

PUBLIC MEETING: School Transport Issues

Gort Community School

8th February 2011

On Tuesday, **February 8th**, a **Public Meeting** was held at Gort Community School to discuss impending school transport changes and to describe Parents Association activities over the past two months (since the Information Meeting in December) to lobby the government to continue the shared catchment for Gort/Kinvara. Dail candidates from Galway East and from Clare were invited to the meeting.

The meeting was attended by approximately 60 people including parents of existing students, parents of prospective students, teachers and staff at the school, school bus transport providers, and seven Dail candidates:

- Michael Kitt, TD (FF – Galway East)
- Sen Ciaran Cannon (FG – Galway East)
- Clr Jimmy McClearn, Mayor County Galway (FG – Galway East)
- Clr Brian Meaney (Green – Clare)
- Colm Keaveney (Lab – Galway East)
- Michael F Dolan (FF – Galway East)
- Jim Connolly (Ind – Clare)

The panel of speakers at the meeting included:

- Denis Corry – Principal, Gort Community School
- Leona McCormack – Parents Association & Board of Management, Gort Community School
- Amy Talbot – Vice Principal, Gort Community School

The Chairperson of the Board of Management, Pat Gilmore, also sat on the panel.

The meeting was chaired by Catherine Cronin, Chairperson of the Parents Association.

Catherine Cronin opened the meeting and gave apologies from Sen Fidelma Healy-Eames. Catherine explained that communication had continued since December with Joe McDonagh (Transport Liaison Officer) and with the Seamount College Parents Association. Seamount College also supported the extension of the shared catchment area for 2011-12.

Denis Corry welcomed today's decision to extend the shared catchment by one year, but highlighted the fact that the school transport issue will be an issue from September 2012 onwards. Mr. Corry reviewed the correspondence received from the VEC, detailing the decision to extend the shared catchment by one year only.

Leona McCormack spoke on behalf of the Parents Association, summarising the history of school transport in the Gort/Kinvara area. Since October, parents had contacted the school and the Parents Association to explain the problems posed by preventing school transport to Gort from the Kinvara area (Kinvara, New Quay, Doorus, Northampton, Ballinderreen, Kiltiernan). The two main problems highlighted were (i) younger children not being able to attend the same school as their older siblings (a problem for both Seamount and Gort), and (ii) lack of subject choice. Subjects such as *Woodwork, Metalwork, Physics, Applied Maths, Design & Communication Graphics, Engineering, Construction Studies* and *Agricultural Science* are not currently offered at Seamount College but are offered at Gort Community School. Ms. McCormack pointed out that, from both parent and student points of view, Lack of School Transport = Lack of Subject Choice.

Amy Talbot spoke on behalf of Gort Community School, explaining that 25% of the current school population is from the Kinvara catchment area. Loss of a significant number of students at the school will translate to loss of teachers, and thus loss of subject options. Ms. Talbot noted that the creation of

Gort CS 16 years ago was designed to offer a broader range of subjects and to cater for all students. A good example of this inclusive ethos is the Leaving Cert Applied (LCS), which enables students who do not plan to complete a traditional Leaving Certificate to stay on in school and receive a qualification. This programme could be at risk if school/subject options are lost.

Many issues were raised in the Q+A session which followed.

Questions:

Q. Mr Tough queried the early start of bus journeys. Chair said Parents Association would look into this and get back to him.

Q. The *Value for Money Review* has been cited as the reason for the elimination of school transport catchment areas in 2010. Is this a move towards privatisation of school transport?

Q. Will we be looking at the school transport issue again in a year's time?

Ciaran Cannon acknowledged urban/rural differences and promised to help parents to fight to retain what we have/want. He admitted that pre-election promises can be empty.

Colm Keaveney applauded Ciaran's honesty, then he promised to support the community's wishes.

Pat Gilmore cited the lack of communication from Dept of Education on its previous decisions.

Jimmy McClearn suggested requesting an immediate meeting with the new Minister and stated that the McCarthy Report is anti-rural.

Jim Connolly, new on the political scene, understands the issues as an ex-teacher, and as a grandfather is worried for the future

Q. Can the catchment decision be immediately changed by the new government?

ANS. Yes. FG will look again at this decision.

Michael Dolan suggested we ask the department to consider whether transport costs can be balanced against cost of new provisions in Kinvara as an argument for keeping arrangements

Michael Kitt will help whether elected or not.

Leona McCormack suggested that a national parent body (e.g. National Parents Council) be asked to provide input into future discussions and negotiations regarding school transport.

Brian Meaney suggested approaching Bus Eireann directly to cost private bus transport.

Pat Gilmore wished all the candidates well.

The meeting concluded with thanks to all who attended and contributed, and a commitment on behalf of the Parents Association to continue to support parents and students.