

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Coláiste Daibhéid
Sráid Mhuileann na Sábhadóireachta,
Cathair Chorcaí**

Roll number: 71124S

Date of inspection: 27 April 2012



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April 2012 in Coláiste Daibhéid. 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 of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Introduction

Coláiste Daibhéid is a co-educational Irish-medium college under the aegis of Cork City Vocational Education Committee. The school was founded in 1993, mainly to provide post-primary education for students from *Gaelscoileanna* on the south side of the city. The school has undergone remarkable growth since then. At the time of the evaluation, there were 195 students enrolled in the school. There are 24 teachers on the staff, a significant number of whom teach in other schools that are part of the same VEC scheme.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- Irish is the everyday language of the school and, of particular note was students' competence in spoken Irish. Staff members are commended for their efforts to overcome the challenges presented by Irish-medium education.
- Members of the board of management show ability as leaders of learning and of Irish-medium education.
- The principal and deputy principal see themselves as leaders of learning and they are working to add greater formality to all systems which support learning.
- There is scope to further develop the system of posts of responsibility so that the main management needs of the school might be better served.
- With appropriate supports and communication channels in place, many more opportunities for distributed leadership could be created.
- Staff members who seek leadership opportunities – be it through involvement in formal initiatives implemented on a whole-school basis, or projects undertaken individually on their own initiative – are commended.
- A benefit of the school's participation in the VEC scheme is students' access to a wide range of subjects.
- The extension of the school building should bring with it significant improvements to many aspects of school life and especially to in-house communication,
- The current development of the school website is worthwhile.
- On the whole, the quality of teaching and learning was good. While good practice was observed during some lessons and excellent practice in other cases, scope for improvement was identified at times.
- There is a system of assessment and reporting in operation which keeps all the participants informed of students' progress. Effective assessment practices were noted during some lessons.

- The value of external assessment is acknowledged. Recommendations from previous assessments were welcomed and a commendable effort has been made to implement many of them.
- A movement towards improvement and development is firmly rooted in school culture. The benefit of self-evaluation is acknowledged and it is good that the first steps have been taken in this process. It is necessary, however, to compile base-line data before improvement targets can be specified.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- It is recommended that senior management encourage the teaching staff to avail of opportunities for entrepreneurship.
- It is recommended that continued efforts be made to ensure the fluency and accuracy of all members of the school community in both their oral and written Irish.
- It is recommended that teachers make greater use of co-operative learning strategies and of varying questioning techniques during lessons.
- It is recommended that students play a more central role in the learning process and in other aspects of school-life.
- It is recommended that, as part of a self-evaluation process, students take standardised tests and that the results of the tests be used to raise students' expectations for themselves, as well as their teachers' expectations for them.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

The board of management is appropriately constituted. This particular board is in the middle of its term of office. Board members bring a variety of experience to their work and some have been members since the school's establishment.

Board members are very proud of the school. They show a good understanding of school life, as well as a reasonably good understanding of the changes taking place in the education sector. They are aware of the importance of fulfilling statutory responsibilities. To this end, they are asked to meet the requirement that they furnish an annual report on the operation of the school to parents. It would also accord with good practice if, after each meeting, an agreed statement was issued and presented to staff members and parents.

The board endeavours to follow the appropriate consultative process when formulating school policies. Such a communicative process would be greatly enhanced if the school's Parents' Association were re-established. It is recommended that, when the school's enrolment policy for 2012/2013 is being reviewed, the nature and order of the entry criteria be checked to ensure inclusivity. It should also be ensured that the policy meets all requirements specified in Paragraph 15 2(d) of the Education Act which requires the board to state clearly that students with special educational needs (SEN) are catered for. It will be indicated, later in this report, why it is necessary to review the code of behaviour. The board is also reminded that a review date for each policy should be specified.

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*.

The school's priorities for development

All members of the board of management are strongly committed to school development, while at all times remaining true to the school's characteristic spirit with regard to the Irish language and Irish-medium education. Developmental priorities include: strengthening the standing of the school as a provider of Irish-medium education, enhancing the quality of teaching and learning and formalising the support systems to ensure a positive experience of schooling for students. Furthermore, it is planned to upgrade the school building so that the school will be on a single site.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

Both the principal and the deputy principal were appointed in the Autumn of 2011. Their loyalty to the school was noted, as was the energy they bring to their work. They show a good understanding of the school's merits and of its developmental priorities.

The principal and deputy principal see themselves as leaders – leaders of the school community and leaders of learning. They are operating from two separate buildings at present. This arrangement will not last much longer and once all students are based in a single campus, it will be necessary to review their individual responsibilities: it would be expected that, as they become more familiar with other's individual talents, the principal and deputy principal would function as a close-knit team that would facilitate opportunities for leadership for other members of the school community.

Senior management is making a praiseworthy effort to add greater formality to the school's communication and planning processes. This is a positive development in so far as it will clarify the school's targets for improvement, communication procedures and areas of responsibility. On the other hand, it is important to ensure that these structures do not inhibit the enterprise displayed by individuals. It is important that the whole-school community feel that they will be supported should they, of their own volition, avail of leadership opportunities.

A core objective of senior management is to improve the students' learning experience. This is an admirable aim. As subject teachers themselves, they welcome developments which enhance the learning experience. They acknowledge the talent of the teaching staff and their willingness to embrace the most up-to-date methodologies. The school's participation in the Learning Schools Project (LSP) is a useful means of encouraging staff members to make extensive use of the most effective methodologies.

Teachers value opportunities for discussion and, as a result, the use of worthwhile classroom approaches is extended. Such practice is an indication of the potential for all teachers to become leaders of learning. Although many staff members are serving two schools, it was remarkable that a large number of teachers are involved in some aspect of school development. Teachers are asked to continue availing of enterprising opportunities, whether in class or elsewhere.

The staff handbook is a valuable reference aid. The occasional references to good teaching-, learning-, and assessment-practices are very helpful. There are ample opportunities to develop this useful tool for teachers. A further useful section might include a specific statement of the school's vision with regard to teaching, learning and assessment as well as a list of classroom activities that support that vision.

The whole school community is highly commended for the significant effort made to provide students with an authentic experience of Irish-medium education. Of particular note is the resourcefulness and creativity displayed when facing the various challenges involved.

Nonetheless, teachers are reminded of the importance of their competence in Irish and the fact that they are each individually responsible for using the language accurately in their oral and written communication with their students. Similarly, attention should always be paid to the accuracy of the Irish used in school documentation, signage and correspondence.

It happened that, at the time of the evaluation, the Parents' Association was not functioning. It was indicated that it is intended to revive the Association shortly: this is welcome news. Parents' answers in questionnaires indicated that they are very satisfied with the school. Answers also indicated, however, that there are certain weaknesses in the channels of communication with parents and that, as a result, parents have played only a limited role, up to now, in certain aspects of school life. The school newsletter, the yearbook and the text system enable information-sharing with parents. It is anticipated that communication channels will be further strengthened with the revival of the Parents' Association and further development of the school website.

Leadership of students

Students showed a positive attitude to their schooling in their interaction with the inspectors, in the classroom, and in the questionnaires distributed to them.

It is good that the school is working towards providing more positive experiences of learning for students. Emphasis on courtesy and regular monitoring of student attendance provides a good foundation for this. Staff have high expectations regarding the use of Irish by students and, during the evaluation, the students' high levels of competence in spoken Irish was noted. The anti-bullying policy was reviewed and amended this year and it is commendable that students' opinions were taken into account as part of the process. Involving the Students' Council in such consultative processes is worthwhile once it has been ensured that students have a stronger voice in choosing all representatives on the Council.

Students have access to a broad range of subjects, thanks to the school's participation in the VEC scheme. The steps already taken to provide Physical Education classes for all students within two years are welcome. It was also indicated that each junior-cycle class-group will study SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education) from the coming school-year onwards and that RSE (Relationships and Sexuality Education) classes will be provided for senior students. There is great demand for the Transition Year programme and the emphasis on review as part of the co-ordination of this programme is commended.

Students are supported in many ways. Students with special educational needs (SEN) are given appropriate assistance and the constant pursuit of novel ways of providing this support is commended. The resources available to students with SEN and the manner in which students avail of them should, however, be specified. A high level of support is provided for students when making educational, professional and personal decisions. It was reported that the class-tutor system that was initiated some years ago is very successful. The benefits of establishing a permanent care team should be considered.

The school's code of behaviour clearly outlines the type of behaviour expected of students. Furthermore, the sanctions resulting from transgression of the rules are clearly laid out. It is considered necessary, however, to develop this code so that greater emphasis is placed on personal responsibility and responsibility to other people. Indeed, the weekly competition 'Labhairt na Gaeilge supports such an approach in so far as it promotes responsible behaviour rather than punishing bad behaviour.

Students' and parents' answers in questionnaires provide guidance with regard to some areas for development. Firstly, they reinforce the inspectors' opinions that more formal

channels of communication should be developed. It is important that students and their parents feel that their opinions are considered when making decisions. Another issue that emerged was the need for SPHE and RSE lessons for students. It is strongly recommended that the requirements of circular M11/03 be met as a matter of urgency.

2.3 Management of facilities

When the extension of the main building is finished, the whole school community will be based in one location. A modern learning environment will be created through considerable investment in ICT (Information and Communication Technology) resources. Although the campus will not have a sports hall, arrangements have been made with a local club, to allow for the running of PE (Physical Education) classes, as well as training sessions for extra-curricular events.

In spite of all the challenges pertaining to the current arrangements, both school buildings are in good condition. The health and safety of the school community are looked after as well as possible and any concerns expressed by the Health and Safety Officer are immediately addressed. The school safety statement was up-to-date at the time of the evaluation and it would be worth including it in the document in which the school policies and their scheduled review dates are set out.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

As part of the evaluation process, students' opinions on the quality of the learning and teaching were sought. The judgements of the inspectors, accord, more or less, with the students' opinions.

On the whole, the quality of the learning and teaching observed was good. It was satisfying that very good practice was observed in certain classes and excellent practice in a few cases. Furthermore, praiseworthy assessment strategies were employed in some cases. Irrespective of all of this, however, a certain scope for improvement was identified in many of the lessons. To enhance the learning experience for all students, it would be worth trying to implement as many as possible of the practices recommended below, on a whole-school basis. With their implementation, students should become more actively involved in the learning process.

A wide range of methodologies was used to present lesson content and facilitate learning. Students engaged most effectively with a newly-taught topic when concepts were clearly explained to them, when teachers built on their prior knowledge and when clarification was provided with the aid of stimulating resources. Particular praise is due to those teachers who made a deliberate effort to serve students' differentiated needs.

Many teachers consolidated learning by getting students involved in activities which reinforced the new material. This was particularly effective when a mixture of individual and interactive tasks was used. Another highly-effective strategy, which gave students encouragement, was to return, at the end of a lesson, to the learning outcomes shared at the outset.

Best practice was observed when there was a balance between the teacher's voice and that of the students. Some teachers displayed resourcefulness in the methods they used to encourage students to play a more central part in the learning process. Among the strategies used were group-work, peer-assessment, presentations to classmates and encouragement of students to ask questions.

Team-teaching is being trialled in the school as part of the LSP. The effectiveness of using this approach to foster independent learning was noted. Of particular note were the opportunities created for co-operative learning. Co-operative-learning activities were observed in other classes also, but, on the whole, the number of opportunities created for students to take responsibility for their own learning was limited. It is strongly recommended that extra use be made of strategies which afford students opportunities for authentic communication with one another.

In most classes, Irish was the language of communication, where appropriate. In these cases, most of the teachers were sufficiently competent in Irish and the students were well able to follow lesson content that was delivered through the medium of Irish. Particular praise is due to those teachers who, when necessary, spent time teaching and practising the accurate usage of new terminology. With the recognition of developing students' literacy skills as a main area of focus for school self-evaluation, it would be worth paying particular attention to the accurate use of classroom metalanguage and the accurate usage of terminology.

An atmosphere of courtesy and co-operation existed in all classes observed. Students undertook lesson activities enthusiastically. Their interest in the content of the lessons was enhanced when links were made with their own lives. Frequently it was during these lessons also, that there was a variety of learning activities and, consequently, lessons moved at an appropriate pace.

All teachers work to meet the requirements of the school's assessment and reporting system. The emphasis placed on homework is commended: it is good that learning tasks are recognised as a key homework activity and that the teachers monitor the standard of the work closely. It was obvious that some teachers conduct class-tests regularly, a practice which ensures that students have a good idea of the standard they are achieving. A wider range of assessment methods is used for Transition Year students and it would be worth considering the benefits of using these methods with other year-groups. In addition, and as part of the national strategy on literacy and numeracy, it will be necessary for students to take standardised tests and to be re-tested after a specific period of time.

Questioning was the most common means of assessing the effectiveness of the learning during lessons. There was variety in the standard of questioning and in the questioning strategies used. Best practice was observed when students were given sufficient time to frame their answers and when they were given opportunities to consult one another if they could not answer the question themselves. Teachers are reminded of the importance of questioning as an assessment instrument and it is strongly recommended that they use a range of techniques to stimulate all the students, whatever their ability, to offer an answer.

Some teachers monitored the work of the students as they were undertaking learning tasks. This was particularly effective, as it afforded the teacher an opportunity to assess the differentiated work in progress.

On the whole, students' copybooks were in good condition and it was evident that the majority of their teachers set written tasks for them on a regular basis. In a small number of cases, it was felt that greater emphasis could be placed on how students make notes of what they have learned.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

A praiseworthy effort has been made to implement the majority of the recommendations of previous evaluations. The broadband system has been upgraded and there is a new science laboratory in the school. In addition, the school-development planning process is working well, with school management and teaching-staff participating fully in it.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Most of the recommendations made related to assessment, questioning and ways of facilitating the participation of all students in the learning process. Only limited progress has been made to date in implementing these recommendations on a whole-school basis.

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

5.1

A movement towards improvement and development is firmly embedded in school culture. School management shows an understanding of the value and possibilities of school self-evaluation as an instrument for review and planning. A start has been made, in so far as a framework has been laid out. It is necessary, however, to collect and analyse baseline data, in order to identify areas for improvement. The results of standardised tests would offer clear guidance in this regard and, therefore, students should take such tests sooner. The work done in the case of certain subjects and programmes, regarding open evaluation of their work and identification of areas for improvement, was noted.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

This is a translation of the school response which was submitted in Irish

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

Coláiste Daibhéid and CCVEC welcome this report, in particular the positive recognition given to the achievements of the school in the educational, mental, personal and physical development of the entire community. It recognises and enhances the positive reputation of the school and recognises that the culture of the school is one that supports and encourages improvement and development, especially with respect to learning, professional practice and self-evaluation.

The application and dedication of the school staff, both teaching and support, is acknowledged and praised extensively in the report for what they have done to promote, encourage and support education through the Irish Language. The Board welcomes the recognition in the report that the generally high levels of Irish language competency evidenced by students and the teachers is the foundation stone of the school, along with its unique spirit and culture.

The Board further welcomes the recognition of the efforts of the Principal and Deputy-Principal as a team, in their first year of management, and welcomes this external evaluation as valuable tool to support the further development of the school and the leadership capabilities of management, teaching staff and students.

The Board is particularly pleased that the report recognises that the range of subjects, the teaching methods observed, and the supports available within the school support and promote students in achieving high standards. The central role of worthwhile homework was also obvious to the Inspectors

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

Following recommendations included in the report and from the feedback received from the Inspectors, the following have already been put in place and are progressing:

- Staff Working Groups are developing opportunities for enterprise for the teaching staff as well as extending the proposal (proposed plan) for School Learning.
- Additional measures to support and enhance Irish language acquisition and competency have been initiated, including:
 - Focus on spelling and to grammar in the school Literacy plan
 - All the books in 1st year and in Transition year are entirely through Irish
 - Staff members identified to act as ‘grammar experts’ to help other teachers
 - Teachers are attending intensive grammar courses in UCC
 - Intensive Irish course in the Gaeltacht for 6th years
- Changes to selection of Students’ Council is chosen to encourage more active involvement, regular meetings with the (Príomhoide), the students have been involved in policies development and will be invited to BOM meetings
- Range of information sessions laid out for parents this year on relevant topics. The committee of the Parents Council has been reinvigorated.
- Parents received an annual Report on the functioning of the school, before the summer and the habit of issuing an agreed report by the Board after each meeting has been started

In line with the recommendations and advice from the MLL Inspectors, policies are being reviewed and updated to strengthen their context and application within and for the school community.

In conclusion, the Board would like to reiterate its acceptance of what is a very positive and supportive report, and would like to thank the members of the inspectorate involved in the MLL for their professionalism, insight and support throughout the process and indeed in all their interactions with the school.