Digital Schools Award Evaluation Report

School: Ardfert Central School, Ardfert, Co. Kerry.

Roll No: 19384C

Date of validation: 12/06/2018

Leadership & Vision:

The Ardfert Central School philosophy and vision on digital teaching methodologies is incorporated and integrated into the school plan. It is a comprehensive and holistic class structured vision embracing the following key elements which envisage:

- the enablement of staff and student awareness and competence.
- The development of skills to exploit digital technologies
- The use of same with a defined purpose and plan
- Stimulation of curiosity and imagination…..enriching children’s learning and enjoyment.
- Mediation of the national curriculum
- Creation of autonomous users in the school
- Development of partnerships beyond the school
- ICT as a medium of celebrating the school’s many successes.
- The understanding of e-safety.
- ICT as means of informing the community of the many events that happen in the day to day life of a busy school.
- Usage of ICT as a major tool in the SEN Sector.

Integration of ICT is seen in the pedagogies, in the management, in administration and in communications inter school and extra school.

There is a dedicated ICT co-ordinator who implements the programme. In conjunction with the principal and endorsed by The Board of Management the policy is constantly reviewed and updated due to the sheer dynamics of this medium. Apropos that latest
point the appreciation of Continual Professional Development is recognised and there is CPD support.

Inclusivity of SEN is more than well catered for and during my visit I observed and was informed of the evaluation process and selection of appropriate hardware and software for this sector.

A detailed chart outlines the tasks and functions aspired to across the whole range of classes.

A robust AUP is in place. The students throughout the school are aware of the benefits of the internet for research and its facilities for curriculum linkages but they are also aware of their responsibilities, Staff is aware of the various legislation in force relating to internet usage particularly the new data protection law. The ICT co-ordinator is aware of software licensing, password security and anti-virus and accordingly takes action.

**ICT in the Curriculum:**

A precise, immersive and progressive structure across the respective class sectors in the school outlines goals, consolidation of knowledge and what is expected in each successive level.

During my tour of the various classrooms I observed great examples of digital curriculum integration across a wide variety of age groups.

In the Junior section lovely examples of literacy and numeracy outputs were created by teams of students. I refer to one outstanding literacy theme running simultaneously through the room. This involved the development of a digital story. Brilliant diverse examples of characters, their moods, dress etc., contexts, backgrounds and sequencing were discussed, agreed on and produced using the SCRATCH software.

In the middle section strong examples of project work were observed here. While I was present I was introduced to an SESE-Geography project on comparing, contrasting and presenting. Online research was the basis for knowledge building and it was outputted in PowerPoint. The individual slides were very attention grabbing with a great aesthetic balance of flags, images and text. As an addendum to the creation and presentation an assessment tool, namely, Kahoot was used for assessment. These Kahoot assessments/quizzes were designed by the various teams and totally indigenous to the school.

Use of video and film as a teaching methodology is very strong in Ardfert Central School. There is a role for everybody in this medium. I observed actors/actresses, directors, camera people and producers. There is a high standard here. The technical side of the team is very advanced and terminology such as pan, tilt, long shot, mid shot, near shot are everyday words in the students’ vocabulary. Over the years the school has built up a national reputation in this medium.
In the Senior section I observed several activities using the vast range of apps in the school. Apart from usage in the national curriculum areas (I observed apps in Maths) widespread usage of apps are used for co-curricular activities and extra-curricular activities of a local and national activities such as JEP, Green Schools, Blue Flag, Active Schools, Listowel Writers’ Week, Scriobh Leabhar, Science Projects, Creative Schools and Fresh Film Festival, all digitally mediated.

In my conversation with the SEN teachers I was introduced to the various apps used in this area of special needs. Particularly impressive were the video apps used for the hard of hearing. Very exhaustive research and evaluation was undertaken in the procurement of resources consistent with the requirements of the students. Seomra Ranga and [www.scoilnet.ie](http://www.scoilnet.ie) is also accessed for SEN teaching.

**School ICT Culture:**

It is apparent and palpable that ICT plays a dynamic role in the school. Each classroom is equipped with an IWB and software relative to the class group and the respective curricular areas. The corridors and classroom walls exhibit great examples of digital images. There is also a well-equipped computer room where I observed teams of pupils working on collaborative projects. Laptops, tablets and apps are seamlessly accepted tools of the everyday school life. Film production is very strong in the school and has been for years through the Fís programme. Several of the school’s films are available on the youtube channel and any viewer will be impressed by the concepts, quality and technical expertise therein. Digital planning, sharing and storage are all part of the fabric of the school’s pedagogical life. This is equally true in the areas of administration and management. The Aladdin software package is used for administration. The school has a very attractive and informative website which receives a lot of attention. School work and students’ work is strongly featured. The site is relevant, current and authentic and constantly updated. The involvement in a vast array of local and national projects, activities and events further amplifies the school’s ICT culture.

**Professional Development:**

There is a very high level of pedagogical ICT expertise amongst the staff. The ICT co-ordinator is very up to date on ICT theory and emergent technologies, on criteria for digital schools, the national strategy. I also had a good conversation with her on the Digital Learning Framework (DLF). The school recognises the everchanging developments in technology. The school also has very strong relation with The Education Centre, Tralee and engages in many of the centre’s promotions. For many years customised courses based on staff needs analysis have been conducted to satisfy staff requirements. These have been extremely well attended. Another one of these courses will be held in the school starting on Monday 2nd July 2018 and is already subscribed. As outlined earlier in this report CPD is an element of the school’s vision and philosophy.
A major development in the school during the coming year is its role as project lead school in a newly formed cluster that will explore VR and AR. This will deal with the exploration of Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality, immersive experience, teacher directed lessons and station teaching.

**Resources & Infrastructure:**

Ardfert Central School is very well resourced with a fine inventory of devices including IWBs, projectors, desktops, laptops, tablets, i-pads, visualisers, digital audio, printers, cameras, digi cams. I must make particular reference to the excellent film making equipment and associated software which would do justice to a commercial film studio. The device to pupil ratio is well above national expectation.

There is also a wide range of age related, class related, age and ability appropriate licensed software. Antivirus protection is in place. There is a wide range of specially evaluated educational apps for pupils with special educational needs.

Internet access is through the Schools Broadband Network.

**General comments and recommendations**

Outputs, projects and activities were consistent with the objectives documented in the cover letter ICT policy and AUP.

The school is a great example of digital integration of teaching, learning and assessment. The level of competence amongst teachers and students is showcased in outputs which are great examples in creativity, collaboration, critical thinking and communication. A feature of my visit was the willingness of the students both male and female to “show and tell” their achievements such as sporting, technological, community and heritage. The school meets all the criteria necessary for the coveted dignity of a Digital School of Distinction Award and with continual participation in new and exciting projects we will, no doubt hear a lot more about it in the future.

I would like to thank Principal, Mrs. Betty Stack, her ICT Co-ordinator Marie O’Connell, her staff academic and secretarial and the students for an engaging and informative visit.

**Scoring.**

The visit validated the statements on the school’s Self Evaluation Review.

Thomas Roche M.Sc.
(DSoD Validator)