on "Student Mentoring", I think that if this programme is properly implemented it would be a great asset in reducing bullying. Later on today we have Stephen Minton who will speak to

us about a DVD called "Silent Witnesses". This DVD shows what tragic effects bullying can have.

Each year some deranged person comes up with new ideas to make our children's lives a living hell. This year is no different. The latest craze is "Ghost texts". This is where somebody can buy a sim card which is untraceable, they then text young children and get them to do tasks which normally they would not do. The person sending the text pretends to be somebody from the area who has recently died. If the child does not carry out the instruction they are given they are threatened that a ghost will appear at the foot of their beds during the night and will have severe consequences. We need to be extremely vigilant with our children's mobile phones and keep an eye on texts they receive. All modern technology like mobile phoned, the internet etc. is very good but must be kept in check.

(WSE) Whole-School Evaluations are continuing in our schools at the moment. The Whole-School Evaluation is a process of external evaluations of the work of a school carried out by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science. The process is designed to monitor and assess the quality, economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the education system provided by the state. In general we are satisfied with this evaluation but with some reservations. Parents are involved during the original evaluation but when it comes to evaluating the draft of the report prior to the final print parents are excluded. This needs to be remedied as we need to be involved for the entire process. If we are equal partners in education then we need equal rights.

During the last twelve months we received "The Report of the Task Force on Students Behaviour in Second Level Schools". This is a 180 page document dealing with every aspect of student behaviour. To quote from the report "there is a wealth of evidence to indicate the centrality of the role of parents in influencing their children's adaptation to and progress in school". The Task Force recommends that schools and parents ensure that at all times they work in ways that promote genuine collaboration in the best interests of the young people who's progress and well being both aspire to achieve. Almost every educational report states the important of parental involvement in schools. We must never lose sight of the fact that parents are the first and most significant influence in a child's development and learning. The most critical stages in a child's development begin when a child is born, long before they start school.

NPCpp (The National Parents Council post primary) has had many changes over the last year. The five constituent bodies are now involved. NPCpp are holding a conference this year which is the first in a many years. They are progressing well with an external review on the direction NPCpp should be going. Each of the constituent bodies is devoting a lot of time into making a better and stronger NPCpp thus achieving a stronger parent voice. We're delighted to have representatives of each of the constituent bodies with us this weekend as well as representatives from NPCpp. It can be disheartening when in some newspapers we read what are NPCpp doing? The media seem to forget that we are there in a voluntary basis and not in full time paid positions as are all other partners in education.

As parents if we see something we feel can benefit our schools we should push to have these implemented. Examples of these are "A Code of Courtesy", a copy of this is in your handbook. It was jointly produced by the parents, teachers and students of Kenmare Community School. It is a very simple down to earth document which will greatly benefit our schools. Another example is the "Living

Scenes” project which can have many benefits to the school community as a whole. It creates a very positive bond between the older and younger generations.

As I said at the start I do not like giving speeches so I now think it is time for me to be quiet. My third term as President is coming to a close and it is time to hand over the rein to somebody new. Over the past three years I have met many people in the education sector and in general I found them to be helpful and understanding towards parents. I have made many genuine friends through PACCS. It is an association which I have great regard for and I hope that my involvement has made some contribution towards bettering our education system.

Again I would like to thank our National Executive. They always made my job as President very enjoyable.

Thank you.

Humphrey O’Riordan

President.