

## STUDENTS ANXIOUSLY AWAIT BALLOT RESULTS

Students in Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne remain anxious as teachers are balloted this week on whether or not they will continue industrial action against the Lansdowne Road Agreement. The outcome of this ballot has the potential to have a significant detrimental effect on a large number of students within the school. Tensions are high amongst the student population as this is a critical vote in the ongoing dispute between members of the ASTI teachers' union and the Department of Education. As almost all teachers on the PCD staff are members of the ASTI there has already been disruption to the school year. The Government and the ASTI trade union are in dispute over several issues mainly, the lower pay for newly qualified teachers, the introduction of the new Junior Cycle and teachers not being paid for supervision. This led to the strikes and school closures in November.

The ballot, which is being conducted in all ASTI schools, from Monday 20<sup>th</sup> - Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> of January follows conciliation talks in November 2016. After these discussions concluded, two documents entitled "Outcome of Department of Education and Skills and ASTI Discussions" and "Junior Cycle Statement of Assurances" were published which contained a set of proposals. These are what teachers are voting on.

If the ASTI teachers vote 'No', as their union is recommending, students of PCD currently in third year will be those most affected. Although Junior Cycle English has been introduced, ASTI members have not attended training days for teaching this course and they have not been conducting classroom based assessments. However as the other main teachers' union, the TUI, accepted the Lansdowne Road agreement, students in these schools have completed such assessments. This means that students in PCD have not done the same tasks as those in TUI schools and this is the source of anxiety for many of those currently in third and second year.

One third year, Conor Ó Flannúra said, "Even though my teacher has explained to us that we have covered the same course as every other student and that we have learned the same skills, I still think it's really unfair that I won't get the same marks as other people." Another student said, "I feel like my teacher isn't completely certain about what they are doing. I wish I wasn't in the first group that have to sit the new paper." The principal of PCD, Pádraig Firtéar said it is regrettable how students have been affected but he is hopeful it will be resolved by this ballot.

When speaking to a teacher who is a member of the ASTI trade union she said, 'Going on strike and refusing to assess our pupils is our last resort and it is unfortunate that the students have to suffer but it is deemed necessary for young teachers' careers and to prevent a lessening of standards.'

The ASTI has stated that it does not intend to use the withdrawal of supervision and substitution in the event of a "No" vote, an action which resulted in additional

closures to the majority of secondary schools, including PCD in October. Despite this many Leaving Cert students remain fearful that a “No” vote could result in further disruption to their studies if strike action is used to fight the issue of new entrants pay. One student doing his Leaving Cert this year said, “I want every chance to achieve my maximum points but this industrial dispute makes me anxious as I’m afraid of more lost days.”

The results of the ASTI ballot are due in early February.

**Judges Citation:**

Creating a good story means finding and verifying important or interesting information and then presenting it in a way that engages the audience.

By taking the issue of a potential teachers strike, told from the perspective of its effect on the students, this author illuminates a topic often over-shadowed by statistics.

Demonstrating a keen eye for subject matter that is both relevant and current, Ciara Ní Bhruic, Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne, An Daingean, takes the second place award in the news category.