

# ACCS

## Newsletter Nuachtiris

Cumann na Scoileanna Pobail is Cuimsitheacha Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools

No. 3 2012/2013

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## Beannachtaí na Nollag

ACCS wishes all our schools a Happy Christmas.



In keeping with the spirit of Christmas, ACCS will make a donation to The Carers Association instead of sending Christmas cards.



## ACCS In-School Management Conference 2012

ACCS held its conference for Principals and Deputy Principals in the Knightsbrook Hotel, Golf and Spa Resort in Trim on November 22nd and 23rd. There was a high attendance from the 93 Community and Comprehensive schools which was run by the ISM sub-committee under the chairmanship of Mr. Paul Fiorentini, Principal of Carndonagh Community School. Mr. Malachy Molloy, President of ACCS, welcomed all



Mr. Pat Kirwan, Deputy Director and Ms. Gemma D'Arcy, Lead Risk Manager of the State Claims Agency presenting Mr. Ciarán Flynn, General Secretary of ACCS and Mr. Malachy Molloy, President of ACCS with a copy of the Survey of Child Protection and Welfare Management in Community and Comprehensive Schools at the In-School Management Conference.

delegates to the conference and hoped that they would enjoy their participation at the events. He paid a tribute to the late Seán Maguire, a great friend and supporter of ACCS, who died in late October. Brendan Carroll from PCI, spoke about Seán and his great connections with members of the Association.

Mr. Brendan Cunningham from the Labour Relations Commission was introduced by Ms. Anne Marie Dillon, Human Resources Manager in ACCS. He outlined the changes envisaged in the recently agreed new grievance procedure for teachers, now common to both ASTI and TUI members. He also informed delegates of the work of the LRC and the proposed changes which are due to happen in the organisation.

Delegates had the opportunity to meet in their regional groups and consider the issues which concerned them at school level. The greatest concern among the school leaders was work overload for Principals and Deputy Principals. They are finding that new initiatives, such as the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, School Self-Evaluation and the Junior Cycle Framework are very challenging in their own right and require high energy levels. However, with the Budget cuts over the past number of years more and more work seems to be landing on their desks when there are less teachers, less post of responsibility holders and less administrative and caretaking staff in our schools to share the workload. At the same time expectations from parents and the public seem to be even greater. It was clear from the individual and regional inputs that a

lot was expected of ACCS in supporting the needs of school leaders in their work.

It was opportune, then, that Dr. Tony Bates, the founding director of Headstrong, championing the mental health needs of young people, addressed the delegates on the subject of “Mindfulness and the School Leader”. This address, without any doubt, was the highlight of the conference for many. Tony was in a position to explain the mindfulness

concept to delegates and to convince them of the need for it in their busy lives. He even gave a very practical example of an exercise which could be practiced by those present and this helped everyone to relax and take stock.

There were three concurrent workshops which were also well attended with exemplars of good practice from schools. “Supporting Homework Practice” was delivered by Bríd Ní Annracháin, Deputy Principal of Pobalscoil Neasáin, “Assessment for Learning in Action” by Pat Tynan and Paul Behan, Deputy Principal of Castlecomer Community School with Áine Baggot and Nigel Brennan from Sacred Heart School, Tullamore delivering on “Interactive Teaching Techniques” with Jim Moore and Jim Enright from the Laois Education Centre in support. A number of delegates also attended a “Plan for your Future” session with Brendan de la Harpe from Cornmarket. The Open Forum provided an opportunity to revisit the burning issues of the day and tease out possible ways forward.

Mr. Pat Coffey, who made a remarkable recovery from illness over the past few months since retirement got a wholehearted and emotional welcome from delegates when he responded on behalf of all the retirees to the presentations made to each of them by ACCS. Each retiree present received the well-known lamp, hopefully something which will light their way into a bright future. A lovely atmosphere prevailed at the presentation banquet when friends old and new chatted long into the night. This was supported by a reception



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Please circulate to Board Members.



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generously sponsored by PCI and presided over by host, Brendan Carroll from the company.

The In-School Management Committee received very positive feedback in their written evaluations from delegates who attended the conference. In particular they were delighted with the presentations and the workshops, and especially by the Dr. Tony Bates presentation. They felt that they were all highly relevant to their work in schools and looked forward to

applying some of the ideas in their own schools. Great value was placed on the interaction between delegates themselves and all valued the opportunity to share and to network in comfortable surroundings. Unfortunately, the golfers who had arranged an early morning outing on Thursday were prevented from playing by adverse weather conditions and were unable to sample the wonderful course in the Knightsbrook.

**Retirees 2011/2012**



From left: Marie Diskin (Ramsgrange C.S.), Antoinette Nic Gearailt (Vice-President ACCS), Pat Callan (Pobalscoil Iosa), Chris Purcell (Ashbourne C.S.), Eileen Mawe (St. Peter's C.S.), Michael Kennedy (Donahies C.S.), Malachy Molloy (President A.C.C.S.), Patsy McVicar (Pobalscoil Chloich Cheannfhaola), Anne Fitzgerald (Blackwater C.S.), Kevin Duffy (Moate C.S.), Frank Moran (St. Aidan's C.S.), Pat Coffey (Tallaght C.S.), Ted Kennelly (Ballincollig C.S.), Ivan O'Callaghan (Pobalscoil Rosmini).



Pat Coffey (retired Principal, Tallaght C.S.), speaking on behalf of retirees. Austin Naughton, (Principal, Tallaght C.S.) listens.

**Presenters at In-School Management Conference**



Bríd Ní Annracháin (Pobalscoil Neasáin).



Pat Tynan and Paul Behan (Castlecomer C.S.).



Tony Bates (Director of Headstrong) and Siobhán McCarthy (Mountrath C.S.).

**ACCS In-school Management Task Group for the coming year:**

- Connacht: Ann Brady & Gay McManus
- Dublin: Pat O'Riordan & Bríd Ní Annracháin
- Leinster: Joe Sweeney & Siobhán McCarthy
- Munster: Bernie Heffernan & Denis Ring
- Ulster: Paul Fiorentini & Noirín Fitzgerald

The following presentations can be accessed on our website: [www.accs.ie](http://www.accs.ie)

- 'Homework Matters' presentation by Bríd Ní Annracháin
- TL 21 presentation 'Teach to Learn' by Bríd Ní Annracháin
- Booklet on Homework by Bríd Ní Annracháin. Bríd is happy to advise her colleagues. She can be contacted at [deputytyn@gmail.com](mailto:deputytyn@gmail.com)
- 'Assessment for Learning in Action' by Pat Tynan and Paul Behan

**Photocall from In-school Management Conference**



Frustrated Golfers: Standing at back from left: Gay McManus, Dermot Healy, Nicky Cuddihy, Peter Keohane, Malachy Molloy and Padraig Nolan. Seated from left: William Culkeen, Patsy McVicar, John McKennedy and Séamus Ó Ceallacháin.



Brendan Carroll (PCI) presents a prize to Eithne Deeney, Portmarnock C.S.



Ronan Fennessy from Cornmarket Group Financial Services presents a prize to Padraig Nolan (Scoil Mhuire, Clane).

## ACCS Strategic Plan – eSurvey

A reminder to our Boards of Management that ACCS would like to hear your views in the development of our Strategic Plan for 2013 – 2016. Please consider the questions that have been sent to schools in this regard and

form a single response per each Board of Management. This response should be keyed in by the Secretary to the Board or to a delegated person from the Board online at the 'PollDaddy' link supplied to each school.

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### Project Maths: Now and into the Future

From September 2012 all schools are implementing the five strands of the revised mathematics syllabuses. This means that students in First and Fifth Year will be studying a totally new syllabus from the one taught pre 2008.

Project Maths is an initiative which began in 2008 to address issues in syllabuses, teaching, learning and assessment of post-primary mathematics. **What was wrong with the syllabus pre 2008?**

- Problem solving wasn't emphasised enough in the old syllabus.
- The 'new' mathematics culture had so much abstraction as a core principle that for forty years the practical application of mathematics had gradually lost ground.
- Over three cycles of PISA, Ireland had been ranked in the middle of the OECD countries in mathematical literacy.
- Only 22% of students in the Leaving Certificate examination were taking Mathematics at Higher Level. This was a lower percentage than any other subject taken at higher level in the L.C. e.g. Biology: 74%; Accountancy: 70%; English: 65%; Geography: 78%; Irish: 37%.
- The Chief Examiners' reports on state examinations in mathematics over a number of years had consistently pointed to the over-reliance by candidates on rote-learned procedures and the lack of deeper understanding of basic mathematics concepts.
- The inability of students going on to higher education to cope with basic concepts and skill requirements in the mathematical aspects of their third level courses.
- Culturally, poor attitudes towards and performance in mathematics were accepted as the norm in our society. Many people were negative about mathematics, many children were turned off by it and their school experiences of the subject remained with them throughout their lives.
- In many developed countries there is a trend towards a more 'real-life' focus in mathematics, and emphasis on the development of problem-solving skills is the most distinctive and significant shift in mathematics education in many countries.

The Department of Education and Skills is very anxious to get Project Maths right! They commissioned three pieces of research which were discussed at a National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Conference at the end of November 2012. Some of this research is on-going and as NCCA admits, this is a much longer and more complex project than they had ever envisaged.

The first piece of research was conducted by the Educational Research Centre (ERC) and is based on a survey of a nationally representative sample of mathematics teachers and mathematics school co-

ordinators. 1,300 teachers in 180 schools took part in the survey which was implemented as part of Ireland's administration of PISA 2012. It must be noted that all of the strands of Project Maths hadn't been implemented at the time of the survey.

- Regarding Project Maths at Junior Cycle: 48% of teachers did not know if Project Maths was having a positive impact on students' learning of mathematics. It is too soon for teachers to form an opinion about the impact of Project Maths.
- Teachers were negative about the phased implementation of Project Maths, new textbooks, clarity of the syllabus learning outcomes, support from the Project Maths Development Team (PMDT), and students' responses to Project Maths.
- Teachers were positive about the websites at [www.projectmaths.ie](http://www.projectmaths.ie) and [www.ncca.ie/projectmaths](http://www.ncca.ie/projectmaths), using the syllabus in lesson planning, the Common Introductory Course, the Bridging Framework, and the professional development workshops.
- Teachers also reported using a greater range of resources in class, and that students now have to do more 'thinking' in class than previously.
- Teachers were of the opinion that there had been positive changes in a number of aspects in students' learning, in particular, their understanding of key concepts in statistics and probability, and in geometry and trigonometry, their level of awareness of the relevance of mathematics to other disciplines, their ability to solve real-life problems, and their ability to work collaboratively with one another. Confidence levels were high in teaching these aspects of the course.
- Confidence levels were lower in facilitating the use of concrete materials, analysing problem-solving strategies, supporting students with learning difficulties, engaging students in assessing their own progress, and preparing students for the revised Junior Certificate examination. In a general sense, teachers' reported levels of confidence appear to be rooted in the more traditional aspects of mathematics and are lower in areas that reflect newer concerns in the teaching and learning of mathematics. Not surprising!
- When asked about the challenges that they perceived in implementing Project Maths in their schools, 40% of teachers surveyed indicated that the time available (both inside and outside of mathematics classes), the phased implementation, assessment materials available (or not available!), and the literacy demands of the revised courses presented significant challenges.
- In addition, between 20% and 40% of teachers indicated that teaching materials and resources available and students' reactions to Project Maths were major challenges.
- Teachers were almost unanimous in their view that implementation should not have been done on a phased basis, with a strong preference for starting at First Year,

and working upwards from there. There was concern that the current cohort of senior cycle students lacked the foundation skills to tackle the new course.

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative findings concerning Project Maths indicate that while teachers regard some aspects of the implementation of the initiative as being positive, particularly as they relate to teaching and learning practices (e.g. use of ICTs, small group work), significant challenges remain.

The second piece of research was conducted by The National Centre of Excellence – Mathematics and Science Teaching and Learning (NCE –MSTL) in the University of Limerick. This project examined the early-stage textbooks that were made available by publishers in 2010/2011 for Project Maths.

The findings of the research were that:

- All the textbooks in the study fall short of the standard needed to support Project Maths.
- Some topics were omitted from some of the textbooks, when all the topics on the syllabus are compulsory.
- Some textbooks show greater consideration for teaching for understanding in terms of narration.

While the developmental nature of Project Maths is on a strand by strand basis, this militates against topic integration, and, when the roll out is complete, a more integrated approach should feature in textbooks.

The Irish Publishers Association welcomed the findings and would support the recommendation of the research which is:

- An exemplar textbook series for Project Maths should be produced by a specially selected and constituted writing team appointed and funded by the DES,
- All commercially produced textbooks for Project Maths should then be reviewed against this exemplar textbook series,
- Such a review procedure should lead to an approved list of mathematics textbooks for Project Maths.

This type of research isn't possible for other subjects, because it is only in mathematics that there is an internationally comparable standard for textbooks.

The comment from Dr. Anne Looney regarding the recommendation: 'If teachers are going to continue to use textbooks, they should be good textbooks'.

The third study was conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research (Nfer). The first part of the study was presented at the Conference. In this study, 8 schools who were part of the Pilot Phase of Project Maths (Phase 1, commencing 2008) and 8 schools who were not part of the Pilot Phase (commencing in 2010) participated in this research. Student attitudes, motivation and performance were assessed and the outcomes were as follows:

- Overall, students are performing well in many aspects of the revised mathematics syllabus.
- Students are reflective about their experiences of learning mathematics and can identify their own strengths and weaknesses.
- Both Junior Cert and Leaving Cert students are performing particularly highly in relation to Strand 1, Statistics and Probability.

- Students who participated in Phase 1 of Project Maths found Strand 4, Algebra, more difficult than other students.
- At Junior Certificate level there is no discernible difference in skills of students despite Phase 1 students following different syllabus pathways. This suggests that the revised syllabus is not, as yet, having a significant impact on students' performance.
- Students of the new syllabus positively identify a range of teaching techniques central to the aims of the Project Maths e.g.:
  - The application of mathematics to real-life situations.
  - Making connections and links between mathematics topics.
  - Using mathematical language and verbal reasoning to convey ideas.
  - Planning and conducting investigations.
- On the other hand, students have found it challenging to adapt to the new approaches to learning mathematics. Higher order skills, such as reasoning and an ability to transfer knowledge to new contexts, are found more difficult by students than those skills which are more mechanical in demand.

Next steps in this research:

- Nfer is conducting attitude surveys and assessment of performance with a further cohort of Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate students.
- Nfer will continue working with the 16 schools and do a qualitative analysis of students' work, exploring the processes being promoted in the revised syllabus.

In conclusion, Project Maths is a work in progress. It has proved to be a challenging experience for students, teachers and schools. For teachers it is a radical shift in teaching methods. Some teachers feel that they have achieved significant change, others see themselves as having a long way to go. While teachers recognise that the road ahead is a long one, increasingly, it is a road that they can see the point of being on. They can see improved engagement on the part of their students and, in general, would not want to go back to 'the old way'.

Students have found the change difficult, not least the unpredictability of examination questions and the context-based problems. However, they have become more involved in discussing mathematics problems, in making sense of what they are studying and in some cases deepening their mathematical knowledge and building their confidence.

Project Maths as a curriculum and assessment initiative has also proved challenging for the education system. The developmental nature of the revision of the syllabus, the phased introduction of the strands, the very substantial teacher professional development required, and trying to get the examination papers to probe the kinds of understanding that Project Maths supports have all proved more difficult than anticipated.

The research discussed in this article will inform the process of change. 'There are encouraging signs of progress towards achieving the vision of a change in mathematics education that is fundamentally for the better, and for all'. (NCCA).

The three research papers can be downloaded from the NCCA website [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie).