Living Schools Lab

Observation Case Studies

Ireland

Co-funded by the 7th Framework Programme of the European Union
Introduction

With the participation of 15 partners, the two-year Living Schools Lab project promoted a whole school approach to ICT use, scaling up best practices in the use of ICT between schools with varying levels of technological proficiency. Visits to the project’s Advanced Schools in 12 countries were carried out to observe school’s best practices leading to a report and recommendations on developing and mainstreaming of whole school approaches to ICT.

In addition to this, twelve case studies present the evidence gathered as part of the school observation visits to two Advanced Schools in each of the 12 countries: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Portugal, and the United Kingdom. Alongside the case studies, each Link Observation Visit was detailed in a blog post, along with useful links and practical ideas to try in the classroom: [http://lsl.eun.org/observation-visits](http://lsl.eun.org/observation-visits).

A framework of eight main questions was used to develop the case studies:

1. What types of technologies and resources are available in the Advanced Schools?
2. Are there recent national initiatives that have had an impact upon whole school development of ICT?
3. Who leads the decisions about the development of ICT?
4. What types of training and professional development are available to teachers?
5. How is ICT being used in different subjects?
6. What kinds of research and development are the teachers engaged with?
7. Are the Advanced Schools engaged in any partnerships or networks?
8. Are there particular areas that could be mainstreamed or replicated?

All case studies contain information that has been reviewed by National Co-ordinators. The studies outline evidence gathered as part of the Link Observation Visits and throughout the Living Schools Lab project. Further information is available on each school website about the individual school, although this may be in the home language.

All of the school visits were undertaken by Diana Bannister MBE, University of Wolverhampton. These case studies should be read in conjunction with the project’s Link Observation Visits final report available at [http://fcl.eun.org/lsl](http://fcl.eun.org/lsl).
# Observation Case Studies: Ireland

**January 2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Age Group of Students</th>
<th>School Website</th>
<th>Name of Principal</th>
<th>LSL Project Lead Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scoil na gCeithre Máistí</td>
<td>Athlone, Ireland</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>5-12 years</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ceithremaistri.scoilnet.ie/blog">www.ceithremaistri.scoilnet.ie/blog</a></td>
<td>Laobhaoise Nic Aogáin</td>
<td>Gearóid Ó Duibhir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coláiste Bríde</td>
<td>Clondalkin, Ireland</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>12-18 years</td>
<td><a href="http://www.colaistebride.com/">http://www.colaistebride.com/</a></td>
<td>Marie-Thérèse Kilmartin</td>
<td>Sarah-Jayne Carey</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What types of technologies and resources are available in the Advanced Schools?

In the primary school in Ireland, the school has access to the Internet via the wired and wireless network giving coverage throughout the school. The ICT co-ordinator has worked with the school to ensure that each class teacher has a defined level of access to technology with the classroom. In every classroom there is a tablet laptop, a data projector, a printer, speakers and a visualiser. There is a computer lab and library facilities together; this is increasingly used as a space for the students to work on projects. All the computers in this space have two sets of headphones, one of which has a microphone so that children can work in pairs on language based activities. The school has tutor control software (AB Tutor Control) which allows the teacher to monitor progress. The school has 32 portal notebooks (Fizzbooks) which are distributed to the junior classes each morning by a group of students.

Within the school older students are allowed to bring their own technologies to school for use in class. This has facilitated the sharing of software so that the exposure in school can continue at home (e.g. using Audacity for practising reading).

In the secondary school in Ireland, all teaching classrooms and tutorial rooms have data projectors, thus all students have access to numerous Internet based resources which teachers use in teaching and learning. All Maths and Science rooms have an interactive whiteboard and visualizers. All classrooms have a computer and access to printers, scanners and faxing facilities. A wireless network is available throughout the school and the school has worked with O2 to provide this. Students can use their mobile phone in lessons with agreement from the individual teachers.

In four ICT labs students have their own direct PC access and ICT is integrated into all programmes and subjects throughout the school.

The school has a managed network and ICT services are managed remotely. There is a helpdesk for the school and the school is provided with technical support for ½ day every two weeks. The headteacher Marie-Thérèse Kilmartin emphasises that one of the most important factors “is that it [technology] absolutely needs to be able to work.”

In 2004 when the announcement of a new school building was made, the headteacher established an ICT committee to set priorities. This involved visits to look at other school models including in the UK. This helped the school to futureproof the technologies available. The school liaised with the former National Centre Technology in Education (NCTE) (now PDST Technology in Education),1 becoming early users of the national E-Portal, and set staff expectations that ICT would be embedded into the new school and all school systems. As part of the move to the new school in February 2006 a plan was developed to upskill all staff with the use of ICT. Through the NCTE, the school linked with the Dublin West Education Centre (DWEC) and developed a number of core ICT staff members to become NCTE local facilitators for staff training and development. ICT training is a staff priority and is on all agendas and it is at the heart of the school focus. In September 2012, the Board of Management identified, as part of the 5 Year Plan, five areas of focus under teaching and learning including ICT. An ICT committee with 15 members was established to divide out responsibility and look at policy, resources and new initiatives.

From 2008 the headteacher welcomed other schools to visit the school as an example of a working model. All staff have been involved in this process, not just the lead teachers who had good ICT skills but to all teachers including those who had no ICT skills. The school has developed a local reputation of bringing teachers with very little IT experience to being very comfortable in a changed classroom environment with computers, data projectors, video cameras and interactive whiteboards.

The school was invited to present at CEIST Conference (2009) to other schools within the Trust around the school’s model of ICT integration. Since then CEIST, in collaboration with Unity Technology Solutions, has invited the school to be an example of best practice for the other schools within the Trustee group, in ICT integration and development.

1 The National Centre for Technology in Education now Professional Development Service for Teachers Technology in Education: www.pdst.ie
In 2011, the school was selected to become part of the pilot for science at Junior Cycle. The Principal applied to become a pilot school for the new Junior Cycle JC2 in December 2011 and was successful. The school has been involved with a national “Connected Classrooms Project” where one of the mathematics teachers in school has taught higher level maths via Microsoft Lync to a small number of students in another class remotely at Presentation Secondary School Warrenmount which is in Dublin (though it could be anywhere in the world). This means that the teacher has been connected in real time to these students remotely whilst still continuing to have her own class of students in the classroom.

2. **Are there national initiatives that have had an impact upon whole school development of ICT?**

In Ireland, the leading teacher in the primary school described how the financial recession had led to “ICT going off the boil at a national level.” There is a new vision for numeracy and literacy; these subjects are the current main focus. NCTE filmed some video examples of personalised learning so that teachers could observe exemplary practice. These show the use of technology within learning and teaching.

However, the leading teacher remarked that the school level focus on ICT remains just as important.

In the secondary school, members of the ICT committee are keeping an eye on developments in other schools regarding new technologies, e-books, iPads, smart phones, tablets, etc. as personal devices in the classroom. The school is equally conscious of costs and the socio-economic background of the students.

3. **Who leads the decisions about the development of ICT?**

At a national level, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) Technology in Education provides the support and guidance to schools implementing the use of technology within learning and teaching. The PDST co-ordinates the Schools Broadband Programme. Alongside this, the PDST provide professional development and training to teachers. Furthermore, PDST leads the development and access to Scoilnet, a portal providing access to high quality teaching resources.

In both schools in Ireland, there is evidence of whole school change being led by a team of staff with the principals driving the decision making process.

The primary school started the process of developing an e-learning strategy in line with the NCTE e-Learning Plan and guidelines and has established an ICT committee of enthusiastic and motivated teachers. It is significant that there is a representation of staff from across the different year groups; this allows for pinpointing dissemination of ideas, policy and feedback to the appropriate class levels.

These meetings are structured and usually last for 45 minutes to include elements of Feedback, Planning and Training (FPT 45). There is a whole staff meeting on Thursdays.

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2 [www.juniorcycle.ie](http://www.juniorcycle.ie)
3 [www.warrenmountsecondary.ie](http://www.warrenmountsecondary.ie)
4 [www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie](http://www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie)
5 [www.scoilnet.ie](http://www.scoilnet.ie)
4. What types of training and professional development are available to teachers?

Initially in the secondary school in Ireland there were a small number of teachers who had ICT competence and interest, but the school has used the role of the lead teacher to provide support to other staff in school. This means that there are 10-15 teachers who will readily embrace new initiatives in school and encourage others to engage.

The school has used the curriculum to initiate some training opportunities, for example, the Italian teacher has developed language links with a school in Italy. The students have been able to connect via Skype; however, the teacher has used collaborative ICT tools to build the ongoing partnership for the school. The school has been twinned with a school in Bassano del Grappa, Italy; the teacher has been able to develop his own skills of using tools such as Padlet, email and Skype. These skills have been passed on to other teachers in school.

ICT training for the development of staff skills continues to be provided in-house, with the school’s staff acting as facilitators. A range of topics have been addressed including aspects of digital citizenship, how to access and use AFL on-line resources.

The school has encouraged staff to complete online courses, Masters in Technology for Education (DCU), film-making, and cooperative learning (TGD). Staff complete short courses by PDST Technology in Education and these are offered through Dublin West Education Centre. The school board have a grant to encourage staff to undertake Continuing Professional Development.

The Principal and the ICT coordinator are actively involved with other key ICT leaders in discussions about ICT development as the school moves forward with the development of the new Junior Cycle.7

In Ireland, ICT training is delivered through whole school training. PDST Technology in Education8 offers whole school training and many primary schools avail themselves of this as a summer CPD option (Continuing Professional Development). The lead teacher has recognised that some of the younger teachers are proficient at the use of ICT for social media, but benefit from specific training to demonstrate how to access and manage resources within the classroom.

The lead teacher recognises the benefits of a teacher being able to undertake certified training that enables them to gain incremental points towards their career to make it more worthwhile for the teacher to undertake the training. All training is purely by choice; there is no obligation to do CPD/training. In the last year this has probably amounted to one extra hour per week. There is no structure for calculating hours for CPD. If primary teachers take part in a 5 day summer course, they can have three flexible days off in the year if the Continuous Professional Development Training is verified is by the DfE9. Teachers have to register with the Teaching Council8 every year.

5. How is ICT being used in different subjects?

In the secondary school in Ireland, Edmodo11 has been implemented for all subjects and all year groups. This learning management system enables the school to make resources available to students on line. It means that there is a continuous connection between school and home learning as students can access learning online. Students can collaborate on line and communicate more openly with their teachers. Computer rooms have been opened during lunch and after school to accommodate any students with no home access to computers. It has enabled teachers to feedback on a more instant, regular basis. During the observation visit, the maths teacher began the lesson by accessing examples of homework that had been submitted online and addressing some of the common misconceptions prior to the start of the new lesson.

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7 www.juniorcycle.ie/
8 www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/en/Training/
9 Department of Education and Skills
10 www.teachingcouncil.ie
11 www.edmodo.com
All Maths and Science classes use interactive whiteboards to enhance the learning experience; higher level students have connected with a partner school via Microsoft Lync. Italian and French Departments use Skype, Email and Edmodo to communicate with partner schools in France and Italy.

In History, Geography and Art, Internet access means that students can virtually visit galleries and museums. In the music department, it is embedded in the curriculum for students and staff to integrate Sibelius, MuseScore and YouTube.

Through the school's involvement with Bridge21,12 Trinity College Dublin, students in transition year are developing their ICT skills and sharing this with students from other schools through group networks.

Students with Special Educational Needs and English language deficit use ICT as a support for their learning. The school has introduced Touch, Type, Read, Spell (TTRS) and other software packages to enhance learning at their own level. Many of the packages allow for individualised learning and progress tracking. The school has purchased class sets of Kindles for English classes and as a literacy incentive and the SEN Department are trialling two iPads with students.

As a Gaelscoil, the teaching of a second language is central to the work of the primary school. The integration of ICT has allowed the school to extend the learning opportunities for the children both in and beyond the classroom. All computers throughout the school have the same software installed. (All software is freeware, so that such licensing is neither a problem nor a drain on resources.) This covers age-appropriate material and allows teachers to differentiate when assigning work to children.

The development of Literacy is a key aim of the school and an example of how the school is using ICT to enhance this is the recording software Audacity to allow children to record themselves reading.

In keeping with national educational development, Numeracy and Literacy is central to the school development and as a Gaelscoil this is of greater significance as bilingualism is central to teaching and learning. As such, ICT is being used effectively in each of the three areas Maths, Irish and English, and beyond.

6. What kinds of research and development are the teachers engaged with?

In both the primary and secondary School in Ireland, the principals are keen for staff to be involved in external projects, recognising the benefit of being able to engage with larger initiatives for the benefit of the school.

The leading teacher from Ireland commented that he "does not actively look for research but keeps up on research and keeps an ear to the ground. There is always research in the background, and this in turn inspires him to do some further research." He has written for a monthly journal.

12 www.bridge21.ie
“Involvement in the Living Schools Lab gives Scoil na gCeithre Máistri the opportunity to extend and enhance the teaching and learning of its students with and through ICT and to continue its long-running practice of establishing ICT as a central tool in offering our children the best education possible.” (Primary Headteacher)

7. Are the Advanced Schools engaged in any partnerships or networks?

The secondary school website gives up to date information on what is happening in the school. Parents can download application forms, newsletters, booklists and the school calendar. Parents have been given access to their daughter’s record through E-Portal; thus parents can access school reports and attendance.

As indicated previously, the secondary school is using technology to videolink with Presentation Warrenmount and Digital Hub (H2) Dublin; and Skyping with schools in France and Italy. The school is linked with Trinity College, Dublin Access Programme (TAP), with TCD Bridge 21, with CEIST and Unity Technology Solutions. The secondary school is a lead school for Serco / E-Portal and is currently looking at being an early adaptor for the next generation.

The school maintains strong links with the local college and with employers in the area of Clondalkin.

In 2011 the school became involved with the Global Education Experience (GEE) project, organised through the Presentation Sisters. The school was linked with Presentation Secondary School Delhi 6 in India; this has involved reciprocal visits.

The primary school uses a school blog to communicate with parents. In addition, the parents are kept fully informed about events through the parent text service and email.

The primary school has forged strong links with other schools, the community and industry since its establishment. The school hosts visits from principals and ICT co-ordinators of schools in the region to demonstrate how ICT has been embedded in the school.

The school has built links with Ericsson, who have a software development plant in the town of Athlone. Many parents of students in the school are employed by Ericsson and they have always played a supporting role in the development of ICT within the school. However, the ICT co-ordinator feels that there are more opportunities for companies to support the primary schools.
Are there particular areas that could be mainstreamed or replicated?

- The eTwinning project where the secondary school has developed links with a school in Italy. The school has used Skype for the oral discussion between classes. However, the students have been able to continue to share resources using Padlet. The students have used this shared collaborative space to learn about new vocabulary, sentence structure, basic dialogue and they have included written text, photos and videos to teach each other.

- The Connected Classrooms Project could be adapted for other subjects too; for example, in this school a mathematics teacher delivered higher level maths lessons to students from another school via Microsoft Lync. Schools may be able to identify subject experts across different areas of the curriculum. Equally, the school may be able to engage with an external expert in a library, museum or specific organisation who is willing to share practice.

- The distribution of technologies across the school to ensure that all classrooms have potential to access devices within all areas of the curriculum. This further enhances the baseline provision of specific technologies to all classrooms across the school.

- The e-Learning Planning process as a whole school planning process is one that could be mainstreamed.

- The 45 minute e-Learning Team meeting format of 15 minutes each for Feedback, Planning and Training for short structured meetings can provide focused purposeful meetings.

13 www.pdsttechnologyineducation.ie/en/Planning/
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