

Island schools reach Education Awards finals

By Katie Macleod

The school year ended on a high note this summer for the two island schools who reached the finals of the 2017 Scottish Education Awards in Glasgow.

Held at the Doubletree Hilton Hotel on 7th June, the annual awards recognized the achievements of pupils and staff throughout Scotland – and this year both Sgoil an Taobh Siar in Lewis and Iochdar Primary School in South Uist were among those celebrated for their work.

Staff and pupils from Primary 5-7 at Sgoil an Taobh Siar were among the three finalists for the Gaelic Education Award, while Mairi Macinnes, Head Teacher at Iochdar Primary School, was a finalist for the Lifetime Achievement Award.

“We are so thankful to CnES education department for giving us the opportunity to go, as it was a huge achievement for the school, and the trip was amazing,” says Margaret Macleod, who teaches at Sgoil an Taobh Siar and attended the awards ceremony with her colleague, Anne Macarthur, and Primary 6 pupils Emma Mason, Catriona Macarthur, and Katie Morrison.

“Seeing what was going on in Scotland's schools was fantastic. It was a real celebration of achievement and although we didn't win on the day, we weren't disappointed. We got £200 for the school fund... Our pupils did so well to get down to the final three and we are so proud of them all. The day was definitely a highlight of our teaching careers.”

The pupils at Sgoil an Taobh Siar, which has long had links with Historic Environment Scotland, were recognized for their work on two films – one in Gaelic and one in English – that acted as educational tools detailing the history of the Arnol Blackhouse.

Some pupils took on acting roles in the films, while others got technical behind the scenes. Three judges visited the school in May, when the pupils involved put on a presentation for them. “They went through the whole filming process, sharing their highs and lows, and they showed both films to the judges who were so impressed,” remembers



Primary 6 pupils Emma Mason, Catriona Macarthur, and Katie Morrison

Margaret.

“The school choir sang for them at the end of the presentation, as the choir sing at the end of the films, so we thought it would be nice for the judges to hear it ‘live.’ We were glad we did, as it made one of the judges cry!”

Mairi Macinnes, who has been Head Teacher at Iochdar Primary School for 14 years, also met the judges when they visited the South Uist school. “The school staff, the children, the parent council, and various groups in the community all came together and set up meetings, presentations, and a whole book of evidence of things that we had been involved in over the years, and presented that to the judges. And they had an interview with me, about what I had to say, and for the first time in my

life I had very little to say!” she laughs.

Although she has been Head Teacher at Iochdar for 14 years, Mairi has been teaching since 1974. “I’ve been a teacher for a long, long time, and now I’m teaching the grandchildren of pupils I had in these early years, so I think that tells its own story,” says Mairi.

Mairi is no stranger to the Scottish Education Awards, either – Iochdar Primary School has won a Gaelic Award in the past, among others – and she enjoyed her time at the awards ceremony in June. “It’s certainly a grand ceremony, completely arranged with schools and children at the centre of it.”

While she admits she “wasn’t interested in any



personal gratification” from making the final three out of a long list of 70 for the Lifetime Achievement Award, Mairi says the nomination was reflective of “all the good work that happens around the school and the community, of which I have been a part, and I was very happy to see that recognized.”

“Iochdar School is very much rooted in the community, and we have had several highlights, and as well as that we’ve had several low times and sad things as well. The school’s always at the heart of everything that’s happening the community. I’m grateful for the ongoing support that I’ve had from colleagues, community members, and the education authority throughout the many years I’ve been there.”