

**Rector and Chairperson of the Board of Management's speech, at  
the blessing and official opening of the 9/6/2016 extension at  
Whitechurch National School.**

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- Archbishop, our public representatives Councillors Paula Donovan, Francis Duffy and Deirdre O'Donovan, Ms. Richards and staff, parents, pupils, parishioners and neighbours - on behalf of my sister and brother Board of Management members, I welcome you all here today.
- First, in the midst of so many other demands on him, I very warmly thank the Patron, the Archbishop, for his kindly and official presence here today, to perform the blessing of this new extension. I want to assure you, Archbishop, that your patronal presence and blessing are very much appreciated by us all.
- Secondly, I wish to say a really big 'thank you' to several people. I begin by expressing our very sincere gratitude to the Minister and the Dept. of Education and Skills. The grant-aid given for the provision of this Extension has been very substantial and generous. I want to assure the Minister and his Department that this grant-aid provision is indeed very sincerely appreciated by the whole School community here, so we extend a very special 'Thank You' to you today.

I've been a B.O.M. Chairperson for a lengthy period of time. Over years of experience of what I'd call 'discussions' with the Dept. of Education, I've learned a lot. No one has a 'right' to anything. You have to 'earn' that right. And you 'earn' it by cultivating a patient and consistent working relationship that is built on openness and trust, and all designed to working together towards producing a mutually-beneficial outcome. Even when 'discussions' have been protracted, uncertain or even tense, over the years I have held and I continue to hold in considerable personal respect the various senior Departmental officials I myself have had dealings with.

- I pay a very special 'thank you' to the School Principal, Ms. Sarah Richards, who has expended a huge amount of her own time and considerable skills in relation to securing this Extension. You can take it from me that that expenditure by her has been a really vital

component and ingredient in the successful outcome you see with your own eyes, newly built in front of you today.

- It is particularly fitting that parishioner and former Board of Management member, Ms. Stewart Paul, has very kindly agreed to perform the official Extension opening ceremony today. I have known Stewart since I first came here, in 1976. When major issues soon arose in the late 1970's as to the possible and then subsequently actual provision of a new School, Stewart, an engineer by profession, was the person I instantly sought out. Few here would know the vital, unseen amount of time and skills he brought to bear from far back then and right up to this present hour. This included the key provision and eventual purchase by the parish of this once green-field site; the whole building of this new School, completed in 1990; the further completion of the 2007 Extension and now today, this 2016 completed Extension. Always quietly but ever efficiently, and never once seeking the limelight, Stewart's often daily time and skill contribution to the School's great benefit quite simply has been prodigious, and in material and professional terms, unquantifiable. We believe Stewart's cutting of the tape today simply reflects the great respect, esteem and value which the School community continues to hold him in.
- The design of this quite lovely extension is the very skilful handwork and vision of our architect, Mr. Louis Burke. Louis has very considerable experience of School Building Projects and knowledge of all the requisite interactions with the Department and other related public bodies. This School is undoubtedly the rich beneficiary of Louis's well-seasoned expertise and professional experience, in terms of his winning design of this new Extension.
- Design is a vital component of any building, but so, too, is its construction. We are extremely grateful to Hugh Keogh Builders, from Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow, for all the varied skills that were so expertly exercised in the construction of this lovely extension. Hughie, you and your staff were at all times an extremely hard-working and courteous presence and team at the School, and we thank you and your staff for all that you have been and have done, during your time of building construction at the School. In relation to the building works, we also record with much appreciation the contributions of Ken Moran (Plumber), Brian Gill (Electrician) and Johnny Sammon (Builder and Carpenter).

- Finally, this School was founded, in the church grounds, in 1823, and it continued as a National School until it closed its doors in 1968. However, it was re-opened for use in 1978 in the now Old Schools, and then moved across here to its new site and building in 1990. It is wonderful today to see the great service the now beautifully restored Old Schools gives both to the parish and to the wider community every day. I wasn't here very long when our then Sexton, the late and quite estimable Mr. Ernest Williams and I were rummaging through a pile of rubbish and rubble, destined for the dump, at the Old School. What we thought in the darkening dusk were slates - turned out to be various and most informative Whitechurch N.S. record and account books from 1827 - 1840! Today, they are lodged in the Museum of Education in the C. of I. College of Education, Rathmines. They may even be the earliest of all such School records, I've been told. I know those records were later the catalyst whereby one person went on and obtained a Ph. D.

I sincerely thank parishioner and current B.O.M. member, Mr. Gerry Pullman, for his very gifted presentation today of the Church of Ireland's cross logo, carved in wood. What's especially significant is that the beautiful piece of wood Gerry has used is from a tree the very same age as when the original School here was built. We extend our very grateful thanks to Gerry for this lovely gift of such very special craftsmanship by him today.

- In 2023, this School will be 200 years old. So someone in the School, please do keep a note of that future date-today!
- In conclusion, and for your reflection, I leave you with a 'Thought for the Day' - it's a quotation by G.K. Chesterton:- *"Education is simply the soul of a society, as it moves from one generation to the next"*.

Thank you for listening.  
Horace McKinley.