

Mullingar ALN (continued)

Other initiatives undertaken by the other schools in the cluster included;

- The planning of a staff day for all middle leaders to further explore with them their role in the overall leadership structure in the school.
- The holding of informal discussions with post holders on an individual basis with a view to exploring the idea of changes of duties.
- Exploring ways of encouraging non positional leaders in schools.
- The development of “handover documents”, which each post holder was asked to complete were a very useful initiative. The document listed
 - (a) a chronological account of the main activities involved in the post throughout the year month by month and
 - (b) details of any contact numbers needed by the post holder in the execution of the post.

All of the schools in the cluster will continue to work on developing middle leadership in their schools.

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.

Welcome to our second Forbairt Post-Primary **‘Action- Learning Networks Newsletter.’** Michael J. Marquardt, in his book,

‘Optimising the Power of Action Learning’ (2004), states:

‘Perhaps action learning’s greatest value is its capacity for equipping individuals, teams and organisations to more effectively respond to change.’

If this is true, then we can say with some confidence that you, the participants on **‘Forbairt P.P. 08/09’**, are well equipped indeed to meet the challenges of an uncertain future in our schools.

The Forbairt Team would like to pay tribute to all the Principals and Deputies who, over the course of the Forbairt Programme, engaged so enthusiastically in the process of action - learning. The sharing of practice at Network meetings and the level of openness of those present, in collaboratively reflecting on current school issues and on individual leadership dilemmas, was very apparent.

Your commitment, through your attendance at these meetings, to your own professional development, and indeed to the fostering of good practice in your schools, is highly commendable.

Learning Networks in Cork, Ennis, Galway, Mullingar, Dublin, Donegal, Navan and Kildare became, over the course of the year, real Learning Communities where problems were shared and actions for resolution suggested and we sincerely hope that you continue to meet long after you have ‘graduated’ from Forbairt!

Finally, we wish to acknowledge the work of all the Forbairt Team in organising and facilitating the various Networks. Thank you!
Beir búa agus go n-éirí libh.



Raising the Bar - Navan ALN

This was the chosen topic of the Navan ALN—comprising **Athboy Community School**, Anthony Leavy Principal & Angela Crowcock Deputy Principal

St. Aidan's Comprehensive School, Cootehill, Mary-Anne Smith Principal & Teresa Carroll Deputy Principal
St. David's C.B.S., Artane Padraic Kavanagh Principal
Syngue Street, C.B.S. Michael Minnock Principal & Brendan Keenan Deputy Principal.

The group met on four occasions and was facilitated by Sheila McManamy. The hallmarks of the cluster were the concentrated focus of the schools involved on improving student performance across the whole spectrum of their respective schools.

What made the network unique was the fact that each school established a clear picture of its cohort and became situationally aware. Then, using this data, they carried out various initiatives designed to improve student performance.

Following the introduction of these initiatives extensive research, both qualitative and quantitative, was done to establish the success or otherwise of the interventions. The outcomes provide fascinating reading and they will act as incentives for many schools interested in 'raising the bar'.

Athboy Community School focused on 2nd Year – where disaffection often takes root.

Syngue Street CBS focused on raising student performance through increasing the number of students taking higher level at the Junior Certificate examination through a variety of strategies. **St. David's, Artane** modified their system of mixed ability and adapted it to a form of class arrangement which on the basis of performance seems more appropriate to the cohort of students in the school.

Finally, **St.Aidan's, Cootehill** has introduced Transition Year and it is managing it in such a way so as to ensure that it provides an opportunity to enhance students' performance in Senior Cycle.

The **Mullingar ALN** was facilitated by Mary Nihill and met on 4 occasions. The members of the ALN were:

Ursuline Secondary School, Sligo - Sr. Mairead O Regan & Olivia Kenny

Our Lady's Bower Athlone - Sr. Denise O Brien & Noel Casey

Colaiste de hIde Tallaght - Fergal O Giollain

Senior College Dun Laoghaire - Barry O Callaghan

It was agreed that the focus of the action project would be:

“To review of and improve the effectiveness of Middle Leadership in participating schools “

Issues discussed included:

1. Centrality of teaching and learning
2. Imbalance in work done by Middle Leaders
3. Time to meet
4. Year heads vs. the rest!
5. Turnover of posts

Below is a brief description of the learning journey that one of the schools in the cluster undertook:

Coláiste de hIde Tallaght

“We discussed how to proceed with raising awareness of the importance of middle management in school. We were referred to Liz Flanagan (LDS) and we organised a Principals' meeting for the Dublin Gaelcholáistí, held on 6th June 2008. Agenda for in-service days discussed and agreed with emphasis on raising awareness of the role of APs and SDTs in the management of the school. Two days in-service held on 16th September and 23rd September 2008. Projects for each school agreed and LDS team to visit schools over academic year”.

Mentoring of NQTs in Coláiste Bride

6. Deputy Principal/ Post Holder and 2 subject mentors on rotation in the UCD National Pilot Project on Teacher Induction.
7. Deputy Principal compiled handbook for subject mentors.
8. Mentors and mentees meet on informal basis

Next Steps

1. Meeting with all mentors and Deputy Principal November 08 to get feedback.
2. Meeting with all NQTs for 08-09 (15 including PGDE students). Continue to put in place previous suggestions from 07-08 survey.
4. Reflect/evaluate work to date, compile report for BOM and School Development Plan.
5. Redesign and plan for Subject Mentoring 09-10.

Coláiste Bride

“Raising the Bar” at Athboy Community School

Raising the Bar

- All 2nd year pupils surveyed re their academic progress (copy of questionnaire).
- Chose 30 students of average ability (according to NRIT) scores as a focus group.
- Compared their ability with their attainments.
- Interview 15 students (increase awareness of their progress).
- Monitor their class assessments tests and mock results.
- Compare with the 15 students not interviewed.
- Interview 3 tutors, all English teachers, very committed to developing strategies to supporting the average student to reach their full potential.

Strategies

- New journal layout (example included).
- Maith thú included.
- Development of Tutor system.
- Credit System (example included).
- Awards System.
- Homework Policy (reviewed, evaluated and amended).
- Standardized Letters re materials, homework attainments
- Increased parental involvement.
- Positive reinforcement fostering student confidence in their abilities.
- Encourage students to stay at higher level in Junior Cert. involve parents in decision.
- Explain impact for levels in senior cycle.
- This project was explained to all staff at staff meeting, creating an awareness of the need to address the issue of academic underachievement



“Raising the Bar” at St. Aidan’s

A ‘Raising the Bar’ project team was set up within the school to focus on teaching and learning in particular in relation to our gifted and talented students.

In-service was undertaken with new methodologies including co-operative learning and a pilot project on ‘Assessment for Learning’. The sharing of good practice among staff in subject department, team teaching and a reward system for good quality class and homework are key components of this initiative.

We will track our incoming first years and Transition Year students so the project may be evaluated using both quantitative and qualitative evidence.



**Teaching at the whiteboard at
St. Aidans**

Synge St: -

"Our focus was on increasing the number of students taking higher level at Junior Certificate. Over a three year period we believe that we can demonstrate significant progress at almost every subject, the exceptions being Irish and Mathematics. We achieved this outcome by a combination of whole school staff involvement, earlier intervention with career guidance and increased parental support through more evening meetings on relevant educational topics."

Mentoring of NQTs in Coláiste Bride

Background - Prior to project in existence.

1. Post holder responsible for Induction.
2. Ad-hoc mentoring.
3. Ad-hoc feedback meetings with Principal, Deputy Principal and Post Holder.

Steps Taken

1. Survey devised for 07-08 NQTs 15 in total
 - *What is your general impression of the Induction Process you experienced coming into Coláiste Bríde?*
 - *What has worked well?*
 - *What has helped you?*
 - *What could be done differently?*
 - *Have you any previous experience as a new teacher in a school that you would be willing to share?*
 - *What characteristics would you appreciate in a subject mentor?*
2. End of year staff meeting – Mentoring on agenda for discussion at subject department meetings.
3. Subject mentors formally identified for 08-09.
4. Meeting of 07-08 NQTs with Post Holder and Principal.
5. Suggestions by NQTs taken on board in planning for 08-09.
 - Have photographs of all staff in order to aid recognition and to help people to get to know one another.
 - To be introduced to a Mentor one-to-one by the end of the first week.
 - To identify five established members of staff who would be available to act as Mentors from a cross section of subjects rather than one-to-one.
 - To put information on e-portal and/or teacherpublicfolders file for H Dips, new and substitute teachers.
 - Develop a file/document of frequently asked questions (FAQs) regarding things like in-house exam system, when to give dockets vs when to give notes in journal etc, where to find supplies/information, procedures for supervision etc.
 - There was a lot of positive feedback about the current annual staff handbook and how useful it is as a reference document.



Gallen Community School was formed in September 2004 as a result of an amalgamation of Ferbane Community College and St Joseph's and Sarans Secondary School.

WSE: March 2006 + subject inspections since then.

Subject departments established and policies in place on a range of issues.

- **Sep/Oct 2007** Review of present practice - staff handbook, meetings with Principal and key support staff.
- Following discussion and planning with staff, mentors were appointed to new staff members.
- A structure was put in place regarding formal meetings with Principal during the year. Meetings with mentors were informal.
- Questionnaires were distributed to teachers and mentors at the end of the year and feedback was analysed.
- **Sep/Oct 2008** Meeting held with two teachers appointed 2007/08 to see if further information could be gained about Mentoring/Induction process. New teacher appointed and procedures followed.
- Supplementary Information Booklet was prepared for newly qualified teachers/teachers new to Gallen Community School.
- Feedback regarding this booklet and supports in place at present.
- **Next Stage** Collation of some lesson plans in different subject areas.
Different teaching methodologies –
On going feedback between Mentors and teachers.

“Raising the Bar” at St. David’s

I proposed that we would remove the 24 most academic students and set up a class for them. I felt that although they were doing well, they could do better. This was discussed at staff, parent council and B O M level before it was agreed to implement it. It was agreed that all subjects would be rotated from year to year and that the teacher of the “good” class would also teach the same subject to the SEN class.

Students who were in mixed ability classes continued to have the same access to higher and ordinary levels in each subject. The anecdotal evidence was that the new approach was a successful one.

By 2008 it has been possible to compare 4 years results before and after the change.

The evidence appears to validate the anecdotes.



St. David’s, Artane

The Clare/Limerick Action Learning Network

The Clare/Limerick ALN was facilitated by Tom Moore, and met on 4 occasions over the course of the past year . Our meetings took place in Clare Education Centre.

The schools participating in the Network were:

Kilrush Community School, Principal, Rock Kirwan and Deputy Principal, John Brody;

St. Anne's Community College, Principal John Fitzgibbon and Deputy Principal Michael Mc Namara;

St. Nessan's Community College, Principal , Eugene O'Brien and Deputy Principal, Michael Treacy.

The Network chose to investigate the possibility of introducing **TEAM TEACHING**, on a pilot basis, for selected cohorts of students in each of the schools in Sept 2008

On Feb 4 2008, the Network had a presentation from Ms Joan Russell E.O. Co. Cork V.E.C., who outlined the **challenges and the opportunities** which such an initiative might pose for both students and staff in each school.

Following a meeting on April 16th 2008, the members of the group decided that good decision-making in the selection of the actual 'teaching teams' in each school and the protocols surrounding how each team would operate within the classroom, would be crucial for success.

LDS FORBAIRT 2007-08 & 2008-09 TEACHER SUPPORT SCHEME IN COLÁISTE MHUIRE

We introduced a scheme where teachers worked with each other in a collaborative and supportive manner to help raise the academic standard of the pupils in Coláiste Mhuire.

Strand 1 - Teacher Support

- Teachers worked together -learning from each other through classroom observation
- 2 sessions per year (Term 1 and Term 2)
- Carefully planned procedure – Schedule put in place – Observation form – Review
- Examples of effective teaching methodologies and practises were discussed by staff, summarised and presented to staff.

Strand 2 – A Structured Induction Programme for New Staff.

- New Teacher Package
- Planning Week 1 – In-service Day – presented by 3 teachers – Themes:
 - Assessment For Learning
 - Classroom Management & Discipline
 - ICT
- Scheduled Meetings/Review Sessions/Support

LDS FORBAIRT 2007-08 & 2008-09 SCÉIM TACÚ MÚINTEOIRÍ I gCOLÁISTE MHUIRE

Bhunaíomar scéim inar oibrigh múinteoirí lena chéile ar bhealach comhoibritheach agus tacaíochta lena chéile chun caighdeán acadúil na ndaltaí i gColáiste Mhuire a ardú.

Sraith 1 - Scéim Tacú

- Múinteoirí ag obair agus ag foghlaim óna chéile trí bhreathnú sa rangseomra.
- 2 sheisiún sa bhliain (Téarma 1 agus Téarma 2)
- Nós imeachta pleanáilte – Sceideal socráithe – Foirm Breathnadóra – Athbheithniú
- Pléadh samplaí de mhodheolaíochtaí éifeachtach i measc na foirne – achoimriú orthu – tugtha don bhfoireann

Sraith 2 – Clár Insealbhaithe Eagraithe do Mhúinteoirí Nua

- Pacáiste Nua
- Seachtain Pleanála (Seachtain 1) – Lá Inseirbhíse curtha i áthair ag 3 múinteoirí – Téamaí:
 - Measúnú chun Foghlama
 - Bainistíocht ranga agus iompar
 - TFC
- Cruinnithe sceidealaithe/seisiúin athbheithnithe/tacaíocht



Foireann Teagaisc



Lá Inseirbhíse – Seachtain 1



Lá Inseirbhíse – Seachtain 1

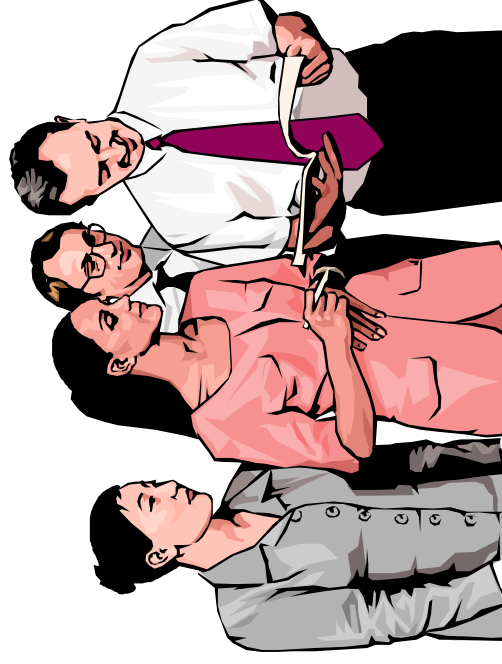
It was then decided to enlist the expertise of a school where TEAM TEACHING was working well. In May 2008 a work–shop was organised and was attended by the School Principals and 10 teachers from the three schools.

Back to back workshops took place on the day on ‘**Leading and Managing a Team Teaching Initiative**’ and ‘**Classroom Issues in Team Teaching**’.

The workshop was excellently facilitated by Ms. Dorothy Meenehan, Team Teaching Co-ordinator, Ennistymon Vocational School.

The Network would also like to thank Mr Enda Byrt, Principal, Ennistymon Vocational School for his help and encouragement.

Roll on September!



The **Donegal ALN** was facilitated by Tom Moore and was the collaborative work of four VEC colleges in Co. Donegal
Mulroy College, Milford
Finn Valley College, Stranorlar,
Magh Ene College Bundoran and
Gairmscoil Mhic Diarmada, Aranmore Island), who met together as a network.

Our focus was on raising academic standards and we decided that the specific area for our project would be **Assessment for Learning (AfL)**.

As a springboard to our action learning project, each individual college undertook a wide range of in-school initiatives to introduce the staff to the concept of AfL and also to incorporate AfL into teaching and learning in each college. Some examples of these initiatives are as follows:

- In-house presentation by teachers on AfL
- Whole staff development day with SDPI facilitator(s)
- Senior Management team meeting
- AfL on agenda of all Subject Department meetings
- Questionnaire to find out what AfL practices are already being used by teachers.

At our ALN network meetings that were very well attended and facilitated by Tom Moore (LDS), we discussed the action plans of our respective colleges and also decided on an ambitious plan to bring all the teachers from the four colleges together to receive further training in the practical implementation of AfL in the classroom and also to share ideas and resources in the various subject departments.

Kildare ALN (continued)

A compilation of job descriptions from about twenty schools was circulated and Principals and Deputy Principals found that useful as frequently we need ideas about the best way to describe certain posts and the best combinations of duties. Discussions focused on whether or not to have an outsider to conduct the review and it was felt that SDPI personnel were very useful in this regard. Although a combination of an internal committee and outside facilitation was best. Suggestions for the composition of this committee were having a representative from the Assistant Principals, a representative from the Special Post Holders and a non-post holder. As WSE reports seemed to focus on this area, it was felt to be a critical area for school management. The changes ahead may put a different complexion on any review.

Oaklands Community College

The staff of Oaklands C. C. identified SEN as an area to be addressed as part of school

development planning 07/08. Our Principal gave a presentation to staff on recent legislative changes regarding SEN provision. Staff also completed an audit of this area and highlighted areas that needed to be addressed. In October 2007 Katherine Bates, (Special Education Support Services) gave a seminar to all staff entitled “**Inclusion of Special Education Needs Students in Mainstream – A Whole School Approach**”. All subject departments subsequently met to discuss differentiated teaching strategies in their respective subject areas. The SDP coordinator met with personnel in the SEN department and a statement of current practice was formulated. The school steering committee subsequently discussed areas for attention as highlighted during the audit by staff and a draft policy which incorporated new initiatives in the SEN department was drawn up. These initiatives addressed inadequacies as highlighted by staff in SEN provision. Following consultation with all the educational partners the draft policy was ratified by our Board of Management. We found the cluster group meeting organised by The Action Learning Network with Mr Padraig Moran, Senior Special Education Needs Officer to be extremely helpful when processing applications for Special Education Needs Students in our school.



The Cork Cluster was facilitated by Tom Hughes. The group met on a number of occasions and a wide range of topics were considered in the general area of school planning. The cluster consisted of four schools.

Glanmire Community College, Pat McKelvey & Gerlie Cahill
Youghal Community School, Seamus O'Ceallachain & Bernie Heffernan
Clonakilty Community College, Anne Dunne & Denis O'Riordan
De La Salle College Macroom, Noel Dunne & John Murphy

At the outset it was agreed that various aspects of School Planning would be the theme for the cluster. Different schools were at different stages and the following topics were considered:

- Subject Departments
- Improving teaching and learning
- Planning in a newly established school
- Programme planning

There was considerable sharing of ideas and a great appreciation of the opportunity for colleagues to talk openly about the problems encountered and to share thoughts and possible solutions. Different schools were at various stages with their work and there was a genuine feeling of support arising from the opportunity for professional dialogue.

Issues to be addressed include:

- Common assessments
- Further work on subject departments
- Classroom methodologies
- Parent teacher meetings



It was a daunting undertaking but we are delighted to report that this staff development day did take place on the 29th August 2008 and feedback from teachers was very positive.

This was a first for Co. Donegal VEC as never before had whole staffs from different colleges met as a professional group for staff development.

At present **Assessment for Learning** is up and running in each of our colleges. Some have targeted a year group while others have adopted a whole school approach. Key approaches include:

- Learning outcomes stated at the start of each lesson
- A no-hands up policy
- Delayed questioning (wait time of five seconds or more)
- Putting homework on board at the beginning of class
- Traffic light method when asking for help
- Comment only marking
- Open questioning

These approaches seem to be working well for most teachers.

Our next task will be to review our approaches and make appropriate changes in the light of our review. In the long term it would be an interesting research project to monitor examination achievements of students who experienced the AfL method of teaching and learning. At our last network meeting in Sligo, plans were being finalised for the presentation of our project at the next Forbairt meeting in Cavan. As a group we would like to thank Tom Moore for his work with us on this project.



Gairmscoil Mhic Diarmada

The Kildare ALN; Oaklands Community College, Gerry Connolly Principal & Richard Murphy Deputy Principal, **Coláiste Mhuire, Naas**, Marie O'Neill Principal & Teresa Nolan Deputy Principal, **Colaiste Chroimlinghe**, Etain O'Moore Principal & Terry Shorten Deputy Principal. Sheila McManamy facilitated this ALN.

As well as the area of Special Needs, this ALN also looked at Middle Management structures and conducting a review of same. It was interesting to observe two different ends of the spectrum in terms of school size grappling with the same problems. Coláiste Chroimlinghe has only two post holders while Coláiste Mhuire in Naas has more than ten times that number. Oaklands Community College is somewhere in the middle though coming from a much tighter structure. Both schools in the voluntary sector benefited from the accountability aspect of the V.E.C. structure where post holders sign off on their duties for the final Board meeting of the year. The template for this was shared with all.

The Connaught ALN consists of three schools, facilitated by Michael McCann.

St Brigid's Secondary School, Tuam John G Davin & Marie Hughes-McCabe

Coláiste Muire, Tuar Mhic Eadaigh, Co Mhuigheo Deaglán de Phriondargás & Maureen Byrne-McKeon

Summerhill College, Sligo Michael Murphy & Tommy McManus represented by the named Principals and Deputy in each school.

The topic chosen was Assessment for Learning.

At the first meeting after the residential Mary Forde of LDS gave a presentation on the whole concept of AfL and each school decided to progress it in its own way.

Coláiste Muire, Tuar Mhic Eadaigh:

The process of introducing AfL started with the Deputy Principal in her own 5th year Agricultural Science class. She began by using elements of peer assessment allowing the students to correct each other's tests without totting up totals. The students found this quite beneficial as they had to focus on content in a critical way as opposed to jotting down corrections on their own. She then introduced the concept of sharing the learning intention for each session and has now extended it to sharing the intention for a fortnight/month. The concept of AfL has now been mooted with the Business and Science departments and it is intended to introduce elements of it in 1st year. Indeed, one of the Business teachers is already using elements of it at Senior Cycle. The following initiatives are planned for the near future: (a) One staff member to attend two in-service days on AfL. (b) A meeting of departments willing to be involved to be held as soon as possible. (c) A presentation to be made to the whole staff.



Tuar Mhic Eadaigh

St Brigid's Tuam:

The Principal presented the idea to the staff at a meeting. There was a general acceptance of the benefits of AfL and the majority of teachers expressed themselves as willing to become involved with the process. Indeed many teachers pointed out that they were already using it in an informal way. It was decided to try and gather more information about AfL and an assistant Principal attended in-service organised by SDPI and NCCA. As a result of this it was agreed to introduce AfL in a more structured way in the Geography department and this was done in first year in 2007/08 and it has been continued on in second year this year. It is intended to gradually extend its use to other departments.

Summerhill College Sligo:

Initially, on a trial basis, Assessment for Learning was introduced as a teaching and learning tool with two first year classes, 1L1 Science and 1L2 History as the teachers of these classes had a particular interest in this method of learning. While pupils and their parents were initially skeptical at this deviation from the traditional assessment method they quickly grew into it and now they see it's worth as a motivational tool. It was then decided to expand it by bringing the other Science and History teachers on board at Faculty meetings before opening it up to the staff as a whole. The two teachers initially involved 'spread the gospel' and it is progressing nicely with most teachers happy with the progress being made. The process is having greatest effect among the weaker students who benefit most from the positive reinforcement used in this method of assessment. The next step is to widen it to the remaining staff members and it is intended to get that done after Christmas. As the results so far are encouraging, it is hoped that the remaining staff will grasp the opportunity with the same enthusiasm as their colleagues who are already involved.