

Education newsbrief

DECEMBER 2008



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Happy Christmas and a Blessed New Year to Patrons Boards of Management and School Communities

Times Change!

The outgoing Secretary to the Board of Education was previously secretary to the Diocesan Board of Education in Dublin & Glendalough. In that capacity in or around 1997 he attended the opening of an extension and refurbishment of Zion National in Rathgar. The then principal, Ms Carol Revington, in welcoming parents and guests to the occasion commented that the school had been the last in Dublin with outdoor toilets. There was a frisson of horror and even revulsion among the assembled audience on hearing this fact. Fortunately no one noticed that John McCullagh was shaking not with horror but with suppressed hysteria and even a little sadness. Zion had provided his primary education. His earliest memories were of the yard with beaten earth and patches of grass and in one corner by a sycamore tree a single toilet. In the snapshot memory of childhood there was a clanking cistern and chain and rough paper on wire and autumn leaves blown in under the toilet door.

Like many a child there were prayers that the school might fall down and holidays would extend forever. One year it seemed prayers were answered when the start of term was delayed by a week. When the pupils returned the playground was beautifully concreted and the old toilet gone. Instead there was a spanking new toilet block with separate cubicles, urinal, washbasins and even a mirror. No doubt the girls had similar state of the art facilities. The boys rejoiced and while Canon Daunt held a formal opening ceremony it was we who proudly marked the event at our convenience. A generation later it was the demolition of this facility that brought new celebrations to Zion.

John became education officer when the Education Act had just been signed into law. Ten years later there are four education acts and the '98 act amended on five separate occasions. Add to that new equality legislation, health & safety legislation and a plethora of circulars and procedures and most of all new content and forms of delivery of education. Just as Zion saw its physical structure being updated in a generation it is now time for a fresh beginning in the support for education in the Church of Ireland and wider community.

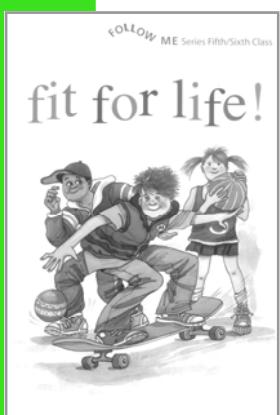
The advertisement for the post of secretary to the General Synod Board of Education and Education officer will be in the national press in early January. The preferred candidate is also likely to be appointed as secretary of the Secondary Education Committee. In the meantime Jennifer Byrne and Vicki Hastie will, in the words of the evangelical hymn writers Sankey & Moody, "hold the fort for help is coming".

Come back John,
there are more
questions to be
answered...

Come back both
of you – I don't
know what I'm
doing yet!



Follow Me



The Primary RE Committee, led by the Bishop of Meath & Kildare Most Rev Dr Richard Clarke, has given careful consideration to the Research Document on the *Follow Me* Programme. This was prepared by a group from Marino Institute of Education and the Committee is most appreciative to those who completed questionnaires or attended focus group or other meetings.

In the light of the research the Committee has taken two separate decisions. A long term decision has been to advise the Board of Education to commence planning for a totally new RE Programme which would begin to become available in 2012 or 2013. The committee itself has arranged for Mrs J Wilkinson to revise the two teacher's book for infants to include new worksheets, a list of hymnody linked to available recorded music and other revisions. (see note on page 8)

The Committee noted that some comments in regard to the content and presentation of parts of the *Follow Me* project appeared to be made without reference to the teacher's book for each unit. In particular there was a lack of awareness of the range of biblical stories and teaching that were listed, in some cases, as alternatives to contemporary stories. It had been indicated at in-service and in the books, that the breath of material was such so as to allow teacher's use their professional judgement in selecting the topics or aspects of topics to teach. These comments do not gainsay the valuable insights provided by teachers to the research.

Plans are in hand to revamp the *Follow Me* website and it would benefit enormously from your suggestions and tips for resources.

It is planned to offer in-service to those teachers who have not previously taught the current programme and to provide in-service who wish to up-skill their teaching of religious education.

Opinion - lay chairs

At the inception of boards of management in 1975 the then Bishop of Cork, Cloyne & Ross, RG Perdue, made a policy decision that all chair persons in the diocese would be lay people and the clergy, while serving on boards, would concentrate on their roles as chaplain to the school and supporting the provision of Religious Education. This pattern does not apply today to all schools in that diocese but the practice of appointing lay chairs is becoming increasingly common in a number of other dioceses as the number of Cork émigrés increases.

The change to a lay chair often requires a different working relationship with the Principal. This is not a change in role but rather a change in mutual expectations. The clerical chair was seen as available during the school day and immediately post the teaching day and brought a certain knowledge of the broader school community to the role. The lay chair, in the words of one, has another life: they are not readily available during the school day and may not have the same local knowledge as the cleric. On the other hand the lay chair brings his or her own skills and expertise to bear on the role and the more limited availability of the lay chair due to employment or domestic commitments helps to more clearly define the role of the Principal as the person with day to day responsibility for the school. The change also assists clergy in being able to exercise their pastoral duties without the confusion of representing the board of management in its duty as an employer.

Any newly appointed chair or principal needs to work out the parameters for regular briefings and face to face meetings to ensure that there is mutual support and understanding. The Bishop of Cashel in his recent Synod address also pointed to the need of those who had formerly exercised the role of chair and had now stepped back to being a member to be careful in keeping to their new role. Communication whenever and however it happens is key to an efficient and effective working relationship throughout the school community and lay chairs can certainly help to spread the burden of responsibilities and create a wider communication link to a broader community that may not always be aware of the demands and difficulties faced by all involved in the delivery of education.

Child Protection Booklet

Staysafe, the Child Abuse Prevention Programme (CAPP), has launched a guidance booklet for schools. The overall aim of this booklet is to assist schools in developing a comprehensive Child Protection Policy which addresses appropriate educational provision, procedures for dealing with concerns and/or disclosures of abuse and child protection practices in operation in the school.

At the launch, Maria Lawlor, who is Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist and was one of the team who developed the Staysafe programme, spoke of the way things were 20 years ago when noone talked about abuse and if a child were to suggest something distressing was happening to them, they would be met with anger and disbelief. It was initially difficult to get the Staysafe programme off the ground in 1991. Teachers were nervous and uncomfortable with the idea. The first government official to take any notice was the then Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke.

Thankfully, it's a very different picture now, although it has taken tragic issues like the Kilkenny Incest case and the Ferns Report to raise awareness. Some 90% of schools are now on board.

Patricia Shanahan, National Coordinator, CAPP, spoke about training and the importance of schools not only having a Designated Liaison Officer (DLP), but also a deputy DLP. She stressed that having a good Child Protection Policy in place (and adhering to it) protected both children and staff. It was important to both involve and inform parents of the policy, but also that parents volunteering their services to schools be treated in the same manner as staff in terms of their recruitment, i.e. trained in child protection, references checked and vetting carried out.

Mary O'Rourke T.D. then officially launched the booklet, noting that she was slightly disappointed that only 90% of schools were using the Staysafe programme and hoped that it would soon be 100%. The booklet will help schools put a policy in place and there should be no excuse now not to have such a policy.

The booklet was recently circulated to schools, together with details of training available.



Meeting with the Minister

The Secretary met the Minister and his officials with representatives of other primary management bodies. It was a difficult meeting though always courteous as it was clear from the outset that the Minister was not for turning and the worsening of the economic situation pointed to the possibility that things might well get worse for our schools before there is an amelioration in the situation. The Minister was pressed on the impact of the cutbacks on the disadvantaged and those with special needs and on the supervision issue which is likely to cost more rather than save funds. In each case the response from the Minister and his officials was that the improvements are only recent and the cutbacks revert to a situation that existed three or four years ago. Warning that boards of management who are required to provide "appropriate education" for each individual child was met with deaf ears.

The Minister had another engagement and there followed a useful conversation on three new developments 1) the recasting of the appointment procedure for posts of responsibility 2) the change in the redeployment scheme with the requirement to declare vacancies and 3) the disciplinary procedure for teaching staff. The long term possibility of an introduction of a revised and detailed employment contract was welcomed by management.

The Secretary had met with the Minister earlier in the same afternoon when he accompanied a delegation raising concerns about the impact of budget cuts and changes on the voluntary schools under Protestant patronage. Again there appeared little or no prospect of a row back on the removal of grants and the penal change in the pupil teacher ratio. The assurance that the block grant would continue for necessitous Protestant pupils was welcomed as was the ongoing provision of 90% capital grants for building.

Booterstown National School

Thursday October 23rd 2008 was a very special day in the life of Booterstown National School. Finally our new extension was being opened after years of planning, fundraising and at least two Board of Management changes - our hopes and dreams had become a reality.



The Archbishop cuts the ribbon!

Following a Service of Thanksgiving – themed around school life, the Most Reverend John R.W Neill, Archbishop of Dublin, blessed our school and cut the ribbon to cheers and applause from staff, children, parents, friends and dignitaries.

The doors were opened and the children delighted in showing everyone the fruits of their labours since September – Science experiments, lighthouses, project work, Philip Treacy Hat designs, Autumn pictures, stories and a myriad of other things.

It was a wonderful occasion that was only made possible by the foresight, generosity and hard work of a bunch of parents who want the best of their children.

Original funding was provided through the Summer Works Scheme by the then Minister of Education, Mary Hanafin. This funding was to cover the cost of ramping, a dedicated Learning Support Room and a wheelchair accessible toilet. The Board of Management felt, however, that the School, while grateful to receive what we did, was in dire need of more space all around. Resource teaching would no longer be in a converted storage cupboard, the Language Support Teacher would no longer have to work in the corridor, the staff would have a larger staffroom, the Principal would have an office and a General Purpose room would allow all staff to deliver the curriculum as intended. This provided space for drama, music and other practical subjects. The Library would be returned to all the children and the Learning Support teacher would have a room to call her own.

The Board bravely made the decision to double the money allocated by the Department of Education and Science. This meant that everything could be done at once and that all the school requirements could be met.

The fundraising began in earnest. A combination of Diocesan Board of Education investments, donations and various parish/school fundraising activities culminated in what is now a 21st Century school with the space and facilities to be an inclusive and progressive school. We face into the future with confidence, and a huge thank you is extended to everyone who has made this possible.



The new extension

Staysafe – Best Practice in child protection – Guidance for Schools

The booklet referred to on page 3 which was issued in October/November to schools through the Child Abuse Protection programme states:

The staff of the school includes all personnel (paid and voluntary) working with in the school environment, e.g., teachers, special needs assistants, visiting speakers/teachers, bus escorts/drivers, ancillary staff, parents helping out, etc.

It later refers to the recruitment of such staff and states that Garda Vetting should be sought *but it is important to note that garda vetting is not in itself a complete safeguard, as many perpetrators of abuse are not known to the authorities... It is considered good practice to do background checks on anyone being considered to assist in a voluntary capacity or seeking work experience in the school.*

In light of the above we offer the following points to make vetting easier:

In order to get off to an easy start why not introduce the topic of volunteering to parents when they come in for their induction day. You can simply say that you very much welcome participation by parents who volunteer to assist in school life, but as good and careful employers you must treat everyone coming into the school to work with the children, either in a paid or voluntary position, in the same manner. As parents they should appreciate the care that the school takes in this regard.

This means that in respect of interested parties, you will need to take up two references, conduct a vetting check and bring them in for an evening early in September to give a short talk on supervision and child protection. You might even prepare short job descriptions so each role is clearly defined.

Please stress to parents that vetting only applies to those who volunteer, or apply for employment, in the school.

The talk should cover how the volunteer would act in the event of:

- a child misbehaving
- a child having an accident
- a child divulging personal information about home life
- a child disclosing something which might suggest abuse, physical or otherwise

When done this way, parent volunteers will be happy to take part in the appointment process which includes the filling out of the vetting forms as they fully understand why it is happening, that it is in the best interest of their child, but that it is also just one part of the process.

You should stress that vetting is handled in a strictly confidential manner, with only the principal/chairperson, an authorised signatory and the Garda Central Vetting Unit having sight of the form. However, it must also be borne in mind that there may be reasons why parents feel uncomfortable with this process and may wish to opt-out (it is more appropriate for parents to opt-in). This decision must be respected and you should not make parents feel obliged to 'volunteer'!

To ease administration:

Save time by filling out one cover sheet with the relevant information and keep photocopies of it. That way you don't have to fill it in each time you are sending on a form for processing.

Ensure you always have blank vetting forms and addressed envelopes in stock.

Additional Authorised Signatory

It is clear from the increasing number of Garda Vetting Application Forms coming into this office that parishes and schools are adhering to the processes and are recruiting many volunteers to assist in school and parish activities. However, this has resulted in an increase to the workload of this Board. So that we can continue to offer as quick a turnaround of forms as possible, an additional Authorised Signatory has been appointed. Vicki Hastie has now been approved by the Garda Central Vetting Unit to act an additional Authorised Signatory for the Church of Ireland. Forms will continue to be processed in a strictly confidential manner.

Train the Trainers Day

There was a recent *train the trainers* day for the three additional modules to be presented to boards of management. Some worrying points were made which arose from the failures of some boards to comply with Health & Safety or Financial reporting requirements.



- Do you provide cleaners with guidelines on the storage and usage of cleaning fluids?
- Do you provide your cleaner and caretaker with proper safety equipment such as non slip shoes, steel capped shoes/boots, ear muffs and goggles?
- Do all school paid employees receive a proper pay slip and are all deductions properly remitted to the Revenue?
- Have you nominated a PRSA provider and advised same to all employees.
- Are your accounts certified or audited annually by a professional accountant who will stand over the certificate if challenged?

The three training modules are on Child Protection, Legal Issues and Financial Management. There is also a unit on the section 29 appeal process.

Trainers who attended received a cd rom of the presentations and support materials together with a print copy of each presentation for each school.

There are a number of useful guides and specimen contracts on www.cpsma.ie. There is also a revised appendix to the CPSMA Handbook.

There will be, probably in March 09, a revised procedure for redeployment panels which it is hoped will speed up the redeployment process. It will require all schools to declare all permanent vacancies other than those for principal positions.

September 09 will see the introduction of a new procedure for posts of responsibility and of an agreed disciplinary process for teachers.



School Leadership Research Project

Strong and effective leadership is a key factor impacting on educational achievement and boards of management must consider succession planning in relation to senior management and particularly assure when a principal moves on that there is not a significant loss of the communal memory. In the light of the limited interest in the key role of principal at primary level the Leadership Development Service, LDS, has commissioned research which will investigate the reasons why some teachers apply for the post of principal and others don't. It will review levels of reward and levels of support attached to the post, the element of career satisfaction, personal circumstances and the perceptions of the role. It will look at how skills for effective school leadership could be developed and how effective leaders can be retained. The research is being undertaken in Northern Ireland as well as the Republic and should be complete by April 2009. Teachers in Northern Ireland can now take a professional qualification for headship (PQH) which is currently a desirable criterion for selection boards and in time may become a mandatory criterion. This information is supplied by Peter McCrodden who represents the Board on the LDS advisory group.



Quotes from WSE Reports

How would your school measure up?

- The board is constituted correctly, meets regularly and functions in accordance with agreed procedures and protocols.
- It is recommended that the board should work towards a more collaborative engagement and systematic process of planning and communication with all the partners to accommodate the views of the parents' association. It should ensure that all policies are ratified and that review dates are established and initiated.
- Representatives of the parents' association raised their concerns about communications between the association and the board in relation to a perceived lack of consultation on policy decisions in the school planning process.
- The school's anti-bullying policy, which is particularly comprehensive, provides very clear guidelines for the prevention of bullying and clear preventative strategies for countering and promptly dealing with bullying behaviour.
- It is not clear how the school ensures that planning impacts on teaching and learning. Incorporating an element of action planning into these plans would assist in maximising the impact of planning on practice.
- Pupils' written work is exhibited and celebrated throughout the school.
- Detailed individual pupil learning profiles (IPLP) are compiled for all pupils in receipt of learning support and these are supported by appropriate, short-term plans. Teachers and parents are consulted and kept informed about the progress of pupils in the development of IPLPs. There is a common approach to the review and assessment of the pupils' specific learning targets at the end of each instructional term.
- Test results are recorded and filed with appropriate care. While the results of these standardised tests are analysed in the order in which they are administered, there is scope to expand upon this analysis to identify trends that might be emerging over a number of years and to adapt planning and teaching as a result. Pupils' written work is very well corrected with detailed and appropriately personalised comments optimising the impact on pupils' learning. Annual report cards are issued to parents. The information contained in these reports is comprehensive and detailed. The school is to be commended for creating a tracker file for each pupil which contains samples of their work across the curriculum and documents their progress.



Code of Behaviour

The Patron in Dublin and Glendalough has requested sight of codes of behaviour which should have been revised in accordance the statutory guidelines of the National Educational Welfare Board. A copy of the guidelines was supplied to every school.

In brief...

National Programme of Training for Boards of Management

All boards of management should by now have received training in the first two modules:

1. The Board as Corporate Entity
2. Appointment Procedures

The next three modules are now available and training should be delivered by the end of this school year. They are entitled:

3. Board Finances
4. Legal Issues
5. Child Protection

In some dioceses training has been held in conjunction with other management bodies.

If you have missed out on training and would like to receive a copy of the presentation, please contact this office.

Section 29 Appeals

Dublin & Glendalough diocese welcomed guest speaker, Elspeth Henderson, a facilitator for Section 29 Appeals, to give a presentation in the Clarion Hotel Liffey Valley on 2 December. Ms Henderson stressed that schools must have policies which:

- recognise relevant legislation
- are reviewed regularly
- are dated and state when a future revision is due.

Other points to note:

- Care must be taken that all relevant parties are consulted and informed when major changes are made to policies.
- If you have bullet points within a policy, the order of the bullets is taken as priority in terms of application, it is not considered to be simply a list.
- There is a perception that the parents always win Section 29 Appeals. This is not true, certainly in terms of suspension/expulsion, where more rulings are in favour of the school. Where there is a clear policy, correctly drawn up, which has been followed precisely, the school is in a strong position to win an Appeal.

Music for Schools



A resource list of readily available recorded music which can be used with the *Follow Me* series will be available in the New Year. The list has been compiled from CDs already in use in many schools. It is hoped that providing this list of appropriate additional music for each lesson will make life easier for teachers.



Contact us

Jennifer Byrne:
Direct dial 01 4125624
E.Mail: jennifer.byrne@rcbdub.org

Vicki Hastie:
Direct dial 01 4125618
E.Mail: vicki.hastie@rcbdub.org

Church of Ireland Board of Education
Church of Ireland House
Church Avenue
Rathmines
Dublin 6

Main telephone line: 01 4978422
Fax: 01 4978821

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