

Chief Executive opens new state of the art canteen in Newtownhamilton High

Thursday 14th November 2013 was a momentous day in the history of Newtownhamilton High School. Not only was it an occasion to celebrate the success of the class of 2013, but it was also the day when the new state of the art canteen was officially opened by Mr Gavin Boyd, Chief Executive of the SELB and Chief Executive Designate of the Education Skills Authority (ESA).

The assembly hall was packed to capacity as Chairman Rev B Wilson chaired the proceedings, opening with an act of worship.

Principal Garnet Mullan welcomed guests to the celebration of success and opening of the new canteen. He referred to his last meeting with guest speaker Gavin Boyd – an event in Stormont earlier in the term when Mr Mullan had represented Newtownhamilton High at a reception for Northern Ireland schools who had been judged “Very Good” by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

A warm welcome was given to Mr Oliver Mooney (Principal of St Paul’s HS Bessbrook) and Mr John Jones (Principal of St Joseph’s HS Crossmaglen). Mr Mullan explained the importance of collaboration between all three schools, not only in fulfilling the requirements of the Entitlement Framework and providing greater choice for pupils, but also the hope that pupils would be able to look forward to a brighter future in South Armagh. In particular, Mr Mullan spoke of the celebratory event held on 20th June 2013 in St Paul’s High School, where a very large audience had been entertained by Ulster Scots dancers, Irish cultural performers, members of Whitewater Pipe Band and a rugby “haka”. All the performances had been from the stage of St Paul’s HS Bessbrook and were a showcase for the richness and diversity of cultures that were present in the communities in south Armagh. Key to the success of such ventures was the funding provided under the Shared Education Project, the mutual respect evident in all that took place and the obvious support from the communities.

An example of the success of the project was to be found in the quilts that had been woven by Year 8 pupils from both schools - the quilts were now on display permanently in the Newtownhamilton High in a case created by local craftsman Derek McNiece.

Further evidence of the developing collaboration is the shared courses that are now offered by all both St Paul’s HS and Newtownhamilton High. Pupils from Newtownhamilton High are now studying BTEC awards in Sport and Childcare; pupils from both St Paul’s and St Joseph’s are studying a joint Agriculture and Land Use GCSE with pupils from Newtownhamilton High.

Mr Mullan paid tribute to the support that had been received from the SELB in so many ways down through the years. In particular, it was a delight to have the official opening of

the new canteen; the Education Board had also provided a replacement heating system in the school assembly hall and provided a new set of steps to access the stage. All of these improvements were very welcome.

Turning to the School Association, he praised them for their sterling work. With the support of the community, they had raised almost £2000 in the school to provide additional resources for the pupils.

Also on this topic of the school in the community, he commented that it was so good throughout the year to see the benefits for the pupils when organisations and individuals came in to speak to or work with the pupils in areas such as careers, personal development, childcare and others. Collectively they all contributed to the wonderful opportunity that Newtownhamilton High School pupils had to receive a broad and balanced education.

Every year in school brought changes and it was with regret that the school learned that Mrs Beattie had decided to avail of an early retirement scheme. Mrs Beattie had done a superb job for the school and was well known to all parents for her contribution to Mathematics, the organisation of previous prize evenings and the school's Scripture Union.

Turning to current educational issues, Mr Mullan made the point that DE's own policies referred many times to strategically necessary small schools, of which Newtownhamilton High was a classic example. It was therefore of paramount importance that the funding was made available through the current review so that the school could continue to be successful.

Regarding the class of 2013, he paid tribute to the excellent results of pupils who had worked well and achieved highly. Particularly good A* grades in GCSE or equivalent had been achieved by Danielle Armstrong, Callum Glenny, Jessica Haffey, Leanne McNiece, Lois McNiece, Jodie Riddle and Rebecca Ritchie.

Mr Mullan concluded by thanking everyone else who did their jobs so faithfully and well. In conclusion, he urged pupils to continue with their education and maintain the Christian attitudes of tolerance, respect, fair play, justice and values that were so much evident in the educational experience that they had in Newtownhamilton High.

Head Girl Deborah King provided a report on many successful events such as a trip to France, ski holiday to Les Minuires, Ulster American Folk Park, joint ventures with St Paul's, the wonderful musical "Sister, Sister", STEM events, a trip to the Ulster Museum and visits to Newry, Stormont and Drogheda.

Head Boy Matthew Giffin reported on success in quizzes, entrepreneurial success, support for charity, the Duke of Edinburgh scheme and winning teams in football and Tug O War.

After presentation of the prizes, Mr Boyd spoke movingly about the challenges and opportunities that faced the young people of today and pledged that SELB support for the school would continue for as long as the community continued to support the school.

Vice-Principal Mr Neil Megaw, in an amusing and eloquent manner, thanked Mr Boyd for the excellent manner in which he had carried out his duties and invited Head Girl Deborah King to make a presentation to him.

Under the directorship of Miss Graham and Mrs Laverty, the school choirs provided much appreciated renditions of “Good Morning Baltimore” and “Run”.

Chairman Rev Wilson closed the formal part of the proceedings and gave thanks for the meal that had been provided by Mrs Sharon Porter and her willing band of workers, ladies from the School Association and parents.

After a short pause to allow Mr Boyd to officially cut the ribbon and open the new canteen, a sumptuous spread of wonderful food was enjoyed by all in the ample space and luxurious surroundings of the magnificent new canteen.