

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Coláiste Pobail Ráth Chairn
Contae na Mí
Roll number: 71991T**

Date of inspection: 5 December 2012



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S
I N S P E C T O R A T E**

Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in December 2012 in Coláiste Pobail Ráth Chairn. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for school improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school 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; a response was not received from the board.

Introduction

Coláiste Pobail Ráth Chairn was established twenty six years ago, in 1986, as an all-Irish Gaeltacht post-primary school under the auspices of County Meath Vocational Education Committee. The school received permanent recognition in 1994, and the new school building was opened in the millennium year, 2000, with provision for a projected capacity of 200 students.

The highest enrolment to date of 140 students, equivalent to 70% of the maximum capacity, was achieved in the year 2002/03. The enrolment for the current year 2012/13 is very close to that, at 138 students. There is extensive provision for post-primary education in Meath and, accordingly, a wide choice of schools is available. The school faces a challenge of attracting more local parents to enrol their children in order to achieve the projected capacity of 200 students. It is recommended that a publicity team be established in the short term and a vigorous action plan activated and reviewed in order to improve the school's communications with the wider community.

The school's management and staff have a strong commitment to education through the medium of Irish and the students and their families support that school ethos. Nearly all the students come from all-Irish primary schools and a minority of them, about 16%, come from Gaeltacht families. All subjects are taught through Irish, apart from one subject at present where a newly-appointed teacher is learning the language *ab initio* with the encouragement and support of the school, including the students.

The programmes available in the school are the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate and Transition Year, which is a demand-led optional programme and, as a consequence, is not in place this year. This school has a transfer rate of 71% of students to third level.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The senior management team is highly qualified for school leadership.
- Staff member have added to their qualifications in relevant areas to the benefit of the school, including Guidance and Special Educational Needs, and more members are prepared to add to their professional development.

- Information and communications technology (ICT) is heavily promoted as a tool to support learning. This is indicated by the training in e-learning and in the use of e-textbooks currently being provided to staff.
- The school plan is incomplete regarding implementation of essential policies, identification of developmental priorities, and an action plan to achieve them.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in nearly every lesson and there was an atmosphere of mutual respect between teachers and students in nearly every case.
- Progress has been made in the implementation of recommendations made in previously published inspection reports.
- A fundamental area for development, recognised by the school itself, is the school self-evaluation process.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The board of management should make arrangements for the approval of a school plan.
- It is recommended that an incremental plan of continuing professional development (CPD) be set out as support to ensure that properly qualified teachers are teaching the subjects.
- It must be ensured that all members of staff are informed of the school's Child Protection Procedures.
- Inspection reports should be shared with all teaching staff in order to identify common recommendations for improvement.
- The opportunity presented by the school self-evaluation (SSE) process should be grasped in order to establish proper structures for school development planning on a whole-school basis and to establish instructional leadership.

2 QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

The board of management is properly constituted and is supportive of the senior management. The members of the board have expertise in the functions of a board of management and specifically in post-primary education matters. Attendance at board meetings is good but meetings are not held on a regular basis for reasons which are outside the board's control.

The board has identified worthwhile priorities which include increasing enrolment, especially locally, promoting the speaking of Irish, solving problems with iPad computers used by students in the junior cycle, and increasing the proportion of students undertaking higher level in the Junior Certificate examination. This latter aim is in keeping with the Vocational Education Committee's aim throughout the scheme.

These aspirations are laudable. However, the board has not set out a strategic school plan containing specified concrete actions, identified success criteria, and recorded deadlines for their achievement. Some essential school policies were delayed and incomplete including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), the health and safety policy, the code of behaviour and the admissions policy. In these last two cases specific mention is made of deficiencies regarding information about appeals and school transfers. There were general deficiencies regarding monitoring and review of school planning documentation.

The board, therefore, should make arrangements to approve a school plan. As part of this, arrangements should be made to implement effective procedures enabling the board to deal with policy development, approval, monitoring and review practices.

The senior management is committed to achieving high quality all-Irish post-primary education in the school. The senior team is highly qualified for school management and various duties are assigned to each of them. These include, however, significant teaching duties, over half a timetable of teaching classes in the case of the principal and three quarters of a timetable in the case of the deputy principal. All duties regarding school development planning fall to the senior team.

There is a very limited structure at the school's middle management level and good care is taken to ensure that essential administrative responsibilities are complied with. There are only two teachers with special duties posts, however, and only one post holder at assistant principal level. As a result, many administrative duties fall to the senior management team and the opportunity to promote instructional leadership is very limited. The senior team should adopt instructional leadership as a priority in their managerial responsibilities.

The parents' committee is active though it has a limited role in the development of school policies. The committee co-funds optional Leaving Certificate subjects which the school does not have the resources to provide. Examples of these are Chemistry and Physics. The students' council have elected good representatives and a liaison teacher has been appointed. The students are given the opportunity to develop leadership and are listened to. The committee has not yet had any input, however, to school policies. The parents' committee and the students' council should be included more in the development of policies and in the identification, implementation and review of a school development plan.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

It is good sign that staff members, at the recommendation of management, have added to their qualifications in important areas covering Guidance and Special Educational Needs and that more teachers are displaying an interest in the like, including liaison teachers of literacy and numeracy. This CPD has added to the capacity of the school to respond better to the needs of students. It is good that the promotion of ICT as a tool for learning is currently being fast-tracked and that the staff is being trained in e-learning and in the use of e-textbooks.

The school's curriculum has been extended due to appointments and internal staff professional development. As an indication of this, Music and Agricultural Science have been provided. However, there is still a need for a whole-school structure and incremental programme to guide teachers' CPD as the teaching staff are not allocated commensurate with their qualifications in all cases.

A priority target should be to have suitably qualified teachers in the subjects. This issue could be one of the developmental priorities in the school action plan specifically mentioned above. As an initial step, appropriate arrangements must be made to assign a suitably qualified teacher to SPHE and RSE. In the case of SPHE specifically, a newly-appointed, unqualified teacher was undertaking all the teaching during the assessment period. The school does not have a RSE policy or provision for RSE in senior cycle.

The record of planning activities on a whole-staff basis for the period 2005 to 2012 was limited and the account of the two years 2009 and 2011, respectively, was blank. Every encouragement and support necessary should be provided, for example, to the literacy and numeracy liaison teachers.

Good efforts are made to provide a wide curriculum and the allocation of time for teaching is in accordance with the provisions of Circular M29/95. The frequency of lessons per week for the core subjects, English and Irish, was regarded as low in the timetable for junior cycle.

The resource and learning support hours due to the school are used appropriately and a fully qualified teacher is in charge. A valuable resource which is undeveloped at present is the school library. It is recommended that every effort be made to provide a room specifically for learning support and to develop the library as a support for literacy. It would be worth investigating the possibilities with the County Meath library service of developing an electronic service.

Despite the efforts to provide a wide curriculum the range of available programmes is quite limited. Transition Year is an optional programme and it is clear in recent years that demand for the programme is receding, as the programme has been absent for four years out of the five since 2006/07. In addition there is clearly a very low demand for the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) even though the appropriate subjects are available to implement this programme.

As there are eight subjects timetabled in senior cycle and the majority of students undertaking seven, this ensures that there are frequently study classes or free classes. It is recommended that Transition Year as an optional programme should be reviewed and that the suitability of the LCVP as an eighth subject be reviewed in order to provide the advantages of this programme on a permanent basis. The arrangements for Guidance should be looked at again. The current arrangements were regarded as awkward regarding timetabling at lunchtime and concurrent with other subjects.

Student retention rates are good and monitoring of attendance is good. The work of the student care team is of a high quality. The students' results and participation at the various levels in the certificate examinations are analysed and compared with national norms. In addition, more care is now being taken to provide a continuous record of the progress of those students.

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*. Having now been adopted by the board, it should be ensured that each member of staff is informed of the school's child protection procedures.

2.3 Management of facilities

The quality of accommodation is good; the school's building, site and resources are well-kept and students show respect for the school and school property. Good photographs of classes, school activities, and of students' achievements and awards are displayed in the school corridors. ICT resources are good in the classrooms and there is a focus on placing e-learning centrally in learning through an iPad scheme with students in first and second years. A particular recommendation is made in this report on the need to develop the school library as an important resource in learning. The draft health and safety policy should be updated and approved. Environmental awareness is being well fostered in the school and the Green Flag has been achieved and is flying prominently in front of the school.

3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 *The quality of learning and teaching*

The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in almost all of the eighteen lessons observed. Thirteen teachers, all of the teachers on the staff, were involved. A wide range of thirteen subjects was observed and there was a good balance between lessons in the junior cycle and those in the senior cycle.

The quality of preparation for teaching was very good; resources prepared by teachers helped greatly to make appropriate provision for the various abilities and learning styles of students. In certain cases care was taken to ensure that the subject was topical, stimulating and attractive and in media frequented by the students. In an exemplary case the subject was linked creatively and very effectively by identifying cross-curricular links which stimulated the students' imagination and input and which enhanced their experience and their own local knowledge.

For by far the most part, the learning results were shared with the students at the start of the lesson and in the best, they were revisited during or at the end of the lesson to assess progress. Care should be taken of this in each case and the lesson content identified from the learning results.

The lessons were well-structured in almost all cases. In some cases excellent practice was observed in the questioning practised with the students which contained a blend of lower-order and higher-order thinking. Good questioning is good for placing differentiation in learning. It is recommended that more care be taken with practising questioning habits like this with students, a mixture of open and directed questions, giving time to compose answers and students answers to be audible to all.

In the best lessons there was very good recognition and good opportunities for the students to show their prior learning of the lessons' content and as a basis for the next stage of learning. There was good attention also to practising and consolidating the language register of the various subjects. It would be worth displaying samples of this common terminology in the classrooms.

Samples of collaborative learning were observed and the students were clearly experienced in this good practice. In order to enhance collaborative learning, it is recommended that a subject be chosen which will stimulate discussion among students, specifying roles for group members, setting a time limit for the task, and collecting oral feedback from the groups.

Some examples were observed in which special care was taken to develop the students' literacy skills. It was clear from questions put by certain students that they had an understanding of themselves as learners and that skills were being fostered in them which would help them to learn how to learn.

Respect among teachers and students was shown in nearly every lesson. In one case, learning suffered due to weaknesses in the management of students. In such a case the management should provide professional support in the management of students as part of the teachers' professional development programme.

The teachers have high expectations regarding their students' attainment and there was evidence of analysis of participation at the various levels in the certificate examinations. These data should be scrutinised further and findings extracted and used as a basis for

setting out improvement targets in teaching and learning, and for raising expectations higher.

The practices regarding corrections varied. Examples of excellent practice of correction for learning were to be seen in the written work of students in particular subjects. In other cases, however, a regular habit should be made of providing helpful feedback to the students on their written work.

The vast majority of parents indicated that they were satisfied with the overview given in the school reports of the students' progress. Reports are now provided monthly in the case of students in certificate examination classes. These reports could be developed to provide helpful guidance in order to improve learning. It would be worth linking the learning objectives set out individually with the Guidance teacher in Leaving Certificate year with the reports.

Various models are used to provide support for students with special educational needs and it is commendable that this is mostly in-class support.

An important aspect which complements learning is the opportunities to participate in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. The school's teachers are to be commended for providing a range of activities encompassing sport, drama, music and debating.

4 IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

There is a limited number of subject inspection reports - three - published about the school, namely Music, English and Guidance. The senior management has engaged with the recommendations and has made progress in their implementation. Teachers have since obtained qualifications in Guidance and Learning Support. Limited progress was made in making additional provision for English in junior cycle but that additional provision has since been curtailed. The board is reminded that the opportunity exists to respond to the reports' findings and recommendations – an opportunity which has not yet been taken.

4.2 Learning and teaching

Individual staff members from the subject departments took individual responsibility for the implementation of recommendations. The implementation of the most recent recommendations for Music was a work in progress during the evaluation, and development could be seen in that subject's plan regarding the recommendations for planning. It should be mentioned that questioning strategies were a common guidance in the reports published and that it was clear in two thirds of the lessons observed that the practices were in accordance with those recommendations. It would be worth sharing inspection reports with all the teaching staff in order to identify common recommendations for improvement systematically.

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

An area for fundamental development is school self-evaluation, which has been identified by the school itself. Self-evaluation practices are identified in some of the planning work at the subject level of Music. It was indicated that the WSE-MLL evaluation stimulated the

process of reflection among the teaching staff and that preparations are being made to commence the SSE process formally. The appointment of a member of staff as liaison teacher for literacy during the WSE-MLL assessment was a positive sign. The opportunity should be taken under the SSE process to establish proper structures for school development planning on a whole-school basis.