

Pupils from the school, whose curriculum is inspired by the School of Philosophy movement, taking part in a recent fundraising event

Revenue looks at gifts that replace school fees

The Sunday Times 27/3/95

Siobhan Maguire and Jill Nesbitt

THE Revenue Commissioners have held discussions with a Dublin school that has abolished fees in favour of voluntary contributions that parents in turn can write off against tax.

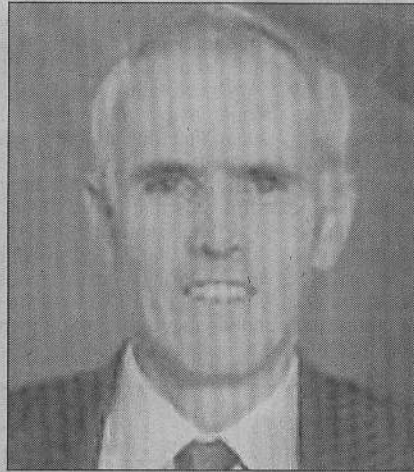
The John Scottus senior school in Donnybrook asks parents to donate between €900 and €1,700 per child for each of the three terms in the school year. Its junior school in Ballsbridge asks for contributions of more than €700 per term.

Parents who make donations are told by the school, a registered charity, that they can claim some of it back from the Revenue Commissioners.

Michael Telford, principal of the senior school, said: "The school operates on a not-for-profit basis. There is nothing special or unique in what we are doing. Other schools receive donations which are eligible for tax purposes. Details of all charitable donations received by the school have at all times been notified to the Revenue Commissioners."

Tax officials have held a meeting with the school to establish whether the contributions are eligible for tax relief. A Revenue spokesman said that, while donations to charities including schools are eligible for relief, school fees do not qualify.

The John Scottus school, which has 350 students, was established in 1986 by parents involved in the School of Philosophy, a movement developed in the 1930s in Britain that



Telford, left, runs his school on the same principles as John Scottus junior school on Northumberland Road

incorporates academic learning with philosophy. Its curriculum includes Greek, Latin and Sanskrit, an ancient language of India now only used for religious purposes.

Parents of students at the secondary school were first told about the voluntary contributions in a letter from the board in September 2002. The school was said to be in "an impossible financial situation" with the cost per child per term estimated at €1,484, mainly because of small class sizes.

It was proposed that school fees be abolished and parents make a contribution instead, a system already in place in the junior school. The school originally suggested that parents pay about €860, 5% higher than the then fees.

The current school prospectus says: "By accepting voluntary contributions from parents, this allows PAYE employees to

contribute the lesser sum, but each January they complete a Revenue form and we, the registered charity, receive the tax portion of the contribution. If you are other than PAYE you can contribute the larger sum and in January of each year, you keep the Revenue form and return this when doing your tax return. Revenue will then give the tax portion of the contribution back, directly to you."

One parent of a child who used to attend the school felt the contribution was really a fee under the guise of a donation. "I don't know many parents who considered it voluntary," she said.

Telford said the contributions were in line with Revenue and Department of Education guidelines because there was no obligation on parents to pay. "There are a number of parents who do not make a contribution, and a greater number who

contribute only a small amount," he said.

Brendan Tangney from Darryl, who has two children in the junior school, said he pays up to €600 a month by standing order to the school. "I have no problems making these voluntary contributions because of the education my children are getting," he said. "If it means I have to pay more to have my children in a class of 15 rather than 30, then I will do that."

"There is no pressure on parents to pay. There is a real mix in the school, from the very wealthy to those who don't have a bean, but the education ethos is the same for everyone."

The principal said parents who paid nothing were not at a disadvantage. "We will continue to educate any child that enrolls in the school irrespective of contributions being made. The means of the parents are not a factor in admission."

Finian McGrath, independent TD, raised the issue of contributions to the school. He said earlier this month he had been contacted by parents and teachers who were concerned about the school's payment practice.

Mary Hanafin, Minister for Education, replied that voluntary contributions from parents in recognised schools are permitted. She said it is made clear to parents that the question of compulsory contributions is not the school's business.

She said: "The school should be such as to be in a situation where the education of pupils could be maintained without the contribution. That the contribution is compulsory is a matter for the school to decide."

The education minister said schools can decide to replace the voluntary contribution with a non-fee system. She said: "The school must establish that it is non-fee paying."

Hint of chilli destined to hot up ice cream

LAVENDER flavoured custard and ice cream with a hint of green tea or chilli are to be launched later this year by manufacturers trying to entice the palates of bored consumers with unfamiliar foods.

Green tea is being used in a variety of products from ice cream and salads to crisps and even breakfast cereal, according to a report. It has been described as having a similar taste as a blade of young grass.

The move towards combining unusual flavours is partly an attempt by companies to boost the sale of products with which consumers are over-familiar.

Previously, strange flavour combinations, often condemned as gimmicks, have been tried by avant-garde cooks such as Heston Blumenthal, proprietor of the Fat Duck restaurant in Bray, Berkshire, England. He is known for his bacon and egg ice cream. Now such ideas are

destined for the mass market.

The report by Mintel, the market research company, finds that "the world is getting spicier". Unilever, the food company, has launched a chilli ice cream. The product, a version of the Magnum chocolate lolly, is on sale in Italy and may come to Britain.

Food developers are confident that consumers will be able to adapt quickly to tastes once considered bizarre. A few

Lois Rogers

years ago, for example, many people were disgusted by the Japanese taste for raw fish, but now sushi is fashionable.

Already, lavender-flavoured crème anglaise — more commonly known as custard in Britain — is selling well in the trendier supermarkets of America's West Coast. Food multinationals believe that it is only

a matter of time before Britons are sprinkling vinaigrette on their ice cream.

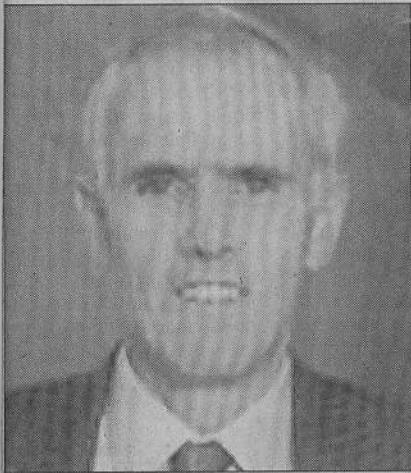
Another flavour to see growth, according to the report, comes from chilli, smoked and dried peppers. These are in mayonnaise, "rings" and cream sauce.

Consumers are also experiencing innovative Nestlé's apple and chocolate bars.

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Finian McGrath, an independent TD, raised the issue of contributions to the school in the Dail earlier this month. He had been contacted by a number of parents and teachers who said they were concerned by the payment practice.

Mary Hanafin, the education minister, replied that "voluntary contributions by parents of pupils in recognised primary schools are permissible provided it is made absolutely clear to parents that there is no question of compulsion".

She said: "Their collection should be such as not to create a situation where either parents of pupils could reasonably infer that the contributions take on a compulsory character."

The education department said schools can abolish fees and replace them with a voluntary contribution system, but must establish themselves as non-fee paying.

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Another flavour set for rapid growth, according to Mintel, comes from chipotles — smoked and dried jalapeno peppers. These are being used in mayonnaise, "ranch dressings" and cream sauces.

Consumers are also in line to experience innovations such as Nestlé's apple crumble-filled chocolate bars or Douwe

Egberts's sugar lumps flavoured with amaretto, chocolate or "Irish cream".

Elsewhere there are Vietnamese Snacks, flavoured with native spices and bush flavours of Australia, and a Turkish style pizza which is being tried out in Holland.

The trend towards ever more artificial food comes despite mounting concern over the need to lower consumers' and sugar intake.

Schools told tax relief care needed

Jill Nesbitt

19/6/95

THE Revenue Commissioners have confirmed that all 58 fee-paying secondary schools in Ireland got a letter from them last week warning them to make sure school fund-raising did not abuse the tax relief scheme available to charities and educational institutions.

"The important condition to be kept in mind is that relating to benefit", said the Revenue.

The scheme of tax relief for donations to eligible charities and other approved bodies under Section 848A of the Taxes Consolidation Act, 1997 was introduced "to promote benevolence towards charities and other approved bodies. It is not intended to provide tax relief for contri-

butions, the purpose of which is some personal benefit."

This follows the news that one private school in Dublin 4, the John Scottus senior school, has been asking parents to pay "voluntary contributions" instead of fees.

Parents complete a Revenue form each year to claim tax relief on these contributions which the school then avails of.

Parents are also encouraged to seek tax relief on voluntary contributions to the John Scottus primary school.

The school received income tax refunds of €91,928 and €49,122 in recent years but admitted in a letter to parents last week that in 2004 Revenue "queried our claim for a refund in respect of 2003."

Total:

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Outcry over tax relief for voluntary school fee

Paul Melia

A DAIL committee is to ask the Revenue Commissioners to examine how parents who make voluntary donations to a secondary school for their children's education are able to claim tax relief on the amount donated.

Independent senator Joe O'Toole told the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Finance and the Public Sector yesterday that he has written to the Revenue Commissioners and the Joint Committee on Education to see if the donations gave the John Scottus school in Dublin an "unfair advantage" over other schools.

The Education Department was providing funding to the school, he said, and he wanted to ensure that any particular "religious beliefs" were not being subsidised by the State.

"I believe that (allowing tax reliefs) has us supporting an elitist system," Mr O'Toole said.

John Scottus has a primary and secondary school, and the main aim of the senior school is to "develop love and reason in the student before they reach adulthood", its website says.

"The philosophic training of many of the teachers in the school, and the use of the great wisdom of both eastern and the western traditions combine to bring about this development in the pupils," it adds.

As well as the usual school curriculum, the schools also teach philosophy, classical language Sanskrit and classical studies.

The committee heard that the school on Morehampton Road in Dublin 4 asked parents for voluntary donations of €1,000 per term, and because it was registered as

a charity, parents could claim a portion of the donation back in tax relief.

Labour's Joan Burton said that because many of the parents would be high earners paying the top rate of tax at 42pc, up to €420 of the €1,000 donation could be reclaimed. She had previously asked the Revenue Commissioners and Finance Department if tax breaks were available on school fee payments, and was told none were available.

The situation unfairly prejudiced children attending other schools which were forced to rely on funding from the State. The John Scottus website says both the junior and senior schools "are funded in part by the Department of Education and Science, voluntary contributions from parents, generous support from the School of Philosophy and a number of fund-raising activities".

"It is a huge injustice in equity terms for PAYE workers who pay for schools through their taxes," Ms Burton said.

The most recent figures available showed tax relief on charitable donations cost the State €21m.

Ms Burton said that allowing tax relief on school donations was akin to re-introducing the covenant system of the 1990s, whereby high-earners could write off a portion of their child's third-level education.

"This is a charity relief being used to fund private education. It is correct that the Revenue Commissioners should look at this," Fine Gael Finance spokesman Richard Bruton said, adding that Finance Minister Brian Cowen should examine the situation in his review of tax reliefs.

20/3/2005 ST.

Dublin school seeks 700 'contribution'

Shane Coleman

A DUBLIN 4 school's request for "voluntary contributions" of more than 700 per term from parents has been raised in the Dail, with a TD claiming the practice will squeeze out children from low-income families and have a serious effect on the education system.

However, the head of the John Scottus senior school in Ballsbridge, Michael Telford, told the Sunday Tribune that the contribution is strictly voluntary and that no pupil will be excluded for not making a payment. The school's website specifically refers to its wish that "none should be deprived of access to this education because of financial constraints".

Dublin North Central TD Finian McGrath put down the written Dail question to the Minister for Education, Mary Hanafin, asking her to make a statement on the case of a school that was requesting "voluntary contributions of 725 to 1,250 per child per term from parents". McGrath, a former teacher, said "a number of people" asked him to raise this in the Dail.

"Their concern is that the school is demanding a so-called voluntary contribution.

I'm concerned that if this school gets away with it, it will squeeze out those from lowpaid families and become an elite school," he said.

Requests for large contributions "can make life difficult for the child and their family," he said, adding that he wanted "to nip this in the bud" because, "if this spreads, it will have a serious effect on the education system".

This was rejected by Telford, who said people can attend the John Scottus nondenominational junior or secondary school and pay nothing up front. Not everybody paid the 725 contribution, he said, insisting it was voluntary.

The school's website says both junior and secondary are funded "in part by the Department of Education and Science, voluntary contributions from parents, generous support from the School of Philosophy and a number of fundraising activities".

In her response to McGrath's question, Hanafin said voluntary contributions by parents "are permissible provided it is made absolutely clear to parents that there is no question of compulsion to pay".

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Fr Martin Tierney



From time to time prestigious advertisements appear in our daily newspapers promoting courses organised by The School of Philosophy and Economic Science. Many people enrol in these classes believing that they are attending a course taught by established philosophers. They know nothing of the School of Philosophy and Economic Science or its origins. They take on faith the 'bone fides' of the School and willingly hand over their hard earned money. Hardly any other 'academic' institution in the State could afford the cost of the advertisements placed in the daily papers. What surprises me is that media people, who pride themselves on their investigative skills, seldom cast an eye over the School of Philosophy and Economic Science. What a gullible lot we are!

birth of one Andrew Mac Laren, born to Irish Catholic parents. He moved to London and in 1914 joined the Independent Labour Party. In the mid 1930s he started a group called the School of Economic Science. In 1947 he handed over control of the School, now called the Fellowship School of Economic Science, to his son Leon. Throughout the 1950s the movement remained small and tightly knit, without the subtle regimentation which exists today. Leon was convinced that the only way to change the world was to transform the nature of mankind itself. His studies led him to twentieth century 'mystics', Greek Armenian, George Gurdjieff and a Russian called Pyotr Ouspensky. They claimed to possess ancient knowledge handed down through the ages. It is said that the School of Philosophy and Economic Science considers itself the last in the long line of esoteric schools which have safeguarded the secret of immortality. The man who was to provide the real impetus to the School was Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who became famous as meditation master to the Beatles. The Maharishi taught a system called Transcendental Meditation which he believed would eradicate all disease and violence in the world if only enough people would take it up. TM involves a 'puja' (initiation) ceremony with the usual invocation to Hindu gods. The links between the School and the Maharishi are usually kept under wraps and few who attend the School would be aware of its relationship with Hindu mysticism. Later the School split with the Maharishi.

Should you enrol, and many do, you will not be told that the 'lecturers' are volunteers. You will not be told that they hold no philosophical qualifications. You will not be told that practically the same 'lectures' are delivered worldwide from prepared notes. In 1981, for example, a student in England complained to the Advertising Standards Association that the 'philosophy' on offer in the introductory course was nothing of the sort. Two years later, the *London Evening Standard* ran a series of articles which claimed that the SES's influence over its members was far from benign. Unless one has some prior knowledge of the normal content of more traditional philosophy courses, nothing will appear out of the ordinary. It is quite possible to arrive in the classroom for the first lecture, having seen only a newspaper advertisement for the school, where it is not made clear that it is a particular philosophy that is on offer. Indeed, many of the students are not aware that they were not getting a traditional philosophy course. That is one of the main complaints I have with the school. It is a free country and one is entitled to preach any Gospel subject to public order and the law of the land. However, I am convinced that a truly ethical approach would give the history of this movement (it is much more than a school!), the personalities involved in its foundation, and a clear description of the course content and the credentials of the lecturers.

The story begins in Glasgow in 1883 with the

While other groups were attracting great notoriety, the School of Philosophy and Economic Science managed to multiply almost unnoticed. It bought up prestigious properties in England and in Ireland. The organisation is hard to spot as it uses a number of names in different countries. This School has an ideology that many of the participants in the courses fail to detect. I have no problem with this, provided its ideology is clearly explained in advance to intending students. This is not a school in any accepted sense. Beware of any course under the auspices of The School of Philosophy and Economic Science.