

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Deansrath Community College
Clondalkin, Dublin 22
Roll number: 70040H**

Date of inspection: 13 May 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 May, 2015 in Deansrath 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

Deansrath Community College is a co-educational school offering second level and post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) programmes in a designated disadvantaged area. The school operates under the trusteeship of Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board. The school first opened in Clondalkin Village in 1969 before moving to Deansrath in 1986. The school is a participant in the Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools (DEIS) scheme. Second level enrolment in recent years is steady and 367 students are currently on the roll. A further 237 students are enrolled in the school's extensive PLC, adult and continuing education courses.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The school's positive atmosphere is one in which high expectations are set for student learning underpinned by the values of care and respect for all.
- The board and senior management are committed to excellence and quality improvement.
- The process of self-evaluation is integral to all school activities.
- Many examples of exemplary subject and programme planning were observed.
- The quality of learning and teaching was in the good or very good range with a significant number of lessons in the very good category.
- The organisation of special educational needs provision is exemplary.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The school development priorities should be actioned and associated timeframes defined.
- The further development of learning and teaching practice should focus in particular on task design, questioning and feedback.
- The school transfer programme should be enhanced to include a more in-depth discussion on pedagogy and expectations across the sectors.
- The very good practice of devising SMART targets identified in some areas in planning documentation should be extended.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management (the board) is correctly constituted and has a very good understanding of its role. Board members have accessed relevant training. In accordance with the school's vision and mission statements, the board is dedicated to providing an inclusive and safe learning environment in which each student is afforded opportunities to achieve his/her potential. The board is proactive in leading the school and it was evident that, while the school is a DEIS participant, disadvantage as a disposition was not a feature of school operations. The board deals with challenging issues and makes difficult decisions. The board is reflective in its practice and continues to develop its capacity to lead school self-evaluation and gain a deeper understanding of the school's curricular provision. The Education and Training Board (ETB) provides a very good level of support for the school.

Overall, the practice of policy development and review is very good and includes the sharing of draft policies with parents and students as relevant. All mandatory school policies have been adopted. A number of policies and all DEIS planning themes are currently under review. A review of policy documents indicated that the inclusion of dates of ratification, review and detail of those responsible for the implementation and monitoring policies is somewhat random. It is recommended that the very good practice evident, for instance, in the programme improvement plan and the homework policy, be adopted as general practice.

Deansrath Community College is truly a school of the community. This is a key strength in the operation of the school. Plans to include representation from a second feeder school on the board is indeed positive. A very good school transfer programme is offered which includes comprehensive information to parents, the introduction of primary pupils to optional subjects at Easter and a very effective Belonging Plus programme. Consideration should be given to the enhancement of the transfer programme to include a greater focus on the sharing of learning and teaching experiences and expectations in different curricular areas in senior classes in primary and junior cycle.

In accordance with Circular letter 40/2012 the board has reviewed and adopted a new literacy policy and the development of a numeracy policy is in progress.

The senior management team (SMT) has a very good balance of skills and competences and works effectively in leading and managing the school. Established work practices concerning the distribution of work and communication are very good. It was indicated that the deputy principal will attend future board meetings – a welcome development. The obvious care and respect for students that is evident throughout the school emanates from the SMT.

The extent of leadership roles among teaching staff indicated that the SMT operates in an inclusive manner towards staff. Leadership roles assigned to middle management are regularly reviewed and relevant.

Students are provided with many opportunities to develop their leadership skills and are afforded a voice as partners in the school. The student council is representative of all year groups. In the current year, all but first-year representatives were democratically elected. Management indicated a commitment to returning to the previous good practice of electing first-year students. In addition to the existing student council notice board, consideration should be given to allocating the council a dedicated space on the school's website. To date, the board has not met with the student council. It is recommended that the student council and the board meet once per year to share development priorities as relevant. Other

leadership opportunities include the school's prefect system, head boy and girl, mentoring and Belonging Plus in addition to various co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Interactions with students indicated that they are happy with the school: this is also reflected in responses to the student questionnaire where, for instance, a large majority indicated that they are proud to be in the school.

Parents are recognised as key partners in supporting and developing student engagement with learning and progression. A significant majority of respondents to the parent questionnaire agreed that there is a good and welcoming atmosphere in the school. Parents' association representatives were also very positive about the welcoming atmosphere experienced and the support of senior management and staff. The school is very effective in encouraging parent engagement with the school through the school transfer programme and various courses offered through the School Completion Programme. Parents were particularly complimentary about the initiative whereby mathematics lessons are provided for parents of first-year students to better prepare them to assist in their children's learning. To build on the very good initiatives already in place and to enhance the school transfer programme, consideration should be given to focusing on STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).

Discussions and documentation demonstrated that the school self-evaluation (SSE) process is integral to the identification of school improvement priorities. Teachers' level of knowledge about SSE, and of education developments generally, was very impressive. The range of developmental priorities identified is well balanced and improving the quality of learning and teaching is fundamental to the process. Current areas of priority include the use of active and effective student-centred methodologies to support differentiation, assessment for learning (AfL) and teacher professional learning. In order to further guide the implementation of the priorities identified, it is recommended that the school plan includes action plans for each with specific targets, strategies and timeframes.

1.2 Effectiveness of Leadership for learning

The SMT has a strategic approach to school improvement and is committed to excellence and quality improvement through teacher professional learning and empowerment. As demonstrated in areas such as Materials Technology (wood), Metalwork (materials and technology), Religious Education, Home Economics and English, teachers are self-motivated and committed to exploring new and effective strategies and approaches to improving students' learning experiences and outcomes. Staff members are supported in availing of professional learning opportunities through nationally provided continuing professional development (CPD), post-graduate study and participation in ETB-led initiatives and developments such as the NCCA Junior Cycle Network of schools. SMT's recognition of in-house expertise in the area of professional development is particularly noteworthy.

The management structure is cleverly used to support the school's vision and commitment to excellence. Each year-group of students is assigned an Academic Year Monitor (AYM). The AYMs meet senior management regularly and student progress is closely monitored.

The functioning of the special educational needs team is exemplary. All members of the team are fully qualified and share considerable experience and expertise. The team has a clear understanding and vision for its role in improving the quality of learning and teaching experiences of students and the need for a balanced approach to the provision of support, including students of exceptional ability. As demonstrated by the survey conducted with teaching staff on the preferred team-teaching approach, the team has the capacity to offer effective leadership to colleagues on the integration of students with special educational needs in mainstream classes. The team took the initiative to develop a programme for

exceptionally able students which includes participation in public speaking. This could be extended to benefit the wider student body where oracy skills development is concerned.

The school curriculum is broad and well balanced. In addition to the established Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate, students have access to the Junior Certificate Schools Programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Due consideration has also been given to the introduction of Transition Year. As the timetable demonstrates, senior management is committed to meeting students' demands for curricular areas as far as practicable. Art and higher level Mathematics have been introduced and the LCA programme revised to include a module on Childcare. In keeping with the school's commitment to inclusive practices and high expectations JCSP participants are fully integrated with their peers.

Except for the limited access to PE in the case of students taking LCVP, the time allocated to subjects and programmes on the current timetable is appropriate. The focus group of students stated that access for all in senior cycle to PE was the main change they would like see. Management expressed a commitment to addressing this issue in the next academic year.

Students in both junior cycle and senior cycle and their parents are invited to open evenings and offered comprehensive detail on the various programmes on offer in a timely manner. On entry, first-year students engage in a taster programme and students again make subject and programme choices based on open bands as they enter senior cycle.

The school offers tuition hours in excess of the minimum required by the Department and is open on the required number of days per year. Designated hours are used for their intended purpose. The school's admission policy and its application reflects its commitment to equality and inclusion. Associated documentation does, however, contain wording that could be construed as obstructing access. The board should be mindful to exclude such wording in the future review and ensure that any cap applied to enrolment is published.

The school has been very successful in maximising student retention. Management acknowledges that attendance is an ongoing challenge. The school is pro-active in seeking solutions to maximise attendance as demonstrated by the inclusion of an afternoon registration, the effective use of technology to alert parents of absences and the home-school-community liaison officer's strategies to improve communication with target groups of parents.

Student care is led by a dynamic and effective multidisciplinary team. The team, which includes senior management and the school counsellor meets on a weekly basis. The team's work is supported by relevant school policies and very good links have been established with external agencies.

The code of behaviour is comprehensive, presents a clear ladder of referral and seeks to promote positive student behaviour. Where there are particular behavioural challenges, students and teachers are supported through the school's participation in the Behaviour for Learning Programme (BfL). Worthwhile efforts are made to generate an awareness amongst teachers of the very good range of supports available in the BfL Programme and to integrate expertise and knowledge gained into general classroom practice.

Social personal and health education (SPHE) and relationships and sexuality education (RSE) programmes are in place and a cross-curricular approach is adopted in their provision as relevant. Guidance is integrated into the curriculum in senior cycle. Provision in junior cycle is by way of access to class groups during time scheduled for subjects and

individual appointments. Management acknowledges that the plan needs to be updated. As part of this revision, it is recommended that the tracking of students, post-Leaving Certificate, be improved.

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 accommodation and grounds are maintained to a very high standard. Specialist rooms are well equipped and their use maximised to support learning. The school registered to participate in the Green Flag programme in 2006. While school management is mindful of its environmental obligations, there is a need for the school to articulate more formally its commitment to environmental responsibility and renew efforts to achieve a Green Flag.

The further development of the use of information and communication technology (ICT) is an identified priority and plans to pilot the use of iPads is in progress. Management recognises that the use of ICT by students to lead and support their own learning should underpin developments in this area. To support this vision it is recommended that future developments take account, in the first instance, of the desired teaching and learning experience ICT can provide, and identify the most suitable infrastructure to achieve this.

School corridors and public spaces are used to good effect to display examples of students' work, including engineering projects and art. Dedicated notice boards with current information are provided in key assembly areas.

The health and safety statement is currently being reviewed and all stakeholders are contributing to the development of a new statement.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Subject departments and programme teams work effectively to prepare high quality plans for learning and teaching. There are many examples of exemplary planning based on learning outcomes and the integration of literacy and numeracy skills with subject specific content.

The quality of learning and teaching varied from good to very good with a significant number of lessons in the very good category. Very good lessons were characterised by exemplary planning for student learning, providing for well-structured lessons that promoted learning development and progression. Clear learning intentions were shared with students and fully explored during lessons helping them understand the purpose of the process in which they were engaged. Differentiation was effective and questioning was skilfully used to assess and scaffold learning, ensuring that students were appropriately challenged and prompted to ask content related questions. The tasks selected ensured purposeful student engagement in their learning. Pair-work and group-work tasks had clear learning objectives. Literacy skills, including the development oracy skills, and numeracy skills were seamlessly integrated into the content.

It was evident that teachers had high expectations of students in almost all lessons. Examples of very good differentiation strategies were observed in various curricular areas.

In general, however, differentiation through teacher movement to ensure individual students or groups were on task dominated. Aspects such as the differentiation of learning outcomes in line with subject plans, questioning, classroom and homework tasks need to be enhanced and used more widely to benefit students' learning.

One of the key findings from previous reports in the languages area concerned the use of the target language. Observation in one case indicated that there is still scope for the development of students' capacity to use the target language.

To build on the very good examples of best practice observed in some areas, the sharing of expertise in the areas of AfL and questioning should be revitalised and extended across the curriculum with an explicit aim to develop students' oracy skills in order that they can become more active partners in the learning process. A review of a sample of students' written work and in-house examination scripts indicated some excellent practice in constructive feedback. It is recommended that the provision of formative feedback on written and oral work also becomes general practice.

The AYM's have a significant role in monitoring student progress and ensuring issues are addressed as relevant. An analysis of student attainment in state examinations demonstrated that good progress is being made in improving participation rates at higher level and outcomes more generally. The monitoring of attainment in in-house examinations is a strength in the assessment practices. There is scope for the further integration of this aspect into department plans and for instance, and as relevant, its reflection in any amendment to plans. Parents are provided with regular reports on student achievement and, in some cases, very good use is made of the school journal in this regard.

Electronic or hardcopy resources were, in most instances, well selected. Best practice in the use of ICT was where it was used creatively to support learning.

Classroom management in all cases was very good. Lessons were conducted in an atmosphere of care and trust in which students' contributions were acknowledged and affirmed. The learning environment included samples of students' work. Best practice was noted where the material displayed was used to support learning. In some instances there is scope to augment displays and ensure they reflect current areas of focus.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Very good progress has been made in implementing recommendations from previous reports including the whole-school evaluation conducted in 2008. It is evident that the board gives due consideration to recommendations in inspection reports and adopts effective strategies to support their implementation. Practice indicates that school management recognises the value of sharing findings and recommendation arising from individual subject or programme evaluations across the curriculum.

3.2 Learning and teaching

The whole-school approach adopted to improving academic attainment for students and a move to mixed-ability class groups has been particularly effective. Changes in practice were supported by a programme of teacher professional development accessed through a variety of CPD models and providers over time. An appropriate emphasis was placed on differentiation and AfL and the improvements brought about by the introduction of these practices were augmented by, for instance, delaying decisions on the levels taken by

students in certificate examinations, clarification of the role of AYMs, the analysis of results and the identification of strategies for improvement. In keeping with the recommendations of this report there is a need to extend the examples of very good practice observed and revisit areas such as task design, questioning and feedback to support continued improvement in student outcomes.

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

The school engages in robust self-evaluation processes which encompass the collation and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. The board is well placed to benefit from the very good level of knowledge of SSE among staff as it continues to engage in the development and review of policies. The staff's capacity to identify challenges in agreed targets and review and amend accordingly is reassuring. While a very good quality school improvement plan for literacy is in place, the quality of targets both in this and plans for other DEIS related themes varies. To benefit the implementation of formulated plans, and the planning cycle, it is recommended that a greater focus be placed on formulating SMART targets.

The board, senior management and staff demonstrated a very positive disposition towards change and a very good capacity for further school improvement.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Deansrath Community College warmly welcomes this very positive Whole School Evaluation, Management, Leadership and Learning inspection Report wherein the quality of learning and teaching was greatly affirmed as being “in the good or very good range with a significant number of lessons in the very good category”, assisted by “exemplary subject and programme planning”, with “the integration of literacy and numeracy skills with subject specific content”. The Inspectorate also praised the “school’s positive atmosphere” in an “inclusive and safe learning environment”, wherein “high expectations are set for student learning underpinned by the values of care and respect for all”.

The senior management team felt very avowed that the “obvious care and respect for students ... throughout the school emanates from the SMT, that the latter “operates in an inclusive manner towards staff” and “works effectively in leading and managing the school”.

The board of management, SMT and all staff were naturally very honoured that “in responses to the student questionnaire ... a large majority indicated that they are proud to be in the school”.

Furthermore the Board and staff were delighted with the positive response from parents’ questionnaires, whereby they find the college “welcoming” and were appreciative of the “support of senior management and staff”, benefiting and enjoying all courses/initiatives/programmes, provided through the work of the H.S.C.L. and S.C.P.

The Inspectorate was further impressed “by teachers’ level of knowledge about SSE and of education developments generally” and praised teachers for being “self-motivated and committed ... to improving students’ learning experiences and outcomes”, whilst the “SMT’s recognition of in-house expertise ... is particularly noteworthy” in accommodating the sharing of same with all colleagues.

Also, the Inspectorate avowed the management structure being “cleverly used to support the school’s vision and commitment to excellence” and acknowledging that staff “demonstrated ... a very good capacity to further school improvement”.

Finally, the board was very appreciative for the acknowledgement of the Inspectorate of the ancillary staff when it recognised that “the school accommodation and grounds are maintained to a very high standard”.

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, SMT and staff welcomed and reviewed the report in detail and as all are committed to self-evaluation and improvement, will strive to implement in full the recommendations, as in similar responses to previous inspections, whereby this inspection found that “it is evident that the board gives due consideration to

recommendations ... and adopts effective strategies to support their implementation”.

1. Enrolment documentation has been amended to fully express Deansrath Community College’s open and inclusive enrolment tradition.
2. The Board has determined to meet with the newly elected Student Council on a bi-annual basis.
3. Physical Education has been timetabled at senior cycle.
4. SMART targets in all documentation is already being addressed and it is envisaged that best practice will extend to all practice and documentation. Adhering to best practice, the Attendance subcommittee for SSE and DEIS Planning, has already set particular targets for each year group according to the symmetry of each specific cohort.
5. In house peer/staff development is focused currently on sharing best practice across disciplines, focusing on distributing successfully varying strategies/AfL methodologies to be embedded in school-wide practise, to enhance individual student’s learning experience and outcomes.

As “plans to include representation from a second feeder school on the board is indeed positive” and has been warmly welcomed by ddletb, it is envisaged, that the aim to enhance student learning during and through transfer will be met fully in time: co-operation between primary and post-primary mathematics departments has already occurred.