

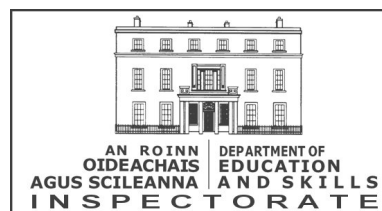
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning
REPORT**

**Bailieborough Community School
Bailieborough, County Cavan
Roll number: 91351S**

Date of inspection: 4 April 2011



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April 2011 in Bailieborough Community School. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Introduction

Bailieborough Community School opened in 1981 as an amalgamation of Bailieborough Vocational School and Lourdesville Secondary School. It currently caters for 540 students, 269 males and 271 females. The school offers the Junior Certificate (JC), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LVCP) and the established Leaving Certificate (LC).

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The members of the board of management show a strong loyalty to the school and a pride in its achievements.
- Senior management shares a vision for the school and works as a very effective team. Its management style is open and consultative.
- Transition Year (TY) will be introduced for the students in September 2011 with Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) being introduced at the start of the following academic year.
- The school operates an open and inclusive enrolment policy.
- Keeping students' needs central to all decision making is one of the school's core values.
- A high level of care and concern for student welfare was evident.
- The school has a committed and well-qualified staff.
- Lessons observed were well structured and engaged students in the learning process.
- Physical Education (PE) is not offered to students at senior cycle.
- Almost all the recommendations from previous inspection reports have been fully implemented.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- Several policy documents need to be progressed from draft form as a matter of urgency. The board needs to be more proactive in leading this development.
- In light of the introduction of TY and LCA, a full review of the roles and duties attached to posts of responsibility should be carried out.

- The number of teachers involved in the delivery of learning support needs to be reduced so as to form a specialised core team.
- A curriculum committee should be established to review the quality of timetabling and curriculum provision at junior and senior cycle.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

The board of management is properly constituted and is well informed about its role, functions, responsibilities and statutory obligations. Members of the board show a strong commitment to the school and are proud of the role it plays in the community. The board demonstrates a sense of ownership of the school and sees itself as a support to staff, management and students. Members of the board attend school functions and graduation events as a means of affirming staff in their work and students in their achievements.

Whole-school planning is collaborative and consultative with all members of the school community enabled to contribute to policy development. Progress to date has been modest overall with a considerable number of policies remaining in draft form. The board recognises policy development as an area to be progressed in the school. It is recommended that the board take a more proactive role in ensuring that draft policies are quickly brought forward for ratification. The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy is the most urgent of these and should be completed in accordance with Circular Letter 27/08.

The main stated priority of the board is to support teaching and learning in the school and to ensure that all students reach their full potential by responding to their needs. With this in mind, the board has sanctioned the introduction of a voluntary TY which will be available to students from September 2011. Planning around the overall structure of the TY and for the individual modules of work within the programme is well advanced. In addition to the introduction of this new programme, the school plans to re-introduce the LCA for the following academic year. It is evident that keeping the needs of the students central to all decision making in the school is a core value and is commended. Other priorities identified by the board include the development of information and communication technology (ICT) facilities in the school, improvements to the school building and grounds, and the ongoing support of teachers through continuing professional development (CPD).

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (Published September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

The Parents' Association is well established and its participation in school activities is valued by school management and teachers. The association plays an important and constructive role in the life of the school through its fundraising events and its support of a wide range of activities.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal are deeply committed to the school and work well together as the senior management team. Both have an active on-the-ground presence in the school and manage the school effectively. Responses to the questionnaires indicate that most parents surveyed agree that the school is well run. The principal was appointed in September 2010 and has successfully and dynamically adapted to her new role. She views her role as leading and managing all the school partners and resources while the deputy principal's role deals more directly with student issues.

Currently among the teaching staff there are seven assistant principals and twelve special duties post-holders. They make a strong contribution to the smooth running of the school. Post duties are assigned on the basis of the school's needs but also to reflect individual teachers' interests and talents. This is good practice. Post-holders see themselves as middle management and describe discussions between themselves and senior management as democratic and open. It was evident that the roles and duties of post holders have evolved over time with post-holders continuing to show a willingness to adapt to change. In light of the imminent introduction of two new programmes at senior cycle, it is recommended that a full post review be carried out in order to ensure that the duties assigned best meet the school's needs.

The school operates an open admissions policy and acknowledges inclusion both in principle and practice. The code of behaviour is based on respect, rights and responsibilities. Of the students surveyed through questionnaire, almost all agree that they understand the school rules. The code of behaviour is currently being redrafted to produce a document which, in line with best practice, is positive in tone and framed in terms of expected student behaviour.

Year leaders work closely with class tutors in the administration of the care and discipline system of the school. Morning assemblies are held four days a week. Of the students surveyed through questionnaire, most indicate that they can talk to an adult if they are having problems in the school. Assembly notices are prepared and read out daily. These notices are a valuable means of communicating news and events to the whole school cohort.

Year leaders meet with senior management on a weekly basis. Issues raised by teachers and class tutors are discussed at these meetings and this facilitates consistent enforcement of discipline and attendance strategies. These meetings also provide a forum where ideas can be shared and open contributions made towards planning for the future. This is commended as it provides post holders with day-to-day management experience.

Staff CPD is actively supported and encouraged by senior management. Many members of staff have furthered their professional development through a variety of post-graduate and in-service courses with the help and support of the school. Whole-staff in-service training and information days have been provided on a variety of relevant topics, including TY, study skills and students with special educational needs (SEN). It is suggested that future professional development should prioritise the key areas of assessment for learning (AfL) and the effective use of ICT.

It was evident that senior management places great emphasis on co-operation and collaboration amongst the school partners. An example of this can be seen in the preparations for the introduction of the TY programme. This featured a presentation to the staff followed by in-depth discussions. The parents' and students' views and opinions were then sought via an information evening. A similar approach was used when rolling out the study skills programme where great efforts were made to bring teachers, parents and

students along as a cohesive unit. This measured, incremental approach facilitates a sense of ownership of these initiatives and is highly commended.

The quality of subject department planning is generally very good; a number of planning folders however need further development. The schemes of work within these folders need increased levels of detail on student learning outcomes, teaching methodologies, resources and assessment methods for each topic listed. It is suggested that senior management should play a role in monitoring the development of subject plans.

A good range of academic and technical subjects is offered at both JC and LC levels. The school's student-centred approach is evidenced by the recent addition of Agricultural Science at senior cycle. This was in direct response to students' expressions of interest. A whole-staff review of subject provision for the JC is planned. It is felt by the school that the number of subjects which students currently study is excessive. This proactive approach to modifying and adapting what is offered to students is commended. It was noted that senior cycle students are not offered PE. The omission of PE overlooks the contribution that the subject can make in developing active lifestyle practices in students. Efforts should be made to provide this subject as part of the core curriculum in senior cycle. During the evaluation, concern was expressed by some teachers over the shortening of class periods due to ten-period days on Mondays and Tuesdays. It is recommended that a curriculum committee be established to review the quality of curriculum and timetabling provision at junior and senior cycle with a view to making recommendations on these two matters.

A range of supports is available to students at times of transition. Incoming first-year students and their parents are invited to the school for an Open Day during which they meet teachers and visit classrooms. On entry to the school, first-year students are provided with an opportunity to sample optional subjects before being asked to make their choices. Students moving to senior cycle sit the Differential Aptitude Tests (DATs) after which the guidance counsellor conducts individual interviews with students and their parents to discuss subject choice. Students are offered an open choice of subjects at this level with option bands then generated to best accommodate these choices. Information gathered from the questionnaires indicates that the majority of parents and students agree that they received good advice about subject choice. The support structures in place at times of subject choice are good but the questionnaire responses indicate that some work needs to be done on improving communications with parents and students.

The existence of a care team provides further evidence that the school prioritises the welfare of its students. This group meets regularly and liaises with teachers and year leaders regarding the welfare of individual students. In addition to this, a social skills group assists selected first-year students to integrate fully into the school. This is a worthwhile initiative and is run as part of the school's personal safety programme. Of the students surveyed, most agree that they feel safe and cared for in the school.

The school operates an effective system to identify and provide support to students with special educational needs (SEN). Learning support is provided on an individual or group withdrawal system with some team teaching in Mathematics. In addition to this, some small group settings are provided in Mathematics and English. Two teachers form the main learning-support team in the school and they are assisted by sixteen additional teachers. In the interest of best practice, it is recommended that a much smaller core team of resource teachers be established so that there is better continuity with students from year to year and that teacher professional development and experience can be maximised. Individual education plans are drawn up for students receiving support and this is commended. These plans are reviewed regularly to monitor progress and set new targets. To build on this good practice, it is recommended that more regular formal testing of identified students be

carried out. Such testing can assist in analysing the effectiveness of interventions which have been put in place.

The student council is well established in the school and is properly constituted. Council members see their functions as listening to and speaking on behalf of students thus bridging the gap between students and the school management. A staff member supports the council's work and officers meet regularly with the principal and deputy principal.

2.3 Management of facilities

A warm welcoming atmosphere is evident on entry to the school building which is clean, tidy and well maintained. A good range of student artwork is on display as well as photographs and displays of student achievements. Considerable infrastructural improvements have taken place in recent years including refurbishment of the Home Economics rooms, Science laboratories and the Design and Communication Graphics room. Up-dating and repair works are still necessary, in particular to the toilets and the roof. Classrooms are predominantly teacher-based and teachers have taken full advantage of this to create rich, colourful and stimulating learning environments.

The school is not well resourced in terms of ICT. With the exception of specialist rooms, ICT equipment was not widely available for teaching and learning. The Department of Education and Skills has recently provided significant funding to the school for the purchase of such equipment. It is commendable that senior management has carried out a needs analysis survey to ascertain the most judicious use of this funding.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty-two lessons were observed during the evaluation. In the majority of lessons observed, the standard of teaching and learning was good and in some cases very good. Responses to questionnaires indicate that most parents agree that teaching is good in the school. Clear routines were evident with teachers sharing the aims of the lesson with their students at the outset. This is good practice. In most cases, these aims were displayed throughout the lesson and were returned to at the end to assess what had been achieved.

Good links were established with prior learning by reviewing homework and by recapping on previous material. This provided a suitable context for the introduction of new material. Lessons were well paced and were pitched at a level appropriate for the students.

Lessons were confidently delivered and teacher instruction was clear and accurate. Well-chosen resources were used to stimulate and maintain students' interest and to help students engage in the learning process. A variety of methodologies and teaching strategies was observed in almost all lessons. These stimulated students to engage actively with the content of the lessons. By providing variety, the teacher supports the process of differentiation and facilitates the varied learning styles of students. The majority of students surveyed find their lessons interesting.

Very good examples of effective questioning strategies were evident in almost all lessons observed. These allowed the teachers to gauge the level of students' understanding, to probe their responses and to reinforce recently learned material. Questioning was most effective when questions were directed at named students, were open-ended and required students to demonstrate a deep understanding of the topic. Such strategies should be

sustained and developed in order to support students in the development of higher-order thinking skills. Questioning worked less well where student responses were short and limited, where questions did not move beyond recall and comprehension and where the teacher supplied the answer.

Student notebooks, class and homework exercise books were examined during classroom visits. These were generally of a good standard and were checked regularly. In some cases, teachers' written comments provided feedback to students. Teachers are encouraged to increase the extent of such written feedback. Results from the questionnaires indicate that most parents and students agree that teachers regularly check written work.

Teaching and learning took place in a positive and supportive environment characterised by appropriate affirmation of students' efforts and a good rapport between students and their teachers. This resulted in a comfortable and secure atmosphere where students were eager to ask questions and to contribute during lessons.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

The school's response to the seven most recently published subject inspection reports for the school was taken into consideration during this evaluation. The school management has proactively addressed all the recommendations relating to subject provision and school support which were made in these reports.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

There was clear evidence that the recommendations made on planning from previous inspection reports have been implemented. In one instance, the subject department had carefully documented how each of the recommendations was considered and addressed. This is good practice.

The wider use of AfL principles and practices was encouraged in several of the previous subject inspection reports. Some progress has been made in this area but there is still room for improvement. It is recommended that the school advance its work on a homework and assessment policy, which is in draft format, with a view to developing a whole-school approach to assessment strategies.

The subject inspection reports contained very few additional recommendations concerning teaching and learning, and from observation of lessons, the inspectorate team conclude that these have been addressed.

5. THE SCHOOL'S SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS AND CAPACITY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

5.1

The school shows a strong capacity for school improvement through its thorough implementation of the recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports. Both senior management and the staff openly discuss the best way forward for the school, keeping the evolving needs of the student cohort central to all decision making. This

commitment to the students motivates a constant review of the curriculum and programmes offered. This has resulted for example, in the recent introduction of Agricultural Science, the imminent introduction of TY and LCA and a planned review of the JC curriculum.

Senior management demonstrates clear leadership of the school development planning and review process. This, coupled with the willingness shown by the other school partners to engage in the process, should see good progress being made in the development of the whole-school plan. To accelerate this, time-bound targets should be set for each body of work being undertaken with progress reviewed regularly.

The overarching impression of Bailieborough Community School is of a school which is willing to change and adapt in order to benefit its students and does so through cooperation and collaboration.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcomes this positive WSE-MLL report. The whole school community is encouraged by the affirmation in the report of the many strengths of the school and its community.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

The Board of Management is committed to the recommendations of the report and has been particularly proactive in relation to school policies, curriculum provision planning, reducing the learning support team to a smaller core team as well as ICT provision and training.