

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 27/3/05

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.

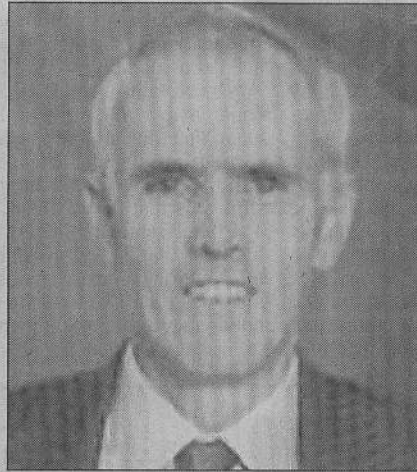
The John Scottus senior school in Donnybrook asks parents to donate between €900 and €1,700 per child for each of the three terms in the school year. Its junior school in Ballsbridge asks for contributions of more than €700 per term.

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 Darity, 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, an independent TD, raised the question of contributions to the school. He said he had been contacted by parents and teachers who were concerned about the school's management practice.

Mary Hanafin, a junior minister, 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 every child of pupils could reach the school and that the contribution is not compulsory character."

The education minister said schools can continue to educate any child and replace them with voluntary contribution. She said schools must establish their own 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.

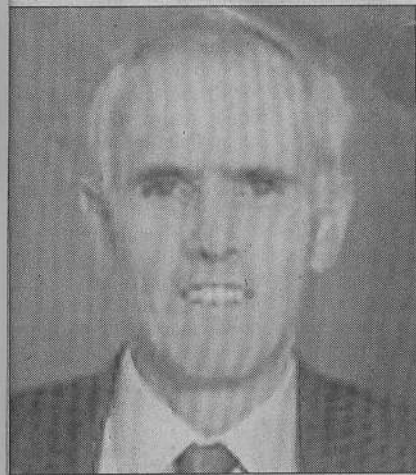
Another flavour to see growth, according to the report, comes from chilies, smoked and dried peppers. These are used in mayonnaise, "rings" and cream sauces.

Consumers are also experiencing innovation in 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.

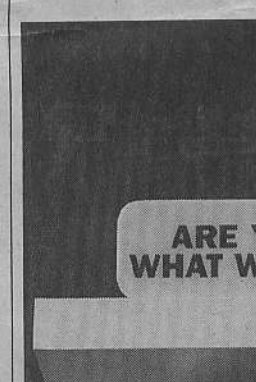
impose charges and... ing, "as this letter ill... Many were not so... prised by the contents... ter but by the fact th... had it. This weekend... cials are wondering... Labour has a strategi... tricks — believed to... as Operation Black... dedicated to infiltrat... meetings and groups... seeking legal advice o... the covert taping of m... party groups is pe... under British law.

Senior Tories said the... tern was emerging o... and leaks, although th... solid proof. Last Mon... Labour-supporting Da... ror published a tape o... Howarth, a Tory... spokesman, addressing... dom Association. In hi... he derided political co... and the Mirror accuse... arth of making a joke... friend who was "black... ace of spades".

Liam Fox, the Tory... man, was taped at a B... meeting last year. Ag... tape found its way to a... supporting newspaper.

The six-man "attack... headed by a young... called Patrick Loughran... seen by Fraser Kemp, a... MP and a close frie... Alastair Campbell, the... director of communicat... strategy in Downing... Campbell is advising... Blair on the election cam...

The Tories have tried... ordinate policies and... gaffes. On the key issue... lic services Howard and... commissioned a report... David James, a business tr...



Howard, above, has un...

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

Egberts's sugar lumps f... oured with amaretto, choco... or "Irish cream".

Elsewhere there are... Snacks, flavoured with... native spices and bush flav... of Australia, and a Turk... style pizza which is being t... out in Holland.

The trend towards ever m... artificial food comes des... mounting concern over... need to lower consumers'... and sugar intake.