

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

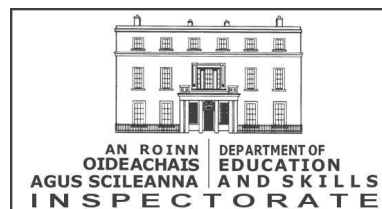
**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Tullow Community School  
Tullow, County Carlow  
Roll number: 91356F**

**Date of inspection: 16 May 2012**



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

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in May 2012 in Tullow Community School. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, 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***

Tullow Community School is a co-educational school serving 569 second-level students from the town of Tullow and its hinterland. As a community school it also offers further education through the provision of a small number of Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses with a current enrolment of 32 students.

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

### ***1.1 Key Findings***

- The board of management fulfils its administrative functions effectively and has recently increased its focus on leading teaching and learning.
- The leadership of the senior management team indicates a significant commitment to devolved leadership, the inclusion of all members of staff in the school development process and a subsequent willingness on the part of the school community to embrace change.
- The strategic plan with its overall focus on teaching and learning is well placed to bring about desired school improvement and to underpin an effective self-evaluation process.
- The school offers a comprehensive curriculum and a number of good systems are in place to support students' personal development.
- The quality of learning and teaching in the lessons observed ranged from fair to very good.
- The progress achieved in recent times reflects the school's capacity to bring about school improvement.

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

- In the context of senior management's commitment to devolved leadership, post-holders' duties should be examined to afford assistant principals (AP) more opportunities for active leadership within a middle management structure.
- Teachers should develop collaborative schemes of work to ensure that subject plans serve as working documents supporting best practice in the classroom.
- Consideration should be given to clustering the identified priorities relating to teaching methodologies, student behaviour and attainment and to progressing them in tandem.

- The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) should be implemented for students in an integrated way from first year.
- Teaching methodologies and assessment practices should be directed at ensuring active learning and improved attainment.

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

### ***School ownership and management – the Board of Management***

The board of management is properly constituted and meets regularly. The board is active in fulfilling its responsibility for the management of school finances and for matters of an administrative or legal nature. Many of the policies required by legislation or by circular have been drawn up, ratified and posted on the school's website. Some additional policies still need to be drafted, while others should be reviewed. To support a systematic approach to policy development and review, a timeline should be drawn up to inform the present and future boards of the ongoing status of policies in the school and proposed dates for review.

Members of the board identified recruiting teachers and supporting ongoing professional development as a first stage in their role in assuring quality education provision and in leading learning. Board members have recently engaged in discussion related to teaching and learning at board level. This new focus is due, in part, to the outcome of a very successful 'vision day' organised by senior management and attended by members of the board, staff, and representatives from the parent and student bodies.

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 school's priorities for development**

The main priority identified by the board together with senior management is that Tullow Community School would be the school of choice for all students living in the catchment area. To this end, a strategic plan has been drawn up, outlining a number of targets to be achieved incrementally over a five-year period. Commendably, some of these targets such as the school's vision day and the establishment of a strategy team have already been achieved. Plans are also in place to re-introduce the Transition Year (TY) programme and the tutor system in the forthcoming school year. Other proposed initiatives relate to positive student behaviour, advancing the quality of teaching and learning, and reviewing provision for students with special educational needs (SEN). The introduction of self-evaluation and a solution-focused approach to ongoing school improvement is also planned. These priorities are appropriate, in line with current educational policy direction and praiseworthy.

There is a vibrant parents' association, whose current intent is to help the wider parent body to actively engage with all aspects of educational provision for their students. Initiatives are ongoing to encourage greater attendance at parent-teacher meetings, to support students and parents in making subject choices and to improve students' study skills. Their contribution to fulfilling the school's vision is valued.

## ***2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

### **Leadership of staff**

The leadership and management style of the principal and deputy principal and the shared sense of purpose emanating from the school's vision day have impacted positively on all members of the school community. Contributions from all groups achieved a high level of consensus in relation to the desired vision and future for the school. The principal defines

his leadership role as directing the vision for the school and has identified high-quality teaching and learning as central to its fulfilment. The principal is actively supported by the deputy principal who has undertaken new responsibilities relating to school development in addition to her many administrative tasks. A strategy team, comprising members of management and staff, has also been formed to identify areas for improvement, develop proposals and bring them back to the general body of staff for discussion and consensus. This marks a significant commitment to devolved leadership and the inclusion of all members of staff in the school development process.

Good communication is promoted through the willingness of senior management to address issues as they arise and to actively engage with all members of the school community. A need to promote greater inclusion and partnership with those in the community for whom education is not a priority remains a challenge to be addressed. There are regular meetings with staff, newsletters and informative text messages are issued to parents and better use is made of the school's website. This has resulted in a greater openness to change and co-operation from all relevant partners. Teachers reported improvements in staff morale and this was reflected in their willingness to embrace change and development.

The school has traditionally assigned assistant principals (APs) a range of administrative tasks, all of which contribute to school management and organisation. In the context of an annual review of posts, duties should be examined to afford APs more opportunities for active leadership at middle management level. The evolving needs of the school should offer opportunities in this regard. In most instances, the duties of year head are carried out by special duties (SD) teachers. A weekly time allowance of four hours is allocated to them, at the discretion of senior management, to carry out their work. Some inconsistencies were noted regarding the allocation of the same duties to both APs and SD teachers. In the interests of equity, these should be addressed. In light of current available resources, the time allowance currently afforded to SD teachers should be re-examined.

To progress the praiseworthy initiatives outlined in the strategic plan in a timely and cohesive manner, management and staff should consider clustering priorities which impact directly on each other. Teaching methodologies, student behaviour, and attainment form such a cluster and could be worked on together. It is therefore suggested that the analysis of examination outcomes, currently planned for 2013-2014, be brought forward to serve as a point of departure for a review of current teaching and learning practices and general student attainment. Subsequent initiatives contained in the plan could then be prioritised.

Subject planning documentation examined at the time of the evaluation focused primarily on the organisational context of the subject. In order that subject plans can serve as working documents informing practice, teachers should develop schemes of work documenting the learning outcomes in terms of skills and competencies, proposed methodologies, resources and assessment protocols. To ensure overall preparedness for teaching and learning, teachers should adopt a collaborative approach to subject planning, whereby subject meetings could include discussion on the long-term developmental needs of the subject as well as issues of a practical nature. Consideration should be given to the appointment of a school development planning co-ordinator to assist with both whole-school and subject planning and to progress self-evaluation.

### **Leadership of students**

The school offers a broad curriculum to meet the varied needs of its student cohort. The decision to re-introduce TY is welcomed, as it enables students to further develop their academic, social and personal skills within the context of a different learning environment. Senior cycle students with the appropriate subject combinations can choose the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) to augment the established Leaving Certificate. The JCSP programme is offered in third year to students at risk of early school leaving.

Organisationally, this is unsatisfactory. Students would benefit more if the programme were implemented from first year, with JCSP students integrated into all class groups and withdrawn at certain times for JCSP-related initiatives. This would afford these students more opportunities to experience success, to celebrate achievement and, in this way, to remain in school.

The school timetable has been reviewed and changes are planned for the forthcoming school year. This is timely as the current breadth of choice within subject option blocks at senior cycle is resource intensive. The current blocking of arts and humanities with practical subjects creates further challenges, given that some subjects are best timetabled in single periods while other subjects require a number of double periods. Senior management should explore ways whereby the timetabling needs of all subjects can be acknowledged. The proposed introduction of a new computerised timetabling scheduler should also improve the spread of subjects across the week.

Difficulties with the biometric system used to monitor attendance meant that no records were submitted to the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) for the year 2010-2011. However, records for the previous year indicate high rates of absenteeism. While alternative systems for monitoring attendance and investigating absences are now in place, further strategies may need to be introduced. An attendance and participation strategy should also be expedited in accordance with the requirements of the Education Welfare Act.

The school's current focus on introducing measures to ensure positive student behaviour is praiseworthy. These include re-introducing the class tutor system, revising the ladder of referral and implementing a rewards system. This would not be possible without the willingness of staff members to volunteer for the duties of class tutor for the next academic year. Constructive alternatives to suspension are also in place for serious misbehaviour. The code of behaviour should be updated to reflect these changes. The school's anti-bullying policy should also be updated to include reference to homophobic and cyber-bullying in addition to reflecting recent advances in dealing with issues of bullying behaviour.

The work of the school's care team is effective in providing a coordinated approach to identifying and managing students presenting with difficulties. This includes the provision of both in-school pastoral and counselling supports and, where necessary, referral to the relevant external agencies.

An analysis of student outcomes in certificate examinations, carried out as part of this evaluation, indicates improvements in many subjects in 2011. These trends, however, should be carefully monitored to ensure that improvements continue and, in turn, impact on the appropriate uptake and outcomes at Leaving Certificate. The analysis also indicates a need to raise attainment in many subjects, particularly in relation to the uptake of higher level.

There are three qualified learning support teachers. Two provide literacy and numeracy support, while the third works with the JCSP students. A large number of teachers are also deployed to provide designated students with additional tuition either in literacy or numeracy or in their own subject area. Good practice was noted in the creation of a register detailing the resources allocated to students entitled to additional support. The system developed to track and evaluate the progress of these students is praiseworthy, but difficult to fully implement given the number of teachers involved. In order to better monitor student outcomes, school management should establish a smaller core team for the delivery of learning support and resource teaching. Time should be designated for the purpose of assessing, planning and tracking students' needs and progress. Team teaching with a

qualified learning support teacher should also be considered as a means of maximising resources.

Valuable leadership opportunities are provided for students through the Meitheal peer mentoring programme, the Green School's initiative and the student council. However, while the student council has representation from each year group, the findings of the student questionnaires indicated that a significant number of students felt that they did not have a say in relation to school improvement. To overcome this, students should be regularly informed that the student council serves as the forum for their contributions to school improvement.

### ***2.3 Management of facilities***

The school is well maintained. The building is divided into year group areas and subject specialist rooms are situated in a separate area. This limits opportunities for teacher-based classrooms. However, good practice was noted where the classrooms were shared by teachers of the same subject, thereby facilitating the creation of a subject-specific environment in most classrooms visited. Furthermore, the very laudable initiative of displaying students' artwork on the corridors has created a more attractive school environment in addition to publicly affirming their artistic talents. All classrooms are equipped with computers and data projectors. While the physical infrastructure is very good, some temporary technical issues have impeded the full integration of information and communication technology (ICT) across the school's curriculum. Once resolved, ICT should be a useful component in the design and delivery of interactive and participative lessons. Further training however, is needed to support teachers in exploiting the full potential of ICT.

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

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

Twenty-one lessons were observed, covering core, optional, practical and non-examination subjects. As it was the final term in the school year, most lessons concentrated on revision and examination practice.

The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from fair to very good. Teaching methodologies varied from traditional approaches to more facilitative teaching strategies. The teacher-led approaches, favoured in a significant majority of the lessons observed, led in a number of instances to an undesirable level of passivity among students. Whether initiating, developing or consolidating learning, teachers should choose approaches that actively involve students in the lesson.

Most lessons had a clear focus and a desired learning outcome or outcomes. Specific attainable learning outcomes were identified, shared and assessed in only one lesson observed. This very good practice should be extended to all lessons.

Lessons were well prepared and structured. In instances where very good practice was observed, short and focused visual presentations were used to explain key concepts and well-planned teacher demonstrations helped to reinforce key skills. Where observed, the use of pair or group work enabled students to both consolidate their knowledge and extend their competencies. ICT was incorporated into many of the lessons observed. It was beneficial in a number of instances, improving the delivery and explanation of concepts as diverse as woodturning, tourism, respiration, history and cyber-bullying. In other lessons however, more creative use of ICT is recommended. Worksheets supported and reinforced learning further.

Questioning was used in all lessons. It was most productive where teachers used a combination of global and directed questioning, differentiated according to students' abilities, and used techniques such as 'hot seat' to enhance student engagement. Questioning was also the primary mode of assessment utilised in lessons. Assessment practices included some written activities and practical tasks. Oral feedback was administered regularly and this was both developmental and affirmative. Teachers' commitment to their students and their learning was further evident in their willingness to provide additional tuition to students during the Easter holidays

A positive learning environment was facilitated in lessons where there was good communication between teachers and students and where active methodologies were used. These good practices should be shared and developed throughout the school. Where poor behaviour occurred, it was generally low-level and often due to student disengagement linked to the passive learning environment identified. To address this issue, classroom management protocols, including greater use of active methodologies, should be discussed and measures adopted that promote positive behaviour and ensure consistency in dealing with disruption.

Students demonstrated very good recall when questioned and were willing to contribute when invited. Active learning was observed in a few instances, where student assignments included the completion of tasks or the application of skills. In general, these lessons were most successful. To assist teachers in deploying more active learning strategies, school management should consider professional development initiatives such as assessment for learning. In-school expertise should also be identified and shared.

There was some integration of literacy and numeracy interventions into mainstream subjects observed, which is praiseworthy. While very good use of keywords was evident in a few lessons, the concept was not fully developed in others. As part of the school's ongoing self-evaluation process, consideration should be given to identifying specific targets and strategies aimed at achieving these goals.

Students' completion of homework was monitored. However, a consistent approach to the management and assessment of students' work was lacking and is recommended. Students should have their copybooks in class at all times. Appropriate attention to the correction of errors and the provision of formative written feedback should be implemented throughout the school. A whole-school assessment policy should be developed over time.

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

Recommendations arising from the four most recent subject inspections related to subject provision and teacher professional development, collaborative planning, the use of resources and active methodologies and the development or implementation of assessment protocols to improve attainment.

#### ***4.1 Management***

School management has implemented some of these recommendations. JCSP students can now study History to Junior Certificate. Students have also been surveyed concerning the low uptake of Business Studies in junior cycle and work to improve uptake is ongoing. Teachers are now consulted prior to being assigned to deliver Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) before being assigned to deliver the subject.

#### ***4.2 Learning and Teaching***

One subject department has engaged with the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and is making good progress in collaborative subject planning and improving methodologies in response to recent syllabus changes. Other subject departments are working to ensure the sharing of good practice, common programmes of work and greater use of ICT. There is still scope for development in the use of active methodologies and assessment protocols.

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

#### ***5.1***

The recent vision day marked a defining moment in that it gave all members of the school community the opportunity to articulate their vision and to embrace the changes needed to make Tullow Community School the school of choice for the community, present and future. It created a point of departure from which management and staff could evaluate current practices, affirm what was good and prioritise areas for further development. This process has been underpinned by the dynamism and commitment of the senior management team and their confidence in the staff's capacity to embrace change. The findings and recommendations from this evaluation in addition to the outcomes of the student and parent questionnaires should now serve to further inform and progress the strategic plan and to demonstrate the school's capacity for improvement.

*Published November 2012.*



# **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 Tullow Community School wishes to thank the Inspectors who carried out the MLL for the professional and courteous manner in which they conducted the inspection. The Board welcomes the report which affirms the dedication, hard work and commitment of all members of the school community. The inspection provided a thorough and comprehensive overview on Tullow Community School and the Board is pleased at the overall positive outcome.
- In particular, the Board acknowledges the following key findings in the Inspectors' report:
  - The strategic plan with its focus on teaching and learning will lead to further school improvement. The plan has achieved its first year objectives and is progressing as has been set out with its remaining objectives.
  - That the school offers a comprehensive curriculum and that the Board fulfils its administrative functions effectively.
- It should be noted that the Board strongly agrees with the Inspectors in highlighting the level of confidence felt by senior management of the staff's capacity and willingness to embrace change to make this an even better school for the community.

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

- Transition Year and a class tutor system have been successfully reintroduced, a review of the SEN work has taken place and the school has begun the process of self evaluation and advancing new approaches to teaching and learning.
- A detailed review which has incorporated the views and needs of students and school has been implemented.
- It is hoped to explore the introduction JSCP to all Junior Cert year groups in the near future.

