



Members of Equal Chances Youth Group in Educate Together

Photos: John Courtney

Polish youth group gets VIP visit from embassy

BY MAIRÉAD WILMOT

EXCITEMENT reached its peak in Equal Chances Polish Youth Group last week as they prepared for the arrival of a representative from the Polish government. A member of the Polish Embassy arrived in Carlow last Saturday, 27 February, to meet parents and students who make up the 70-strong youth group, making this the first visit of its kind to the town.

The club began life in Carlow in September 2008 and members meet every Saturday morning in Educate Together, Graignecullen from 9am until 2pm. "We teach Polish history, Polish language, culture and tradition," explained manager Marta Szatkowska. "But at the same time, we also teach Irish culture and tradition because integration is so important. Last year we took part in the St Patrick's Day parade and we hope to do the same this year because we have some great costumes!"

Marta went on to explain that the youth group also helps the students, who range in age from five to 16, with

the English language after discovering that many of them suffer from a lack of self-esteem because the language barrier means that they can fall behind in class.

"That is true for many people, not just Polish. The language barrier in classes means they can get a bit lost and we try to help with that," she says.

They also spend time studying reading and writing in Polish so that if children do return home with their families, they will be able to pick up in school where they left off.

Since the youth group began in 2008, it has already amassed a fantastic Polish library brimming with 1,200 books, which are kept in Educate Together. The group is also supported by a number of local

enterprises such as Co Carlow VEC, Cando, St Catherine's, New Oak Community Centre and Askea GNS, along with a number of Polish foundations.

"We were really looking forward to the visit from the Polish Embassy – this was the first visit of a representative of the government to Carlow and they met parents and the students," added Marta.



Local parents Alina Bednarek, Agata Miniszewska, Ewa Figura, second secretary Grzegorz, manager Marta Szatkowska, Mairead Donohue (VEC) and Thomas Farrell (St Catherine's Community Centre)