

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Hazelwood College
Dromcollogher, County Limerick
Roll number: 71850B**

Date of inspection: 24 September 2014



**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 2014 in Hazelwood 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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

Introduction

Hazelwood College is a co-educational community college under the trusteeship of Limerick & Clare Education and Training Board (ETB). The school is located in Dromcollogher and serves a wide rural catchment area. It has a current enrolment of 545 students. It offers the established Junior Certificate and the full range of Leaving Certificate programmes as well as an optional Transition Year (TY) programme. The school also offers Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses in its separate Organic College.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is very supportive of senior management, staff and of the work of the school.
- The senior management team provides very effective management and leadership of the school.
- In their questionnaire responses, parents and students were very positive with regard to the school and its operation.
- The staff is committed and professional in its approach to its work.
- The support systems in place for students are well organised and provide very good quality care.
- Students' transition from primary to post-primary is well managed.
- A wide range of curricular programmes and extracurricular activities are provided.
- Facilities in the school are of a high standard and are very well maintained.
- Good quality teaching and learning was observed with a number of examples of very good practice.
- Student achievement in the certificate examinations and the uptake of higher-level subjects is strong.

Recommendations for Further Development

- Greater use should be made of the school website for the dissemination of information, including school policies, in order to enhance communication with the wider school community.
- There should be an increased focus on acknowledging the positive behaviour of students as outlined in the school's Code of Behaviour.
- The role of the Student Council in providing a voice for students should be further promoted and developed.
- A whole-school approach to Assessment for Learning (AfL) should be adopted.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The Board of Management is appropriately constituted and works in collaboration with senior management in the carrying out of its role. The board members bring experience and expertise to their role. They display a strong commitment to the school and to upholding the school's mission statement as exemplified by its motto "*Achieving our full potential*". They are very supportive of senior management and demonstrate a clear understanding of the value of ongoing review and development.

Board meetings are organised regularly, with an agenda prepared in advance. In order to underline the centrality of teaching and learning to the work of the school, it is suggested that teaching and learning be included as a standard item on each agenda. The board's communication with management and staff is very good and an agreed report is prepared for dissemination to the parents' association and to the staff at the conclusion of each meeting. An annual school report is also prepared for the trustees. It is very positive that the board has invited individual students to address them in the past. It is suggested that these communication links could be further strengthened by extending a similar invitation to the student council.

As part of the school's structured planning process, the board plays an important role in the development and ratification of policies, both mandatory policies as well as those policies that facilitate the smooth operation of the school. As is good practice, a review date is included on all policies. However, policies are not published at present on the school's website and so are not readily accessible to stakeholders. It is recommended that the board should look at how communication with the wider school community and with the parents of prospective students could be enhanced by making relevant policies such as the Admissions Policy available through the school website.

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*.

Partnership with parents is important to the school which benefits from the involvement of a well-informed, active and interested Parents' Council. The council plays a consultative role in policy development and is active in fundraising for the school, with the monies raised being used to provide additional resources. The council also organises various events that help to foster strong links and positive relationships with parents and the local community. In their responses to the WSE-MLL questionnaire, parents spoke highly of the

school, and the findings indicated their very high level of satisfaction with many aspects of school life.

The principal and deputy principal provide very effective management and leadership of the school. They work as a team with complementary roles and approaches, and demonstrate an evident pride in the school, both in its achievements and in its importance as a resource for the local community. Senior management is committed to all aspects of school improvement, and this commitment to leading change is evident in areas such as the advancement of the new extension; the promotion of staff and student welfare; engagement with new educational initiatives; and facilitating staff professional development.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Teachers are deployed according to their qualifications and expertise. They are committed and professional in their approach to their work, and promote good relations between staff and students thus contributing to the positive and friendly atmosphere evident in the school.

Leadership roles at middle management level are devolved to members of staff through the post-of-responsibility system with specific duties assigned. Given the current restrictions on the establishment of new posts, it is very positive to note the response of staff to meeting the current needs of the school, and their undertaking of many leadership roles in a voluntary capacity, thus enhancing the quality of the school's overall provision. Teachers have demonstrated leadership by taking responsibility for school projects and initiatives; through their involvement in professional development courses such as the Instructional Leadership programme; and in undertaking further academic studies. The contribution and commitment of staff is acknowledged, in particular their support for the extracurricular and co-curricular activities which contribute so much to the quality of the students' educational experience in the school.

Leadership of learning is evident in the ongoing engagement with new initiatives such as school self-evaluation, literacy and numeracy, and the establishment of teams to oversee this work. The school has a firm foundation in subject planning. Subject departments are well established with plans and procedures well documented, including strategies reflecting the school's focus on literacy. A variety of approaches has been taken to planning including the development of electronic plans and resources stored on the school server. It is suggested that sharing existing good practice amongst departments would be helpful in enriching future discussion around subject planning.

The school's Code of Behaviour has recently been reviewed and places an emphasis on the development of students' personal responsibility for their conduct. The code outlines a clear ladder of referral while the student journal is utilised as a key tool for communication with parents. Given that the behaviour of students was observed to be very good, and that students in their questionnaire responses were very positive about how well students interacted with each other, it is recommended that there should be an increased focus on student affirmation. Responsible behaviour by students, in keeping with the revised code, should be acknowledged through the addition of a positive comments category in the class tutor and year-head record book and through positive comments in the student journal.

The support systems available to students are of a high quality. An integrated student support structure has been established comprising of the Student Support Services Teams (SSST), as well as a system of year heads and class tutors, all with clear roles and responsibilities. The provision of meeting times for key teams has served to emphasise their consultative role and to facilitate communication with senior management. It is commendable that provision for Guidance and counselling has been maintained with an emphasis on formal Guidance in senior cycle and informal in junior cycle. Very good

quality leadership in supporting students' learning is demonstrated by the work of the special educational needs department and by all involved in learning support. Students with special needs are supported by a core team of qualified staff. A system of withdrawal from mainstream classes is in place as well as some team-teaching. The communication between the teams and the whole staff is very good and the positive contribution of all involved in the care of students and in the provision of support for them is acknowledged.

The school is committed to the maintenance of a broad curriculum with a very wide range of subjects provided at junior cycle and senior cycle. Additional subjects are made available outside of the school day, where possible.

A very comprehensive integration strategy for in-coming first-year students has been developed including an Open Day and an Easter Camp for sixth-class students, as well as information meetings for parents. A bonding outing at the start of the first term is a commendable way of ensuring that new students get to know one another. The experience also allows the students to become acquainted with their senior-cycle mentors thus helping them in their transition to second-level.

First-year students choose their option subjects prior to entry to the school as a subject-sampling programme is not currently offered during first year. However, the questionnaire responses indicated a need for improved communication with parents and students in order to allow them to make informed decisions regarding the choice of subjects. In order to address this need, it is recommended that the information made available to parents and prospective students should be reviewed, in order to ensure that they receive helpful advice in selecting their options.

The full range of curricular programmes is offered at senior cycle including the TY programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational programmes. These programmes are very well organised and delivered, and address students' learning needs as well as facilitating their transition to senior cycle in the case of the TY programme.

The TY programme is optional for students and provides a wide range of new curricular opportunities and extracurricular activities and experiences. During the evaluation, the students spoke highly of their regard for the TY programme and suggested that its merits should be further promoted amongst students and parents. A very positive feature of the programme is the opportunity for students to sample a range of Leaving Certificate subjects before making their final selection. This represents very good practice. However, it is suggested the timetabling allocation for a small number of subjects in TY should be reviewed in order to optimise the use of the time available.

High expectations are created for students' academic achievements during their time in the school, and attention is paid to monitoring their progress in class through a system of regular tests and assessments. An analysis of outcomes for students in the certificate examinations is undertaken annually and the uptake of higher-level in subjects is closely monitored. Student achievement in the certificate examinations and the uptake of higher-level subjects is strong.

Opportunities for student leadership are provided in a number of ways including the student-mentoring scheme and through the democratically elected student council. The members of the council meet on a weekly basis and have the assistance of a liaison teacher. The council contributes to the development of relevant policies such as the anti-bullying policy, and is involved in fund-raising initiatives and in carrying out surveys on relevant issues. It also represents an important vehicle through which all students can communicate their views. As the questionnaire responses indicated that the majority of students did not

feel that they had a say in how things were done in the school, it is recommended that the role of the council in highlighting the students' voice should be better understood and promoted throughout the school.

1.3 Management of facilities

The facilities available in the school are of very high quality and consist of one main school building with additional external temporary accommodation. Facilities for sport are extensive and include a gym, indoor and outdoor basketball courts and a full-size sports pitch.

The school building is maintained to a very high standard and is bright and spacious. Recent developments such as an informal canteen area as well as the attractive displays of artwork, projects and photographs displayed in the corridors create a strong sense of community. The provision of teacher-designated classrooms has facilitated the development of a print-rich environment, while the many specialist rooms are well-equipped and their use is well managed by the teachers involved. The valued contribution made by the administrative and ancillary staff, and by the school caretaker, is recognised and commended.

A current priority for the school is the planned new extension to cater for the requirements of an increased student enrolment. Plans for the expansion of the school to include new classroom and specialist rooms are at an advanced stage. The development of this new space will provide a unique opportunity for management and staff to explore the many possibilities it will offer for enhancing the teaching and learning experience.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty-one lessons were observed in the course of the evaluation. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in lessons was of a good standard with a number of examples of very good practice.

The questionnaire responses received from parents and students reflected a high level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Parents stated that their child was doing well, while students indicated that they were getting on well and were encouraged to do their best by the teachers.

Lessons were well planned and a range of resources such as hand-out materials, graphic organisers and worksheets had been prepared and were used effectively. There was good use also of information and communication technology during lessons. Established routines were evident, and the intended learning outcomes were shared with students at the outset of most lessons. The assignment and correction of homework formed an established part of the lesson structure.

Lessons were conducted using a variety of teaching methodologies and generally included tasks that encouraged student participation. Clear instructions and explanations were a feature of most lessons and good links were made with prior learning. There was an appropriate emphasis on communication in the target language as well as effective use of subject-specific terminology, in keeping with the school's strategy for the development of literacy.

In lessons observed where teaching and learning was found to be of very high quality, practice was characterised by very well paced lessons and by a focus on the development of students' skills in the subject. In addition to a clear learning intention, the learning outcomes were revisited during the course of the lessons and students were encouraged to reflect on and to consolidate their learning at the end of lessons. The structure of the lessons incorporated very good sequencing of skills which helped students to take ownership of their learning.

This high quality practice was also observed in lessons where active methodologies such as group work were fully exploited to enhance the learning experience for students. It was noteworthy that students demonstrated a clear understanding and familiarity with working collaboratively and were fully focused on what they had to do. Students were challenged by the assigned task and encouraged to participate confidently in the activity. Opportunities were also provided for the development of their communication skills through making presentations to their peers, and there was a focus on student autonomy and independent learning. As the adoption of such strategies results in positive outcomes for students, the use of co-operative learning strategies should be further consolidated and expanded.

In a number of lessons, there was effective and successful use of formative assessment. As well as facilitating opportunities for peer assessment by students, constructive feedback was provided by the teacher with the aim of helping students to further develop their ideas. Students were encouraged in their learning by the energy, enthusiasm and patience shown by the teachers; their contributions were valued; and they responded positively to the high expectations set for them. The quality of the students' learning was very high in these lessons and their level of engagement was commendable.

Where recommendations were made, they focused on aspects of classroom practice and lesson management that included the need for more active participation by students in the learning process through increased use of collaborative-learning methodologies, as well as the use of a wider range of questioning techniques. While there was an emphasis on teacher-directed questioning at times, effective use was also made of higher-order questioning. In order to develop more varied questioning techniques, a focus on the use of Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies is recommended as a framework for supporting students' learning and for encouraging more extensive use of formative assessment.

Classroom management was very effective with mutually respectful student-teacher interaction. Students were well behaved and cooperative at all times thus ensuring a positive and relaxed learning environment.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Recommendations from a number of published inspection reports including French, Science, Music, Special Educational Needs and Irish were considered as part of this evaluation. The board of management reviews all inspection reports and there has been a clear commitment by management to addressing and implementing the recommendations relating to timetabling and resources.

3.2 Learning and teaching

The reports are used to promote discussion at subject department level and the recommendations are incorporated by the teachers into their subject planning and teaching. Progress in the implementation of recommendations is documented and there was evidence of full or very good progress made with regard to the implementation of the subject-specific recommendations.

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

The school's engagement with school self-evaluation is very good and reflects the culture of reflection and review within the school. As part of the approach taken to this work, appropriate themes have been chosen in the area of literacy and action plans have been advanced. The gathering of relevant data has been a key part of the process and has involved consultation with stakeholders. A school report and a school improvement plan have been produced and disseminated as appropriate. The school's capacity for improvement is very good and the school is well placed to engage in further school improvement.