

News

“Cá bhfuil ár scoil nua?” ask children of Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré left in “atrocious” conditions

“The department is essentially saying our children are second class citizens” - Anger from only primary gaelscoil in Sligo that have been accommodated in "dilapidated" pre-fab buildings for 30 years. **Cara McHugh** reports

LAST week, the National Development Plan (NDP) Education Capital Programme 2026-2027 published their first tranche of school projects that they have identified to progress to tender or construction.

Much to the community of Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré's disappointment, the school was excluded from the list of 105 school projects nationwide that will be developed. This has been an ongoing issue for the school for over three decades, and has sparked considerable frustration amongst the parents and staff who have been advocating for a fit for purpose school building for what seems like forever.

Speaking to *The Sligo Weekender*, Liz Nic Searraigh, current principal of the school describes the physical environment of the school as “atrocious” as she tells of the persistent battle that the school has faced with the department of education.

Ms Nic Searraigh says that the school is part of an ADAPT programme, a specific programme for schools in the category of rented accommodation, that was essentially set up as these sites are costing the exchequer a substantial amount of money.

She said the department currently pays €181,000 per year for the rent of these prefabricated accommodation, the one building of St Marys and for extra space at the school of Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré.

The premise of the ADAPT programme states that from the start point to the finishing point of a design phase, a site should be at the planning permission stage within thirteen months.

“The site [for the new school] has been acquired for about 10 years, in terms of the feasibility of the site - it's perfect”, she said.

Ms Nic Searraigh says that Rogerson Reddan, a construction firm, was appointed in May 2022. The design team was in situ by June 2023.

Gaelscoil Chnoc na Ré is not at planning permission stage, despite the guidelines under the ADAPT scheme outlining the terms that would amount to them being at this stage from July 2024. There have been no adequate responses in relation to the reasoning for this.

“The department would send back very formulaic, nearly AI type of



responses” said Ms Nic Searraigh.

She detailed how the school put forward a freedom of information act request looking for information regarding a detailed programme setting out how all the members of the design team are going to comply with the time programme but this request was denied by the department, under the grounds that it was “too voluminous”.

Ms Nic Searraigh said that the school met with previous Minister for education Helen McEntee last November, but then the minister was “gone from her role the following week”.

In December, the children of the school wrote Christmas cards to current Minister for Education Hildegard Naughton, which simply said “Cá bhfuil ár scoil nua?”. These

cards received no response.

Ms Nic Searraigh said there’s “no way to describe” the impact of the school’s housing facilities on the children.

“The one building on site is cold. The pre-fabs are dilapidated - there’s holes in them, health and safety risks, they’re smaller than the department size should be. There’s water coming in the windows, doors that don’t properly close, poorly ventilated toilets. Really archaic stuff”.

The príomhoides office, secretary’s office, staff room, junior infants and the special unit is housed in the main building, with the majority of classrooms on site housed in the pre-fab accommodation. There are 11 pre-fab buildings on their site.

Ms Nic Searraigh said that the school is the only primary gaelscoil

in the whole of county Sligo, delivering and promoting the Irish language, but they are being restricted by the government.

“The priority here is the safety of the students, safety of the staff and the future of the school”, she said.

Speaking to *The Sligo Weekender*, retired principal of the school Mícheál O’Broin stressed the length of time that this issue has been prevailing for without any action.

He said that he was the principal of the school since 2002, retiring in December of last year and he says that he believes the problem has persisted since 1996.

“It’s been soul-destroying”, he said. Mícheál O’Broin received a Cathaoirleach’s award last week for his outstanding contribution to the Irish language. He used this platform

to highlight the issue that the school has been facing for all these years.

“The Cathaoirleach awards noted that the Irish language was an important part of community life and yet on the other hand the department of the government are really rubbing our noses in it by saying that we’re not that important because we’re 30 years waiting for a new school and they’re going to leave us for another few years”, he said.

He described the level of advocacy that the school has undergone in an attempt to gain attention towards this.

“We have written numerous letters. In November, we did a silent protest outside where the new school should be going, all of the staff and the children”.

“30 years is an awfully long time to be housed in temporary accommodation