

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Louis Community School
Kiltimagh, County Mayo
Roll number: 91494R**

Date of inspection: 5 December 2012



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

Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in December, 2012 in St Louis 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Introduction

St Louis Community School was founded in 1993 with the amalgamation of St Louis Secondary School and Coláiste Raifteirí Vocational School. This co-educational post-primary school is the sole provider of second-level education in the area and draws its students from a wide area. The mainstream enrolment currently stands at 493, with a further 154 students enrolled in post-leaving certificate (PLC) courses. The school provides a very broad education and offers all second level curricular programmes including the Transition Year (TY). The school has a long and successful history of curriculum innovation and engagement with initiatives, most recently as one of forty-eight schools that comprise the NCCA Junior Cycle Network. Inclusion, respect and student and staff welfare are key principles underpinning the school's Christian ethos and all its activities

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The school is inclusive, student-centred, innovative and progressive.
- The board of management functions very collaboratively and effectively.
- The principal and deputy principal are highly-committed to the school and provide very good leadership.
- A noteworthy sense of community and partnership that involves parents, students, staff and the board of management is evident throughout the school.
- There is a strong spirit of volunteerism and commitment among staff.
- There are effective formal and informal communication structures.
- The school's open admissions policy, its broad curriculum, its facilities, and its commitment to providing student support are particular strengths.
- There is a pressing need for additional school accommodation.
- In almost all the lessons observed the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good with elements of excellent practice noted.
- The school has demonstrated very good capacity for change and improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development

- A strategic time-bound plan to include specific action plans to advance the school's developmental priorities should be formulated.
- The increased use of active learning methodologies and approaches for differentiation to support students' learning is recommended.

- Assessment for learning (AfL) practices should be implemented across all subjects and the homework policy should be further developed into a whole-school homework and assessment policy to reflect this.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is well informed, appropriately constituted and functions collaboratively and effectively. Educational expertise, strong community links, and long-serving commitment are key features of the board's membership.

The board is supportive of the school and plays an active role in school development. Board members have a very good knowledge and understanding of the school and are committed to the school's ethos and ongoing development. It was noted that the board has good ongoing communication with all stakeholders and the agreed reports support this well. Some members of the student council make representations at board meetings. The principal's regular report could be further developed into an annual composite report on the operation and performance of the school and be made available to the school community.

The board functions effectively and particularly so in the following areas: policy development and review; support for teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) and advancing school accommodation and refurbishment. The board supports high quality teaching and learning and regularly discusses curriculum provision. In order to further increase its focus on teaching and learning, the board should engage with the school's analysis of examination results in the context of national norms across all subject areas. The board should also seek progress reports on the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations from subject departments.

The school's parents' association is well-informed and it demonstrates high capacity to support school development into the future. In furthering the school's partnership with parents, it is recommended that the full potential of parents to contribute to policy development and review be explored and acted upon. Parents and students should continue to be consulted in the school development process, so that a clear vision for school improvement can be informed by all stakeholders.

The board demonstrates a clear vision for the school. Current priorities for development include: enhancing teaching and learning, supporting student welfare, promoting CPD, developing school accommodation, strengthening the positive dimensions of behaviour management, supporting numeracy and literacy, developing school self-evaluation, trialling aspects of the junior cycle framework, and enhancing communications across the school community. These priorities reflect the forward thinking focus of the school and significant progress has been made towards achieving many aspects of them. The school is advised to prioritise a manageable number of these for specific development.

In light of the need to manage change into the future, the board should oversee the development of a cycle of planning to advance its chosen priorities. This should link together the plans and policies already developed or in train and set realistic targets for the achievement of identified priorities within specific time frames. A central focus on teaching and learning should form a key part of this development plan as well as the school's plans for additional accommodation. Furthermore, action plans should then be developed to support the achievement of targets and performance indicators should be designed to monitor progress. This approach would facilitate a more focused process of review and self-evaluation and enable the school community to

establish more readily its achievements and areas where further work is required. This work should become a key component in the school's self-evaluation process.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal are very committed to the school and together they form a highly effective senior management team. They work in partnership and have a visible role in leading learning in the school. Their individual talents and abilities are complementary and their management style is open, collaborative and consultative. They lead by example and have successfully driven and managed change across a number of areas of school life. They are well established in their management roles, are professional in the way they work and they set high standards for themselves, the teaching staff and the students.

A positive school environment based on the provision of a holistic education, respectful relationships and the affirmation of students and teachers is given central priority by senior management. Building leadership capacity among staff and developing collaborative work practices are key characteristics of their management style. They promote good quality communication with all stakeholders. The key priority for senior management is teaching and learning and the ongoing promotion of excellence and quality improvement. Parents surveyed indicated high levels of satisfaction with how the school is run and with how their children are progressing.

A key strength of the school is its committed and hardworking staff who are afforded, and avail of, opportunities to lead many initiatives to support school improvement. There is a shared vision for the school among staff and they reported feeling empowered. Teachers are deployed according to their qualifications and expertise and they are consulted on timetabling requirements. They demonstrate a strong sense of community and care for students. Staff welfare is a significant priority for senior management. There is a high level of engagement with CPD, the outcomes of which are shared at whole-school level.

Senior management is building capacity effectively within the staff by encouraging individuals and teams to lead new initiatives. Examples of distributed leadership include the tutor system, which operates on a voluntary basis, co-ordination of school programmes and teachers' involvement in extracurricular activities. Leadership opportunities are embraced and the contribution of non-post holders is very significant and highly valued. The secretarial, caretaking and cleaning staff and the special needs assistants (SNAs) make highly-valued contributions to the school.

The middle management team is an important structure in supporting senior management and the team's members are given autonomy in developing their leadership roles. The duties attached to posts of responsibility should be regularly reviewed to ensure that they continue to meet the needs and priorities of the school with a central focus on teaching and learning. In addition, the duties should be updated to reflect actual practice and the level of each post. In line with best practice it is recommended that procedures be developed for periodic reporting on the performance of duties to senior management and the board.

The school has made good progress in developing a co-ordinated whole-school planning process, in developing and agreeing the permanent and developmental sections of its school plan, in supporting formal subject department planning and in engaging in ongoing policy review work. A number of areas under review are being progressed simultaneously by agreed task groups. The school should maintain a formal record of the progress made in meeting its priorities so that it can track its achievements and as a means of informing and guiding future planning.

Homework and assessment practices would benefit from review. A range of assessment modes should be implemented to cater for the variety of students' learning styles as well as a range of strategies for the effective implementation of assessment for learning (AfL) practices across all subjects. It is recommended that the homework policy be further developed into a whole-school homework and assessment policy to reflect this.

Communication among staff and management is very good and includes regular staff meetings and an informative staff handbook. The goodwill of staff is evident in the significant work that is accomplished informally and on a voluntary basis, in addition to formally convened meetings. The openness and willingness of the school management to communicate and consult with staff, parents, students, feeder primary schools, the local community and outside agencies to support school development are commended.

The school aspires to being a centre for excellence. It is innovative, progressive dynamic, inclusive and open to ongoing change and development. Responses from student and parent questionnaires indicate very positive attitudes towards the school. In this context the school should consider revisiting its mission statement to more accurately reflect this ambition.

The school operates an open and inclusive admission policy. Practices in relation to the management of students are very good and are facilitated through the school's code of behaviour. Very good standards of behaviour and respectful student-teacher relationships were evident during the evaluation. Student leadership is facilitated effectively through such mechanisms as the mentoring system, circle of friends and the student council. Attendance, punctuality and retention are closely monitored. The aim of tutor time is to affirm students' efforts, reinforce procedures and monitor students' progress.

The school is commended for the broad and balanced curriculum provided. The curriculum is regularly reviewed with purposeful efforts made to meet students' needs. The construction of the timetable is good; the process is both consultative and student-focussed and it provides for some concurrent timetabling. Additional designated teaching hours are being used for their intended purpose. Transition Year is a very successful programme and uptake is very high. In addition, a highly commendable range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities contributes to students' holistic development. The spirit of collegiality and volunteerism demonstrated by teachers supports school activities well. The school promotes and celebrates achievement by students in many aspects of school life.

Students' welfare and educational needs are at the heart of the school and regarded as a responsibility of all staff members. A commendable range of student-support structures exists. This finding was endorsed by parents and students in their questionnaire responses. Year heads and tutors play a pivotal role and are highly valued by the students. Good communication serves to consolidate a whole-school approach to student care. Social, personal and health education (SPHE) and relationships and sexuality education (RSE) programmes are appropriately delivered. Chaplaincy plays an integral part in the school's support system, and is effective in focusing on the care of the whole school community. In addition, a range of retreats and liturgical celebrations is undertaken in line with the school ethos.

Flexible models of provision for students with additional educational needs are provided. Work is ongoing with regard to individual student profiles. The teachers involved are committed to the ongoing review and the enhancement of the service. Identification of students is informed by testing; however, retesting is recommended to determine the effectiveness of interventions which have been put in place. Subject teachers providing support to students should develop plans to support the learning. Existing good practice in additional educational needs should be further developed through the formalisation of a special educational needs support team which would meet regularly. In addition, there is scope to further enhance communication with teachers and parents regarding individual needs of students.

There is a good level of provision and whole-school support for guidance and students have access to a very well-developed counselling service. A whole-school approach to guidance is evident and guidance personnel support pastoral care and additional educational needs well. There are good supports for students and parents at various transition times. At the time of the evaluation the guidance plan was under review. This plan should be further developed collaboratively. Once the revised guidance plan has been circulated to the partners and agreed it should then be ratified by the board.

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

Management of school facilities is very good and school management addresses maintenance and upkeep issues as they arise. The school should develop procedures for regular review of its health and safety statement in line with current guidelines and legislation.

The Green Flag award reflects the school's commitment to its environmental responsibilities and the school is working towards its second green flag. Provision of information and communication technology (ICT) facilities throughout the school is very good.

There is a strain on existing space in the school building and there is a pressing need for additional accommodation. The school is actively exploring all available means to provide adequate accommodation to meet the needs of the school population. This should remain a priority.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

During the evaluation, a total of twenty-four lessons was observed spanning a range of subjects and levels across the school's curriculum. In almost all the lessons the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good with elements of excellent practice noted in a number of lessons. In a very small number of classes there was scope for improvement.

The majority of programme and subject plans are well developed. However, further development is recommended in some cases where plans have a content-driven focus. Schemes of work are in place. To further enhance provision for teaching and learning, collaborative discussion should lead to plans being further developed as appropriate in relation to: student learning outcomes; active learning methodologies; AfL practices and differentiation.

There was a very good standard of preparation and planning for the lessons observed and the choice and use of resources were effective. ICT was utilised effectively as a visual learning aid and to illustrate and explain concepts in almost all lessons. A positive learning environment and respectful interactions underpinned classroom atmosphere. High expectations were set for learning in almost all cases. In all lessons observed students' behaviour was exemplary and they engaged well in a cooperative manner.

In the most successful lessons the expected learning outcomes were clear and in some cases these were reviewed at the end to consolidate student learning. This practice of sharing and reviewing learning outcomes should be extended to all lessons. Lessons were generally well

structured and sequenced in line with the planned learning outcomes. In over half of the lessons observed very good practice was noted where the methodologies facilitated the active engagement of students, where both lower and higher-order questions were well distributed and a good level of formative feedback was provided to students to enable them to improve the quality of their work. In almost all lessons there was a good focus on key word strategies and subject terminology was explained, reinforced and integrated into the lesson delivery.

In order to further support student learning the following advice is provided. Teacher instruction should be interspersed with active learning activities such as pair work, group work or individual learning tasks. There is scope for the increased use of differentiated questioning strategies and extension activities to cater for the wide range of abilities evident. Teachers should undertake more checks on learning throughout lessons. They should also employ a greater range of strategies including mind maps, writing frames, word glossaries to support the development of students' literacy skills. The potential to further develop students' numeracy skills should also be explored in all subject areas.

Students generally displayed good levels of knowledge, understanding and skills commensurate with their ability. While homework is regularly assigned and monitored well, there is scope to increase the level of comment provided to assist students in improving their work. Teachers should review their assessment practices and employ strategies that support students in attaining improved learning outcomes. In line with the school's literacy strategy students should be required to follow up on feedback provided on their work. In small number of classes a higher standard needs to be set with regards to the presentation of students' work, handwriting and the more complete development of their written answers.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

The school has made very good progress in the implementation of recommendations made in the eight previous evaluations related to whole-school provision. This is indicative of the high levels of support given by school management to subject provision.

3.2 Learning and teaching

In most subject areas good progress has been made in implementing recommendations related to teaching and learning. Given the pedagogical nature of many of the recommendations, continuing work is necessary to address them adequately into the future. Therefore areas such as differentiation to support varying abilities, active learning to support student engagement and AfL strategies continue to need attention and development by the teachers.

A whole-school approach to monitoring the implementation of existing and future recommendations and to assessing the impact of their implementation on other subject areas should be adopted.

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

The school demonstrates very good capacity to initiate change and drive school improvement. The school has engaged in a commendable variety of self-evaluation activities across various aspects of school life. These include surveys, teacher reviews, subject department reviews, curriculum review, end-of-year programme evaluations, policy review, and analysis of

examination results. The analysis of the data gathered is used to inform the school's developmental priorities. The school is proactive in anticipating and responding to the evolving needs of students and is very well placed to implement the recommendations of this report.

Given the school's central focus on high standards in teaching and learning and its experience in mentoring new teachers, it is an opportune time for teachers to begin to engage in peer observation and review. The principal and deputy principal are very well positioned to lead such an initiative.