

ACCS

Newsletter Nuachtiris

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

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IN THIS ISSUE

- Consultation Required
- Our European Champions
- Anti-Bullying Procedures
- Rosses Community School takes a new approach to school improvement planning
- ACCS Convention 2014
- Tribute to Kevin Meehan
- School Trips organised by our schools
- New Principals Induction Day in Hodson Bay, Athlone on August 15, 2013



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This newsletter is a private and confidential document for circulation only to Boards of Management and Principals.
Please circulate to Board Members.



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Consultation Required

Our schools have to be among the most flexible and responsive workplaces in the country. In what other area of work would you have union members, who have accepted a harsh pay and conditions work adjustment, working side by side with other union members who have rejected it. Ironically, those who have rejected continue to get paid for some elements of that work, while those who have accepted continue to do the work and don't get anything for it! Schools are different. For reasons of history and choice some of our Principals and Deputy Principals are on either side of the union divide, making the situation even more complex. As the vast majority of our schools are dual-union schools the difficulties and the choices are felt most keenly. Despite all of this the management teams and the teachers continue to ensure that students receive the best possible education in difficult circumstances. It is important that our Boards of Management give whatever support they can to our school leaders. Affirmation in the difficult circumstances in which they find themselves is very important. Our school personnel show great respect for difference and certainly do not want a legacy of bitterness when the industrial strife comes to an end, as it inevitably will.

The mood of the country, despite the significant voices against austerity, is that more difficult adjustments have to be made, and this includes teachers in common with the other employees in our schools. All of the other grades in our schools have made such adjustments. Most of us, however, are naturally inclined to hold that others should make the greater adjustment. Holding ballots are crude ways in which to gauge opinions and the multiplicity of reasons why individuals vote one way or another can be difficult to decipher. In the Education sphere and as also demonstrated more recently in the political sphere, it can be difficult to understand the reasons why. One thing is certain, better communication and real engagement is the only process which will

solve the strife being felt in our schools.

The 'Féilte' Conference, organised by the Teaching Council in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham on October 5 2013, was a celebration of the teaching profession. It is great to see the Teaching Council actively promoting teaching as a profession, an essential part of its remit. Fintan O'Toole's contribution was very thought provoking. He stated that the personal engagement of the teacher within education is important not just at an individual level but also for us as a society. Teaching is a personal transaction and involves a relationship between individuals. In order to create confident, creative and critical students our teachers need to be valued and empowered. But teacher confidence is being undermined by the system through casualization, contempt (lack of trust) and containerisation. He sees education as the currency of social justice with the power to transform. It is hard to disagree with much of what he says. On the other hand if teacher unions respond with their own list of very specific restrictions on what teachers can and cannot do regardless of the school context, is this not further diminution of the teacher as professional? Are teachers just the pawns in a much larger power game? And are our Principals caught in the middle?

I was very struck by Noel Malone's (Principal, Coláiste Chiaráin, Croom) comment in the Irish Times on October 8: "All sides need to recognise that their voices matter and that decisions cannot, and should not, be made without genuine consultation and respect." We do not seem to have a forum in which such a discussion can take place. Is it time for another national consultative forum on the lines of the National Education Convention? Our last one was held 20 years ago, and now we even have a new hall to hold it in! Croke Park and Haddington Road may well be doing a lot for our balance of payments, but is it doing much for Education?

Our European Champions - Kinsale Community School

Emer Hickey, Sophie Healy-Thow and Ciara Judge won First Place in the Biology Section of the European Union's Young Scientist competition.

The Kinsale students came ahead of more than 120 students from 38 countries to win first prize in the biology section of the contest in Prague.

The Kinsale Community School students represented Ireland after winning the BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition in January for their project which examined the effects of diazotroph bacteria on plant germination.

We congratulate the students and staff of Kinsale Community School, especially the successful students' science teacher Shaun Holly on this tremendous achievement.



Emer Hickey, Sophie Healy-Thow and Ciara Judge with their winning project.

Anti-Bullying Procedures

Circular 045/2013 sets out the new Anti-Bullying procedures for our schools.

What do schools need to do with them?

- Boards of Management have to formally adopt and implement an anti-bullying policy that complies with the requirements of the procedures.
- Boards of Management have until the end of the second term of the 2013/2014 school year (before Easter) to complete the process.

All schools already have Anti-Bullying Policies in place, so they might consider proceeding as follows:

- Form a small sub-committee to examine the new procedures.
- Audit the schools existing Anti-Bullying Policy to see where the gaps are.
- Consider the Anti-Bullying Policy template in Appendix 1 which has a Standardised Part and a Flexible Part.
- Decide on the members of staff who have responsibility for investigating and dealing with bullying, i.e. the "relevant teacher".
- Decide on the education and prevention strategies that will be used by the school as outlined in Section 6.5 of the DES Procedures.
- Decide on the procedures to be followed for

investigation, follow-up, recording and intervention strategies as outlined in Section 6.8 of the DES Procedures.

- Decide on a programme of support for students affected by bullying as outlined in Section 6.8 of the DES Procedures.

In drafting the policy there needs to be discussion at staff level and consultations with the parents' association and the student council.

Once the draft policy has been finalised it should be presented to the Board of Management for discussion and ratification.

Oversight by the Board of Management:

- The Principal will report the number of bullying cases that have been recorded to the Board once per term and confirm that they are being dealt with.
- There will be an annual review by the Board of Management that the Anti-Bullying Policy is being fully implemented.

The 'flexible part' of the policy will be discussed in greater detail at a workshop during the In-School Management Conference on November 14th in Sligo.

Rosses Community School takes a new approach to school improvement planning

In January 2013, the Rosses Community School launched its 3 year school improvement plan. School self-evaluation and school improvement plans are not unusual in second level in 2013. What was unusual about this approach was that an external expert was used to do this. Another unusual aspect of this plan was that a comprehensive three year plan, with the input of almost 700 people, was completed in a 8 week period. The school based personnel were involved in a maximum of 4 x 2 hour workshops. Most school personnel had a maximum of 2 x 2 hour workshops. 180 hours of work was supplied by the contracted planning specialist team, a company called Pinta, who are development planning specialists.(www.Pinta.ie)

Why this approach? A number of years ago Dame Geraldine Keegan, former Principal of St Mary's in Derry City, had given a presentation to post primary school principals. She talked of how she used an external management team to assess where the school was at and to advise how it should progress in the future. This was a very powerful process, as it brought the school into the top 20% of schools in the UK.



Jim McGuinness addressing students

The Rosses Community School, for the last 6 years, has used reflective mechanisms to progress school issues. However in order to produce a comprehensive plan for school, a process like this involves between 150 to 180 hours of work. In light of all the cutbacks, in terms of middle management structures in school and operating budgets, this task was just too ambitious for a school based team.



For a number of years Rosses has been looking for a vehicle that would take an independent look at school, help to capture the voices of all education partners and who had the expertise in this area, using the current reflective approach. In April 2012, we approached Pinta in relation to this type of approach in schools. The Board of Management in the school endorsed the approach. In September and October 2012, an 8 week process began.

A steering committee with representation from all the partners and local community, plus some third level input, set the terms of reference for the project. The steering committee met on 4 occasions during the process. They set the terms of reference, edited and agreed various drafts and finally presented the final plan to all the partners. All stakeholders attended a 2 hour workshop to put forward their ideas, over a two week period. Online surveys were also available to capture the thoughts of the various stakeholders. The comprehensive improvement plan was then launched in January 2013, to run from 2013 to 2016.



Members of the Steering Committee

A comprehensive plan, capturing 7 critical operating themes was agreed. All of these are in keeping with Circular Letter 0040/2012, School Self-Evaluation. The themes and committees were as follows: 1. Communications, 2. Leadership and Management, 3. Financial Planning and Advancement, 4. Facilities and Infrastructure, 5. Teaching and Learning, 6. Health and Lifestyle and 7. Connecting with our Community.

Each theme has a committee, which oversees the action items agreed over the three years. Regular meetings and action planning takes place to review and prepare action plans and to advance the agreed action items for each committee. All members of teaching staff are members of the various committees and these are currently chaired by the Senior Management Team.

The plan has led to major success to date, some 9 months later.

1. Communications: all staff have transitioned to using internal email and sharing and editing documents online, having attended various in-school workshops, using Google docs. This has led to a reduction in the amount of face-to-face meetings, reducing time away from the classroom.
2. Leadership and Management has seen a redefining of various management roles and a review of middle management roles and processes. Senior management and middle management have a well-established meeting schedule and reporting mechanism.

3. Financial Planning and Advancement has seen savings of €60,000 to school budget, with advancement plans to add an additional €70,000 to school budget. Net gain €130,000.
4. Facility Development has seen the completion and progression of projects worth in excess of €500,000, with a school library, running track and additional classroom accommodation.
5. Teaching and Learning has led to the introduction of Spanish, best practice workshops in relation to AFL and a school standardised approach to subject plans and schemes of work.
6. Health and Lifestyle has led to community and school based initiatives in cycling, running, spinning TRX and nutrition.
7. Connecting with the Community has led to major advancement in terms of utilising the school's alumni expertise and greater connection with various community-based clubs and organisations to utilise school facilities and programmes.

The school now has a comprehensive roadmap for the next 3 years. All education partners have a clear and comprehensive view of the direction that the school wishes to take and are informed of its progress. For further detail contact jgorman@rossescommunityschool.ie or peter@pinta.ie



ACCS Convention 2014

The 32nd ACCS Convention will take place on the 27th, 28th & 29th March, 2014 in The Malton Hotel, Town Centre, Killarney, Co. Kerry.

Dates to remember

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| 27th December, 2013 | Nominations for Presidency and motions for Convention to be submitted. |
| 27th January, 2014 | Draft agenda of business and nominations for Presidency and motions to be issued to Member Boards and Executive Members. Member Boards will be invited to submit amendments to the motions. |
| 27th February, 2014 | Latest date for receipt of amendments to the motions. |
| 13th March, 2014 | A final agenda will be issued to Member Boards. |

Tribute to Kevin Meehan

4

All in ACCS were deeply saddened on hearing of the death of our good friend and colleague Kevin Meehan on September 9th last at the age of 82.

Kevin was Principal of St. Kilian's Community School in Bray from 1981 until his retirement in 1998. During that time he played a very substantial part in the development of ACCS. He served firstly as Honorary Secretary and later as President 1989 - 1991 when the first full time General Secretary Mr. Sean Moriarty was appointed. Kevin played a large part in the development of the role of General Secretary and of ACCS as a full time management body. Following his retirement in 1998 he has continued as a member of the Board of Management in Pobalscoil Neasáin and in that capacity was a regular delegate to our Annual Convention and served as an ACCS Trustee right to the end.

Prior to his time in the Community School sector Kevin was an active member of ASTI serving as its first full time President in 1972/73. It is significant that during his year as ASTI President the first two Community Schools in Tallaght and Coolmine were established. He worked very hard during that year to ensure harmonious relations between TUI and ASTI in the Community School sector.

In recent years those of us who are retired are eternally grateful to Kevin for his part in the establishment of ARCPD – (the Association of retired Principals and Deputies of C/C

Schools). He served as Treasurer until last year and played a large part in the organisation of our annual gathering which we enjoy wholeheartedly.

With all of this activity in the field of Education it is hard to imagine how he found time for his golf, which was legendary, and his involvement in his local church in Bray. It does little, however, to describe his personality; his friendship for colleagues and for those under his care in school. All of us in ACCS send our sympathy and condolences to his wife Bríd, his son Dáire and his extended family on their sad loss.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

Liam Ryder



School Trips organised by our schools

The DES was contacted by the Commission for Aviation Regulation in relation to the operation of school trips.

The purpose of the contact was to assist schools in ensuring that pupils and staff who are travelling on foreign school trips are aware that the protection under the legislation in repatriating passengers and providing refunds to those prevented from travelling abroad only comes into operation where bookings are made directly with licensed travel agents and/or tour operators.

Therefore if any school wishes to organise a school tour abroad it must do so using a licensed tour operator or travel

agent to arrange the travel package including accommodation and other services.

All monies must be paid directly to the tour operator or travel agent not to the school staff or event coordinator(s). This requirement ensures that the trip is covered by the relevant bond held by the tour operator or travel agent with the Commission for Aviation Regulation as part of their annual licensing requirement, if for any reason the licence holder ceases to trade.

The full list of current licence holders is always available on www.aviationreg.ie

New Principals Induction Day in Hodson Bay, Athlone on August 15, 2013



L-R: Mr. Malachy Molloy (President ACCS), Mr. Ciarán Flynn (General Secretary ACCS), Mr. William Culkeen (Ballinrobe CS), Mr. David McDonagh (Ballyhaunis CS), Ms. Martha Lievens (Bailieborough CS), Ms. Rachel O'Connor (Ramsgrange CS), Mr. Padraig Leyden (Ballinamore CS), Mr. Richard Prendiville (Tarbert Comprehensive), Ms. Eileen Salmon (Assistant General Secretary ACCS).