Welcome to our 5th Forbairt, Post-primary ‘Action Learning Network’ Newsletter.

Forbairt is a capacity-building programme for experienced Principals, Deputy Principals and teacher leaders in post-primary Schools. The Programme’s relevance and the professional support it provides to participating schools, across all three school sectors, is demonstrated by the numbers of schools who have completed the Programme, to date. Since the programme inception in 2005 a total of 300 schools have participated in Forbairt. This high uptake, for a voluntary programme, is rare by international standards and according to Professor John West-Burnham, ‘provides powerful evidence of the perceived relevance, integrity and professional value of the programme.’

We invite you to read for yourselves this ‘powerful evidence’ within the cover of our Action Learning Newsletter.

We are grateful to all the school ‘leaders’ who have undertaken the Forbairt learning journey with us, over the past year and complement each one of them on the work they have undertaken, for the benefit of the students in their schools.

A recent critical review of the Forbairt programme concluded that it was, at once, ‘highly successful, well regarded and highly credible’.

We wish to acknowledge the professionalism and hard work of all the Forbairt Post-primary Team over the past year and, in particular, their efforts in organising the various Networks, whose research is included in this publication.

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**List of Participating Schools & PDST Leaders**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PDST Leader</th>
<th>School Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Jim Cooney  | Portumna Community School, Portumna, Co. Galway  
St. Enda’s Community School, Galvone, Limerick |
| Tom Hughes  | Christ King Girl’s Secondary School South Douglas Road Cork  
Presentation Secondary School, Milltown, Co Kerry  
Carrignafoy Community College, Cobh, Co Cork. |
| Fiona McCafferty | Magh Ena College, Bundoran, Co Donegal  
Carndonagh Community School, Co Donegal |
| Michael McCann | Ratoath College, Co. Meath  
St. Dominic’s College, Cabra  
St. Dominic’s Secondary School, Ballyfermot  
Dominican College, Griffith Avenue |
| Sheila McManamly | Cnoc Mhuire, Granard, Co. Longford.  
Bailieborough Community School, Bailieborough, Co Cavan.  
Mercy Secondary School, Kilbeggan. |
Mercy Secondary School, Kilbeggan, Co. Westmeath

Title: “Beatha Teanga í a Labhairt”

Project Team:
Garrett Farrell, Principal
Bernadette Gallen, Deputy Principal
Karen Hennessy
Catherine Heraty

Aims:
- To improve participation at Higher Level Irish both at Junior and Leaving Cert level.
- To improve the profile of Irish within the school.
- To promote Irish as a living language within the school.
- To make the Gaeltacht experience more accessible to students.
- To support Irish teachers in raising expectations.

Background:
The participation of students at Higher Level Irish had declined and this needed to be addressed. The use of spoken Irish in the classroom needed to be developed and improved in line with changes in the state exams.

Actions Taken:
- A scholarship to the value of €880 was provided by Coláiste Sheasaimh to 1st Year students.
- An Irish Club, Club Rí Rá, was setup for the First year students during lunchtime for 20 minutes every week.
- Seachtain na Gaeilge. More emphasis was placed on the importance of Seachtain Na Gaeilge. Two weeks of activities were organised by the Irish Department.
- 2nd Year Irish. There would be no banding at the beginning of 2nd Year and classes would continue to be mixed ability until the end of second year.
- Transition Year students would be encouraged and mentored to undertake Higher Level at Leaving Cert. in 5th Year.
- An Irish Print Rich Environment was developed in classrooms and communal areas
- An attitudinal survey was conducted amongst a random cohort of the student population at the start of the school year. This survey asked 100 students across all years to express their feelings across a broad range of perceptions with respect to Irish in September 2011.

Carrignafoy Community College, Cobh, Co Cork
(021) 4811325

Frank Donovan (Principal)
Thomas Jones (Deputy Principal)
Frances Murphy (Assistant Principal)
Kathy Murphy (Assistant Principal)

Project title:
Improving School Culture through Positive Discipline

Aim:
To give pupils a more positive view of school life, encourage respect and participation, and thus give a greater sense of school identity and community.

Supports/Resources:
We worked with the year head and class teachers and the positive discipline system. Students were encouraged to improve their contribution to school life through a positive rewards system. Various aspects of behaviour were targeted each month, e.g. uniform, time keeping, no negative comments in journal etc. Students who met the criteria were rewarded with a variety of educational/fun trips. No exceptions were made. Trips included a visit to the naval base (integration with local community) and an ice-skating trip. The steering group worked carefully with the year team and all staff were made aware of and encouraged to promote the venture. While difficult to quantify, it is felt the initiative worked well and is now being extended to 1st and 2nd years.
Project Description:
The Project focused on a Literacy Project involving Transition Years, totalling 160 students, approximately.

The difficulties identified at the beginning centred around the growing reluctance of all age groups to undertake reading assignments. Unless the work was actually read aloud in class, the majority of students did not manage to finish a book. Usually, only about three or four students per class identified themselves as ‘Readers’, the rest admitting to never or rarely reading a book. They were enthusiastic and knowledgeable about various visual presentations but were reluctant when faced with book format.

Method:
An extensive book list was created (copy attached) and it was decided that one of the four weekly English classes would be designated a ‘Reading’ class. The students were issued with the list and everyone was instructed to buy one title.

After a few weeks, the Reading List was expanded to include some more student friendly titles (Hunger Games, Twilight series) on the basis that anything that would get them reading was justified.

The initiative was very successful. Parents were fully behind it and the costs, in all cases was under €10. Students were encouraged to swop titles and had to have two books read by Christmas. A Book review question was incorporated to their Christmas Test, thus giving the project extra credibility in their eyes.

The Project was so successful that it has now been written into the TY Programme and an adapted format is being introduced to all First Years.

Conclusion
This Project was a spectacular success, with students admitting it was their favourite class. On a regular basis, students could be seen quietly reading at other times and enthusiastic recommendations were passed on from class to class. Costs/effort were minimal and this approach would work in any school.

Outcomes:

- Twenty six first year students applied for the scholarship to the Gaeltacht. Each student completed a ten minute interview in Irish. All applicants received a Fáinne for taking part. The winner received their scholarship at a school assembly of teachers and students. The winner will speak to the new first years about their experiences and encourage as many as possible to apply for the scholarship in the coming year.
- Second Year students were encouraged to take part in an Irish interview for various other colleges. One student received a full scholarship and five others received part-scholarships. They too will be speaking to the First year and Second year students about their enjoyable experiences of the Gaeltacht.
- There was excellent participation in Club Rí Rá. Students played games through Irish, made friendship bracelets, listened to and learned Irish songs and music.
- Sixth and Transition year students were encouraged to be leaders in speaking Irish through mixing with First Year students.
- We ran a number of activities during Seachtain na Gaeilge.
  - Poster Competition
    - We ran a poster competition for First, Second and Fifth year students
    - A winner was selected from each year and presented with an Irish T-Shirt by the Principal
    - All the posters that were entered were hung up in the school canteen for everyone to see.
  - Tráth na gCeist
    - We ran a quiz in the school canteen for First, Second and Fifth year students
    - The winners each received a Seachtain Na Gaeilge pen and wrist band
  - Teacher Competition
    - A competition was ran amongst the teacher to see who made the best effort to speak Irish in the classroom during Seachtain Na Gaeilge
    - The students voted for the teacher they thought made the best effort and the winning teacher was presented with an Irish T-Shirt. (The Irish Teachers did not take part!)
Lá Glas
On the 16th March all students were asked to wear something green and to make a €2 donation which went to The Carers Association

Other Items
The Principal read out and explained a Seanfhocal each day over the intercom during Seachtain Na Gaeilge.
The Brodhrán and Tin-Whistle were taught to First, Second and Fifth years.
TG4 will call to the school to interview students about their hobbies and school life during the current school year. This should be very exciting.

Challenges:
- The organisation and creation of new activities for both the Irish Club and Seachtain Na Gaeilge.
- The hope that other scholarships will be provided for other years.
- Maintaining students’ confidence to participate in Irish at a Higher Level at Junior Cert and Leaving Cert Level.
- The progress that has been achieved in the appreciation of Irish is maintained going forward.
- To ensure that participation in Irish at second level is an enjoyable and beneficial experience.
- Tailoring this model to develop similar initiatives in other subject areas.

Magh Éne College, Bundoran, Co. Donegal

Actions continued:
- Parents are encouraged to meet with Academic Monitors at Parent Teacher Meetings.
- Academic Monitors comments are included in School Reports sent home.
- The points system is now taught to Second Year students up as well as gone through with parents at Information Evenings.
- Upon returning to school in September Leaving Cert students go through their points received at the previous summer House Exams.
- Leaving Cert students receive their Mock Exam results on an individual basis from the Principal and the Deputy who go through with them their points and what they should be focusing on (AFL).
- A whole school review was carried out at the end of the first year, results of which were analysed by the Working Group with priorities identified for Year Two.

Resources Accessed:
- Whole staff development with specific emphasis on AFL, Instructional Intelligence (Barrie Bennett), teaching & learning methodologies, learning styles etc.
- External facilitation for students on developing study skills, learning & study styles.
- Three Croke Park hours allowed to supplement teachers carry out their Academic Monitoring responsibilities on top of their own time.

Outcomes & impact on school life:
- Significant accountability for students own individual learning.
- Very positive feedback from parents.
- Increase in academic achievement.
- Greater engagement with students own learning.
- Leaving Cert year is broken down into smaller more doable steps with shorter term goals.

Challenges Addressed:
- Time—teachers were supported in this by allowing three hours from Croke Park.
- The school now has a strategy in place for supporting students’ ongoing review and development of academic achievement.
- Internal expertise is being maximised.

Cnoc Mhuire, Granard, Co. Longford.

Title of the Project: Cnoc Mhuire Assessment Policy

Team: 1. Margaret Farrell.
2. James Carroll.
3. Una Campbell – Vice Principal.
Magh Éne College, Bundoran, Co. Donegal

**Project Title:** Academic Monitoring: Maintaining & improving academic achievement

**School ALN Team:** Jacqueline Dillon (Principal)  
Pat Tighe (Deputy Principal)  
Colette Mc Aree & Noel O’Donnell (Assistant Principals & Year Heads)

**Project Background:**
- A Working Group was formed to review results and methodologies by which academic improvement could continue to develop while engaging students more with their own learning.
- We wanted to raise the academic achievement of those ‘grey’ students who were generally very good students yet who plateaued along the C strata of results.

**Aims:**
- To motivate students and encourage students to take more account of their own academic capabilities.
- To make students more responsible for their own learning.
- To engage parents more with the learning & teaching.
- To maintain and raise where necessary academic achievement.

**Actions:**
- Each teacher took on the role of an Academic Monitor.
- Each teacher took responsibility for up to four students who they met in their own time once a month.
- Teachers monitored their student progress using the schools E portal system.
- A Recording Template was developed which logged each meeting, students goals.
- SMART targets were set for each student—these were agreed between each student and his/her Academic Monitor.
- Each student was helped develop an individual Study Plan.
- Parents of Leaving Certificate students were invited in for an evening along with their son/daughter to go through study plans, specific requirements for each subjects etc.
- Academic Monitors liaised with subject teachers if a concern was identified.
- Each teacher & student has specific record sheet in both Teachers Handbook & Student Journal to keep record and log the academic monitoring process throughout the year.

Cnoc Mhuire, Granard, Co. Longford. (cont)

**Description of the Project:**

Through this initiative our goal was to formulate and implement an Assessment Policy for Cnoc Mhuire. A major part of improving student performance is in developing a common workable assessment policy across all subject areas. To date, the assessment policy and procedures were largely dependent on the interpretation of the teacher and were largely assessment of learning. The subject departments had been examining their own subject assessment policies but the ALN group decided that this ad hoc system needed looking at and towards this end, the staff as a whole undertook an assessment review in Sept. 2011. The problems highlighted were as follows:

- Lack of detail i.e. some teachers gave 2 assessments, some 8.
- Lack of commonality.
- Poor student motivation in 5th year leading to students opting for pass in Leaving Cert.
- Poor reporting procedures.
- No assessment for learning.

**Actions taken:**
- Sept. 2011 – review of present policy by whole staff, problems identified.
- Project team inservice.
- Project team research into types of assessment, possible proposals, other school policies and put together the following:

  **Junior Cycle:**
  - Continuous Assessment for Christmas Report to include at least 5 pieces of assessment e.g. written tests, project work, End of year report to include: 50% Continuous Assessment, 50% House Exams.

  **Senior Cycle:**
  - 5th Year  
    End of term/three terms report – 50% Continuous assessment and 50% exam.
  - 6th Year  
    End of term report – 100% formal exams as per mock exams

  **Transition Year**
  - Christmas Report – Continuous assessment.
  - End of year – 50% Continuous Assessment/50% House Exams.
• Common end of year exams in subject areas for 1st, 2nd and 5th years.
• Common end of term exams in subject areas for senior students also.
At subject department meeting in September, a teacher is nominated to set an exam per year.
• Teacher’s record keeping of various exams/assessments results is vital.

Year Head:
The Year Head will monitor reports with a view to meeting certain students/parents to set targets, motivating students, etc.

Student Diary:
• Add an extra page into student diary to monitor test results on special “results page”.
• Parents/Guardians to sign the above “test/results page”, and sign homework sections of diary once a month and for 1st years once per week.

Staff Handbook/Diary:
1. This handbook to include “subject plan page” at the end of each class section.
2. Develop “assessment for learning” with further CPD for staff, meeting with parents association and student council.
3. Develop subject plans with stated “learning outcomes”.
4. Ensure that homework journal is used effectively.
5. Liaise with literacy and numeracy strategy group.
6. Put up additional white boards in language and maths classes to ensure that all learning outcomes are put on the board at the start of the class.

Ultimately our aims were to:
1. Have common end of year/term assessments.
2. Assess the impact of introducing formal testing into year 5.
3. Raise awareness among parents and develop stronger partnerships.
4. Improve student performance.
5. Increase collegiality among staff.
7. Support teaching and learning.

The initial proposal to introduce 3 terms with end of term formal assessments for senior students was discussed and accepted. Dates were set out and the project team decided to compare end of year results for least years 5th years with the incoming cohort who now would have 3 formal assessment dates. The information was given to the students and the principal brought this to the Parents Association and Student Council.
Where do we want to be by March 2012?

By March we would hope to have

- Gathered baseline data on the attendance, test results, homework standard, and aspirations of all the students in class 2A
- Developed and initiated a special mentoring programme for the class to foster student target and goal setting
- Seen an improvement in student attendance and work ethic

Compilation of Data

Conclusions

- Increased levels of motivation and ambition in Second Yr. 2A student cohort
- Created a beneficial link with Past Pupils
- Created an opportunity for professional development within the Management Team
- There was a very positive student response
- The project is very transferable to whole school mentoring

Additional Documentation

- Student Questionnaire
- ‘River of Life’

2A Mentoring Programme

Self Assessment Form

Name __________________________

Please read each of the following statements and then place a tick in the appropriate box

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can think positively</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can recognise what makes me feel negative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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**Cnoc Mhuire, Granard, Co. Longford.  (cont)**

**Assessment Policy**

**Introduction**
This Assessment Policy was developed in partnership with all members of Cnoc Mhuire Secondary School – students, teachers, parent, management and trustees. It recognises the requirement of the school to regularly evaluate students and periodically report the results of the evaluation to the students and their parents, as set down by the Education Act 1998. This Assessment Policy will be reviewed regularly, as directed by the Board of Management.

**Relationship to Mission Statement**
Cnoc Mhuire Secondary School is a Catholic co-educational school committed to the holistic education of all students, to ensure that individually, they each realise their full potential in a social and physical environment that is caring, supportive and joyful. We work in partnership with students, staff, parents and the community, and welcome all students from our multicultural society.

This Assessment Policy will play a key role in striving to ensure that each student realises his/her full academic potential in a learning environment that reflects a culture of partnership between teachers, parents and students.

**Aims and Objectives of this Policy**
The primary aims and objectives of the policy are:

- To facilitate improved teaching and pupil learning.
- To create a consistent and standardised assessment procedure for monitoring and reporting achievement in the school.
- To co-ordinate assessment procedures within departments on a whole school basis.

**Assessment for Learning & Assessment of Learning**
Our policy covers both assessment of learning and assessment for learning. Assessment of learning is assessment for accountability purposes, to determine a student's level of performance on a specific task or at the conclusion of a unit of teaching and learning. The information gained from this kind of assessment will be used in reporting. Assessment for learning, on the other hand, is a continuous process which combines a grade with advice to the student towards further improvement. Both forms of assessment are invaluable, and will be used by equally by teachers in this school.

**The Purposes of Assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To evaluate what a student has learned in a particular area.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide feedback to students in a timely and constructive manner.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide feedback to teachers on the success of particular teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodologies in the learning process.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To highlight difficulties and shortcomings in the learning process in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>order to develop intervention strategies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**St. Endas Community School, Kilmallock Road, Limerick.**
info@stendas.ie  www.stendas.ie  061 419222

**Title**  ‘ONWARDS AND UPWARDS’ – a mentoring programme for 2nd Year students

**Aims**
To foster ambition in the students of 2A class

**Team**
- Gina O’Connor - Principal
- Phil Roche - Deputy Principal/Business
- Joe O Farrell - A.P. Year head /Science

**Actions**
- Inform Teachers, Parents, Students and B.O.M. of the project
- Collect Base-line data on the students
- Appoint each Core Group Mentor to 4 or 5 students in the 2A class
- Organise a system to meet the students each week
- Develop a Special mentoring programme
  - Wk. 1 – Introduction of the group to the project, completion of self assessment questionnaire – to be devised
  - Wk. 2 and 3 – ‘River of Life’ – Self reflection of students on their lives to date - significant milestones, events, people
  - Wk. 4 – Past Student ( Garda ) invited to speak to the students
  - Wk. 5 – 12 – Weekly mentoring session – the following topics were covered over the 8 weeks
    - Setting and achieving goals
    - Study Skills - on-line survey and analysis
    - Study environment analysis ( concentration and memory) and structuring study sessions
    - Self Motivation Quiz
  - Wk. 13 and 14 – Final sessions with students – completion of ‘River of Life’, re- administer the self assessment questionnaire and completion of Feedback questionnaire
- Students on the Special Mentoring Programme to accompany Parents at the next Parent Teacher meeting
- Presentation of Programme details and outcomes to the staff
## Portumna Community School, St. Bridgid’s Road, Portumna,
Survey for parents of students in Portumna Community School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you check your son/daughter’s homework that it is completed?</td>
<td>[ ] Often [ ] Sometimes [ ] Rarely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Has your son/daughter a regular routine for doing homework?</td>
<td>[ ] Yes [ ] No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Have you assigned a room specifically for study to your son/daughter?</td>
<td>[ ] Yes [ ] No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you ensure that television, mobile phones, ipods are off while your son/daughter is studying?</td>
<td>[ ] Yes [ ] No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do you ensure that your son/daughter has adequate supplies and access to reference materials</td>
<td>[ ] Yes [ ] No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How much time per school night would your son/daughter spend on homework?</td>
<td>[ ] 1 hour [ ] 2 hours [ ] 3 hours [ ] 4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do you monitor the time your son/daughter spends viewing T.V. and playing video games?</td>
<td>[ ] Yes [ ] No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Do you regularly praise your son/daughter for their efforts?</td>
<td>[ ] Yes [ ] No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. If you had a concern about homework, would you talk to the teacher to resolve your concern?</td>
<td>[ ] Yes [ ] No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Would you help your son/daughter to draw up a homework schedule?</td>
<td>[ ] Yes [ ] No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Do you encourage your son/daughter to take breaks?</td>
<td>[ ] Yes [ ] No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the end of a completed Assignment No structure to the breaks</td>
<td>[ ] Yes [ ] No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Do you have a homework contract with your son/daughter?</td>
<td>[ ] Yes [ ] No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### Cnoc Mhuire, Granard, Co. Longford. (cont)

- To identify students who require extension activities such as learning support.
- To encourage and increase the skills of self assessment.
- To keep records of attainment that will inform parents through the school’s reporting process.
- To measure the progress of students over time.
- To raise expectations and standards.
- To act as an incentive for students in the learning process.
- To ascertain whether it is appropriate for a student to continue studying in any given subject area.

### Forms of Assessment

#### 1. Informal Assessment

The most common forms of assessment used in the school are of an informal nature, and these take place regularly in the classroom. These informal assessments are at the discretion of individual teachers who will use them constructively for learning to take place. Timely feedback and constructive advice are vital components in this process. Where appropriate, teachers will keep records of these assessments to provide an insight into a student’s progress over time and to fully inform the learning process. Informal Assessment methods include –

- Worksheets & written classwork.
- Questions and answers in class.
- Essays & assignments.
- Reading & writing in class.
- Sample exam questions.
- Homework – written or learned.
- Practical work (including oral, aural, etc.).
- Project.

#### 2. Formal Assessment

There are many types of formal assessments that take place in the school environment.

1. **Monthly/End of Topic Test** – These forms of assessments will be conducted at the discretion of the teacher on a monthly or end of chapter basis. These formal tests will be a vital component in providing feedback to teachers, students, and parents, on the level of each student’s attainment and learning in that specific subject area. Constructive feedback will be given by teachers to students who participate in these tests, and the results of these tests will be used in the school’s formal reporting structure where appropriate. This continuous assessment must include 5 pieces of work which will contribute to the students overall Christmas/End of term grade. End of Year Report to include 50% continuous assessment, 50% house exam.
II. House Exams – 5th years will sit their formal house exams at 3, 11 week intervals. The duration of these exams shall be for 2 days – each exam of 1.5 hours duration. The purpose of these exams is to measure student learning and attainment in each subject area, to encourage high standards and to give students experience in sitting formal exams similar in nature to the state exams. All house exams will follow the same operating rules as state exams. The results will be recorded and posted home to parents. 1st, 2nd and Junior Certs will have continuous assessment as described previously and will have formal house exams at the end of the year. The duration of these exams will be decided at subject planning meetings. Christmas reports will be based entirely on continuous assessment and end of year reports will be based on 50% continuous assessment and 50% house exams. In order to ensure commonality, common end of year exams will occur in all subject areas for all years. At the subject department meeting in September, a teacher is nominated to set an end of term/year exam.

Transition Year students will have assessments as appropriate to their subject area. A Christmas Report based on continuous assessment will be sent home. The end of year report will be based on 50% continuous assessment and 50% house exams.

Special Needs Students – students identified through the S.N. Programme will have a special centre for house exams. The examining teacher will read/explain any difficulty for the student.

Mock Exams – Pre Junior and Pre Leaving Cert Mock Exams will take place each February for 3rd and 6th year students. These mock exams are seen as being very beneficial to the students in measuring their progress in their Junior Cert and Leaving Cert years. Students will gain valuable experience in time management and answer techniques through sitting these mock exams. The results of these exams will be sent to parents as soon as possible. There will be a cost to parents associated with the running costs of the exams.

III. State Exams – The school will strive to ensure that all 3rd and 6th Year students participate - as directed by the State Exams Commission - in the many assessments that make up the Junior Cert and Leaving Cert exams. These assessments which may include orals, course work, practical work, portfolio work amongst others, will be operated in accordance with the regulations set down by the State Examinations Commission.

IV. Other Assessments – the school may engage in other forms of assessment from time to time. Incoming 1st Years will undertake a CAT assessment which will be used as a basis to form mixed ability 1st Year classes. This assessment will offer an early indicator to the school of a student’s potential. All 1st Years will be screened by the Learning Support Department to investigate the possible provision of additional help where necessary.

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Portumna Community School, St. Bridgid’s Road, Portumna, (continued)

Survey for students at Portumna Community School (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14 Do you think that 3rd years should have a study skills course?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 When do you complete the subjects you dislike?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Do you finish homework in the morning before you come to school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Or do you finish work before you go to class?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Do you take regular breaks?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Do you think the homework given helps you to revise?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 In your opinion do you get enough homework?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Does the homework you do help you to learn the topic?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 How much time do you spend per school night to complete Junior or Leaving Cert State Exam Projects to ensure the deadline is met?</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
<td>60 mins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Portumna Community School, St. Bridgid’s Road, Portumna,
Survey for Students at Portumna Community School

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Do you study at home or in school?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>At home where do you study?</td>
<td>Own room</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Have you adequate heat and light?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Have you a comfortable chair for study?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Have you a computer?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Is this computer in your study room or your bedroom?</td>
<td>Study room</td>
<td>Bedroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Can your mobile phone access the internet?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Do you spend time on Facebook each night? If yes, how much time?</td>
<td>Yes 20 mins</td>
<td>No 1 hour Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Do you listen to music or watch television while studying?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>How many hours do you spend studying each evening?</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Do you complete all of your homework</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>If you do not complete homework, is it as a result of: Don’t understand the work I understand but am not bothered</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Have you a study plan?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Cnoc Mhuire, Granard, Co. Longford. (cont)

All 3rd Years will undertake a DATS assessment to assist in their investigation of possible college and career choices, when they proceed to 5th Year. The school’s NEPS psychologist, in consultation with school management, may carry out psychological assessments and other assessments on students at different times throughout the year.

**School Evaluation** The staff will engage in regular in-house self evaluation, subject team evaluation and norms. The results of this evaluation will be used to improve teaching and learning in Cnoc Mhuire.

**W.S.E./M.L.L./Incidental Inspections** – These are Department led inspections of the whole school community and will be used to better teaching learning and management in Cnoc Mhuire.

**General Guidelines**
The form that these informal and formal assessments will take, are dependent on the subject area being assessed and will vary from subject to subject. Certain forms of assessment may oftentimes be peculiar to a particular subject. All forms of assessment above will strive to meet the additional needs of students in the classroom when they arise. Classroom strategies such as differentiated assessment, visual aids, hearing aids, spelling waivers, increased time and dictionaries amongst others, may be used from time to time, as determined by the individual subject teacher. Where feasible, and as determined by each department plan, common assessments across a year group will be used in each subject area. This will provide for increased cooperation and a common benchmark across each subject area. Students are expected to treat all of the above forms of assessment with respect. Any student who willingly fails to participate fully, or who acts in a disrespectful way towards any form of assessment in the school will be dealt with accordingly.

**Assessment and Reporting**
There are different methods whereby the results of formal and informal assessments will be reported to parents.

- **Student Journal** – the teacher may communicate the outcome of any assessment to the parents/guardian of a student by writing a note in the students journal. The parent/guardian is expected to acknowledge receipt of this note by countersigning it. A results page will be included in the student journal.
- **Direct Contact** - the teacher may decide as they see fit to contact the parent/guardian directly with respect to the outcome of any assessment undertaken by a student
- **Signature of Parent on Assessment** – the teacher may send the corrected assessment itself home with the student to be viewed and signed by the parent/guardian.
Cnoc Mhuire, Granard, Co. Longford. (cont)

- **Parent Teacher Meetings** – there are Parent Teacher Meetings for all Year Groups throughout the academic year. At these meetings it will be possible for teachers to relay the outcomes of varying assessments to parents/guardians of individual students, that generates a accurate picture of the student's progress.

- **Written reports** – Formal written reports are posted to the parents/guardians of students on two occasions during the academic year, depending which year group they are in. 1st, 2nd, Transition Year and 5th Year parents/guardians will receive their Christmas Report in December before the Christmas holidays, and their Summer Report during the Summer holidays. Parents/guardians of 3rd and 6th will also receive a Christmas Report in December, but will then receive another report in April with the results of their Pre Junior and Pre Leaving Cert Exams. 3rd and 6th Year parents/guardians do not receive a Summer Report.

This policy has been ratified by the Board of Management at its meeting of __________________________ ( date)

Signed_______________________________________ Chairperson

Next review date : __________________________

Bailieborough Community School, Bailieborough, Co. Cavan

**MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER IN A DIGITAL AGE**

**Project Team:** Ms Patricia Atkins, Ms Martha Lievens, Mr Fergal Kenny, Ms Joanne McGovern, Mr Matthias Winkler.

**Description of Project & Actions Taken:**

**Structural Level**
- Equipping every classroom in the school with Ebeams, personal computers, broadband access with up-to-date features and Windows 2010 as the operating system.
- Opening three newly equipped computer rooms (two for general purpose, one for LCA purpose).
- Introducing the Facility Scheduler Package to generate a timetable for the current school year
- Introducing E-portal to allow each teacher to record lesson by lesson registration, am & pm roll call, access student records/histories/timetables/assessment comment banks and enter results from home.

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**Portumna Community School, St. Bridgid’s Road, Portumna,**

**Homework survey for teachers at Portumna Community School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Bi-weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you allocate homework?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do you communicate homework to SEN students and absentees?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How frequently do you collect homework?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you think homework advances student learning?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How do you know if your students are realising their personal best?</td>
<td>Quality of homework</td>
<td>Interaction in class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Does your plan/scheme of work for the year have a reference to homework?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Does the school code of conduct support the completion of good quality homework?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Is homework discussed at subject planning meetings?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Do you use assessment for learning as a method to improve homework?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Do you differentiate homework for students?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How much time do you spend on Facebook each night?

63% of students spend time on Facebook each night.
42% do not.
34% spend 20 minutes on Facebook.
23% spend 1 hour on Facebook.
9.55% spend 3 hours on Facebook.
Clearly students are spending too much time on Facebook.

Do you listen to music or watch T.V. while studying?

45% responded yes.
55% responded no.
45% is an excessive amount of students who watch TV while studying.

Have you a study plan?

69% of students in third year do not have a study plan?
31% of students have a study plan.

Supports and Resources accessed
- IT was used in developing the survey and in the analysis of the survey.
- Parents were also used, as they were directly involved in the survey.
- A core group of teachers were involved in the project from source to product.
- Access to printing facilities in the school.

Outcomes and impact on school life
- Feedback was given to the students in the form of a power-point at the beginning of March 2012; many of the students were surprised by the results. The presentation helped refocus the students in terms of work-ethic in the classroom. The exercise provided results that we as researchers did not anticipate.
- The exercise also prompted us to spend more time on motivation with our examination classes.
- As a result of the research, we will provide fourteen presentations to our Leaving Cert class on motivation, revision, classroom ethic, re-engineering the social, re-setting goals, study skills and stress.
- Feedback was given to teachers at a staff meeting outlining the results.

Challenges addressed
- The result of the project challenged the students’ work ethic.
- We hope to develop and enhance our homework policy this year.
- The result of the project disturbed the comfort zone of students.
Bailieborough Community School, Bailieborough, (cont)

- An evaluation survey was administered to ascertain the staff’s experience of the ICT training to date, the impact it had in their classroom in terms of benefiting students’ learning and how they could further enhance the use of ICT within their own subject areas.

**Supports and Resources Accessed:**

- Peer-to-peer support.
- School’s e-learning team.
- Meritec In-house E beam training.
- County Cavan VEC’s Technical Support Service.
- County Cavan VEC’s Educational Officer.
- County Cavan VEC’s Continuous Professional Development Programme.
- NCTE’s Continuous Professional Development initiatives.
- Serco.
- 100 Mbits High Speed Schools Network Initiative.
- An Gardai Siochana.
- Timetabling Training in Monaghan Education Centre.
- ICT Conferences e.g. “Teaching and Learning in the E School.”

**Challenges:**

- Responding to the ongoing demand for ICT professional development that is relevant and specific to our teachers and ensuring it becomes embedded in their own classrooms.
- Embarking on the process of curriculum mapping leading to systematic uploading of quality teaching and learning resources that will enhance student learning at subject departmental, school wide and scheme level.
- Launching and regularly updating the school’s new website.
- Maximising the use of our e-portal system as a behaviour management and communication tool.
- Applying teachers’ current ICT skills to enhance literacy and numeracy skills and assist students with special educational needs.

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Portumna Community School, St. Bridgid’s Road, Portumna,

- At our next meeting we refined the questions in the survey.
- The survey was given to students, parents and teachers in February 2012.
- The results of the surveys were analysed by James Coughlan and feedback was given to the staff concerning the results.

**Task 2**
The focus of the task was to ascertain whether or not our homework practice meets our needs and if not what elements need to be changed with a view to developing a comprehensive policy.

**Schedule**
The project will take place from November 2011 to September 2012.

**Task 3**
Devise a survey for teachers, parents and students on homework.

**Task 4**
Analysis of results.

**Task 5**
Action as a result of analysis of surveys that provides information we need to decide on the effectiveness of homework in the school.

**Main Points**

**Do you have a computer in your room?**
44% have a computer in their bedroom.
8% have a computer in their study room.
48% did not answer the question.

Clearly an excessive amount of students in year 3 have a computer in their bedroom.

77% of students’ phones can access the internet.
23% of students’ phones unable to access the internet.

*The amount of phones and computers in bedrooms that can access the internet is worrying and students should change this practice to ensure more work is done.*
Title of the project: The focus of the task is to ascertain whether or not our homework practice meets our needs and if not, what elements need to be changed with a view to developing a comprehensive policy.

Team involved in the project: Derry Long, James Coughlan, Breda Larkin, Anne Fahy, Sinead Keena and Fiona Kenny.

Objectives:
1. To enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the school.
2. It is a way of improving performance in schools by involving the stakeholders; parents, pupils and teachers.
3. It is also a capacity building programme for the school to share resources, expertise and practice.

Action Learning Network Project
Where are we now? SURVEYS
Where do we want to be in September 2012? RESEARCH & VISION
How do we get there? ACADEMIC REVIEW GROUP, PLAN
How do we know we got there? RE-SURVEY

Title of Task
To conduct a rolling audit on homework correction effectiveness as a learning tool in third year at Portumna Community School. The survey will focus on:
- The amount of homework given
- The type of homework given

Task 1
Recruit team: Team to include Derry Long (Principal), James Coughlan (Deputy Principal), Year Head (Third Year) Breda Larkin, Anne Fahy, Sinead Keena and Fiona Kenny.

Meeting: 15-12-2011: Sequencing of project
- We decided to devise a survey for parents, teachers and pupils.
2. **Strategy implementation**
   - The 25 target students were divided into five groups as we decided to adopt a five pronged strategy to see how students respond to different approaches by teachers to resolving the problem.
   - Five teachers involved in the project undertook to monitor the punctuality of a small group of students and to invoke different strategies in engaging with these students.
   - The five strategies were:
     1. **The control group**: students were informed that their progress was being monitored but were offered no incentives or were to receive no punishments.
     2. **The incentive group**: students with no lates in a month to be provided with a phone voucher.
     3. **The punishment group**: consistent lateness would meet with a period of detention.
     4. **The phone call group**: parents to be called when students were late.
     5. **The principal group**: the school principal to take direct involvement with a group.

**Evaluation**

The ALN team met to discuss and evaluate strategies employed. A consensus would then be sought on an appropriate strategy to implement for the next academic year.

**Supports and resources accessed:**
- Designated meeting each week for ALN team.
- Questionnaires for parents and students.
- Web texting system to inform parents.

**Challenges addressed:**
- Poor response rate to parent questionnaire.
- Finding correct balance of incentive and punishment.
- Consistent monitoring of students which may be affected due to unforeseen circumstances.
- Ensuring that students continue to be motivated and recognise importance of attending school in a punctual fashion.

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**Presentation Secondary School Milltown, Killarney, Co. Kerry**

Four teachers were involved in the organization, implementation and supervision of the event which proved to be a very successful. Feedback from the students was very positive.

Orienteering thus provides opportunities to apply syllabus skills and understanding in a social context such as:
- Social Studies - Maps, plans and landforms
- Physical Education and Health - Walking and running
- Mathematics - Spatial relationships, scales, angles, distance time and speed
- Outdoor Education - an essential introduction to any form of outdoor education, allowing students to work independently, without constant teacher supervision
- Personal Development - Practices planning ahead, problem solving and decision making. Helps develop memory skills, concentration, as well as self-confidence and self-esteem.

Orienteering provides an ideal combination of skill development for health, fitness and intellectual stimulation.

The staff involved worked on the assumption that extracurricular involvement has a strong link with curricular success.
Presentation Secondary School Milltown, Killarney, Co. Kerry

The conclusions we have drawn from observation of both the Lunchtime Club and the TY shop.

- Students have a fear of maths and shut down their ability to learn or even try.
- Mathematics/Numeracy when used in a non-institutional way and as a part of work or play, their ability to learn is enhanced.
- Numeracy club also enhances their communication and confidence levels and in turn their ability to learn and to try. This brings in the social aspect of the programme.
- Their older peers, the TY students, showed a willingness to help and in return they felt a feeling of self-actualization and social achievement. This peer teaching and mentoring is a valuable resource that all schools have and should exploit.

Orienteering

This project was part of a strategy to help promote and develop numeracy within the school environment. The project consisted of an orienteering event, it was a once off event that involved 96 first year’s students and was hosted by some transition year students who were involved in the lunch time Club.

Orienteering is a wonderful teaching tool encourages spatial relationships and allows teachers to illustrate many ideas in concrete terms. The sport also appeals to students operating on multiple learning levels.

Gathering the information, identifying relationships, considering all the factors involved in a given situation and making sound decisions, underlie the work of most subjects but that of social studies in particular.

The objectives of the event were as follows:

- To identify numeracy indicators
- Raise awareness of the opportunities and activities that exist for the numeracy development across the curriculum
- Raise awareness of the impact of numeracy skills on learning through-out the curriculum
- To make numeracy development and integral part of each subject department’s developmental plan
- To improve the communication skills and to promote a better attitude to maths
- Introduce a fun and action element into learning

The students assembled in the school yard, where we split up the students into 12 groups of 8. Students were informed that at each control point there was going to be a maths puzzle and that each runner would have to return with the puzzle and the remaining teammates would complete the puzzles.

Ratoath College, Jamestown, Ratoath, Co. Meath. (cont)

Outcomes and impacts on school life:

- Results of student questionnaires:
  - Students cited ‘sleeping in’, ‘laziness’ as reasons for being late. Other answers included “to avoid classes” and “illness.”
  - 95% said they wanted to improve their punctuality.
  - Students suggested “going to bed earlier” as a method of improvement. Other answers included “finding motivation to get up.”
  - 30% felt detention was appropriate punishment for a consistent lack of punctuality. Others said “assembly is irrelevant” and “punctuality shouldn’t matter in 6th year”.

- Results of parent questionnaire:
  - “Traffic” and “laziness” were suggested as the main factors in students being late.
  - Punishments suggested by parents were “detention”, “cleaning school” and “try anything”.

Findings:

After introducing the strategies mentioned above, the following findings were deduced:

- The incentive group showed marginally better results, however, no one strategy appeared to be the ‘silver bullet’. Punctuality from the five students involved improved from 67% on time in February to 82% in over the course of the project.
- It was agreed that an extra ‘punctuality award’ to be included in the student of the month ceremonies in 2012/13. Students with full punctuality will be entered into a draw for phone credit.
- We realised that a personal approach to each individual resulted in an improved punctuality rate. The team suggested that year-heads identify students with a poor punctuality record and implement an early intervention approach at the beginning of the school year highlighting the benefits of being punctual.
St Dominic’s College, Cabra, Dublin 7

Title: A Whole School Approach to Improving Literacy

Team:
- Ann Donnelly: Principal
- Mary Largey: Deputy Principal
- Therese King: Assistant Principal
- Elaine Byrne: Learning Support Teacher

Aim: To improve literacy levels in St Dominic’s College.

Objectives:
- To develop a culture of reading.
- To develop a whole school strategy for comprehension.
- To raise the reading age of First Year students.

Background:
- The mandate to implement the National Strategy to improve Literacy and Numeracy.
- We have a well resourced school library.
- The project provided the opportunity for in-house CPD.

Actions:
- The team decided to develop strategies for (i) Reading and (ii) Comprehension and made a presentation to staff.
  - Used NFER Nelson to test reading and comprehension age of all first year students
  - The team focused staff on addressing the three levels of comprehension:
    - Literal
    - Inferential
    - Evaluative
  - Subject Departments identified question key words particular to their subject and appropriate to each level of comprehension.
  - Key words were laminated and displayed in each classroom.
  - Teachers were involved as reader role models.
  - The school librarian was invited to the team meeting following which she drew up a list of popular books and provided lollipop prizes to library users.
  - The English Department promoted the annual “Bookfest”.
  - We reviewed progress after one month and decided to time-table specific reading classes. We asked English teachers to focus on the writing framework element of the “Book Buddy”.

Presentation Secondary School Milltown, Killarney, Co. Kerry

School Roll no: 61410N
Tel: 066-9767168
www.presmiltown.ie

Project Team: Mark Hanly, Sean Costelloe, Turlough Bonner, Niamh Barton, Kerry Harkin, Cormac Bonner

45 1st year students were surveyed using survey monkey to design a programme to help student’s confidence in the use of numbers in everyday life. From the data collected a number of activities were created under the umbrella of Numbers for Life (N4L). These activities included a lunchtime club and a number of in school afternoon activities. Details and observations of these activities can be seen below.

The Lunchtime Club
On a Wednesday lunch break in a Transition year room, we set up the Lunchtime N4L club and marketed it as enhancement of numeracy skills through playing games such as Darts, Cards (Pontoon or 21), Countdown, Nintendo DS Brain training and Bingo with a twist.

We enlisted the help of the Transition year students with the supervision of these games but indirectly as a mentoring and induction component for our First year Sample group. As part of the development team in the promotion of numeracy. We felt that we needed to take the mathematics out of the equation (excuse the pun) and instill an element of fun. The students could then relate to and feel confident in their ability to use mathematical functions as a tool to playing the different games we offered.

In removing the word “math’s” we discovered that a lot more students participated each week as it was about playing games and not extra help in math’s or Math’s Class.

One activity we tried to initiate was shopping with an Argos catalogue. We gave them a budget and a certain number of products to find and to calculate the change from the budget given. The outcome was an eye opener. Weaker students found it difficult to comprehend as they were writing down their values and getting the calculations wrong. We then decided to experiment and asked some of these students if they would like to help the Transition Year students in the TY tuck shop. The results were amazing. The practicality of serving behind the counter gave them such confidence in their numeracy ability, that supervision was not needed after a couple of days.
Supports and Resources Assessed

1. **Making Time for Team Members**
   - To cope with the delegation of tasks:
     - (a) Timetable hours were allocated in order to work on the project
     - (b) A PGDE student was allocated to a staff member
     - (c) Meetings were arranged between members of the team to review actions and monitor the project

2. **Communication with Staff, Care Team, Guidance & Counselling and Year Teams**
   - (a) A staff survey was implemented
   - (b) Templates were developed, tested and amended with a view to evaluating them in the next school year
   - (c) Updates were reported at staff meetings during the year
   - (d) Feedback was provided by all groups to the Forbairt Team

Outcomes, Impact on School Life

1. Templates were developed, tested and modified in time for next school year 2012-13
2. Revision of the Code of Behaviour resulted in clearer procedures and structures for the role of Deputy Principal, Year Teams and Teachers
3. Staff emails have been allocated for internal school communication
4. Standardised system of Pastoral Care and Year Teams
5. Draft new model of Teacher Diary provided to all members of staff 2012-13
6. E-portal user guide included in Teacher Diary
7. On-line Year Team Notice-boards have been implemented
8. Improved atmosphere in school

Challenges Addressed:

- Improving Communication using a variety of approaches
- Time management: Allocation of time to work on the projects, meeting time
- Formalising vision and perspectives of the project
- Identifying clear goals, dealing with expectations
- Distributed leadership: encouraging a more “hands-on” inclusive experience for staff

St Dominic’s College, Cabra, Dublin 7

- Parents were advised of the project by letter and a recommended reading list for first year students was issued to parents.
- “Book in the Bag” was launched for all First Year students.
  - Three reading periods per week.
  - A reflective journal (Book Buddy) and writing template was provided to all students.
  - Weekly prizes based on reading involvement.

Supports and Resources:

- National Strategy to improve Literacy and Numeracy.
- Time for meetings – working staff.
- Class teaching time.
- School Library.
- NFER Nelson Group Reading Test.
- TV Screen for display.
- Book Buddy journals.
- Bookmarkers.
- Subject Planning Meetings.
- Laminated Keywords.
- Survey Monkey.

Outcomes:

- The whole staff engaged well with this project.
- Library use by first Year Students increased.
- The First Year students engaged enthusiastically with the “Book in the Bag” Programme.
- A sample survey from parents showed the following:
  - 67% were aware of the “Book in the Bag” Project
  - 28% were aware of the comprehension element of the project.
  - 56% said that their daughter had been reading more since Christmas.
  - Parents offered suggestions for improving reading levels of students and promoting reading at home.
  - 82% said that their daughters were members of the Public Library.
St Dominic’s College, Cabra, Dublin 7 (cont)

Test Results: Of the 170 First Year students, 131 completed all elements of the Nfer Nelson Test creating our sample group. Reading Ages were assessed in December 2011 and again in March 2012 for Sentence Completion and for Context Comprehension. Results were compared.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading Age - Sentence Completion</th>
<th>Reading Age - Context Comprehension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>Increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Change</td>
<td>No Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decrease</td>
<td>Decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Challenges: - Testing students and ensuring accurate results.
- Printing and laminating comprehension keywords (over 1200) was very time-consuming.
- Time for meetings of the ALN Team.
- Keeping the momentum of the project going.

Where to next?
- The “Book in the Bag” element will be re-launched for our new First Years and all Second Years must continue to carry a book in the bag at all times.
- Literacy classes are timetabled for some Second Year groups.
- The Keyword comprehension will be continued in all classrooms.
- We will investigate the possibility of using a GRT reading test on all First Year students.
- We will continue to raise awareness of literacy among parents.

Dominican College, 204 Griffith Avenue, Dublin 9
Phone 01-8376080 Email dominicancollege204@eircom.net

Description of Project and Actions Taken

Aims of the Project:
- To support the integration of a New Year Team system within the school
- To identify issues/problems related to the transition to this new system
- To develop and implement strategies which would reduce/eliminate difficulties

Actions Taken:

1. Identifying the problems – those highlighted as a result of survey and discussion were as follows:
   (a) Communication within the staff
   (b) Procedures for Reporting to Year Teams
   (c) Under-utilisation of E-portal as a method of communication
   (d) Rolling out the Year Team structure as a new approach
   (e) Year Teams acting as filters of relevant information between the Year Team and Management structures

2. Allocating time to the Forbairt Team from limited resources

3. Identifying relevant targets appropriate to such an initiative. The targets set were:
   (a) Surveying staff for their views
   (b) Improving communication by developing appropriate templates for reporting, requesting information and informing Year Teams
   (c) Reviewing and amending the Code of Behaviour procedures to incorporate more explicit actions by all members of the school community
   (d) Setting up of school email accounts (gmail) to improve communication
   (e) Overcoming obstacles associated with Croke Park, inadequate time, resistance to change
   (f) Development of a Teacher’s Diary to include the school handbook and other relevant documentation

4. Delegating Tasks
Supports and Resources Used:

A Whole School Approach is adopted in relation to the provision of homework and the supports and resources used in St. Dominic’s.

‘Keeping Them with You’ – In collaboration with the PDST, many staff in St. Dominic’s shared their expertise with fellow staff at in-house in-service workshops throughout the year in the areas of active learning methodologies, assessment for learning, co-operative learning and peer correction. These strategies are all transferable into homework completion and correction.

Challenges:

The work completed must continue to be monitored and reviewed so that good practice is maintained year on year. Efforts must be made to further develop a consistent approach to teaching the skills of doing effective homework. At the same time, these skills and techniques must be regularly reviewed and monitored in their effectiveness. We need to incorporate the study skills into our subject planning. We have still to produce the official Homework Policy for approval by the Board of Management.

Conclusion:

We, as a school community believe that this project is improving the teaching and learning in our school and bringing about positive change in attitudes towards homework and therefore raising standards and enhancing achievement among our students.

Some examples of a student workshop, study hub and peer correction.

Action Learning Network: The Effectiveness of Homework on Teaching and Learning.

Mary Daly (Principal), Sr. Liz Smyth (Deputy Principal), Michelle Delaney, Michelle McConnell & Sarah Green.

Description of Project:

In recent times, the benefits of homework as an effective means of reinforcing learning have been discussed at length. Some educational reports have suggested that homework is a useless exercise. Dr. Naoise O'Reilly of ‘The Homework Club’, believes “excessive homework is harmful and erodes family life”. We, as a staff in St. Dominic’s recognise and believe in the importance of homework in consolidating the learning that happens in the classroom. However, we realise that we have room to improve in making it more effective and valuable for our students.

In this project, we took time to examine our students’, staff and parents’ attitudes to homework.

The following points were highlighted:

1. Students recognised homework as an important facet of school life. However, they did not see its value in their personal learning journey. Generally, it was seen as “work to be done for the teacher”.

2. Students did not rate different types of homework equally. Written work to be submitted for correction was given significantly more weighting than ‘reading’ or ‘learning’ work which would be assessed during class time.

3. Students were finding it difficult to complete quality homework at home due to a lack of appropriate study facilities. There were many distractions for them and they were experiencing concentration difficulties.

In light of these findings, we put certain measures in place to try to overcome these challenges and make homework a more effective part of teaching and learning in our school.
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<th>Actions Taken</th>
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<td><strong>Assisted Study</strong>&lt;br&gt;Throughout the year, we offered assisted study after school, at weekends and during school holidays.</td>
<td>This enabled students to develop study and homework techniques which have assisted them to become independent learners. They have developed an understanding that homework is necessary to achieve their learning outcomes.</td>
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<td><strong>Study Hub</strong>&lt;br&gt;In January 2012, we commenced the Study Hub, which is an afterschool supervised and assisted study facility primarily aimed at 3rd years to help them prepare effectively for their Junior Certificate.</td>
<td>The Study Hub enabled students gain confidence in their learning skills and helped them develop positive study habits. It met the diverse needs of our students and provided all students with a suitable environment for quality study to take place. Students who participated in Study Hub gained the skills to complete their homework more effectively and developed capacities to become effective learners.</td>
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<td><strong>Staff and Student Workshops</strong>&lt;br&gt;The Career Guidance Counsellor facilitated homework based workshops with both staff and students. Staff examined and discussed the different types of homework and various techniques and skills needed to complete homework for all subjects. The aim of the student workshops was to equip them with the necessary skills to complete their homework effectively in specific subjects.</td>
<td>As a result of these workshops, student confidence grew, as did their capabilities. Their approach to homework changed, particularly among state examination classes as they were able to complete homework of a good standard and quality. They started experiencing success and achievement.</td>
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<td><strong>Homework Policy</strong>&lt;br&gt;The Positive Behaviour Strategy Team looked at formalising our stance on homework by developing a new school policy on homework.</td>
<td>This document will act as guidelines for staff, parents and students alike and will positively set standards for what expectations are expected in terms of homework provision, completion and correction.</td>
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### Homework Policy (cont)

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<td>A draft policy has been drawn up which reflects staff, students’ and parents’ views on Homework and its provision and completion in St. Dominic’s.</td>
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<td><strong>Study Skills Workshops</strong>&lt;br&gt;Various workshops were provided for all year groups on study skills and methods of completing homework effectively. A collaborative approach was adapted involving many staff personnel (Career Guidance, NBSS, Learning Mentors, Positive Behaviour Liaison Teacher)</td>
<td>These workshops equipped students with skills and techniques for effectively completing homework and study.</td>
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<td><strong>Homework Club</strong>&lt;br&gt;Homework club was available to all 1st years after school last year. It was a positive experience as they completed their homework for the first half of the afternoon and then had an opportunity to participate in fun activities.</td>
<td>This club provided students with the facility to complete homework with help from staff and their peers. It was excellent for creating the habit of “doing your homework” straight after school rather than leaving it until later. It was particularly successful at building a positive attitude towards homework among the students. This year, we are organising an obligatory “Club Day” for each first year class so that this tradition can be continued with all first year students.</td>
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<td><strong>Homework Journal</strong>&lt;br&gt;We redeveloped our Homework Journal making it more student friendly. The importance of recording homework in the journal is constantly reinforced with our students. The new journal includes information on multiple intelligences and learning styles. These materials will be discussed during SPHE classes in September.</td>
<td>The new journal includes a daily reflection/reminder section which are excellent for students, offering them more space to record important dates, projects, facts, lists and reflections.</td>
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