

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Ard scoil Éanna
Crumlin, Dublin 12
Roll number: 60990G**

Date of inspection: 12 December 2013



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
AGUS SCILEANNA** | **DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
AND SKILLS**
INSPECTORATE

Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in December 2013 in Ardscoil Éanna. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's management committee, in-school management, and groups of teachers 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

Ardscoil Éanna is a co-educational voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 137 students. The school was established in 1939 and remains in the ownership of the founding family, ensuring that the ethos, values and guiding principles of the founder have remained. The school is a member of the Federation of Lay Catholic Schools. The most recent owner died in October, 2013, and had requested that the school close. The trustees have taken a decision to close the school in three years. The school offers the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate and participates in the Department's DEIS initiative for delivering equality of opportunity in schools.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The school has traditionally had a unitary manager; a management committee that includes the principal currently discharges trustee and management functions.
- The current Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan is of a high quality.
- The principal and deputy principal have defined roles and areas of responsibility, and work well as a team.
- A key strength of the school is the professional and caring teaching staff who have taken on leadership and developmental roles within the school.
- There are good channels of communication in the school.
- Many subject plans require significant additional information on teaching and learning.
- The timetable provision for students falls short of the minimum 28 hours tuition required and not all students are provided with Physical Education (PE).
- The quality of teaching and learning was good in most lessons and very good in some instances, but in a small number of lessons there was considerable scope for development.
- Progress has been made in implementing recommendations from previous inspection reports but some recommendations have not yet been addressed.
- The school is capable of self-evaluation and has the capacity for school improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The school management structure should be developed to support a spirit of partnership and to enable greater strategic planning.
- Senior management should ensure that it is fully compliant with *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* and should ensure compliance with the Department's regulations regarding tuition time and provision of PE.
- A profiling system that monitors and tracks the academic progress of all students in a coherent manner should be progressed.
- Teachers should further explore and incorporate co-operative learning methods, Assessment for Learning (AfL) practices and differentiated questioning strategies into their practice, where appropriate.
- School management and staff should review the homework policy and devise whole-school numeracy and literacy policies that include effective and practical strategies to be used in the teaching of all subjects.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

Ardcoil Éanna was managed by the owner and the principal until October 2013. Five trustees have replaced the deceased owner. While a staged closure of the school is envisaged, it would be helpful to put in place a management structure that supports a partnership approach to strategic school planning for the foreseeable future. The spirit of partnership as envisaged in the Education Act of 1998 should underpin the formation of any new management structure. Consideration should also be given to co-opting an external educational expert to help and guide school management through the next three years.

The school has traditionally had a unitary manager who devolved an executive role to the principal in relation to the day-to-day operation of the school. A management committee that includes the principal currently discharges both trustee and management functions. As the school has taken on initiatives such as DEIS and the JCSP, the principal's managerial responsibilities have grown. At the bi-monthly meetings of the management committee, the principal reported on the operational activities of the school and on current national educational issues. In recent years, matters such as review and evaluation of key aspects of the school or the setting of long-term priorities have not featured on the agenda of the management committee. Nor was an annual report compiled for the school community on the operation and the performance of the school.

The school has never had a parents' association nor a student council. The principal operates an open-door policy for parents and students to address their concerns and views. However, there is a need for the overarching views and concerns of both parents and students to be represented more systematically. To further the development of a partnership approach, the setting up of a representative parents' association and student council is recommended so that they both have a formal voice in policy development and school self-evaluation, and can access an appropriate forum in which to articulate their views.

Generally policies were drafted by the school planning group and then reviewed by staff and on occasion by students and parents. Policies were ratified by the owner and they then formed part of the school plan. Some policies were not dated or signed and in some instances, previous out-of-date versions were included in the planning folder. To aid a

systematic review of all policies, it is advisable to create a template which lists all relevant and active policies and details the date of ratification and a proposed review date.

The school's management committee had identified school self-evaluation, the implementation of the new junior cycle reform and continuing professional development (CPD) in the area of assessment for learning (AfL) as priorities. In addition, the principal was concerned with improving electronic methods of communication and data collection within the school community and exploring ways to improve school buildings. While such priorities would normally be entirely appropriate, the decision to close the school in three years necessitates a review of these priorities.

A positive indicator of the capacity of the whole staff to engage with strategic planning was evident in the compilation of the current three year DEIS plan. A DEIS team was formed to lead the planning process, to gather baseline data and set targets. At the regular DEIS team meetings, targets are monitored and reviewed. At the end of the last school year, the principal and the School Completion Programme co-ordinator reviewed the year's achievements and set new targets for the coming year. This is good practice.

The policies in the school planning folder act as a good blueprint for the operation of the school. However, the school plan lacks a written development strategy. To fulfill statutory requirements and to act as a benchmark for school improvement, a three year plan that articulates the vision for the school and encompasses the current DEIS action plan and the school's self evaluation improvement plan should be collaboratively developed and agreed by all educational stakeholders.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal each have defined roles and areas of responsibility and work as a united team. Their work is characterised by a high level of collaboration and respect. Educational programming, management of personnel and liaising with external agencies are some of the responsibilities undertaken by the principal. The main focus for the deputy principal is the co-ordination of the discipline system, liaising with year heads and managing students' assessment records and reports. As already mentioned, the principal places a high priority on being available to parents and students and devotes considerable time and energy to this. While acknowledging the principal's commitment to students and parents, increasing managerial responsibilities also require more time and attention. It is advisable that wherever possible more formal communication structures be put in place so as to free up time for the principal in leading the school community.

The school's one assistant principal is an integral and effective part of the management team. He is year head to three year groups and is the examination secretary. He has a major role in the school's disciplinary system and is part of many school committees. Staff members presented as dynamic and motivated and, commendably, they have taken on additional leadership roles that contribute to the successful daily operation of the school.

Good channels of communication exist within the school. Monthly staff meetings provide a forum for discussion on aspects of school organisation and development. Almost all teachers are on a school organisational team which helps to strengthen co-operation and collaboration within the school and regular meetings are facilitated. While it is commendable that staff have leadership development opportunities, it is advisable that senior management review the function and composition of each team to minimise any duplication of activities.

Subject planning documentation was reviewed. There were some very good well-developed plans which outlined how a subject was to be delivered in the classroom and how student

attainment was to be assessed, and included teacher evaluation of their own practice. However, approximately half of the subject plans require significant additional information. It is evident from planning documentation that teachers work independently and follow their own individual plans of work for each of the subjects they teach. It is recommended that for subjects where there are a number of teachers, an agreed subject plan be designed collaboratively and implemented across that department. The existing well-designed subject plans can provide a benchmark for the further development of all subject plans.

The school offers an academic curriculum and the range of subjects is determined within the limitations set by student numbers and staff allocations. The co-operation with a local school resulting in the sharing of a teacher is admirable. This helped ensure that both schools can widen their subject choice. The combining of fifth and sixth-year class groupings for some subjects also demonstrates the willingness and efforts of school management to support and meet students' needs. Junior cycle students take all the subjects provided on the school's curriculum while Leaving Certificate students generally can choose a preferred option from four fixed subject choices. These choices are made as students start the new academic year and as a result the timetable for Leaving Certificate students is not set till September.

The daily 15-minute roll call and assembly is a means of sharing information with students. Its function was observed to be organisational and therefore cannot be considered part of the required 28 hours of instruction time for students. Senior management should ensure compliance with Circular M29/95 *Time in School*. In addition, school management should ensure to provide Physical Education for all year groups in accordance with Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools. Currently, a double period is allocated in first and second year and a single period is provided in fifth year. The configuration of the school day should be reviewed as the absence of a scheduled break time in the morning and the short lunch break, limit student opportunities for social interaction; a necessary component of teenagers' personal and social development.

Learning support is provided through resource mathematics and English classes and withdrawal classes are available for students who are exempt from studying Irish. Student learning is also supported through a range of JCSP literacy and numeracy initiatives. The learning support teacher works closely with the DEIS and pastoral care team to ensure the provision is student-centred. At the time of the evaluation there were unused hours allocated from the Department of Education and Skills and these should be deployed in relation to learning support.

A numeracy co-ordinator and committee are in place. While a document proposing some whole-school actions to promote numeracy has been drafted, there is in effect no whole-school numeracy policy. There is also no whole-school literacy policy. The development of these policies should be progressed to provide guidance for the implementation of whole-school approaches to literacy and numeracy and to show how the relevant DEIS action plan targets will be achieved.

The majority of students are taking examinations at ordinary or foundation level. In a small number of subjects, the percentage of students taking higher-level papers is good. Attainment is good in most subjects at all levels and poor in a small minority of subjects. An analysis of examination attainment is conducted by one teacher. This good practice should be conducted annually by all teachers so as to inform teaching and learning. In addition, an overarching profiling system to monitor, track and support academic progress in a coherent manner should be progressed. The profiling system should also include students' cognitive ability scores and other relevant information.

A key strength of the school is its professional and caring teaching staff. A clearly structured code of student behaviour and pastoral care is implemented through a student support system which is co-ordinated through weekly meetings of the care and JCSP teams. The newly appointed Home School Community Liaison co-ordinator plans to play a significant role in liaising with parents of children attending the school.

Career guidance was scheduled on a weekly basis for sixth-year students but fifth-year students were not receiving timetable guidance support, a matter which should be addressed. Students have good access to personal counselling services through self-referral or through year heads and the principal. Care for students is enhanced by the extra curricular activities such as the guitar, drama and hill walking clubs. The commitment of individual teachers and school management to these activities is acknowledged. In the responses to questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation, a very high percentage of students and parents stated that students felt safe and cared for in the school.

Students have some opportunities through their optional participation in Gaisce and some sporting activities to develop leadership skills and set challenges for themselves outside of formal learning activities. However, there is no class prefect system or student council operating in the school.

Confirmation was provided that the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* was formally adopted without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary School*. However, while the policy document held in the office was the current document which was signed and dated, the policy contained within the school plan was an older out-of-date version. The policy requires that the name of the designated liaison person (DLP) is displayed in a prominent position near the main entrance to the school. This was not the case the time of the evaluation. The school's Child Protection policy had not been brought to the attention of all parents.

1.3 Management of facilities

Good use is made of existing facilities to optimise educational activity. Most teachers are classroom based and this has resulted in bright, print-rich, and visually stimulating learning environments. Information and communication technology (ICT) facilities are available to support teaching and learning. An outside agency is employed to ensure that health and safety procedures are compliant with legislation and that a health and safety statement is in place. The provision of a reading room with good student friendly books was recently completed with JCSP funds and this is a very good development. There is potential to further develop the outside fabric of buildings, yard and garden so that they are aesthetically pleasing for students and staff.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Eighteen lessons were observed ranging across all year groups and almost all subjects. The quality of teaching and learning was good in most lessons and very good in some instances. However, in a small number of lessons there was significant scope for development in the types of teaching approaches used and in the management of students. The majority of lessons were well-planned and purposeful.

The majority of students were engaged in their learning and worked co-operatively in completing set tasks. In many lessons, the well-structured follow-on tasks afforded students

the opportunity to consolidate their learning. Best practice was noted in lessons which featured effective use of ICT and visual images, and used of a variety of teaching methodologies including co-operative and active learning. There is potential to further expand co-operative learning activities in lessons, where appropriate. In addition activities such as project work, debates and presentations could be established in all class groups so as to further involve students in leading their own learning and developing their key skills.

In most lessons, effective question and answer sessions supported and assessed students' learning. A mixture of global and directed questioning was observed in numerous lessons. Many students were capable of engaging with higher-order questioning and its use should be expanded. Greater use should be made of questions directed to named students to ensure the inclusion of quieter and less attentive students.

Attention to literacy was noted in many lessons particularly in the use of keywords and in activities to promote the acquisition of subject-related vocabulary. Attention to numeracy development in lessons was observed in relation to Mathematics but not in other subjects. The teaching staff should work together to set specific literacy and numeracy targets which can be further integrated into their mainstream subjects.

In modern language lessons, the teachers' and students' use of the target language in interactions and tasks was good. Teachers used a good range of visual resources to convey the meaning of the language and the use of aural work enhanced student pronunciation of the target language. In Irish lessons, strategies that encourage students to increase their usage of the language as the medium of communication could be more fully explored.

Only a minority of teachers shared clear and relevant learning outcomes with the students and many did not revisit the outcomes at the end of the lesson. Constructive feedback was given orally in many lessons; however, there were few examples of written formative feedback on students work. The observed good practices, including those which are central to the principles of AfL, should be extended to all lessons.

Classroom management was most effective in lessons where students were actively engaged and were afforded opportunities to experience success. In lessons which were predominantly teacher led, better planning and more activity would have enhanced student engagement and learning. Almost all teachers successfully managed any challenging behaviour but in a few lessons some students' behaviour impacted negatively on learning. This needs to be addressed through teacher professional development in the use of appropriate methodologies and classroom management skills.

In most lessons, a positive atmosphere prevailed and a good rapport between teachers and students, and among students, was evident. Teachers had good knowledge of their students' needs and often provided individualised support. While the pace of lessons was good overall, in some lessons it was too slow or too fast. Lesson pace should maximise learning for all students.

Good examples of student self assessment were observed in a small number of lessons while in the majority of lessons there were limited opportunities for students to assess their own or their peers' learning. It is advisable that students be involved more in assessing their own learning so as to further develop independent learning skills.

Homework was assigned in most lessons and there was evidence of some teacher corrections in a number of the students' copybooks examined. However, a review of journals showed that many students are either not set homework regularly or do not record it. A whole-school review of homework policy and practice should be carried out. All

teachers should monitor journals to ensure homework is being recorded. Furthermore, all teachers should keep a record of homework corrections in addition to examination results in order to track academic progress and inform students' choice of levels in the state examinations.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Since 2009, inspections of French, Science and Biology, Mathematics and English have taken place. They contained recommendations relating to timetabling, sourcing of resources, and development of subject planning. Management have enabled many of the recommendations to be implemented. A review of subject plans indicated that recommendations relating to the further development of subjects plans have been acted upon in the Science and Biology but not in Mathematics and English. Further development of subject plans including the setting of developmental goals for each subject should inform future planning.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Recommendations that related to the increased use of resources, ICT, target language and displays of student work have been addressed. There is still some scope for further development, as student learning will benefit from more applied use of active methodologies, differentiated learning techniques, AfL and suitable questioning strategies as outlined in this report as in previous evaluation reports.

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

The school is capable of self-evaluation and has the capacity for school improvement. The senior management team is committed to school improvement and has identified some developmental priorities. It was evident during the evaluation that there is close monitoring in the areas of attendance and retention. The principal is committed to improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Very good self-evaluation processes are evident in DEIS planning and in some subject departments. The school has the capacity to implement the recommendations arising from this evaluation report as the school's management and staff are committed to improvement.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The process looked at all aspects of the school and took into account its history and ethos. The WSE/ MLL acknowledged the work we are doing well and also helped us to identify areas where improvements can be made.

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

ACTIONS ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:

1. A Student Council has been established
2. School management structure has been developed to include an external educational expert and a legal expert.
3. CPD in Assessment for learning (AfL) and aspects of co-operative learning is being provided to staff in this school year and will be further developed in 2014 /15.
4. Unused hours allocated were deployed from January to learning support primarily. However, hours to career guidance were also increased to provide greater access to all other years particularly 5th years and 3rd years, as recommend in WSE.
5. While the name of DLP person (at time of WSE) was displayed on three signs in the entrance to main area which houses Principal and School administrator's offices and also in both of these offices, further signs are now on display in assembly area and in every classroom.

ACTIONS TO BE UNDERTAKEN IN 2014/15

1. Compliance with Circular M29/95 will be addressed in the 2014/15 timetable.
2. PE will be provided to all years.
3. A review of our homework policy and development of whole school numeracy and literacy policies will be priorities for 2014/15 school planning.
4. For the last number of years serious effort has been made to establish a parents' association. We will continue to encourage and facilitate the establishment of a PA, despite the difficulties already encountered in previous years.