

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Banagher College, Coláiste na Sionna
Banagher, County Offaly
Roll number: 76105Q**

Date of inspection: 13 November 2013



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in November, 2013 in Banagher College, Coláiste na Sionna. 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

Banagher College, Coláiste na Sionna operates under the trusteeship of the Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (ETB). The school provides all the Leaving and Junior Certificate programmes. It also offers Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. There is a special unit in the school catering for students with mild general learning difficulties. Transition Year (TY) is provided as an optional programme for students.

The school is very inclusive, has strong links with the local community and is committed to providing the best possible educational service for that community. It is the only second-level school in the town and attracts almost all of the students from the local feeder primary schools and also students from further afield. Enrolment has been increasing year-on-year. The current enrolment in the mainstream school is 285 boys and 223 girls. There are also twenty-two PLC students enrolled in the school.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The school is very inclusive.
- The school is very well supported by the board of management and the Laois and Offaly ETB.
- The principal and deputy principal provide outstanding leadership for the school.
- The middle management team provides very good support to the operation of the school.
- Throughout the evaluation students were observed to be confident, happy and very well behaved.
- The quality of care provided for students is excellent.
- Very high quality learning support is provided for students with special educational needs and this provision is very well managed.
- The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum and makes every effort to meet the needs of students.
- There is excellent provision of resources.
- The standard of teaching and learning was very high overall and examples of excellent practice were also noted.
- There are very good strategies for supporting student literacy.

- The quality of curricular planning ranged from good to excellent.
- Very good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations from previous inspections.
- The school demonstrated very good capacity for improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should develop and document a strategic plan for managing system-wide change and the school's own improvement processes.
- The very good practices in relation to optimising levels of student engagement, differentiating learning, providing feedback to students, and subject planning that were evident during the evaluation should be extended through collaborative subject department and lesson planning and peer observation.
- In the interest of sustaining recent improvement, the percentage of very high ordinary-level grades achieved by students in the certificate examinations should be monitored and student performance in the standardised tests completed in first year should be used as a baseline for comparing student outcomes.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is very supportive of the school and provides valuable leadership in policy development and decision-making. The board is properly constituted and conscientiously fulfils its statutory obligations. The board has ratified all mandatory school policies. Minutes are kept of board meetings and these indicate good practice in recording the board's main decisions. Each meeting should also include a report on child protection and a record of this report should be included in the minutes.

Communication between the board and the wider school community is very good. For example, two student representatives attend board meetings and are present for appropriate aspects of the board's discussions. The views of parents, teachers and students are sought in the development and review of policies. In order to promote the very good work of the board, it is recommended that the board agrees a report at the end of each meeting to be provided to each nominating body. Consideration should also be given to putting the board's main decisions on the school's website.

The Laois and Offaly ETB supports the school very well through the provision of training and resources. Collaboration between teachers and between principals and deputy principals of the schools under the trusteeship the ETB is facilitated. This collaboration is very beneficial in promoting good practice. Schools under the trusteeship of the ETB broaden their curriculum through the use of video conferencing. This was observed to be very effective during the evaluation. The ETB engages in strategic planning with the schools for which it has responsibility, for example, planning for system-wide changes such as Project Maths and the reform of the Junior Cycle. The ETB strategies to assist schools with strategic planning have been very well implemented in the school.

The school has continued to develop strongly since its establishment in 2007 because of excellent management and the commitment of staff to drive improvement. This has been a very positive experience. The school's very good engagement with School Self-Evaluation (SSE) is evident in the development of an SSE report and school improvement plan (SIP), both of which are of very

high quality. In order to ensure that improvement continues, it is recommended that the board develops and documents a strategic plan for managing system-wide change and the school's own improvement processes. This will provide the school community with a motivating sense of achievement when success is measured and recorded in the plan.

The principal and deputy principal are an outstanding senior management team. They work very well together; they are open and consultative in their dealings with all members of the school community, and they are committed to school improvement. Evidence of their success includes: the very great extent to which middle management, teachers and students are empowered through their assigned leadership roles, the effectiveness of the systems that are in place for managing students, the efforts made to include the student voice in decision making, and the warm and caring atmosphere that characterises the school. They share a common aim in ensuring that the school is a very well organised, caring environment where students can achieve their full potential. The relationship that senior management has with teachers and students is excellent.

The middle management team, which comprises the post-holders, provides very good support to the operation of the school. The post-holders have appropriate autonomy, meet regularly and capably carry out their duties. The school's needs are very well met by the post structure. A review of the posts is currently underway. This will result in a restructuring of the posts that will involve consultation with the teaching staff. This is in keeping with very good, established school practice. Every post-holder provides the senior management team with an annual report on the operation of his/her post. This often includes a short meeting to discuss the report and is very valuable. An annual meeting between senior management and all the post-holders is also held as a means of sharing expertise and engaging in strategic planning for the school.

It was evident throughout the evaluation that the teachers share a strong commitment to the school. They are self-motivated and are actively involved in the life of the school through their work as tutors, class teachers and year heads, through their participation on school and subject planning consultation groups, and through their contribution to the very extensive extracurricular programme provided for students. The teachers view themselves as part of a whole-school pastoral care team and work together to support the students and each other. The results of the survey carried out as part of this evaluation indicated a very high level of student and parental satisfaction with the school.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal provide very effective leadership for learning through ensuring that the timetable is well organised, that teachers are encouraged to engage in continuing professional development, and through the very good provision of resources for teaching and learning. They are also active in maintaining very high standards of student behaviour. In addition, the principal and deputy principal consult daily with teachers and value their views. They encourage ideas and innovation. This has created a culture where senior management and teachers work hard as a team to encourage students to identify and develop their talents and to achieve their full potential.

In keeping with very good practice, the senior management team monitors student outcomes through the completion of an analysis of student attainment in the certificate examinations. This analysis indicates that the school is performing well and shows an upward trend in higher-level uptake by students in almost all subjects in the certificate examinations. In the interest of sustaining this improvement, it is recommended that the percentage of very high ordinary-level grades be monitored in order to ensure that all students, who are capable of taking higher levels in their formal

examinations, are encouraged to do so. It is also recommended that student performance in the standardised tests that are completed in first year be used as a baseline for the analysis of student attainment.

The school's code of behaviour centres on positive discipline and the pastoral care of students. The code is implemented very effectively. Throughout the evaluation students were observed to be confident, happy and very well behaved. They have a voice in the school through the student council and through completing surveys on their experiences in school. The school has high expectations for students and teachers are very affirming and encouraging.

Admissions procedures are well structured and open. Almost all of the pupils from the neighbouring primary schools attend Banagher College, Coláiste na Sionna and the school is very inclusive. The students of the school's special unit and the students in the mainstream school are very well integrated. A social area containing table-tennis and 'foosball' tables has been provided and is situated in the special unit. This has been very successful in encouraging students to socialise together. There are very good systems in place to monitor and promote good attendance and punctuality.

The quality of care provided for students is excellent. The school's pastoral care system is very well supported by the care team, tutors, class teachers, year heads and the special needs assistants. The school chaplain and the guidance counsellors play a pivotal role in ensuring that the pastoral needs of students are met.

Very high quality learning support is provided for students with special educational needs and this provision is very well managed. The main modes of learning support provision are small-group withdrawal, team teaching and the creation of smaller class groups. One-to-one support is provided in exceptional circumstances. The range of programmes available, which include the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme, assists the school in providing students with the best option to meet their educational needs. In keeping with best practice the teachers involved in the provision of learning support are chosen on the basis of their experience, expertise and desire to be involved. There is very good collaboration between mainstream subject teachers and learning-support teachers. Individual education plans are developed and maintained for all students in receipt of support.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum and makes every effort to meet the needs of students. Guidance lessons are provided for senior cycle students. Individual careers counselling appointments are arranged. Personal counselling is also available from the guidance team and the school chaplain. The guidance counsellors support students very well in making subject and level choices. They play a key role in first-year induction and in supporting students in the transition from junior to senior cycle.

Very good communication between the school and home is maintained through the school journal, school website and 'App' (application), and the school's 'Twitter' account. In addition, text messages are sent to parents and phone calls home are made where necessary. The school also produces a newsletter and there are various open nights and information evenings organised for parents.

Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) are provided within the curriculum. However, the student responses in the questionnaire provided as part of the evaluation indicate that the delivery of RSE needs to be investigated.

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

The school building is relatively new and was provided under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) scheme. The design of the building and the layout of the corridors, classrooms and grounds contribute significantly to positive school experiences for students. There is excellent provision of sports and recreation equipment, canteen facilities, resources for teaching and learning and ICT. Very good use of these resources was observed during the evaluation. The administration staff play a vital role in supporting the school. The school is very well maintained by the management company responsible for this work. The high standard of upkeep is appreciated and respected by all of the school community. The building is equipped with the relevant health and safety equipment and regular fire drills are held. There is an up-to-date health and safety policy.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty two lessons were observed during the evaluation. The standard of teaching and learning was very high overall, and examples of excellent practice were also noted. There was, however, some scope for improvement in most lessons. Students in their meeting with the inspectors and in their responses to the questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation expressed much appreciation for the hard work and commitment of their teachers.

Very good quality learning was evident in the lessons observed. Students were attentive, interested, confident and motivated. They demonstrated understanding in their answers to teacher questions and in their discussions. They were confident in using subject specific language. In most lessons they engaged in activities that allowed them to be independent learners. There was scope in some lessons for a better balance between student and teacher input and in these lessons listening and note taking were the main student activities. It was evident that the students enjoyed learning most in the lessons that included higher-order activities such as thinking, doing and discussing.

All lessons were well planned and an appropriate range of materials and resources was prepared. Very good practice was observed where the students were actively engaged, personally identified with the lesson content, were required to think for themselves and used ICT to enhance their own understanding. The methodologies observed that facilitated active student engagement included group and pair work, project work, teacher exposition combined with student questioning, practical work and setting students individual tasks. Elements of the practice outlined above were evident in most lessons. Brainstorming, 'Think Pair, Share', role-play, discovery and investigation are methodologies that should also be considered for inclusion. In addition, it is recommended that the very good practice described above be extended to all lessons through collaborative lesson planning and peer observation.

Teachers differentiated learning by including tasks that ranged in difficulty and by assisting students where necessary. In a small number of lessons there was scope for the inclusion of these and other differentiation strategies. It is, therefore, recommended that students, who are finished their work ahead of their peers, be provided with additional and more challenging material and that they be encouraged to provide assistance for their class mates where appropriate.

Teachers monitored progress through questioning and, where students were engaged in individual or group tasks, through observation. Very good oral feedback was given when teachers attended to individual students. Some of the students' written work that was reviewed during the evaluation included teachers' comments indicating what was good about the student's work and also providing advice on how to improve. There was scope for the provision of such feedback in some of the copybooks reviewed. It is therefore recommended that the assessment described above in relation to the correction of students' work should be more consistently practised across the school. Students highlighted the value to them of such feedback in their discussions with the inspectors.

Very good attention was paid to the explanation of key words in all lessons when introducing new language and concepts. In most cases the key words and their meanings were written on the board. Strategies to promote literacy such as 'Drop Everything and Read' and 'Make a Book' are well established in the school. Students can also borrow books from a mobile library containing a range of books sourced from Banagher Library. It is very appropriate that the school is targeting literacy and has developed a very good literacy policy as part of its school self-evaluation and improvement process.

The quality of subject planning ranged from good to excellent. All subject plans include analyses of students' attainment in the certificate examination and some also include details on student surveys conducted by teachers. These are very valuable in promoting reflection on classroom practice and on student attainment. Schemes of work for each subject have been developed and best practice was noted where they clearly outlined the intended learning outcomes together with the methodology, resources, materials and modes of assessment to be used. Appropriate timeframes for the completion of work were also a feature. It is recommended that the very good practice described above be extended to all subject areas through collaboration on curriculum and lesson planning. A section for action planning, identifying challenges faced by each subject department and outlining strategies to address them should also be included in all subject department plans, where this has yet to be developed.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 *Management*

All the whole-school recommendations that were made in previous evaluations have been implemented fully. Examples include: increasing the length of the school week in compliance with the 'Time in School' circular, M29/95 and introducing a taster programme for first-year students to assist them with making subject choices.

3.2 *Learning and teaching*

Recommendations were made in previous evaluations in relation to storing resources electronically and developing the schemes of work to include learning outcomes, resources, methodology and modes of assessment. All resources and subject plans are now stored electronically and this has facilitated very good sharing of resources. However, while the plans of the subjects evaluated are now very good, there remains scope for the extension of this recommendation to some other subject areas.

The provision of formative feedback to students on how to improve their work was recommended in previous evaluations. Although there was good practice noted in this area in the current evaluation, full implementation of this recommendation has yet to be achieved.

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

The school has demonstrated very good capacity for improvement. This is evident in the analysis of student achievement in the certificate examinations which shows steady improvement over the last number of years, in the school's self-evaluation report and improvement plan and in the variety of surveys administered to students in relation to improving their experiences as learners. The senior management team with the support of the board of management and the commitment of the staff have the insight and vision to meet future challenges by strategically planning for sustained improvement and continued excellent provision for students.

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 is delighted with the very positive and encouraging report following the WSE-MLL. It affirms the wonderful work being carried out on a daily basis in Banagher College Coláiste na Sionna.

The Board acknowledges and warmly welcomes the following key findings:

- The school is very inclusive.
- The school is very well supported by the board of management and the Laois and Offaly ETB.
- The principal and deputy principal provide outstanding leadership for the school.
- The middle management team provides very good support to the operation of the school.
- Throughout the evaluation students were observed to be confident, happy and very well behaved.
- The quality of care provided for students is excellent.
- Very high quality learning support is provided for students and makes every effort to meet the needs of students.
- There is excellent provision of resources.
- The standard of teaching and learning was very high overall and examples of excellent practice were also noted.
- There are very good strategies for supporting student literacy.
- The quality of curricular planning ranged from good to excellent.
- Very good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations from previous inspections.
- The school demonstrated very good capacity for improvement.

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 should develop and document a strategic plan for managing system-wide change and the school's own improvement processes.
- The very good practices in relation to optimizing levels of student engagement, differentiating learning, providing feedback to students, and subject planning that were evident during the evaluation should be extended through collaborative subject department and lesson planning and peer observation.

- In the interest of sustaining recent improvement, the percentage of very high ordinary level grades achieved by students in the certificate examinations should be monitored and student performance in the standardized tests completed in first year should be used as a baseline for comparing student outcomes.

It is evident that the school is running in a most efficient, caring and successful manner and to be given a clear affirmation of this by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills is indeed most satisfactory. The Board congratulates the management, teaching staff and students of the school and sincerely thanks the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate for the courteous, encouraging and positive report.