

ACCS Convention 2017 – “Community and Comprehensive Schools: Inclusion and Diversity”

The 35th Annual Convention of ACCS took place from Thursday 23rd to Saturday 25th March 2017 in the Malton Hotel, Killarney, Co. Kerry. As in previous years the Convention consisted of the necessary business of the ACCS while also allowing delegates the opportunity to reflect on what are very current issues on the theme for Convention, ‘Inclusion and Diversity’. Ms. Antoinette Nic Gearailt, President of ACCS opened the Convention welcoming delegates. Following the formalities Mr. Paul Crone, ACCS Executive chaired the opening session inviting Ms. Eileen Salmon, General Secretary ACCS, to present The General Secretary’s Report.

The General Secretary’s Report provided a detailed report of the work of ACCS over the previous year. She highlighted: Development of policies:

- Draft Dignity at Work Policy
 - Protected Disclosures Policy template
 - Parental Leave Policy template
- Reform in Education Sector:
- Budgets 2016 & 2017
 - Action Plan for Education 2017
 - New SEN model
 - New DEIS model
 - New Management and Leadership model

The General Secretary brought delegates attention to the extensive programme of continuous professional development delivered during the course of the year to support Boards of Management in their role. She referred specifically to the publication of ‘The Governance Manual for Community and Comprehensive Schools’ by the Department of Education and Skills which came into effect on 1st September 2016.

In a year that was fraught with difficulty for Boards of Management the General Secretary provided detailed consideration of how Industrial Action of ASTI has impacted on schools.

Looking at the different strands within the Strategic Plan the General Secretary outlined progress to date under the headings:

1. Managing the Evolution of ACCS
2. Promoting the Community & Comprehensive school as models of the schools of the future
3. Shaping the future by influencing and managing change

As part of these considerations delegates were asked to reflect on the observation of Dean Lindsay, Sales Leadership Speaker, “we don’t want managers to manage our change, we want leaders to lead our progress”.

The General Secretary’s Report was followed by The Honorary Treasurer’s Report presented by Mr. Séamus Ó Ceallacháin. The detailed report presented the audited accounts to delegates which indicated the Association was in financial good health and addressed the reporting requirements of bodies in receipt of public funds.

This session concluded with the Human Resources Manager’s Report presented by Ms. Anne Marie Dillon, ACCS Human Resources Manager. The main activities included:

- An extensive In Service Programme
- Principal/Deputy Principal Appointment Process, including Competency Based Recruitment Interview Skills Training
- Posts of Responsibility Appointments
- Garda Vetting
- Data Protection
- Paternity Leave
- Fitness to Teach
- Protected Disclosures
- Revised procedures for the filling of available teaching posts
- Redeployment

A copy of these reports and those of the ACCS Sub-Committees can be accessed in the Convention Handbook which is posted on www.accs.ie; click on the CPD Programme Tab and then Convention 2017.

The focus of business of Convention turned to the election of President of ACCS for 2017/18 where Ms. Antoinette Nic Gearailt was formally elected on the proposal of Mr. Peter Keohane



The Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Richard Bruton T.D. and Ms. Eileen Salmon, General Secretary ACCS at the recent ACCS Convention in Killarney.

and seconded by Mr. Seán McCann, both of Donahies Community School. In accepting the position for a third year Ms. Nic Gearailt expressed her sincere thanks to delegates for the honour of being President of ACCS and committed to continuing to advance the best interests of the Association.

The attention of Convention turned to the address by Keynote Speaker Ms. Emily Logan, Chief Commissioner of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission. Ms. Logan was introduced by ACCS Executive member Ms. Áine O’Sullivan and presented a thought provoking presentation entitled ‘Providing Leadership through Inclusion and Diversity’. A report of this presentation is included later in this newsletter with the full text available on www.accs.ie.

www.accs.ie

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Mr. Séamus Ceallacháin, ACCS Executive, provided an incisive response to Ms. Logan's presentation.

The business of the first day of Convention 2017 concluded with the Election of the ACCS Executive Committee 2017/18 with the following members elected:

Connacht:

Mr. Michael Brett, Mr. Gay McManus

Dublin:

Mr. Paul Crone, Mr. Pat McKenna,
Mr. Frank Moran

Leinster:

Ms. Geraldine Keena, Ms. Áine O'Sullivan,
Mr. Paul Thornton

Munster:

Mr. Dermot Healy, Ms. Noralene Ní Urdail,
Mr. Séamus Ó Ceallacháin

Ulster:

Ms. Maureen Curran, Mr. Paul Fiorentini

Comprehensives:

Mr. Derek Lowry, An t-Úas. Tomás Ó Nídh

Members co-opted by the Executive:

Mr. James Duignan, Mr. David Leahy

ACCS Officers:

President: Ms. Antoinette Nic Gearailt

Vice-President: Mr. Paul Fiorentini

Hon. Secretary: Mr. Pat McKenna

Hon. Treasurer: Mr. Séamus Ó Ceallacháin

Convention Motions was the first item of business on Friday morning. There were three motions introduced by the Chairperson of the session, Mr. Paul Thornton, ACCS Executive, which were actively debated. The motions and their outcomes were:

1. That ACCS would engage with the relevant parties to ensure that teachers are not summoned for Jury service during the academic year as this is placing a further burden on sourcing qualified replacements and disrupting teaching and learning.

Carndonagh Community School

Not carried

2. That the ACCS would ask the DES to abolish the requirements to 84 days in an acting up role before the acting up allowance is paid.

St. Brendan's Community School

Carried

3. That the ACCS would ask the DES to develop a policy in relation to the release of teachers for State Examination. School management are finding it increasingly difficult to get substitutes for teachers released for state examinations and almost impossible to get same subject replacements.

St. Brendan's Community School

Referred to the Executive

At 10.00 a.m. on Friday, Convention warmly welcomed Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Richard Bruton, T.D., for the Presidential Address and the Ministerial Address to Convention. Ms. Antoinette Nic Gearailt's Presidential Address was thoughtful,



The team from Portmarnock Community School following their presentation, 'Global Citizens Mapping the Future' at the recent ACCS Annual Convention: L-R Ms. Eithne Deeney, Principal Portmarnock Community School, Tom Finucane, Ravi Gollapalli, Mr. Niall Fitzgerald, Colin McAndrew, Ms. Colette Cronin, Emma Forde, Ms. Cora Fitzgerald Tighe and Darragh Bolger.

considered and addressed the pertinent issues facing school management at present while acknowledging the engagement of Department Officials with ACCS and the funding secured by the Minister in the current Budget. The Minister responded positively to the presidential address commending ACCS on the choice of theme for Convention and promising engagement on issues raised. He also focused on the Action Plan for Education stating that it is rightfully an ambitious plan where the Irish education system is benchmarked against the best. He acknowledged the considerable progress under the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy and looked forward to continued progress in educational reform which must be ambitious but also fair. Detailed reports on both addresses will follow later in this newsletter.

Both presentations were extremely well received by delegates who found them inspiring, hopeful and ambitious for what can be achieved.

Following the morning break delegates were invited to participate in a Panel Discussion, chaired by Mr. Pat O'Connor, ACCS Executive which opened with the following inputs:

- Diversity & Inclusion in Irish Education
Dr. Pdraig Kirk, Director of JCT
- Supporting Inclusion in Schools
Mr. Jim Mulkerrins, Principal Officer SEN, DES
- DEIS Plan 2017
Ms. Caitriona O'Brien, Principal Officer, Social Inclusion, DES

Delegates then engaged with the members of the Panel around the areas covered.

The Friday afternoon session comprised of two components, a presentation celebrating the contribution of the first three Comprehensive Schools opened in Ireland, St. Patrick's Comprehensive School, Shannon, St. Aidan's Comprehensive School, Cootehill and Scoil Chuimsitheach Chiaráin, An Cheathrú Rua. Each school contributed to a video presentation commissioned by ACCS to mark the 50th Anniversary of the foundation of these three Comprehensive Schools. It was a particular joy to have Mr.

Diarmaid Ó Donnabháin, the founding Principal of St. Patrick's Comprehensive, Shannon present to share the experience with us. A link to the video presentation can be accessed through www.accs.ie.

The second component was a presentation by staff and students of Portmarnock Community School on their project, "Global Citizens Mapping the Future". The students were awarded the title of Young Social Innovators 2016 for their project. Delegates were truly amazed by this wonderful project. The project involved the students mapping the entire country of Lesotho and concluding a verifying process which involved 24-hour mapping sessions. Lesotho, due to its size, is an ideal country to demonstrate the effectiveness of this project and its application to issues like climate, justice and tackling poverty through strategic planning. The students' presentation can be accessed on www.accs.ie by clicking on the CPD Tab and then Convention 2017.

Friday evening concluded with the ACCS Convention Gala Dinner where delegates and guests had the opportunity to relax and enjoy the evening. Musical entertainment was provided by the students of Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne. Representatives of the three Comprehensive Schools celebrating 50 years of contribution to the education of their local community received a copy of the celebratory video presentation from Ms. Antoinette Nic Gearailt, President ACCS.

The Convention concluded with a Governance presentation for Board members on Saturday morning. This again proved a popular aspect of Convention with the focus of this year's presentation on:

- Financial responsibilities of the Board of Management
- The Board of Management as an Employer
- Changes to the Employee Assist Scheme

Sincere thanks was expressed to Office Manager, Ms. Susan Cunliffe, Ms. Debbie Riordan and Ms. Eileen Diver for all their work in ensuring the Convention ran seamlessly.

“Providing Leadership through Inclusion and Diversity” Ms. Emily Logan, Chief Commissioner, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

In her opening remarks Ms. Logan outlined the remit of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission with its “mandate to protect and promote human rights and equality in Ireland and build on a culture of respect for human rights, equality and intercultural understanding in the State”. The role of the Commission includes engagement with ‘experts in education’ and she expressed her appreciation for the invitation to address the ACCS Convention.

Ms. Logan continued by describing the role of the Commission in building on the work of the Equality Authority and the Irish Human Rights Commission with one of the earliest outputs of the new Commission being the publication in August 2015 of a training programme for staff and teachers in Yellow Flag Schools which explored the importance of respecting and accommodating diversity in Education.

The Human Rights and Equality Commission recognised that the concepts of human rights and equality are established at an early age, in school, and the significant role of educators in establishing a foundation to promote human rights and equality through their vision and leadership. Delegates were

very taken when Ms. Logan referenced the powerful image of American poet and essayist Adrienne Rich:

What happens “when someone with the authority of the teacher describes our society and you are not in it?” This kind of experience she said can be disorienting: “A moment of psychic disequilibrium as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing”.

Ms. Logan indicated that as educators we know this challenge well. “You see at first hand the moments where children from diverse backgrounds cannot see their lived experiences reflected in the curriculum or in the life of the school, and the distance that this can create. Part of your role as educators is to bridge that distance in the school environment”.

She referenced the work of Professor Conor Gearty on human rights principles, containing within them ‘emancipatory potential’. Diversity recognises that groups are different and diversity is beneficial. She referenced the numerous studies which emphasise that diversity and inclusion practices are hugely positive in terms of financial performance, worker retention and staff performance. “But in the educational sphere, we too often see discussion of diversity cast in less-positive, more hesitant terms – diversity as

a challenge, diversity as a problem, diversity as a source of uncertainty”. She continued that:

“Schools – their management and their teachers – are in the unique position to change that narrative, and recognise that the diversity of our classrooms today reflects the diversity of our society and workplaces tomorrow”.

Ms. Logan stated that the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools is particularly well positioned where this is concerned with its tradition of leadership in Education and its core principle of inclusivity expressed in its vision of, “contributing towards a just and caring society”, with a community focus, “genuinely reflective of the diversity of their communities”.

Ms. Logan described the classroom of her youth which was a far different place from today with the many changes that have occurred in Irish society. Demographic change has resulted in far more diverse classrooms where significant numbers of students have a language other than English as their first language. She identified the key role of education in integration and the significant role of school leadership. She encouraged schools to engage in inter-culturalism



Mr. John Irwin, Assistant General Secretary ACCS, Ms. Eileen Salmon, General Secretary ACCS, Keynote Speaker Ms. Emily Logan, Chief Commissioner of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, Ms. Antoinette Nic Gearailt, President ACCS, Ms. Aine O'Sullivan, Executive Member ACCS and Mr. Séamus Ó Ceallacháin, Honorary Treasurer ACCS.

which she defined as follows:

“Inter-culturalism, particularly in education, means more than just respecting ethnic diversity. It is about interaction, understanding and participation. It is about inclusion by design and planning, not as an add-on”.

Focusing on inclusive schools Ms. Logan observed that inclusion involves more than a diversity of nationalities but also students with special education needs, students from socio-economically disadvantaged families, students with disabilities and students from the Traveller community. She stressed that “the inclusive school must create opportunities for participation by everyone, regardless of their background” and crucially “an inclusive school cannot be static – it needs to be adaptable, and responsive to our society as it changes.”

Returning to the current work of the Commission Ms. Logan outlined their response to the current Admissions Bill

describing admissions as a ‘live issue’ for the Commission with a considerable number of calls to their public information line from parents frustrated by the process when their child cannot access a place in their local school. The Commission’s submission on the Admissions Bill included reference to:

- The inappropriateness of religion as a criterion for admission
- Religion in school after admission
- How previous connections to the school are dealt with as a criterion for admission
- Admission should always have at its core the best interest of the child as the primary standard

She continued outlining the Public-Sector Duty as comprehended in Section 42 of the 2014 Act. She described how this provision aimed to ensure a proactive engagement by all public service bodies with responsibility to:

- Eliminate discrimination on any of the nine identified grounds
- Promote equality
- Protect human rights

This is a conversation the Commission will engage in with all public-sector bodies over the coming months.

Ms. Logan acknowledged and congratulated ACCS on the work completed to date and referenced the excellent work of St. Kilian’s Community School, featured in recent ACCS Newsletters, and that of Portmarnock Community School’s Global Mapping Project, presented at this Convention. In conclusion, she hoped that there would be continuing engagement between the Commission and ACCS to further the goals of inclusion in education.

(The full text of Ms. Logan’s presentation can be accessed on www.accs.ie by clicking on the CPD Programmes tab and then Convention 2017.)

Recent relevant DES Circular Letters

CL 35/2017	Assessment Instruments (including tests and web-based resources) approved for use for guidance and/or learning support in post-primary schools from May 2017 until further notice
Imlitir 34_2017	POLASAÍ DON OIDEACHAS GAELTACHTA 2017-2022 AN CHÉIM FHEIDHMITHE TOSAIGH (AIBREÁN 2017 GO MEITHEAMH 2018)
CL 34/2017	POLICY ON GAELTACHT EDUCATION 2017-2022 - INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION PHASE
CL 32/2017	Measures to be adopted by schools to reduce the cost of school uniforms and other costs
CL 31/2017	Prescribed Material for the Junior Cycle Programme of Achievement (JCPA) in English. For Students Commencing Junior Cycle in September 2017 only
CL 24/2017	REVISION OF SALARIES OF SCHOOL SECRETARIES AND SCHOOL MAINTENANCE STAFF IN COMMUNITY AND COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS WITH EFFECT FROM 1 APRIL 2017
CL 22/2017	REVISION OF SALARIES FOR SPECIAL NEEDS ASSISTANTS (SNAs) WITH EFFECT FROM 1 APRIL 2017
CL 18/2017	Prescribed Material for the Junior Certificate/Junior Cycle Examination in 2019 and Leaving Certificate Examination in 2019
CL 16/2017	Statutory Requirements for the Retrospective Vetting of teaching staff, non-teaching staff and others
CL 16/2017	Frequently Asked Questions. Statutory Requirements for the Retrospective Vetting of teaching staff, non-teaching staff and others
CL 15/2017	Arrangements for the Implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle with particular reference to school years 2017/18 and 2018/19
CL 11/2017	Community & Comprehensive Schools Approved Allocation of Teaching Posts (2017/2018 School Year)

For a complete list of relevant DES Circulars please refer to the ACCS website, www.accs.ie, and follow the DES tab → Relevant DES Circulars.

ACCS Presidential Address to Convention 2017, Ms. Antoinette Nic Gearailt, President ACCS

Welcome

In her opening remarks, Ms. Antoinette Nic Gearailt, President ACCS, welcomed Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Richard Bruton, T.D., and thanked him for taking time from his busy schedule to be with us. She also welcomed the Officials from the Department of Education and Skills and thanked them for their ongoing engagement with ACCS throughout what has been a year fraught with challenges. She also gave a very special and warm welcome to representatives of St. Patrick's Comprehensive School, Shannon, St. Aidan's Comprehensive, Cootehill and Scoil Chuimsitheach Chiaráin, An Cheathrú Rua, the first three Comprehensive Schools to open in Ireland, each celebrating fifty years contributing to education in their communities.

Celebrating 50 Years

Reflecting on the Convention theme of Inclusion and Diversity Ms. Nic Gearailt reflected on the founding purpose of the first three Comprehensive Schools fifty years ago. Their purpose was to offer a comprehensive education to all students of their communities without any form of selection. They were innovative from their very inception, aiming to combine the traditional academic emphasis of the secondary voluntary schools of the time with the technical emphasis of vocational schools. She reflected on the observations of Mr. Diarmaid Ó Donnabháin, founding Principal of St. Patrick's Comprehensive School, Shannon, that the initial years in post primary education should be a 'period of exploration and observation' allowing students the space to grow and



At the recent ACCS Convention hosted in the Malton Hotel, Killarney, Mr. John Irwin, Assistant General Secretary ACCS, Ms. Eileen Salmon, General Secretary ACCS, The Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Richard Bruton T.D. and Ms. Antoinette Nic Gearailt, President ACCS.

identify and develop their strengths and talents. She observed fifty years later that this is consistent with the central themes of the new Junior Cycle Framework. Ms. Nic Gearailt stated:

"At the heart of what we do is the right of each individual student to be educated alongside their peers. Each of our schools reflects the needs of the community they serve".

Educational Funding

The past year has been hugely demanding in the context of the industrial relations issues facing schools. However, the provisions for education in the Budget for 2017 provide a more positive background to view the future for Irish education. The

President congratulated the Minister on securing funding to:

- Provide additional posts at Deputy Principal level to schools in excess of 700 students. This will involve the appointment of 42 new Deputy Principals in 35 Community and Comprehensive Schools. This is in addition to the previous supports for schools under 500 students announced in the previous budget. This is a significant statement regarding the importance of leadership in our schools.
- Provide additional ex-quota guidance posts in schools.
- Provide funding for the implementation of the ambitious objectives of the



The President of ACCS, Ms. Antoinette Nic Gearailt, presents Ms. Marianne Smith, Principal of St. Aidan's Community School, Cootehill with a video to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the opening of the school.



Mr. Seán Mac Donnacha, Principal and Mr. Mairtín Ó Conghaile, Chairperson of Scoil Chuimsitheach Chiaráin, An Cheathrú Rua, receive a presentation from Ms. Antoinette Nic Gearailt, President ACCS, to mark the 50th Anniversary of the opening of the school.



Ms. Antoinette Nic Gearailt, President ACCS makes a presentation to guest of honour at the ACCS gala dinner, Mr. Diarmaid Ó Donnabháin, founding Principal of St. Patrick's Comprehensive School Shannon, the first greenfield Comprehensive School to open in Ireland.

Digital Strategy for Schools.

- Provide additional middle management posts moving toward the introduction of new middle management structures in schools.

This much needed investment would provide the opportunity to develop management teams with the flexibility and responsibilities to meet the needs of an ever changing educational landscape.

The Admissions Bill

With regard to the Admissions Bill the President noted that much of the debate focused on the issue of religion. She stated that this is not an issue for Community and Comprehensive Schools as religion is not used as a criteria for admission to schools and the Deed of Trust for Community and Comprehensive Schools addresses the issue of religion, outlining that schools strive to meet the needs of students of all religions and none. She observed there was a need to broaden the debate on admissions beyond the sole issue of religion. She referred to the ESRI Report of 2013 which noted that while religion may be a criterion for some parents selecting a school for their children, the report noted the most important criteria for parents were:

- Good teaching
- Good choice of subject areas
- Good selection of extra-curricular activities

In other words, a good school. In broadening the debate there should be a greater emphasis on the diversity of curricular provision to ensure inclusivity. The debate also needs to consider what we value and what values schools promote.

Teacher Supply

Teacher supply is an issue of concern to all schools. Ms. Nic Gearailt asked, “is there a realisation within official circles how bad it is?”. She noted recruitment is now a year round activity with particular difficulty being experienced recruiting qualified teachers for short term contracts created by the ever expanding amount of short term leave. In a recent survey of ACCS schools she stated that 96% of schools experienced difficulty recruiting staff for RPT and TWT posts. She provided examples of schools that received no applications in certain subject areas and, where planned leave such as maternity leave/parental leave was concerned, the problems were further exacerbated. She stressed that “schools cannot limp along as at present” and recommended the following possible options to meet the need:

- Conversion courses for qualified teachers in certain identified areas with greatest need
- The possibility of PME, particularly in the second year of their studies, being available for substitution work when on school placement
- Creation of additional concurrent education courses for students seeking to enter post primary teaching

She observed that the cost of living in Dublin also imposed a barrier on recruiting teachers. “Current planning is ad-hoc, there is a need for a robust system of evaluation of this issue on an annual basis”.

Planning in Schools

The current phase of industrial action in schools has posed significant restrictions on planning in schools. Ms. Nic Gearailt reiterated ACCS support for the implementation of the new Junior Cycle Framework with its emphasis on key skills such as critical thinking and how to manage the world of information. She welcomed the recent clarification on the Assessment Task for Junior Cycle students of English and professional time for teachers stressing the critical need for professional collaboration between teachers.

New SEN Allocation Model

With regard to the new allocation model of resources for students with special education needs, SEN, the President welcomed the potential for the new model to be a fairer and more equitable means of distributing the finite level of resources available. She stressed the importance of the next two years in implementing the new process and the need to constantly review the model. While acknowledging the purpose of the 20% baseline allocation to all schools, ensuring that all schools could meet the needs of students presenting with special education needs, she believed that it was too high. Resources needed to be allocated where the greatest need exists.

CL 14/2017 sets out a range of expectations around the planning and co-ordination of special education provision in schools. The President pointed out the only reference in the circular letter to coordination is that hours be taken from within the allocation, but these coordination hours be kept to a minimum. She stated that using hours allocated for the provision of supports to students should not be diverted for coordination purposes and asked the Department to engage with the management bodies on their proposal regarding a specialist post of Special Education Needs Co-ordinator in schools.

DEIS Review

Continuing on the theme of inclusion and diversity, attention turned to the DEIS Review. Ms. Nic Gearailt stressed the need for supports for DEIS schools who faced the many challenges society presented. As well as being amongst our most inclusive schools they also often faced the difficulty of fractured families and social difficulties. “There is a need for an interagency group to ensure the services supporting DEIS schools are coordinated and sufficient”.

Scoileanna Gealtachta

Rinne and tUachtarán tagairt do na scoileanna Gealtachta agus do na dúshláin a bhaineann leo sáid amháin. Ina measc, deacrachtaí níos mó maidir le soláthair múinteora agus sna scoileanna beaga deacrachtaí curaclim iomlán leathan a chur ar fail. Rinneadh tagairt do Pholasáí don Oideachais Gealtachta agus an ról tabhachtach atá ag na scoileanna Gealtachta maidir le todhchaí na Gaeilge. Iarraidh ar an tAire an soláthar ex-quota a chinntiú láithreach.

Designation of New Schools

The President noted that the Action Plan for Education aimed to broaden school choice. In this regard it was very disappointing that none of the new post primary schools announced recently were designated as Community Schools. ACCS analysed the findings of the published report outlining the decisions reached which raised a number of significant questions as to why this was the case. In five of the locations chosen there was no existing Community School. Parental choice in certain areas was divided relatively evenly between patrons. Combining both these facts, ACCS would contend that the provision of a Community School would have met parental demand while also meeting the requirement for diversity of provision. ACCS has asked to engage with the Minister and his officials on this issue which poses the question as to whether a Community School could have been designated.

In Conclusion

In her concluding remarks the President acknowledged the leadership and direction given to ACCS by Ms. Eileen Salmon, General Secretary. She stated, “her commitment and insightful opinions are respected not alone in this sector but in the wider world of education”. She also thanked the other members of the office staff Mr. John Irwin, Assistant General Secretary, Ms. Anne Mare Dillon, HR Manager, Ms. Susan Cunneiffe, Office Manager, Ms. Debbie Riordan and Ms. Eileen Diver, Clerical Support Staff.

Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Richard Bruton T.D. Address to the ACCS Convention 2017



Minister for Education and Skills, Mr. Richard Bruton T.D.

The Minister opened by congratulating ACCS on the chosen theme for Convention, 'Community and Comprehensive Schools: Inclusion and Diversity'. He remarked it made a refreshing change in a climate which is dominated by building walls and planning exits. In recognising the unique position education held in society he stated "education is the crucible where young people get their direction". Reflecting on 50 years ago when the first comprehensive schools opened he was reminded of the decision to invest in education with the establishment of the free education system under Donogh O'Malley in 1966. This generation and future generations would benefit from that most progressive and insightful decision.

The Minister viewed recent years as a lost decade for investment in education, but acknowledged the role that education played during that period. Despite the lack of investment, improvements were delivered in participation, literacy and numeracy standards and the PISA results. He continued that it is time to invest in

education again, but we must be ambitious. The Action Plan for Education sets the goal to establish the Irish education system as the best in Europe within a decade. He believes, given recent improvements, that this is attainable and educational reform must embed fairness as well as excellence. He cautioned that the reform would not be without its hitches but the Action Plan for Education is a living document that requires constant review and, where necessary, amendment to meet the changing educational needs of society.

Minister Bruton stated that he shared the ACCS President's view that 'Admissions' is not just about religion and it is a wider debate. He explained the rationale of the Department and reassured delegates present that the provision with the Bill allowing schools to refuse admission based on the ability to meet the needs of the student was not intended as a soft barrier to admission. He reminded delegates of the powers conferred on the NCSE to make placements in schools where students failed to access a school place. In the event schools failed to accommodate students based on special education needs the Department now had the authority to review the school's allocation of resources.

In acknowledging the ACCS commitment to the full implementation of the new Junior Cycle Framework he shared the belief of ACCS President, Ms. Antoinette Nic Gearailt, that it provided the opportunity to broaden the learning experience of all students. In addressing DEIS he identified challenges in finding pathways for young people to access further and higher

education. He believes we should investigate clustering of schools where shared experience could be utilised for the benefit of all learners. He continued that we need to model and test new practices that may then be rolled out across the system. He referenced the uniqueness of education in being the most sustainable solution to poverty and the importance that no one is left behind. Returning to pathways, he referenced the commitment to increase the number of places in traineeships and apprenticeships from a current level of 4,000 to 14,000 by 2020.

The Minister noted the submission by ACCS regarding the designation of 9 new schools in 2016 and committed the officials within his Department to engage with ACCS on the issues raised.

Minister Bruton turned his focus to the five goals of the Action Plan for Education:

1 Create the Best Learning Environment

- Investment in the Digital Strategy to enhance the learning experience of students through engagement with new technologies
- Introduction of new subjects and learning areas such as Wellbeing

2 Delivering Pathways

- Enhancing diversity and inclusion

3 Support Colleges and Schools to improve

- Investing in leadership capacity to innovate and not only think in straight lines

4 Building Bridges to the Wider Community

- Ireland has changed and the education system needs to respond to reflect that change
- Development of the Parents/Students Charter; everyone's voice needs to be heard
- Engagement with employers and industry

5 Create the Best National Structures

- Look to improve how the Department itself does its business and how it delivers services

The Minister concluded that we share a common ambition and many similar goals. He noted he was the first Fine Gael Minister for Education to attend the ACCS Annual Convention in 30 years and committed to working closely with stakeholders to advance educational improvement and reform for whatever period he remains Minister.



Members of the Panel Discussion at Convention: L-R Mr. Dalton Tattan, Assistant Secretary, DES, Ms. Caitriona O'Brien, Principal Officer, Social Inclusion, DES, Mr. Jim Mulkerrins, Principal Officer, Special Education Section, DES, Dr. Pádraig Kirk, Director of JCT with Mr. John Irwin, Assistant General Secretary and Chair Mr. Pat O'Connor, ACCS Executive.

News and Events in our Schools

Ballinrobe Community School Secure the Drummond Cup



Ballinrobe Community School players celebrate their All Ireland Senior Football victory in Croke Park.



Mr. William Culkeen, Principal Ballinrobe Community School, Nathan Moran, Captain and Mr. Aogán Ó Fearghail, Uachtarán Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, at the recent presentation of All Ireland Medals to the Ballinrobe Community School senior football team.

Ballinrobe Community School won their third all Ireland "B" title in Croke Park on the 1st of April 2017 getting the better of a very strong St. Ciarans, Ballygawley side after extra time on a score line of Ballinrobe 2.19 St. Ciarans 2.16.

Congratulations to a very dedicated and talented team who were mentored by a very hardworking Manager in Mr. Damien Egan and his coaches Mr. Norman O'Brien and Mr. Ciaran Kilkeny.

The school is very thankful to An Uachtarán Cumann Lúthchleas Gael, Mr. Aogán Ó Fearghail for taking the time to present the medals to the team. It made for a very special evening for the team and their families.

Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne Abú

It has certainly been a busy time in Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne, An Daingean, as our photographs portray with:

- success in the recent Press Pass National Awards
 - students providing the musical entertainment at the Gala Dinner at the recent ACCS Annual Convention held in the Malton Hotel in Killarney
 - a very successful run of Guys and Dolls the musical performed completely through Irish
 - their Junior footballers being crowned All Ireland Colleges A Champions
- Congratulations to all involved.



Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne award winners at the recent Press Pass Awards, Overall winner: Tomás Ó hUallacháin; 1st News Category: Kate Ní Dhubháin; 2nd News Category: Ciara Ní Bhric.



Corn uile-Éireann Paul McGirr, Craobh Shóisir A, buaite ag Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne.



Students enjoyed the experience performing in the recent production of Guys and Dolls in Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne.



Students of Music from Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne who recently performed at the ACCS Annual Convention in Killarney.