

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Tralee Community College
County Kerry
Roll number: 70550H**

Date of inspection: 17 October 2012



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

Whole-School Evaluation

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in October 2012 in Tralee Community College. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

Introduction

Tralee Community College is a co-educational multi-denominational post-primary school, which operates under the auspices of Kerry Education Service (KES). Currently, there are 130 students pursuing second-level studies and 448 engaged in post-leaving certificate (PLC) courses. The school is one of five post-primary schools in the town. Second-level numbers have increased in recent years as part of the school's response to the Area Development Plan for North Kerry (2007-2011).

The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. It offers a range of second-level programmes including the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). A significant number of the second-level cohort is made up of students for whom English is not their home language.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- Tralee Community College is actively engaged in delivering on its commitment to develop its second-level provision under the leadership of senior management and with the support of KES, the board of management and the ongoing co-operation and commitment of school staff.
- The recently appointed principal and the deputy principal have established an effective working relationship and have been proactive in leading developments in the school.
- A number of necessary and significant developments have been achieved since the appointment of the new principal.
- School staff is very professionally committed to supporting the range of learning, personal and social needs of the diverse student cohort.
- The evaluation provided clear evidence of parent and student satisfaction with the school.
- Teaching and learning in lessons observed were universally good with many examples of very high quality practice.
- The evaluation provided clear evidence of support for and success in terms of student achievement.

- Many of the recommendations made in previous evaluations have been implemented.
- The school has engaged in some self-evaluation particularly in relation to DEIS planning.
- The school has a proven capacity to continue to proactively expand and develop its second-level provision.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should take steps to ensure compliance in the key areas identified in the evaluation.
- The board should see that an audit of existing policies is undertaken and that a plan is put in place to support the development and on-going review of policies.
- Senior management should ensure that a process of collaborative decision-making underpins all key policy decisions in the school.
- Initiatives in teaching and learning should be carefully planned and limited in number in order to bring greater focus and to allow for clear monitoring of impact.
- The decision to discontinue the LCVP should be reviewed.
- Priority should be given to progressing plans to provide separate toilet facilities for the two sections of the school.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is correctly constituted. It meets regularly and maintains records. Members of the board are committed to the school and have shown great flexibility in their willingness to attend additional meetings. The current board has been involved in the development of a new vision statement for the school. It has ensured the development and approval of the school's DEIS plan and the ratification of a number of key policies.

Systems are in place to support communication with relevant members of the school community. The board reviews examinations results and inspection reports. Positively, it now also receives an annual report. The adoption of the use of a new template for the principal's report to the board is also a good development.

The board should now ensure compliance with the requirement to develop a whole-school guidance plan, an attendance strategy and a substance use policy. It should see that an audit of school policies is undertaken and that a plan is put in place to support the ongoing development, ratification and review of policies. The board should have oversight of the monitoring of the implementation of the school's DEIS plan. Consideration should be given to the idea of seeking periodic reports from key groups in the school, such as the JCSP team, and to the idea of inviting an occasional brief presentation from such teams or from groups such as the student council.

The current senior-management team has been in place since January 2011. The principal and deputy principal have established an effective working relationship and have an agreed understanding of their individual and team roles. Communication is ongoing and involves a weekly meeting. It is very positive that the senior-management team is part of key in-school groups such as the DEIS core team.

The senior-management team has been proactive in leading developments in the school. Much has been achieved in a short space of time with its leadership and the support of KES, the board of management and the ongoing cooperation, commitment and flexibility of school staff. The school's vision statement and admissions policy have been revised and its DEIS plan has been developed. The code of behaviour and posts of responsibility have been reviewed. Priorities for whole-school development have been agreed. Curricular provision has been reviewed and a number of changes implemented. Improvements have been made to school infra-structure and a number of new systems and structures have been introduced.

The level of progress made is acknowledged by the school community generally. Such progress has required much decision-making. It is recommended that a process of collaborative decision-making underpin all key policy decisions. Decisions relating to teaching and learning should be carefully considered and should always be taken with staff input and in the best interests of the student cohort. Initiatives in teaching and learning should be limited in number in order to bring greater focus and to allow for clear monitoring of impact.

Partnership is actively encouraged in the school. Much is done to promote the involvement of parents in their child's education. The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) teacher has done much to support parent involvement. The JCSP programme also promotes parents' involvement in their child's education. The school organises open and induction evenings to which parents are invited. The practice of inviting the student to attend parent-teacher meetings with their parent/guardian has also been instituted.

The school has an active parents' council. The council is affiliated nationally and is part of the KES support structure. The current council successfully suggested that students might accompany parents to parent-teacher meetings and that one of the school canteens be reopened. The council is currently giving active consideration to promoting music and drama in the school. It is suggested that it consider using the school's website to communicate with the general parent body.

The students' council is representative and enjoys the active involvement of a liaison teacher. It is part of the KES students' council forum and members have participated in training. Positively, links with the parents' council are promoted and the chair of the students' council had an opportunity to meet with the board of management. The council is proactive and has been instrumental in the promotion of curricular change and in improvements to facilities.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The senior management team is committed to ongoing school improvement. The extent to which staff volunteerism has contributed to progress made and to the school's capacity to respond to students' needs is notable.

Notwithstanding constraints which limit the school's capacity to appoint staff to posts of responsibility, leadership is being distributed and strategic and instructional leadership is being facilitated through the creation of teams such as the DEIS core team, the JCSP team, the special educational needs team, the student-care team and the team responsible for students of English as an Additional Language (EAL). Members of staff have shown a great willingness to accept additional responsibilities and have been generous and flexible in the implementation of change. They have also demonstrated a capacity for self-motivation and a willingness to take the initiative. Inspectors acknowledge the role of

senior management in achieving school improvement through the recognition and building of staff capacity.

Teachers are deployed across both sections of the school. Whilst this presents challenges for timetabling, it means that teachers have also acquired additional skills in areas such as programme design and, as such, will be well placed to deal with the implementation of junior cycle reform.

It is good to note the flexible models of support timetabled for students with special educational needs and the increase in time allocated to Irish at junior cycle. The evaluation noted that, in some subjects, it has been necessary to timetable senior classes together. Timetabling of PLC classes in computer rooms can constrain access for second-level students. Both of these issues should be kept under review.

KES, the board, and senior management are supportive of teachers' continuing professional development (CPD). Senior managers themselves participate in CPD provided by KES. Subject departments are facilitated to attend relevant Department of Education and Skills CPD and they also participate in the CPD provided through the communities of practice established by KES. Members of staff pursuing individual qualifications are also facilitated.

Whole-staff leadership of students is of a very high quality. The needs of the small but diverse group of students are very well catered for. Questionnaire responses showed high levels of student satisfaction with the school and clear recognition of the level of teacher interest and care. Evaluation evidence showed that the staff is highly supportive of the students.

The school provides quite a broad curriculum. To its credit, a recent collaborative review led to the introduction of History at junior cycle and of Biology at senior cycle. A taster programme was also introduced in first year. The JCSP and the work of the dedicated JCSP team support student achievement. A decision was taken at board level to discontinue the LVCP programme. It is advised that this decision be reviewed in the light of students' needs. It is also recommended that the impact of the taster programmes be monitored. Should student numbers continue to grow, consideration may need to be given to the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

The revised admissions policy makes specific reference to school policy and procedures in relation to transfers from other schools; this, as a direct consequence of the amount of time and attention inter-school transfers during the school year have required at all levels in the school. The decision to offer a place to, and accept some students, is expressed with some conditionality. It is advised that this element of the policy be re-examined and re-worded to fully reflect the principles of relevant legislation and the inclusive values as practised in the school.

The DEIS plan includes targets in relation to attendance. The school is endeavouring to improve attendance through the introduction of the use of e-portal and a system of texting alerts for parents. Attendance and punctuality are positively encouraged through such initiatives as the breakfast club.

The school community is aware of the revised code of behaviour. It is perceived to be successful in its operation both by staff and students. Commendably, it is implemented by all, supports classroom learning and is supported by a system of restorative practice.

Currently, provision for Guidance is quite limited. A programme of classroom guidance is provided for third, fifth and sixth years. An external psychotherapist provides some

individual counselling. School management should consider how best to provide an integrated programme of Guidance and the fullest programme possible.

The needs of EAL students with special educational needs are well catered for in an organised and professional manner. Individual education plans (IEPs) have been developed as appropriate and these are communicated to teachers generally. It is suggested that a short part of a staff meeting at the start of the year could be used to allow subject departments customise their subject-specific input to these IEPs.

Support for students is evident in planning documentation and the care structures in place. It is also reflected in curricular supports and support for learning and literacy. Effective links with the PLC college enable the provision of a paired-reading programme while partnership with the local community enables a programme of support to be provided through the community mentoring programme. The school's programme of extra-curricular activities is a further source of support although female students expressed a desire to have a greater range of sports available to them.

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

Parent and student questionnaires expressed general satisfaction with the facilities. Improvements made are evident. It is recommended that priority be given to progressing plans to provide separate toilet facilities for both sections of the school.

Consideration should also be given to the issues of appropriate access to computer-based facilities for practical and technical subjects, to the redecoration of aspects of the staff room and to progressing the reacquisition of rooms currently allocated to another KES group. The parents' council's aspiration to promote theatre and drama in the school should encourage reorganisation of the games room.

The school has devised a draft health and safety statement. It is recommended that the statement use the template contained in the *Guidelines on Managing Health and Safety in Post-Primary Schools* (2010); that persons with designated responsibility be identified and that, as per the 2006 evaluation of Construction Studies and Materials Technology (Wood), the expanded document on Health and Safety in Technology rooms be incorporated.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Observation of lessons provided evidence of many examples of very high quality practice and overall teaching and learning in lessons observed were universally good. Positively, departmental plans examined included long-term plans and schemes of work. Schemes were common, where appropriate, and included student learning outcomes. Reference was made to literacy and numeracy, and special educational needs. It is advised that schemes should be cross-referenced to JCSP statements and that they be differentiated to ensure a requisite level of challenge for the diverse student cohort. An opportunity exists to enhance subject planning by developing action-planning that focuses on teaching and learning, supporting the DEIS school-wide emphasis on literacy and numeracy.

Planning and preparation for lessons was thorough and took cognisance of support for student literacy and numeracy. It involved the preparation of a range of resources and

materials. This is commended. The identification of student learning outcomes was widespread. This supported the delivery of well-structured and paced lessons linked to prior learning. It is advised that learning outcomes be shared with students and that they be suitably linked to the aforementioned JCSP statements.

Teachers are commended for their use and promotion of student use of the target language in language lessons. Information and communication technology (ICT) was used in the vast majority of lessons; there were some examples of very effective integration of ICT. Where students were provided with the opportunity to directly engage with ICT themselves, there was a clear enthusiasm for the work. As teachers develop their skill in this area, it is advised that care should be taken not to become over-reliant on its use at the expense of students' participation.

Student surveys rated the interest level of lessons very highly. This was reflected in lesson observation and was supported by the various active learning methodologies noted. Methodologies employed included pair and group work, team teaching and the use of cooperative learning strategies. There is room for consideration of how team teaching might be further advanced through a shared review of lessons. Teachers should continue to develop their use of pair and group work using tight structures and tasks to ensure effective communication between students. Collaborative activities have the potential to further support student engagement with all types of literacy activities.

Support for students' literacy skills was evident in lessons, with examples of very good practice. In the context of the use of keywords, consideration might be given to viewing this area through the overarching lens of 'vocabulary'. Creating imperatives around the use of important vocabulary by students themselves is worthy of exploration, as is the consideration of key cross-curricular vocabulary.

Student-teacher relationships were very good and lessons were conducted in a safe and supportive environment. Frequently the learning environment was well-developed. The learning environment of classrooms should always be a key consideration in supporting students' engagement with literacy and learning.

Teachers used questioning well, especially in checking students' understanding. There were some very good examples of the use of probing questions. Students answered well when questioned and displayed evidence of learning. Classroom feedback supported students' learning. It was positive to see that the school is working towards the use of common assessments and that, as an overview of results shows, students are enabled to achieve at appropriate levels.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

The school has developed a Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy, dust extractors have been installed in the workshops and signage is now appropriately displayed in most of these rooms. This is positive and this work should now be completed. Although Computer Assisted Design (CAD) has been introduced to the school, junior cycle student access to the relevantly equipped rooms is limited. Improvements to facilities for Guidance have taken account of client confidentiality. Some progress has been made in planning for the professional development of teachers of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and in the development of an assessment toolkit.

The requirement to develop a whole-school guidance plan has not been met. This should be progressed as a priority as should the recommendation to develop a collaborative framework for the assessment of incoming students. It is suggested that the school planning coordinator lead the process of collaborative guidance planning.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Recommendations relating to teaching and learning have been implemented. Observation of lessons demonstrated that such recommendations are also contributing to the school-wide development of provision.

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

Tralee Community College has engaged in some self-evaluation as part of DEIS planning and in relation to curriculum review. Subject departments are well placed to include some subject-specific evidence-based self-evaluation in their planning. Such self-evaluation should make reference to DEIS targets as relevant. An opportunity also exists to ensure that such self-evaluation is referenced in annual departmental reports.

Improvements made in the school are clear. This evaluation concludes that the school has a proven capacity to continue to proactively expand and develop its second-level provision.