

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Coláiste Oiriall  
Monaghan  
Roll Number: 76091I**

**Date of inspection: 25 September 2013**



**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 September 2013 in Coláiste Oiriall. 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 Oiriall was opened in temporary accommodation on the site of Coláiste Ard Feá, Monaghan, in 2004 under the auspices of the Vocational Educational Committee, the first all-Irish post-primary school in the county with twenty eight students enrolled. In February 2013 the school moved to a newly-built premises on the County Monaghan VEC educational campus with a confirmed enrolment of 274. The new building has a capacity for 400 students. The educational programmes available are the Junior Certificate, Transition Year, which is obligatory, and the established Leaving Certificate.

Initially the school principally a demand for continuity in all-Irish education for children from all-Irish primary schools. There is a growing demand now for all-Irish post-primary education from parents whose children attended English-medium primary schools.

## **1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

### ***1.1 Key Findings***

- A creditable all-Irish post-primary education alternative has been made available in Monaghan within a short period of years for both all-Irish primary school children and English-medium primary school children by the excellence of the provision in Coláiste Oiriall.
- The senior management are a competent team which operates as a unit and which is dedicated to ensuring the highest educational standards for the students.
- It is thought that the workload of the senior management team is unsustainable in the long term under the current arrangements.
- Appropriate obligations regarding student leadership are placed on the middle management team and these duties are being fulfilled effectively.
- The improvement of the quality of teaching and learning is a primary objective of the senior management team and there is strong evidence that the leadership to this end is very successful.
- There is high morale in the teaching staff due to the principal's and deputy principal's leadership with a high standard of excellence being achieved in every aspect of the functioning of Coláiste Oiriall.

- In nearly every class observed there were strengths in teaching and learning and the learning and teaching were perceived to be of a high standard in more than half.
- There were opportunities for active learning in practically all lessons, mostly involving group or pair work.
- Students participated fully in learning and were being well-trained as independent learners.
- Attention has been paid at management level to all the recommendations made in the inspection reports and those recommendations have been implemented.
- Excellent work has been done in developing the school development plan in literacy and this is a good indication of Coláiste Oiriall's capacity and preparedness for school self-evaluation.

## ***1.2 Recommendations for Further Development***

- An area for development is to have the board of management more central in the management of the school.
- The senior management are advised to review their management duties and to delegate certain responsibilities.
- This is now a suitable time to manage and guide the middle management team on a more formal basis. In general, there is a need to be more specific about roles and duties and to end the *ad hoc* approach associated with the school being small, which placed too many responsibilities on the school's senior management as a normal practice.
- Priority should be given to reviewing the code of conduct to bring it in line with the practice of fostering good behaviour which is very successful in the school.

## **2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

### ***2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management***

All the Coláiste Oiriall interested parties have recognised the strong support of the Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board (ETB) chief executive officer specifically for the all-Irish educational project on Monaghan education campus.

The evaluation showed that another creditable option, of all-Irish post-primary education, has been provided in Monaghan town in a short period of years for all-Irish primary pupils and English-medium primary pupils. The school has succeeded in reaching all the estimated enrolment targets and it is predicted that the new building's 400-student capacity will be reached by 2020.

The board of management is appropriately constituted, trained for its functions, and capable of implementing its activities through Irish. It has made recommendations to the ETB, regarding the approval of a series of mandatory policies.

It is recommended that priority be given to review the code of conduct in order to implement appropriately the whole school consultation process which is the basis of the National Educational Welfare Board's guidelines on fostering good behaviour. The entrance policy should be reviewed latter to suit the increased demand for places in the school, and to review the entrance criteria in particular.

An area for development is to have the board of management more central in the management of the school and to create links with other bodies such as the student council.

It would be worth the board's while to adopt review and evaluation procedures regarding the principal policies of the school and to provide input to the whole-school improvement and development areas and for those to be the item for development of a school plan which is specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and timed (SMART). This would entail the formulation of clear strategies and timeframes.

In order to improve the board's feedback practice, it is recommended that consideration be given to publishing an annual report of the functioning of the school to the school's community.

The principal and deputy principal are a capable management team who work long hours in order to achieve a high standard of excellence in every aspect of the functioning of the school. There is great respect for their effectiveness as a unit throughout the school and for the example they show in completing their professional duties.

It is felt, however, that the sustainability of the workload of the senior management team is in danger, if current conditions persist. Heavy teaching duties fall on the deputy principal, for example, in addition to management duties, and the principal operates without that support for a large part of the school day. The pair focus on management work together mostly before and after school time.

With the school growing as it is, the senior management team are advised to review their management duties and to delegate other duties, as much as possible. Those duties recommended in this case include planning for the administration of school development.

Appropriate duties, dealing with student leadership, have been allocated to the middle management team which include two assistant principals and two teachers with special duties together with the Transition Year programme coordinator. These duties are being fulfilled effectively.

The time is now right to administer and guide the middle management team on a more formal basis. In general, there is a need to be more specific about roles and duties and to end the *ad hoc* approach associated with the school being small, which placed too many responsibilities on the school's senior management as a normal practice.

Leadership is being well-developed among the students with the students' council and the new leadership system which was launched during the evaluation. Cooperation with parents is very strong in the school and representatives of the parents' committee take an active part in curriculum development, in the development of school policies, in school activities, from celebratory activities to publicity and information activities on behalf the school.

## ***2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

The improvement of the quality of teaching and learning is a primary target of the senior management team and there is strong evidence that the leadership to this end is very successful. The school's community clearly trust what is being achieved.

The senior management team has developed a network of professional contacts which assists the provision of teachers who are capable in their subject and competent in Irish. An example of this is the ongoing contact with the post-graduate diploma course in education (PDE) in NUI Galway.

During the evaluation, high morale was evident among the teaching staff and this was associated with the principal's and deputy principal's leadership, affirmation, high

expectations of achieving the school's vision, examples and professional support. Special emphasis is placed on the teaching staff's continuous professional development (CPD).

The teaching staff have appropriate qualifications in their subjects and have been assigned teaching duties commensurate with those qualifications. Other teachers are obtaining additional qualifications to be suitably qualified in other subjects. Most of the staff have achieved or are achieving post-graduate qualifications — including Learning Support, and Guidance at the moment.

The management has established a reflective approach to preparation and review of teaching and learning in the case of the teachers. This was to be seen in the subject plans observed, which paid attention to identifying learning targets and to make the student's learning experience central to the lessons. This was clear especially in the Transition Year plan and in the review of teaching programmes.

There was recognition also for the work of various subject departments in planning matters and designing resources in Irish for the classroom and that this material was shared freely with other Gaelcholáistí and with an Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta.

A reflective approach towards learning is being developed with the students also, particularly with the student's handbook in Transition Year, where Transition Year students are obliged to engage in self-evaluation of personal progress in learning and a critical attitude towards the merit of the learning programme.

There is a mentoring system to guide staff members and peer observation is practised in order to share best practice. It would be worth while for the staff to develop team teaching further for the sake of variety and to affirm excellence in learning.

It is commendable that there is a common understanding that the school is concerned with recognising and maximising every child's learning capacity in a happy learning environment as opposed to academic achievement only. The analysis of attainment in the certificate examinations shows that academic achievement is robust in Coláiste Oiriail.

Good care is taken with students with special educational needs in the subject plans and a qualified specialist will be in charge of this department in due course. In the meantime a teacher with significant experience has those duties. Guidance in learning and resource support is being given to all the staff and the fact that many of the staff have hands-on experience in this work is regarded as beneficial to teaching and learning in the school.

A very wide curriculum is provided in the school and thirteen optional Leaving Certificate subjects are available. Together with creative modules such studying digital media and law, these Leaving Certificate subjects are available in Transition Year. It is recommended that due regard be paid to the optional subjects, History, Geography and Business in a review of the Transition Year programme. An amalgamation of the first two subjects is provided as a co-disciplinary module but the Business subject is missing.

A good indication of the teachers' diligence is that all members participate in various committees which support the students' learning. As a result of curriculum planning committee's research work the recommendation was made to remove French as a core subject in the junior cycle to benefit certain students who had difficulty in acquiring a third language. Metalwork is now available as well as Materials Technology (Wood) and Technical Graphics.

The school transition arrangements from primary school are highly commendable, including the friendship awareness week. That commendation applies in particular to the six-week Irish-language support programme organised on Saturdays. The school itself has proof that all-Irish post-primary education is no hindrance to students from English-medium primary schools.

The well-being and welfare of the student is core to the work of the school. There is strong evidence of this in the answers to the questionnaires. Indicative of this is the extra class period introduced this year to promote physical exercise and to guarantee worthwhile recreational activities to those students who are not inclined towards sporting matters. It would be worth building on the existing good practice and appointing a specific duties team, something which is warranted by the many students which are being specially catered for on a regular basis.

A very large number of both parents and students that there is active participation in a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular events. The school has won major national prizes in these events which greatly enhance a broad education.

There are sound arrangements regarding the investigation of students' attendance and the parents' representatives attest to the effectiveness of the home liaison in absenteeism matters. It was clear from the students' diaries observed that the diary is an effective communications medium between school and home.

The current written code of conduct is not a good reflection of the positive behaviour which is fostered in the school or of the parents' and students' positive attitude towards behaviour issues in the school and it should be reviewed as a priority.

The admissions policy needs to be reviewed. The provisions of this policy must be clear and specific right down to the allocation of the last place in the school to an applicant, and the criteria and order of priority which will be applied where the number of applications exceeds the number of available places. The current policy does display such clarity.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) are available as appropriate and additional input to personal development. The response of parents and students indicates a widespread knowledge of these programmes.

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*.

### **2.3 Management of facilities**

The school has excellent resources and facilities. These facilities are well-managed and the students show respect for the school's property and resources. The movement of students throughout the school and outside is well ordered.

The additional development of information and communications technology (ICT) in learning in Coláiste Oiriall is among the short-term priorities in the whole-school plan. As a first step in this development an iPad has been provided this year to each teacher. Students' access to the school library and to a widened supply of books is core to the literacy project which has been launched in the school. There is good provision for physical education on the school's timetable. The available sports facilities are used as appropriate.

An up-to-date and appropriate health and safety statement is in place. The Green Flag might be an appropriate target in order to further promote environmental awareness.

### **3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

Nineteen lessons were observed during the evaluation with nineteen teachers, nearly all the entire teaching staff. In nearly every case of these lessons there were strengths to the teaching and learning and the learning and teaching was perceived to be of high quality in more than half. In the case of a very small minority of the lessons weaknesses in the teaching and scope for development were perceived.

There was very good preparation for the lessons and good resources were prepared as a good support for learning. This was evidenced in the clear learning objectives shared with the students at the start of the lesson in nearly every case. In certain cases, however, the learning objectives were gone through at high speed. In the most successful lessons the learning objectives were recalled and were returned to at the end of the lesson to assess the progress made with them. Repetition relates to learning and this best practice is stated to affirm learning objectives.

ICT resources, which were commonly used, added greatly to the effect of the lessons. In a practical lesson the teacher denied himself the use of these resources, as was appropriate, and did the drawing carefully on the white board by hand as an example to the students who had to do the same.

There were opportunities for active learning in nearly every lesson, mostly involving group work or pair work. It is recommended that a better structure be placed on the group work, that roles be determined and that gaps in knowledge be filled. It was significant how the best lessons showed the empathy of the teachers with their own subject, a good sign of self-confidence and qualifications in the subject. The junior students sampling optional subjects were reassured that they would quickly get a grasp of the challenges associated with those subjects.

Teaching was done clearly and discussion followed with the students to ensure understanding. In certain senior classes it was noticed that teachers had ongoing discussion with the students while questions were being resolved on the board. In the best lessons seen the teacher deliberately stayed one step behind the students and allowed them to guide the teacher in the approach to answering a Leaving Certificate question. The quality of both questioning and answering in these lessons, and the pace of this, indicated clearly that the students were participating fully in learning and were being well trained as independent learners. In a lesson in the junior cycle the teacher was observed being silent at times in order to get students to count before the class. The students responded excellently to this challenge.

There was an inclination in other cases to share information too early with the students or to answer questions too soon before there was a suitable opportunity to consider the question. It is recommended to place a prior learning stage in the lesson as a challenge to the students to show what they already know at first and an opportunity to praise that much.

It was evident that good attention was paid to literacy in the vast majority of lessons. There is greater scope in some cases to display the range of language required in certain subjects on the classroom walls.

There was a different approach to providing students with contact with the target language in two different lessons. In the best example the students had contact easily with the target

language from the teacher, there was practice of the spoken language, of asking and answering questions, and of accurate pronunciation as an integral part of the lesson.

The management of lessons was highly commendable but shouldn't seek to do too much in the odd lesson and manage time better. The students and teachers had respect for each other and the focus was on learning throughout. Overall the lessons were challenging and achievable and differentiation skills were obvious in the different questioning. The students were keen to learn, fully cooperative and there was a pleasant atmosphere. Homework was assigned and this work was noted in the diaries in a timely manner before the end of the lesson.

#### **4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

##### ***4.1 Management***

Attention has been paid at management level to all the recommendations made in the published reports of subject inspections and in the unpublished and those recommendations have been implemented. Attention has been paid to developing best practice in the subject departments' planning work and on ensuring consistency. The school has developed a wide curriculum in order to serve the needs of all students.

##### ***4.2 Learning and Teaching***

Attention has been paid to the recommendations and an account was seen in appropriate subject plans of the implementation of the recommendations. A newly-appointed teacher on the staff confirmed that a copy of a relevant subject inspection report was provided to him, that his attention was directed specifically to the recommendations and to strategies for their implementation. The language passport has been introduced to the self-assessment for Irish in Transition Year as a step to develop quality recognition and assurance in learning in the students. The subject plans show an attention to learners' needs, to specifying learning targets and to place the learner at the centre of the lesson.

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

A very successful start has been made to school self-evaluation. The school focussed on self-evaluation as soon as the project was announced and the steps were followed as set out in the process. The current focus is on improving the students' Irish-language literacy and a whole-school action plan as well as strategies and review system have been published to achieve the targets.

The recommendations and the preparatory work for this project came from the central literacy and self-evaluation group but it is to be implemented as a whole-school policy. A presentation on the school improvement plan (SIP) has been prepared to share with parents. Excellent work has been done to develop the SIP in literacy.



## **Appendix**

### **School response to the report**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

### **Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

Coláiste Oiriall welcomes the positive report and we wish to highly commend the teaching staff members who participated in the inspection. The Board of Management is particularly pleased at the following matters that were noted in the report: strengths in teaching and learning; very good preparation in lessons; excellent resources and facilities; student welfare and wellbeing as core matters in the school; a very broad curriculum, high morale among the teaching staff, the reflective approach in planning and learning, the good attention to special educational needs students, the commitment of teachers who are members of various committees, the very good school transfer arrangements from the primary school, arrangements for monitoring student attendance, good opportunities for active learning, careful attention paid to literacy, good lesson management, good differentiation skills in the varied questioning, a capable management team, good leadership development among the students and a very successful start to 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 Board of Management will meet with the Student Council, the Parents' Association and the teaching staff before the end of the school year, the board will review the main school policies and in future will publish an annual report.

The Board of Management has appointed an Assistant principal as School Development Planning Co-ordinator who will have responsibility for ensuring that the school is engaging satisfactorily with school self-evaluation, literacy and numeracy, school priorities and the School Plan. The Principal held formal meetings separately with each of the holders of posts of responsibility before Christmas to clarify duties and roles and to hear the postholders' views on developing the posts and to adjust the posts to better suit them. In future senior management will hold such a meeting with the postholders at least once a year.

The Board of Management approved a new Code of behaviour in December that is now implemented. The school began the review of this policy in January 2013.

*This is a translation of the school response submitted by the board of management.*