

Report of ACCS In-School Management Task Group and Conference 2019

Members: Mr. Paul Fiorentini, President, Mr. Denis Ring, Chairperson, Mr. Howard Welch, Ms. Ceola McGowan, Ms. Eileen Gildea, Mr. Willie Culkeen, Ms. Anne Smyth, Ms. Bríd Ní Annracháin, Ms. Bernie Heffernan, Mr. Joseph Sweeney, Mr. John McKennedy, Ms. Áine O'Sullivan, Assistant General Secretary & Mr. John Irwin, General Secretary.

The main task of the In-School Management (ISM) Task Group is to organise the annual In-School Management Conference which took place in Farnham Estate, Co. Cavan on the 28th and 29th November 2019. The theme and central focus of this year's conference was *"Being Well, Staying Well"* with a strong emphasis on how important it is for the school leader to manage their own wellbeing, taking advantage of all the supports which the system offers. The conference was very well attended with 85 schools and more than 174 delegates attending the two-day event.

ACCS President, Paul Fiorentini, welcomed all delegates and formally opened the Conference before calling on the Chairperson of the ACCS In-School Management Task Group, Denis Ring, to introduce the theme of the conference and to outline the plans for the two-day event.

The plenary session *"Coaching for Effective School Leadership that is Rewarding and Sustainable"* was a panel discussion facilitated by Rachel Doogue, Executive Coach and Assessment Specialist. Panelists on the day included Clare Catterson, Principal, Syngé Street, CBS, Tara Nolan, Coach, Elizabeth Garry Brosnan, Coach and Valerie Maher, Principal Holy Child Community School. Coaching is a confidential, one to one personal service which is available through the Centre for School Leadership (CSL) for all DES registered school principals. Coaching is a particularly powerful tool and one that has proven to be a highly effective way of developing individual and organisational performance by unlocking potential and capability. Coaching is well established as a leadership development service in large organisations and in industry to date. By engaging in coaching school leaders will gain the following benefits:

- Enhance your capacity to work in a changing environment
- Increase your ability to prioritise and manage demands
- Renew your enthusiasm for the job
- Enable you to manage change more successfully
- Assist you in creating a coaching culture in your school
- Provide time and space for you to reflect

Clare and Valerie shared their own experiences of the coaching service during the panel discussion and spoke about how the service has enabled them as professional leaders in their schools. Clare has accessed team coaching and presented to the conference on the benefits of this service and how this has assisted her in enhancing the distributed leadership model in her school.



Rachel Doogue, Executive Coach and Assessment Specialist, Clare Catterson, Principal, Syngé Street, CBS, Tara Nolan, Coach, Elizabeth Garry Brosnan, Coach and Valerie Maher, Principal Holy Child Community School.

The plenary session was followed by three concurrent workshops:

1. *“Enhancing Wellbeing - Promoting Student Voice in the School Community”* facilitated by Pól Ó Siodhcháin, Principal, Millstreet C.S
2. *“Child Protection in Schools Inspection Model (CPSI) – Lessons Learned”* facilitated by Bernie Heffernan and Annelee Casey, Deputy Principals, Pobalscoil na Tríonóide
3. *“In-School Management – Building Relationships – A Team Approach”* facilitated by John McKennedy, Principal, Aileen Ryan and Karen Philben, Deputy Principals, St. Colmcille’s C.S

Following the regional area meetings, delegates were invited to participate in a choice of Health and Wellbeing Activities, in keeping with the theme of the conference, and taking advantage of the lovely Farnham Estate walking paths and leisure facilities. Later, Thursday evening the atmosphere was lively as guests and delegates revealed a healthy competitive spirit while showing off their general knowledge at this year’s inaugural table quiz. The winning table representing Dublin and Munster received Butlers’ Chocolates compliments of VSware.

The immense contribution of the newly retired Principals and Deputy Principals was acknowledged at the Gala Dinner when they were presented with the new ACCS lamp by Paul Fiorentini, President ACCS and James Duignan, Vice-President ACCS. Jimmy Keogh addressed the audience on behalf of his retired colleagues, acknowledging the support and guidance of the ACCS to schools and reassuring all, that retirement is just another exciting chapter on life’s journey.

School Governance

On Friday morning the School Governance session, chaired by Anne Smyth, ACCS In-School Management Task Group, introduced the current legislation underpinning admissions to schools and the main provisions of the Education (Admissions to Schools Act) 2018 including key changes. While it is not envisaged that there is significant work for schools in amending their Admissions Policies, ACCS does recommend that Boards should review their Admissions Policy consistent with the provisions of the Education (Admissions to Schools Act) 2018.

The second part of the Governance session focused on the Leadership and Management (Circular 0003/2018) annual reports and review meetings which will be carried out over next term and will inform the Principal’s Annual Report on Leadership and Management to the Board in June 2020. Advice regarding the timeframe of this process and guidelines on completing reports and review meetings were explored with the delegates. The presentations were received very positively by delegates and these have been circulated to all members of the Board of Management and senior management in schools to assist in their preparation for their work in this area.

ACCS was delighted to welcome students from Pobalscoil Inbhear Scéine and the Thomas F. Meagher Foundation to the ISM Conference this year. The Foundation promotes pride in and respect for the Irish Flag and its meaning for peace. It seeks to foster active citizenship in our school children irrespective of ethnicity, creed or gender to work together under the Irish Tricolor and live its message of peace promoting inclusivity of the Flag Day especially among the new Irish. Senator Mark Daly addressed delegates and reminded schools that they can be involved by registering for the free fundraising pack at info@tfmfoundation.ie.

“The Resilient Leader”



Shane Martin, Psychologist, (Moodwatchers).

Shane Martin, Psychologist, (Moodwatchers) concluded the conference with an uplifting, insightful and practical presentation on the theme of “The Resilient Leader-Harnessing Strengths during Challenging Times.” Shane is a psychologist dedicated to teaching the very best evidence-based psychology to help people protect their mental health and enhance the quality of their lives.

Shane highlighted that it is never too late to embrace a better quality of life and that the first step for all of us is to practice being present. He underlined the importance of health, happiness and resilience in our personal and professional lives. What’s guaranteed about this precious life of ours is that challenges will arise, and he offered some tips for developing greater resilience:

1. Emotional Awareness/Avoiding Panic – the ability to identify your feelings and to express your emotions is important. There is enough annoyance in life without adding unnecessary annoyance.

2. Empathy. Seeing beyond yourself, supporting others – no one has exclusive rights on stress.
3. Minding yourself – ‘when I am under pressure, I always take to the road’. Doing what is good for us whether we like it or not. What are you doing for yourself?
4. Optimism – when under pressure, it is important to keep company with optimistic people. To stumble is to learn!
5. Social Connectivity – people need people. Harness a sense of team. The powerful resource of the family.
6. Prayer/Faith – if you believe you are being looked after, it is harder to be frightened. Spirituality/Religiousness.
7. Life is a journey. Mindfulness.
8. Extra tip – Keep laughing! – Humour is a therapy in itself!

‘Laughing one hundred times amounts to the same exercise as riding a stationary bike for fifteen minutes. Five minutes of intense laughter can double the heart rate. Three minutes of laughter is equivalent to three minutes on a rowing machine. Laughter stimulates circulation, tones muscles, energises lungs and stimulates endorphins in the immune system.’

Dr William Fry (Stanford university)

Shane is also author of *‘Your Precious Life - How to Live it Well’* published by Orpen Press which is now available in all good bookstores nationwide.

“Sometimes we want exclusive rights to stress. We can convince ourselves that we have the worst problems in the world. Helping others not only protects us from becoming self-obsessed but can also be a great help to ourselves in contextualising our own problems.”

Feedback from delegates was overwhelmingly positive in terms of venue and content of presentations and workshops. Delegates welcomed the opportunities to network with colleagues from other schools throughout the two days and acknowledged the positive choices made by the ISM Task Group with regards to the sustainability agenda; reduced photocopying along with the introduction of reusable bottles and learning journals for all delegates.

The ACCS In-School Management Task Group would like to record its gratitude to General Secretary, John Irwin and the ACCS team for their support in organising the conference, acknowledging the substantial work completed by Susan Cunniffe, Debbie Riordan and Eileen Diver in ACCS Head Office. The Task Group also acknowledges the support and patience offered throughout the conference by Photographer, Tom Cash and expresses its appreciation of the wonderful photographic record of the event created by Tom over the two days. Finally, it wishes to thank all conference exhibitors for their continued support of this event, especially PCI, VSware and Microsoft, main sponsors of this year’s ISM Conference.

The following people were re-elected to the In-School Management Task Group 2019/20:

- Connacht: Willie Culkeen & Eileen Gildea
 Dublin: John McKennedy & Bríd Ní Annracháin
 Leinster: Joseph Sweeney & Anne Smyth
 Munster: Denis Ring & Bernie Heffernan
 Ulster: Ceola McGowan & Howard Welch

*Mr. Denis Ring,
 Chairperson.*