

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Grange Community College
Donaghmede, Dublin 13
Roll number: 70020B**

Date of inspection: 17-20 October 2011



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in October, 2011 in Grange Community College. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management 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

Grange Community College is multi-denominational, catering for 161 male and female students which operates within the auspices of County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC). The school participates in DEIS, *Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools*, the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. The college also provides courses for adults.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good.
- The school is meeting many needs of its student population.
- The board of management is very engaged with the school.
- There is a strong history of engagement with school development planning.
- There is an open approach to the welfare of students.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The DEIS plan should be progressed as a matter of priority.
- The senior management team now needs to redefine its duties.
- The implementation of the code of behaviour requires careful managing.
- The school needs to evaluate the effectiveness of support being provided to all students with special educational needs.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

There is a high level of communication between the trustees and the school. The chief executive officer (CEO) meets regularly with all principals in the scheme.

The current board of management, formed in March 2010, is constituted appropriately and meets regularly. The VEC has made training available for the full board. The board is very engaged with the school. However, in recent months, the board has spent most of its time dealing with individual student management issues. There is a need for the board to

recognise that these meetings are extraordinary and should designate these meetings as additional to, but separate from those that deal with normal board matters such as governance issues and teaching and learning. For instance, the school is at an early stage of DEIS planning and the board should focus more attention on ensuring that the plan is completed and implemented. It is recommended that the board ensures that it is this framework which underpins all curriculum planning in the school.

It is very good to note that the board has developed a link with the student council and this practice could now extend to the parent association. This is important as the majority of parents are not aware of the board's activities.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has adopted the Department's Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (Published September 2004) but has yet to formalise this compliance. This is being addressed. Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

The school's priorities for development

The board and the principal have a shared vision for the school: to increase enrolment. However, they have yet to consider other planning priorities such as learning and teaching. Management should now spend time developing the school as a centre of excellence and a community of learning. As part of this, the professional developmental needs of the teaching staff should also be considered. It is acknowledged that the school accessed training in the area of assessment for learning (afl) for teachers. However, other training needs should now be addressed including mixed ability teaching, differentiation and teaching students with differing learning needs.

The school has a history of engagement with the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI). Formal school development planning is well under way in this school. The school has adopted very good planning practices. A number of planning committees were established and policies were developed which were ratified by the previous board. These good practices will be very valuable as the school progresses the DEIS plan. In the next review of the Special Education Needs (SEN) policy, the school is advised to refer to the post-primary guidelines *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs (2007)* and ensure that it reflects the differing learning needs of all students.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The senior management team comprising principal and deputy principal has demonstrated a strong commitment to the school. The principal was appointed in 2007 and the deputy principal in 2009. Their roles have evolved over time. They are dedicated to the welfare of students and have a very open approach to parents. They work very well together. This is endorsed by a large number of parents who state in questionnaires that the school is very well run.

The principal is involved in almost all facets of school life and devotes considerable time to student management. A large number of parents state in the questionnaires that discipline is

good; the current extent of principal input needs to be addressed. The school should explore the feasibility of developing an internal discipline committee which would serve three purposes. First, this committee would be an important layer in the implementation of the code of behaviour. Secondly, it would provide the principal with more time to focus on broader planning issues and thirdly, it would build leadership capacity amongst the teaching staff.

The deputy principal, in addition to her teaching duties, provides a high level of support to the principal in the day-to-day management of the mainstream school. The other half of her time is spent co-ordinating all Post Leaving Certificate courses (PLCs) and further education provision in the college.

Some aspects of leadership have been devolved to post holders. This school currently has an allocation of eight posts of responsibility, three assistant principal (AP) posts and five special duties (SD) posts. Weekly meetings are held between senior management and APs. However, management should now review the post schedule to ensure that it meets the current and future needs of the school. Furthermore, following collaboration with all teaching staff, it is recommended that senior management draws up a list of duties for each post holder to ensure that there is an equitable workload attached to all posts of responsibility.

It is apparent that senior management is spending considerable time engaged in a number of tasks that could be delegated to other members of staff. There is a need to foster a stronger culture of distributed leadership. In so doing, time could be set aside by the senior management team to take a more active role in leading teaching and learning. The school should also adopt a strategic approach to the implementation of learning arising out of external continuing professional development (CPD) activities. In order to maximise the benefit from such inputs, a mechanism needs to be established to share good practice within and across subject departments. An initial step in this process might be the establishment of a teaching and learning committee driven by a member of the senior management team. This committee should establish targets with defined timeframes for the implementation of strategies derived from the sharing of good practice.

The Parent Association (PA) in the school is not affiliated to the National Post-Primary Parent Council (NPPC). It is recommended that the PA become associated with the NPPC. The PA has played an active role in the school and has provided valuable support. However, there is ongoing difficulty in attracting parents to become active members of the association and consequently membership of the association is small. In accordance with the DEIS planning programme, specific targets should be set for the promotion of partnership with parents. A co-ordinated approach should be adopted for this process and ideally should include the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator, School Completion Programme (SCP) personnel and the guidance counsellor.

School communication procedures have been formalised into a policy document and this is very good. Regular staff meetings are held. However, there is a perception among a number of staff that some decisions are being made without consultation. It is recommended that senior management and staff explore this view in the context of a review of the communications policy.

Leadership of students

There is much evidence that the school's mission statement underpins many of its activities. All parents and students are made aware of the code of behaviour and this finding was overwhelmingly endorsed by results in questionnaires. However, the policy does not reflect adequately the promotion of positive behaviour that is clearly evident in the day-to-day

running of the school. It is recommended that in any future review of the policy, care is taken to ensure that it reflects all of the positive supports that are in place.

The school offers three programmes: Junior Certificate; Leaving Certificate; and Transition Year (TY), which is compulsory. The current weekly instruction time is twenty-eight hours except for TY students who are allocated one day per week for work experience. The allocation of time for this activity is excessive and needs to be reduced. Notwithstanding the size of the school, the range of subjects available to students is commended. Currently, first-year students are allowed to sample all subjects and then make their selections from fixed option bands by November. The school challenges students to work towards achieving their best possible outcomes and this finding was borne out at a meeting with students and in the questionnaires.

Homework was assigned in most of the lessons visited. Nevertheless, a review of homework journals indicated that in some cases, very little homework is being recorded by students and that there is an inconsistent approach being taken to the signing of journals by teachers and parents. It is recommended that these two issues be addressed.

The atmosphere in the school is very positive and this finding was endorsed by responses in the student and parent questionnaires. Some very successful programmes are in place for the betterment of the students. The school is willing to devolve responsibility to students and provide opportunities for them to assume leadership positions. For instance, a very good mentoring and induction programme for incoming first-year students is in place and a very active Student Council is also in place. Students also commented very favourably on the range of extra-curricular activities that is available to them. The commitment of all staff involved in their provision is commended.

The school is in receipt of 0.14 whole-time teacher equivalents (WTE) to meet the needs of students for whom English is an additional language (EAL). Currently, one EAL student is attending the school and some EAL planning was evident. Assessment and tracking procedures should be established to ensure that EAL students can engage appropriately with the curriculum.

Grange Community College has a generous allocation for the support of students with SEN in addition to 0.5 WTE for Guidance. An autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) unit was opened in 2010 and this is providing high quality support to these students. The school employs one fully qualified SEN teacher who provides all support to a range of different-sized groups. It was reported that all of the remaining SEN resources have been diverted into the creation of smaller class groups across all class levels.

It is unclear whether this model of support is proving to be effective and that the needs of individual students are being met. In addition, no tracking and assessment procedures have been developed to monitor students' progress. These areas should be addressed to ensure the effectiveness of all support being provided. In keeping with the ethos of inclusion, the school should explore the feasibility of team teaching as another model of support. In this way, provision of support could be delegated to a wider range of staff, thus building more awareness and expertise in this area. Many staff cited the need to receive more professional development opportunities in this regard and the school is strongly advised to pursue this.

There is one guidance counsellor allocated to the school who provides both pastoral and career support to students. Guidance is timetabled in senior cycle and the guidance counsellor is available for one-to-one counselling. Formal referral systems are now in place. Students commented very favourably on the level of information being provided to them regarding subject choices. However, analysis of parent questionnaires indicated that there may be some room for improvement in this regard.

Overall, care for the wellbeing and welfare of students is good. A care team has been established which meets regularly. The school is working hard at improving attendance and punctuality rates through the HSCL and the SCP. In addition, positive reward schemes are in place to promote attendance.

2.3 Management of facilities

Facilities in this school are good. Parents and students expressed satisfaction in this regard. All available department grants have been optimised and much work has been done to upgrade the facilities over the years. The school is generally well maintained both inside and outside and the work of the ancillary staff is commended

The school has conducted an internal risk analysis and engaged the services of an external agency. Regular fire drills are held.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Formal planning time is provided for meetings of subject departments. Subject plans were made available and agendas and minutes of meetings were evident in many of these plans. There is scope for all departments to set aside time to share good practices with regard to teaching and learning, both within and across subject departments. Senior management could contribute to the agenda from time to time as a further means of guiding teaching and learning.

Subject department plans are at various stages of development. The majority of the subject plans focus on both the organisational and curricular aspects involved in the delivery of the subjects. All of the plans outline a programme of work in the form of an agreed list of topics to be covered in each year group. Good practice was noted where topics were linked to learning outcomes and where consideration was given to the deployment of afl strategies. These good practices should be incorporated into all subject plans and include methodologies for the delivery of each topic. It was reported that all subject departments conduct an analysis of achievement in certificate examinations. However, this information was not available in most subject plans. The results of this analysis would prove to be very useful to subject departments when setting and evaluating attainment targets in the context of DEIS planning and when drawing up plans for teaching and learning.

Sixteen lessons straddling twenty four class periods were observed during the course of the evaluation. The quality of teaching and learning ranged from fair to very good but overall it was good. Good practice was observed when the lesson was well ordered, instructions were clear, the different learning styles were catered for and when there was a high level of purposeful student involvement. Lessons were equally successful when they captured the interest and motivation of the students, when the class was suitably challenged and when each activity was appropriately paced.

In a small number of lessons, care was taken to articulate the purpose of the lesson to the students and very good practices was observed when this was referred to as a means of determining the extent of the learning. These were two good examples of afl strategies. In many lessons, teacher-generated materials were used which were appropriate to the age and ability of the students. ICT was integrated effectively into many lessons observed.

In a small number of lessons, poor practice was observed when planning did not take account of the need to differentiate for the learning styles of the learner or when there was an over-reliance on examination material. In one instance, very poor practice was observed when students were left unsupervised at intervals due to lack of teacher preparedness for the lesson. In addition, in a minority of lessons, students were provided with excessively descriptive handouts which lacked a clear learning intention. This practice should be avoided.

Questioning strategies was varied. In many lessons, questions were distributed to a wide number of students and in some cases, these required students to think on a higher cognitive level. This is very good. In many lessons, teachers were very encouraging of their students and affirmed their work continuously.

There are very mixed practices with regard to the assessment of student work. It was evident that in many cases, work is regularly monitored, marked appropriately and comments indicating strategies for improvement are provided. However, in some lessons, there was evidence that students' work is not being corrected regularly and that no records of homework are being kept. In subjects where students maintain portfolios or notes copies, it is very important that these should also be regularly corrected. In two lessons, excellent practice was observed when there were a number of assessment records available for each student.

All practical lessons observed were very active and student-centred.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

There is good support for subjects in the school and good progress has been made regarding the implementation of recommendations made in previous subject inspections. These include the acquisition of resources and the development of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policies. However, the senior cycle RSE plan should now be included in the SPHE planning folder. Overall, there is a need for the board and senior management to adopt a more strategic approach to the implementation of all recommendations arising out of subject inspections.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

It was apparent from previous subject reports that there was high quality teaching and learning observed in most subject areas. The current evaluation found that a number of recommendations in relation to teaching and learning had been implemented. For instance, substantial improvements have been made in both the planning and delivery of the art curriculum. However, other recommendations have yet to be implemented such as the further development of planning regarding the use of spoken Irish language in lessons. Nonetheless, it is good to note that the Irish department is developing an Irish Language and Culture Policy which may well address this matter.

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

The culture of self-evaluation in this school is at a very early stage. It is acknowledged that the needs of the student cohort were identified and an ASD unit was established in addition to the provision of courses at PLC level and for adults. However, the school needs to begin engaging more critically with its work in order to determine its strengths and areas for development. This process should begin with the board of management and senior management who should then involve all staff, parents and students as appropriate in the process.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The visit by the inspection team was a positive and worthwhile experience. The inspectors were most courteous and professional to all. We are pleased that the inspectors highlighted the positive atmosphere in the school which is of utmost importance to us in Grange Community College. The school will continue to challenge students to achieve their best possible outcomes, while maintaining a high level of care for the wellbeing and welfare of students.

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 is fully compliant with the Department's Child Protection Guidelines. Disciplinary issues are now dealt with in an extraordinary meeting.
- DEIS planning is being prioritised. There have been initiatives for literacy implemented this year. DEIS planning will underpin all aspects of school development next year.
- The staff have received training in differentiation.
- The use of SEN hours is being addressed in next year's timetable, and the policy has been prioritised for review next year.
- The PA will be affiliated to NPPC next year and are reporting and linking with the board of management.
- Subject Choice, CAO and other information meetings are organised by the Guidance Counsellor annually. The school will continue to encourage parents to attend information meetings.
- A review of the posts of responsibility has been conducted and new duties are allocated for next year. An internal discipline committee will be in place for next year.
- A teaching and learning committee will be established next year and together with senior management will decide upon appropriate strategies to further develop the students' learning experience.
- In reviewing the code of behaviour policy, the promotion of positive behaviour that is "clearly evident in the school" will be reflected in the policy.