

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Coláiste de hÍde
Tallaght, Dublin 24
Roll number: 70021D**

Date of inspection: 19 January 2012



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in Coláiste de hÍde in January 2012. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for further improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school senior management, groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Introduction

Coláiste de hÍde is a co-educational, second-level school operating under the trusteeship of County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC). Since its foundation in 1993 student numbers have continued to increase and a total of 300 students are enrolled in the current academic year. The majority of students come from all-Irish primary schools in the Tallaght area. In any one year, up to eighty-five per cent of pupils transferring to Coláiste de hÍde are enrolled in schools participating in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- Coláiste de hÍde is an open, welcoming school where a positive atmosphere is evident.
- The school community is committed to securing the use of Irish as the language of educational and social activity within the school.
- Students are well cared for and leadership skills are developed.
- The teaching staff is enthusiastic and dedicated to the school.
- On the whole, the quality of teaching and learning was good, and the quality was very good in a third of classes observed.
- The senior management team performs their duties effectively.
- The senior management team is competent to develop and implement an effective self-evaluation process which would support school improvement.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- All membership positions of the board of management should be filled and the board should ratify a school plan.
- The good teaching and learning practices identified in this report and in other school evaluations should be shared across the curriculum. Improving participation and achievement levels in Mathematics and achievement at the higher grades in the case of Science need to be focused on in particular.
- Subject and programme development planning at department level should be further developed through the specification of learning outcomes and monitoring and review practices should be promoted.
- A register illustrating the use of hours which have been allocated to students with special educational needs should be established.

- A minimum of twenty-eight hours of timetabled instruction must be provided, in keeping with the requirements of CL 29/95.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

Coláiste de hÍde operates under the trusteeship of County Dublin VEC. The VEC provides a very good level of support for the school and for education through the medium of Irish. As minutes show, regular, constructive meetings of the Board of Management (board) are held. Discussion with representatives of the parents' committee, and responses from survey questionnaires completed by parents, indicate that the majority are satisfied that the school is well managed.

In relation to the composition of the board, two representatives from the VEC had been nominated at the time of the evaluation. It is recommended that the VEC nominates the third representative without further delay. Not every member of the board had participated in training for their roles; it is recommended that this be addressed through the VEC. It would be desirable that all members of the board participate in this training together.

In the interest of ensuring openness and clarity of communication minutes of meetings are provided in a bilingual form and both Irish and English are used during board meetings. This approach facilitates every member of the school community to contribute to the functioning of the school. To enhance this process, the board should provide agreed reports on the operation of the school to parents and staff on a regular basis.

A very good level of communication exists between the board, senior management, parents and the VEC. Having representatives of the main feeder primary schools on the board creates a very valuable opportunity to build a strong base for the school community and for continuity and development of learning from primary to second level.

No formal structure exists to facilitate communication between students and the board. It would be worthwhile for the board, in conjunction with senior management, to put arrangements in place to meet with the student council from time to time.

The school's priorities for development

Senior management prepares annual reports for the VEC on the operation of the school. These reports indicate the school's priorities for development for the year. While these reports contain a range of aspects of the school development plan such as policies, curricular plans and development priorities identified by the staff, the current board has not adopted a school plan for its term of office. It is strongly recommended that the board ratify a school plan. In order to support the self-evaluation process and development of the cycle it is recommended that development priorities be identified and agreed with all the partners, and action plans with realistic timeframes set out for each of the priorities identified. The development of these priorities should be monitored on a regular basis, reviewed as necessary and progress reported accordingly in the annual report. A review cycle for policies should be linked to the process whereby policies are developed and/or reviewed.

Development priorities identified for the current school year indicate appropriate emphasis on improvement of learning outcomes; improvement of academic standards; development of the learning support department, and an increase in student enrolment.

While the school's admission policy is open it needs to be reviewed and appeal procedures included; the feeder primary schools mentioned set out in order of priority; and, since Transition Year (TY) is compulsory, it should be indicated to students beginning in first year in Coláiste de hÍde that the school offers a six-year programme of education.

A Relationships and Sexuality Education programme is not offered in senior cycle. It is recommended that the board makes appropriate arrangements for the development and delivery of a RSE programme.

The board had not formally ratified a child protection policy. It is strongly recommended that the board attend to this issue without delay. In addition, it is recommended that board members who have not received training in this area do so without delay. Training in child protection procedures is provided to school staff. 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*.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The principal and deputy principal work closely together and provide effective leadership to the teaching staff and the school community. They have a shared vision for the development of the school and the provision of every opportunity for students to achieve high academic standards. Management duties are clearly defined and shared between them and they hold daily formal and informal meetings. While there is evidence that the senior management team provides instructional leadership to staff, there is scope for the development of this aspect of leadership among the staff in general. In addition, senior management needs to further develop distributive leadership.

Assistant principals, each of whom has the role of year head, are the next level of school management. Senior management recognises the very high degree of flexibility shown by this team and that there is scope for development of instructional leadership at this level. Review of minutes of meetings of assistant principals, teaching staff, and discussions held with staff members during the evaluation indicated that the pastoral care committee mentioned should be operating actively. Such a committee would help to deal with issues relating to student behaviour thereby creating time at staff meetings to focus on matters concerning teaching and learning and school development planning.

School staff is enthusiastic and dedicated to the school and to the promotion of Irish as the language of the school community. As part of their leadership skills development, the role of chairpersons of various meetings is rotated in turn. When resources permit, and in order to support national priorities such as school self-evaluation, it is recommended that other committees, such as a school development planning committee, be established. In addition, there is scope for the further development of the role of subject and programme coordinator across the curriculum in a manner that would systematically support the development and implementation of all school development priorities at subject and programme level.

Variety was evident in the use of the template available for planning and in the quality of subject planning in general. It is recommended that good practices obtaining should be built upon and, in particular, focus placed on setting out clear learning outcomes; methodologies and teaching and learning strategies to be used, including information and communications technology (ICT); and differentiated teaching and learning. In addition, procedures for monitoring and reviewing these plans should be developed.

In order to support the development of learning from primary to second level, it is recommended that the Irish, Mathematics and English departments develop specific learning modules for the first term and that the outcomes of assessment of learning in these modules be used to inform subject planning for first year.

The Guidance and Counselling Plan is of a very good quality. The time available for Guidance is used effectively. It is to be commended that there is a TY coordinator in place and, it is indeed timely and necessary, that a review of this programme has begun.

School management supports teacher continuing professional development (CPD). Focus on certain areas is recommended to ensure the qualifications and training of the teachers who provide these programmes: Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), and the areas of learning support and resource teaching.

Very effective use is made of ICT facilities and resources to facilitate communication. Parents, teachers and students were generous in their praise of the use made of email to share information and answer questions on various aspects of school life.

Leadership of students

The quality of leadership of students is good. The admissions policy is open and good support is provided for students as they transfer from primary school. Good and regular records of student attendance are maintained. School management acknowledges that it is necessary to devise strategies to deal with the absenteeism of certain students.

As indicated in the questionnaire responses, great emphasis is placed on the pastoral care of students. However, a review of the weekly timetabled class period assigned to pastoral care is recommended in the context of the other curricular supports provided in this area.

The school community is satisfied that the school code of conduct is effective and this is evidenced by the decrease in the number of students on detention and/or suspension. Procedures for appeal should be set out clearly in the next review of the code.

The development of the learning support department has been initiated. This work should be expedited. It was not clear how the hours provided to students for resource and learning support were being allocated. An immediate review of this is recommended and, in the interest of ensuring clarity with respect to the allocation, provision and use of hours allocated to students with special educational needs, the school should create a register of students which identifies the needs of individual students; the teaching hours which have been allocated to them; the ways in which the support is being provided; and when.

Worthwhile efforts are made to develop student leadership through various committees and roles as leaders and class captains. A wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, including sports, debating and music competitions, provide students with additional opportunities to participate in school life and develop their leadership skills. The student council is representative of each year group other than sixth year at certain times.

The representation of every year group throughout the school year should be ensured. In addition, it is recommended that the council develops a constitution. Student questionnaire responses and a meeting with a focus group indicated that there is scope for strengthening the role of the council and ensuring that student voice is included when school policies are being developed and/or reviewed.

A core committee exists for Guidance and Counselling and Guidance is well integrated into the senior cycle curriculum. Students in third year have access to Guidance through SPHE. It is recommended that the school explores how Guidance could be integrated further in the junior cycle curriculum. Parents and students confirmed that the guidance service is very supportive when guidance related decisions are being made.

An appropriate range of programmes and subjects is offered. Teaching hours fall short of the minimum twenty-eight hours required under Circular 29/95. It is recommended that management corrects this shortfall.

A single period of Physical Education (PE) is provided for every class in junior cycle. It is recommended that a double period be provided for every student so that the PE programme may be implemented appropriately.

2.3 Management of facilities

School facilities are well managed and maintained. Analyses of parents' survey reflect this finding. Significant developments have taken place in ICT provision and use both as a means of communication and to support learning. In addition, very good sports and PE facilities are available.

The school is concerned with environmental responsibilities and is working to achieve a second green flag based on energy saving. While commendable work has been undertaken to develop a recycling system in the school, there is a need to address the issue of litter from outside sources that tends to build up on school grounds.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning was good, and very good in a third of the classes observed. Classes were most effective where teachers had high expectations of student learning; lessons were very well structured and appropriately paced; learning outcomes were shared with students and reviewed before the end of class. A good balance was evident in these classes between teacher input and student active participation through questioning, pair work, practice of practical skills, and peer presentations. Teacher guidance and explanation were clear. In some of the classes teaching was too teacher-centred.

In the main, lower order questioning was used to assess learning during class. It is recommended that an appropriate range of questions be used; especially questions to stimulate and support the development of students' higher order thinking skills. Occasional examples of effective differentiated learning were observed. Practices that support differentiation should be developed across the curriculum in the presentation of subject content, class activities and in homework. Pair work was observed in less than a third of classes and no example of group work was observed. In certain cases, many opportunities

were created for students to pose questions on lesson content. It is recommended that this practice be fostered and extended.

Despite references to numeracy in some subject plans, no examples of the use of effective numeracy strategies were observed and, in only a small number of cases was focus on the development of student literacy skills evident. Further development, on a whole-school basis, is recommended in respect of the strategies to be used to improve literacy and numeracy skills and to support students' grasp of concepts across the curriculum.

While there was evidence of good practice concerning the assignment and correction of homework among the staff and that homework was given in all classes observed, a review of samples of student journals revealed that this was not regular practice in many instances. Samples of student written work indicated that it is primarily monitoring of work that is carried out, and that in certain cases, it is very rarely that work is corrected in a constructive manner. Recommendations in this regard were made in inspection reports previously issued to the school. Discussion with parents and questionnaire responses indicated that they are not entirely satisfied with procedures concerning homework and corrections.

Monthly tests administered to students in every subject create very good opportunities for undertaking regular monitoring of learning progress. However, outcomes should be used to guide planning and review of learning. Analyses of student achievement in certificate examinations are carried out and it is recommended that this practice be extended to house examinations.

Analyses of results in the state examinations indicate that students are successful in the majority of subjects and that very few students undertake foundation level. However, in relation to Mathematics and Science and, given that the allocation of time for Mathematics is very generous in senior cycle, it is recommended that a more thorough examination of student learning in these subjects be carried out and strategies devised to improve it.

In some curricular subjects, examples of good practice were observed in relation to the development of self-assessment and peer-assessment skills. The use of these practices across the curriculum would be very worthwhile in supporting students develop an awareness of their own learning and of themselves as learners.

Positive interaction was evident between teachers and students and student behaviour was very good. Classrooms were suitably decorated, bright and well equipped to support learning.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Limited progress has been made on recommendations contained in inspection reports issued to the school to date. For example, in the case of Irish, the same recommendations were made previously in 2004 and again in 2011 concerning a review of the homework policy and the development of subject plans with clear learning outcomes based on language functions of the syllabuses. In addition, there was a recommendation regarding the distribution of class periods throughout the week that remains to be implemented.

Very good progress has been made on recommendations made in a History inspection report. An extra teacher was provided for senior cycle and a member of the department fulfils the role subject coordinator.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

As previously stated in section 3.1 of this report, while there are very good practices in the school in relation to teaching and learning, these, as well as the general recommendations in relation to teaching and learning made in this report and in previous subject inspection reports, should be implemented across the curriculum.

With regard to Irish as the medium through which students learn, the level of student expectation should be raised across the curriculum with effective differentiated learning. A review of the homework policy is recommended and homework should be integrated with assessment practices and process.

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

As indicated by established and developing practices in the school, self-evaluation practices are being gradually created and strengthened to support school improvement. Senior management is committed to establishing sound structures to support the implementation of the process.

As previously stated, it is customary in the school to prepare annual reports for the VEC, a practice that is beneficial to the school as an effective self-evaluation process in being developed. At the time of this evaluation, a review of the TY programme was under way and consideration was being given to how Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) could benefit learning in the school. This is a good indication of the school engaging with improving learning outcomes for students, an area for development identified in this report.

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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, staff, parents and students of Coláiste de hÍde welcome this positive WSE-MLL. The board is particularly pleased with the following aspects as identified in the report:

- The diligence of staff and their commitment to the students and to Irish
- The pastoral care system that supports the above point
- The quality and very good teaching and learning practices in the school
- The welcoming, positive and open atmosphere
- The work of the senior management
- The very effective use of ICT resources
- The effectiveness of the code of conduct
- The good support for pupils transferring from primary school
- The very good quality of the School Guidance and Counselling Programme
- The reference to our efforts to develop leadership skills in students
- The wide range of cross-curricular and extra-curricular activities
- The very good management and maintenance of school facilities
- The valuable work in the area of environmental responsibilities
- The positive interaction between teachers and students
- The good behaviour of the students
- The process underway to develop self-evaluation.

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 of Management, in consultation with the staff and all school partners, is committed to implementing the recommendations in the report and facilitating appropriate steps to achieving their implementation.

A lot of progress has taken place in regard to the following:

- A twenty-eight hour teaching timetable is in operation in the school year 2012/13
- The third representative has been nominated by the Vocational Education Committee and is functioning as a member of the board
- The school has adopted the County Dublin Vocational Education Committee strategy for Literacy & Numeracy and it is part of every subject plan in the school
- Staff members in the school are participating in the TL21 course organised by County Dublin VEC to enhance the staff's professional development plan for Teaching and Learning. We are also hoping that more team teaching and dissemination of good practice will be an outcome of this
- All students have two Physical Education periods per week in the school year 2012/13
- Three teachers have undertaken training in regard to Child Care/Protection
- An RSE programme has been developed and is being implemented for the senior cycle in the school year 2012/13
- A committee is developing a child protection policy this school year

- A committee is reviewing the code of discipline so that it is in line with the National Education Welfare Board guidelines
- Each subject department is focusing on assessment and on the role of homework as part of that assessment. Assessment for Learning (AfL) forms a key element of this process
- The board of management has approved the School Plan (which is based to a large extent on the recommendations of the inspectorate)
- The Guidance Counsellor, Transition Year Coordinator and Learning Support Teacher made a presentation to the board of management, setting out the responsibilities, the challenges and the progress made by those particular departments
- The learning support teacher is attending a training course in the Church of Ireland College of Education, Rathmines, as part of the development of the learning support department. A register has been established for the school year 2012/13 for the learning support/resource hours assigned to the school and for the students entitled to those hours
- Each subject department has a convenor this year
- The staff and management meetings have been restructured in order to have more time available for teaching and learning issues, as recommended in the report.
- The mathematics department continues to develop and Project Maths is being effectively implemented and we hope that the significant increase in students achieving higher grades in science will continue inline with the significant increase in the number of students taking higher (from 30% in 2008 to 95% in 2012).

The board is grateful to the staff of the school for their diligence and commitment to Coláiste de hÍde. The Coláiste will be established twenty years in September 2013 and it is considered that this analysis of the school is timely. It provides clear direction for the next twenty years ensuring that growth and development will continue as it should.