

# *D4 School portrait Sint-Dimpna Geel Free Primary School*

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Report: Guido Aerts Co-ordination: Willy Verbeken

## **1 General characteristics of the school**

The Sint-Dimpna free primary school is based at three locations. The largest location is in the centre of the municipality and provides primary education. The two other locations are nursery schools situated further from the centre.

A total of 520 children attend the school.

In 1997, the school started buying second-hand PCs (type 386), which it placed with motivated teachers in at least one classroom for each age group. The school then systematically expanded the number of computers and modernized them. Quite early on, a network was installed in the main school building, which runs on an NT server and is maintained by one of the parents. At present, the school has 65 Pentium computers connected to the network (also connected to the internet), 5 standalone PCs and four laptops for mobile use. Every classroom has at least two PCs. The school also has a computer room. From the very start, the school has taken part in various ICT projects, such as the 'Rivers project' ('Rivierenproject'), in order to gain the necessary expertise.

Until now, the school has spent around € 10,000 on ICT every year. Around three-quarters of this amount consisted of PC/KD money<sup>10</sup> and the other quarter came from contributions from the parents' committee. The school uses around 90 percent of resources for maintaining and modernizing the hardware, while 10 percent goes to the purchase of software. Because the end of the PC/KD project means that schools will no longer be funded for ICT, the school's policy now involves a greater focus on maintaining the infrastructure rather than expanding it further.

The teachers organize their own continuing education and refresher training. For the continuing education of the ICT co-ordinator, the school uses resources from the continuing education budget. Since 1999, several hours from the lesson packages have been used for ICT co-ordination. Since the 2002-2003 school year, those hours have come from the allocated package for ICT co-ordination. This school year started with a cell of ICT co-ordinators in the school community.

## 2 *Changes for pupils*

The changes for the pupils are in two areas. Firstly, all of the children now have the same opportunities for using ICT and developing ICT skills. Secondly, the teachers now give frontal lessons less than in the past, and the children have more chances to practice and do exercises. They also learn how to use digital information sources (CD-ROM and internet). In addition, the focus is on learning how to find information and critically assess its value. To protect children against unsuitable information, the school uses the child-friendly and pre-filtered *netwijs.nl* search engine. The school is also taking part in a Comenius project, in which information is exchanged through email with five schools in four different countries. In the third class, the introduction of ICT has already led to a form of curriculum differentiation for French and mathematics, where the software and/or the performance level are chosen selectively according to the level of the pupils.

## 3 *Changes for teachers*

The motivation to integrate ICT in education was fuelled by the enhanced social prospects it would provide. The school wants to prepare the children for a life in society and provide them with the necessary skills. The school believes that ICT skills are an integral part of this. Contemporary programs (word processing and spreadsheets) must therefore be integrated into the school as modern-day educational tools. On the one hand, the school follows the relevant ICT learning guidelines drawn up by the VVKBaO supervisory board<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand, the teachers are integrating ICT especially in the independent working methods, such as “*hoekenwerk*” (corner work) and contract work, for which an average of two lessons per week are organized in the primary level. When that is provided for in the educational learning packages, teachers use the accompanying software mainly as a tool for practice and differentiation. Here, the teachers function more as guides than as knowledge-providers.

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The introduction of ICT has led more to a gradual change in teaching practices. During the first phase, use of the PC in the classroom was stimulated but was not obligatory. The task of ICT was mainly to support and motivate. Because the school team was already occupied with *hoekenwerk* or contract work, it was quite easy to integrate the computer in these working methods. Here the emphasis is mainly on further practicing and absorbing the acquired content and skills. On the other hand, there is still little use made of ICT during the instruction phase, especially because suitable programs are difficult to obtain on the market. At present, the school mainly works with software from OWG, with informative CD-ROMs, and to a limited extent with structured programs. Edutainment is scrupulously avoided.

<sup>11</sup> Vlaams Verbond van het Katholiek Basis Onderwijs (umbrella organization for Catholic primary schools in Flanders)

## **4 Organisational change**

In the past, the school anticipated the imminent developments in ICT by reserving lessons in the lesson packages for an ICT co-ordinator. This person provides a lot of demand-driven support (software, organization within hoekenwerk...) but is also responsible for training teachers. Within the team, there is a lot of interaction aimed at integrating ICT into classroom and school practices in a useful way.

Now that the allocation of hours for ICT co-ordination is linked to the establishment of a school community, the task of this pioneer co-ordinator has been extended. The school community commissioned the ICT co-ordinator to develop an ICT vision and place the emphasis on the use of ICT for children. A core team has been set up within this school community. The ICT co-ordinator is responsible for training (at present, particularly the necessary technical training) the new ICT co-ordinators. The intention is to elevate the other schools in the school community to the level of this school.

At this school, ICT is also used as a support tool for the school organization. The student data is stored on a separate partition on the server. There is a separate folder for each child, which contains the child's personal data as well as a summary of all arrangements, interviews, remedial activities and assessments. When necessary, the teachers can retrieve this data on the spot in the classroom. In addition, the student counsellor has one of the laptops and can retrieve the information through the network from every classroom.

The class computer also includes every teacher's personal version of the 'Doelpunt'<sup>12</sup> reporting program. However the reports do have to be printed through the network on the central network printer.

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## **5 Changes in co-operation with others**

Because expansion of the number of computers took place exclusively with the school, the introduction of ICT has led to few changes in the co-operation with the environment. The server is maintained by one of the parents, who is a specialist in this field. Hardware repairs are carried out by the ICT co-ordinator.

One clever initiative involves co-operation with the supervisory board. The board organizes in-service training courses in the form of 'At home with...', where practical examples are exchanged and discussed.

As already described, the establishment of the school community has led to the expansion of the duties of the school's own ICT co-ordinator.

<sup>12</sup> For more information, visit <http://www.doelpunt.be>

## 6 Reflections and ambitions

The school is very happy with the way the ICT policy was tackled from the very start. This was a gradual process but was still an exceptionally smooth process. From the beginning, the school opted to use second-hand class computers and to integrate them in the independent teaching methods. By participating in various projects, the school gained a lot of know-how and this in turn gave the school extra opportunities to try out new things.

The school is less satisfied with the change in the Government's policy. The ICT hours are a good idea, but the school believes that they are not enough to meet all the needs within the allocated hours. Now that there are no more funds for ICT, the school is afraid that the boards of governors will start focusing more on other financial priorities, which means that there will be less money left for ICT.

The teacher training study programme is another tricky problem, according to the school. Although the tide is gradually turning, today's graduate teachers still have far too few ICT competencies, both in the general use of ICT and in the integration of ICT in the classroom.

The school is soon to start a new project: 'Diggi's Toolkit'<sup>13</sup>. This is a digital open learning environment in which both teachers and pupils can collect information and process it in different ways (on a web page, in a presentation....). The school also wants to start using ICT during the instruction phase.

## 7 Appreciation

In just a short time, this school has become quite advanced in the implementation of ICT. Because the school initially opted for class computers with motivated teachers who played a pioneering role, and a working group was set up, and hours were made available from the school's own lesson packages for ICT co-ordination, the introduction of ICT went quite smoothly. This school has developed a sound ICT policy that now serves as a model for the school community.

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The fact that the school still makes little use of ICT in the instruction phase is mainly because of the lack of suitable software. On the other hand, the pupils are already using ICT a lot to collect and process information.

The use of a network with a server guarantees very efficient use of the resources, especially the management of the software. We realize that this is not technically or financially possible at all schools.

<sup>13</sup> For more information, visit <http://www.toolkits.be>

## **8 Lessons for others**

The school has formulated some simple but very practical tips:

- Do not purchase any brand-new and expensive materials. A solid and reliable second-hand Pentium with multimedia options is sufficient.
- Begin on a small scale. Let the implementation of ICT grow and develop gradually. Do not lose sight of the teachers. Do not force them to do anything, but try to convince them of the added value of ICT - for example, by giving them sufficient technical and didactic support.
- Make sure that the support is well organized. Give teachers enough time and allow them to learn from each other. You can do this by forming a representative working group of motivated teachers.