

A KILKENNY man has been preaching the hurling gospel in the Premier County.

If Tipperary do the business on Sunday and go on to become hurling's royalty in the years to come, principal of Mullinahone NS James Cahill won't be thanked in his native county.

Since 1997 Kilkenny man Mr Cahill has been sharing his hurling wisdom across the border in Mullinahone, and his young charges could yet become the stars of Tipperary's future.

He's not likely to be top of Brian Cody's Christmas card list but he's still cheering for the Cats.

"I've had to buy a Tipp flag and bunting for the school," he confessed yesterday. "But I won't be cheering for Tipp -- we want the four in a row!"

If that comes to pass, Monday may be a good time to come in and grant a discretionary holiday, if the headmaster wants to avoid a day or more of dirty looks from his blue and gold-clad pupils.

In the past -- BJL, or Before John Leahy -- Mullinahone was largely a footballing stronghold, but that's all changed in recent years. The school has produced current Tipp stars Eoin Kelly and Paul Kelly and such is the time now being put into hurling in this part of south Tipperary that more look sure to follow their illustrious example.

Indeed, Eoin Kelly's cousin, Bridget Maher, is a teacher at Mullinahone National School.

"It's definitely a hurling school," says the principal with a laugh. Other county players from the local club, such as Paul Curran and Sean Curran, were schooled at Kilvemnon.

Border areas such as Mullinahone and the various areas between it and Callan, across the frontier, will be where hurling fever will be pitched highest in the coming days as Tipperary aim to defy the current champs (and the odds).

Local historian Ricky Sheehan, who spent a few years teaching in the border territory of Urlingford, admits to some incursions at this time of year by Mullinahone lads in the past, when it was Tipp who ruled supreme. "They would go into Callan to, let's say, raise the temperature a bit."

A few miles away, along a stretch of the N76 where land is in Co Kilkenny for a few yards, before crossing back into Tipperary, then back into Kilkenny and so on, the rivalry is said to be "friendly" at Poulacapple National School.

"Technically we are in Tipperary but the majority of the children are from County Kilkenny," says principal Mary Meagher.

"I'm living in Tipp for 19 years but, yes, I'm from Kilkenny. With a husband and children cheering for Tipperary, when the match is on I'll be sitting in the corner of my kitchen."

## Teacher keeps faith amid divided loyalties

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