

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

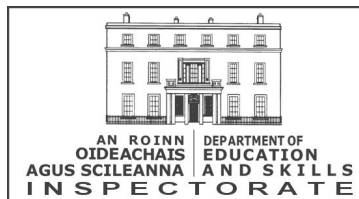
Department of Education and Skills

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

**Coláiste Cois Life
Griffeen Valley**

**Lucan, County Dublin
Roll number: 76065H**

Date of inspection: 9 May 2013



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in May 2013 in Coláiste Cois Life. 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, 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 Cois Life was established in 1997 as an all-Irish post-primary school. Having been accommodated in temporary premises for nine years, a new building was opened in 2006 in Griffeen Valley in Lucan. Coláiste Cois Life is a designated community college with a Catholic ethos, operating at the time of the inspection under the patronage of County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (now Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board).

Student numbers are increasing progressively and in the school year 2012-2013 a total of 425 students were enrolled. Students attending Coláiste Cois Life come, for the most part, from five all-Irish primary schools in Lucan, Leixlip, Maynooth and Kilcock. Pupil numbers in the local catchment area—and especially in the all-Irish feeder schools—have increased significantly. As a result, there is high demand for places in the school, and from the school year 2013-2014 Coláiste Cois Life will be unable to accept all applicants from the feeder primary schools.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- School management and teaching staff are strongly committed to the Irish language, Irish culture and to education through the medium of Irish.
- Effective school management structures are in place.
- The senior management team provides very good leadership for the teaching staff and administrative matters are very well organised in the school.
- The teaching staff is diligent and committed to the education of their students.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good in the majority of lessons observed during the evaluation.
- Excellent care and support are provided for students.

Recommendations for Further Development

- Meetings of the board of management should be held on a more regular basis and the board should be more proactive in providing leadership.
- The requirements of Circular 29/95, in relation to the length of the school week, should be implemented without delay.
- Strategies to improve teaching and learning should be developed and implemented.

- A whole-school approach should be used to improve the accuracy of students in oral and written Irish.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is appropriately constituted. The board provides valuable support to the senior management team, and the necessary policies have been adopted by the board. Generally, board of management meetings are held once a term. This means that there is insufficient time to deal with matters such as teaching and learning, examination results and school self-evaluation. More regular board meetings would enable the board to discuss reports from subject departments, for example, or to discuss subject inspection reports and formulate a school response.

It is recommended, therefore, that board meetings be held on a more regular basis—at least five times in the school year, as recommended in the guidelines of the Irish Vocational Educational Association (IVEA). It is also recommended that the board's practice in relation to the review of the various policies listed in the Inspectorate's guidelines for school self-evaluation, be agreed on.

As regards the school's senior management, the principal and deputy principal work well together and their roles are clearly defined. They provide very effective management, especially in relation to the day-to-day administration of the school. Middle management structures have been established; the roles and duties of assistant principals have been identified, and these duties respond to the school's requirements.

A democratically elected student council is in place. The council participates appropriately in the life of the school, and work has begun on writing a constitution. It is recommended that training be provided for members of the council and the role of the council further developed. The parents' association, *Cairde Cois Life*, is very active in the life of the school. Its committee provides support to school management and has an important role in policy development, communication and in the decision-making process in general.

Communication is very good in the school. Newsletters, an annual report and an information booklet are issued to parents. Parents are welcome in the school and given an opportunity to express opinion or concern. To enhance communication, it is recommended that the school's website be further developed and that all school policies as well as the school self-evaluation report be made available online. It is recommended that an account of academic matters, such as student achievement in the certificate examinations, be included in the school's annual report.

The school has developed a strategic plan for the period 2012 to 2015 and nine priorities have been identified. This plan is a work in progress, with scope for development. A planning schedule has been set out for five of these priorities. A review of the strategic plan is recommended, with perhaps fewer priorities. Teaching and learning needs to be central in the strategic plan; for example, priorities regarding the improvement of teaching and learning.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

School senior management is very diligent and committed to excellence and to education through the medium of Irish. They provide the teaching staff with effective leadership. The principal and deputy principal have excellent human resource management skills, they foster a positive attitude and goodwill among the teachers, and they give them every encouragement and support.

It is commendable that a post of responsibility for the induction of new teachers has been created in the school. The comprehensive handbook provided for teachers is to be especially commended: it contains all the necessary information, especially those who are newly appointed. Teachers who are not yet experienced in teaching through the medium of Irish are given assistance to develop their language skills.

Good structures are in place to facilitate subject planning, and very good work has been achieved in the subject departments in developing and reviewing subject plans. Subject departments have begun to analyse the certificate examination results and compare them with national norms. In order to obtain maximum benefit from this analysis, it is recommended that a brief commentary be added and that, where there is scope for improvement, targets be set as part of the subject department's strategy. It is recommended that each subject department in turn would have an opportunity to make a presentation to the board of management.

Minutes of staff meetings are maintained and a wide range of topics relating to school life discussed. However, more discussion at whole-school level is needed on particular aspects of teaching and learning. Areas for discussion could include, for example, assessment for learning, strategies to promote literacy and numeracy, and ways to improve students' accuracy in written and oral Irish. In these areas there is scope for senior management to develop their role as regards instructional leadership.

In the action plan alluded to above, there are two priorities concerning continuing professional development (CPD) for the teaching staff. These are training in information and communications technology (ICT) and a first-aid course for staff. Review and expansion of these priorities would be worthwhile, so that a comprehensive CPD programme would be central to the school's action plan.

In order to share good teaching practice and to support newly appointed members of staff—especially newly qualified teachers—it is recommended that collaborative professional review of teaching and learning form part of the CPD programme. Advice and resources in this regard are available in the Inspectorate's guidelines on school self-evaluation.

It is recommended also that competence and capacity be fostered among staff by means of participation, when possible, in projects such as TL21, or in projects connected to assessment for learning or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

The school offers a high-quality curricular programme to its students. A very wide range of subjects is provided, and planning is ongoing to extend this range. As part of that planning, a discussion on the possibility of offering the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is recommended. In the current Transition Year (TY) programme students spend five weeks on work experience. This amount of time is considered excessive and a review of this arrangement is recommended.

Incoming first-year students decide their subject preferences before entering the school; there is no opportunity for them to sample optional subjects. A review of this practice is recommended, to explore the possibility of offering students a taster programme in optional subjects so that they could make a more informed choice.

At the time of the evaluation, the minimum number of twenty-eight teaching hours per week, as required by Circular 29/95, was not being provided. The shortfall was more than an hour and a half per week. The requirements of the circular should be put in place without delay.

Timetabled class periods are thirty-five minutes long. These periods are considered too short, especially as students have to move from classroom to classroom and quite an amount of time is lost in this way. A review of this aspect of the timetable is recommended.

School attendance is closely monitored. The school journal is used effectively to maintain communication with students' homes. There is a very clear code of behaviour, which students and parents all understand, and this code is implemented effectively. During the evaluation the good behaviour of students was noted.

There is a rule for the use of Irish, to ensure that students speak Irish while in school. This is an important rule in the life of the school and it is enthusiastically enforced. The success of the rule is evidenced by the fact that during the evaluation students were heard speaking only Irish around the school.

The Guidance plan and guidance practices are very good. Provision for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) are satisfactory and serve the needs of the students.

The support and care provided for students is very good. Opportunity is provided for students to develop leadership skills, as prefects of Irish for example, or as members of the sports committee. Questionnaires were administered to students and parents as part of the evaluation process. It was evident from the responses that both parents and students are very satisfied with the quality of education provided in the school.

A wide range of extra-curricular activities is offered, which greatly assists the personal, cultural and social development of students. A good example of the type of holistic education provided for students is the Active School Flag. Members of staff are to be congratulated on the collaborative work undertaken to achieve the flag.

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 requirement of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

1.3 Management of facilities

School accommodation is maintained to a very high standard and school facilities generally are well managed. Photographs of school events and student achievement are displayed on school corridors. The clear signage evident throughout the school is to be especially commended, as well as the posters and various displays which help to create an attractive learning environment.

ICT resources in classrooms are very good, and the development of an e-portal system for the school has been identified as a priority.

Currently, an arrangement obtains where students take turns in helping to clean the dining room at the end of lunch time. It is recommended that the school ensures that students do not miss any teaching time while assisting in this task.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

In the course of the evaluation eighteen lessons, across a range of subjects and year groups, were observed. The quality of teaching and learning was good in the majority of classes. In a few cases the quality of teaching was excellent, and in a few instances significant weaknesses were evident.

Long-term plans were of a high standard generally. Planning and preparation for teaching through Irish were very good: teachers are diligent in this regard and are to be highly commended. In certain cases there was scope for development in relation to the identification of learning objectives in the short-term planning.

In general, lessons were well structured and learning objectives were clear. Best practice was observed where learning objectives were very clear and sufficiently challenging. However, only on rare occasions was time left at the end of the lesson period for recapitulation and for assessing the attainment of the lesson objectives. Lesson periods are quite short, and frequently not all of this time is available for teaching.

For the most part, a good range of learning activities was evident, but in a minority of lessons the activities chosen were not appropriate.

In almost all instances, student management was very good, and students were very well behaved and well mannered. Good relationships were evident between students and teachers, and students were affirmed and praised for their efforts.

As regards assessment, appropriate homework is assigned and checked regularly. Common examinations are arranged, and examples of written examinations reviewed during the evaluation were of a high standard. The system of continuous assessment established in the school is to be commended. In a number of copybooks, constructive statements and recommendations for improvement, rather than marks, were noted. This good practice is in keeping with the principles of assessment for learning and should be extended.

In almost every classroom visited, teachers had created positive learning environments through the use of posters, maps, displays and examples of student work. In some classrooms subject-specific terminology was displayed, or samples of common errors and terms to foster literacy. Teaching aids of a very high standard had been prepared by teachers to support teaching and learning.

Students participated very well in classes. Students surveyed reported that they enjoy lessons and that classes are interesting. However, more opportunities could be provided for students to report on and explain their own learning. It is recommended that more opportunities be provided for students to speak in order to foster fluency and to reinforce their understanding of lesson content.

As this is an all-Irish school, one would have expected a greater emphasis on literacy and accuracy in Irish in the lessons observed. For example, there was very little evidence of students' Irish being corrected. In the interests of fostering language awareness and accuracy in oral and written Irish, it is recommended that common strategies be agreed and promoted at whole-school level. The very effective points system used in the Irish rule

could form part of this strategy. In addition, a short intensive course on aspects of the language could be provided for teachers who would like one.

If one overarching recommendation to improve teaching and learning were to be made, it is that the teaching staff would begin to implement the principles of assessment for learning systematically across the curriculum. For example: to set out very clear learning objectives and share them with students at the beginning of the lesson; to inform students of the criteria for success; to employ questioning techniques which stimulate thought and discussion; to check in every lesson for the achievement of the learning objectives; to provide written feedback in copybooks; to involve students in monitoring and assessing their own progress; and to provide opportunities for students to reflect on their own work and identify how they can improve.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

To date, three subject inspection reports on Coláiste Cois Life have been published: English (2007), History (2011) and Irish (2012). During the current evaluation, an account was given of the progress made in implementing recommendations regarding management issues, and these have been implemented.

Some progress has been achieved in implementing the recommendations regarding teaching and learning. It is worth noting that inspection reports should be discussed at whole-school level, since recommendations rarely apply to one specific subject area alone, but usually have implications for teaching practices in other subject departments as well.

Four sample recommendations regarding teaching and learning were reviewed during this evaluation to assess the progress made to date in their implementation. These recommendations concerned assessment for learning, questioning to foster higher-order thinking skills, and the development of student oral skills. While some progress had been made, in the majority of the lessons observed the same recommendations could be made again.

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

The culture and practices of self-evaluation have been established and are being consolidated in Coláiste Cois Life. The board of management and senior management in particular reflect on the strengths of the school and on future challenges. This was evident in the presentation made by the board at the beginning of the evaluation. Principles of self-evaluation are evident also in the subject planning completed to date and in the various committees set up in the school. The school prepares an annual report for the VEC, and this practice is an excellent basis for the ongoing school self-evaluation process.

In the school year 2012-2013, a central self-evaluation committee in relation to literacy and numeracy was established, and the six-step process was initiated. It is recommended that the school now proceed to undertaking a systematic self-evaluation of teaching and learning using the tools provided in the Inspectorate's guidelines.

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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 quality of leadership and management:

The board, the teachers, the parents and the students were very satisfied with the findings as regards:

1.1 Ownership and management of the school:

- The board of management and the support it provides to senior management.
- The senior management and middle management, serving the needs of the school.
- The student council and its active role in the life of the school.
- Communication with the school community, and especially with the parents.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning:

- The good structures in place as regards planning in subject departments.
- The high-quality curricular programme
- The Irish rule and the fact that Irish is the spoken language in the school.
- The support systems and the care for students, as evidenced by the responses to the student and parent questionnaires
- The wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer in the school.

1.3 Management of facilities:

- The high standard of school accommodation and the good management of facilities.
- The attractive learning environment which is noticeable in the school.

2.0 The quality of teaching and learning:

- Very good long-term planning and preparation for teaching through Irish
- While learning objectives were generally clear, there is scope for greater sharing of the objectives with the students, for more systematic implementation of the principles of assessment for learning, and for recapitulation at the end of lessons to make sure that the learning objectives have been attained.

- Management of students was very good and students' behaviour and good manners were evident.
 - Assessment systems are in place, appropriate homework is given and corrected regularly, high-quality common examinations are set, and there is continuous assessment for third year, fifth year and sixth year.
3. Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations:
- Although the recommendations from three inspection reports (English 2007, History 2011, Irish 2012) had been implemented at subject department level, they needed to be discussed at whole-school level and implemented across subject departments.
4. The school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement:
- There is a very good basis for the culture and practices of school 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 terms of Circular 29/95 are in place for the school year 2013-2014.
- At the beginning of the school year 2013-2014 the whole staff had an in-service day focusing on assessment for learning and how to implement it across the curriculum.
- There will be more meetings of the board of management in future.
- In collaboration with Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board, we intend organising a course in accuracy in Irish for the teachers,
- A whole-school campaign, based on the points scheme and supported by the Irish prefects, will emphasise accuracy in Irish among the students.