

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Killarney Community College  
Killarney, County Kerry  
Roll number: 70450D**

**Date of inspection: 30 September 2015**



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

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

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in September 2015 in Killarney 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***

Killarney Community College was founded in 1903 and operates under the auspices of Kerry Education and Training Board (Kerry ETB). It is the only co-educational, post-primary school in Killarney and has a large rural and urban catchment area, which includes twenty feeder primary schools. The current enrolment in the post-primary school is 400 students. It is a multi-faith and multi-cultural school, with students from many nationalities.

It provides a balanced and comprehensive curriculum. All available programmes, Junior Certificate (JC), Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Transition Year (TY), established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme (LCA), are offered to students. It provides a large adult education programme and there is one Post-Leaving Certificate programme. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) for educational inclusion.

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

### ***Key Findings***

- The board of management is effective and committed to fulfilling its role, responsibilities and statutory obligations.
- The parents' association is proactive and very supportive of the school.
- The principal and deputy principal provide very good leadership.
- In line with its culture of self-review, the school has demonstrated a clear willingness to change and has put systems and structures in place in order to improve outcomes for students.
- A key strength of school is its professional, loyal and caring staff.
- The school community is engaged in ongoing collaborative planning.
- Leadership is distributed among middle management effectively, both as part of the school's post of responsibility structure and among other staff.
- The comprehensive curriculum offered ensures the needs of students are met.
- A care team very effectively leads the valuable provision of supports for students.
- A whole-school approach to student support which is inclusive, student-centred and caring, is evident. This needs to be documented in a whole-school Guidance Plan.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good, but with clear areas for development.

- It is clearly evident that the school has considerable capacity to initiate change and drive school improvement.

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

- The board should issue an annual report on the operation and performance of the school to parents, staff and the student council in accordance with section twenty of the Education Act.
- Teaching and learning practices acquired at continuing professional development (CPD) events should be embedded and their impact monitored
- The board, together with senior management, should lead the implementation of recommendations provided in relation to teaching and learning, with a particular focus on putting in place initiatives that would support a greater sharing of observed best practice and that would enhance levels of student participation in class.
- In relation to DEIS planning, the school should focus on the implementation of agreed actions at classroom level, together with the subsequent evaluation of their impact.

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

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

The newly formed board is properly and democratically constituted, and is clear on its role, responsibilities and obligations. It is very committed to the school and its inclusive ethos. Its members have wide-ranging expertise and, like the previous board, hold regular meetings and use effective communication strategies with stakeholders. An agreed report is delivered to partners and links with the school's stakeholders are well established. A majority of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'The board of management keeps teachers informed about its leadership and management role'.

Kerry ETB provides very good support to its schools, providing training for board members, school leaders and teachers, and setting up the parents' and students' forums. The board supports the provision of high quality teaching and learning by, for example, encouraging teachers' participation in CPD and discussing student attainment. It is now time to embed teaching and learning practices acquired at CPD events, and then monitor their impact.

The board and school community have pro-actively identified an appropriate range of developmental priorities. Individual board members liaise with the in-school leader who leads a specific priority area. This very good strategy ensures that the board has up-to-date information on the progress made in relation to priorities set.

The parents' association is very committed to the school, has a good understanding of teaching and learning and has taken an active role in supporting many initiatives. A parents' association section should be included on the school website in order to enhance communication with the general parent body. Communication from the school to parents is good. The overwhelming majority of parents agreed or strongly agreed that school reports give them a good picture of how their child is doing. Parents stated that parent-teacher meetings are particularly beneficial as both parents and students attend.

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

The senior management team provides very strong leadership and has a shared vision for school development and for driving and managing change. Their management style is collaborative and consultative. Management and staff have demonstrated a clear

willingness to change and have put systems and structures in place in order to improve outcomes for students.

The professional, loyal and caring teaching staff is a key strength of school. Staff is very well supported by senior management who facilitate leadership capacity building. Staff is clearly empowered through the effective distribution of leadership among middle management. Teachers' willingness to undertake leadership roles and manage tasks on a voluntary basis is acknowledged. Duties attached to the various roles are undertaken in a diligent manner. Good lines of communication exist between senior management and staff. The generosity of staff in providing a huge array of extracurricular activities that facilitate all interests is commended. All ancillary staff, including the special needs assistants (SNAs), make a valuable and valued contribution to school life.

The school community is engaged in ongoing collaborative planning through the DEIS and school self-evaluation (SSE) processes. The school demonstrates very well how the SSE process underpins effective DEIS planning. Commendably, realistic evidence-based targets are set that are linked to a number of DEIS themes. Partnership with outside agencies is effective. While there is clear evidence of partnership with parents, nevertheless the DEIS plan should include target(s) to enhance this partnership. The school has ensured that the new DEIS plan (2015-2018) has identified links to practice at classroom, subject department and whole-school level. The introduction of leaders to direct priority areas is very positive. In line with the school's culture of review, it is recommended that these leaders would lead the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the impact of agreed measures in the DEIS plan, possibly using self and peer review. In particular the focus should be on the implementation and evaluation of the impact of agreed actions at classroom level.

Subject plans examined indicate that subject department planning is firmly established. It is positive that common subject plans and modes of assessment are agreed. Building on this good practice, it is recommended that departments discuss, implement and review agreed teaching and learning strategies such as active learning methodologies. Certificate results are analysed by Kerry ETB and, in some subject areas, meaningful interpretation focused on strategic planning for improved attainment has resulted. All subject departments should adopt this approach. It is suggested that the teacher handbook be reinstated and updated, to include specific advice about teaching and learning methodologies such as active learning and differentiation.

Students are enabled to develop leadership qualities through the student council and the house system leaders. It is suggested that stronger links be established between the student council and parents' association through working together on joint tasks, such as policy review.

The school operates open and inclusive enrolment and admissions practices. The board has agreed to review and amend the admissions policy and remove conditional clauses so that the policy reflects the school's inclusive practices. The application form and subsequent offer should be separate to the request for a voluntary financial contribution. Appropriate strategies are used for monitoring attendance and, following review, focused interventions for students with very poor attendance levels have been devised.

A very broad curriculum is provided, including an extensive evening programme. All programmes are well co-ordinated. The curriculum is regularly discussed in order to ensure that the school continues to meet the needs of the students. Students were very positive about their experience of the optional TY programme, which was introduced in 2014. Teachers' and management's efforts in maintaining the LCA programme are commended. The school should keep the combining of the fifth-year and sixth-year LCA groups under

review, taking cognisance of the fact that only some courses are suitable for combined year groups. Student uptake of LCVP is good. The school is aware of the need to provide an *ab initio* language module when required. The organisation and co-ordination of the JCSP interventions is commended. However, there is no evidence of an integrated approach to using JCSP statements. Therefore, it is recommended that the school review its approach to student use of JCSP statements.

A subject-sampling system allows students to study optional subjects before making choices, both in first year and in senior cycle. This is good practice. In line with its practice of review, the school is encouraged to continue monitoring the effectiveness of the length of the first-year subject sampling system. Overall teachers are deployed according to their expertise and timetabled allocation to subjects is appropriate.

A significant minority of students have special educational needs (SEN). The school has a substantial allocation of additional teaching hours, twenty-two of which have yet to be allocated. Management should ensure that all hours are used for intended purposes in accordance with Circular 70/14. Commendably, a core teaching team provides additional support, using a range of modes. Co-ordination of SEN is very good and this is supported by a weekly meeting time. The co-ordinator works very well, both formally and informally with key personnel and teachers and has devised a comprehensive and high quality plan. SNAs are clear on their role. To further enhance communication within the SEN department, regular meetings between the co-ordinator and core team, and the co-ordinator and SNAs should be considered.

A comprehensive guidance programme has been devised with an appropriate balance between guidance and counselling. All classes have formal access to Guidance. A draft guidance policy was devised in 2015. This should be circulated to the education partners and then ratified by the board. Guidance personnel are committed to enhancing and further developing the guidance service in the school. A whole-school approach to student support is clearly evident. This needs to be documented in a whole-school guidance plan. Existing guidance and student support policies, for example, could be merged to produce this plan.

A student support team very effectively leads the valuable provision of a wide range of care structures and interventions which support student welfare. Co-ordination is facilitated through weekly meetings. Year heads and class tutors have key support roles. Excellent support is provided for students and parents during transition from primary to post-primary school. This includes a strong induction process, student mentoring and the formation of first-year base groups. The house system very effectively promotes a sense of community and inclusion, and significantly enhances relationships between students and staff.

The home-school-community liaison co-ordinator has a significant role in providing strong school links with parents and has organised courses which have been successful in engendering interest among parents. The school completion programme (SCP) provides additional support for target students as necessary in the form of volunteer community mentoring and the Natural Highs summer programme, in addition to breakfast and homework clubs.

The code of behaviour is written in a positive manner. Accompanying graphics are written in student-friendly language to make the code more accessible. However, some students are unclear about aspects of the code. There are also a high number of suspensions. The school should consider using alternative strategies, such as increasingly rewarding positive behaviour in the management of students.

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**

School facilities are maintained to a high standard. Improvement works have taken place and plans are progressing for expansion of facilities. It is good to note that the school has achieved its first green flag. Provision of information and communication technology (ICT) resources is very good, broadband connectivity has recently been further enhanced and plans are being implemented to use e-portal more effectively. The corridors and general areas are visually stimulating and the TV display in the general purpose area is a very good way of communicating with staff and students alike. The school canteen provides a good service.

Health and safety training has been undertaken by relevant staff. Some subject areas have comprehensively documented risk assessments which outline hazards, risks and controls. Risk assessment documentation is required for all areas of the school including general areas. To ensure a comprehensive approach to risk assessment, it is recommended that all subject areas use the template provided for post-primary schools that is available on [www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie). Staff has recently reviewed the health and safety policy. The risk assessments should be appended prior to its ratification by the board.

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

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

The overall quality of teaching is good. Lessons were prepared and based on a series of learning intentions, which were explicitly shared with students in most lessons. Best practice was observed where learning intentions were presented as desired student outcomes rather than content lists. This is further encouraged.

As observed in a number of classrooms, effective lessons were underpinned by teacher planning and preparation that ensured continuity and progression in students' learning. Very effective learning resulted from these lessons, which were suitably pitched and paced to facilitate appropriate levels of student participation. An expansion of such effective lesson preparation throughout the school is recommended and would gainfully contribute to the overall quality of teaching and learning.

Most lessons commenced with a valuable review of prior learning or the correction of homework. It is recommended that approaches to in-class correction could be extended to include structured peer assessment activities. This will develop students' analysis, synthesis and evaluation skills. Teacher inputs were well informed and explanations provided to students were clear. A good range of strategies was observed, with very good provision in some lessons for audio, visual and kinesthetic learning styles.

A range of quality resources were sourced or created for use in lessons. Best practice was observed where lesson structure was developmental in nature. Such lessons used students' prior learning or experiences as a springboard for introducing new concepts and for developing or refining skills. This approach merits wider implementation throughout the school.

Classrooms were visually stimulating, some displaying student work, with evidence of the use of resources to support topic exploration. In a number of lessons there was a striking 'it's ok not to know' philosophy evident, and students responded well to this approach by displaying a confidence and ease in both asking and attempting to answer questions.

Teachers' interactions with students were very positive and characterised by warmth, friendliness and mutual respect. Students were well behaved and responded promptly to teacher direction. Student inputs were readily affirmed.

In some lessons, students were encouraged and facilitated to be active participants in their learning. When students were required to work purposefully together on a task, interactions were respectful, student engagement increased, and energy levels rose resulting in high quality teaching and learning. By contrast, teaching and learning strategies in other lessons were less active with a corresponding impact on the quality of learning. Positively, in a small number of lessons, note-making strategies such as information grids and mind-maps were in use. This strategy was found to be far more effective than note-taking as a method of promoting greater levels of student engagement and understanding. It is recommended that management and teachers explore further the benefits of active learning with a view to expanding the good practices such as note-making and other student-led activities throughout the school.

In some instances where students were facilitated and instructed to work in pairs or small groups, they were more inclined to work alone. Such activities should be effectively structured, with a clear focus on the purpose of the task and how it might be better executed and processed to support greater understanding and learning. It is recommended that best practice relative to the incorporation of individual, pair and group tasks be further explored at whole-staff level. When they were facilitated, strategies such as placemat and snowball were very well executed. Such co-operative learning strategies should be embedded across all classrooms.

The use of rubrics in a range of subjects is noted as a very positive component of teachers' approach to the assessment of student learning, as it is supporting an overt sharing of success criteria with students, whilst promoting student self-evaluation of their own work.

In practical lessons, it was clear that teachers have clearly communicated their expectations relating to effective and safe student practice. The provision of guide sheets also supported students to work independently and at a rate suited to their personal abilities. Teachers gauged students' readiness for whole-class inputs, providing differentiated instruction in small groups to meet immediate learning needs. A greater use of the visualiser, as a resource to support student engagement and learning, was recommended in some instances.

Questioning is a key classroom strategy in the school. Best practice was where teachers equally distributed questions, discouraged chorus answering, provided adequate wait time, promoted a blend of lower and higher-order thinking, and encouraged, prompted and affirmed students. A school-wide embedding of observed best practice is recommended. To support the less confident student, varying the method of student answering should be considered. Further incorporation of strategies such as think-pair-share, whiteboards, and brainstorm groups would be useful in this regard.

In a number of lessons, consolidation of learning at lesson end required more thought and more time. This should be addressed. It is further recommended that plenary activities be clearly linked to shared learning intentions, in order that teachers, and students alike, can evaluate progress and achievement.

Homework designed to consolidate or extend classroom learning was assigned in almost all lessons. It was recommended that when assigning research-based homework tasks, students be provided with key headings to support effective personal research. There was an appropriate referencing of certificate examination papers and the related approach to question analysis and answering.

It should be noted that exemplary practice was observed in a number of instances, and in such lessons, student participation and learning were maximised. Development and expansion of these good practices, capitalising upon the spirit of collegiality and dedication that was observed amongst staff, will greatly enhance the overall quality of teaching and active-learning among students. Strategies to support ongoing progress in this area may include the introduction of shared-learning opportunities, such as peer observation, which would provide a safe space for teachers to develop professionally.

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

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

The school has made good progress in implementing recommendations related to whole-school provision. For example, gas isolation switches and heat sensors have been installed, Irish signage is imminent and management has ensured that the school's timetable complies with DES Circular M25/95. Following the last whole-school evaluation, posts of responsibility were reviewed and changed in consultation with staff in order to ensure that the school's needs continue to be met.

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

Subject departments submitted progress reports in relation to recommendations made in previous evaluations. Overall good progress has been made in implementing recommendations. Efforts made by some teachers in relation to active learning are commended. In some instances questioning was very effectively used and in language lessons, there was a commendably high use of the target language.

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

A culture of self-review is embedded in the work of the school. The views of staff, parents, and students are gathered to assist in review and self-evaluation processes. Monitoring the effectiveness of literacy strategies resulted in re-prioritising a reduced number of strategies, and in providing parent and student training in graphic organisers.

The school has engaged in the SSE process across a number of areas of school life. DEIS planning has been aligned with SSE and developmental priorities have been identified. It is clearly evident that the school has considerable capacity to initiate change and drive school improvement. This capacity should now focus on teaching and learning in the classroom to a greater extent.

# **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 Killarney community college acknowledges the affirmation received through the recent WSE-MLL process of the progressive developments taking place in the college. The report noted that it is clearly evident that the school has considerable capacity to initiate change and drive school improvement. The board extends its gratitude to the education partners for their support and respective contributions towards transformative change in the college.
- The Board values the report's reference to the college's whole school approach to student support which is inclusive, student centred and caring, and the acknowledgment that a key strength of the school is its professional, loyal and caring staff. The Board is gratified that the inspectors highlighted and commended teacher's willingness to undertake leadership roles and manage tasks on a voluntary basis; the Board sees this commitment as a foundation stone of the success of the school.
- The Board is also pleased to note that the overall quality of teaching is good. The Board is particularly gratified to see that exemplary practice was observed in a number of instances, and in such lessons, student participation and learning were maximised. It is the aim of the Board that this inherent capacity will be maximized as we further embed our targeted strategies.

### **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 WSE highlighted that the school demonstrates very well how the SSE process underpins effective DEIS planning. The school has identified realistic evidence based targets linked to DEIS themes. The introduction of Priority leaders to direct priority groups is very positive. These Leaders with their groups have already identified specific aspects of classroom practice that they are going to support and monitor. Each leader will link with a Board of management member to monitor progress and this feedback will form part of the school's annual report from the BOM. This will then be shared with all school partners.
- The teaching staff along with management have analysed the findings of the WSE and are currently in the process of developing a long term plan to address any items raised and to further embed teaching and learning practices acquired at CPD. The learning and teaching staff group are examining how the staff can develop structures to share observed best practice.
- Killarney community colleges whole school guidance plan is alive and ever evolving. We are committed to fully documenting the wide range of supports that our students avail of in a whole school guidance plan.