

Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning
REPORT

Coláiste Cholmcille
Ballyshannon, County Donegal
Roll number: 91506V

Date of inspection: 12 May 2016



**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 2016 in Coláiste Cholmcille. 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

Coláiste Cholmcille is a post-primary community school under the auspices of the Bishops of Raphoe and Clogher and the Donegal Educational Training Board (DETB). The school provides a wide range of junior and senior-cycle programmes and includes an autism unit. The school caters for 647 students, drawn from seventeen feeder primary schools located in Ballyshannon and its surrounding hinterland.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management has a very good range of expertise within its membership and works diligently to meet the needs of the school.
- The principal and deputy principal adopt a collegial approach to the running of the school and are strongly committed to leading a school that provides a holistic student-centred education.
- Staff are dedicated to their work and show highly commendable levels of volunteerism.
- Student care is a high priority and there is a well-developed integrated pastoral care system.
- The school provides a broad curriculum programme; the deployment of some tuition hours for the provision of supports to students with additional educational needs requires review.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good to very good in almost all of the lessons observed, with examples of exemplary practice noted; further adoption of student-centred methodologies would be beneficial.
- The school demonstrates a commendable capacity for school improvement; a more strategic approach to action planning would prove advantageous.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board, in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders, should agree a list of whole-school priorities to be achieved in the short, medium and long term; action plans that support the achievement of each priority should be included in the school plan and progress reviewed regularly.
- Management should ensure that the allocation of resources for the provision of supports to students with additional learning needs is in accordance with directions provided in Department circular 70/2014.

- As a means to further enhance the good teaching and learning practices evident in the school, the formation of a teaching and learning committee to lead developments in a whole-school adoption of key pedagogic practice, to include student-centred active methodologies, would be worthwhile.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The overall quality of school ownership and management is good, with evidence of some high-quality practice. The board of management, appointed in 2015, is appropriately constituted and functions effectively. Board members have a very good range of expertise and evidence indicates that they are very dedicated to the on-going development of the school.

The board meets regularly and works diligently to meet the needs of the school. In its term of office, the board has devoted its attention to a range of developmental priorities that supports the school in providing its holistic education programme. Very good minutes of meetings are recorded; they indicate that important agenda items are discussed thoroughly. To assist the board in monitoring aspects of curriculum provision, matters concerning teaching and learning should now be included as regular items on the agenda of meetings.

Since its appointment, the board has been actively involved in policy review; to date five policies have been revised and ratified. All mandatory policies are in place; the board recognises that a number remain in need of updating. In attending to future policy development and review, the board should adopt a systematic development-review cycle to assist with its on-going work.

There are very good links between the board, its trustees and the senior management team. The principal's report keeps the board informed of initiatives taking place in the school. Overall findings from teacher and parent questionnaires, administered during the evaluation, indicate that there are good satisfaction levels with the general management of the school. Findings also indicate a need to enhance communication between the board and other partners within the school community. In so doing, the board should re-establish its past practice of circulating an agreed report from its meetings and consider its procedures for informing all parents of matters relating to the operation and performance of the school.

Deliberate efforts are made to create strong partnerships between the school, parents and students. The parents' association is well established and is very supportive of the school. Findings from questionnaires would indicate a need to explore additional mechanisms to familiarise the general parent body with the good work and operation of the association.

Valuable efforts are made by the school to foster student leadership through a prefect and peer-mentoring programme. A democratically elected student council, supported diligently by liaison teachers, gives students a voice. School documentation provides evidence that students' opinions on school matters are sought regularly; this is very good practice. Findings from the student questionnaire indicate good levels of satisfaction with the school in general. It would be worthwhile for the school to consider the effectiveness of its procedures for apprising the student body on how their views inform school planning matters.

During discussion, school management identified various priorities for school development such as the maintenance of facilities, further policy development, and ensuring that the curriculum provided continues to meet the needs of its student cohort. Some progress is evident in all of these priority areas. In order for the board to ascertain its own progress

more readily, an over-arching action plan should be drafted. It is recommended that the board, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, agree a specific list of whole-school priorities to be achieved in the short, medium and long term. Action plans that support the achievement of each priority should be documented in the school plan and progress reviewed regularly.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

During the evaluation, very effective practice was evident in respect of the leadership for learning; there is scope to enhance practice further in a small number of areas.

The senior management team (SMT) of principal and deputy principal is strongly committed to leading a school that is inclusive and which places the student at the centre of all agreed practice. They adopt a collegial approach to the running of the school and have defined roles and responsibilities which they undertake effectively. The principal builds leadership capacity effectively by empowering staff to lead projects.

A very good induction and mentoring programme, supported by a '*Teacher Handbook*' developed collaboratively by teachers, is in place for new staff. Staff members are very dedicated to their work and demonstrate commendable levels of volunteerism in leading initiatives that impact positively on the students' experiences in school.

There has been a good level of engagement with whole-school and subject-specific continuing professional development (CPD). Some teachers have also participated in *Forbairt* and *Toraíocht*. It is praiseworthy that pedagogic practice is discussed at some staff and subject department meetings; such good practice might be extended. Staff reflections from CPD might also be shared more systematically at a central forum so as to establish goals for the development and consolidation of classroom practice at whole-school level.

The middle-management team is an important structure in supporting senior management. The team includes six assistant principals, a programme co-ordinator and two special-duties teachers. Very good systems are in place to review the schedule of posts. Duties are assigned according to the needs of the school and staff demonstrate flexibility in taking on revised duties. At the time of the evaluation, the duties assigned to the post of programme co-ordinator were related to year-head duties; this is not in accordance with circular letter PPT 18/02. While acknowledging that the school has lost middle-management posts due to the recent public-service moratorium, it is recommended that the post of programme co-ordinator be reviewed in line with the circular letter.

A very broad range of curriculum programmes and subjects is provided. Additionally, a commendable array of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities of a sporting, artistic, cultural and social nature supports the holistic education programme provided for students.

First-year students sample every available junior-cycle subject. They choose their options in February and continue to study all optional subjects for the remainder of the year. Whilst this arrangement has served students well in the past in helping them to make their subject choices, this practice should now be re-examined in light of the timetable requirements for the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle, as outlined in circular 0024/2016.

The optional Transition Year (TY) programme incorporates a valuable range of learning experiences and is organised well. The TY team provides dedicated support to the programme which it reviews regularly. To enhance practice further, the team might consider how the subject-sampling layer in TY could be re-organised to further support students when making senior-cycle subject choices. Data from the most recent in-house TY review could help to inform this consideration.

The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme has many strengths. It is beneficial in meeting the needs of a current cohort of students. A review of school documentation indicates that students in LCA are provided with a good range of learning experiences. There is some scope to enhance the profile of the programme and to develop pedagogic planning. A focused formal review would be beneficial, undertaken in collaboration with staff, parents and students. This review should inform an action plan to further support learning in LCA and to assist in the on-going development of the programme.

The deployment of some of the hours designated specifically to support students with additional educational needs should be reviewed. At the time of the evaluation, a number of hours which had been allocated by the Department to support students with additional educational needs were not being used for their intended purpose. Management should ensure that the allocation of resources for the provision of supports to students with additional learning needs is in accordance with directions provided in Department circular 70/2014.

The admissions policy is clear and reflects the inclusive ethos of the school. Students from a large number of feeder schools enrol. The criteria in the policy document for the allocation of places in the event of oversubscription would benefit from further refinement. The information provided in relation to students with special educational needs should also be amended to reflect more fully the school's inclusive practice.

Good systems are in place for tracking students' attendance; these include a new electronic tracking system along with letters sent home from year heads to inform parents regarding student absences. The school reported that it analyses trends in attendance. This information, along with the outcomes of the current in-house action project on attendance, will prove beneficial in assisting further action planning to maximise student attendance.

The school has a very good induction programme to support students and their parents during the transitional phase from primary to post-primary school. The booklet '*New Beginnings*' provides a valuable support to students during this interim phase.

The school is committed to supporting students with special educational needs (SEN). Students are provided with additional support through individual or small-group withdrawal and benefit from the assistance of special need assistants (SNAs). Some team teaching is provided. Commendably, a number of teachers have specialist qualifications in this area. Learning plans have been introduced recently as a mechanism to support and monitor students' progress; this good beginning now needs to be embedded. Currently, the SEN team comprises a large number of teachers. To further enhance the support for students, the school should consider the creation of a smaller core team of teachers, each of whom would have greater contact with the delivery of SEN support, and the development of more robust systems that link programmes of work with mainstream teachers. The autism unit has a very good range of facilities and teaching and learning are undertaken in a very caring and inclusive environment. The school reports that students from the autism unit integrate with their peers for some subjects.

The code of conduct sets out clear expectations for the students and is underpinned by the principles of restorative practice. Students are supported in managing their own behaviour through a range of positive behavioural interventions. During the evaluation, classroom management and student behaviour were found to be of a very high standard.

Student care is a high priority and the school is commended for its very effective work in this area. There is a tiered approach to providing student support at whole-school level. Year heads play a key role in overseeing the academic and pastoral progress of their year

groups. Class tutors act as a vital support for students and complement the work of the year heads. The guidance team and school chaplain play key roles in providing advice and support. The work of teams, such as the pastoral-care team and the student-management group, provides for a co-ordinated approach to supporting specific students' needs.

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*. The updating of the policy for Relationships and Sexuality Education, in accordance with Circular 37/2010, should be finalised as a matter of priority.

1.3 Management of facilities

The management of facilities is very good overall. The school building and grounds are maintained to a very high standard. Specialist rooms are well resourced and general teaching resources are kept up to date. There is a clear sense of student ownership of, and respect for, the building with many displays of student work and celebrations of their achievements exhibited on school corridors.

The health and safety policy indicates needs to be updated so that a risk assessment is customised to the school. Subject departments could use the information in *Health and Safety in Post-Primary Schools* to inform the review.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning was good to very good in almost all of the lessons observed, with some examples of exemplary practice noted. In a few instances, there was scope to review the alignment of the methodologies chosen with the overall purpose of the lesson.

Preparedness for the lessons observed was good overall. All lessons had a clear purpose and began with the sharing of learning intentions. Best practice was evident where the learning intentions were differentiated sufficiently, aligned to the teaching strategies chosen and expressed clearly in terms of what the student should know or be able to do. In a small number of instances, there was need for teachers to take the time, during and at the end of the lesson, to revisit the learning intentions so as to better assess students' learning in the lesson.

Very good teacher-student rapport was evident in all lessons. In some rooms, students' work was exhibited prominently and purposefully; this helps to give ownership to students of the learning space and to set expectations.

A range of teaching methodologies was observed in the lessons visited. High-quality learning was noted when deliberate efforts were made to link the lesson content to students' experiences or prior learning, and where the teaching strategies chosen facilitated students to engage actively with or reflect on the learning. Some very good use was made of resources such as show-me-boards and targeted worksheets to support students' learning. In some instances, electronic presentations were used in a manner that facilitated active learning, for example through the inclusion of interactive quizzes. This was very good practice and such use might be shared and adopted throughout the school, as appropriate.

Highly effective group work was noted in a few lessons; students were assigned a problem that necessitated their analysis and application of lesson material. The activities were well

structured and the plenary sessions facilitated and reinforced the learning. At times, an over-reliance on teacher-led activity was observed where student-led activity would have been more appropriate to the work underway. During the evaluation, the SMT discussed the benefits of establishing a teaching and learning committee to further support the sharing of effective methodologies and good classroom practice; this would be a worthwhile initiative. Such a committee could establish more systematic means for teachers to share best pedagogic practice at whole-school level, and to facilitate the extension and embedding of student-centred methodologies in lessons.

Teachers presented a wide range of lessons during the evaluation including revision lessons in preparation for upcoming examinations. Some exemplary lessons were noted where students were facilitated to engage actively in reflecting on their prior learning. These lessons incorporated activities that challenged students to reflect on what they knew as a starting point, and subsequent discussions with their peers deepened their understanding of the lesson material. In one instance, students were facilitated very ably to develop mind-maps to summarise efficiently. The use of such strategies is commended as a means of facilitating learners' autonomy and active reflection on learning. Such practice might be implemented systematically across the school.

A broad range of questioning strategies was used in all lessons. In the main, teachers' questioning was skilful and varied. Where best practice was seen, the questions posed promoted higher-order thinking skills and students were allowed appropriate time to develop their answers. In a very small number of lessons, an over-dependency on the use of global questioning strategies was observed; this should be reviewed.

In almost all lessons observed, students were provided with effective oral feedback on the quality of their work. In examining the copybooks of students, it was found that very valuable written formative feedback was provided in some instances; teachers who undertake such work are highly commended. There is scope now to extend this practice and to develop additional opportunities for peer and self-assessment.

Some good work was noted in tracking students' attainment. An effective mentoring programme for Leaving Certificate students is facilitated by current and retired members of teaching staff. Year heads and individual teachers also play key roles in tracking students' progress. There is scope to further advance the whole-school systems that support students to reflect on and track their own learning; for example, wider use of the tracking form in the student journal should be encouraged.

Subject departments are well established and programme plans have been developed for all areas. A review of planning folders indicated that there is variation in the quality of such planning. Planning was found to be most successful in instances where the planned learning intentions demonstrated incremental progression and linked specific teaching, learning and assessment strategies clearly. The subject planning folders reviewed included a synopsis of student attainment outcomes; there is scope for a deeper analysis of this data. All subject department teams should track and analyse attainment trends to devise specific targets and actions to support learning.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations from previous reports. Improvements have been noted in areas such as timetabling and the deployment of teachers.

Further work is needed in the review of the arrangement to enable subject sampling in first year, as was outlined in the recent Guidance inspection.

3.2 Learning and teaching

The implementation of the previous recommendations relating to teaching and learning was found to be good in many areas, most notably in respect of the sharing of learning intentions. Additional work is needed to implement fully those recommendations made previously in relation to the provision and use of constructive written feedback.

To enhance the impact of subject inspection, school management could consider devising procedures that facilitate whole-staff discussions on the actions arising from recommendations made in reports.

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

Overall, the school community has engaged readily in the school self-evaluation (SSE) process; it demonstrates a laudable capacity for school improvement and SSE. To date, a number of external and internal surveys have been undertaken and analysed successfully. The ways in which feedback from students, parents and teachers have informed both the enhancement of the first-year transition programme and the action projects undertaken by the Health Promoting Schools committee are examples of such good work. Such good practice in using survey findings to inform action planning could be employed usefully in progressing other areas for development into the future.

To date, the school has engaged with the process of SSE to promote improvement in aspects of literacy and numeracy at whole-school level. Draft school improvement plans have been documented; they should be ratified at board level. The board of management should communicate progress in SSE, in an accessible way, to the school community. It would also be beneficial, when addressing its third SSE priority, for the school to refine its use of targets so that progress is more easily measured and to include more specific guidance in respect of in-class strategies.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Coláiste Cholmcille would like to express its satisfaction with the overwhelmingly positive thrust of the WSE/MLL Report.

The Board questions the advisability of having WSE Inspections in the month of May.

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

The Board will use the Report as a positive platform for improvement and development.