

An African school owes its development to a visionary Galway nun, her brother-in-law a school principal – and ten years of East Galway primary pupils who have given a slice of their Confirmation money to a great cause. **DAVE O'CONNELL** tells the story.



GALWAY PUPILS SHOW TRUE CLASS

■ Confirmation donations help build a thriving primary school – in remote part of Tanzania



DAVE O'CONNELL

THERE'S a school in a remote village just over an hour south of the largest city in Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, which is home to 3,000 pupils – and it's all thanks to the seed capital provided by a Confirmation class on the Galway/Roscommon border!

That was back in 2007 when the pupils of Creagh NS decided to put some of their Confirmation money towards a good cause – and coupled with funds from sponsored walk, they raised an impressive €7,000 for their chosen project.

But this was also a family affair – because the instigator for the fundraising drive was former Creagh National School Vice-Principal Johnny Johnston, and his interest was stirred by his sister-in-law, Sr Annette Farrell, who had written to the pupils to tell them of her plight.

The Holy Union Sister and native of Kilconnell is over 30 years working in Tanzania, where she is a well-respected leading light – particularly in education – in that country's former capital, Dar Es Salaam.

Sr Annette and Johnny Johnston came up with the Confirmation Project, where each year Sr Annette would write and tell the Confirmation class of a project she knew of that needed funding.

Back in 2007, Sr Annette wrote and told the pupils about a remote village

called Saku, where the children had to walk an hour to get to the closest school.

That same summer, Johnny Johnston, accompanied by his sons Barry and Conor, travelled to Tanzania to see what was needed for themselves – and thus the seeds for the school were sown.

Ten years ago, Éilis Treacy was the Sixth Class teacher in Creagh NS and, just as the pupils were infused with enthusiasm for this project, so too was their teacher.

Ten years on, Éilis is Principal of Eyrecourt NS – and now her students send a portion of their Confirmation money to Sr Annette too.

“While I taught in Creagh school we built the first classrooms of Saku and Churwi primary schools. We also supported the COBET project in building extra facilities.

“When I became teaching principal in Eyrecourt NS, I brought this idea with me and while we only have Confirmation every two years in our school with less pupils, the children still pledge a portion of their gift money and take great pleasure in the photographs and letters Sr Annette sends them outlining the project the money supports,” she says.

Éilis is just back after another volunteering stint with the Holy Union Sisters in Dar Es Salaam, having also



MANY OF THESE PUPILS – WHO WERE ALL BETWEEN EIGHT AND 16 – HAD NEVER TOUCHED A COMPUTER

spent time there last year to help out and see the work that has been done, thanks in part to the generosity of these young Galway students.

“Each year before the Sixth Class made their Confirmation, Sr. Annette would write and tell them of a project that needed funding,” says Éilis.

“Sometimes it was a well for a village, the first ever project was tools for an apprentice and often the project was something to do with a school.

“This time, she asked the pupils for their help to build the school. She had started schools before with the assistance of the Creagh and Attyrory pupils.

“Then when these schools are up

