An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Kildare Town Community School
Kildare, County Kildare
Roll number: 91530S

Date of inspection: 24 March 2014
Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in March, 2014 in Kildare Town 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, 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

Kildare Town Community School was established in 2011 following the amalgamation of the Presentation Secondary School, St. Joseph’s Academy Secondary School and Kildare Vocational School. The Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin and Kildare-Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB) are the trustees. The school was provided under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) scheme. Current enrolment numbers 659 students.

The school is co-educational, multi-denominational and inclusive. In keeping with the school’s primary purpose of serving the local community and meeting students’ needs the curricular programmes offered are the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY) and all Leaving Certificate programmes. The school also has a special unit, The Acorn Centre that caters for students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is strongly committed to effectively fulfilling its leadership role in managing the new school and ensuring the success of the amalgamation.
- The capable management skills of the principal and the deputy principal are demonstrated by the efficient daily operation of the school and they provide effective leadership for learning.
- A good range of curricular programmes, subject choices and extracurricular activities is provided for students.
- Focused attention is being given to improving students’ expectations and academic attainment.
- Care of students is informed by the school’s ethos and is safeguarded by the policies and structures that are in place.
- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in most lessons observed and included examples of exemplary practice.
- Evident progress has been made in implementing the recommendations from two previous subject inspections.
**Recommendations for Further Development**

- Core planning teams should be established for the TY and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes and, where relevant, subject department plans should be further developed as indicated in the body of this report.
- Greater use of concurrent timetabling should be explored as a means of supporting student attainment; the weekly allocation of four Irish lesson periods for junior cycle students should be increased; the frequency of double classes being timetabled across breaks should be minimised.
- Management should ensure appropriate use of all resource teaching hours for students with special educational needs.
- Management should utilise the outcomes of the WSE-MLL student and parent questionnaires that formed part of the evaluation to inform the ongoing development of the school.
- The best practices observed in relation to differentiated learning, review of lesson objectives and the provision of written, formative comments for improvement should be extended.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is strongly committed to fulfilling effectively its leadership role in managing the new school and ensuring the success of the amalgamation. The board’s good work in this regard is evidenced by the progress that has been achieved in implementing the priorities set out in school development plan 2012-2015. The plan however, needs to be updated for the period 2013-2015. This should be done to include areas prioritised since the plan was developed such as improvement of students’ attainment both in terms of their individual expectations and attainment in the certificate examinations, increasing the numbers of the school’s students who progress to third level and improving student attendance.

The board, which is ably chaired and appropriately constituted, meets monthly during the school year. The principal’s report to each meeting ensures that the board remains very well informed about the school. An agreed report is issued to the representative bodies following each meeting. Furthermore, the principal, on behalf of the board, makes an annual report on the operation of the school to the Annual General Meeting of the Parents’ Association.

The board’s development and ratification of policies for the new school is ongoing. The ratified policies include the mandatory admissions policy, code of behaviour and child protection policy. The school’s anti-bullying policy following consultation with the school community is soon to be ratified. It is recommended that the admissions policy include an explanatory statement about the voluntary nature of the school’s service fee, which is referred to in the enrolment form. The criteria applicable to the board’s reservation of four of the places that are allocated annually to first-year students should be documented.

The board proactively supports the development of teaching and learning by employing subject specialists and by encouraging and facilitating the continuous professional development (CPD) of the teaching staff. The board displays commitment to curricular review as evidenced by its approval of the school’s recent introduction of the TY and LCA programmes. Discussion of the students’ attainment in the certificate examinations is
conducted annually. It is recommended that this discussion include a comparison with the students’ entry assessment data in order to provide the board with a clear understanding of the students’ attainments in relation to their potential.

Developing strong links with the school community is important to the board. This is exemplified by the board’s consultation of parents, teachers and students in the development of school policies. Members of staff have been invited also to make a presentation to the board on a particular aspect of their work. This good practice should be extended to include annual invitations to the students’ council and to the chairperson of the parents’ association to meet with the board.

The senior management team comprising the principal and the newly appointed deputy principal act in partnership, communicate well and ensure the efficient daily operation of the school. They share the same vision, which is to ensure that the school is the first choice of local families for their children. Their priorities in realising this vision include improving students’ attainment and attendance, development of the school’s year head and tutor system and the development of school policies.

The senior team’s capable leadership is evident in their good working relationship with the board, teaching staff and the parents’ association. The principal and deputy principal receive strong support from the board, maintain an open-door policy for staff, consult with them about proposed school initiatives and they attend the monthly meetings of the Parents’ Association. The senior management team actively promotes a stronger partnership between the school and home by, for example, encouraging parents’ attendance at parent-teacher and parent association meetings. High importance is placed too, on good communication between parents and the school regarding student absenteeism.

Middle-management roles have been delegated to individual teachers through the school’s remunerated post of responsibility allocation and to teachers who expressed interest in voluntarily assuming positions of responsibility. Review of the middle-management structure in consultation with the teaching staff is also currently being undertaken. In order to underline further the importance of middle management’s role, it is recommended that senior management obtain an annual report from each holder of a middle management position regarding the performance of the duties associated with the position. Senior management should also hold an annual plenary meeting with the middle management tier.

School Development Planning (SDP) is a key aspect of the work of the senior management team as was evidenced, for example, by the principal’s role in ensuring the success of the school’s planned development following the amalgamation. Furthermore, the undertaking of the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) processes has recently commenced in the school and is being directly overseen by the senior management team. Notwithstanding the team’s very good work in progressing SDP and given that teachers’ input to the school’s development is encouraged and welcomed a steering committee with a remit for the co-ordination of school improvement initiatives should be established. This will provide added opportunity for members of the teaching staff to contribute to SDP.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Senior management provides effective leadership for learning by ensuring that teachers are deployed to teach their subject specialism in a very well-resourced school environment. CPD for the teaching staff, collectively and individually is fully supported. The teaching staff are consulted appropriately also, as is evidenced by senior management’s attendance at the Year heads’ weekly meeting, the business of staff meetings and the two formal staff surveys that have been conducted, the most recent of which in February 2014, will inform
the review of the current middle management posts. It is recommended that the minutes of
the year heads’ meetings be recorded.

The importance of effective subject department and programme planning is communicated
strongly by senior management. Good quality subject and programme department plans
have been developed and subject departments provide senior management with a report of
their meetings. It is recommended that all department plans include: the agreed
responsibilities of the subject co-ordinator; the annual coursework schemes of the subject
teachers in which the learning outcomes to be achieved in respect of each topic are
identified; a strategic plan for the development of the subject; reflection on how the
analysis of outcomes in the certificate examinations inform pedagogical practices and
targets for student attainment. Core planning teams for TY and LCA should be established
to support the programme co-ordinators in this important work. More opportunities for
members of the teaching staff to share their expertise with colleagues should also be
explored.

The school’s curricular programmes, subject choices and wide range of extracurricular
activities are indicative of the commitment of management and teachers to the holistic
education of the students. As has been indicated, focused attention is being given to
improving student attainment and attendance and a number of strategies have been
implemented to achieve these goals. These include increasing the students’ uptake of
higher level in their subjects and the appointment of a teacher to the middle-management
position of attendance officer. Gradual improvement is being realised as a result of the
strategies implemented.

Care of students is informed by the school’s ethos and is safeguarded by the structures and
policies that are in place to ensure their well-being. Year heads assisted by class tutors, for
example, monitor and support the progress of students in their charge. The school’s care
team meets weekly and makes an important contribution to student welfare. The code of
behaviour strongly emphasises the importance of the rights and responsibilities of all
members of the school community. However, responses from the student and parent
questionnaires and inputs from some focus groups that formed part of the evaluation
suggest a requirement for more effective and consistent implementation of the code.
Moreover, senior management has identified that the role of the class tutor needs to become
more firmly established within the school’s year head-tutor system.

The transitions of students from primary to post-primary and from junior cycle to senior
cycle are well managed. The school’s chaplain meets with all new first-year students
individually. Guidance Counselling is available to all year groups and is formally
timetabled for fifth and sixth-year students. The school also has a School Completion
Programme (SCP) officer and home-school-community liaison co-ordinator, who do
important work in supporting the retention of students.

Students are provided with a broad and balanced curriculum and timetabling is generally
well managed. First-year students are organised into mixed-ability classes. Mathematics is
concurrently timetabled for all year groups from second year onwards. Irish and English are
concurrently timetabled for Leaving Certificate students. Second and third-year Irish class
groups are set or streamed within two non-concurrently timetabled bands. All junior cycle
English classes are mixed-ability. Greater use of concurrent timetabling as a means of
facilitating movement between levels and allowing a greater number of students take higher
level should be explored. The weekly timetabled allocation of four Irish lesson periods for
junior cycle students should also be increased to five lesson periods. The frequency of
double classes being timetabled across breaks should be minimised.
Learning support is provided in a number of ways such as reduction of the class sizes for English and Mathematics, small group resource classes and team teaching. The work programme for students in receipt of support teaching, who are members of the small group resource classes, is a group plan rather than an individual learning plan. It is recommended that the group plan be further developed to cater for the students’ individual and diverse learning needs. Additionally, as a number of teachers are involved in the provision of learning support to the small group resource classes, it is recommended that formal meetings of the learning-support teachers and the learning-support co-ordinator be convened at regular intervals. These meetings should be used to report on progress being made, challenges encountered and to share expertise. The current use of some of the school’s allocation of resource hours to enhance the provision of optional subjects for students should be discontinued. Management should ensure appropriate use of all resource hours.

Student leadership is facilitated and actively promoted. A representative students’ council has been democratically elected and provides a forum for students to express their views. Senior prefects are selected from sixth-year students and work closely with the student council. Student mentors ensure the successful induction of first-year students. However, management’s attention is drawn to the outcomes of the WSE-MLL student and parent questionnaires which indicate, for example, that the majority of student respondents felt that they do not have a role in how to make the school a better place and a sizeable minority indicated that they did not enjoy going to class. The quantified responses of parents to a number of questions point to the need for improved communication with them. Management should utilise the questionnaire findings to inform planning for the ongoing development of the school.

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 is very well maintained and provides a wide range of very good indoor and outdoor facilities. Environmental responsibility is actively promoted and is attested to by the school’s upkeep and Green Flag award. A comprehensive health and safety risk assessment was completed prior to the opening of the school. Fire drills are conducted termly. The interior of the bright, modern school building is enhanced by many attractive displays of students’ art work and photographs. The school’s attractive and easily navigable website is updated regularly.

1. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in the majority of lessons observed and included examples of exemplary practice. The respectful learning atmosphere in all classrooms visited was underpinned by the teachers’ good rapport with students and the students’ willing engagement. In a small number of lessons there was scope for further development of aspects of classroom pedagogy to ensure effective learning. It is recommended that the best practices observed be universally adopted.
Lessons where best practice was observed commenced with students being well informed about the intended learning objectives, which were often displayed on screen or on the board. These lessons were characterised by very good pace and structure that facilitated an appropriate balance between teacher and student input. Differentiated learning was effectively supported by the methodologies and resources employed. When interacting with students, questioning was used very well to support and assess learning. Opportunities were provided for students to engage in independent learning activities. Collaborative learning activities such as pair work and group work were very effectively integrated into many of these lessons.

In lessons where there was more pronounced scope for development, there were some weaknesses noted with respect to ensuring effective learning. For example, student learning would have been enhanced by using a combination of global, direct and higher and lower-order questions. Precise identification of the intended objectives was sometimes warranted and review of the objectives before the lesson concluded was frequently either overlooked or should have included greater feedback from students. In some lessons a better balance between teacher and student input could have been achieved. Greater use of the data projector and active learning methodologies such as collaborative learning tasks merited inclusion in a number of lessons as means of promoting and supporting differentiated learning.

Development of students’ literacy and numeracy skills was supported in the lessons observed by various methodologies such as teachers’ interactions with students and the setting of written and mathematical tasks. There was also a strong focus on familiarising students with pertinent key words in a number of lessons. Reading aloud and silently was incorporated into some lessons. Overall, however, there was scope that should be explored to further support literacy and numeracy development.

The extent to which teachers regularly assign homework and monitor and provide developmental feedback to students on their written assignments is positively noted. The very good practice of setting differentiated homework tasks for students that was also observed in some lessons is commended. However, greater consistency should be established at a whole-school level in relation to the provision of written, formative comments on students’ written work.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management
Subject inspections in Irish and Geography were conducted previously in the school and there has been good progress made in implementing the recommendations. For example, progress has been made by management regarding the recommendation that ways be examined of facilitating formal meetings of the Irish department more frequently during the year. The regularity at which the meetings will be scheduled has still to be finally determined. Management has also acted upon the recommendation in both subject inspection reports that the subject departments incorporate their analysis of students’ attainment in the certificate examinations into their subject department planning. All subject departments now submit a report to the principal at the start of the academic year that includes analysis of their students’ attainment in the certificate examinations and the targets set for improving students’ attainment.

3.2 Learning and teaching
The recommendation that the geography department make greater use of the locality in teaching the coursework has been implemented. Both the geography and Irish subject
departments have acted upon the recommendations relating to analysing students’
attainment in the certificate examinations as already alluded to. There was also evidence
during the evaluation that good progress is being made by the geography teachers in
relation to the recommendation that geography planning focus more on active learning
methodologies and Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies and that these good practices
are being implemented by other subject departments. It is recommended that the work of
the subject departments in implementing recommendations be recorded in their subject
department folders.

3. THE SCHOOL’S SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS AND CAPACITY FOR
   SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

School self-evaluation and review are inherent aspects of the work of the board, senior
management and teachers in sustaining improvement. This is evidenced for example, by
the identification and monitoring of the developmental priorities in the school plan. Indeed,
the current review of middle-management and the strategies that have been implemented to
improve students’ attainment and attendance clearly indicate the school’s good engagement
with self-evaluation. Moreover, quantitative and qualitative evidence inform this work
such as relevant school data and, wherever appropriate, the views of the teaching staff,
parents and students. The school’s engagement with self-evaluation together with the
commitment, expertise and skills of the board, senior management and teachers ensure that
there is sufficient capacity to achieve ongoing improvement.

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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 welcome the positive findings contained in the inspection report and are actively planning to implement the recommendations contained therein.

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

Core planning teams for Transition Year and Leaving Certificate Applied have been established and meetings have been held.

A steering committee to guide school development planning has been established and meetings have been held.

A staff committee has been established to review the Code of Behaviour and its implementation.

Student leaders have been invited to meet with the Board at its next monthly meeting.

Plans are being developed to address the remaining recommendations. At each monthly meeting the Board of Management will review the progress made on the implementation of the MLL recommendations.