



Digital Schools of Distinction Award Evaluation Report

School: Ballinlough NS Kells, Co. Meath

Roll No: 092381

Date of validation: 10/05/2016

Leadership & Vision

Ballinlough NS, Kells, a rural co-ed, multi-class, primary school, with a fervent team of teachers and support staff exhibits in both written word and in everyday classroom action, that technology- enriched learning plays an key role in the students', community's and teachers' lives. Moreover the leadership and vision displayed during the DSoD validation indorse the fact that 21 Century ICTs play a calculated and deliberate role in the everyday lives of the school and wider rural community. Pupils and teachers are afforded the opportunities to become familiar with a range of ICTs and to engage with the skills to successfully employ them. They are also encouraged to pursue ICT interfaces and possibilities by a most dedicated and excellent ICT co-ordinator, Ms. Carmel Reilly a very pro-active Principal teacher, Ms. Tanya Farrelly and a very warm and friendly teaching staff. The CPD and peer-to-peer provision and ICT collaboration offered by the ICT coordinator and the other members of staff, during the school-year, is noteworthy. The use of ICTs is merged into the various policies, projects, displays and posters throughout the school and there is no doubt that technology plays a very determined and hands-on role in teaching and learning. The school building has been re-furbished in parts and the running of wired and wireless technologies is an ongoing issue throughout the structure, with the provision for future expansion being presently explored in the area of WiFi provision. There is a clear commitment to resolving these issues as soon as possible but the progress is hampered by a lack of response from NCTE to several emails concerning access to the Net and broadband capacity.

The secretary and teachers use a variety of software to share files and documents. The students use laptops mainly to access lessons and share their work with the teachers and on-line. The school uses the web-text/text-a-parent and the school website (<http://www.ballinloughns.com/>) for communicating amongst staff and with parents. Blogging and student participation is highly encouraged and training is provided to undertake the task of designing and uploading the Blogs. Leadership and Vision are central to the school's ICT journey and for a small, rural school, there was excellent collaboration and co-operation at all levels.

ICT in the Curriculum

Ballinlough NS, Kells, a vertical, co-education school, strives to ensure that each student, regardless of his or her age, ability or intellectual challenge, leaves the



school feeling self-confident using computers, having gained a fortification and strengthening of their general classroom work in many curricular areas and in particular, Gaeilge, Ceol, Literacy Activity worksheets, Oral skills, Maths, PE and English. Other curricular subject areas are also accessed and explored utilizing a variety of Education websites / Maximo Mindfulness Animation, GoNoodle, Word Processing and ICT tools to enhance learning. The effective use of laptops at 'stations', during classes and in various 'stations' during classes, is to be commended, where the students and their teachers, enjoyed a variety of ICT activities at a differentiated pace whilst exploring Maths, Literacy and phonics. This, along with aspects of Internet and Cyber Safety and ICT usage, was absolutely wonderful to observe and discuss with the students. The use of IWB systems is very effective also at all levels of assessment and classroom revision and testing throughout the school.

In catering for pupils' needs especially in Learning Support and in the classrooms: They use adaptive technologies as per ability and exceptional needs of individual students as they present themselves and the SNA support is to be commended.

School ICT Culture

There is rich and clear evidence that ICT is ever present into the cultural fabric of Ballinlough NS, Kells . Posters and project work on Cyberbullying and safe internet practices are also clearly visible throughout the school. The effective use of various hardware is also evident throughout the school. This is also effectively used for SSE (School Self Evaluation) with

teachers/students/Parents/Community. The school's website is very informative <http://www.ballinloughns.com/> bringing together a variety of Blogs, classroom and community based activities, events, projects, school policies, galleries, new and current Information, links to education Apps and classroom activities.

Scratch, Minecraft and Coding is also encouraged throughout the school and a variety of students discussed their experiences with the validator.

The daily use of internal software such as Airgead Bunscoile etc., to communicate and organize school, internal e-mail, testing and attendance related activities was evident. It clearly shows a commitment to endorsing every aspect of the school's professional life and work. The use of students and staff members to update the website and Blogs also allows the school to publish Quick and Immediate updates to families. Recent updates demonstrate the emphasis on Blogging, Extra-curricular activities/Sports/ Cookery/ Policies/Parents activities/ Photos and other competitions and various students were only too happy to discuss how they engage with the school website. This is all moderated by an excellent ICT coordinator. The Principal is fully supportive and encourages all teachers to participate and be active. All children are comfortable utilising technology such as a suite of laptops and iPads (SPLD) to



prepare their work for the websites with excellent learning to learn tools. Discussions with the students and various classes on specific aspects of ICTs in society and their daily lives was most informative. Iontach ar fad.

Professional Development

At present training requirements are adequately catered for by in-school, peer-to-peer and Summer CPD attendance at various courses and ICT Support evenings at various Education Centres, especially in Navan. The ICT coordinator also provides opportunities of one-to-one CPD, with interested teachers, in identified areas of ICTs. There is also noticeable Peer to Peer collaboration going on when teachers find new ideas and practices. A full and comprehensive history of CPD engagement by each member of staff and ancillary staff was presented to the validator during the visit. Moreover, various ICT experts have visited the school to provide assistance with specific issues of CPD and this list was also provided for perusal. There is strong evidence of on-going commitment to CPD among all staff members and this is to be highly praised for such a small, rural school. A selection of students informed me that they will again undertake Scratch and Coding classes very soon with the full support of the school.

Resources & Infrastructure

Resources are evident throughout the school. Every classroom visited had an IWB facility /SMART Technologies facility or similar hardware, laptops, desktop computers, cameras, a dedicated laptop for each teacher with effective and sometimes adequate internet access and the necessary equipment to offer an appealing, technology-enhanced environment for the students. A suite of Mobile laptops, with a desire to acquire more in the future, are available to all classes. There is no doubt that the evidence of ICT incorporation and practice both seen and witnessed during the validation in this school is praise-worthy. The school is currently undertaking the setting up of a 'cloud', server-network for educational and organizational purposes. This was discussed in detail during the visit and recommendations were proposed by the validator. A wireless connection is available for use with laptops/iPads and at present the ICT coordinator is exploring a more effective hardware and WiFi distribution system for the school. The Broadband is provided by the NCTE but is inadequate and intermittent at best throughout the school day. Attempts to contact NCTE have failed and again recommendations to overcome these issues were discussed during the visit. There is a wealth of licensed software and other related educational tools available throughout the school. The present school building was refurbished to ensure that modern 21 Century ICTs would be accessible to all students, and every effort is being made by the school to ensure that they are. The SEN and Resource rooms are well resourced and are utilizing the appropriate hardware



and software to enhance the students' lives and learning journeys. The school's infrastructure is extremely functional in spite of the ICT obstacles presented on a daily basis and again the work undertaken to provide an effective infrastructural provision is to be commended.

General comments and recommendations

Ballinlough NS, Kells is providing validation of real-time, everyday incorporation of ICT in school life. The validator was given a detailed time-tabled, guided tour of the school facilities, classrooms and associated ICT / SEN provisions. The expertise and dedication displayed and validated by all involved in their use of ICTs is to be highly commended.

The standard of utilising and integrating ICTs was most ardent in the various classroom settings.

Ballinlough NS, Kells meets all the criteria for Digital School of Distinction Status and I have no reservations in recommending them for this prestigious DSoD award. I believe Ballinlough NS, Kells, its teachers, students and community will continue to lead the way for other small, rural schools, with on-going broadband and infrastructural issues, to follow. I would especially like to thank Ms. Carmel Reilly, a most dedicated ICT coordinator and Ms. Tanya Farrelly, a most supportive principal and all the teaching staff and students of the school for giving the validator a glimpse of what a resolute and committed school is achieving in the area of ICT, when a clear vision is well-defined and executed. It was my pleasure to feel very enthused and encouraged after my visit to Ballinlough NS, Kells and I thank all involved for their time and consideration in spite of their busy schedule and so many other responsibilities. Níl dabht ar bith ach go bhfuil obair iontach theicneolaíochta faoi lán-seol sa scoil. Go leana an sár-obair. Molaim go mór iad.

++ Recommendations concerning NCTE and Infrastructural issues. Server setup. ICT expert assistance.

Please outline any good or noteworthy examples of ICT integration in this school:

Literacy.
School Blog
GoNoodle
Gaeilge/Maths /Literacy in the classroom
Scratch.

Scoring

The visit more than validated the statements on their Self Evaluation Review.