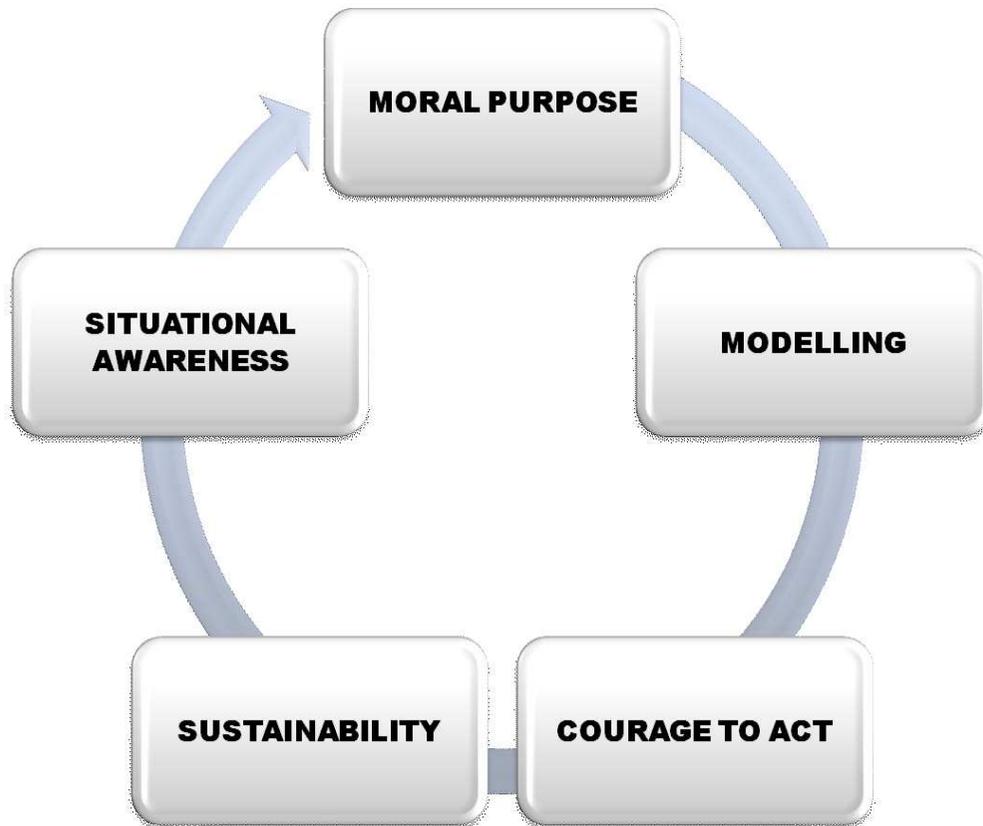


# Action Learning Network Newsletter



21<sup>st</sup> Century Leadership

The Forbairt Post-Primary Team is producing this Newsletter to outline 'in brief' the work of five ALNs, comprising nineteen schools. The idea behind it is to provide a sample of the topics discussed, the level of participation and the genuine sharing which goes on at these networks. Despite the sectoral differences, the overall impression is one of true professional engagement where teaching and learning are to the fore.

This little publication is a forerunner to the presentations taking place at Module 6 on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2007 in Adare, the final session for this cohort. Special thanks to the personnel who facilitated the networks in the many education centres from Kerry to Kildare.



**The Kildare Cluster** was facilitated by Sheila McManamy. This cluster met on a number of occasions. Sometimes the cluster was facilitated by Sheila and other times self-facilitated. The cluster was represented by:

Maria Barry & Michael O'Grady	St. Wolstans, Celbridge, Co. Kildare
Catherine Burke & Pdraig O'Lunaigh	St. Kevins CS, Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow
Cyril Hughes & Bernard Cashman	Knockbeg College, Co. Carlow
Majella Deasy & Carol Hanney	St. Thomas' CS, Bray, Co. Wicklow

Topics discussed were:

- Subject Departments
- How do we use results? Keeping an eye on those who drop down from Higher to Ordinary level and maintaining control of such a process to reduce the incidence of students taking a 'soft' option. Ensuring Parents and Form Teachers are aware when this happens.
- Homework Policy — record of test results in the Students' Journal/idea of monthly testing.

Following these discussions and explorations, schools identified a number of priority areas and in consultation they identified a number of priorities and they decided on various approaches, some of which had been tried and tested by their colleagues in the network.

**Priorities:**

- Subject Departments.
- Better use of the data provided by results
- Follow up with students on a monthly reports
- Homework policy

*LDS appreciates the co-operation*

*of the networks and schools*

*included in the production of this newsletter.*

*The views expressed and the practices outlined are those*

*of the individual networks and schools.*



## Establishing a network of schools

### Successful networks:-

1. Are designed around a compelling idea
  2. Focus on pupil learning
  3. Create new opportunities for adult learning
  4. Plan and have dedicated leadership and management
- 
1. Compelling idea - Arrive at **quick wins** and create a momentum-need internal leadership to initiate and act as information brokers – transferring from one to another.
  2. Should be based on lived reality, make learning experience better and raise achievement. Need: -
    - Information or data from schools
    - To be clear on content and process
    - Target group identified from data
    - Needs to be measurable
    - Establish baseline and timeline of milestones
  3. Personal attendance is key –
    - Learning from discussions - not information meetings.
    - Leaders are modelling for teachers.
    - External facilitators for sessions - visit each others' schools and networks.
  4. Essential for focus to have **dedicated leadership/management** – this ensures the network is purposeful and successful - share responsibilities for booking venue / minutes.....
    - Need not always be Principals could be Deputy Principals and Middle Leaders - helps distributed leadership.
    - Need a timetable for successful completion.
    - Plan for review from the start.
    - Set in context and sharing is the key while respecting diverse communities from which networks originate.

Adapted from NCSL—Think Piece

## Subject Departments at St. Wolstans Community School Celbridge. Co. Kildare

In 2002 each subject department received a folder with documentation on how departments should be run and what activities they should be involved in. This documentation was received from Gerry Watchorn of SDPI.

Departments are given time for about 6 meetings per year. Minutes are kept of all meetings and actions are put in place. One department had a subject inspection at the end of 2002 and they were complimented on their record keeping. This empowered other departments to do likewise. Five years later departments now are at a much more advanced stage. They have common exams for their classes. They plan what is taught for each term. They share ideas, notes and expertise.

In some departments team teaching is used. A few departments are involved in a pilot assessment of learning project involving homework. I believe that exam results in recent years reflect the close collaboration of teachers within their departments.

Michael O'Grady, Deputy Principal



Geography Class on a field trip

**“STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE”**  
**at St. Kevin’s Community School, Dunlavin, Co. Wicklow**

Management felt the need to look at tangible means of addressing on an ongoing basis the academic progress of students and through the intervention of Year Heads to help/encourage students to achieve to their full potential. As process is open and transparent, pupils, teachers and parents will see at first hand student academic progress. This would allow for dialogue/intervention with pupils and parents at the earliest possible stage of the year.

The proposed Project was discussed with staff towards the end of school year 2006. Feedback from staff assisted in helping to frame the procedures that would apply from September 2006. In essence class tests had to be given at the end of agreed months of school year. Results for these tests had to be entered on a spreadsheet set up on computer in the staff room. Additionally students had to enter their test results in a section of their Journal which Year Heads and parents could access.

Year Heads were able to access a hard copy of results for each subject for agreed months of testing. Academic progress could be monitored on an ongoing basis.

Positive affirmation and challenging of poor progress would be a feature of the follow up by Year Heads.

This Project was coupled with a Policy Document in relation to Change of Level. In addition statistical analysis of Leaving Certificate results for each subject area are produced together with the national statistics to allow for dialogue within Subject Departments.

An Awards Scheme was also expanded to provide further motivation for students.

The above initiatives have been designed to raise the academic crossbar for pupils.

Padraic O’Luanaigh  
Principal

Catherine Burke  
Deputy Principal



**Improving Teaching and Learning through the use of I.T. in the classroom**  
**Colaiste Mhuire, Buttevant, Co. Cork**

Colaiste Mhuire is a Community College of 192 students and 18 staff under the auspice of Co Cork VEC.

We, as a staff have spent a number of years working on The School Plan with a particular focus on Subject Plans. However in August '06 with the threat of WSE looming, we invited Ms Joan Russell (EO Co Cork VEC) to speak to all staff on her experience of WSE. Her presentation was very impressive and what stood out most was the urgent need for our subject plans to be finished. We also felt the need to take on board recommendations from other WSE's on the use of I.T. in the classroom.

We dedicated 2006/2007 school year to completing our subject plans, focusing on the curricular content. Then in May 2007 at our staff-planning, day having achieved our goal we decided to focus 2007/2008 on looking at 'how to incorporate I.T. into the classroom', with an initial focus on incorporating I.T. into first year subject plans.

At our staff meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2007 we had an in-service for all staff on 'I.T and the curriculum'. Mr Paul McDonnell, ICT coordinator for Cork region, facilitated this.

In Sept 2007 three laptops/projectors/screens were purchased by school and made available to staff who wished to use them in the classroom. At present we have three teachers, in three different school buildings, leading the use of I.T. in the classroom. These teachers are at the forefront of this project and are engaging the interest of other staff members.

A booking form for using these laptops/projectors and the computer room has been drawn up.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> October there was a 1.5 hours in-service given to interested staff on how to prepare a powerpoint/lesson plan. Mr Paul McDonnell, ICT coordinator for Cork region, facilitated this.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> November we envisage there will be subject group meetings for 1.5 hours with a focus on I.T.

This is where our action plan is to date. We are very pleased with the interest among the staff in this project and those that are leading the way are very pleased with the positive reaction they are getting from the pupils. Our aim is to have a computer/projector in every classroom within the next three years and to see I.T being used as both a teaching and a research tool by all staff and students.



Carol O’Mahony  
Principal

Phil Field  
Deputy Principal

The **Cork Cluster** was facilitated by Tom Moore and dealt with topics as varied as

- Assessment for Learning
- Incorporating I.T. in the classroom

Tony Walshe & Mary Keane      Mayfield Community School, Co. Cork  
Carol O'Mahony & Phil Field      Colaiste Mhuire, Buttevant, Co. Cork

In Mayfield Community School it was decided to focus on:

- The introduction of Assessment for Learning to support Learning in the school.
- Seeking advice and information on best ways of achieving this by discussing it with our S.D.P.I. regional co-ordinator Ms Jean Geoghegan.
- At a school planning day assessment was prioritised and a task group was set up.
- The Deputy Principal was also a member of this task group.
- Having discussed the principles of Assessment for Learning with this task group they were not entirely convinced of it's feasibility.
- About the same time the school signed up for the Learning School Project.
- The two contact persons for this project are the Deputy Principal and a junior member of staff, Ms Fox.
- As the school has disadvantaged status there are innumerable supports already in place for the 'weak' student and it was felt that there were less supports for the 'better' student. So Ms Fox felt that as she was teaching a very good Y1 class that she would be interested in trying out new approaches that would improve their learning outcomes.
- With this in mind and on further discussion with the Learning Project team we decided to try out aspects of assessment for learning with this identified class.
- This was presented to the staff and others were invited to join the project. Two other teachers of this class then joined the team.
- We invited Kieran Golden to the school to help this team with developing this new approach.
- The project is ongoing for this year.
- What we hope from this is that if this team sees a positive increase in the learning outcomes of this class that this will inform their professional dialogue in the staffroom. This hopefully will result in a whole school approach to assessment for learning.

Tony Walsh, Principal

Mary Keane, Deputy Principal

## **HOMWORK POLICY** *at Knockbeg College, Co. Carlow*



**Knockbeg College:** voluntary secondary school; circa 390 students; all boys; situated outside Carlow town; new school in the pipeline; WSE: February, 2005 + numerous subject inspections; Subject Departments firmly established; move to policy-making – Behaviour Code established – Homework Policy = improving Teaching & Learning & Assessment; HW Overload.

**Risks:**

- a) Coordinating hw across subject departments & individual teachers
- b) Encroachment on teaching style
- c) Uncovering unprofessional approach to hw- individual accountability?
- d) Time

**Gains:**

- a) Improving Teaching, Learning & Assessment by evaluating hw
- b) Hw situated within a collective framework
- c) Teacher CV

**Losses:**

- a) More paperwork v. reality on the ground
- b) Cynicism / Recrimination
- c) Status quo v. creative individuality

**Kick - off**

Usual planning days at start of year: outlined list of policies; underlined planning involves everybody; buy-in to hw; asked for volunteers

**Actions;**

- Planning Co-Ordinator + team of two; documentation (NCCA, SDPI, DES, Ed. Centres Seminars, ALN) re hw.+ data from students and teachers initially
- time allocation: one term : 2/3 classes; School Business
- Presentation of Draft Policy at end of year Planning Day

**Modelling:**

- a) Management support + encouragement
- b) Informal liaison
- c) Team members developing own ideas
- d) Indicators of Good Practice: regular, differentiated, Journal, corrected, feedback, records, influence teaching, sanctions, rewards, study skills seminars

**Evaluation:**

- a) Feedback from teachers, pupils initially
- b) Written data from questionnaires, interviews
- c) Draft presentation to Staff

**Sustainability:**

- a) Increasing data over time by matching small number of pupils and parents over time; open questions v. ticking boxes = fact v. conjecture.
- b) Expertise
- c) Time allocation
- d) Subject Departments & hw

**Moral Purpose**

HW = improving Teaching & Learning: meaningful, reinforcing class work, linking, skill application, types, assessment for & of Learning

**Action Learning Network:**

Advice + sharing of challenges; regional – wide collegiality & co-operation

Cyril Hughes, Principal & Bernard Cashman, Deputy Principal



**The Wexford/Tipperary/Laois Cluster** stretches from Counties Wexford to Tipperary and to Laois, was facilitated by Clare Ryan and was represented by:

Seamus Murphy & Brendan Nee  
 Seamus Bennett & Martin Gleeson  
 Seamus Redmond & Mary Enright  
 Tom Fennessy & Martina Creedon

Enniscorthy Community College, Wexford  
 Colaiste Iosagáin, Portarlinton, Laois  
 Kilmuckridge Voc. College, Co. Wexford  
 Presentation College, Ballingarry, Tipperary

Clare describes the network as follows:

The Network initially met with the primary theme of In School Management. However, our meetings broadened to include additional issues and concerns such as:

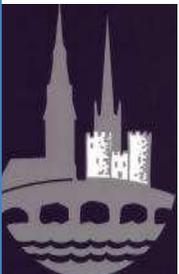
- Examination of the various structures in each of the schools,
- Reviewing the ISM,
- The development of effective meetings with Principal and Deputy as well as with Assistant Principals, Special Duties Postholders and Non-Postholders
- The induction of new staff, H. Dip's and NQT's.

Meetings at all times included sharing information such as schedules of posts, exemplars of meeting formats, selection processes etc. The key hallmark of our network was a strong desire to contribute and extract ideas in a respectful, honest and collegial way.

The network met on five occasions and members are unequivocal in their appreciation of the meetings as a means of collaborative support. The following are some comments from participants in relation to the ALN.

***“So positive: non-threatening, pleasant, no pressure at all, sharing of ideas, social aspect. I usually have a horror of meetings but did not feel intimidated at all”.***

***“ ... marvellous to share ideas, information, sense of collegiality, no-one was hiding, no hierarchies; came to management late in our school life, thrown into management, weren't alone, felt that you wouldn't make a fool of yourself”***



***“Helpful, put a better schedule of posts together”***

***“Sense of trust, brought a sense of openness”***

***“Helpful, feel comfortable, threw in the tuppence worth and took something out of it”***



Kilmuckridge Vocational College

Presentation College, Ballingarry

Enniscorthy Vocational School

**The Galway/Clare Cluster** was facilitated by Michael McCann and addressed a number of topics involving conflict resolution in the broadest sense. The schools involved were:

Bartley Fannin

St. Mary's College, Galway

Matt Power & Tiernan O'Donnell

Ennis Community College

Eileen Mulkerrins

Seamount College, Kinvara

Specific Topics dealt with were:

- The Grievance Procedure — invoking the formal complaints procedure
- Parent Complaints - an informal protocol for dealing with parents.
- Group Conflict—a case study

**The Limerick/Kerry/Cork Cluster** was facilitated by Margaret MacMahon, and involved the following schools

Ned O'Callaghan & Liam Murphy

St. Joseph's, Abeyfeale, Co. Limerick

John O'Donovan & Ann Cummins

St. Joseph's, Ballybunion, Co. Kerry

Jim Twohig & Mary Jones

John The Baptist CS, Hospital

Sr. Nuala O'Leary

Presentation Secondary School,

Listowel

Denis Kerins

Scoil Phobail, Rathmore

Margaret McCormack

St. Brigid's, Killarney

Helen Cadogan & Margaret Corckery

Bishop McEgan College, Macroom

The Specific topic dealt with here was a review of the Middle Management Structure.

