

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Adamstown Community College**

**Lucan, County Dublin**

**Roll number: 76097U**

**Date of inspection: 24 September 2015**



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS  
AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION  
AND SKILLS  
INSPECTORATE**

# **Whole-School Evaluation**

## **Management, Leadership and Learning**

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in September 2015 in Adamstown Community College. 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, and 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 of the school 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***

Adamstown Community College opened in 2009 to serve the needs of a large urban area with a fast growing young population in County Dublin. It is a post-primary school operating under the auspices of the Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board. The student cohort is multicultural and multilingual and for many students English is not their mother tongue. The current enrolment is 933.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

### ***Key Findings***

- The board of management is deeply committed to the school and attends with due care to its responsibilities.
- The principal's contribution to managing and leading the development of this school from a green-field site to a thriving centre of learning is outstanding and the more recently appointed deputy principal demonstrates excellent management and leadership skills.
- The post holders form an effective middle-management team and carry out their duties with commitment.
- One of the key drivers in ensuring high standards in the quality of teaching and learning is the school's participation in the Instructional Leadership (IL) programme and the teachers' peer observation project is excellent.
- The quality of leadership for learning in relation to students is very good and this is strongly evident through the excellent curriculum and myriad of extra-curricular activities on offer in the school.
- The quality of the teaching and learning ranged from good to very good with many examples of excellent practice.

### ***Recommendations for Further Development***

- The board of management should expedite the ratification of the whole-school guidance plan and should also review the school's admissions policy to ensure that criteria applicable in relation to admission to the Transition Year (TY) programme are included and that the policy complies with Circular 0065/2010 in relation to voluntary contributions from parents.
- Strategies should be developed to bring about greater parental engagement with the school and to develop the student voice in the school.
- Attendance data should be reviewed more frequently and further strategies to improve attendance should be implemented.

- The draft policy relating to provision for students with English as an additional language (EAL) should be completed in line with the recommendations in the body of this report.
- All teachers should develop strategies associated with assessment for learning (AfL) and teachers should give regular written formative feedback to students.

## **1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

### ***1.1 School ownership and management***

The quality of management structures in the school is very good. The board of management demonstrates great commitment to the school and has ratified all of the mandatory policies except the guidance plan. The board should now seek to expedite the ratification of this. Currently, policies are developed and given to representatives of the parents' and students' councils for comment. A more meaningful partnership approach could be adopted at the developmental stage of policy formation. All policies should have a review date.

The board reviews the school's admissions policy on an annual basis. The policy needs to include the criteria applicable for successful enrolment in the TY programme. It is noted that as part of the admissions policy, an annual "necessary financial contribution" is charged. This is not in line with the terms of circular 0065/2010 and the board must clarify that financial contributions are voluntary.

The board attends with due care to its responsibilities and is very supportive of the principal and staff. It is particularly good practice that the board reviews the statistics in relation to student attainment in the certificate examinations. However, there is scope to develop the leadership role of the board and to develop clearer strategic priorities.

The senior management team (SMT), comprising the principal and deputy principal, is a key component of the management structure in the school. The principal has managed and led the development of this school from a green-field site to a thriving centre of learning with an enrolment of 933 students. His contribution to the success of this new school is outstanding. The more recently appointed deputy principal also demonstrates excellent management and leadership skills and contributes most effectively to the ongoing development of the school.

The middle management team comprises eight assistant principals and three special duties teachers who have a range of clearly defined appropriate duties. There is clear evidence that management tasks are well distributed at this level and that duties are carried out with a high level of commitment to the school.

An active parents' council is in place and meetings are held regularly. The parents' survey indicates that there is scope for the parents' council to improve communication with the wider parent body. The school communicates with parents via the school's website, the school journal and newsletters. There is, however, scope for strategies to be developed to ensure greater parental engagement with the school.

A student council has been democratically elected and is engaged appropriately in school activities. A review of data from surveys administered to students indicates that there is significant scope to develop the student voice in the school. Senior management needs to engage with the student council and the wider student body to establish what strategies can be put in place to enhance the student voice.

## ***1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

The quality of leadership for learning as demonstrated by the SMT is excellent. Both principal and deputy share a common vision and commitment to ensuring high standards in teaching and learning throughout the school. One of the key drivers of this is the school's participation in the IL programme. In addition to participation in this programme, the SMT supports staff to avail of a wide variety of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities. To maximise the benefit for the school, teachers should upload a short report on the learning gained from any CPD event onto the school's information and communication technology (ICT) platform for the benefit of all staff.

The middle-management team plays a key role in leading learning in the school. Some established post holders have a new range of duties this year and this ensures capacity building within the team. Currently post holders do not provide a written report on their work over the year. In line with best practice post holders should provide this, including a section of self- review, to the principal and the board.

The quality of leadership for learning among teachers is also excellent. Teachers are voluntarily leading projects related to improving teaching and learning. The mentoring project for newly qualified teachers and the current peer-observation project are examples. The peer-observation project involves teachers visiting lessons to learn how different IL techniques are used. The capacity and willingness among the teaching staff to learn from one another in order to enhance their own classroom practice is outstanding and demonstrates that this school is a true learning community.

Subject department planning is well established. Subject and programme plans are all shared on the school's ICT platform. Subject departments analyse the certificate examination results and some departments have written commentary on the results. A whole-school approach to the analysis of results should be taken and teachers should set specific targets for improvement. Teachers should develop an action plan which has a clear focus on classroom methodologies, AfL strategies and the provision of written formative feedback to students.

The quality of leadership for learning in relation to students is very good. The school offers an excellent and varied curriculum. As part of the transition from primary school, prospective students get opportunities through the school's open night to learn about the new optional subjects. However, student surveys indicate that there is scope to improve the advice that students get in relation to subject choice. The school should review the transition for incoming first-year students to see how they can provide increased experiences of new subjects so as to support the students when making subject choices.

Currently Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) is not provided for due to an historical arrangement with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. However, to redress the current deficit plans are in place to incorporate CSPE into the timetable for the next school year.

The optional TY programme is very good and comprises a good balance of core, modular and calendar events. The very good practice of reviewing the programme annually is noted. In future, students and parents should be surveyed as part of this review. In line with the terms of circular M29/95, twenty-eight hours tuition time must be provided in TY. In the Home Economics module, four students are removed from a lesson on a rotating basis as only twenty students are permitted in the lesson. This practice should be discontinued.

The provision of the Leaving Certificate Applied as an option for students who have completed junior cycle or TY is commendable. For the most part students seek their own

work experience placement. The school should consider how it can link more with businesses in the community to provide high quality work experience for the students.

A good attendance strategy is in place and follow up on student absences occurs. However, a review of the attendance data in the school indicates there is significant scope among a certain cohort of students to improve their attendance. Targets to improve student attendance should be set by year heads and students should set their own targets. Year heads should provide the SMT with regular reports relating to student attendance.

Students were well behaved in the course of the evaluation and there is a Code of Positive Behaviour in place. While there is a merit system in place to encourage positive behaviour, the code places more emphasis on sanctions for poor behaviour. When the code is reviewed significant input should be sought from students about how to further encourage positive behaviour.

Student leadership is fostered in a number of effective ways in the school. Students develop leadership skills through the student council, as class captains, prefects and as head girl and head boy. Students in senior cycle are offered the opportunity to be mentors to first-year students. The introduction of the *Cara Aire* programme is an excellent example of student leadership in the school.

A very good special educational needs (SEN) policy is in place. Support for students with SEN is provided through a mixture of withdrawal from mainstream classes and team teaching. More team teaching is recommended. Currently one teacher is engaging in significant relevant CPD and there is a need to ensure that more teachers are upskilled in the area of SEN. The practice whereby a number of teachers, not qualified in the area of SEN, are assigned to teach students in receipt of learning support and resource hours needs to be reviewed. A team of special-needs assistants (SNAs) provides very effective support to students with significant learning needs.

The multi-lingual and multi-cultural nature of the student cohort brings a wonderful diversity to the school. The school has a policy of only English being spoken. This needs to be reviewed as, in line with best practice, efforts need to be made to ensure that students' mother tongue is preserved and that positive attitudes to all languages are displayed.

Effective supports for EAL students include initial testing, additional English lessons and twinning EAL and native English speaking students. Nonetheless, teachers identified that levels of English among non-native speakers are a barrier to student attainment. A policy relating to EAL provision in the school should be completed. To inform this policy a review of the provision for EAL students needs to take place and all teachers should engage in a whole-school approach to ensuring students reach a greater proficiency in English. Specific targets should be set for EAL students in terms of age-appropriate books to be read and academic language to be acquired. Part of the support should be to provide students with guidelines on becoming autonomous language learners.

In relation to guidance provision, the good practice of timetabling lessons in senior cycle and gathering data in relation to the progression of students who have completed the Leaving Certificate is noted. As previously stated, the finalisation and ratification of the draft whole-school guidance plan should be prioritised. Very good practice in relation to the provision of Social, Personal and Health Education and Relationships and Sexuality Education was noted and the teachers engaged in the delivery of these programmes have availed of significant relevant CPD.

There is a very positive and vibrant atmosphere in the school and good structures are in place to support students. Class tutors and year heads play a vital role in the care of students

and regular care team meetings take place. The results of student questionnaires indicate that the majority of students feel safe and cared for in the school.

Student learning is actively promoted through the wide and varied programme of extra-curricular activities, exchanges, musical and sporting opportunities that are provided by the extremely hard-working and dedicated staff who give most generously of their time.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

### **1.3 Management of facilities**

The school buildings are new and the facilities for the most part are excellent. A number of specialist rooms is available to support the teaching of practical subjects and these rooms are consistently used for their designated purpose. The school accommodation is maintained to the highest standard. The school has an excellent ICT infrastructure which is very well used. However, facilities for Physical Education are limited and there are no indoor facilities or changing rooms.

The school has a health and safety statement and this is due to be reviewed in the near future.

## **2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### **2.1 The quality of learning and teaching**

The overall quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good with many examples of excellent practice observed in lessons. In a few lessons there was significant scope for development.

The lessons where excellent practice was observed were characterised by an AfL approach. In-depth assessment of the students' learning was integrated into the lessons and guided the development of the lessons. At the outset of these lessons a number of learning outcomes were written on the board and the students and teachers were very clear about what students were aiming to learn and how. Teachers assessed students' learning before moving on to the next stages in the lessons. Teachers used an excellent variety of methods to assess learning such as mini white-boards, card games, work sheets and rapid fire questions. In addition teachers used some very good techniques at the end of lessons to consolidate learning.

In lessons where less than optimal practice was observed the learning outcomes were very general and AfL practices were not used. Teachers were unclear about the progress of students within the lesson and in some cases the material covered was too difficult or too easy for students. This impeded the students' learning and their sense of success. To build on the excellent practice identified it is recommended that a whole-school approach to AfL be taken in planning and executing lessons.

In all lessons classroom management was exemplary. Classroom interactions were positive and student-teacher rapport was good. In most lessons students were praised for answers to questions and for contributions but not in all. It is important to affirm and encourage students in the course of lessons.

Classrooms were bright, colourful and provided a most appropriate setting for learning. The majority of classrooms had a wealth of relevant materials on display. Student work was on display and this gives students ownership of the learning environment. The arrangement of tables in many of the classrooms in settings that facilitate students working together is exemplary as it allows for a more student-centred approach to teaching and learning.

Student engagement in learning was very good and students remained on task throughout lessons. In a minority of lessons students were provided with opportunities to report on their learning. As this is a key activity which supports students in learning to learn, students should be given more opportunities to report on their learning in the course of lessons.

Student attainment is good. An increase in numbers of students taking higher-level papers in the certificate examinations is evident as is an increase in attainment in most subjects. The academic monitoring carried out by some year heads is excellent practice and assists in increasing student attainment. An overarching and whole-school approach to academic monitoring, including students setting targets for attainment, should be developed.

### **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

#### ***3.1 Management***

The school has had subject inspections in Mathematics, Science, History, Music and Geography. The SMT meets with subject coordinators to discuss the findings, recommendations and actions to be taken. The SMT also consider what recommendations are applicable to other subject departments. Good progress has been made in relation to the introduction of the Mathematics competency test for first-year students and a review of the timetabling in History. It is recommended that the SMT now put in place a structured approach to following up on recommendations and teachers should provide ongoing reports on progress.

#### ***3.2 Learning and teaching***

There is evidence of some good progress in relation to recommendations from previous inspection reports. Many subject plans now contain specific learning outcomes and, in many lessons observed, these were used to guide the lesson structure and, less often, to assess the attainment of the learning outcomes. The use of higher-order questions as recommended in some previous inspections was good in some lessons but there is scope to develop this on a whole-school level. The increased use of written formative feedback to ensure students' progression in learning needs to be addressed and implemented at a whole-school level.

### **4. THE SCHOOL'S SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS AND CAPACITY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

The school has engaged well with SSE process and good procedures are in place to gather data and set targets. It is very good that student surveys have been carried out to ascertain attitudes towards reading and Mathematics and, more recently, students' experience of the use of learning outcomes in lessons. To enhance the gathering of data, parents should also be surveyed. The school has developed comprehensive SSE reports and school improvement plans in relation to literacy and numeracy and has conducted some review of the plans.

Given the track record of the school's development from a green field site, the dedicated post of responsibility assigned to SSE and the commitment of the whole staff to the continued success of the school, it is clear that the management and staff of the school have significant capacity and motivation to engage with the school improvement agenda.



# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

### **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

We, the Board of Management of Adamstown Community College, accept in full the inspection report on management, leadership and learning which was conducted in the school in September 2015. The board wish to thank the inspectors for conducting the evaluation in an independent and impartial manner. The board are happy that all stakeholders in the school were afforded the opportunity to engage with the inspection process and comment on their experience in the school. We were delighted to be able to make a formal presentation to the inspectors, outlining the particular history and characteristics of both the school and the new community of Adamstown. The Board of Management are proud of the quality of leadership and vision amongst the Principal and all of his staff. Innovative styles of teaching and learning are evidently practised throughout the school. We are especially pleased that the Inspectorate have identified these qualities for inclusion in the evaluation report.

### **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 acknowledges the recommendations made in the report and commit to overseeing the implementation of these recommendations over the coming years. The Board will continue to support the school in the delivery of a quality student centered education. Having completed one full 6 year cycle the Board is cognisant of the need for continuous review and renewal and in the respect we welcome the inspectorate's insight and recommendations. We are committed to overseeing the implementations of these recommendations now and in the coming years.