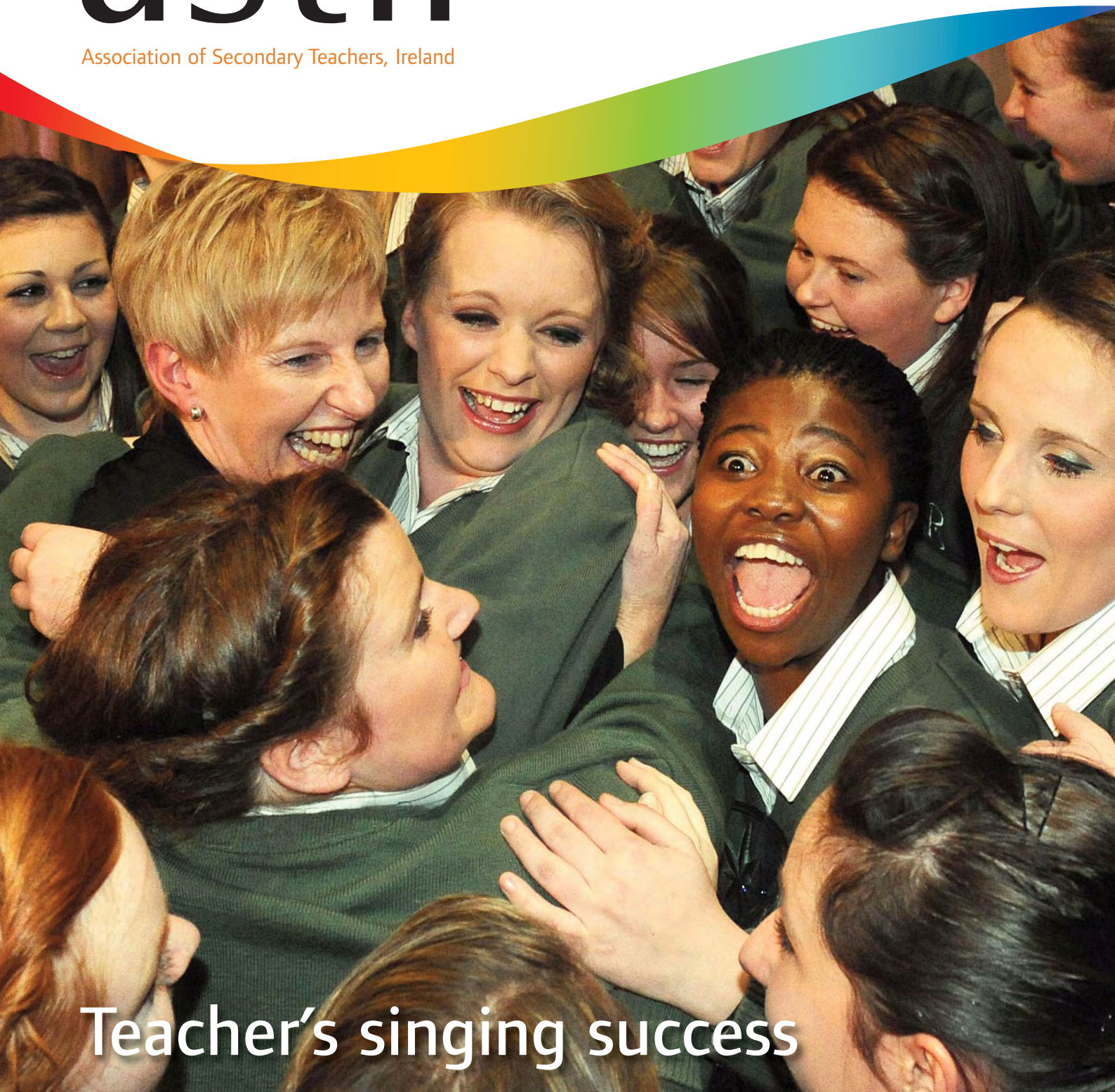


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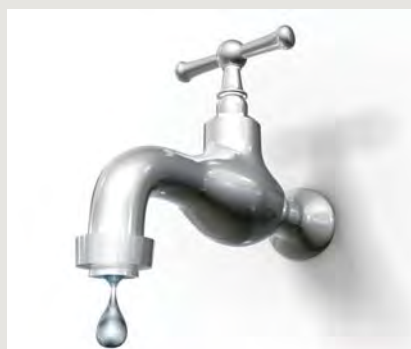
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Cover photo: Teacher Anne Dunphy with her students from Presentation Secondary School, Ballyphehane, Co. Cork, who won the All-Ireland School Choir Competition in November. (See page 11.)

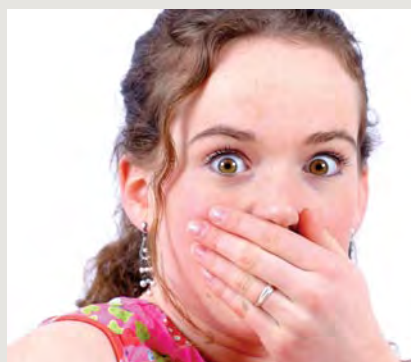
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An unbalanced budget

Budget 2011 has dealt another devastating blow to schools, second-level students, and the teaching profession.

It is appalling that the Government has not only hit education once more, but has targeted some of the most vulnerable students in our schools. We are all too aware that our students and children will be burdened with repaying a debt they had no part in creating throughout their working lives. But the Government expects them to start paying now by underfunding their schools, by taking teachers away, and by diminishing their chances to make the most of their second-level education.

Senseless loss of jobs

Five hundred second-level teaching posts will be lost from 2011 through a range of measures, including an increase in pupil-teacher ratio for LCVP classes, the withdrawal of resource teachers for Traveller students, the removal of language support teachers, and the deferral of the 150 extra teachers promised under the Revised Programme for Government (see page 6).

At a time when many of our teacher graduates find themselves unemployed and forced to leave the country to find work, this Budget takes even more employment opportunities away. Meanwhile, our students are left in classes of upwards of 30 students, their subject and programme choices are restricted, and their classes are amalgamated. The best solution for all sides is glaringly obvious but our Government, once again, ignores the better, fairer way.

New teachers hit hard

The Government's Four Year Plan for recovery creates a 'second class' of teacher. Those entering teaching from 2011 will be paid 10% less than those already in the profession. New teachers will also be forced to pay into a greatly diminished pension scheme, which will see them pay more, work longer and get less. This plan further disadvantages young teachers, who are already struggling

to secure full-time work and a decent income. Again the Government is clearly demonstrating who they want to pay for the crisis – the young and the vulnerable. The ASTI is very concerned about the damage this inequality will do to the teaching profession.

Work placement scheme

Teaching numbers are being reduced budget after budget. Add to that greatly reduced pay and poorer conditions for new teachers, and it is very difficult to see how teaching can continue to attract the top calibre graduates required to maintain the high standard of our education service.

The announcement of a work placement scheme, which will allow schools to employ unemployed teachers on an unpaid basis, will do nothing to provide employment opportunities for young teachers or give them access to a proper career structure. Every ASTI member must be vigilant in ensuring that this scheme does not lead to the displacement of existing teaching posts, or the exploitation of unemployed teachers (see page 12).

New Year's resolution – use your vote

The ASTI is asking all members to make a resolution to vote in the upcoming General Election. In this issue of *ASTIR*, we ask the political parties to tell us about their education priorities. Read what they had to say on page 16.

Ask the same question of your local candidates when they arrive on your doorstep. Find out where they stand on the issues that are important to you and your profession, and make sure they know where you stand.

Croke Park Agreement

Intensive discussions on the Croke Park Agreement are ongoing as this edition of *ASTIR* goes to print. These talks do not indicate an acceptance of the Croke Park deal but are concerned with clarifying how aspects of the Agreement would operate in schools, should the deal be accepted. In these talks, the ASTI will always seek to serve members' best interests and protect working conditions. Any outcome reached will be put to a ballot of members. Keep an eye on the ASTI website for developments – www.asti.ie.



Jack Keane

ASTI President

Getting the message out

ASTI General Secretary PAT KING says that all teachers have a role to play in emphasising the importance of protecting our education service.

A message for politicians

Ireland has a long tradition of under-funding its education service, as evidenced by OECD reports, which chart and compare investment in education by countries throughout the world on an annual basis. These OECD reports show that even during the Celtic Tiger era, Irish governments failed to give education its due priority. Spending in our schools may have increased during this time, but we continued to lag shamefully behind our international counterparts.

Despite this, our poorly resourced schools were hit with savage cuts over a series of budgets. The fall-out from all of this is that today second-level schools are operating in survival mode – literally getting by from month to month. Schools have dropped subjects and amalgamated classes. Pastoral care and administrative work are suffering. Staffrooms are hoping that fundraising efforts and charitable donations will enable schools to pay the bills.

This should not be how schools are forced to operate. Education is the key to our emergence from recession; funding for education is an investment, not an expense. Schools should not have to worry about being able to pay electricity bills or heat classrooms. They should be concerned with providing the best possible service to our young people. Our schools deserve investment now to allow them to get on with that task and to pave the way for the future.

Young teachers

Young teachers are having a particularly hard time. Following graduation, 95% of our young second-level teachers spend between five and eight years in precarious employment before acquiring a full-time secure teaching position. This situation is set to worsen with the loss of 500 second-level teaching posts in September 2011 (announced in Budget 2011). Many young teachers do not receive a full income and have found the imposition of the pay cut and pension levy extremely burdensome.

Standing up for future teachers

The ASTI believes that the future of teaching in Ireland is in jeopardy because of the stripping of resources from schools, the denigration of public servants (including teachers) and, most recently, the decision to introduce inferior pay

and conditions to new public service entrants from 2011. A pay cut of 10% and the loss of salary increments mean that teachers entering the profession this year will earn 14% less. In addition to this, these same teachers will be forced to join a revised pension scheme, which will have them paying more into the scheme in contributions than they will receive in pension benefits. The creation of a two-tier system within the teaching profession will be devastating for the education service. Teachers already in the system – who have experienced a 14% cut in their pay (pension levy and pay cut) and a worsening of working conditions – will work alongside younger teachers who have it even worse. The morale of all will be deeply affected. Entry to teaching and the retention of teachers will be affected. In the end, students will suffer.

Your story can make a difference

During the past two years, the ASTI has campaigned vigorously against cuts to education and the pay of public servants. We have campaigned with our colleagues in the INTO, TUI and IFUT, and have participated in the ICTU Better, Fairer Way campaign. Many have supported us along the way. Fifty thousand parents, teachers and members of the public took to the streets for the Schools United demonstration in December 2008. More than 50,000 came out to support the ICTU Better, Fairer Way march in November 2010. But the message is not getting through to the Government. The challenge for the teaching profession is to create a deeper awareness and understanding of why education must be protected. This is a complex message that cannot be delivered in a slogan. It requires classroom teachers – with their real life experiences, knowledge and stories – to be a key voice in the debate. We must all be part of the message.

The upcoming General Election provides an important opportunity for teachers to act together. Politicians will be calling to our doors, there will be phone-in radio programmes, there will be on-line discussions and blogs, and there will be chats outside the local supermarket. The theme for all of us working in education is that schools should not just survive: they should thrive. The message is your story.

Croke Park talks

At the time of going to print, talks involving the ASTI, TUI, school management bodies and the Department on the Croke Park Agreement are nearing completion. ASTI members will receive full information on the outcome of these talks and a ballot of members will then take place. Each ASTI member has a duty to exercise his or her right to vote in this important ballot.



Pat King

ASTI General Secretary

Budget 2011 – what does it mean for you?

ASTIR offers a breakdown of the effects Budget 2011 will have on teachers and schools.

Your income

Changes to taxes, tax credits and tax bands announced in Budget 2011 will have a significant impact on your pay packet.

Taxation

The reduction of the standard rate tax band means that you will be paying the higher rate of tax on more of your income. Tax credits have also been reduced. Tax credits operate as a discount against your tax liability. Employee and personal tax credits, along with others, have been reduced. This means that you will now pay more income tax. Many tax reliefs, including relief for trade union subscriptions, have also been abolished.

Universal Social Charge

Under budget measures, the Health Levy and Income Levy have been abolished and replaced by a new Universal Social Charge. This will apply at the following rates to your gross income:

- 0% if you have an income less than €4,004
- 2% on income up to €10,036
- 4% on income between €10,037 and €16,016
- 7% on income above €16,016

Pension relief

PRSI

PRSI rates remain unchanged for most; however, relief for the amount you pay towards your pension and through the pension levy has been abolished for the calculation of PRSI. This means that from January 1, PRSI and the Universal Social Charge will be charged on all of your income.

Income tax

There is no change to income tax relief for pension contributions for 2011. However, pension tax relief will be reduced from 2012 as follows: from 41% to 34% in 2012; to 27% in 2013; and, to 20% in 2014. Currently, you can claim up to 41% tax relief on pension contributions. Because you don't pay tax on the amount you pay into your pension, you effectively save 41% or 20% of that amount, depending on your tax rate. The reduction in tax relief means that by 2014, the tax relief for pension contributions will be 20% for all, regardless of your tax rate.

For full information on the Budget 2011 measures affecting you, see the Budget section on the ASTI website – www.asti.ie.

Your family

Budget measures will impact on your family expenses.

The post-primary charge for school transport will be increased to €350, and a €50 fee will apply at primary level, subject to a maximum family charge of €650. A flat higher education student contribution of €2,000 will apply from 2011. A €200 charge will apply for PLC students. The higher student service charge will only apply to one child in a family at any one time.

There will be a 4% reduction in the rates of student grants, and to qualify for the non-adjacent grant rate, students will have to live over 45km from their college, rather than 24km as previously applied.

Your school

Short-sighted budget measures will impact on disadvantaged students, teacher numbers and school funds. A 5% reduction in capitation funding leaves schools struggling to cope with day-to-day running costs such as power and heat. 150 much needed extra teachers promised for September 2011 under the Revised Programme for Government will not be allocated. LCVP students will suffer as the favourable pupil-teacher ratio for LCVP is scrapped. Traveller students will be further disadvantaged as the Visiting Teachers for Travellers Service is to be withdrawn from September 2011 and resource teachers for Travellers at second level will be lost. 500 language support teacher jobs will be lost over four years. Altogether, second-level schools will lose approximately 500 posts in September 2011. For full details of Budget impacts on the education service see www.asti.ie.

Your profession

This budget has hit teachers and public servants once again.

The salary scale for new teachers is reduced by 10%. New teachers will now start on the first point of the scale. This means that a new teacher appointed in 2011 will be paid over €5,000 less than a new teacher appointed in 2010.

A less favourable pension scheme will be introduced for new teachers from 2011. Up to 500 teaching jobs will be lost due to reductions in the pupil-teacher ratio for LCVP classes, the loss of language support teachers and resource teachers for Travellers, and the Government's failure to follow through on the 150 extra teachers promised for September 2011 under the Revised Programme for Government.

Public service pensions

The grace period for the "pre pay cut salary pension calculation" is extended to the end of February 2012.

A pension cut of an average of 4% will apply to existing public service pensioners and those who retired before February 2010 and up to the end of February 2012.

The average reduction in pensions for those who retire after 2012 is 7%, i.e., the salary scale post pay cut is used for pension calculation. There has been no cut to the lump sum and only lump sums over €200,000 will be taxed.

For teachers retiring after February 2012, the lump sum will be based on post-cut salary.

Members' voices

ASTI members took to the snowy streets in protest against the Government's budget plans in November. We asked them why they braved the cold and what they hoped to achieve.



Pictured at the ICTU demonstration (from left): Ann Piggott; Roisin Curtis; Emer Murphy; Aoife Curtis; and, Francis Foyle.

Roisin Curtis

St Mary's Diocesan School, Drogheda

I'm fed up with the cuts and everything – I just want to make a stand. We're being hit left, right and centre. As a teacher I'm angry about the education cuts and things like class size, but as well as that I'm being hit with higher costs, taxes, charges and rates. Protests like this show the Government how we feel. One voice doesn't have much power but the thousands together can make a difference.

Emer Murphy

Catholic University School, Dublin

So many cuts have already been made and people can't afford to take any more. It seems unfair too; it always seems to be the same people who are hit. I don't know what this protest will achieve, but if we are seen to accept what happens, and never show opposition, the cuts might be worse and it will seem as if we don't care. Maybe we won't achieve anything, but we can let the Government see how disgusted we are and that might make a difference.

Francis Foyle

Dundalk Grammar School

I'm here to add to the evidence that there's a body of opinion that supports a different response to the banking crisis. Demonstrations like today let the marchers know they should keep going when they get back to their workplace. Also, I've run into some old friends; that's made for a good day!

Ann Piggott

Kenmare Community School, Kerry

I'm protesting today to send a message to a government that is entirely out of touch with the people they supposedly represent. Public servants have already experienced two severe pay cuts, €15.4 billion has been clawed in by the Minister for Finance in three callous budgets, and no effort is being made to create jobs or stimulate work. The 2011 budget will squeeze another six billion out of the pockets of hard-pressed people in our society, resulting in a further deflationary depression and more businesses closing their doors. Placards here today exhibit anger towards the banks and a lack of affection for this government. Despite the weather conditions, so many people have turned up to voice their frustration, anger, fear and disbelief to a government that has presided while this mess unfolded and whose actions have worsened the situation.

By getting huge numbers onto the streets we show elected representatives how strongly people feel about issues; this may lead to a reduction in the severity of measures to be imposed now or in the future. While this march was organised by the ICTU, many other groups stood side by side with trade unionists to voice common concerns.

The demonstration showed the strength of the people and the palpable anger of protestors was evident in the midst of a peaceful march. The eyes of the world looked on this rally. If nothing else, it warned our government that people power can generate attention. There was also a determined focus by all participants that we would willingly and readily assemble in the future.

For more images of the November 27 protest, see overleaf.

ASTI members march for a better way



A 50,000-strong crowd participated in November's protest march.



ASTI General Secretary Pat King and Jack O'Connor, ICTU President.



ASTI members: Mary Lyndon; Liz Crumme; Micheal O'Neill; Ann Piggot; Gerry Breslin; and, Sally Maguire.



ASTI General Secretary Pat King; Gerry Breslin, Sligo Branch; and Philip Irwin, Dublin South 1 Branch.



A view of the crowd from the roof of ASTI Head Office.



Marie Doyle, President of the Retired Secondary Teachers' Association.

Top of the class



Each year the ASTI awards the top students in the PGDE courses in each of the universities. Pictured at the presentation in DCU are: Moira Leydon, ASTI Assistant General Secretary; Dr Joe O'Hara, Head of Education Studies, DCU; Denise Mulhaire, joint winner; Dr Sarahjane Belton, DCU; and, Colm O'Coileain, joint winner.

Branch retirement function



Pictured at a Wicklow Branch retirement function are: retirees Mary Kenny; Jean Tyrrell; Daniel Murphy; Eddie Nolan; Pat Cronin; Sadie Sheehy; Gabrielle Devine; and, Breda Donnelly in lieu of Stephen Donnelly.

ASTI representing members

Important decision for CID claims

An adjudication under the Transitional Agreement awarded a CID to a member who was employed last year as a fixed-term teacher to replace a teacher on sick leave, but who was refused a CID in May 2010 for reasons unconnected to this fact and for reasons that were incorrect. This teacher was refused a CID in May 2010 for the stated reason that: "The appellant does not have appropriate continuous teaching service in an Oireachtas post in the school". This was incorrect, as the member had been employed out of Oireachtas funds. Furthermore, she is currently employed in her own right. This decision demonstrates that while a member may not meet all the requirements for the award of a CID, a particular element of his/her contract or a particular ground for refusal of a CID may actually result in the award of a CID, or 'save' the claim for a CID. In advising members, the individual circumstances of each case are examined and are used to the best advantage of the member.

ASTI members win European eLearning Awards!



Pictured at the presentation of their awards are Donal O'Mahony and Conor Kelly, along with the winners from eight other countries.

Two Irish teachers have been rewarded for their innovative use of technology in education by the European Schoolnet eLearning Awards. Conor Kelly, teacher at Moyle Park College, won the Gold Award for Outstanding Teachers for his project, which involved classes of students in different countries making a literary film – see www.iol.ie/~kellyc. Portmarnock Community School's Donal O'Mahony was awarded the European Bronze Award for Europe's Digital Heritage for his project in which each of his Junior Cert history students created a blog about a historical figure – see historypcs.edublogs.org. Schools from nine countries were rewarded for excellent use of ICT in education at the eLearning Awards ceremony. The eLearning Awards will take place again in 2011. For more information see www.eun.org.

ASTI member wins prize



Congratulations to Fiona Watts, ASTI member and teacher in Jesus and Mary Secondary School, Crossmolina, Co. Mayo, who recently won €8,000 in the Cornmarket public sector draw. Fiona is pictured receiving her prize from Dermot Ryan, Galway Manager, Cornmarket.

Teacher discriminated against due to religion

The Equality Tribunal has awarded €12,000 to a primary school teacher who was discriminated against because of her religion. The Tribunal found that Knocktemple National School in Virginia, Co. Cavan, discriminated against the teacher when she applied for a job at the school in 2007. The teacher, who is a member of the Church of Ireland, was offered a permanent job at Knocktemple National School, which is a Catholic school. Soon after, she was questioned about holding the Catholic Religion Certificate, and the offer was withdrawn. The teacher, supported by her union the INTO, took a discrimination case to the Equality Tribunal contending that religion has become a factor in the appointment procedure. The Equality Tribunal upheld her claim and found that not only was the teacher's religion discussed, but it also influenced the school board of management in withdrawing the offer that had been made. The ASTI is committed to promoting equality in all aspects of education, including the employment of teachers. If you feel that you have been discriminated against, contact us. See www.asti.ie.

ASTI member and Mayor

ASTI member Councillor Joe Ryan is the current Mayor of Wexford. Councillor Ryan teaches in Wexford CBS, where he has also served as ASTI school steward.

A key part of Councillor Ryan's work as Mayor was in preparing for the celebration of the centenary of the Wexford Lock Out. The Lock Out occurred when foundry owners refused to recognise the right of workers to join a trade union of their choice. The involvement of trade unions will be central to marking the event, says Councillor Ryan: "We feel that the conditions that inspired workers to join a trade union a century ago still remain important values to this day".

€23m in grants for high-tech classrooms

Second-level schools are to receive €23 million in grants for high-tech equipment as part of the Government's strategy to make technology an integral part of the learning process.

This funding is the second phase of funding for the second-level sector, which recently received almost €21 million in grants. This funding is vital and long over due, says ASTI General Secretary, Pat King:

"During the years of the Celtic Tiger, our second-level students had the lowest access to technology in classrooms, compared to their European peers ... The integration of new technologies into teaching and learning will ensure that our young people are leaving school well equipped for the modern workplace, which relies more and more on technology."

Schools will each receive a base grant of €1,700 and a payment of €70.22 per capita, which will enable the schools to purchase equipment. DEIS schools will receive a higher basic grant of €2,550.

All-Ireland School Choir Competition winners



Presentation Secondary School, Ballyphehane, Co. Cork, was named winner of the All-Ireland School Choir Competition in November. ASTI member and Choir Director Anne Dunphy (pictured above with President Mary McAleese and her students) said after the announcement: "We are absolutely delighted. The school will be so proud, as will the whole of Cork. Congratulations to all the girls who worked so hard to make tonight such a success".

Pension levy overpayment

In May 2009, the pension levy paid by those earning less than €15,000 per annum was reduced from 3% to 0%.

The ASTI has made representations on behalf of teachers who earned less than €15,000 and had the pension levy deducted in error. The Department of Education and Skills informed the ASTI that the pension levy is deducted automatically from salary and a balancing exercise is carried out on a cumulative basis. Overpayments for 2009 were due to be refunded on November 18.

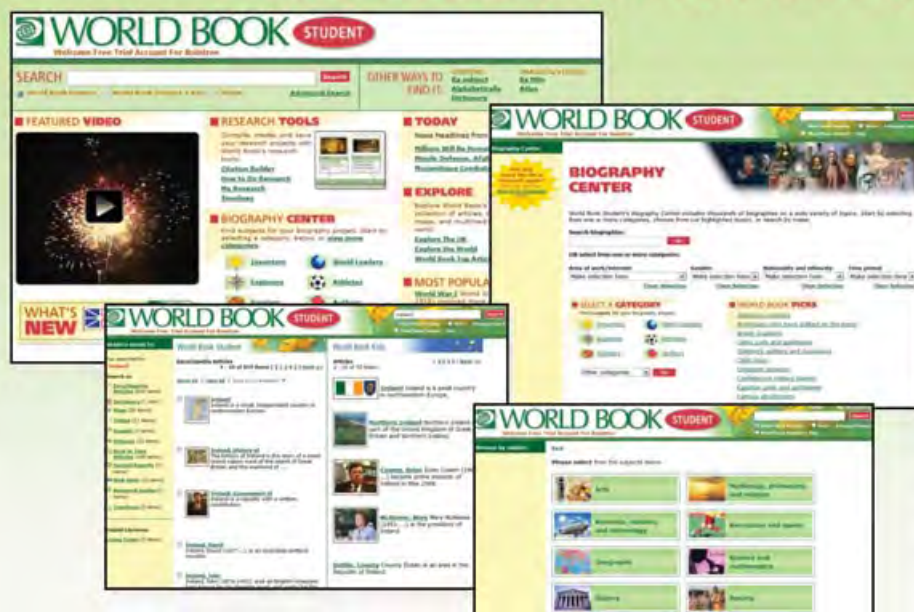
If a levy was deducted from your salary in error and you have not received a refund, contact your ASTI union official, who will contact the Department on your behalf.

Dineen's Dictionary

December 25 was the 150th anniversary of the birth of Fr Patrick Dineen, the lexicographer and author of the first Irish/English dictionary.

Fr Dineen was a teacher for much of his career, as well as a leading figure in the Irish Texts Society. His best-known work – especially to students and teachers of Irish – was his Irish/English dictionary, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla*, which was first published in 1904.

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Work Placement Scheme – a cynical exercise in presenting a concern for unemployed teachers

The extension of the FÁS Work Placement Programme will allow schools to offer unpaid work experience to unemployed teachers and other job seekers.

The ASTI has expressed concerns about this programme, given that its announcement came in the wake of the announcement of the Government's four-year plan, which sees the pay and conditions of new and unemployed teachers cut drastically, and the further loss of employment opportunities for teachers.

Calling the work placement scheme "a cynical exercise in presenting a concern for unemployed teachers," Pat King, ASTI General Secretary, said: "It is questionable that the Government is seeking to engage 'unpaid' qualified teachers when there are so many overcrowded classrooms because of the deterioration in the pupil-teacher ratio. From the point of view of unemployed teachers, the Work Placement Programme will do little to help them gain access to a proper career structure".

Should the Work Placement Programme be used in your school, ASTI members should be vigilant in ensuring:

- that vulnerable unemployed teachers are not exploited;
- that any placement does not displace an existing member of staff;
- that any placement is not used to fill a vacant post;
- that there are no vacancies in the area of activity in which a placement is offered;
- that any placement is not used to replace someone who has recently been made redundant;
- that a person on placement does not take up paid employment in the school, such as substitution work; and,
- that a person on placement is not used to fill a post or any post duties covered by the moratorium on posts of responsibility.

See the FAQ section on page 32 for more information.

Irish students are politically aware

Young people in Ireland are more politically and civically aware than students in some 30 other countries, according to an international survey of civic and citizenship education (ICCS). A total of 38 countries took part in the study carried out in Ireland by the Educational Research Centre. In Ireland, 3,400 students, 1,900 teachers and 145 schools were surveyed.

Projected enrolment

The most recent Department of Education and Skills projections predict that the total enrolment in second-level schools will rise from 312,200 to between 331,500 and 336,600 by the year 2017.

ASTI reacts to radical plan to address literacy and numeracy



A new plan to improve literacy and numeracy in schools includes reforms to teacher education courses, increased time for literacy and numeracy in schools, and extension of the use of assessment and testing in reading and maths.

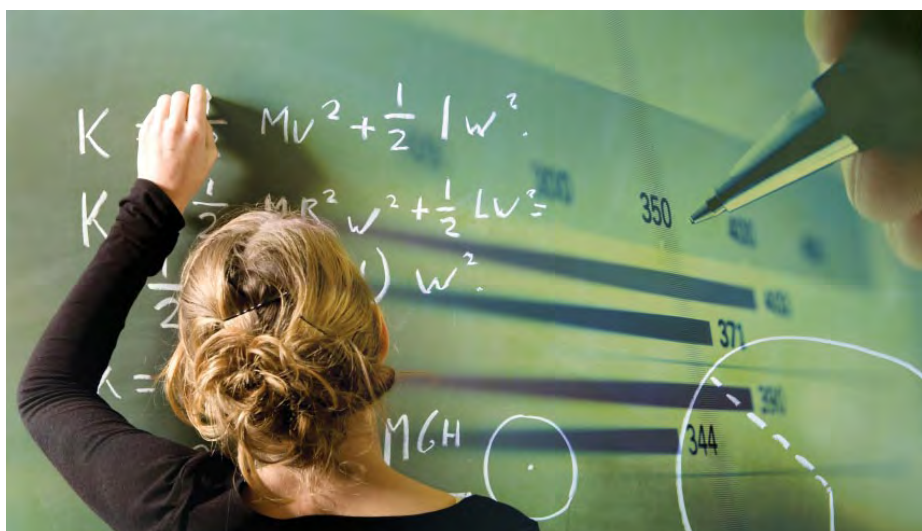
Under the strategy, announced by the Tánaiste late last year, the PGDE course for second-level teaching will be extended to two year s' duration and teachers of English and maths will have to complete a minimum of 20 hours of in-service training on literacy and numeracy every five years.

The plan also aims to make radical changes to the way in which schools assess and report on students' progress in literacy and numeracy. Among the changes included in the plan are the publication of national standards and standardised testing of students in primary and second-level schools. Responding to the plan, Moira Leydon, ASTI Education and Research Officer, said: "The publication of a draft national plan to improve literacy and numeracy in schools is the most significant policy direction for schools over the last decade. Its proposals are both wide-ranging and detailed, and extend beyond classroom practice to requirements for initial teacher education, and for applications for leadership positions in schools and continuing professional development for teachers.

Many of the draft Plan's proposals are meritorious in their own right. However, changing the teaching and learning environment in classrooms cannot be reduced to target setting and excessive recording of data. We must be very careful not to repeat the mistakes that were made in the UK in the last decades, where learning became reduced to standardised testing. The end result for the UK has been an entrenchment of social inequalities in educational achievement and a deeply demoralised teaching profession. It cannot be emphasised enough that change processes in schools must be supported by other education policy instruments, making sure that schools have adequate numbers of specialist teachers, such as learning support teachers, resource teachers and guidance counsellors, to make the Plan a reality".

PISA – behind the results

MOIRA LEYDON takes a look at what the recently published PISA report has to say about education in Ireland.



Overall, the PISA 2009 report on the literacy standards of Ireland's 15 year olds was not a good news story for Ireland. Ireland dropped from the 5th highest performing country in literacy in 2000, to 17th – just at the OECD average – in 2010.

In maths, Ireland dropped from 20th to 26th place – below the OECD average. Irish students' performance in science improved – moving from 20th to 18th place and placing Ireland above average performance.

Analysing the results

So what has happened in the last decade to account for what was referred to as a "precipitous" decline? The answer to this question has to be qualified by two other questions. Firstly, are the declines in maths and literacy scores indicative of real declines in standards? Secondly, is it possible that aspects of the PISA survey itself, its administration and interpretation, may have skewed the results? So concerned was the Department of Education and Skills that it commissioned an international statistical consultancy, Statistics Canada, to assist the Education Research Centre in answering the above questions.

Both agencies concluded that the level of decline in Ireland appears to have been overestimated, in particular in reading, because of aspects of the PISA methodology. Further corroborating evidence is needed to test the PISA results.

In accounting for changes in 15 year olds' performance, both agencies referred to the massive social changes that have taken place in Irish schools over the last decade. Over 8% of the student population does not speak English or Irish as a first language. Thousands of students with special educational needs are now taught in mainstream classrooms. Also, Irish schools have – in comparison to the EU – a much higher retention level of weaker students and potential early school leavers.

Departmental response

However, whether the decline is apparent or real, the PISA results pose many questions for education policy-makers and, ultimately, for schools.

The Department of Education and Skills pre-emptively launched a Draft National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy in late November. The action plan contains wide-ranging and detailed proposals, which will impact on the work of schools and teachers. Education has never been more central to the process of economic recovery. Our educated workforce has been one of the main reasons we attracted key global firms to Ireland. While the Celtic Tiger powered on, the level of investment in education declined as a percentage of GDP. Investment in ICT in schools actually ceased during the decade and was only kickstarted in 2009 because of the negative comments made by former Intel CEO Craig Barrett at the Farmleigh conference. Maybe PISA 2009 will similarly cause the Government to be innovative and improve investment in education. Education must become part of the solution to our country's economic problems. To do that, it cannot sustain any further cutbacks in teacher numbers or increases in class sizes.

ASTIR will examine the full PISA report in the next edition. The five-volume report contains a wealth of informative detail about student motivation and attitudes to learning.



Moira Leydon

Moira Leydon, Assistant General Secretary:
Education and Research.

Speaking out for teachers

ASTI representatives make the teacher's voice heard on a variety of issues.

Budget 2011 and the four-year plan

"It is storing up major problems in the school system. The change in demographics means that we are going to have larger classes and fewer teachers ... Essentially you are going to have to take a vow of poverty in order to become a teacher. The added problem is that permanent jobs are becoming increasingly difficult to secure. Most graduates have to wait at least seven years for a job."

Sean O'Neill, ASTI Standing Committee – *Irish Times*, November 25

"This amounts to a disgraceful attack on vulnerable young teacher graduates. Currently, approximately 95% of second-level teacher graduates spend up to seven years in part-time and temporary teaching positions before they can secure a proper job and income from teaching. This means that many young teachers are on the poverty line. Under this plan new entrants to teaching will be further disadvantaged and the ASTI can only assume that many capable newly qualified second-level teachers will leave the country."

Pat King, ASTI General Secretary, RTE.ie, November 25

"Our schools were at the bottom of the funding league in the boom years. Every parent must now be concerned about how this [plan] will impact on teaching and learning in the classroom."

Pat King, ASTI General Secretary, *Irish Examiner*, November 25

PISA Report

"General Secretary of the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland Pat King expressed concern that the survey indicated a closer link between socio-economic status and achievement in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) tests among Irish pupils. This must be a major concern for all of society," he said. Mr King pointed out that up to 18% of students in second-level schools now have special educational needs. At the same time the number of international students has increased significantly from 2.3% of the cohort in 2000 to more than 8.3% in 2009."

Irish Times, December 8

Croke Park Agreement

"We are in the middle of intensive negotiations with the Department. We are working our way through the agreement, clarifying what changes and what developments are required ... The sane way out of the economic problems is through agreement, negotiation and sensible discussion. That's what the ASTI and the other unions are engaged in now."

Pat King, ASTI General Secretary, Newstalk Breakfast, November 11

Publishing information about teachers

"There are a lot of things wrong in this country at the moment, but certainly the standard of teaching and the standard of education is not a major problem in Ireland. In fact, it is one of the successes ... The information they are talking about in England is readily available here at the moment. Every teacher's salary is known ... any parent can go on to the Teaching Council website and see their child's teacher's name and see whether they are qualified and registered."

Pat King, ASTI General Secretary, Newstalk Breakfast, November 11

Keep up with the latest news on the ASTI website, and on our Facebook



and Twitter pages:

www.asti.ie

www.facebook.com/astiteachers

www.twitter.com/astionion



Teacher vetting

All newly appointed teachers must now undergo Garda vetting before commencing employment. *ASTIR* gives a rundown of the new regulations in relation to teacher vetting.

Under new regulations published late last year, all teachers appointed to positions of any duration in schools must be vetted prior to commencing employment, unless they have already been vetted during the same or previous calendar year. Teachers who are changing employment to another school and teachers who are returning to work after a leave of absence of two or more years must also be vetted.

Teachers transferring between schools that are part of the same VEC and teachers who are being re-employed by the same school authority, with no gap in employment immediately prior to their re-employment, are not required to be vetted, providing they have already been vetted as part of the initial employment process.

Any person who refuses to be vetted cannot be appointed or engaged by the school in any capacity, including in a voluntary role.

As well as undergoing Garda vetting, teachers must also complete a child protection Statutory Declaration underlining their suitability to work with children. An associated undertaking must also be signed prior to commencing employment. The Department of Education and Skills' payroll appointment forms incorporate this undertaking, but for any appointment that does not require the completion of a payroll appointment form, the Form of Undertaking must be completed separately.

What is Garda vetting?

Garda vetting is carried out by the Garda Central Vetting Unit (GCVU) to provide registered organisations with a statement that gives full details of all convictions and/or prosecutions, successful or not, pending or completed, in relation to the applicant for vetting.

Vetting does not provide clearance for persons to work with children. The



key issue for the school authority is to determine whether any disclosure as a result of the vetting application would render a person unsuitable for employment by the school.

The fact that a teacher has a conviction does not automatically render them unsuitable to work with children. It is a matter for the school authority to make a judgement as to suitability in relation to child protection.

Getting vetted

The Teaching Council is the registered organisation that liaises with the GCVU for the vetting of teachers. Teachers should apply to the Teaching Council to undergo the vetting process by requesting an application form. The Teaching Council will only arrange for the vetting of teachers who are registered or who have applied for registration. On completion of the vetting process, the Teaching Council issues a vetting letter to the applicant teacher giving the outcome of the vetting as received.

If you are seeking employment or seeking to change employment, you should apply to the Teaching Council at least three months in advance so that your vetting can be arranged in time.

Where an unqualified teacher who is not eligible for Teaching Council registration is employed as an interim measure, vetting will be processed by the VEC, management body or diocesan office.

If a student teacher has or may have unsupervised access to children, he or she must be vetted. This will be arranged through the relevant university or by the school authority.

For more information, see Circular 0063/2010 on the ASTI website.

Did you know...

- All teachers appointed to any position of any duration in a school must undergo Garda vetting.
- Vetting does not provide clearance for persons to work with children; the school authority must make a judgement on suitability based on vetting results.
- The Teaching Council is the registered organisation that liaises with the GCVU for the vetting of teachers.

Vetting of existing teachers

Discussions are at an advanced stage with the relevant education stakeholders on how best to introduce the vetting of existing members of teaching staff who have not yet been vetted. It is envisioned that the vetting of existing staff will commence on a phased basis in early 2011, as the expansion of service by the GCVU is rolled out.

Education policies – how will you vote?

The ASTI is urging all members to use their vote in the upcoming General Election.

Education is vital to economic recovery, and all teachers should consider the views held by parties and politicians in relation to teaching, schools and education.



The ASTI asked the political parties' education spokespersons to submit their views on education and these are posted on the ASTI website. Here is a flavour of the responses received:



Fianna Fáil – Tánaiste Mary Coughlan, Minister for Education and Skills

Protecting education from the worst

The Tánaiste stresses that the Government has gone as far it can to protect education for the four years of the National Recovery Plan. While difficult choices had to be made to identify savings, she states that the Government recognises the critical importance of education in recovery and this is demonstrated by its decision to maintain the general pupil-teacher ratio: "Given that determination by the

Government [to protect frontline education staff], what we need now is a clear commitment from all partners in the sector to embrace reform, to challenge the status quo and to ensure greater output and better outcomes for the taxpayer's investment". The structural changes in the education sector being implemented in 2011 will have a significantly higher medium-term impact, which will lessen the need for further policy savings from the sector in future years, says the Minister.

A more detailed submission from Minister Mary Coughlan is available at www.asti.ie.



Fine Gael – Deputy Fergus O'Dowd

Doing things differently

Deputy Fergus O'Dowd says that Ireland needs a world-class education system if the country is to return to long-term growth and prosperity. "Unfortunately the recent OECD PISA study shows that Irish educational outcomes, despite very significant increases in funding since 2000, have actually fallen." Fine Gael has been conducting an extensive review of its education policies. The results of this review will form the basis of the

party's forthcoming general election manifesto. "Our basic proposition is simple," says Deputy O'Dowd. "Ireland cannot afford an education system that is just average. But excellence in education will only be achieved if we start doing things differently. If we start to move away from a narrow focus on inputs to a much greater emphasis on outcomes. If we recognise that excellence in education must go hand in hand with fairness. If we are prepared to give schools and their teachers much greater freedom to experiment and innovate."

A more detailed submission from Fergus O'Dowd TD is available at www.asti.ie.



Green Party – Deputy Paul Gogarty

Scrap costly white elephants

Deputy Paul Gogarty says the Green Party believes that education is the most important area for investment: "This is why we sought to protect it as much as possible at a time when all other departments are seeing much greater cutbacks. If we hold the balance of power in the next government, education will form a key part of our Programme for Government platform, and we will be seeking to alter priorities within

the current four-year framework to protect education even further, as there is flexibility for doing so," says Deputy Gogarty.

Areas for reform can be examined and costly white elephants can be scrapped. "Even with money tight, we believe that it is possible (in the context of a higher percentage of GDP investment in education) that class sizes at second level can be improved incrementally."

The Green Party's stated policy is an increase in investment in education to 7% of GDP.

A more detailed submission from Paul Gogarty TD is available at www.asti.ie.



Labour – Deputy Ruairi Quinn

Undoing the damage

Deputy Ruairi Quinn believes that it will take Ireland 10 years to recover from "the economic damage done to our society by Fianna Fáil". Education will be a key part of recovery, "but our approach, because of the damage done, will have to be visionary and radical". Because current education infrastructure is inadequate, Deputy Quinn believes that, while maintaining investment in education is important, we will have to do more

with less. This could mean some clustering and merging of existing schools, sharing facilities and specialist teachers – particularly in the science, technology, engineering and maths subjects. Quinn says literacy is a major problem. "Every child leaving primary level should have an educational passport indicating their skill levels in the three Rs. The critical transition from sixth class to first year needs special attention." He also says that raising the school leaving age to 17 could help to keep vulnerable students within the system. IT should be mobilised in a way that assists classroom teachers.

A more detailed submission from Ruairi Quinn TD is available at www.asti.ie.



Sinn Féin – Deputy Pearse Doherty

Funding schools fairly

Deputy Pearse Doherty says Sinn Féin has a vision for education that is not based on the ability to pay or to fundraise: "We believe in investing in education as a key to the future growth of the country. Sinn Féin would spend at least 6% of GDP on education. Cutting education can only lead us deeper and deeper into recession and will have a profound effect on the country's future, both economically and socially". To provide for a more equitable education system, Deputy Doherty

would keep funding for schools fully public and under democratic control, end the practice of school league tables and provide additional measures to tackle educational disadvantage. "It stands to reason that we need to stop the exodus of fully qualified teachers from the country and utilise their skills in order to rebuild the education system," says Doherty. "We can get our economy back on track. Investment in education is crucial to our long-term recovery. If we can find the money for bailing out banks to the tune of billions, we can find the money to build schools and employ teachers."

A more detailed submission from Pearse Doherty TD is available at www.asti.ie.

It has not been possible to cover the views of individual independent TDs or all the views of political parties and education spokespersons in this article. More information is available at www.asti.ie under General Election.

Money-saving tips for teachers

It's never been more important to make your money go further. IVAN AHERN talks us through some simple ways you can save money in 2011.

Health insurance

If you hold a health insurance policy, you could make substantial savings by reviewing your current plan this year. In a bid to win new customers, VHI, Quinn Healthcare and AVIVA Health have launched plans with reduced rates and, in some instances, even better benefits. You may not even need to switch insurer in order to save money. You can switch at any time – you don't have to wait until your renewal date. If you decide to switch, your insurer can't impose any additional waiting periods on you unless you are upgrading your cover.

Medicine and personal care goods

Save money by shopping for over-the-counter medicines and personal care goods in supermarkets rather than pharmacies. Recent research carried out by the National Consumer Agency revealed price differences of up to 160% between retailers.* Where possible, you should also ask for a generic drug when purchasing medicines, as these are usually a few Euro cheaper.

There are many other tax allowances that you could also be missing out on, so you should check your entitlements. Cornmarket teacher clients received an average tax rebate of €900 in 2010 alone.

Tax

This year is your last chance to get back any money owed to you in unclaimed tax credits for 2007. You can claim back for overpaid taxes for a period of up to four years. You could be entitled to a substantial amount of money. For example, if you are a full-time teacher paying tax at 41% and you haven't been claiming for your flat rate expenses, Teaching Council and trade union subscriptions allowances since 2007, you could be due back up to €1,112. There are many other tax allowances that you may also be missing out on, so you should check your entitlements. Cornmarket teacher clients received an average tax rebate of €900 in 2010 alone.

Life cover

Have you reviewed your life cover policy lately? A lot of people don't realise that there may be a better deal out there. For example, a review of a typical policy could save up to €412 in year one and in excess of €10,300 over the full term of the policy.** You should take the following steps when it comes to reviewing your cover:

1. Check what cover you already have in place and how much you are paying for it.
2. Don't forget to check the cover you may have through your Salary Protection, Superannuation, and any other pension schemes.
3. Decide if this cover meets your individual/family needs.
4. If you think you don't have enough cover or that you may be over-insured, you should contact an independent authorised financial advisor for a quote.

Electricity

Bord Gáis Energy and Airtricity are currently offering customers savings of up to 13% on their electricity bill by switching from ESB. You could save over €135 per annum on a bi-monthly bill of €200.*** So if you haven't already done so, review your provider this year. To find out how much you could save on your bill, log on to www.bonkers.ie for a free comparison.



Travel

Book your train tickets online and, where possible, avoid booking in peak times, as it's more expensive. By doing so you could save up to €31 on your return train ticket at weekends.**** If you are under age 25 then you can get a Faircard, which will also help you to save money. For more information visit www.irishrail.ie.

Money-saving websites

The following websites offer some great ways to save money and give great discounts and coupons, such as buy one get one free offers, etc.

www.citydeal.ie	www.pigsback.ie
www.buy-online-ireland.com	www.moneyguideireland.com
www.menupages.ie	www.pixmania.ie
www.valuebreaks.ie	

Sources:

*www.consumerconnect.ie

**This quote is an example and is for illustrative purposes only. It compares the lowest price to the highest price available, and is based on a male aged 40 and a female aged 35, both non-smoking, with life cover of €250,000 and specified illness cover of €50,000, for a 25-year term with benefits and premiums increasing (source: advisor plus 14/12/10)

***based on first-year switching from ESB to Bord Gáis Energy Paper Direct

Ask the experts – a free advice column for ASTI members

We know members are trying to save money this year, so we will be providing free expert financial advice through our 'Ask the Experts' column in future editions of *ASTIR*. When making long-term financial decisions, getting the right financial advice is crucial, so ask us a question! To submit your queries, please email astir@asti.ie.

Debit option or Airtricity SmartSaver Online Budget Plan. Current bill €200 bi-monthly, consumption 629kWh per year paid by direct debit, domestic tariff for rural region 24-hour rate

****based on return fare from Dublin to Cork departing on Fri 17/12/10 at 9.00pm instead of 6.00pm and returning Sun 19/12/10 at 3.30pm instead of 6.30pm.

Ivan Ahern

Ivan Ahern is Director of Cornmarket Group Financial Services Ltd. Ivan is a qualified financial advisor with nearly 20 years' experience working in financial services. He also holds a Higher Diploma in Education and a BA (Hons) Philosophy and Economics from UCC.

Would you like to do something completely different next summer?



The Global Teachers Programme offers teachers and principals the chance to work in an African school in July and August 2011.

- Learn about life in an African school
- Share skills
- Change lives
- Have the experience of a lifetime

For more information, please visit www.lcd.ie; email info@lcd.ie; text GTP INFO with your contact details to 087 9697623; or phone 01 2841414.

Charity number: 17232

Cutting costs in schools

ASTIR looks at ways teachers, students and management can help to reduce school running costs.



Recent budget cuts will put a very tight squeeze on school finances. The 5% reduction in capitation funding means that belt tightening will be required in every school in the country. While taking the initiative to reduce costs doesn't make up for the Government's failure to provide for schools and education, it can go some way towards alleviating the pressure on underfunded schools.

A funding 'nightmare'

The cut to capitation grants is an "absolute nightmare", says the principal of one small rural school. The news of the cut in funding came at a time when that school was already running on empty; with only one term gone, the school had already been forced to dip into its savings account. While the school might just manage to continue to finance itself by borrowing from Peter to pay Paul, improvements to the school or its resources are impossible. Without the recent funding for information technology, the principal says it is no exaggeration that the school could hardly pay for a mouse, let alone a computer. This principal says the system of funding needs to be examined, as it disadvantages smaller schools, which, irrespective of how many students they cater for, must still be heated, lit, insured, staffed and stocked.

Energy efficiency

Recently built schools have an edge when it comes to energy efficiency, as the Department of Education has made sustainability an integral part of new school design, maximising natural resources and using energy-efficient approaches. Older school buildings can prove more challenging, but measures such as energy monitoring and resource conservation can really pay off in any building.

The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) and the Department of Education and Skills are currently collaborating on a 'one-stop-shop' energy website, which will help schools to implement cost-saving measures. The new site will provide a range of practical supports to assist in the process of energy management, including training events and case

Resources will range from practical tips on measuring energy use and finding savings, and online tools and calculators, to curriculum-relevant teaching resources to help involve students in the process.

studies. Resources will range from practical tips on measuring energy use and finding savings, and online tools and calculators, to curriculum-relevant teaching resources to help involve students in the process. The website will be available early in the New Year at www.energyeducation.ie.

“There are a range of low cost and no cost measures schools can apply to bring about serious cost savings and at the same time increase the comfort levels in schools.”

Whole school involvement

It is important to make sure that the whole school is involved and informed, says Sinead Begley, a consultant who is assisting in the development of a suite of supports for effective energy management in schools: “If everybody in the school community is aware of the benefits and is encouraged to play their part, there are a range of low cost and no cost measures that can be applied to bring about cost savings and at the same time increase the comfort levels in schools”. Simple things like closing doors, turning off appliances and effective heating controls might seem like insignificant measures, but they really can make a difference to the overall energy spend.

According to Sinead, a good rule of thumb is that 5% in savings can be made through ‘good housekeeping’, 10% through modest building improvements and 25% through medium-cost capital investments. One ‘housekeeping’ area Sinead suggests looking at is computer equipment, which can be energy intensive. Turning computers off when they are not in use can reduce costs. Effective heating controls can also reduce costs and ensure that energy is not being wasted in classrooms that are too hot and need windows open. Getting students involved in the energy efficiency task makes measures more effective, and is a great way to educate students about energy, environmental concerns and sustainability, says Sinead. It also integrates very well with the energy theme of the An Taisce Green-Schools Programme.

If schools are over 1,000 square metres in size, they are required to have a Display Energy Certificate (DEC), a type of energy label. Schools can go to

www.energyeducation.ie and input information on their school building and energy use to generate a DEC. The school fulfils its statutory obligations and, once they have their Certificate, schools can benchmark their performance and see the real savings that are possible.

Water waste

Sustainable water management through rainwater harvesting or water monitoring can significantly reduce water usage. Metered water charges were introduced for all schools in January of last year, doubling water costs in some cases. No additional funding was allocated and, while grants were made available by the Department of Education for water conservation works, this funding was not made available until October. It is estimated that up to 85% of all water usage in schools is for toilets. This water does not require treatment and can be supplied directly from rainwater. The vast roof space many schools have is ideal for retrofitting rainwater harvesting systems and, though the initial investment in such systems is significant, suppliers insist that they can pay for themselves in two to six years, depending on school size.

It is critical in the interest of health and safety that all rainwater recovery systems are only piped directly to the toilets via a dedicated distribution system; this will always require re-piping in the school.

Other less expensive, common sense measures include toilet block systems and urinal management. CBS Midleton, for example, has made significant savings by installing timers on urinals to shut them off out of school hours. Most toilets generally flush nine litres of water, when just two would be sufficient. That’s a huge waste in a school of 200 or more students. Flushing devices can be retrofitted to toilets to reduce the flush by up to 53%. As a simple, cheaper alternative, hippo bags, which schools can obtain free of charge from many councils, can be placed in cisterns to reduce the amount of water contained and used.

Other measures schools can take to reduce water usage include reading the school meter carefully to identify trends and possible money-saving changes, carrying out a leak test, replacing worn or broken equipment, and using rainwater for groundskeeping and other untreated water needs.

Simple measures every school can implement

Lighting

- Turn off lights in strong daylight
- Ensure that lights are turned off in rooms not in use
- Paint walls bright colours to give better reflection
- Consider switching to energy-efficient bulbs

Equipment

- Ensure that PC monitors are switched to power-saving mode
- Ensure that appliances, PCs, data projectors, printers, etc., are not left on overnight

Heating

- Avoid unnecessary heating outside of school hours or in unoccupied rooms
- Avoid excessive temperatures
- Switch radiators off when they are not needed
- Ensure that thermostats are located in appropriate locations

Keeping heat in

- Ensure that doors and windows are not left open
- Draught proof building exits
- Repair broken windows
- Consider installing double or triple glazing

Hot water

- Install insulation on hot water storage vessels and pipes
- Avoid unnecessary use of hot water
- Avoid excessive temperatures in hot water taps

Canteen/home economics room

- Avoid running dishwashers on half load
- Avoid placement of fridges and freezers next to heat sources

Teachers achieve

Teachers across Ireland make outstanding contributions to their schools, communities and country. The ASTI has presented three such teachers with Achievement Awards to celebrate their achievements.



Eileen Murphy kayaking on the Kerry coast.

Making a splash

Eileen Murphy, Old Bawn Community School, Tallaght
Champion kayaker Eileen Murphy, a geography and maths teacher at Old Bawn Community School in Tallaght, was awarded for her outstanding commitment to motivating young people to reach their potential at outdoor activities through her involvement in water sports, mountain and rock climbing, and the Gaisce President's Award.

Eileen has competed at World Championships and taken part in kayak expeditions everywhere from the Alps and Himalayas to the Murray Darling, Scottish Islands and Norwegian Arctic.

In 2005, Eileen became the first Irish woman to complete a solo circumnavigation of Ireland by sea kayak. Eileen first became involved in competitive water activity in her teens and is a former Irish international in

canoe slalom, whitewater and marathon racing. She has competed at World Championships and taken part in kayak expeditions everywhere from the Alps and Himalayas to the Murray Darling, Scottish Islands and Norwegian Arctic.

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In 1984, Eileen won the World Cup K2 in Carrick-on-Shannon. She won the Women's K2 in Australia in 1986 and in doing so set a new world record. She was World Masters Champion K1 in 1998, 2000, 2001 and 2003. Eileen is also a Gaisce President's Awards leader at Old Bawn Community School, where she has guided teams of students through the empowering Gaisce experience.

Eileen Murphy co-runs Shearwater Sea Kayaking – see www.shearwaterseakayaking.ie.



Tom and Triona with the Koni Kats team – Adam Gammell, Eoin O'Connell, Sean Clery and Conor Daly – and their haul of trophies.

A driving force

Tom Reynolds and Triona Brosnan, St David's, Greystones. With the encouragement and guidance of their teachers, Tom Reynolds and Triona Brosnan, four students from St David's Secondary School in Greystones worked towards one goal: to win the F1 in Schools World Championship. In September 2009, their goal was reached!

Their hard work and that of Triona and Tom first paid off in April 2008 when the team lifted the Irish national trophy.

Over the two years it took to get to that point, Tom and Triona guided the four boys up an extremely steep learning curve. The team undertook all the activities of a real Formula 1 team: they designed, manufactured and tested a working model Formula 1 car; created a team identity; secured sponsorship; developed a marketing plan; and, raced their model car against fellow competitors from 20 countries around the world. Achievements like this show the extraordinary impact extra-curricular activities and teacher support have on students' school experience and potential. Displaying



The Koni Kats team pictured with Lewis Hamilton.

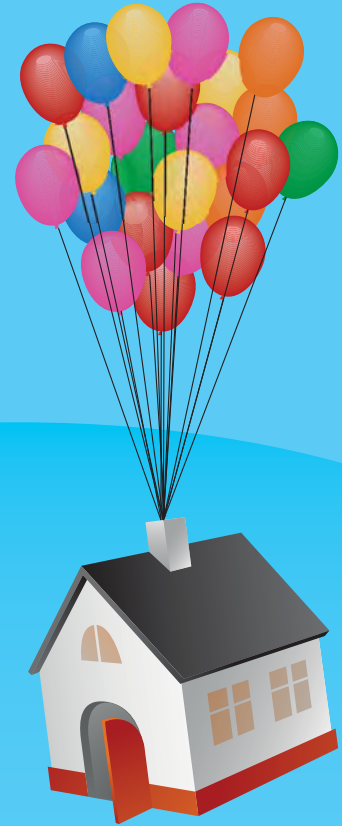
teamwork, confidence and maturity, the team diligently planned and executed tasks that might faze those twice their age. With Tom's support one team member taught himself how to use 3D CAD software and CNC lathes and routers; another negotiated the free use of an online project management application; while another raised over €15,000 in sponsorship and secured international brand Koni as the team's main sponsor. Their hard work and that of Triona and Tom first paid off in April 2008 when the team lifted the Irish national trophy. There followed several months of more hard work, culminating in three days of competition at the international finals in London, where the team faced the judges in: Car Specifications; Use of CAD/CAM; Quality of Manufacture; Portfolio; Design Process; Marketing; Verbal Presentation; and, of course, Racing.

At an awards ceremony in September 2009, attended by former F1 World Champion Lewis Hamilton and other Formula 1 VIPs, the four students were presented with the World Championship trophy. Goal complete!

The F1 in Schools Challenge is organised in Ireland by the Irish Computer Society. For more information see www.f1inschools.ie.

House swap holiday

With many holiday savings jars feeling considerably lighter this year, ASTI member DAMIEN KIELY tells us how a house swap holiday can be more enjoyable and less expensive than other options.



Our first house exchange was in 2007. For us, the idea ticked all the boxes. With two children under the age of four we needed a holiday that was affordable, convenient and logistically possible. In other words, the idea of packing a steriliser, ten baby bottles, two pushchairs and assorted favourite toys through Dublin Airport and beyond was not appealing! I could already envision the Ryanair excess baggage weigh-in people rubbing their hands in glee at the sight of us. The notion of finding a house swap with a similarly constituted family was too good to pass up.

A colleague recommended trying a house swap and in no time at all I had registered on Intervac.com, entered our information and house photographs, and was searching for suitable families. I limited my search to houses that had baby equipment, free internet access, were non-smoking and, crucially for us, offered exchange of car. Within days we were talking to a family from Nantes and a week later we had arranged a swap with them.

A colleague recommended trying a house swap and in no time at all I had registered on Intervac.com, entered our information and house photographs, and was searching for suitable families.

A straightforward swap

Trust is certainly an essential element of any house swap; if you find the thought of others in your house unbearable, then the house swap is not for you. However, we were happy to take this small risk. The way we saw it, it was highly unlikely that a French family (who were also both teachers), would

travel all the way to Ireland just to destroy our house. Besides, we got to know the family reasonably well beforehand through email and texts. Both families booked airline tickets for the same day. As our plane landed in Nantes, our house swap family were waiting to board the return flight to Dublin. I left my car keys, house keys, and directions to where we had parked in the baggage drop-off point in Dublin Airport and texted the code they would need to pick them up; they did likewise for me. So there were no queues or handing over huge amounts of money to rent a car – we simply followed directions, drove to the house and explored what would be our new home for the next 14 days.

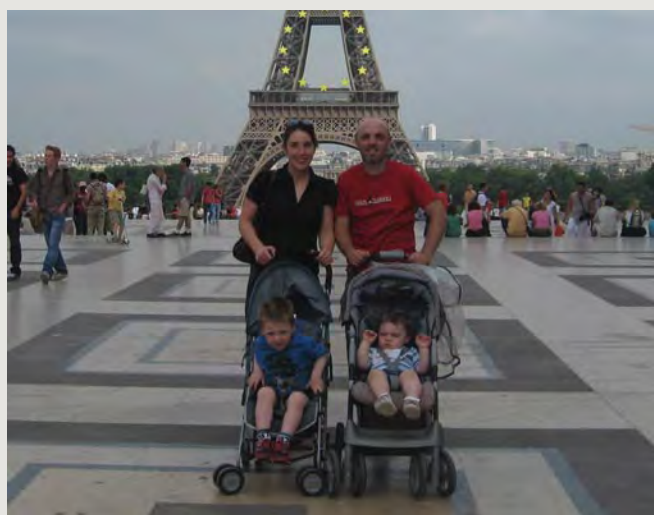
I left my car keys, house keys, and directions to where we had parked in the baggage drop-off point in Dublin Airport and texted the code they would need to pick them up; they did likewise for me.

The advantages of doing a swap with a 'real' French family are obvious. Primarily, you are not located in the 'tourist trap' region – you certainly get a better sense of what constitutes normal life in a foreign country. That was even truer of our second swap to the Alsace region on the French/German border. With small children, over a two-week holiday, there are days where you don't want to traipse to a waterpark or a medieval castle. Some days you just want to stay at home and this was a huge benefit of living in a house. We didn't have to drag the kids to cafes and restaurants all the time either; we could just go to the local supermarket and cook at home, eating in the garden under the warm French sun. Blissful!

Many advantages

Financially, the house swap makes a lot of sense. For our trip to Alsace, we booked early, and for a 20-day holiday we paid only the price of the flights, which we got for €5 each way. We stayed in a beautiful house with a fabulous garden in a quiet town, and had the use of a people carrier for the duration. As the cost of living, particularly holiday things like entry fees, was actually cheaper than Ireland, we more or less had a fantastic holiday for less than it would have cost us to stay at home. The beautiful and well maintained cycling routes that run parallel to all the main towns in the region were a great way to see the countryside, and of course we had the use of the host family's bicycles. The flexibility of such a holiday is also hard to beat. The family from Nantes asked if grandparents could visit while they were there. In return, my sister-in-law joined us for a few days. No hassle. As the grandparents were in our house in Ireland, they left us the keys to a tiny apartment right in the centre of Paris. We booked seats on the TGV and had a fantastic two-day break in Paris. Arrangements involving second homes and holiday homes are quite common so be sure to check it out.

The only downside to the house swap was the cleaning, both at the beginning and end of the holiday. It is considered essential to leave the house spotless, but this is a small price to pay for such a fantastic experience. Emails and texts make it easy to get instant help if you can't figure out how to use the washing machine or forget which day the bins are to be left out. Families generally leave an information pack for their visitors with brochures and leaflets for local attractions. French families don't seem to think anything of the four-hour drive from Monaghan to Connemara, and are keen to explore as much of Ireland as possible, so make sure to leave a wide range of tourist information. The massive advantages of a house swap holiday far outweigh any imaginary downsides. We would not dream of holidaying any other way in the future!



The Kiely family enjoys a break in Paris.

There are a number of house swap websites you can check out.

Try: www.intervac-homeexchange.com
www.homelink.ie

Damien Kiely

Damien Kiely teaches at Patrician High School, Monaghan.

Understanding Tourette's

DR GLENDA KAVANAGH explains how teachers can identify and manage Tourette's syndrome in the classroom.



Tourette's syndrome (TS) is a tic disorder characterised by multiple motor and vocal tics. Tics are brief, sudden repetitive movements that can affect any part of the body. They can be simple motor tics such as eye blinking, head jerking or, in the case of simple vocal tics, throat clearing or sniffing. Tics can also be more complex, such as pulling at clothes, touching objects or mimicking others' movements. Complex vocal tics can consist of repeating words just spoken or repeating one's own words. In a minority of cases (10%) there may be use of swear words (this is called coprolalia).

TS typically begins in childhood before the age of 18, and affects approximately 1 in 100 children. Boys are three times more likely to have it than girls. In TS the tics are often preceded by an urge to perform the tic; it has been described as being like the urge to sneeze or scratch an itch. Some people learn to control their tics for hours at a time, but this requires considerable effort and can lead to a stronger outburst of tics when they are finally allowed to be expressed. TS is typically a waxing and waning condition (the tics come and go). The tics can be exacerbated by stress, excitement, anxiety and fatigue. The symptoms often peak in adolescence and improve into adulthood, although they sometimes don't resolve completely.

Diagnosis and treatment

The diagnosis is made clinically, usually by a child and adolescent psychiatrist or a paediatric neurologist. TS can occur by itself or it can co-exist with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or obsessive compulsive disorder, which are thought to be genetically linked to TS. TS can affect a young person's self-esteem and their social and emotional development, which can sometimes lead to depression or behavioural disorders.

There are a number of treatments for TS, including psychological interventions and, in severe cases, medication, but the first and most important part of treatment is the sharing of information about the disorder with all adults in the child's life. As a child spends a significant amount of time in school, it is imperative that teachers have knowledge about TS: that a child cannot control the tics, and how and when it is appropriate to ignore tics.

A group of 16 Transition Year students in Loreto Clonmel have chosen Tourette's syndrome as their issue for this year's Young Social Innovators (YSI) programme.

YSI invites students from all over the country to make a change and improve their community. The Loreto students aim to raise awareness of Tourette's syndrome in their school and locality. For more on YSI see www.youngsocialinnovators.ie.

Children with TS can experience many social and educational challenges in school. This can include tics that affect concentration or handwriting, or teasing by peers leading to poor self-esteem. The transition from primary to secondary school can prove a major challenge for these children as they face into a new class of students and numerous different teachers for the various subjects.

Guidelines for teachers

The following points are basic guidelines that may be useful to teachers in managing a child with TS:

- All teachers that have contact with the young person should be made aware of the presence of tics. It is important that they have an understanding of the nature and consequences of having tics, as well as possible co-existing conditions.
- The young person with tics may require support to accept the tics as being part of their life. It is important that family members, teachers and peers are also given information that the tics will occur but that they will come and go. Learn to ignore tics.
- Giving information to classmates on TS may be appropriate to decrease teasing. This should be discussed with the young person and their parents beforehand.
- Be aware of the triggers (stress, anxiety, etc.), although these may vary from person to person. Ask the young person what their particular triggers are and work around this.
- Be aware of bullying. If this has occurred refer to the school's anti-bullying policy as soon as possible.
- Allow the young person to have some 'time out' when tics become overwhelming. Have a designated area that the person can go to when this occurs.
- If TS is affecting the young person's educational progress, make sure that all available supports are in place (learning support, resource hours or SNA if required).
- When the young person is sitting State examinations, special arrangements may be appropriate (separate room, scribe, etc.).

For further information on Tourette's syndrome, see www.tsireland.ie.

Dr Glenda Kavanagh

Dr Glenda Kavanagh is Senior Registrar at The Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, City General Hospital, Cork.

More views from the outside

As part of a series featuring views on education from those working outside the teaching profession, *ASTIR* gets some opinions on curriculum review.



Martin Drury is Arts Director at the Arts Council of Ireland

Including the arts in a committed way would pay huge dividends. The arts afford us distinctive ways of making and understanding ourselves and our world, and arts education fosters particular attributes and important kinds of intelligence. Irish education, however, tends to squeeze the arts out in favour of other kinds of intelligence. The consequences of this are significant for education and, in particular, for the commitment to the development of the full range of human intelligence.

Pressure from the economic world dominates curricular design and, while that economic agenda is legitimate and understandable, the business of education is to stand up to that and ask what is really appropriate for student learning. Anxiety about the future of our economy can distort education's allegiance to what I call the 'cumulative presentness' of childhood and youth.

There is a significant body of literature that demonstrates the importance of arts education to motivation. This is related to the fact that the arts tend to value individual making and interpretation. In a soundbite – not very nuanced I agree – if you are teaching maths, you want 30 kids to come to the same answer. But arts education provides a different way of

seeing the world and allows for and fosters 30 different individual views. Indeed, art is often about developing questions rather than arriving at answers.

The arts don't have a monopoly on creativity (and some very uncreative things happen in the name of arts education) but they do have a particular contribution to make to the development of innovation. Arts education can be undervalued or trivialised because the arts tend to be associated with pleasure and entertainment and seen as 'soft'. In fact, the creation of art is a very complex process and student learning could be enormously enriched by engaging with the arts in a meaningful way. 'Curriculum' is a richer word than 'syllabus' in terms of what it denotes. I think the difference between syllabus and curriculum could be defined as 'pedagogy'. The pedagogy needed for arts education is complex; the conventional paradigm of teaching is often replaced by something more collaborative. But because our school system is about timetables, grades, and examinations, it is more conducive to subjects that fit well with that structure. From a systems perspective, arts education can present challenges but we must be careful not to diminish the richness of our education system in the interest of avoiding challenges.

Leanne Caulfield, President of the Irish Second Level Students Union
The present education system does not adequately prepare students for third level. The current system is all about rote learning and regurgitating information, much of which may be forgotten as soon as the exams are over.

Some form of continuous assessment should be considered to ensure that students are continually learning and that learning impacts.

The skills of learning are as important as subject content and we need to encourage critical thinking and creativity so that students have the ability to come up with new ideas. It's important to prepare students for lifelong learning too, so they can see beyond learning in school and university, and are prepared and able to take in knowledge throughout life.

We feel strongly that students should be consulted on the second-level curriculum and how it is delivered. Consultation should take place on an ongoing basis. Parents and teachers are currently consulted through subject committees so there is obvious scope there for our input. If we cannot be accommodated on subject committees, these committees should at least seek our 'on the ground' advice.

Consultation is important in the context of student motivation; we need to engage students and show them the point of learning. If students know why they are learning something, they can take ownership of their learning, and if they are given a say in the curriculum, they will understand the reasoning behind the course that is set out for them.

We are in favour of any measure that will improve student motivation and in that context we welcome the introduction of bonus points for maths. The bonus

points will work to encourage uptake of honours maths because the curriculum is driven by points at the moment. I can't say, however, that it will improve passion for maths, or uptake at third level, but it will improve ability and results, which is important.

A view from the inside

Joe Moran, teacher at Presentation Secondary School, Ballingarry, Co. Tipperary, and ASTI representative on the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), gives his view as a classroom practitioner.

One of the strengths of our education system is the broad and balanced curriculum. Students in second-level schools have access to a broad range of subjects and learning opportunities. The arts, together with social education, business education, the humanities, sports, science, maths, etc., form an important part of the holistic educational experience of Irish students. In fact, over 10 years of work went into the design of a new art syllabus, the implementation of which has been postponed since 2008 due to lack of funding. Our system is designed to nurture the whole person and to ensure that, as well as being prepared for whatever career they choose, students are ready for life. The wide range of extra-curricular activities that goes on in schools provides a host of opportunities to students to discover and display their talents – artistic and otherwise. Many talented young people have gone on to fulfilling careers in the arts having had positive experiences of the arts in school.

Teachers work inside and outside the classroom to deliver this holistic education experience. The focus on providing a broad education must remain strong, despite the influence of the business world and other commentators. This focus must be supported by resources spread across the curriculum and bolstered by a strong and affirmed policy commitment.

At the same time, it is undeniable that we could provide a much greater space for a broader arts education in schools. Drama, for example, has a powerful capacity to engage students in experiential learning at a very deep and reflective level. The current review of the junior cycle programme provides an opportunity for teachers and policy makers to reflect on how we might reorganise the curriculum and allow more opportunities for students to engage with art. Some of the most creative student work in the arts is via digital technology! Perhaps we need to look at arts education as central to learning rather than just confined to subjects such as music or art, craft and design. Motivating students and encouraging critical thinking skills and creativity, as both Martin and Leanne point out, are important elements of enriched understanding and deeper personal and social awareness. It is the job of the NCCA to design a curriculum that is most beneficial and suitable to young people, their motivations and their future prospects. The NCCA's job is not to bow to business interests but to serve the best interests of students and education. As the recent roll out of Project Maths shows, teachers are engaging with and facilitating curriculum reform and new teaching methods to develop these abilities in their students. Appropriate support, such as professional development and smaller class sizes are, of course, pivotal to facilitating changes.



St Patrick's College
Drumcondra, Dublin 9.
A COLLEGE OF DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

Masters in Special Educational Needs (MSEN)

Applications are invited for places on the part-time, two year, taught **Masters in Special Educational Needs (MSEN)** in St Patrick's College commencing July 2011.

On-line delivery plus one week's Summer course in 2011 and two days in February 2012.

Candidates should hold a Graduate Diploma in Special Education or equivalent.

Application forms may be retrieved from:
www.spd.dcu.ie
or in hardcopy from:
**The Special Education Department,
St Patrick's College,
Drumcondra, Dublin 9.**

Closing date for applications:
Monday, 28th March 2011.

Coláiste Phádraig, Droim Conrach, Baile Átha Cliath 9
COLAISTE DE CHUID OLLSCOIL CHATHAIR BHAILE ÁTHA CLIATH



Schools innovating for more choice

Three Kerry schools are using technology to provide a broader range of subject choices to their students.



Michelle Costello and her students in the school's specially equipped classroom.

It is a long established tradition among many schools to work with each other to offer greater subject options to students in a locality. Three Kerry schools have taken the idea of collaboration a step further by establishing virtual classrooms where students can join classes in neighbouring schools without ever having to leave the school grounds. The schools are making innovative use of distance learning technology to allow students to study agricultural science, history and physics interactively with a class in St Joseph's, Ballybunion, and chemistry with a class in Mercy Mounthawk, Tralee.

The solution is one that many schools could benefit from, says John O'Donovan, principal of St Joseph's: "A lot of smaller schools find it difficult to provide subject options for all students. In my school, for example, we could have two to five students opting for a subject like chemistry. We could not afford to provide a teacher for that number of students. In contrast, larger schools like Mercy Mounthawk could have 30 students applying for chemistry and, with the restriction on class size, this would mean that six students would not get their choice. A project like this one solves both problems".

Inspiration and collaboration

Inspired by two Meath schools that pioneered distance learning in Irish second-level education – St Fintan's in Enfield and Dunshaughlin Community School – John discussed setting up a link with St Michael's College, Listowel, and Mercy Mounthawk. After a great deal of planning, involving collaboration with a number of IT companies, the schools are now linked to each other through a server in St Joseph's, and students from one school can sit in on classes from another in virtual classrooms. The 'visiting' students are projected onto the back wall of the classroom, as if sitting behind the last row of

students. Meanwhile, those students can interact from their own classroom and view the class and class work on an interactive whiteboard in front of them. The one question always asked is about discipline, says John, but that isn't any more of an issue than it would be in a normal classroom: "The students are being supervised; the teacher can see and hear them so they apply the same measures as in any other class. Discipline doesn't tend to be an issue, however, because the students really want to do the subjects and they're very motivated".

Smart technology

Once set up, the virtual classrooms offer great benefits for learning, says Michelle Costello, who teaches some of the distance classes in St Joseph's: "Obviously, I had to get used to using all the smart technology initially, but once I was familiar with it and got down to teaching my classes, it was as if I had always used it. The students are hands on; they're very active throughout the lesson and the detail that's available with this technology means that it's great to use in class".

Of course, such quality comes at a price. Each of the schools invested €4,000 in equipment, including a server, an auto focus camera, a projector, a laptop and an interactive whiteboard. But, says John, the outlay is worth it: "I think this is the beginning of bigger and better subject sharing in the future. As well as giving students greater subject choice, the extended classroom helps to prepare them for the real world and the smart economy. The students get to embrace digital technology and to become comfortable interacting online. That will really stand to them in the future. I think this is something that could be used in schools across the country. It's a very simple and very effective solution."

Making a difference

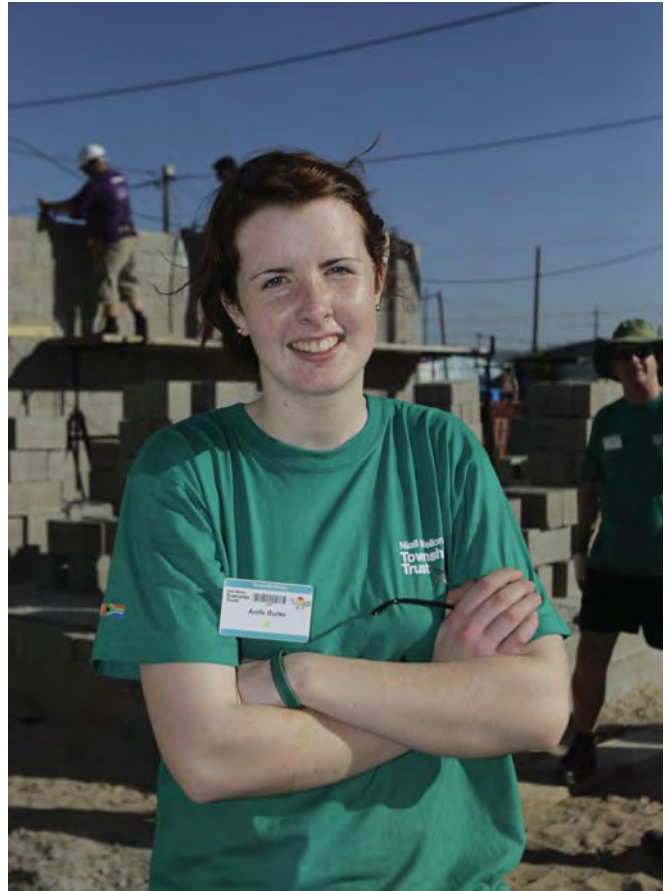
BRENDAN RYAN of Cashel Community School tells us about his school's involvement in the Niall Mellon Township Trust Building Blitz.

I have had the pleasure of travelling to South Africa on the Niall Mellon Township Trust Building Blitz for the last six years. Having travelled myself during mid-term break in November 2005 and November 2006, fellow teacher Caitriona Ryan and I decided to bring students from our school on the November 2007 trip. Once we received the go ahead from our school management and the Niall Mellon Township Trust, we set about the process of selecting the students.

We made the final selection by interview and then we began fundraising the required €24,000. We did this as a school group as for the students to raise such an amount individually might prove very difficult. After months of preparing and fundraising we were all glad when November '07 arrived and we flew to Cape Town to begin work on the Building Blitz.

Seeing fellow humans living in awful, tiny shacks made from scrap galvanise and waste wood, with no toilet, no running water and many with no electricity, was a real eye opener.

The Niall Mellon Township Trust is hoping to have a teachers' blitz during the Summer of 2011. Anyone interested can contact the charity on www.nmtownshiptrust.com or call 01-494 8200.



Cashel Community School student Aoife Burke on site.

Shock

The students were both shocked and amazed by the trip. The shock came from seeing first hand the poverty and living conditions of thousands and thousands of township residents. Seeing fellow humans living in awful, tiny shacks made from scrap galvanise and waste wood, with no toilet, no running water and many with no electricity, was a real eye opener.

From meeting and talking to township residents we learned that these people really have nothing. Low immune systems, very poor nutrition, high levels of disease including HIV, and lack of education are only some of the daily burdens carried by millions of township residents. The shacks, because of the galvanise, are like ovens during the warm weather and are unable to keep out the water during heavy rain. No photos, DVDs or newspaper articles can properly prepare one for seeing this in person.

Our students, along with all the Niall Mellon Township Trust volunteers, were amazed by how a group of people working together can make a difference. Irish builders and tradespeople are joined by people of all ages and backgrounds to work as hard as possible for seven days to change these people's lives.

Spreading the word

When our students returned to school immediately after the trip they spoke to each year group showing pictures and video clips of their experiences. During these student-to-student presentations, you would have heard a pin drop.



Brendan Ryan works on roofing one of the houses in the township.

Following the success of our school's first trip we have taken six students each year on the '08, '09 and '10 Niall Mellon Township Trust Building Blitz. The primary reason for our school's involvement is helping those less fortunate than ourselves, but we have found that the entire student body of 800 now has an increased awareness of poverty and an increased willingness to help others. The 22 students who have represented Cashel Community School on the trips have been the lucky ones; it has been a life-changing experience for them all. Cashel Community School has raised over €150,000 for the Niall Mellon Township Trust over the last four years. This would not be possible without the support of many people. Teacher Caitriona Ryan, who travelled on three trips, and teacher Marie White, who travelled this year, have promoted volunteerism and highlighted poverty along with their fellow RE teachers. Caitriona and Marie have also worked extremely hard on a small Niall Mellon Fundraising Committee in Cashel Community School. This group of a dozen teachers has given up much free time, working extremely hard to raise the required money each year.

School support

Our school's Student Council, along with all our students, has really bought into the Niall Mellon Township Trust. They have both helped to raise money and contributed personally. All the school staff have co-operated with and encouraged our efforts, but without the kind permission, encouragement and assistance of our school management this would all be in vain. We are lucky and grateful that our principal,

Eddie Morrissey, and deputy principal, Margaret Skehan, see the benefits of our charity work and support us each year.

If our combined efforts each year were to improve the life of only one child, we all think it would be worth it. However, through our small involvement in the fantastic work of the Niall Mellon Township Trust, we know that it is not one life that is changed for the better each year, but hundreds of lives. Since the charity began its work in 2002, over 12,500 houses have been built and over 80,000 people housed with running water, toilets and safe electricity. It is our great privilege in Cashel Community School to be involved in this fantastic and life-changing work.

Read about one student's experience on Aoife Burke's blog on www.nmtownshiptrust.com



Brendan Ryan

Brendan Ryan teaches in Cashel Community School.

Answering teachers' queries

The ASTI has all the most up-to-date information to answer your questions.

I'm considering taking a career break next year. How do I go about getting one and will my job be secure?

If you are a permanent teacher, aged under 60, you can apply to take an unpaid career break for up to five years. You will be entitled to resume employment at the end of the period, subject to whatever regulations are in force regarding redeployment.

To take a career break, you must apply in writing to the board of management/manager by March 1 prior to the school year in which you intend to take leave, except in exceptional circumstances. The granting of a career break is not automatic but ASTI advice is that applications should be favourably considered by the school authorities and provisionally accepted subject to approval by the Department. A career break must last a minimum of a year. You can take a career break for up to five years, but you must re-apply each year to extend your career break.

While on career break, you cannot teach in Irish primary or second-level schools, except on a casual or intermittent basis. The period of your career break is not reckonable for superannuation. However, you can maintain uninterrupted membership of the teachers' pension scheme by paying into the scheme while on career break.

For more see the leave section of the ASTI website – www.asti.ie

I am out of work at the moment: how can I get substitute work? I heard there is a new work placement scheme for teachers: what does that involve?

Placements made under the new work placement scheme are unpaid. The scheme will allow qualified teachers or non-qualified personnel to work in schools while they are claiming unemployment benefit, but it does not provide any new jobs or paid work for teachers.

Substitute teachers are employed to cover for absent teachers on a casual basis and are paid for the hours they work. The ASTI runs a substitute placement service, which is available to all schools during the school year. Teachers who are available for substitute work are invited to register with the substitute placement scheme. When a school requires a substitute, the service provides them with a list of suitable candidates who they can contact directly. Register at www.asti.ie or call 01-604 0163.

It can be helpful to send a CV and cover letter to schools in your area letting them know that you are available for substitute work and would like to be placed on a panel for future vacancies. You can follow up with a phone call to the principals to discuss your availability, qualifications and experience.

See the section for new teachers on the ASTI website for more information – www.asti.ie.

I know the budget made changes to the pay scale for teachers – does this affect me?

The Government announced in December that the pay scale for all new public servants, including teachers, would be reduced by 10%. It was also announced that new teachers will now start on the first point of the scale. The pay scale for existing teachers will not change so if you are teaching at the moment your basic salary will not be affected.

As the budget also made a number of changes to tax credits and other tax arrangements, you will probably notice a change to your net pay. See page 6 for details.

More information is available on the Budget section of the ASTI website – www.asti.ie.

I am working on a temporary contract, which finishes in January. I'm planning to seek other work while I am looking for a teaching job. Will I be treated as a new entrant when I return to teaching?

You will be considered to be a new entrant if the interval between your finish date and the date on which your next teaching contract begins is more than 26 weeks. This also applies to school-funded contracts. This is the case whether your contract comes to an end or you resign your teaching position. This is not the case for teachers who are on secondment or are absent on approved paid or unpaid leave.

Any substitute or casual work counts as teaching employment, meaning that if you are employed as a teacher in any capacity, your limit will be reset to 26 weeks from the date this employment finishes.

The definition of a new entrant to teaching is based on that given in the Public Service Superannuation Act, 2004.

As we approach the general election we encourage as many retired ASTI members as possible to join the BSTA by completing the form below

Thank you.
Seán Fallon (Secretary)



Membership application

Name:	
Address:	
Home Tel:	
Mobile:	
Email:	
*RSTA Branch:	

Subscription payment options:

Deduction from pension	€		Direct debit	€	
			Cheque	€	

Members are encouraged to pay by deduction from pension where possible to keep administration and banking costs to a minimum. This year's subscription is just €24 for the year.

Mandate for deduction of annual subscription from pension

I hereby authorise the Retired Teachers' Payroll Division of the Department of Education to make a deduction directly from my pension of the annual subscription as notified to it by the Retired Secondary Teachers' Association on my behalf. I understand and agree that the Retired Secondary Teachers' Association has the right to alter the rate of subscription from time to time and to advise the Department of the changed rate.

Pension Payroll No:

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Please return the completed application to: Muriel McNicholas,
Cordarraagh, Kiltimagh, Co. Mayo.

*RSTA Branches: Cork, Donegal, Dublin, Galway, Kerry, Kildare, Kilkenny, Limerick, Mayo, Midland, North East, Sligo, Tipperary, Waterford, Wexford, Wicklow.
www.rsta-ireland.com

EngineersWeek

14-20 February, 2011

Engineers Week is a programme of nationwide events with the aim of celebrating the world of engineering in Ireland. Events for primary and post-primary students and their families will take place across the country during the week of February 14-20, 2011. Log on to www.engineersweek.ie to find out more about the free interactive events taking place in your county for Engineers Week 2011!

Teaching global issues?

A workshop focusing on teaching Transition Year students about global issues will be held on Saturday, February 5, in the Athlone Springs Hotel. The event is organised by Comhláimh, ECO UNESCO and Trócaire in association with the Professional Development Service for Teachers. To register or for more information contact Ruth, Tel: 01-617 4835, or Email: campaign@debtireland.org.

One good idea can change everything

Sustainable Energy Ireland is calling on second-level students to work together on One Good Idea to improve awareness levels and understanding of climate change and energy efficiency in Ireland. Teams of students will work together to research, design and implement a campaign to improve climate change awareness and promote energy efficiency to one of three target audiences. The winning school will be awarded a range of fantastic prizes. To enter log on to www.seai.ie/onegoodidea.

Exploring space education

The Space Generation Advisory Council (SGAC) website offers advice and suggestions for teaching students about space. There are a variety of space activities happening throughout the country: astronomy, model rocket launches, presentations, workshops, conferences, classes, societies, groups, space camps, and more. SGAC Ireland aims to maximise awareness of all of these events. To find out more, visit Ireland's page on: www.spacegeneration.org.

Irish Aid launches award



The Irish Aid Volunteering and Information Centre, O'Connell Street, Dublin, offers a dynamic multi-media learning environment where second-level students can learn about the work of Irish Aid and engage with the issues of global development, interdependence and human rights. Since it opened in January 2008, about 5,000 students have participated in the Centre's development education programme for schools. The current focus is on food, farming and chronic hunger in Africa. Students learn about these issues in the setting of a rural village called Khulungira in Malawi. Irish Aid has recently launched the Khulungira Award Scheme for schools that visit the Centre. The scheme invites students to develop a project, in a medium of their choice, to communicate what they have learnt with a wider audience. The deadline for entries is April 15. The top three winning entries will be presented with their awards on Africa Day in May 2011. All students who submit entries will receive a certificate of participation.

For further information, contact Barbara Wilson, Tel: 01-854 6923, or Email: barbara.wilson@dfa.ie.

Understanding bullying

A new book, *Understanding School Bullying, A Guide for Parents and Teachers*, offers guidelines on addressing bullying and discusses structures and policies that can minimise the problem and its effects. The book is available on www.veritas.ie.

HETI study tour

The Holocaust Education Trust Ireland (HETI) is organising a study tour to Berlin in April. The programme includes visits to Holocaust sites, lectures, seminars and workshops.

The cost is €595 based on two people sharing. For more information see www.hetireland.org.



Anti-bullying campaign tools for teachers

A free anti-bullying website resource for teachers in secondary schools

www.antibullyingcampaign.ie

Dear Editor,

I have been a higher-level Leaving Cert and Junior Cert maths teacher at Ramsgrange Community School, Wexford, for the past 31 years. After reading the September issue of *ASTIR*, I wish to compliment Michael Moriarty for his candid views re. Project Maths – very down to earth and to be applauded!

Our maths programme has been dumbed down since the change in 1990 and further downgraded since 2003. The Department of Education and Skills should look at the time at which students leave the exam. Allowing students to leave after 30/40 minutes is unreal! Schools have no real authority here (well, maybe religious run secondary schools might have).

I am surprised at the universities if Project Maths is, as I think, a waste of government money and allowing students to enter college with another dumbed down version of Leaving Cert maths.

Can I ask a simple question? Why did 4,000 students fail ordinary level maths at Leaving Cert? Might it be that the gap between Junior Cert ordinary level and Leaving Cert ordinary level is too wide? Or did 4,000 students leave the exam early? This information is easy to access in most schools. My school takes down the times of students leaving early.

I am not in favour of Project Maths. As a teacher I will implement the course/strategy but I will not be responsible for the consequences.

Yours in education,

Mary Carragher
RCS, Wexford

Obituary

Thomas Flynn

February 1934 – September 2010

It was with great sadness that we learned of the death of Tom Flynn: grandfather, father, teacher, colleague and union man. Tom died peacefully at home on September 8 surrounded by his loving family. An adopted Monaghan man, Tom never lost his love for his birthplace and even retained traces of the Cork accent, although he had spent some of his life in Wicklow and Kilkenny. His secondary education was interrupted by serious illness, and it was due to the enthusiasm and kindness of a neighbour in Kanturk, the late Gus Kelleher who owned and ran the boys' secondary school, that Tom was enabled to finish his schooling and gain entry to UCC. He always enjoyed the small irony of devoting his life to preparing students for the Leaving Cert, an exam he'd never sat himself having made his way to college via Matriculation.

In UCC Tom studied English and history. His professor of English considered him to be too involved with the politics of the student union for the good of his studies. Topping the poll on three separate occasions in student council elections undoubtedly laid the foundations for his later involvement with the ASTI and for his insatiable appetite for canvassing.

After graduating in 1964 his first and, as it turned out, last post in teaching was in Clones, mostly in St Tiarnach's Secondary School. The Principal, Rev. Fr Seamus Morris, interviewed him over the phone and told him: "Come on ahead, sure we'll fit you in somewhere!" Tom accepted with the mental reservation that he'd go for one year. He eventually became Vice Principal of St Tiarnach's.

In the border town Tom soon found himself heavily involved in school drama and he produced eight consecutive Shakespeare plays, beginning with *Julius Caesar* and ending with *The Tempest*. In true Shakespearean tradition he used an all-male cast until Largy College opened, which catered for boys and girls. He was particularly proud of his drama successes with the young people of Clones. Past pupils often reminisce about their "kick start" into amateur drama, which

lasted well beyond school years. Tom will also be remembered in Clones for his staging of panto, *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Tarry Flynn*. That friendships forged at such times endure was well in evidence at his funeral.

Tom's involvement with the ASTI began as soon as he started teaching and continued well beyond his retirement. Being an Honorary Life Member meant more to him than a framed cert on the wall and he continued to attend branch meetings until ill health utterly prevented it. He was school steward in St Tiarnach's over a period of about 20 years. He held every officership of the Monaghan Branch over many years, and was an automatic candidate as CEC representative during the '80s and '90s. He sat for several years, and stormy ones at that, on Standing Committee. He was elected Trustee of the union at the time the Baggot Street premises were purchased. He said he never expected to sign a cheque again with as many noughts on it. At the close of his career he was again elected Trustee. His involvement with the ASTI was never self-seeking, but was always directed towards the improvement of conditions for teachers, especially new entrants into the profession. In particular he pursued the shortening of the pay scale, the autonomy of the teacher in his or her own classroom, the improvement of pension provisions, the secularisation of senior positions and a posts structure that acknowledged all the extra work done by teachers. He regarded the smooth and successful amalgamation of St Tiarnach's Secondary School with St Patrick's High School into Largy College as one of the prime achievements to which he contributed as an ASTI rep. Full credit for his role has been accorded by ASTI Head Office, TUI and diocese alike.

To his wife Patricia, his family, extended family and friends, we extend our sincerest sympathy. Ar dheis Dé go raibh d'anam Tom.

By Kevin McEneaney

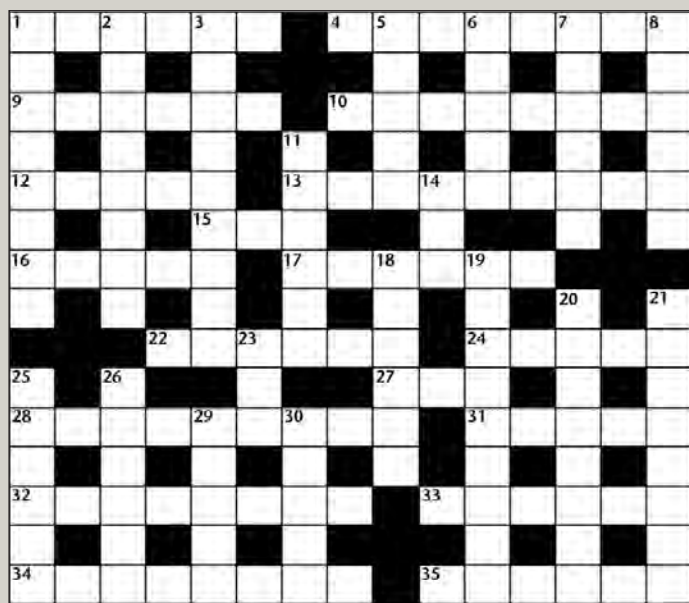


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€200

ASTIR CROSSWORD NO. 1101

€200 prize for the first fully correct answer drawn from the entries.

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The winner will receive €200

courtesy of the ASTI Credit Union.

If you wish to keep your copy of *ASTIR* intact you may send a photocopy of the crossword. One entry only per member.

Name

School

Address

ASTI Branch

Entries to: Astir Crossword No. 1101, Think Media,
The Malthouse, 537 NCR, Dublin 1.

To arrive by: Monday, February 7, 2011

CLUES ACROSS:

- 1 Hornet flying round big chair (6)
- 4 The neat trap was readily seen (8)
- 9 Endlessly talk about Olympic event (6)
- 10 Being (8)
- 12 A sealed gearbox with a projecting ridge (5)
- 13 Sketch or trace strudel in eateries (9)
- 15 Into an adolescent bustling commotion (3)
- 16 Trace a response to a stimulus (5)
- 17 In card with an unpleasant smell (6)
- 22 A sprite with a lively mind (6)
- 24 Tea up having a grayish brown colour (5)
- 27 I rebel in anger (3)
- 28 Could be throwback (9)
- 31 "We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another", he wrote (5)
- 32 A born idea to achieve a cheerful, lively and self-confident air (8)
- 33 Could be sofa, divan or appetiser! (6)
- 34 Honeysuckle by another name (8)
- 35 The hero of Virgil's 12-book epic (6)

CLUES DOWN:

- 1 Little ones (8)
- 2 Air duels remaining after a part is taken (8)
- 3 Causes a neat Sue loathing or disgust (9)
- 5 Point of resolution (5)
- 6 A sonar burning (5)
- 7 Being a Hebrew prophet he avoids jail (6)
- 8 New gadget bears a label (6)
- 11 "Oh Time! the beautifier of the dead,of the ruin, comforter and only healer when the heart hath bled... Time, the avenger!" (Byron)(6)
- 14 American company for writing? (3)
- 18 Nice to observe (6)
- 19 Died having made no legal will (9)
- 20 The ultimate maiming (8)
- 21 Plumes in knife at her side (8)
- 23 Your unique number (1.1.1.)
- 25 In audition manage composer (6)
- 26 It can help you get a date (6)
- 29 An order of classical Greek architecture (5)
- 30 One who keeps attempting in this German city (5)

Solution to ASTIR crossword No. 1005

Across

1. Brainwash
9. Censor
10. Education
11. Banish
12. Flattered
13. Paints
17. Asp
19. Mittens
20. Avenger
21. Sex
23. Inroad
27. Spasmodic
28. Rhodes
29. Attitudes
30. Nordic
31. Hyphenate

Down

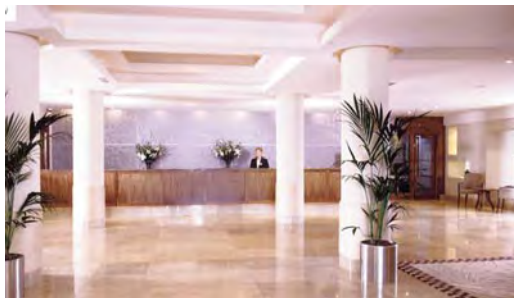
2. Riddle
3. Incite
4. Wither
5. Showers
6. Separates
7. Espionage
8. Orchestra
14. Immigrant
15. Starboard
16. Menagerie
17. Ass
18. Pax
22. Empathy
24. Isaiah
25. Column
26. Silent

Congratulations to the winner of Crossword No. 1005:

Angela Hargaden, Mohill Community College, Convent Lane, Mohill, Co. Leitrim. Carrick-on-Shannon Branch Member.

CONVENTION 2011

WELCOME TO CORK CITY



An invitation from the President to attend ASTI Annual Convention 2011

Dear ASTI member,

I look forward to welcoming all delegates to ASTI Annual Convention 2011, which takes place from April 26 to 28 at the Silver Springs Moran Hotel, Cork City.

Attend Annual Convention to play an important role in deciding ASTI policy and to make your voice heard on issues of importance to you, your school, and to education and trade unionism. Convention gives you the chance to meet colleagues from all over the country, learn more about your union and make a significant contribution to developments in education.

Of course there is ample time for socialising too! Take the opportunity to explore Cork City and surrounds, and to attend the Convention Banquet, which is always a very enjoyable event. Details on ticket prices are available overleaf.

I encourage all members to consider attending Convention 2011. I particularly welcome new delegates, and hope this year we will see many members attending for the first time. If you are interested in attending, go to your next branch meeting and put yourself forward as a delegate. Get involved to shape your future!

I look forward to meeting you at Convention,

Jack Keane, ASTI President

Some comments from delegates on previous conventions:

"It's my first time at Convention and I'm really enjoying it. I find many of the motions very interesting."

Jo Ann O'Connor,
St Mary's Secondary School,
Mallow

"It's brilliant, it's not what I expected; it's surprisingly relaxed, yet there is a lot of important work going on."

John Galligan,
The Royal School, Cavan.

"I've been coming to Convention for a few years. Every year I come, I learn about my profession and my union."

Patrick Andrews,
Colaiste Chriost Ri, Cork City

WELCOME TO CONVENTION 2011

CORK CITY



ASTI Annual Convention runs from Tuesday to Thursday, April 26-28, 2011.

VENUE:

Convention will be held in The Silver Springs Moran Hotel, Cork.

ACCOMMODATION:

Accommodation will be provided at The Silver Springs Moran Hotel, Cork. It will be allocated on a 'first come, first served' basis.

Delegates are asked to book in pairs or at least to indicate the person with whom they have agreed to share. Please note that there are a limited number of single rooms available.

The hotel's family rates are as follows:

Family rooms are charged at a double room rate of €99 per night with a supplement of €10 B&B per child under 12 years of age per night. Children over 12 will be charged full adult price. Please note that there is a hotel maximum of three children under 12 per room.

Further information relating to hotels, guesthouses and bed and breakfasts in the area can be found on our website – www.asti.ie.

CRECHE:

Facilities will be available each day during Convention hours in the crèche located off site. Places must be reserved in advance no later than April 4, 2011.

Further information relating to crèche facilities can be found on our website – www.asti.ie.

ADMINISTRATION FEE:

There is a registration fee payable by your branch of €30 per person for all delegates, CEC members and Standing Committee members. Branches are no longer required to pay the registration fee directly. This will be offset against the branch's April quarterly cheque.

BANQUET DINNER:

The Banquet Dinner will take place on Tuesday April 26, in the Conference Centre.

The cost of a Banquet ticket is normally €45, but if your Branch books a table of ten before Friday April 8, it will cost only €350 – a saving of €100. If your branch wishes to join with another branch for a table, the branch should book under one branch's name by emailing info@asti.ie, reference 'Annual Convention'.

Payment for tables must reach the ASTI Accounts Department on or before April 15, 2011. Book early to avoid disappointment.

Tickets will also be on sale from 1.30pm-2.30pm in the Conference Foyer, Silver Springs Moran Hotel, Cork, on Tuesday April 26, at a cost of €45.

Lunches are available on a cash basis in The Silver Springs Moran Hotel, Cork, each day.

BOOKING FORM FOR CONVENTION 2011

Arrival date: Departure date: Required number of nights:

Please tick whichever room you require

Double/twin €99 ☐ Single €85 ☐ Family room ☐
(as outlined above)

Please reserve one room for:

Name	<input type="text"/>	Name	<input type="text"/>
Address	<input type="text"/>	Address	<input type="text"/>
	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>
Tel. no.	<input type="text"/>	Tel. no.	<input type="text"/>
Email	<input type="text"/>	Email	<input type="text"/>

PLEASE SEND THIS COMPLETED BOOKING FORM TO: THE RESERVATIONS DEPARTMENT, REF. ASTI ANNUAL CONVENTION, SILVER SPRINGS MORAN HOTEL, TIVOLI, CORK CITY. CREDIT CARD NUMBER IS ESSENTIAL TO GUARANTEE BOOKING

Credit card details:

Card holder's name:

Credit card no.: - - -

Expiry date: / /



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