

## Minister opens new Fenor N.S.



Pictured on his visit to officially open the extension at Fenor NS on Thursday last was Minister for Education Ruairi Quinn, along with Paudie Coffey TD, Ciara Conway TD, Cllr. Dee Jacques, Tim O'Byrne, Principal Fenor NS, Stan Flynn, Chairperson Fenor School Management Board, Cllr. Lola O'Sullivan, Waterford Deputy County Mayor and Cllr Ger Barron.

Minister for Education and Skills Ruairi Quinn officially opened the new Fenor National School last week.

The impressive new facilities in the school have replaced pre-fabricated buildings and include four new classrooms, three resource rooms, and a staff room.

"We've achieved quite a lot," said Principal Tim O'Byrne.

He paid tribute to all those who have helped make the new Fenor N.S. a reality, including Peg Curran who donated land to the school.

"Because she gave the land free we were able to jump ahead of other projects. The Department didn't have to pay for land. Peg gave the land for the extended car park, our playing pitch, the extension of the school yard," explained Mr O'Byrne.

The original Fenor National School was located opposite the car park near the church.

In 1946 a two roomed building was opened nearby which catered for over 100 children.

In 1985 this building developed further as three classrooms were added.

From 2004 onwards the school's pupil numbers increased significantly.

Now, 40 per cent of current pupils are from outside the catchment area of Fenor, Annestown, Boatstrand and surrounds.

“Our catchment area borders Tramore so it may be easier for the children living on that border to come here,” said Mr O’Byrne.

“In 2004, outside of Swords in Dublin, Tramore was the fastest growing area in Ireland. At that time Fenor NS was a small country school. It has now developed into an eight teacher school. The Department wanted the school to go to a 16 teacher school but the board of management capped the school as an eight teacher school to hold the county flavour.”

It is this country feel which is one of the major attractions of Fenor N.S.

While numbers have increased, the school has always managed to retain this special feeling.

Classes generally consist of around 25 pupils or less.

At present, there are 212 students in the school in total including 13 special needs children.

The school caters for a large amount of special needs students.

Along with the eight teachers, there are also four special needs assistants, a resource teacher, part-time resource teacher, full-time learning support teacher, part-time learning support teacher, part-time caretaker and secretary.

Around €40,000 has been spent on equipping all classrooms, all resource areas and the library with whiteboards.

The school has purchased 30 iPads and intends to place a large emphasis on developing students’ technology skills.

All special needs children have been provided with laptops.

“The icing on the cake is the hall we have built out of our own finances,” said Mr O’Byrne.

“The hall has been a Godsend to the school. We often missed many weeks of PE due to inclement weather. We now have guaranteed PE every week. We can hold school concerts, bring the school together for the assembly. It means so much for the school.”

The new hall is intended to act as a focal point for the wider community.

The parish has used the hall to stage sales of work, bingo, and various other activities.

A summer camp was held in the hall grounds last year, and another will be held this year.

“The school wants to give back to the community. We realise that without the community we wouldn’t have had all the support we received,” said Mr O’Byrne.

The Department of Education has put €1.14 million into the school since 2004.

“Along with this, in order to extend the car parks, school yard, build the outdoor toilets and the new basketball court, the local community has spent €300,000. They have put so much into it. That’s why we’re conscious of giving back to the community at all times. People are extremely proud and protective of the school and the area,” said Mr O’Byrne.

“Everyone can use the facilities once they respect the school grounds. The hall is designed so that the rest of the school is closed off. We can’t have it sitting idle. Our philosophy has always been to give back to the community.”

The school enjoys hosting various different events such as the hugely popular Grandparents’ Day.

“Grandparents’ Day was started four years ago with two classes,” explained Mr O’Byrne.

“It is now an overall school event where grandparents come into all the classes. This year we had 117 grandparents and great grandparents visit us. We have developed it into one big day and this year the theme was environment where they spoke about what it was like when they were growing up. The kids found it really interesting and it tied in with our Green Schools We had a prayer service and tea, coffee and cake.”

Mr O’Byrne praised the support the school receives from parents and members of the parents council.

“Luckily we have a marvellous parents’ council that do so much for the school. Whenever there’s anything to be done for the school, parents really put their shoulders to the wheel.”

The school is currently working on obtaining its 7<sup>th</sup> Green Flag.

This year, each class has its own theme under the heading of ‘Global Citizenship’.

Fenor N.S. was in fact the very first school in Waterford to obtain a Green Flag back in 1998.

The school also includes preschool and afterschool services.

Presently, there are 12 children in preschool and 48 children use the afterschool.

Kiddies Kingdom was set-up in 1992 to avoid losing teachers and address the issue of dwindling numbers.

“We guarantee with our enrolment policy that if you attend the preschool you are guaranteed a place in the national school,” said Mr O’Byrne.

The school offers over 40 different extra-curricular activities, including music, debating and a wide variety of sports.

Much emphasis is placed on anti-bullying campaigns such as raising awareness of cyber bullying.

“We have a low discipline problem which is one of the main attractions of the school,” said Mr O’Byrne.

“We are firm. We emphasise ‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you’. We are a religious school with a Catholic ethos and the patron of the school is the Bishop. But we also have students from several other religions and we cater for all of them.”

Minister Ruairi Quinn arrived at the school last Thursday morning amid much excitement.

Many dignitaries were in attendance for a fun packed day which was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

The school choir performed and students also recited poetry.

Party bags were distributed to all the students to mark the special occasion.

The school was delighted to welcome back former Principal Tom Nolan who retired 22 years ago as well as former teacher Rita Burns.

Deputy Mayor of County Waterford Cllr Lola O’Sullivan, a parent of students in the school, was also in attendance.

Mr O’Byrne praised Project Manager John Santry and Sean and Kieran Carey of S&K Carey for their workmanship and commitment to the project.

All involved with Fenor N.S. are looking forward to the bright future which is in store for the school.

Kieran Foley