

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Maynooth Post Primary School, Maynooth
County Kildare
Roll number: 70700A**

Date of inspection: February 2014



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

Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in February 2014 in Maynooth Post Primary 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 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

Maynooth Post Primary school is the only post-primary school in Maynooth since it was established in 1971. It is a co-educational school under the patronage and management of Kildare-Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB). The current enrolment is 1,208 students and numbers have significantly increased in recent years. The demand for places in the school exceeds the number available. Plans are in place to provide two post-primary schools on greenfield sites in Maynooth under KWETB patronage. An earlier whole-school evaluation of this school took place in 2006.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- There is considerable demand for places in the school.
- The board of management is very committed and experienced and is well supported by KWETB.
- The principal and the two deputy principals demonstrate a commitment to high standards and quality improvement and they provide effective leadership for learning and teaching.
- The principal and deputy principals have a partnership approach to school leadership and work effectively as a team.
- Students with special educational needs are well supported.
- The school has participated in a number of national initiatives and pilot projects to promote leadership, teaching, learning and self-evaluation.
- Teachers are very committed and work diligently in the best interests of students.
- Teaching and learning were very good in most lessons with some excellent practice evident.
- Teaching and learning took place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and there was very good rapport between teachers and students.
- The school is caring and inclusive.
- Students were very mannerly and their behaviour was exemplary during the evaluation.
- Although considerable efforts have been made to improve student attendance, absenteeism has remained high for a significant minority of students.

Recommendations for Further Development

- A school improvement strategy group should be put in place to focus on improvements in leadership, teaching, learning, self-evaluation and school improvement.
- The principal and deputy principals should establish more clearly defined ways to distribute leadership roles.
- Management should increase the size of the core resource team and expand the role of the SEN co-ordinator to work towards a more collaborative and a co-ordinated approach to meeting the needs of students with additional educational needs.
- The recommendations in the teaching and learning section of this report should be addressed through collaborative planning.
- Attendance strategies should be implemented on a more consistent basis.

QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The school is very well managed. The board is properly constituted and fulfils its statutory obligations. The board members are very committed to managing and supporting the school. All mandatory school policies have been ratified by the board. The school has an inclusive enrolment policy and welcomes students with special learning needs. A considerable amount of board time has been devoted to plans for the two new post-primary school buildings in Maynooth and the enrolment processes involved. This was time well spent. The board should agree a short report for staff and parents after each board meeting.

The KWETB is very supportive of the school especially in coping with the very strong demand for places. The KWETB has funded extra temporary, high quality accommodation to provide additional student places. This is commended.

The principal and the two deputy principals have an open door policy for staff, parents and students. They share common aims, which are to provide a learning environment that encourages students to reach their academic potential and to ensure that high quality care for students is provided. They work very well together as a team and consult daily. They provide very good leadership to staff and students. They are very supportive of each other and staff. They were appointed from the teaching staff and have a strong commitment to the school. They are approachable and open to ideas. The school has participated in many projects that were organised by the National University of Ireland (NUIM) and the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to promote leadership, teaching, learning and self-evaluation.

Senior management's open door policy has its drawbacks in that it encourages staff, students and parents to engage the principal and deputies too early in issues that could be dealt with by other staff. The senior management team should establish more clearly defined ways to distribute leadership roles. Clearer guidelines should be given to year heads, tutors and class teachers as to the remits of their leadership roles. For example, the part the teaching staff plays in the ladder of referral for student misbehaviour, the role they play in monitoring attendance and punctuality and their role in using assessment to monitor progress and to motivate students should be more clearly outlined.

The middle management team comprises six assistant principals (APs), twelve special duties teachers (SDTs) and a number of volunteers. The APs are the year heads of the six year groups. Each year head has either one or two assistant year heads. The posts of

responsibility have been recently reviewed to better meet the school's needs. This is a very good development. The post-holders meet regularly and make a significant contribution to decision-making and to the smooth running of the school. In keeping with very good practice they complete a review of the operation of their posts at the end of the school year. A meeting of all post-holders and volunteers for key duties should be held annually in order to share expertise and to enable them to assist with strategic planning in the school.

Tutors have a mainly pastoral role. There is a need to increase their leadership roles by giving them more responsibility for dealing with minor discipline issues that do not require the attention of the year head. Measures taken by the class teacher, tutor and year head should be well documented before the principal or the deputy principals have to deal with them.

A group of teachers was identified as a result of a staff questionnaire who are willing to take on additional leadership roles in a voluntary capacity. This is a very good example of senior management's collaboration with staff and their openness to change. There is more potential for including other staff in school improvement strategies. A school improvement strategy group needs to be put in place to focus on improvements in leadership, teaching, learning, self-evaluation and school improvement. This group should be open to all staff according to their interests and expertise.

Teachers are dedicated and strongly committed to their students. Teachers generously provide assistance for students outside class time. They provide very high quality care for students.

The teachers' commitment to providing co-curricular and extracurricular activities for students is highly commended. The broad range of sports provided includes Gaelic Football, Hurling, Camogie, Soccer, Basketball, Athletics, Golf, Swimming and Rugby. The school has had a number of successes in the BT Young Scientist and Technology Competition. There is an active Green Schools committee. There is a strong tradition of achievement in debating and public speaking. Twenty years of annual musicals, including this year's musical, which was professional and inclusive, are examples of the commendable collaboration between staff, parents and students.

There are very good induction supports for new teachers and for student teachers. The school facilitates a number of student teachers from various colleges by providing teaching practice as well as general advice and support.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING:

The principal and deputy principals are effective leaders of learning. They know the students well and show a close interest in their academic progress and welfare. They set very high expectations and standards for students' achievement. The senior management team plays an active role in ensuring that students behave well.

The timetable is well organised. One deputy principal has responsibility for it. There is good provision of resources for teaching and learning. There is good provision of information and communications technology (ICT) facilities to enhance teaching and learning. The school has introduced mixed-ability class groupings in first year and this is highly commended as it is more equitable than streaming of students.

There is a well-established practice of comparing student outcomes in the certificate examinations to national norms. These indicate that the school is performing well. The transfer rate to third level from among the school's students is very high. The school has recently begun to use standardised testing to gather baseline data on first years. The analysis of this data should be used to monitor students' progress and to provide an alternative perspective on students' achievement in the certificate exams.

The code of behaviour is positive, fair and inclusive. Students were observed to be confident, very happy and well behaved during the evaluation.

Teachers are deployed according to their qualifications and expertise and are consulted appropriately in the framing of the timetable. Teachers are given good opportunities to avail of continuous professional development (CPD) and to engage in projects and initiatives.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum and makes deliberate and sustained efforts to meet student needs. The school provides instructional hours in compliance with Circular M29\95. Attendance and retention are monitored but the level of absenteeism for a significant minority of students has remained high in recent years. Strategies such as texting and follow-up on absenteeism by year heads and assistant year heads are in place. However, these need to be implemented more consistently by staff.

A representative student council is in place. The focus group of students, who were interviewed during the evaluation, spoke very highly of the commitment and caring approach of school management and staff.

The school's pastoral care system supports students very well. The school is committed to promoting positive mental health, supporting students through critical incidents, bereavement or hardship. The school's immediate response to a recent critical incident was indicative of their caring approach. The guidance team provide good quality counselling and support to students experiencing personal difficulties and additional personal counselling provision is made available by the KWETB. Senior cycle students are timetabled for career guidance lessons and individual appointments can also be arranged.

Individuals and groups with additional educational needs are well supported in classes and by withdrawal strategies. A good quality student register has been drawn up, which details supports for individual students and the teachers who are involved in delivering this support. Individual Learning Plans (IEPs) are drawn up for students in receipt of learning support and an agreed template is utilised. Strategies for sharing individual education planning targets and strategies with all relevant partners should be further developed. There are improvements that can be made in the management of the resource team. Management should increase the size of the core resource team and expand the role of the SEN co-ordinator to work towards a more collaborative and a co-ordinated approach to meeting the needs of the students with special educational needs.

There is regular communication with parents through newsletters, parent-teacher meetings, both formal and informal, the school's website and texting systems. A vibrant parent-teacher association plays a vital liaison and fundraising role. A member of the Presentation Sisters provides valuable home-school support to some vulnerable students. However, while communication between school and home is well developed, the parent questionnaires raised a number of concerns in this regard. A significant minority of parents indicated that more helpful advice regarding subject choice was needed. A large number of parents surveyed expressed the view that the views of parents on school matters should be sought more frequently.

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

Facilities are well managed. Not all classrooms are teacher-based but every effort is made to achieve this where possible. Overall, the school is well maintained. Some classrooms are used by students as a lunch room and for supervised study. These rooms are sometimes left untidy. The student cleaning rota for tackling litter should be monitored more closely by staff.

1. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Teaching and learning were very good in most lessons observed with some excellent practice evident. Classroom interactions were respectful and there was very good rapport between teachers and students. High standards and high teacher expectations of student attainment were evident. Students were very mannerly and their behaviour was exemplary during the evaluation.

Long-term and short-term collaborative subject plans are prepared and available in all subjects. There was some very good subject planning especially in the subject areas that were recently inspected. The quality of subject planning varied, however. There needs to be a more common approach in subject planning that emphasises more active teaching and learning methodologies and that promotes more reflective approaches to planning.

In the lessons observed instruction was clear, relevant and concise. Lessons were well structured. Intended learning outcomes were outlined at the start of lessons and often returned to at the end. However, whether or not the learning outcomes were being wholly or partially achieved needed to be more closely monitored during some lessons.

Teachers worked diligently during lessons. Teaching in the majority of classes consisted of effective whole-class teaching that was mainly teacher directed. Students needed to be more actively engaged in their own learning in these lessons. There was some good group and think, pair and share work. However, a whole-school approach to regular and consistent use of active teaching and learning methodologies such as group and pair work is recommended. Team teaching was not used in any of the lessons observed. This strategy should be used, as resources allow, to promote more varied and more differentiated teaching and learning strategies. There was effective use of ICT in teaching and learning in many lessons.

Print-rich environments were evident in some classrooms. There was good attention paid to literacy and numeracy in some classes, for example, the effective decoding of key terms and concepts. The use of key word strategies and vocabulary extension were evident in a number of lessons. A literacy strategy has been developed. There needs to be a more consistent approach to literacy and numeracy development.

Questioning strategies were generally well implemented. For example, the use of playing cards on tables allowed for more random type questioning in a mathematics class. In some classes more directed questioning to individuals and the use of higher-order questions

should have been used to challenge students and to check students' knowledge and understanding.

A range of assessment strategies is used to assess students' learning. Regular class tests are given. Good revision strategies were also evident especially in examination classes in the build-up to the mock examinations. There were some good examples of peer correcting observed, which is commended.

Student questionnaires raised a number of issues that need further exploration and attention with regard to teaching and learning. A high number of second and fifth-year students surveyed did not find their classes interesting and also the number of these students who indicated that they were not advised by teachers on how to improve their learning was high.

Language teaching was impressive especially with regard to the regular and consistent use of the target language in lessons where the medium of instruction was other than English. Very good use of role play and games was also evident in a number of language lessons. In the practical subjects students were guided through lesson projects and tasks in a safe and supportive manner. The activity based learning observed in some lessons was excellent, enjoyable and engaging for students. Structured and effective approaches to the teaching of poetry were also evident. Think, pair, share work and brainstorming were very effectively used in some of the lessons observed. These very good practices are commended.

Homework was regularly given and monitored. There was good use of the student journal to record homework. There were some very good examples of correcting towards improvement and the giving of constructive written feedback. It is recommended that there should be much more consistent and regular annotation of students' written work in order to demonstrate to students how they can improve the quality of their work.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

The level of implementation of previous inspection recommendations is good but there are still aspects of some recommendations that need further development. The involvement of the school in pilot projects for leadership, teaching and learning was affirmed in a number of previous inspection reports and is affirmed by this inspection team. However, the impact of these projects in promoting more activity-based learning and teaching needs to be closely monitored and assessed.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Subject planning in some subjects has improved partly as a result of the implementation of previous recommendations. However, these improvements need to be implemented more consistently across the school especially in relation to planning for more active methodologies and planning for improvement in teaching and learning.

Effective use of the target language, which was recommended in the French Report (2006) is now widespread in language lessons.

Correcting written work for improvement that was previously recommended in a number of reports including the History report (2009) needs to become more widespread. The effective use of ICT in teaching and learning has also greatly improved since the previous WSE evaluation. The statement of learning outcomes at the beginning of lessons is now

consistent across the school but this needs to be monitored more closely during lessons to see if they are being achieved.

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

School self-review and self-evaluation are becoming established. The school has had a longstanding involvement in pilot projects to improve school leadership and teaching and learning. This involvement has been most evident in the NUIM Teaching and Learning 21 initiative and in the DES school self-evaluation pilot project. Involvement of senior management and another staff member in instructional leadership training has also been of benefit.

The carrying out of a number of staff surveys is indicative of a growing awareness of and involvement in self-evaluation and reflection. The school has shown a willingness to commit to school self-evaluation and improvement. The implementation of the recommendations in this report will further support that process.

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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 Maynooth Post Primary School welcomes the very positive WSE-MLL report. We accept that the report reflects the school accurately and are very pleased that the following areas of excellence were acknowledged.

- The Principal and the two Deputy Principals demonstrate a commitment to high standards and quality improvement and they provide an effective leadership for learning and teaching. The senior management team has a partnership approach to school leadership and work effectively as a team.
- Teachers are very committed and work diligently in the best interests of students, Teaching and learning took place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and there was very good rapport between teachers and students. Teaching and learning were very good with some excellent practice commended.
- Students were very mannerly and their behaviour was exemplary during the evaluation. The care of students is a significant strength of the school. A dedicated care team are in place and meet weekly. They place a high importance on student welfare in the school. A concern for student welfare and a strong ethos permeate all aspects of school life.
- Students with special educational needs are well supported.
- The school has participated in a number of initiatives and pilot projects to promote leadership, teaching, learning and self-evaluation.
- The Board of Management is very committed and experienced and is well supported by KWETB.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

- A full review of posts of responsibility, especially with regards to the distribution of leadership roles.
- A clear definition of the referral system for students in matters of discipline/behaviour.
- Setting up a school improvement strategy to focus on improvements in leadership, teaching, learning, self-evaluation and school improvement.
- A number of staff development sessions/meetings will take place each year to address the need for collaborative planning with regard to teaching and learning and will include literacy & numeracy. A teaching and learning club has been established to allow staff share best practice from the classroom.
- A plan to increase the size of the core resource team and to expand the role of the SEN co-ordinator.
- Attendance will continue to be targeted as part of the overall school improvement plan, with the aim of continuing to reduce the level of absenteeism.
- A review of how the school communicates information to parents will take place and parents' views will be more frequently sought.