

Reflections on many happy memories at the helm of the CBS

The following is an abridged extract from a commemorative publication marking the recent 75th anniversary of Roscommon CBS, written by Brother Michael Heffernan, School Superior from 1970 to 1976.

The two periods I spent in CBS Roscommon brought me into touch with life there at contrasting times. My first experience was for a brief period of teaching in August and September, 1955; a time of great economic hardship, particularly for the farming community.

Jobs were few and thousands had to emigrate each year. While secondary education was an asset for all those who could afford it, it was a special bonus for emigrants seeking employment in other countries.

From 1970 to 1976 I was principal of CBS. In the early 1970's the economy had not changed very much

from the fifties but the first signs of radical changes in Irish life were beginning to appear.

The document Investment in Education identified education as a means of developing the economy in a manner that sought to harness the energy that contributed to our survival as a nation and our political freedom.

For two hundred years prior to this date, Religious Congregations such as the Christian Brothers responded to the faith needs of young Catholics, particularly the poor, by providing an education that would equip them to take their place in Ireland and other countries.

With the founding of the State, the VECs provided further opportunities for young people. The introduction of Free Education in 1967 was a historical event of

great magnitude and while the amounts paid were inadequate to meet the costs of providing all educational opportunities, it did lead to a great increase in young people attending the school.

In this context it is interesting to note that there was a proposal that the schools charging lower fees would receive less state aid than those who had charged more! Prior to this time, over 60% of our people were directly dependent on an agriculture, the value of whose exports was adversely affected by England's subsidised cheap food policy.

However, when Ireland joined the Common Market in 1973 the Mansholt Plan began to make a radical impact on our economy. Mansholt assumed that 7% to 8% of a population would be sufficient to cater for the agricultural needs of a country.

The growth of medium to large farms was to be encouraged while those in small farms were to be provided with work in industry while practicing farming on a part time basis. Unlike other parts of Europe, there was comparatively little industry in Ireland at that time and the economic and sociological implications of these measures were enormous.

In the long term, one of the more positive effects of

our joining the Common Market was the slow but gratifying improvements in farms and homesteads. There was hope that at last after hundreds of years, our country had brighter prospects ahead.

The high standard of education in Irish schools became a significant contributory factor to the economic growth which we call the Celtic Tiger. High standards in subjects such as science and mathematics were highly valued.

In response to these requirements, many of the Brothers devoted the month of July each year to attending courses on these subjects as well as religious education.

Many years ago, Mrs. Julia Conmee left a bequest for the establishment of a Christian Brothers school in Roscommon. This was eventually achieved some seventy years ago after a successful campaign by the people of the town and the surrounding area.

A plaque and a statue to Our Lady were erected in the new extension to honour the memory of Mrs. Conmee. I have many heartening memories of meeting people in Roscommon who proudly reminded me of the efforts they and their families made to establish "their" school.



Brother Michael Heffernan, School Superior from 1970 to 1976.

As teachers, we have the privilege of cooperating with parents in the education of their children. Their support and generosity have been outstanding characteristics of their involvement in promoting the welfare of the school.

An invaluable education ideal is that the home and the school subscribe to the same values and hopes. In Roscommon, I experienced this in a special way and that memory of continuity between home and school is very much alive with me still.

One of the many practical expressions of support by parents and so many others in the area was their involvement in various fund raising activities. "The 300 Club", Tops of the Town, sponsored walks and various other initiatives to raise money for various projects, evoke many happy memories.

For example, just one of the countless memories I still cherish is that of the group of parents from Knockcroghery who took the initiative of setting up a refreshment point in Mote Park to help us on our sponsored walks.

Looking back over the years, I recall the many Brothers and teachers whose dedication and hard work provided an excellent education for the pupils of the schools. Their memories are cherished by past pupils, parents and many others.

The greatest tribute to their work in the school is the success of their pupils. For many years the school week included classes on Saturday mornings. Training of teams took place in the afternoons after school hours and those involved had to be ferried home as the school buses would have departed earlier.

Many inter-school games were played on Saturday afternoons and I have a particular memory of leaving members of the team home at midnight after a game in Dundalk!

I have happy memories of so many pupils, some of whom travelled significant distances to school, who appreciated the educational opportunities provided by the school and contributed so much to its success in studies, on the playing fields, in various cultural initiatives and above all, by the example of their lives then and subsequently.

A series of excellently produced school annuals with a remarkable range of topics which reflect the giftedness of the students and the guidance of the staff are very much treasured. Reading through them recently I recaptured some of the energy and enthusiasm which has marked the school and recalled many proud and happy occasions.

A remarkable tribute to the school and the past pupils is the enthusiasm of response of so many from all over the world to the dedicated organising committee in celebrating the anniversary of the school. I am deeply grateful for the generous support of the Past Pupils' Union over the years.

Reflecting on the present and future of our country and the education of our young people it is vitally important that we actively seek to preserve the sterling qualities that distinguished us as people and contributed to our success as a nation.

The role of Catholic parents and educators is to encourage the formation of sound moral habits, a mature faith and discerning critical thinking that enables one to live a truly

Best wishes and continued success to Roscommon CBS on their 80th anniversary from

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History and experience teach us that knowledge and material success without virtue and an appreciation of the true meaning of life lead inevitably to the destruction of individuals and nations. The greatest tribute parents, teachers and other educational influences could pay to those who went before us is to pass on their faith and values. The alternative is a spiritual vacuum which is too readily filled by destructive ideologies such as hedonism, relativism, fascism, marxism or unbridled capitalism.

The distinguishing element of Catholic education is the emphasis on formation in Christian values and virtues. Today there is abundant knowledge about many things ranging from science to psychology, from complex social systems to medicine.

Such knowledge can be

most beneficial for the human condition by, for example, improving agriculture, automating hard physical work, and relieving illnesses. On the other hand, the same knowledge is too often destructively used in the creation of wars and many other social evils.

D.H Laurence reminds us of the importance of clear thinking in dealing with the problems and confusion that so often confront us in society. He highlights the role of certain figures whose special gift it is to spell out the guiding principles that lead to moral decisions.

Like so many other Brothers, I have very happy memories of my time in Roscommon. The loyalty and support of staff, pupils, parents and so many others have been a source of joy and encouragement in continuing the work of Catholic education.

My hopes and prayers are that under these new

arrangements Roscommon CBS will continue to be a centre of learning that offers a broad vision of Catholic education which will continue to find expression in the five elements of the Edmund Rice Education System.

I wish to remember the many deceased Brothers, Staff members, pupils, parents and the many supporters and well-wishers who contributed so much to the school's success. May they rest in the peace of Christ and may their example inspire us in the living of our everyday lives. Go dtuga Dia suaimhneas síorái dá n-anamnacha.



Brother Denis Gleeson and Brother Michael Heffernan at the official launch of the Edmund Rice Autism Centre.

EDMUND RICE AUTISM CENTRE



The Monastery where the Christian Brothers lived which has become the Edmund Rice Autism Centre.

RIGHT: Students at the centre making use of the facilities.



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