

# School principal pleads guilty to 7 counts of theft and forgery

**A school principal cancelled a school meals programme so he could defraud the Government out of more than €200,000 which he spent on lavish weekend breaks and expensive golf equipment, a court has heard.**

Finbarr Boyle (pictured right) - also known by his Irish name Fionbar O Baoill - spent more than €66,000 of the money on a school credit card, Sgt Michael Fitzpatrick told Cavan Circuit Criminal Court.

Boyle, (35), of Annalee Manor, Ballyhaise, Co Cavan, and originally from Ardara, Co Donegal, pleaded guilty today to seven sample counts of theft and forgery amounting to more than €77,000.

However the guilty pleas were being accepted on the basis of full facts and the full fraud over four years involved €204,118, prosecution barrister Monica Lawlor told Judge John Aylmer.

Sgt Fitzpatrick said that Boyle had been principal of St Patrick's National School in Kilnaleek, Co Cavan, from 2005.

In October 2008, an outside catering company Sharpmount Limited, had been called by Boyle to say they were ending the practice of providing food twice a day to the children at the school.

"He told the provider that the grant money was being stopped," said Sgt Fitzpatrick.

However the grant hadn't been stopped.

Instead, the court heard, Boyle had continued to get the grant from the Department of Social Protection and hid the money away in secret accounts.

He would spend the cash on weekend breaks in London, Dublin and Galway, golfing trips to Spain and to pay his mortgage and household bills.

Sgt Fitzpatrick began his two-year investigation into the fraud after a new treasurer was appointed to the Board of Management at the school and began questioning school spending.

The garda said the fraud came to light when new treasurer Michael Lynch sought information from Boyle in relation to the school accounts but he "wasn't happy with the documents which were forthcoming".

An audit was carried out and Mr Lynch had gone to the AIB in Cavan to ask for an account to be closed.

When he was there he was asked what the school wished to do with the second account - an account the board of management was unaware of.

The original audit which led to the garda investigation found €130,818 missing from school funds.

Sgt Fitzpatrick told the judge that €66,492 was stolen using the AIB school visa card, €29,277 was taken from Ulster Bank cheques made payable to Boyle and his now ex-wife



Maria Murphy and €32,199 was stolen from the AIB cheque account.

Just over €2,800 was taken from a post office account. The thefts also involved forging signatures on some cheques, said the sergeant.

"He used the money for a large array of things from servicing his car to weekends away, clothes and an awful lot of golf equipment," said Sgt Fitzpatrick in his evidence.

The garda said the fraud had a huge impact on the village, on the school community and parents.

"They have been left shocked and angry at the crimes that were committed. It has caused great upset to parents. They were severely upset," said the garda.

When he arrested and questioned Boyle in January last year the Donegal man had admitted his role in the various thefts.

Three former school principals including the father of a Premiership footballer gave character evidence on behalf of Boyle.

Patrick O'Reilly, whose son Ryan plays with Stoke City, said Boyle had been a superb soccer and gaelic coach who had encouraged his son to follow his dreams.

"Without Finbarr my son wouldn't be where he is today. I know what he did was wrong but I think he deserves a second chance," said Mr O'Reilly.

The court heard Boyle sat on executive committees of the Irish Primary Principals Network.

Defence barrister Ronan Kennedy said his client was deeply remorseful for what had happened.

"He realises the impact his actions have had on the school he loved," said Mr Kennedy.

"He is deeply ashamed of himself. He has left the pupils down, the parents down, his family down and the community down."

He had offered to sell his car and to pay €25,000 back to the State over the next year.

Judge John Aylmer said he was taking "the unusual step" of adjourning sentence for a year to allow Boyle to pay back €25,000 of the money stolen.

"I am not going to make any promises but I am currently minded that it may be open to me to take a non-custodial approach - a pre-requisite would be that 25,000 be paid by that time," said the judge. Boyle was released on continuing bail to next December's sittings of Cavan Circuit Court.