

ACCS Education Conference 'Looking at our Schools, Again'

Given the present industrial climate in schools the ACCS Education Conference, held in the Mullingar Park Hotel on April 20th, provided a welcome opportunity for principals, board members and teachers to reflect on and share best practice regarding issues of concern or interest to schools. The theme of the Conference - **Looking at our Schools, Again** - indicates the focus of the day - schools communicating and debating their progress and development on a variety of issues such as School Self Evaluation, School Planning, ICT and Junior Cycle. ACCS is indebted to all contributors for their input and for their very honest exposé and appraisal of their schools progress in a particular area. The Education Conference provides an excellent example of the new methodologies in practice, e.g. peer observation, review and assessment, etc.

Looking at our Schools from the Outside-in and the Inside-out!

The first presentation was delivered by the Senior Management team from Ballyhaunis Community School - Mr David McDonagh, Principal and Ms Majella Morrisson, Deputy Principal, and former Inspector with the DES. In her role as Department Inspector Majella had conducted numerous Whole School Evaluations throughout the post-primary sector. She gave a very comprehensive and focused report of WSE-MLL and presented some very effective whole school practices which emerged during the process. While there are three stages in the WSE process; pre-evaluation, in-school evaluation and post evaluation, Majella concentrated on the actual in-school evaluation and on the findings and recommendations. She presented exemplars of best practice uncovered during the inspection process.

Whole School Evaluation from an Inspector's Perspective

Majella explained that the rationale behind



Ms Áine O'Sullivan, Principal Ashbourne Community School, Ms Antoinette Nic Gearailt, President ACCS and Ms Karol Sadleir, Deputy Director Assessment, JCT, at the recent ACCS Education Conference.

WSE is two-fold. It not only provides information to parents and the general public by identifying and acknowledging good practice but it also serves as a tool for self-evaluation and a platform for continuing improvement and development. The visiting inspectors are charged with collaborating in a professional way with the school community. Consequently inspectors take school context into account in making judgements and recommendations, focus on teaching and learning rather than paperwork, put school improvement before accountability while maintaining both, ensure that all judgements are evidence based and encourage SSE as complementary to the external evaluation.

Having set out the rationale Majella then carefully analysed the WSE process according to the established headings and presented exemplars of best practice as found in schools.

School Ownership and Management

WSE recommends that there should be visible evidence

of a Board of Management's capacity to monitor school improvement and to lead Teaching and Learning. This can be achieved in a number of ways, for example, by the inclusion of a teaching and learning slot at each Board Meeting, by presentations to the Board by task groups and by Board discussion and analysis of examination results.

The Principal and Deputy Principal in forming the senior management team should model good practice. They should establish high expectations for learning for both teachers and students and must motivate and empower staff and cultivate a climate of openness to change and the adoption of new educational initiatives.

It is important to build a sense of identity among the middle management team, and through regular meetings key issues of importance to the school can be discussed.

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Management and Leadership of Students

Student support teams as expressed in **Well-Being Guidelines 2013** and the **NEPS Guidelines 2014** should promote student well-being and monitor interventions.

The Code of Behaviour should set out and communicate high expectations. The Code needs a restorative rather than a punitive basis and should be consistently supported by all staff.

Additional educational needs should first and foremost be addressed in the classroom. Flexible methods of provision, such as team teaching, etc. should be employed. Where students are withdrawn for extra tuition English and Maths classes should be avoided.

Quality Teaching and Learning

Subject planning is a key driver of improvement and should provide a comprehensive road map for teaching and learning. The Principal has a key role in instructional leadership and should promote strategies to encourage new methodologies, new assessment and the use of ICT in teaching and learning.

There is a move away from stating learning objectives at the start of the lesson to stating learning intentions so that students know what is expected of them. It is important to give students samples of different qualities of work and feedback on how to improve. Methodologies such as pair work and group work are excellent student activities but need to be well structured to be successful.

Students need to be taught how to study and revise, take notes, how to organise their learning and how to study revision plans.

School Self-Evaluation

Majella's message is that SSE is a firmly established aspect of the education system, is evidence based and is here to stay. It is recognised that it requires effective leadership by the Principal. Throughout the process it is important to listen to students.

Mr David McDonagh, Principal, Ballyhaunis Community School, concluded this session by presenting his school's experience of a WSE-MLL which was carried out in 2015. David detailed the findings and recommendations under the main headings and the school's response to them.

Learning from the experience of others

The mid morning session was presented by Mr Dermot Healy, Principal of Pobalscoil Inbhear Scéine, on the topic of the Whole School Plan and the introduction of one hour classes, followed by Mr James Duignan, Principal Glenamaddy Community School, on the introduction of iPads for First Years.



Presenters and chairpersons of sessions at the recent ACCS Education Conference, standing, Mr David McDonagh, Mr Paul Crone, Mr James Duignan, Chairperson ACCS Education Sub-committee, Mr Paul Thornton, Mr Dermot Healy, seated, Ms Eileen Salmon, General Secretary ACCS, Ms Antoinette Nic Gearailt, President ACCS, Ms Majella Morrisson.

Introduction of one hour classes

– Mr Dermot Healy

Dermot gave a very detailed presentation of his school's self-evaluation process leading to the introduction of one hour classes in September 2015. Initially, through questionnaires the views of all stakeholders were sought. While there were some concerns regarding the advisability of the change nearly 68% of the teaching staff were in favour of trying the new model for a year with the caveat that a robust review and evaluation be conducted at the end of the year. When parents were surveyed they were overwhelmingly in favour of the change while students were almost totally against it. Dermot then guided the meeting through the detailed curriculum planning and practicalities of timetabling.

Research conducted in December showed that the change was positively received by all stakeholders, even the students had adopted a more positive attitude. The school was perceived to be calmer and less rushed. There was time for more active methodologies and more individual attention in class so that more work is covered.

School Plan

Dermot also addressed the formation of the School Plan. The services of an outside management agency were retained to consult with staff, analyse school needs and to draw up a plan.

Six strategic priorities were identified:

- Communication
- Leadership and Management
- Infrastructure Investment
- Teaching and Learning
- Student Support
- Connecting with the Community

Each priority area has a committee which oversees the targets and action plans over a three year period. Echoing

Majella's earlier advice, a key recommendation from Dermot is to set realistic, achievable tasks rather than taking on too much.

Introduction of iPads – Mr James Duignan

James outlined his school's advancement in ICT with the introduction of iPads for First Years. The rationale for their introduction was the preparation of students for life, work and further education in a digital world and to enhance teaching and learning. The first part of the process was the provision of a fit for purpose wireless network in the school. Once installed there followed an extensive period of consultation with staff, students and parents – it emerged that 85% of parents and over 90% of staff were in favour of iPad introduction.

James asserts that the appointment of an iPad Co-ordinator for each year, the establishment of links with Apple and the local University, the support of staff and the engagement of a technology partner are all crucial elements in the success of the project. In order to reduce problems associated with overuse of screen time, many students use the hardcopy of the books for homework.

Developing Teaching, Assessment and Learning – Ms Karol Sadleir

The final session of the day was presented by Ms Karol Sadleir, Deputy Director Assessment, JCT who set out to update the meeting on the progress regarding Junior Cycle and the changes to assessment. Karol's key message was that Assessment only makes sense when it is seen as the bridge linking Teaching and Learning. Previously assessment took place after teaching and learning had happened but in essence assessment is the link which informs teaching and learning.

Karol concentrated on the concept of

Formative Assessment and why it is such a powerful teaching tool when done properly. Key components of formative assessment are:

- Learning orientation rather than performance orientation
- A shared language of assessment
- Acceptance that making mistakes is an essential part of learning
- A willingness to give and receive feedback
- An emphasis on dialogue to support thinking and learning
- A shared belief in taking responsibility for one's own learning

Karol outlined the different strands and forms of Junior Cycle assessment ranging from Formative Assessment, Classroom Based Assessments (CBA's), Subject Learning and Assessment Reviews (SLAR), Assessment Tasks (AT), the JC Profile of Achievement including the State Certified exam. As a totality the varied forms of assessment present a holistic view of the child as learner.

SLAR meetings are subject specific and focus on teaching and learning. The time allocation of two hours per teacher allows for discussion on examples of student work. This provides for multiple evaluations of students' work so

agreement can be reached on the standard of the work.

The appointment of co-ordinators and the provision of professional time are important developments in the management of the change process in schools.



Mr Dermot Healy, Pobalscoil Inbhear Scéine, addressed delegates at the recent ACCS Education Conference on the topic of their school experience of the introduction of one hour class periods.

Circular 24/2016 sets out the time allocation and responsibilities for co-ordinators while there is flexibility regarding the organisation of professional time.

The difficulties of navigating Junior Cycle waters in the light of the present industrial relations impasse were discussed by many of those present. Community and Comprehensive Schools are dual-union schools which exacerbates the difficulties as some teachers are engaging with CPD while others are not.

Karol's advice to school leaders resonates with the earlier advice given by Ms Majella Morrison. Karol suggests that those who are interested in assessment might provide CPD on Formative Assessment and develop a whole-school, long-term assessment policy and plan. This is an important aspect of school life and irrespective of Junior Cycle issues will prove beneficial for a school as a whole.

Mr James Duignan, Chairperson ACCS Education Sub-committee referred to the importance of the shared knowledge between school leaders and the tacit knowledge within the forum offered by the Education Conference. The contributions from active school leaders greatly informs practice across Community and Comprehensive Schools.

Adult Education in a Community School, a Principal's Perspective



Mr John McKennedy, Principal of St. Colmcille's Community School.

Approximately one third of Community and Comprehensive Schools are engaged in providing self-financing adult education programmes. These programmes offer rich educational opportunities for adult learners within their own communities. The National Association of Adult and Community Education Directors, NACED is their representative group. The following account is based on an interview between the Chairperson of NACED, Mr Fintan Kemple, and the Principal of St. Colmcille's Community School, Mr John McKennedy.

St. Colmcille's is a co-educational school established in 2000. With a day student

population of 720, it is based on the Scholarstown Road in the heart of Knocklyon. The school has a particularly active adult education programme, with over 600 participants attending an average of over 70 night classes per term. The night classes on offer cover the whole spectrum of hobbies, leisure, music, and art and craft activities organised by Adult Education Director Mr John Egan.

For school Principal, Mr John McKennedy, the benefits of adult education to the school are "endless". He believes "offering adult education engages the school in the community and is an opportunity to showcase the school to parents in our community in a way we wouldn't get to do otherwise". As a relatively new school, the night classes are also an opportunity to establish the school at the heart of the community. This makes the school a natural place for adults to attend and to send their children or other family members to study.

He continued that "there is also a direct benefit in terms of resources between the day and night schools". It provides opportunities for teachers not yet on full contracts to teach in the night school and

as many of the students are parents of pupils in our school they get to engage with teachers in a different way. In addition John pointed out that the day school can benefit from additional resources funded through the night school such as a newly acquired kiln in the Art Department.

There are also what John calls "unintended benefits". These include "people coming in and out of the school and the lights being on at night". As a result, graffiti and anti-social behaviour are not an issue on the school grounds simply because there are many people around.

Not only is the Adult Education Department self-financing, but it also receives income from rental of school facilities to other groups for their activities. This ensures that the Department remains healthy financially and able to broaden its appeal through promotion.

"The night classes get great support from the community - members of the wider community get a very positive experience of the school, the school is always open and there's a great buzz about it. For us, Adult Education in the school is a massive benefit, not a burden in any way", said John.

Parents' Associations of Community and Comprehensive Schools, PACCS, Annual Conference 2016

The 32nd PACCS Annual Conference took place in Gallen Community School, Ferbane on Saturday 16th April 2016. The theme for the Conference was 'Parents – You Have a Voice'. In her opening remarks, Ms Ursula Finnegan, Principal Gallen Community School, Ferbane, welcomed all delegates and highlighted that research has shown that parents greatly influence the educational success of their children. Ms Finnegan concluded by introducing Mr Dave Fitzpatrick, President of PACCS.

Mr Fitzpatrick outlined how PACCS is now trying to re-engage at school level through the re-introduction of the Annual Conference selecting a school as host venue. He also outlined the number of visitations to schools and the direct contact with schools by officers in PACCS. Again he stressed the importance of parents in the educational debate and that PACCS is an organisation 'of parents for parents'. The strength of the organisation will be based on the collaboration between member Parent Associations. In conclusion he asked delegates to engage fully in discussions throughout the day and then introduced the keynote speaker, Mr Gareth Noble, Children's Law Department, KOD Lyons.

Mr Noble is an advocate for children's rights and has engaged extensively with government Departments including



The incoming President of PACCS, Ms Rebecca Hemeryk, Ashbourne Community School, addressing the recent PACCS Conference 2016.

Education. His experience is that where there is a difficulty, the earlier the intervention the better. He encouraged parents to engage with their schools to seek resolutions locally where possible but if this cannot be achieved the ultimate responsibility to meet the educational rights of children lies with the Department of Education and Skills. In an excellent address he stressed the difference

between the allocation of resources and the rights of children. While a resource is discretionary the right of the child to equal access of opportunity is enshrined in legislation.

There were three concurrent workshops:

- A. Worrying and how to put manners on it! – Dr Paul Deasy
- B. Dads for Dads – The Fatherhood Programme, Mr Brendan Dennehy
- C. Assistive Technology – Ms Deirdre Madden, Outreach Co-ordinator, UCC

Following lunch the three workshops were repeated. The day concluded with an Open Forum with a panel of Mr Aidan Farrell, SEC, Ms Betty McLoughlin, IGC, Mr Diarmuid de Paor, ASTI, Ms Annette Dolan, TUI, and Mr John Irwin, ACCS. Three issues dominated the conversation:

1. Junior Cycle Reform
2. Reasonable Accommodations for candidates in the State Examinations
3. Teachers pay for new entrants and recruiting quality graduates

The Conference also attends to the business of PACCS and central to this was the election of the incoming President for 2016/17 Ms Rebecca Hemeryk, Ashbourne Community School Parents' Association.



Presenters of the Workshops at the recent PACCS Conference held in Gallen Community School, Ferbane, Mr Brendan Dennehy, Ms Deirdre Madden and Dr Paul Deasy with the President of PACCS Mr Dave Fitzpatrick.

News and Events in our Schools

Amazing glimpse at virtual reality with Google Expeditions

Gloria Sogoba & Blessing Edwin (Third Year Students, St. Aidan's Community School, Brookfield)



The Luas Lecture Room in **St. Aidan's Community School** as seen through virtual reality with Google Expeditions.



Students of **St. Aidan's Community School** got an amazing glimpse at virtual reality with Google Expeditions recently as one of only 10 schools selected for the project.

On 22nd March, 2016 Google came to St. Aidan's Community School to run their expeditions program. The expeditions are a new product that allows teachers to take their classes on virtual school trips and also gives students a deeper understanding of the world beyond the classroom.

The special Google phones allow students to see a 360 degree photo spheres with 3D images depending on where the pupils tilt their heads. This product is annotated with details, points of interest, and questions that make them easy to interrogate. Some schools are already using this product in classrooms. Having experienced one of the virtual reality 'trips', Sr. Ann, Principal, St. Aidan's

C.S said it was one of those "WOW educational experiences for students and teachers".

The expeditions took place in the Library and the Luas Lecture Room. In each room the teacher had a tablet and was able to select a destination (for example 'Petra', 'Space', 'Roman Ruins', 'Verona: Romeo and Juliet' or 'the London Eye') and all the students could see 'Petra' or 'Space' on the phone contained in cardboard viewers. The Wildlife Conservation Society, the American Museum of Natural History, PBS, the Planetary Society and the Palace of Versailles contributed to developing the curriculum for students. One of St. Aidan's Second Year students exclaimed that

everyone was "amazed at the technology and the destinations - everyone was blown away by how realistic the expeditions were".

St. Aidan's Community School were thrilled and delighted to be one of just 10 schools to have been selected to take part in the program. 300 lucky students got to experience the expeditions throughout the day. The students and teachers were amazed and everyone said they had never heard so many "ooooh's and aaaah's" from everyone! Ms. Sloyan said 'It's the most positive experience I have ever had in St. Aidan's - the joy on everyone's face is amazing!!'

Gorey Community School won the Fr Godfrey Cup in Senior Rugby for the first time in a thrilling final played at Donnybrook



The **Gorey Community School** Senior Squad who recently captured the Fr Godfrey Cup for the first time. The final score was Gorey Community School 17 - 12 Dundalk Grammar.



Gorey Community School breach the Dundalk Grammar defence during the final of the Fr Godfrey Cup held at the Leinster RFU Headquarters in Donnybrook.

News and Events in our Schools

Saol Rianú, Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne

Próiseas rannpháirteach, comhoibríoch a lean ar feadh bliana ab ea 'Saol Rianú' idir scoláirí agus foireann Phobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne, an Daingean; an múinteoir ealaíne Brenda Ní Fhrighill agus an t-ealaíontóir Maree Hensey. Bunaíodh an tionscnamh ar an gcoincheap 'cartagrafaíocht' agus an dá fhocal Gréigise as a dtagann sé: chartis (léarscáil) agus graphein (scríobh). Mar chuid den dtionscnamh seo bhí Maree mar ealaíontóir cónaithe sa scoil. Bhunaigh sí stiúideo sealadach sa phríomhphasáiste i lár na scoile agus cuireadh fáilte roimh phobal na scoile páirt a ghlacadh sa phróiseas a bhí ag baint úsáide as cur chuige comhaimseartha. Léiríonn beochan íomhá ar íomhá an cónaitheacht seo, an fuinneamh agus an tiomantas a bhí ag na héinne a bhí páirteach ann. Tá an toradh físiúil ón gcónaitheacht úsáide ag Maree chun mórshaothar ealaíne a chruthú a bheidh mar chuid de bhailiúcháin buan ealaíne na scoile. Buíochas le pobal na scoile agus le Marselis Silkinas, scoláire ealaíne ón dara bliain a chum an ceol.



An tUasal Pádraig Firtéar Príomhoide, Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne le Maire Ní Áinle, Creative Engagement NAPD.

Official Opening of the new school extension and Naomh Bríd in Tullow Community School



Planting of Commemorative Oak Trees on the school lawn with Mr Paul Thornton, Principal **Tullow Community School**, Bro. Cormac Commins, Patrician Brothers, Ms Eileen Curtis, Education Officer Carlow/Kilkenny ETB & Sr. Thomasina Murphy, Brigidine Sisters.



Students of **Tullow Community School** performing at the opening of the new school development.

Recent Relevant DES Circulars Since our Last Newsletter

0031/2016	Commencement of Statutory Requirements for Garda Vetting
0031/2016	Commencement of Statutory Requirements for Garda Vetting – Frequently Asked Questions
0030/2016	Expiry of Increment Measures under the Terms of the Haddington Road Agreement Post Primary

For a complete list of relevant DES Circulars please refer to the ACCS website, www.accs.ie, and follow the DES tab → Relevant DES Circulars.