

## News

# Despair among schools as Sligo schools in county in

Some schools are described to be at a “third world standard” by councillors fighting for extra allocations of funding as they say “it is like we do not exist to the department”

By Cara McHugh

FINE Gael's Councillor Fergal Nealon put forward an emergency motion on Monday, February 9 in the county council meeting which noted that no Sligo schools are included in the recent National Development Plan (NDP) for education.

The Councillor proposed that the council writes to the Minister of Education requesting the inclusion of the Ursuline College, Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré, and Grange Post Primary School.

Councillor Nealon said that he was shown around the grounds of Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré by principal Liz Nic Searraigh as he said that he “couldn't believe” what he saw in front of him.

Cllr Nealon said that he was speaking to some of the sixth class students in the school, and “not only are they proficient gaeilgeoirs but they're brilliant engineers as well. By the time they've come through their old school, they've been helping out - because that school is being kept together with band aid”, he said.

“The kids have to turn on the heat for the first two hours of the school day with these portable radiators and they're in their jackets and they're in their hoods”.

“In a number of classrooms, there's four portable heaters. If you turn them on in the wrong order, the fuse board would blow.

“The kids know where the fuse board is and how to deal with it too, they're getting an education in electricity”, he said to the chamber.

“Not only that, but they're getting an education in plumbing too. There's no ventilation in the toilets either. You flush one of the toilets and the whole cabin seems like it's about to fall on top of them”.

“They're also getting an education in botany, because there's plants growing inside the classrooms and coming up off the roof”, he said.

“When I was in one of the classrooms [which is a pre-fabricated building] it started raining. You could hardly hear the person beside you, let alone the teacher”.

The kids told Cllr Nealon that “It's too cold in the winter time and too hot in the summer time”.

“It's an absolute disgrace that this isn't included [in the NDP]. They're the only gaelscoil in the county, there's over 200 kids, the staff and management do phenomenal work”, he acknowledged.

He believes that “This particular school is at a third world standard”.

Speaking to *The Sligo Weekender* last week on this issue, Minister of State Frank Feighan said that “The omission of Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré from the first tranche of NDP Education Capital funding came as a surprise for me and the school community”.



Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré held last week.

He said that “securing the new school is a top priority for me, and I will continue working closely with the school to ensure their case is advanced without delay. I have requested an urgent meeting with Minister Naughton, senior department officials and school management to seek clarity and push for this to be addressed as quickly as possible.”

A representative group of Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré staged a protest at Nazareth House on Thursday last, 5th February where Minister for Children Norma Foley was attending a CDNT event.

The principal of Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré, Liz Nic Searraigh, spoke with the minister and voiced our concerns over being omitted from the NDP priority list for schools for 2026 despite there being contracts signed in 2022 for a two year completion of the new school build.

Minister Foley reassured the Principal that a meeting between the Minister, stakeholders and the local government representatives would happen in the near future.

She was in turn asked to ensure that there is a ministerial visit to the school from Minister Naughton to see for herself the current conditions in Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré.

On Friday, 6th of February Minister Naughton invited Frank Feighan TD and representatives of the school to meet with her. This meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, February 18.

At the Sligo County Council meeting on Monday the 9th of January,

Independent Councillor Marie Casserly seconded the motion brought forward by Cllr Nealon in relation to the exclusion of Sligo schools from the NDP.

She spoke about Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré too, and acknowledged previous principal of the school Micheál Ó Broin who was in receipt of a Cathaoirleach's award two weeks ago for his outstanding contribution to the Irish language.

“I don't think I've ever seen a man as deflated getting an award” she said, as he spoke at length about his passion and advocacy for the school at the ceremony, stating his disappointment that they were not included in the NDP for education.

Cllr Casserly also spoke about the Ursuline College, which were also excluded from the development plan.

“The biggest issue that I have with the Ursuline is that the planning permission is running out in 2027, already €2 million euro has been spent on fees, planning applications, designs, and architectural reports - which is a complete waste of money” she said.

“Because they're supposedly in this new list, they cannot apply for funding for the old part of the school”.

She spoke about the fact that the council constantly discusses democracy and transparency and that she is not seeing this come into play for the sake of the Ursuline school.

“I want to see a list of these schools that have been on this list for the last ten years, I want to see how the decisions are made,” she said.

“It shouldn't be just because a minister is appointed to the department of education that suddenly schools in their area can just leapfrog to the top. That list should not change and it should be a matter of priority”.

She then spoke about Grange Post Primary school which has installed an emergency toilet facility just to cater for the numbers of the school and the issues that stand.

The enrollments of the school have now been capped due to the high volume of pupils and Cllr Casserly said that some student's siblings wish to attend the school but they can't as there is not enough space.

Cllr Casserly said she also met with the principal of St Edward's NS of Ballytivnan.

The principal of that school, Sinéad Grimes, said that she was bitterly disappointed not only to see that no schools in Sligo were included in the NDP, but also that their urgent extension was ignored.

The principal said that they “continue to experience growth - we are oversubscribed for enrolments again for 26/27 - and face another year of children learning in store rooms, corridors and kitchens and the loss of our library (now a classroom) and Sensory Room while we wait.

We are struggling to provide spaces for our local community which now includes families in two new IPAS centres and families who have moved to the area to work in SUH following expanded recruitment there over the last number of years”.

Councillor Micheal Clarke also weighed in on this subject, supporting the motion.

“I want to support Cllr Nealon in his comments in regards to the Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré especially” he said, as he believes this school should take priority in county Sligo.

“There's over 700 children and young adults who are proficient in Irish because of this school and to think that they have to work in third world facilities to deliver that” he said, as he stressed that the Irish language is part of our heritage and our culture as he believes the school should be prioritised.

“It was laid out that it was a benefit to have two junior ministers in County Sligo, what addition are they if they're silent on this issue?” He said, “we need to put pressure on all members of Dáil Éireann, to bring home this vital development in the North West”.

“The Irish language will die unless it gets the support it requires”, he believes.

Cllr Clarke cited the figure of over €180,000 in rent that the state pays for the rent of the pre-fab buildings and surrounding areas of the gaelscoil, which he says is a “waste of public funding”.

Councillor Tom McSharry said that there is a meeting scheduled with the minister of Education in the next week for Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré.

He encouraged his fellow councillors to lean on their party representatives in ministerial roles to push this through.