Saint Louis Secondary School,
Carrickmacross.

ICT Policy

This policy document sets out the aims, principles and strategies for the delivery of Information and Communication Technology in Saint Louis Secondary School Carrickmacross. It will form the basis for the development of ICT in the school in the period 2008 – 2012.

Introduction
ICT has become an integral and accepted part of everyday life to such an extent that ICT literacy is rapidly becoming a functional requirement for people's work, social and personal lives.

We use the term *information and communication technology* to include the use of any equipment which allows the user to communicate or manipulate information electronically. It includes the range of hardware and software devices and programmes such as personal computers, assistive technology, scanners, digital cameras, multimedia programmes, image editing software, database and spreadsheet programmes. It also includes the communications equipment through which people seek and access information including the Internet, email and video conferencing.

ICT prepares students to participate in a rapidly changing world in which work and other activities are increasingly transformed by access to this varied and developing technology. Students should learn to use ICT to find, explore, analyse, exchange and present information responsibly, creatively and with discrimination. Increased capability in the use of ICT should promote initiative and independent learning with students being able to make informed judgements about when and where to use ICT to best effect and consider its implications for home and work both now and in the future.

Aims:
The overall aim for ICT in the school is to enrich and enhance the learning experiences of students and to ensure that teachers develop the confidence and competence to use ICT in the effective teaching of their subject

Infrastructure and Resources

The school's ICT infrastructure has undergone considerable change in recent years in response to the growing awareness of, and reliance on, ICT in all areas of society. The school recognizes, of course, that ICT infrastructure is not a substitute for teaching; rather it is a resource that can enhance the learning environment for both students and teachers whilst simultaneously developing skills that will benefit both. From a single room containing twenty or so PCs running *Windows 3.1* in 1999 the school's investment, along with grants from the Department of Education and Science, has seen this number grow to over sixty personal computers.

There are two dedicated computer suites in the school.

PC Room

27 networked PC's all with Internet access
Two Printers
One Scanner
One Data Projector

The PC Room is used to deliver the ECDL syllabus to Transition Year Students. It is also used for junior school timetabled classes. Outside of these hours the room is available for use by teachers of general subjects. This room is secure and cannot be accessed by students without teacher supervision. The school relies on the HEA's filtering service to protect students and staff when using the Internet. See Appendix 1 for the school's *Acceptable Use Policy*.

Machintosh Room

X Networked Macs all with Internet access
Two Printers
One Scanner
One Date Projector

Principally, Transition Year students taking a Media Studies module use this suite. Material is shot using digital camcorders and imported and edited using *iMovie* software on the Macintosh computers. The finished movies are displayed as part of the annual Transition Year Night.
Both suites have blackout blinds to maximise the effect of the data projectors.

Specialist Rooms:

ICT is also used to enhance the learning environment in a number of specialist rooms at different locations throughout the school.

Guidance & Careers Department:

Two networked PC's
One Laser Printer
Broadband Internet access
The Internet is an invaluable resource in guidance and career planning. The most regularly used sites are:
www.qualifax.ie
www.cao.ie
www.ucas.co.uk

The main uses are course searches linked to college websites and on-line application. Qualifax is a database of third-level and further education courses in Southern and Northern Ireland. Detailed information on all courses, links to colleges and other training and education websites and a definitive calendar of career events are supplied. Senior students use this site in excess of thirty times a day.

See Appendix 2 for a more comprehensive account of ICT usage in the Guidance Department.

Learning Support Department

Both of these rooms utilized for learning support are equipped with a computer. These computers are used for the administrative work, such as the development of IEP's using specialist software, and also for students receiving support.

ICT is used within the Learning Support Department in order to enhance the literacy and numeracy skills of those students with learning difficulties, depending on a pupil's individual needs. It is a good visual medium; it is consistent and can be motivational for students when used correctly.

See Appendix 3 for a more comprehensive account of ICT usage in the Learning Support Department.

Interactive Whiteboard Classroom

The school purchased an interactive *Cleverboard 3* whiteboard in 2007. This was installed in a classroom with a ceiling fixed data projector, dedicated pc, interactive tablet for student participation, and audio equipment. This room has wireless internet access and is located in a part of the school that minimizes the impact of sound. Specialist educational interactive software, *Lynx*, is installed and teachers have received basic instruction from the vendors and follow-up instruction provided by the school. It has proved a great success with students and teachers and the school has plans to purchase at least one or more board for the coming year. It is particularly useful for subjects with a strong visual element such as Art Appreciation, Geography, Film Studies, etc

School Network, General Equipment and Broadband Internet Access

The school is networked on a pier-to-pier system. The current mixture of different operating systems such as Windows 2000, XP and Vista means that a domain-based client/server network is not possible, however, the main use of the network is to share the school broadband access and to allow teachers to enter examination results from different location on a *Facility* system. There are also laptops and portable data projectors available from the Office on a sign-out basis. The wireless internet access in seventy five per cent of the school enhances the use of this portable equipment. Teachers can also use the digital camera and the digital camcorders to record school trips for CSPE, LCVP projects, fieldwork and school work. The school avails of the *Schools Broadband Initiative*.

ICT and Whole Class Teaching

The school offers an extensive range of subjects to all incoming first years in keeping with best practice. As a result there is considerable pressure on the timetable. Students have one timetabled period of computer per week in second year. However, all students will visit the PC suites with subject teachers throughout their Junior Certificate years.

All Transition Year students must take the ECDL exams. The school has been a qualified ECDL test centre since 2002 and four of the staff members are qualified instructors. Students pay a set fee of fifty euro, which covers the cost of the ECDL registration, the use of the textbook, the use of a USB memory key and the correction of exams. The integrity of the exam system is assured as none of the instructors correct their own students' papers. The school is currently achieving completion rates of sixty-five percent, above the national average. The school has been audited by ECDL Ireland on two occasions and was highly commended for its success in delivering the course.

The school would like to be in a position to offer more ICT classes to its students but timetable exigencies mean a third computer room would be needed to free up time slots. The school intends to equip individual rooms with internet access and projection capability to overcome this difficulty. See *Future Developments*.

ICT and the Curriculum

It is clear that all subjects can benefit from the use of ICT. However, it is also important to recognize that the use of ICT is incidental rather than central to the learning experience. Thus teachers are encouraged to integrate ICT into their teaching where they judge the use of computers to be beneficial. To facilitate this demand the two dedicated computer suites are available for use by all staff on a booking system. In these rooms teachers and students can use the internet access, printing facilities and data projector as teaching aids, a means of independent research or to access specialist websites or use preloaded subject-specific software. Students receive basic computer training in second year and through ECDL in Transition Year so they are better equipped to maximise the potential of the room. ICT has been used in recent years to enhance the learning experience for students in a wide range of subjects. The exemplars that follow show what is possible when integrating ICT into the teaching of curricular subjects.

Home Economics

The internet is used as a research tool for assignments- especially by fifth year students when completing their five food studies assignments for Leaving Certificate.

When completing design briefs that accompany craftwork second and third years use ICT for presentation of their work.

The interactive whiteboard and date projector are used to deliver a module to Transition Year students entitled "Safe Food for Life" which is available on CD. On

completion of this module students have the opportunity to sit *the Environmental Health Officers' Primary Food Hygiene* examination online.

Music

The Music department is currently using software called *Finale.* It is an option for Leaving Certificate music students to choose as part of their music practical. The programme allows all students to create sheet music using the pc.

English

The pc room and the internet are used to integrate the enjoyment of English with ICT skills. First Year students of English use the PC's to word process their novel reviews, which are then enhanced using information gathered from the web about the author. They then use the digital camera to add their photographs to the finished reviews, which are printed, bound and placed in the library for other students. In the course of typing the review, the students become more competent with the ICT facilities.

School Life and ICT

Along with more obvious points of contact between ICT and learning, the general life of the school is also enhanced by ICT. The school operates a computerized attendance recording system, *Facility*. The system is enabled to allow teachers to enter examination results for house exams electronically at a number of locations in the school.

The school website, recently redesigned, www.stlouiscmx.com has been live since 2001 and it allows visitors to the site to check school policies, dates for school events or simply see photographs of events their children participated in.

From time to time the school participates in projects, which attempt to use ICT in a very concerted way to augment pupils' learning experiences. One such project was the recent commemoration of the centenary of Patrick Kavanagh's birth 2004. Given the proximity of the school to Kavanagh's birthplace in Inniskeen, four subject teachers (Geography, Home Economics and English) took up the invitation from the Monaghan Education Centre to take part in an ambitious NCTE funded project. The resulting work, a combination of websites, movies, presentations and photo galleries are all captured, prepared and delivered using ICT whilst simultaneously examining some aspect of the poet's life and the time he lived in. The overall project, involving a mixture of primary and post-primary schools in the region won a Golden Spider award and was one of only a number of projects nominated from Ireland for an EU award recognizing excellence in ICT in the school. The finished projects can be seen at www.patrickkavanaghschoolsproject.ie

The annual school musical is filmed, edited and rendered using digital camcorders and *iMovie* software. Students can then buy copies of their musical and the profits are used to purchases new ICT equipment.

Students use the ICT facilities to prepare liturgies for the school mass and the Taize Christmas celebration. They also can use the school facilities to complete assignments or create posters and notices for Mini-Company, St. Vincent de Paul, etc.

Teaching Staff – Competencies and Professional Development

Many of the forty members of staff have completed the Post-Primary Phase II ICT courses provided by the Department of Education and Science. A good number have also participated in the *Intel Teach to The Future* programme. The school is an accredited ECDL test centre with four members of staff fully qualified ECDL instructors. Mr. Dave Phelan is an official ADE (*Apple Distinguished Educator*) and as such has deliver courses throughout Ireland to teachers of ICT and Geography. His passion for ICT has allowed our LCVP students to be among the first in Ireland to submit all portfolio work on CD using *Hyperstudio*. Ms. Kathleen Tinnelly has recently completed a Masters in Information Technology at the University of Ulster and her project work in Home Economics is currently on the teachnet.ie website. Those staff members with a particular interest in ICT and teaching have undertaken courses in website design, digital photography and digital media editing offered in the local Education Centres.

Maintenance

The ICT co-ordinator, where possible, maintains the ICT infrastructure. A number of scheduled classes are set aside to allow for the updating of anti-virus signatures, inspection of hardware and the general maintenance of the equipment and the network. More serious problems are dealt with by a local IT support company where finances allow. It is clear that this is not a wholly satisfactory situation. The provision of a dedicated ICT support service would allow ICT co-ordinators to focus on enhancing and maximising the pedagogical benefits of technology in education. It is the intention of the school management that a balance should be struck between time devoted to troubleshooting, time spent devising ICT-based strategies to enhance learning and time dedicated to ensuring staff are appraised of the potential of using ICT to deliver the syllabus, where appropriate.

Role of the ICT Co-Ordinator

The ICT co-ordinator post currently attracts a *Special Duties Post* allowance. In essence, this allow for approximately two hours per week to discharge the duties of the post. The aforementioned lack of technical support/maintenance across the second level school system ensures that much of the time the co-ordinator is dealing with technical problems. Notwithstanding this, the role of the co-ordinator is to ensure that equipment is working properly and that problems are attended to. Strategically, the co-ordinator liaises with management in decisions about future developments and purchasing of equipment.

With the addition of newer technologies, such as an interactive whiteboard, there is a role for the co-ordinator in introducing staff to the technology and its pedagogical possibilities. In the past this has taken the form of tutorials on using and exploiting the technology offered to all staff by the co-ordinator. It is envisaged that this aspect of the co-ordinator's role will continue in the future.

Future Development

The welcome increase in demand for access to the dedicated computer suites has made it impossible to facilitate all timetable requests to use the rooms. To accommodate the ever-increasing demand on ICT resources in the school, an agreement was reached between staff and management to undertake a new phase of ICT development for the 2008 academic year. Rather than using funding to further enhance the existing computer suites staff expressed a desire to enable teaching classrooms instead. The majority of the teaching staff now own laptop computers. In addition, the school has continued to exploit the benefits of the *School Broadband Initiative* by extending the network to areas of the campus not previously served. The net result is that many of the classes are Internet enabled and many teachers are prepared to use ICT in their classes to enhance learning. To capitalise on these changes, permanent ceiling/mounted data projectors were installed in five new locations. This simultaneously allows ICT to become an everyday resource, with which the students will become familiar, whilst overcoming the difficulty of excessive demand on the dedicated computer suites. This recent development demonstrates the school's commitment to keep pace with the demands placed on it by the rapidly changing nature of ICT and many improvements have taken place. In the very near future the school would hope to expand the network to all teaching areas. This is a considerable challenge given the discrete nature of many of the school buildings and the general layout of the campus and hence the problems this presents for wireless or cabled networking. Information regarding professional development courses run by the respective Education Centres is routinely publicized on staff notice boards and there is a strong tradition of staff member uptake on these courses.

The question of resources, the need for more ICT staff training and timetable pressures mean the search for the best balance between the use of ICT and enhancing the learning environment will continue into the future. The school aims, through consultation with all stakeholders, to review its ICT Policy in the future to meet the ongoing challenge of integrating ICT into all aspects of school life.