

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

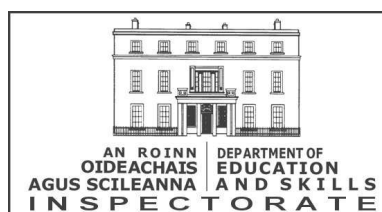
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Kevin's Community College,
Clondalkin, Dublin 22
Roll number: 70042L**

Date of inspection: 7 December 2011



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in December, 2011 in St. Kevin's 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, 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

St. Kevin's Community College is a co-educational school providing post-primary education to students in the surrounding area. It is administered by a board of management, a sub-committee of County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC). The school is in an area of designated disadvantage and is included in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) action plan and the School Completion Programme (SCP).

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- A strong pastoral approach was evident in the management of students.
- A committed board of management is in place with good links to parents and the local community.
- A strong senior management team provides very effective leadership to the school community.
- Very good progress has been made in the area of DEIS planning.
- Staff members are collaborative and reflective and dedicated to the best interests of their students.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed.
- The ongoing development of information and communications technology (ICT) offers considerable potential to enhance student learning.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- All students should have access to their full entitlement of twenty eight hours tuition time.
- Subject department planning should be further developed.
- Teachers should agree classroom procedures in relation to questioning and adopt and develop *Assessment for Learning* strategies.
- There should be an emphasis on oral language skills and the use of active learning methodologies in lessons.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

The board of management, a sub-committee of the VEC, is properly constituted and well informed about its role and responsibilities. Members of the board, some with long periods of service to the school, show a strong commitment to the school and indeed the local community and a very good awareness of developments in the school, both academic and pastoral. This commitment is underlined by very good attendance at board meetings.

Members of the board of management are very supportive of the principal and acknowledge the significant support the school receives from County Dublin VEC. They are informed of developments in the school through the principal's report. There is a high level of expertise on the board and this is used to good effect to make decisions. The board of management is presently engaged in reviewing a number of school policies. The level of consultation on school policies is satisfactory. To help inform board members it is recommended that staff members involved in developing policies be invited to present on those policies to the board. An agreed account of board of management meetings should be prepared for staff members and for the parent's association. Policies should be dated and contain a date for review.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006. School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools as a matter of priority.

The school's priorities for development

The school's planning priorities include the development and review of policies, the promotion of the use of information and communications technology (ICT), the development of the school environment and the promotion of the school in the community. Members of the board articulated a vision of the school as a community college in its widest sense, serving the needs of the community, including the provision of second chance education.

In the last school year, there has been a renewed focus on DEIS planning, following on from recommendations in the DEIS inspection report of November 2010. It was reported by the board of management that DEIS planning is advancing and is now the primary vehicle for school development planning. The DEIS themes of attendance, retention, literacy, numeracy, examination attainment and partnership are properly seen to encompass many of the key priority areas and the tracking system involved offers information about progress. The board of management and senior management team should continue to lead developments in this area and ensure that the momentum associated with DEIS planning in the last school year is maintained.

The board's involvement in leading learning is evidenced by their decision to examine the analysis of certificate examination results. The board has an important role to play in motivating and affirming staff and should take a leading role in this area by looking at

recommendations in subject inspection reports and monitoring progress. The board should continue to support professional development for staff members.

To ensure that school planning is progressed by the board it is suggested that planning should be on the agenda of a number of board meetings. A tracking system is suggested as a means to progress the board's planning priorities and policies.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

There is a very effective, strong senior management team in place. The principal and deputy principal have clearly defined roles and are a visible presence in the school. Their vision for the school is underlined by the school's Core Professional Purpose which was agreed collaboratively with all the education partners. They have been proactive in taking firm action on progressing DEIS planning. Responses to parent questionnaires show that almost all parents feel that the school is well run.

Senior management work collaboratively with staff members and frequent meetings are held with school teams such the student support team and assistant principals. Post holders are to be commended on their flexibility and their willingness to change their posts to meet the needs of the school. Assistant principals hold a wide portfolio of responsibilities and make an important contribution to the running of the school.

A culture of distributive leadership was evident in the school with many teachers inside and outside the post structure taking on leadership roles in the school. Relations in the school are very good. Parents interviewed acknowledged their appreciation of the good level of volunteerism among staff members. Students interviewed were unanimous in their appreciation of their teachers. Many staff members indicated to the evaluation team that the environment in which they worked is non-hierarchical, inclusive and caring.

The professional development of staff members is encouraged and facilitated by the school's senior management team with the approval of the board. This is underlined by good engagement with the support services, the wide range of whole-staff in-service undertaken in the school and the number of staff members engaged with further study. Very good induction for new teachers was noted. This is done in collaboration with the VEC.

Whole-school planning that has taken place to date is consultative of members of the school community. For example, parents, students and teachers have been consulted on a review of the Code of Behaviour and changes to the school uniform.

Good progress has been made in subject planning. The next priority for subject departments should be to ensure that all subjects are consistent in their exploration of learning outcomes appropriate to their subjects, matched with teaching resources and methodologies. Departmental planning has focussed to a significant extent on attainment within the last year and some attainment targets have been set in certain subject areas. However, many of these are too low. All subject areas should meet and set realistic targets for their subject. Raising expectations for student attainment should be a priority area for department planning.

Leadership of students

A strong pastoral approach was evident in the leadership of students underlined by the registration systems in place in the school, both morning and afternoon and the weekly

tutorial period available to many class groups, including all first years. Each class group has a tutor who monitors attendance and acts in a pastoral role. A Year Head has overall responsibility for each year group. Questionnaire data from students indicates that a high percentage of students feel that they could talk to an adult in the school if they are having problems. The existence of a student support team that meets weekly to decide on actions to support students experiencing difficulty in any given week provides further evidence that the school prioritises student care.

Very good strategies that focus on student attendance and retention are in place. Central to this is the role played by the student journal in communicating with parents. Exemplary use of the journal was noted with all parents surveyed in the parent questionnaires indicating that they signed the journal weekly. Journals viewed were well filled out by students and were used by teachers to communicate with parents. A number of positive comments home were noted as well as other comments indicating areas for improvement. Teachers are commended for encouraging a very high level of compliance with good journal practices among students. The positive role played by the home-school-community-liaison officer in maintaining contacts with parents around a range of areas was acknowledged by parents interviewed. The role of the SCP in supporting student attendance and retention also deserves to be acknowledged.

There is a strong focus on the management of student behaviour in the school with good systems in place to manage student movement around the school. Posters outlining the school rules are predominantly displayed in all classrooms. Parents and students interviewed agreed that there was good enforcement of the rules. Very comprehensive continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers has taken place in this area with good engagement with the National Behaviour Support Service evident. Central to this is a number of incentives to encourage positive student behaviour along with specialised support programmes for individual students. Despite these supports the behaviour of some students remains problematic. A significant minority of students surveyed in student questionnaires disagreed with the statement that behaviour is good in the school. Members of the evaluation team observed a number of incidences of low level disruption such as inappropriate comments and calling out of turn during lessons. A recent review of the Code of Behaviour has taken place with good consultation with partners evident. This code should be supported by agreed classroom procedures in relation to classroom practices, including student questioning and the monitoring of student work.

The school has effective structures in place to support student leadership. Senior students have the opportunity to engage in the *Gluais* mentoring programme for first year students. Students elect representatives to the student council from all year groups. The council is proactive in engaging with the student body and senior management around areas for development. Student interviews and questionnaire data indicated that the majority of students in the school feel that they have a say in how to make the school a better place.

A good range of subjects is available in the school. Very good access to ICT was noted. First year students get the opportunity to sample a range of subjects for the first term prior to choosing their optional subjects. Students and parents were positive about the benefits of this sampling system. All first year students study French. This inclusive practice is commended. It is recommended that the school considers diversifying the range of languages on offer to first year students, perhaps in a sampling programme. Timetabling is good in most instances. Anomalies that exist on the timetable at the moment such as having two teachers for the one subject or the timetabling of double lessons where a single lesson would be more appropriate, for example as in Junior Certificate Geography, should be avoided, if possible.

The school has introduced a wide range of programmes to meet the needs of students including the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Students receive good support when choosing subjects and programmes from the guidance department and subject teachers.

The school community is reflective of the needs of the students and constantly reviews the programmes and subjects on offer to meet those needs. The recent decision to introduce mixed ability class groupings for first year students, with the JCSP programme on offer for all, is an example of this and is commended. At present the school is considering the reintroduction of the Transition Year programme. This is to be welcomed.

The percentage of students progressing to third level is rising. Students are supported by very good higher level access programmes such as the Maynooth Access Programme (MAP) and the Clondalkin Higher Education Access Programme (CHEAP). The recent introduction to the school of subjects and courses under the Back to Education Initiative underlines the commitment of the school to provide second chance education for the wider community.

Good support strategies for students with additional educational needs were noted including small group withdrawal and team-teaching. The school is commended for introducing the *Catch Up Literacy* and *Catch Up Numeracy* programmes to meet the needs of a small group of students. The JCSP library offers further support for students. The JCSP programme is available for one class group in both second and third year. These students finish one lesson period early two days a week. It is recommended that all students have access to their full entitlement of 28 hours tuition time.

A very effective transfer programme from the feeder primary schools was noted and very good procedures around admissions are in place. A post holder has responsibility for this area. It is recommended that a paragraph in the Admissions Policy that relates to admissions to second year, third year and sixth year is reviewed and adjusted as it does not reflect the present good practices in place in regard to admissions to these year groups.

Management of facilities

School facilities are well maintained and include general classrooms, two computer rooms, a number of specialist rooms and a JCSP library. The school reported that students have pride in their school. The board of management and the principal have been proactive in progressing improvements to the infrastructure of the school. Significant upgrading of facilities, has taken place in the last two years such as improvements to the school toilets and the installation of a new heating system. A new visitor entrance to the school has been created. The school car park has been extended and improvements made to the school grounds. Problems with the roof have been addressed but some difficulties remain.

The recent installation of whiteboards in all classrooms, facilitated by the VEC, means that very high quality ICT facilities are available in the school. Blinds should be installed in classrooms where glare on the interactive whiteboard is a problem.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty four lessons were observed over the course of the inspection from a range of subjects and programmes. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good with a number of excellent lessons observed. In a small minority of lessons there was considerable scope for improvement.

Very good preparation for lessons was in evidence in the majority of cases. Most teachers had prepared a range of resources including PowerPoint presentations, film clips and handouts. Very good use was made of the newly-installed interactive whiteboards in the majority of lessons observed. Teachers should continue to investigate the range of facilities available on interactive whiteboards to support teaching and learning.

There was good use of visuals in some lessons. Key word posters were on view in most classrooms but key word strategies were in use in only about half of the lessons observed. To cater for visual learners and to progress student literacy in line with DEIS planning objectives there is scope to extend the use of visuals and key word strategies in lessons.

Most teachers introduced the learning outcomes of the lesson at the outset and a few made time for review at the end of lessons. These good strategies should be extended to all lessons. In all classrooms good use was made of questioning to revise previous learning and to progress the lesson. In many lessons observed, the effective use of hands-up, directed questioning, wait-time and a mix of higher and lower-order questions led to a calm, inclusive learning environment in which students were appropriately challenged. A minority of lessons were characterised by lower-order questioning, chorus answering and students shouting out answers out of turn. It is recommended that questioning procedures are agreed at a whole-school level and implemented by all teachers to support student learning and inclusiveness in a calm learning atmosphere.

A variety of teaching methodologies was in use in lessons observed including teacher exposition, pair work and group work. Some good use of pair work was observed but in many cases it was limited in scope and effectiveness. Student activity was encouraged in many lessons visited. Teachers were proactive in circulating and attending to individual students' needs. Where best practice was in evidence teacher expectations were high and students were provided with independent or cooperative learning opportunities during the lesson to allow students to consolidate the learning achieved. In some lessons student activity was confined to the copying of notes from the whiteboard or PowerPoint slides or the filling out of words in worksheets. It is recommended that students be provided with independent learning opportunities that challenge them to be active and to achieve at their own level.

There was limited opportunity for oral expression in many lessons observed. No examples of debate or discussion were in evidence during the course of the evaluation although there was evidence of co-curricular activities such as debates in English. A number of language lessons were observed. Limited use of the target language was observed and widespread use of the translation approach was evident. It is recommended that there be more emphasis on oral language skills in lessons including the use of the communicative approach in language lessons.

Satisfactory homework routines were in evidence in the vast majority of classrooms visited. Teachers, in general, set homework regularly and good monitoring of student copybooks was in evidence. The quality of students' copybooks and work was poor in some instances

and less than half of teachers had annotated suggestions for improvement. While teachers are commended for the good homework practices in evidence there is still some scope for development in this area. It is recommended that a school-wide approach is taken and that all teachers communicate high expectations to students with regard to the standard of student work. This should involve engagement with *Assessment for Learning* principles.

Very good student-teacher rapport was noted in all classrooms visited. Teachers were firm with their students but sensitive to the range of student needs and dedicated to the best interests of their students. Classrooms had very good ICT facilities and adequate storage. Walls of classrooms were used to display posters, students' work and classroom rules. Very good use was made of the student journal in all classrooms visited to note down homework given, to affirm students and to communicate with home.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Very good progress has been made in relation to the recommendations in the DEIS evaluation. Leadership roles have assigned to all areas and a number of committees are in place. Whole-school CPD has taken place in this area. All staff members are members of a DEIS committee. Baseline data has been collected and targets set, although in some instances these targets need to be adjusted. In relation to a recommendation the Guidance evaluation report some work has been completed on the Guidance Plan. However it has not yet been ratified by the Board of Management as it has not sent for consultation to parents and students. This should be progressed as soon as possible. A safety statement has been prepared for Home Economics as outlined in the home economics evaluation report.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

A number of the subject-specific recommendations relating to teaching and learning, planning and the use of ICT in lesson delivery and assessment have been implemented. There is still work to be done in some other areas such as the promotion of student literacy through key word strategies. A more systematic approach to implementing the recommendations from subject inspection reports needs to be developed. Procedures should to ensure that recommendations in one subject area that are relevant to other disciplines, such as the use of *Assessment for Learning* or key word strategies, are more uniformly adopted than is currently the case.

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

There is strong evidence of the school's capacity for self-evaluation and improvement. Over many years the school has developed the ability to cope with challenge and change and to adopt new initiatives to meet perceived challenges. Staff members are reflective and flexible and management have a clear vision for the development of the school. A programme of target setting and review is already underway in relation to DEIS planning processes. This should be expanded to encompass all areas identified for improvement. County Dublin VEC should work closely with the school to manage and implement change processes.

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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 Board of Management and staff welcome the very positive WSE/MLL evaluation report received from the Department of Education and Skills. The school would like to acknowledge the courtesy and professionalism shown to all members of the school community by the inspection team. The report highlighted the tremendous dedication and commitment shown by all of the school's partners in providing a first class education service in the Clondalkin/Lucan area.

The board would like to acknowledge the many positive comments across a wide range of areas contained in the report. In particular, the board is pleased that the inspection team noted the following:

- Students have pride in their school.
- There is a very positive relationship between teachers and students
- That the Board of Management is very supportive of all members of the school community in their work.
- Parents acknowledged their appreciation of the good level of volunteerism among staff members.
- A strong pastoral approach was evident in the management of students.
- Parents are very positive in their support of the school.
- Very good progress has been made in the area of DEIS planning.
- The school has introduced a range of programmes designed to meet the needs of students.
- That students interviewed were unanimous in their appreciation of their teachers.
- Teachers are dedicated to the best interests of their students.
- Members of staff were collaborative and professional.
- School facilities are well maintained.
- Very good access to ICT was noted.
- Teachers were commended for the good homework practices.

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

- All students will have access to their full entitlement of twenty eight hours tuition time.
- Planning time within each subject department will be given priority in the school.
- The school will promote *Assessment for Learning* strategies and teachers will receive in-service in this area.

- Teachers will place a higher emphasis on oral language skills and the use of active learning methodologies in lessons. School management will promote in-service in this area.
- Staff members involved in developing school policies will present these to the Board of Management.
- Management will ensure that the momentum associated with DEIS planning will be maintained
- An agreed account of meetings of the Board of Management will be prepared for staff and the Parents Association.
- The Board of Management will continue to examine statistics relating to examination results.