

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Pobalscoil Éanna,  
Blakestown Community School  
Blakestown, Dublin 15  
Roll number: 91316Q**

**Date of inspection: 20 April 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 April 2015 in Pobalscoil Éanna, Blakestown 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, 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***

Pobalscoil Éanna, Blakestown Community School operates under the trusteeship of Le Chéile Schools Trust and Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education Training Board. It is located in Blanchardstown, Dublin 15 since 1979 and caters for the needs of students from diverse social, economic and cultural backgrounds. It provides a broad and balanced curriculum which includes the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme, Transition Year (TY) and the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA). The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Programme (DEIS). At the time of the evaluation, the school had an enrolment of 515.

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

#### ***Key Findings***

- The board of management is appropriately constituted, operates effectively and is very supportive of the senior management team.
- The senior management team is dedicated, hardworking, collaborates very well and has a clear vision for the school.
- The staff of the school is dedicated, caring and committed.
- Curriculum provision is very good and a wide range of programmes and subjects is on offer in the school.
- Leadership roles are distributed at middle management level.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed during the inspection, with two lessons featuring teaching of outstanding quality and a significant minority of lessons requiring improvement.
- The school has made very good progress in implementing the recommendations from previous inspections.
- The school self-evaluation (SSE) process is very well established, reflecting the senior management's desire and ability to plan for improvement and the engagement of staff with the process.

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

- The number of teachers involved in supporting students with special education needs (SEN) or requiring learning support should be reduced and a small cohesive team established.
- The strategy team in partnership with the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) should set targets for student attendance and develop action plans to achieve them.

- The strategy team should continue to engage with the NBSS and the Educational Welfare Officer to develop strategies to address instances of persistent poor behaviour.
- The school should progress subject department planning to ensure that all subject planning pays due regard to learning outcomes and the teaching methodologies required to achieve them.
- In setting targets for improvement, consideration should be given to analysing data from the following range of sources: student performance in the house examinations, assessments at the point of entry to the school, the targets in the school's DEIS plan and student performance in the certificate examinations.
- In order to address concerns raised by some parents and students, expectations relating to what can reasonably be delivered during TY should be carefully managed and that the entire cost of any planned activities should be flagged at the beginning of each year.
- The range of subjects available in TY should also be kept under review and when resources allow be extended beyond what is currently available.
- It is recommended that assessment for learning (AfL) should be adopted as the next strand of the school's SSE process and the good practices in relation to teaching and learning that were observed in the very best lessons be disseminated and shared within all subject departments.

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

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

The board of management is properly constituted. The members of the board have a very good balance of skills and competences and are very effective in supporting the school's staff and senior management team. The board's members are experienced, well briefed on their roles and responsibilities as evidenced by the number of relevant professional development courses attended by board members in the recent past.

The board has been very successful in leading school planning. A very good school plan is in place and the portfolio of school policies is comprehensive and up to date. The board ensures that the policies are reviewed on a regular basis.

In collaboration with the senior management team, the board has been very effective in identifying priorities for school development and in creating time-bound targets for their achievement. The board recognises the central role of the process of SSE in leading and sustaining change. The school's DEIS planning process is also well established and a very good plan is in place.

The senior management team, comprising the principal and deputy principal, is committed to promoting a culture of excellence and quality improvement. They are dedicated and hardworking, have a clear vision for the future of the school which includes leading a very impressive school-improvement agenda. They have worked tirelessly to promote a positive image of the school, manage its relationships with a myriad of external agencies and maintain the school's enrolment.

The principal and deputy principal are a constant and proactive presence on the school corridors, are understanding of students' needs and operate an open door policy toward teachers, parents and students alike. While their approach to their work ensures that a positive atmosphere underpins all aspects of the school's operation there is a need for them to sit

together and engage in collaborative planning and reflection. One morning should be set aside each week to facilitate this.

Notwithstanding the loss of posts in recent years, senior management in collaboration with the wider staff has managed the delegation of responsibilities very well. The schedule of posts reflects the needs of the school and is subject to regular review. The school's middle management team contributes positively to school development planning, meets regularly and is involved in identifying and implementing priority development areas. The team's contribution to the recent introduction of TY and the LCA programmes together with the development of the positive behavior initiative are examples of how effective a middle management team can be in motivating and assisting change.

A strategy team, designed to engage with developmental areas and make recommendations for improvement has recently been established. The group contains teachers with expertise in SEN, literacy and numeracy, SSE, as well as representatives from the school's care and DEIS teams and external agencies. The existence of such a team is especially welcome as it provides a forum where new ideas can be discussed and developed and recommendations to management can be formulated.

Procedures for identifying and supporting students with SEN or in need of learning support are very good. These procedures involve very good communication with the teachers in the feeder primary schools, the development and use of individualised education plans, and a range of interventions including in-class co-operative support. However, the team delivering learning support is too big and militates against cohesive delivery of the ambitious programme designed by the co-ordinators. It is recommended, therefore, that a core team of teachers with the dispositions, empathy and skills to deliver learning support be established over time.

The pastoral care system is a particular strength of the school. It permeates all of the school's activities and the care team manages the complexities of integrating the work of a range of agencies very well. The team is greatly assisted in its work by the contribution of the year heads and class tutors and representatives from the school completion programme (SCP).

Encouraging students to engage with the school and complete their education is an important element of the work of the staff of the school. Every effort is made to keep students in school. School management, the home school community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator, and the SCP co-ordinator work very effectively to promote good attendance and punctuality. Initiatives such as the breakfast club, the HSCL links with home, text alerts and an initiative in senior cycle linking attendance to student participation in the Leaving Certificate graduation ceremony are examples of interventions to encourage attendance. However, poor student attendance remains a challenge for the school. The strategy team is undertaking a review of the factors affecting attendance and will make recommendations to management for improvement.

This review should draw on the expertise of the various partners, particularly the NBSS. As part of the review, specific targets should be set for improved student attendance and action plans to achieve them should be developed. This should be documented and submitted to senior management. It is vital that a whole-school approach to improving student attendance and punctuality be adopted. Strategies need to be devised to increase parent and student awareness of the importance of attendance and of their expectations in this regard. The work of the team should involve a review of the effectiveness of any existing initiatives, seek to terminate the initiative in senior-cycle which runs counter to the school's inclusive ethos, and should include parents and students as key partners.

Poor student behaviour was also raised by some staff and students as a barrier to student engagement with and enjoyment of school. Therefore, the strategy team should also continue to engage with the NBSS and the Educational Welfare Officer to develop strategies to address instances of persistent poor behaviour.

A parents' association (PA) has recently been re-established and it is already active in the life of the school. During the meeting with the inspection team, the members of the PA expressed a high degree of satisfaction with how the school is run and the manner in which management engages with the general parent body and the pastoral approach adopted by the school in dealing with its students. These sentiments were also reflected in the data gathered from parents' questionnaires.

A student council is in place and has established a good track record over the years in collaborating with school management in addressing issues of mutual concern, most notably in relation to bullying. Its success in this area was reflected in the testimonies of students during meetings and in the student questionnaires. The existing council is not as active as it might be and its profile certainly needs to be raised. In addressing this, the council in collaboration with their liaison teacher should establish a dedicated notice board in a prominent position in the school and develop a presence on the school's website. It should also contribute to each edition of the school's newsletter and meet with the board of management annually.

The meeting with the students was lively and engaging. They expressed their opinions of the school with confidence, eloquence and conviction. During the meeting, they commented positively on many issues relating to the school's provision and raised concerns about some, including TY and the provision of sport for girls. However, there was the sense that they were somehow disengaged from the decision making process and that addressing issues of concern lay outside their circle of influence. As a group, the student body should reconsider this and take greater ownership of improving the school and in making their views known through the student council and by participating in policy formation.

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

The work of the senior management team is facilitated through consultation and centres on motivating and supporting both staff and students. The principal and deputy principal have a genuine empathy for the needs of the students and the challenging situations often faced by teachers in the classrooms. The team leads by example, by being positive and enthusiastic and working closely with staff to create a welcoming and caring environment conducive to developing positive attitudes to teaching, learning and improved outcomes for students.

The school also recognises that students' experiences outside of the classroom are important in developing positive dispositions and, apart from the extensive care system, an impressive range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities are available to them. The provision includes activities as diverse as study skills and revision courses to *Business in the Community* and *Show Racism the Red Card*. The programme of extra and co-curricular activities reflects the school's capacity to liaise with external agencies to enhance their students' experience of life in school.

Arrangements for policy development and subject department planning are very good. Frequent meetings are held and the hands-on-approach adopted by management is reflected in their participation, as far as is feasible, in the various committees and planning groups. All subject departments have written planning documentation and while all are comprehensive there are some anomalies particularly in relation to the use of learning outcomes. It is recommended, therefore, that future planning should ensure that the inclusion of learning

outcomes and the teaching methods to achieve them be standardised across all subject department plans.

All subject departments analyse the level of uptake of higher and ordinary level by their students in the certificate examinations, as well as their performance in the examinations, in order to set targets for improvement. Consideration should be given to including other data when setting targets, for example student performance in the house examinations and assessments at the point of entry to the school. The targets should take cognizance of the school's DEIS plan and each department should prepare a short annual report on progress against these targets for submission to the board of management.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum and has been proactive in adapting the curricular provision to meet the identified needs of students. For example, curriculum review has led to the introduction of TY and LCA within the last two years. The review process which involved contributions from a wide range of the school's stakeholders is commendable and should continue with a view to the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and extending subject choice in senior cycle to include Music and Technical Graphics, when resources permit.

Parents and students expressed themselves as content with the introduction of these programmes but there were some concerns in relation to TY, particularly relating to cost and apparent discrepancies between the number and range of activities initially envisaged compared to those delivered. While acknowledging the efforts made by the school to ensure that all students experience TY to the full irrespective of their ability to meet the associated costs, it is recommended that expectations relating to what can reasonably be delivered during TY be carefully managed. The entire cost of any planned activities should be flagged at the beginning of each school year. The range of subjects available in TY should also be kept under review. When resources allow the range of subjects should be extended beyond what is currently provided.

Timetabling provision for the various subjects and programmes is good and management has addressed all of the issues relating to the timetable raised in previous inspection reports. Timetabling arrangements on Wednesdays, however, are far from ideal with nine class periods scheduled in the morning. This means that the duration of the lessons is very short and acts as a significant barrier to purposeful teaching and learning. This issue should, therefore, be rectified in framing future timetables.

The guidance team make a very positive contribution to the operation of the school and collaborate very effectively with the various committees and agencies working on behalf of school. Their work on tracking student progress is most impressive. Academic year monitors have been appointed to each year group with a view to improving outcomes for students. Consideration should be given to strengthening the links between the monitors and the guidance team to link guidance with teaching and learning. This would bring greater focus on critical elements like student engagement, homework and punctuality and will result in enhanced learning and academic progression.

The school's code of behaviour which focusses on promoting positive behaviour and contains a clear ladder of referral is very good. Similarly, the admissions policy is grounded in the principles of diversity, equality and inclusion.

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 is maintained to a very high standard and the visual environment, which includes subject walls and other displays, is engaging and educationally stimulating. Great credit is also due to the manner in which staff and students have engaged with wider environmental issues including the Green Schools, the development of comprehensive energy plan for the school and participation in programmes sponsored by UNESCO.

The development of the school's information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure emerged as a significant area for development during the inspection. The existing infrastructure militates against streamlining and integrating the school's various activities on one coherent platform. While existing contractual obligations demand that changing the existing ICT provision cannot take place for a number of years, planning for the new systems should start immediately and should address both the infrastructural and instructional models to be employed. The planning process should seek to develop a robust infrastructure to facilitate effective communication, attendance recording and reporting while also enabling new approaches to teaching and learning, sharing resources and collaborative planning.

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

The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed during the inspection. Two lessons featured teaching of outstanding quality while there was scope for improvement in a significant minority of lessons. All of the lessons featured very good classroom management, respectful interactions, effective integration of resources and good lesson planning.

In the very best lessons, the learning intentions were agreed at the outset and fully explored as they evolved. Very good discussions were also facilitated at the conclusion of the lessons to determine the extent to which the learning intentions were realised. These lessons also featured very high expectations of student engagement and attainment and involved the effective use of AfL strategies including excellent teacher questioning which served to develop the students' understanding, oracy skills and encouraged them to speculate, hypothesise and explain their reasoning. Teacher questioning was supported by the use of written comments on the students' copybooks including corrections and suggestions for improvement.

Where there was scope for improvement, the lesson intention was unclear and there was an overreliance on teacher input with little emphasis on group and pair work. There was scope too for more in-depth teacher questioning and the provision of opportunities for students to engage actively with their own learning.

The recommendations concerning teaching and learning have significant implications for collaborative subject department planning. Firstly, the school's adoption of literacy and numeracy as the first two strands of its school improvement plan (SIP) should be reflected across all subject department plans. This should be done by exploring how each subject can contribute to developing the students' literacy, oracy and numeracy skills. Secondly, in planning for enhanced student learning each plan, should include strategies to ensure that teaching for understanding and the integration of AfL are key components in future lesson delivery. It is recommended that in order to achieve this, AfL should be adopted in the next strand of the school improvement plan and the good practices in relation to teaching and

learning that were observed in the very best lessons should be disseminated and shared within all subject departments.

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

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

Management has done very well in implementing the recommendations from previous inspections. Review of these recommendations is conducted systematically by senior management and the board. The outcomes of the review process is used in framing ongoing planning. This has resulted in all of the recommendations relating to management having been enacted over the years. The review process was explicit in the board's planning documentation.

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

Very good progress has been made on the majority of recommendations relating to teaching and learning including the use of learning outcomes and the integration of resources, but work remains to be done in the widespread integration of AfL and student-centred activity-based learning. The implementation of these approaches to teaching and learning will require a review of seating arrangements, more extensive use of displays of student work in classrooms and the innovative use of ICT in lesson delivery.

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

SSE is central to developing and communicating a shared vision of the school and there is a shared ownership of the SSE process. Self-evaluation is led very effectively by senior management with the support of the board and very good progress has been made. The literacy plan is very well constructed and whole-school initiatives designed to promote positive attitudes to literacy have been implemented effectively. A very good start has also been made on numeracy and work on identifying a third strand for SSE is in train.

The importance placed by the school on SSE in contributing to school improvement is evidenced by the work of the middle management and strategy teams and the general sense of ownership of the school's impressive improvement agenda. The school's capacity and desire for improvement was also obvious from the positive manner in which management and staff engage with the inspection process and their willingness to adopt recommendations to inform planning.



# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

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

The reference to a 'significant minority' of lessons requiring improvement seems to contradict the earlier part of the statement which stated - the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed during the inspection with two lessons featuring teaching of outstanding quality. This point a 'significant minority of lessons' was repeated on page 7, point 2. Quality of Learning and Teaching. Paragraph 2

The cost of planned activities for T.Y is outlined to parents and students at the T.Y information meeting in April/ May before the Post Junior Certificate course choices are made. It should also be noted that T.Y. is heavily subsidised by the school.

A dedicated student Council notice Board has always existed in a permanent position at the main student entrance to the school. The Student Council does contribute to the annual school magazine Newslink.

The Wednesday timetable has been reduced to six periods of 40 minutes duration.

### **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 number of teachers involved in supporting students with special education needs (SEN) or requiring learning support is almost halved in this academic year 2015/ 2016