

Irish in China: Pat McCarthy Supports 20,000 Students in Rural China Amid 50% Dropout Rate —Your Help is Needed!

School Dropout Rates in Rural China Reach 50%. This has prompted Pat McCarthy to Start a campaign to help keep 1000 Rural Chinese children in school.



Changtu, Liaoning Nov 3, 2024 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - School dropout rates in rural China have reached concerning levels, with estimates suggesting that as many as 50% of rural Chinese children do not complete their education. This crisis has inspired Pat McCarthy to [launch a campaign aimed at keeping 1,000 rural Chinese children in school](#).

In rural regions, countless children face daunting barriers in their pursuit of education—struggling with inadequate access to quality English instruction, soaring costs, and a severe lack of qualified teachers. Each day, they enter classrooms where resources are scarce, dimming the bright futures they dream of.

Yet, high-quality English education holds the power to change everything. It can unlock doors to academic achievement and a world of global opportunities, transforming their lives in profound ways. For these children, learning English isn't just about communication; it's about hope—hope for a future filled with possibilities, empowerment, and the chance to chase their dreams. They deserve the opportunity to thrive and reach for the stars.

"What makes all the difference is when a disadvantaged rural Chinese child walks through our doors and, against all odds, graduates from high school and university, then returns to look us in the eye and say, 'I did it.' That moment is everything." — Pat McCarthy.

Thirty years ago, a tender-hearted 8-year-old Pat McCarthy began an extraordinary journey of compassion that would shape his life forever. Growing up in the town of Clonakilty, Ireland, Pat watched

as a truck came by each week to collect old clothes for children in need in rural China. **When his mother gently urged him to pack up his old clothes, Pat's heart ached for those less fortunate. In a moment of pure selflessness, he secretly filled the bag with his favorite outfits, choosing to give away what he cherished most.** That simple yet profound act of kindness ignited a lifelong dedication to helping others and opened his eyes to the struggles faced by those far from home.

As the years passed, Pat's empathy extended to the local Chinese immigrants in Clonakilty, where he embraced the opportunity to assist them in adapting to a new life in Ireland. Many of these families were striving for a brighter future, seeking refuge and opportunity as China embarked on its journey of development. When a beloved Chinese restaurant in Clonakilty was devastated by a fire, then called Jade Garden, Pat immediately recognized the predicament faced by the immigrant staff who worked there. Understanding the challenges they encountered in a foreign land, he stepped up to provide crucial support.

He volunteered to help them clean up and restore the restaurant, working side by side with the employees to make it functional again. Additionally, Pat reached out to the affected families, providing clothes and temporary accommodation for those in need. His efforts not only offered practical assistance but also fostered a sense of solidarity during this difficult time, strengthening the bond between him and the Chinese immigrant community.

When Pat met his wife, **Chang McCarthy**, his world transformed as she unveiled the heartbreaking reality of the profound urban-rural gap in China — a chasm that devastates the lives and dreams of countless children. It was her mother, a fiercely dedicated teacher in Changtu Town for nearly 40 years, who became the true catalyst for Pat's awakening. With unwavering love and commitment, **she devoted her life to her students, nurturing and guiding over 50,000 rural Chinese children out of the suffocating grip of poverty during their darkest hours.**

In these rural landscapes, where over 200 million children strive for a brighter future, the statistics tell a tragic story: [school dropout rates soar between 40-50%](#). This grim reality is not just numbers; it represents lost potential, shattered dreams and lives left unfulfilled. Pat's heart ached as he absorbed this knowledge, and he felt an urgent call to action. Inspired by the legacy of his mother-in-law's relentless dedication, he found his own purpose ignited—a burning passion to bridge this devastating divide and uplift those who are often forgotten. His journey became a mission to shine a light on the shadows of neglect and transform despair into hope, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive and achieve their dreams.

In the heart of rural China, countless schools are locked in a heartbreaking struggle—striving to attract and retain qualified teachers amidst the harsh reality of lower salaries and challenging living conditions. **Overcrowded classrooms, some bursting with up to 100 students, have become the norm, and teachers often find themselves juggling multiple subjects, their passion for education stretched thin.** This daunting situation compromises the quality of learning, hindering the growth and futures of children who deserve so much more.

Though free compulsory education has been implemented, the financial burden on rural families weighs heavily on their shoulders. On average, Chinese households allocate 17.1% of their annual income to education, **while lower-income families sacrifice a staggering 56.8% just to ensure their children can attend school.**

The household registration (Hukou) system presents significant challenges to educational access, particularly impacting migrant children's ability to attend urban schools. Rural children with rural Hukou

cannot enroll in urban schools without changing their registration, hindering their access to better educational opportunities. Additionally, urban schools prioritize enrollment for children with urban Hukou, leading to limited spots for rural students, even if they meet academic qualifications. Furthermore, these schools often charge higher tuition fees for those without urban Hukou, which many rural families cannot afford, further restricting their children's educational options.

As many parents migrate to urban centers in search of work, they leave their children in the care of grandparents or relatives, creating emotional voids that can have lasting developmental repercussions. **Research indicates that 45% of children in rural schools experience delayed cognitive development before age five—an alarming statistic that threatens their future potential.** The lack of parental support often translates to decreased academic performance and an increased likelihood of dropping out.

Female students face even graver challenges. Studies reveal that limited educational opportunities severely impact their career prospects and mental health. In Zhejiang province, **girls are found to be twice as likely to experience mental health issues as their male counterparts**, a stark reminder of the disparities faced by young women in these communities.

Amidst this landscape of struggle, Pat and Chang McCarthy made a courageous decision that would change lives forever. Leaving behind promising careers in South Korea, **they established a non-profit school in Changtu Town, officially registered under the Charities Act of the People's Republic of China.** With their life savings poured into this noble initiative, they have become a lifeline for those who need it most. Since 2012, **their unwavering commitment has kept over 20,000 rural Chinese children in school, working tirelessly to bridge the urban-rural gap and promote common prosperity.** In [a poignant 2018 interview with the State Council](#), currently led by Premier Li Qiang, Pat articulated their mission: ***“Our goal is not to make a profit but to help the students of Changtu develop their English so they can contribute to a moderately prosperous China.”***

The "I Love Learning Education Centre", the philanthropic arm of the Ireland Sino Institute, stands as a testament to their dedication. Nestled in Changtu County, Liaoning Province, the center employs skilled teachers from both local and international backgrounds, crafting effective English programs tailored to the community's unique needs. Scholarships are offered to the most disadvantaged students, ensuring that quality education is accessible to all. Yet, the journey is fraught with challenges. Pat highlights the pressing need for specialists to make a lasting impact in rural areas, but attracting international experts is a daunting task, as the allure of higher salaries in urban centers often pulls them away.

[You, too, can make a difference](#) by donating to their new project on GlobalGiving which aims to give 1,000 rural Chinese children an education and help keep them in school, breaking the chains of poverty and ensuring a life of prosperity.

Your donation will support efforts to attract expert teachers both locally and internationally, create and deliver a quality English program, and provide scholarships to the most disadvantaged students. **Supporting our work bridges the urban-rural gap, fostering high-quality development and common prosperity.**

This article is from an educational and non-political perspective and aims to offer insights that contribute to the tremendous progress made in the development of China over the last few decades.

The [Ireland Sino Institute](#) is a non-profit organization based in rural Liaoning Province, China, registered

with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Civil Affairs. Its philanthropic arm, the I Love Learning Education Centre, has supported 20,000 rural Chinese children in staying in school since 2012 through various educational and philanthropic initiatives. It is also a vetted organisation on GlobalGiving.



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