

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Coláiste Dún Iascaigh  
Cahir, County Tipperary  
Roll number: 76063D**

**Date of inspection: 14 May 2015**



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

# **Whole-School Evaluation**

## **Management, Leadership and Learning**

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in May 2015 in Coláiste Dún Iascaigh. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with representatives of 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***

Coláiste Dún Iascaigh was established in 1997 following the amalgamation of the three post-primary schools in Cahir. It is a co-educational, multi-denominational community college under the aegis of Tipperary Education and Training Board (TETB) serving the town of Cahir and its hinterland. It has a current enrolment of 646 students drawn from both rural and urban backgrounds. The school has a small Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) section as well as a class for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

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

### ***Key Findings***

- Coláiste Dún Iascaigh is an open, inclusive school with a high quality of care for students.
- The board of management supports the work of staff and senior management.
- The principal and deputy principal demonstrate a deep commitment to the school, and are effective and hard-working in their management of the school.
- Parents and students were very positive with regard to the school.
- Teachers are fully committed to the school and are professional in their approach.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was consistently good or very good with some examples of very high quality practice.
- Very effective care and support structures are evident.
- A broad range of curricular programmes and subject options is available to students.
- The student council makes a significant contribution to school life.

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

- The board of management should enhance communication with the wider school community by greater use of the school website.
- A review of the schedule of posts of responsibility should be undertaken in order to meet the needs of the school and to develop the role of internal school leaders.
- A regular meeting time should be scheduled for the special educational needs team.
- There should be compliance with the requirements of Circular M29/95 regarding time for instruction.
- The feasibility of offering a subject-sampling programme in first year should be examined.

- There should be a whole-school focus on the principles and practices of Assessment for Learning (AfL) and on the use and consolidation of co-operative learning strategies.

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

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

At the time of the evaluation, the school's incoming board of management was awaiting ratification. The previous board of management was appropriately constituted with experienced, long-standing members who brought a range of skills and expertise to their task. It is positive that the reappointment of some members to the new board will help to ensure continuity. The board was aware of its statutory obligations, and had ensured that all required child protection and anti-bullying procedures were in place.

The board was proactive in supporting school improvement. The priorities that it identified in consultation with senior management include the promotion of school self-evaluation (SSE); the ongoing improvement of the information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure; provision for an ASD class; the improvement of teaching and learning, and the development of internal school leadership.

The board has ratified a wide range of policies including policies adopted by Tipperary ETB. It is suggested that the compilation of a policy review schedule would be helpful in the management and administration of future reviews. The publication of all relevant policies on the school's website should be prioritised as a way of informing the wider school community about school issues. The website could also be used for the dissemination of the school improvement plan and the school self-evaluation report.

The board is commended for its support for teacher professional development and for facilitating staff involvement in initiatives such as the Instructional Leadership programme. In order to reflect the commitment to the continued development of teaching and learning, the inclusion of a specific *Teaching and Learning* heading on the agenda for board meetings is suggested. This would help to ensure that the board would be fully conversant with initiatives in the school and would allow for relevant members of staff to update the board, as required. Extending an invitation to the student council to address the board should also be considered as a way of promoting student leadership.

The school benefits from the support of a well-structured parents' association. The members play a consultative role in the development of policies as well as an active role in supporting school events. The findings of the parental questionnaire carried out during the evaluation found that while almost all parents were happy with the school, however, the number of parents who agreed with the statement that the school regularly sought their views on school matters was much lower. It is therefore suggested that the ways in which the school communicates with its stakeholders should be reviewed, and the possibility of ensuring a stronger presence on the school website for the parents' association should be explored.

The principal and deputy principal are effective and hard-working in their management of the school. They demonstrate a clear commitment to the school and to the welfare of its students. The principal has been instrumental in leading the school since its inception in 1997 and her dedication to ensuring the success of the "Coláiste" is very evident. She has presided over significant educational change and has initiated many positive developments in that time. She takes an active role in the monitoring of all aspects of school life and in building partnerships with the local community. The deputy principal plays a supportive role in the overall management of the school and fulfils a range of specific duties, all of

which contribute to his role in the effective management of students and in the smooth running of the school on a day-to-day basis. The principal and deputy principal have a visible presence around the school and bring energy and enthusiasm to their work. The quality of their management of the school is borne out by the responses of parents to the questionnaires, where a high percentage of the parents stated that the school is well run.

The appointment of a new principal will lead to the formation of a new senior management team for the next school year. The new team should reflect on and plan for the creation of a shared, strategic vision for the school that will be owned by all stakeholders and that will allow for the continued development of the school.

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

The school's middle management structure devolves responsibility and leadership roles to staff through the posts of responsibility system, and roles are organised primarily around a year-head structure. The assistant principals act as year heads and they are supported in their duties by post holders who monitor uniform and attendance within a particular year group. However, there has been no review of the schedule of posts in recent years and the schedule no longer supports the optimal functioning of the school. Given the impact of recent retirements as well as the adoption of new technology, a review of the current schedule of posts should be prioritised in order to meet the changing needs of the school. It should allow for the development of a middle management team with an enhanced role as a consultative group to support senior management in progressing priority areas such as the development of teaching and learning. Teachers have already demonstrated leadership through engagement with professional development and through leading new initiatives. New responsibilities would promote distributed leadership and would allow interested staff to gain middle-management experience through taking on new roles.

The care of students and the support structures in place are of very high quality and are well organised to meet the needs of students. This finding is endorsed by students and parents in their responses to the questionnaires with students indicating that there was a good atmosphere while parents stated that their child felt safe and well looked after. A significant number of staff are involved in all aspects of the care of students and their work is commended and acknowledged.

The support systems in place include an experienced and dedicated pastoral care team, a special educational needs team, guidance counsellors and chaplain as well as an English as an Additional Language (EAL) support team to look after the language needs of international students. Support is well structured and there is a clear emphasis on the promotion of well-being through events such as Friendship Week. It was good to note the positive responses of students with regard to anti-bullying measures. Good quality Guidance is provided to students by the guidance counsellors. While there is an appropriate focus on formal educational guidance in senior cycle, there are also effective structures in place to support the transition from primary school for first year students.

Very good quality leadership in supporting students and their learning is demonstrated by the work of the special educational needs department. Members of the core team have expertise in the area and there is good communication between the team and the whole staff. Their work reflects the open and inclusive ethos of the school with all students encouraged to achieve their potential. Support for students is provided mainly through the withdrawal model and some team-teaching, while the special needs assistants (SNAs) provide good quality support in the classroom setting. The school is commended for its efforts in promoting team teaching for students with additional educational needs. However, in order to maximise the benefits of this approach, there should be a sharing of expertise amongst staff on best practice in the use of team-teaching. The development of an

ASD class is a recent addition to the range of supports for students, and new facilities, including a sensory room, are nearing completion. In light of the diverse range of supports provided by the special educational needs department, a regular meeting time should be scheduled for the core team at which the needs of students would be discussed and action plans prepared. Such a meeting would also enhance links with the external agencies involved in supporting students. While the positive contribution of all involved in learning support is acknowledged, the number of staff working with individual students on a one-to-one basis is high. It is recommended that a smaller teaching team be put in place as a way of building expertise and of providing the most effective way of delivering the service.

The school offers a broad curriculum including a well-organised Transition Year (TY) programme and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). One of the strengths of the optional TY programme is that students are able to avail of a subject-sampling programme before selecting their subjects for Leaving Certificate. In addition, a variety of modules and opportunities for student leadership within the school and local community are provided such as the Cara Skills module.

As the school's timetable currently falls short of the required twenty-eight hours of weekly instruction as required by Circular 29/95, it is recommended that this shortfall be rectified and that there be compliance with the terms of the circular.

Students choose their option subjects for junior cycle prior to beginning first year. While the school allows students to change subjects at a later stage, management should examine the feasibility of introducing a subject-sampling programme in first year in order to ensure that students are well informed. It should also review the information given to parents and students in order to support them in making informed choices.

The school employs a system of mixed-ability class groupings in first year which changes to a streamed or banded system in subsequent years depending on the subject. It is positive that a move away from the practice of streaming for all year groups has begun, and this change should continue to be implemented.

In senior cycle, a wide range of subject options is offered. However, the provision of this extensive choice has implications for the deployment of teachers and the optimal use of resources. The school should examine the sustainability and feasibility of maintaining this broad curriculum in senior cycle within the context of the resources available.

Students are afforded the opportunity to engage in a wide range of sporting and cultural activities which enhance their learning experience. They have experienced success at local and national levels in many areas. The commitment and contribution of staff in the provision of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities is recognised and commended.

Good opportunities for leadership are provided by the student council which carries out its work with the assistance of a staff member. The representatives are consulted on policies, where appropriate, such as in the review of the code of behaviour. The council serves as an important communication link within the school through its newsletter, suggestion box and noticeboard, and through its many activities, notably the promotion of positive mental health through participation in the Amber Flag award. However, only a small percentage of the students surveyed agreed that they "had a say in how things are done in the school". The school should therefore look to promote additional ways of engaging with students and of ensuring that their voice is heard. Facilitating more formal links between the student council, the parents' association and the board of management should also be considered as a way of promoting student leadership.

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*.

### **1.2 Management of facilities**

The building is bright, airy and well-maintained. The facilities are very good and include well-resourced classrooms and an extensive range of specialist rooms. Good use is made of the space available to create a visually stimulating environment through artwork and displays that celebrate the achievements of the school. Ongoing work to develop existing space within the school includes the recently renovated courtyard garden and the development of a new long jump area. The facilities for sport are very good and are a shared resource with the wider community of Cahir. The school is aware of its environmental responsibilities and has achieved the Green Flag award.

The valued and professional contribution of administrative, caretaking and ancillary staff is acknowledged.

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

During the evaluation, inspectors visited lessons across the range of subjects provided in the school. The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was consistently good or very good with some examples of very high quality practice. The classroom atmosphere was very positive, creating a supportive learning environment for students and a good teacher-student rapport was evident. A high percentage of the students surveyed reported that they are getting on well with their school work and that teachers encourage them to do the best that they can. Results from parent questionnaires show that parents consider that teaching is good in the school and that their child is doing well. Levels of achievement in certificate examinations are also strong.

Individual lessons were well planned and structured and had established routines. A range of resources had been prepared including worksheets, graphic organisers and visual stimuli which were used to support the learning experience and as revision aids for examinations. ICT was also used effectively in lessons.

The very high quality practice observed was characterised by the inclusion of a clear learning intention that was revisited during or at the end of the lesson in order to encourage students to assess their own learning and to consolidate any new knowledge. High levels of student engagement and participation were also evident. While there was some use of learning intentions in other lessons, developing this practice to include time for students to evaluate their own progress would increase its effectiveness.

A variety of questioning strategies was used successfully in some lessons to scaffold learning and it was good to note the way differentiated questions helped students in their answering. Good attention was paid to literacy through the use of key words with students encouraged to develop their oral literacy skills or to use subject-specific terminology in their written work. However, teachers should plan to include a brief revision of key terms as part of supporting students' understanding of new vocabulary.

Very high quality practice was evident where there was a focus on the development of students' skills so as to enable them to work independently or with each other. This was demonstrated by examples of very effective group work with students competent in the skills necessary for working collaboratively, and able to interact with and to present their

ideas orally to each other or through discussion with the teachers. In some instances, activities were interspersed with whole-class teaching and the time allocated allowed for both purposeful engagement with the activity and for discussion of the learning involved. The use of higher-order questions and constructive feedback reflected the high expectations held by the teachers and the ways in which they challenged the students to develop their ideas.

The assignment of homework formed part of the lesson structure in many lessons. While students were asked to note homework in their journals, they did not always comply. There should be greater monitoring of journals by teachers to ensure that this practice takes place. Such monitoring would support the work being done on homework strategies as part of the school's SSE plan.

Where recommendations were made, they indicated a need for a greater focus on providing students with an understanding of the skills required for effective pair or group work; the use of learning outcomes for the consolidation of learning; and the use of questioning strategies. It is therefore recommended that there be a whole-school focus on the principles and practices of Assessment for Learning (AfL) and on the use and consolidation of co-operative learning strategies. The sharing of expertise amongst staff is also suggested as a way of developing best practice in this regard.

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

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

In general, good progress is evident in the implementation of recommendations from previous subject inspection reports. Banding and alphabetical order in the creation of class groupings is being implemented in second year while the issue of the uptake of higher level papers is to be included as a formal SSE item in the school plan. Decisions regarding the choice of level are now deferred to third year.

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

Evidence of good or very good progress was provided in the case of the majority of the recommendations referring to subject-specific issues. The use of ICT is being developed; a coordinated approach to the filing of SPHE materials has been adopted and recommendations relating to subject planning have also been adopted.

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

The school self-evaluation process plays an important role in contributing to the school's development planning. Homework was identified as the first theme for SSE and the school is mid-way through this three-year initiative. Data was gathered as a key part of the process and an initial school report and a school improvement plan (SIP) was produced and presented to staff. A summary of this report and plan should now be shared with all stakeholders. A whole-school approach will continue to be important and should lead to targeted and realistic action plans.

The structures in place, the commitment of management and staff as well as the support offered by Tipperary ETB demonstrate that there is a very good capacity for continued school improvement.

*Published November 2015*

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

**Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The board appreciates the positive affirmation of teaching and learning in the Coláiste. We note the excellent comments on the quality of school management in our school. The board would like to thank all school partners for their contribution to the WSE-MLL process.

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

The board has reviewed and discussed the recommendations of the WSE-MLL report. Certain recommendations of the report have already been addressed and a plan is being put in place to address others. The board wishes to point out that these will be done within the restraints of the present resources available to the school.