

Garafine Centenary Celebration – Fr Ray Sweeney

In the 1830s, the National School Initiative was introduced in the United Kingdom and Ireland. The state supported National School System intended to provide education to poorer children and since its introduction into Ireland there was an impressive increase in attendance at these schools. The Irish Education Act of 1892 required parents in cities and urban areas throughout the country to send children between the ages of 6 and 14 to school for at least 75 days a year. Rural areas were excluded from the requirements of this Act, which stated that children could be kept out of school if they were prevented by "sickness, domestic necessity...husbandry and the ingathering of crops, or giving assistance in the fisheries, or other work requiring to be done at a particular time or season"

With the Irish Free State just coming into the Irish political sphere after the centuries long control by the United Kingdom, there needed to be a reconfiguration of the educational system within Ireland. This started with the creation of the Department of Education, which was formed on the 26th of August 1921, with Eoin MacNeill as the first minister of education. It was established as the Department of Education in 1924. Eoin MacNeill was an avid supporter of the reintroduction of the Irish language into the education system, to preserve Irish culture and heritage. He served as the first minister of education from 1922-1925, with John M. O'Sullivan being his successor in 1925. The first National School Programme delivered a minimum programme that aimed to introduce mandatory subjects and it was framed along nationalist lines that were prevalent in the post-civil war period and was clearly unaware of the interests and abilities of the children attending these schools. The curriculum defined the child/pupil 'a child who needed to be filled with knowledge, to be moulded into perfection by strict discipline and the amassing of vast quantities of factual data' As Minister of Education MacNeill was inactive and this was due to his belief that the Church should oversee education and not the state. The main legislation that MacNeill set while in office was the pattern for the state education policy which lasted in the system until the 1960s and his principal legacy was the implementation of Irish as a compulsory subject. The Department of Education's aim as declared to the government in 1925 was, 'to work with all its might for the strengthening of the National fibre by giving the language, history, music, and tradition of Ireland their natural place in the life of Irish schools'

Garafine National School closed permanently in April 1974. It was located in the parish of Ballymacward in County Galway. The school amalgamated with Esker N.S. and Liscune N.S. to form the new Ballymacward Central National School.

Historical Staff and Educators

Mrs. M.A. Morrissey: Served as a prominent teacher and was awarded the prestigious Carlisle and Blake Premium in 1945 for educational excellence while teaching at Garafine N.S..

Kathleen Campbell (née Donoghue): A highly regarded, long-time teacher remembered by generations of local families for her brilliance and support.

Margaret (Peggy) Ward: A former educator at the school who worked alongside fellow staff members during its decades of operation.

Jimmie Burns: A native of Garafine who historically taught local children in early hedge-school structures before the official 1926 building opened.