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Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning
REPORT

Kylemore College
Ballyfermot, Dublin 10

Roll number: 70240P

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Whole-School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in February 2013 in Kylemore 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

Kylemore College was founded in 1964. It is a multi-denominational, co-educational, secondary school in Ballyfermot and is under the overall management of City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC). It is a very inclusive school which caters for students from a broad range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

Second-level enrolment comprises 372 students. The school offers the Junior Certificate, the Junior Cycle School Programme (JCSP), Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). The school participates in the Department of Education and Skills Action Plan for Delivering Equality of Educational Opportunity in Schools (DEIS).

The school has a strong sports and music tradition and provides a very good range of co-curricular and cross-curricular activities that includes team sports, the President's award programme, Gaisce, and An Taisce's Green Schools programme.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is experienced and committed and is well supported by CDVEC.
- Although partnership with parents is central to the school's inclusive ethos and many daily practices, there is currently no parents' association to represent parents' views.
- The new principal and the deputy principal are pro-active leaders and have demonstrated a willingness to embrace a school improvement agenda.
- The teachers are professional and committed to the management and care of students.
- The quality of teaching and learning was very good or excellent in a number of lessons.
- Some very good lessons were observed, where active student engagement was very much in evidence, but teacher talk predominated in a minority of lessons.
- In almost all lessons observed students' behaviour was very good and teacher-student rapport was also very good.

- A well stocked and well used JCSP library acts as an effective hub for targeted literacy and numeracy interventions.
- The school has developed a second three-year DEIS action plan and valuable baseline data has been gathered.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board of management should establish a school improvement planning team and establish associated working groups to progress the school's action planning for improvement.
- A democratically elected parents' association should be established as a matter of priority.
- The arrangements for students' choice of subjects need to be reviewed in order to maximise their options.
- There needs to be a greater focus on embedding of Assessment for Learning (AfL) principles and practice in day-to-day teaching and learning.
- Attention should be paid to the regular correction of students' written work with a focus on giving students advice for improvement.
- Previous subject inspection reports should be revisited to ensure that recommendations have been fully implemented.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The school is well supported by City of Dublin VEC (CDVEC) management. The board of management, a sub-committee of CDVEC, is for the most part, appropriately constituted but there is currently a vacancy for a parent representative. Board members are very supportive of the school. They are experienced and committed. Some individual members have strong educational backgrounds while others have very good community links. Decisions are reached by consensus. The chairperson is a past pupil of the school and is very committed.

The title 'advisory' board does not adequately reflect the board's role and consideration should be given to using the designation "board of management". The board's role in school self-evaluation is underdeveloped. The board should oversee the establishment of a school improvement planning team to assist in strategic action planning for improvement. Associated working groups should be established to build on the effective DEIS action planning that is already underway in order to make planning for improvement more of a whole-school activity.

Policy development is well advanced and is collaborative in nature. DEIS action planning is very well developed and is of high quality. The second, three-year DEIS plan forms the basis for school improvement across targeted areas. There is a committed DEIS team in place. Valuable baseline data has been gathered and measurable targets have been set in the areas of examination attainment, literacy and numeracy, attendance, retention, educational progression and partnership with parents and others. DEIS targets have begun to be more specific in relation to examination attainment and in relation to numbers attempting higher-level papers. The fact that the TY, JCSP and LCA programmes are well co-ordinated assists greatly with attempts to improve engagement, retention and progression.

The importance of parental support is recognised by management and staff. Every opportunity is taken to bring parents into the school. The very good work of the Home

School Community Liaison co-ordinator in supporting parents and families is affirmed. Information evenings and an impressive handbook for parents of first years assists the transfer process from primary to post-primary school. The fact that some parents attend daytime adult courses, while others are past pupils of the school, is supportive of parental engagement. Responses to the parents' questionnaire that was administered during the evaluation were very affirming of school management and staff. However, there is a need to establish a democratically elected and representative parents council.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of Staff

The school is very well managed and well run. Senior management work well as a team and provide proactive leadership. The principal and deputy principal are relatively new to their positions but have years of experience in the school. The principal provides excellent leadership, has good people management skills and shows a willingness to actively engage in school improvement. She is ably supported by a committed deputy principal.

Teaching staff are deployed according to their qualifications and expertise. They are professional, dedicated and committed to the management and care of the students. This finding is reflected in the responses to both the student and parent questionnaires that were administered during the evaluation. The duties of some post holders were revised in 2012. Teachers are encouraged to innovate and to engage in professional development. A number of staff have been supported to engage in post-graduate studies. The teacher's handbook that is provided by school management is a very good resource especially for new teachers.

Leadership of Students

Students from a wide variety of socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds are well catered for in this very inclusive school. The school's management provides a broad curriculum. The organisation of the timetable has a number of strengths. The timetable is sufficiently flexible to provide for team teaching and to provide a wide range of subjects and programmes. Classes are of one hour duration and this arrangement is working well. The fact that all first-year students get the opportunity to study French is commended. Subject choice is limited however, and is not sufficiently open to allow students choose their subjects in a reasonable and transparent manner. Arrangements for subject choice were raised a number of times during student and parent interviews and this needs to be addressed.

Student's attainment in certificate examinations varies considerably from subject to subject. In a number of subject areas, the percentage of students taking higher-level papers is very high, while in others there is a high percentage taking ordinary or foundation-level. A number of subjects have already been identified where the numbers attempting higher-level need to be increased. The examination results are analysed annually, compared with national norms, and are recorded in the subject folders. It is recommended that the analysis of results by subject departments be accompanied by a commentary in which teachers reflect on the results and draw conclusions. A summary of this commentary should be brought to the board's attention. As part of the school's ongoing DEIS planning, achievable and specific targets for improvement in examination results have been set and planned for. Valuable links have been established with third level access programmes.

The school provides the designated instruction hours in compliance with Department of Education and Skills (DES) circulars and is open for the 167 days required by regulation. The Admissions Policy is very inclusive and reflects the school's characteristic spirit and mission. Attendance is monitored effectively and strategies have been put in place by senior

management to follow up on students' absenteeism and late-coming. The use of assemblies to reinforce the importance of good attendance and behaviour is commended. Sanctions and rewards systems are in place. However, there are a number of students with poor attendance.

A clearly structured code of behaviour is in place. A draft ladder of referral to further develop the implementation of the code of behaviour is under consideration. It should be a key aim of both this ladder of referral and the sanctions and rewards systems generally to reduce the number of suspensions. A number of good practices are in place to prevent student bullying and the role of staff and student mentors in this regard is commended. The improvement in retention rates is particularly impressive.

A caring, well organised student support system is in place. Year heads and tutors play a key and effective role in managing and caring for students. A ten minute tutor session takes place at the start of each day. This is used effectively to communicate information between tutors and students. A committed care team meets weekly and works effectively with senior management, year heads, tutors, and support staff. They take a targeted approach to supporting more vulnerable students and families.

The role of the mentoring system, Gluais, in supporting incoming first years is commended. Gluais provides valuable leadership opportunities for senior students. A critical incident policy is in place. A well organised book rental scheme is a great support to families. Work experience is well organised and two week blocks for work experience are used effectively. Mini company and enterprise education are well catered for.

Special education needs support is well co-ordinated and well organised. A core team with the necessary experience, qualifications and empathy provides for resource teaching effectively. Students' special needs are promptly identified and recorded. Every effort is made to address those needs. There is significant resource teaching and learning support provided on both a withdrawal and an in-class basis. Guidance services are working well despite reductions in Guidance and other supports. The school provides a very good, well-targeted English as an Additional Language (EAL) programme.

Educational welfare support for the school's students is available from the educational welfare officer. Support is provided by CDVEC's psychological service and students are benefiting from the access programmes of third level institutions. The National Behaviour Support Service's (NBSS) behaviour for learning teacher operates a support system for students. The School Completion Programme (SCP) assists with the provision of a well-run breakfast club, lunchtime clubs and the provision of a homework club which are of major benefit to students. There is a need to re-activate the student council in order to represent students' views. Steps are already being taken to re-establish this council.

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*.

1.3 Management of facilities

The building is well managed. Teacher-based classrooms are neat, tidy, and well resourced. The role of the administrative staff, caretaking staff and the Green Schools committee in helping to maintain school facilities is acknowledged. A porter system effectively monitors access to the school building and helps to ensure that the building is kept to the highest standards.

School management has prioritised the use of information and communications technology (ICT) and the school is well resourced in this regard. The school's website is user-friendly and accessible. ICT is used effectively by management and staff to share plans and resources. The website needs regular updating, especially in relation to ensuring current version of policies are available online. The school grounds and parking facilities are very restricted but are well maintained.

1. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning was very good or excellent in a large number of lessons. Most lessons observed were well planned and teaching was generally competent in terms of exposition and explanation of key ideas and concepts. In one lesson the quality of teaching and learning was poor in terms of student engagement and clarity of instruction.

Subject departments have developed detailed term and year plans based on course content, aims and objectives. A sample of these plans was reviewed during the evaluation. Some of the subject plans focus on intended learning outcomes and teaching methodologies, and a small number of plans outline the implications of AfL for their subject areas. In general, there needs to be a greater focus in subject department plans on planning for teaching which promotes active learning strategies and on the embedding of AfL principles in teaching and learning.

Teachers worked hard in the lessons observed. Student behaviour was very good overall. Teaching took place within a disciplined environment in almost all classes visited and teacher-pupil rapport was very good. Well equipped teacher-based classrooms provided an effective environment for teaching and learning. Print-rich environments are provided in nearly all classrooms.

Many students showed a willingness to engage in learning. However, greater engagement by a number of students in their own learning could have been further developed in some lessons. The adoption of a consistent, whole-school approach to implementing the principles and practice of AfL would greatly benefit teaching and learning, as would a shift to more active methodologies and greater use of pair work and group work. In three of the four language lessons observed where the language of the lesson was other than English, there was good use of the target language by the teacher. Students' use of the target language was encouraged in most lessons observed.

In the lessons observed, the intended learning outcomes were usually shared at the start of lessons and returned to briefly at the end of lessons. However, the learning outcomes could have been explained in greater detail in some lessons. More rigorous checking of learning, especially towards the end of the lesson, is recommended.

Some very good lessons were observed; where lessons were well structured and where active student engagement was very much in evidence. In a small number of lessons, teacher talk predominated. The quality of teacher questioning strategies varied. In some lessons questioning strategies were well used but in other lessons a better distribution of questions, greater targeting of questions towards more reluctant learners and better use of 'wait time' and higher-order questioning would have improved teaching and learning.

Homework was regularly given and recorded in students' journals, which is commended. A notable feature of the school's homework policy is that it outlines clearly the parent, student and teacher responsibilities with regard to completion of and correction of homework. The homework policy and practices need to place a greater emphasis on the importance of teachers' written comments towards student improvement. This is an area of weakness that needs to be addressed. In many of the copybooks reviewed during the evaluation, there was little or no correction of students' work, and overall there was little evidence of correcting towards improvement, as practised in AfL.

A draft literacy and numeracy policy is being developed which emphasises the whole-school nature of literacy and numeracy development. The current draft of this policy rightly emphasises that teachers are teachers of literacy and numeracy as well as subject specialists. Literacy and numeracy was focused on in many classes with good explanation of key terms and concepts evident. However, while the use of key word strategies is on the increase, a greater emphasis on the development of learners' oral and written skills, as recommended in previous inspection reports and in the school's draft literacy and numeracy policy, would greatly enhance learning. The impressive JSCP library is well used and acts as an effective hub for a range of literacy and numeracy initiatives, including reading initiatives.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

This is the school's first whole-school evaluation. Kylemore College has had a DEIS evaluation (2010). DEIS planning is part of the agenda of every staff meeting. Good progress is evident in the effective implementation of the DEIS evaluation recommendations with the establishment of benchmarks for learner attainment especially in numeracy and literacy. A combined history and geography module for TY was recommended in the history report and this has been established.

3.2 Learning and teaching

There is evidence that the school has carefully considered the recommendations of previous subject inspection reports. Subject inspection reports have pointed out areas for improvement, some of which have been adopted. Schemes of work have been revised and common templates adopted. The Mathematics report recommended more open-ended questions and more problem solving and this was very much in evidence. The increased development of oral language skills was evident in some classes but needs further development across the school. The science inspection recommended the appointment of a co-ordinator for the subject and this has been addressed.

Previous subject inspection reports, should be revisited by subject departments to ensure that recommendations have been fully implemented. More active methodologies were recommended in a number of reports, and these need to be further developed across the school. Monitoring of homework was affirmed in a number of reports but written feedback for improvement, as was recommended in many inspection reports, needs to be addressed as a priority area.

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

A commitment to school self-review is central to the shared vision of the school. The board of management, ably supported by CDVEC management, is committed to the school and its improvement. However, strategic planning for improvement needs to become a more central part of the board's work.

The principal, deputy principal and the staff have shown a great willingness to reflect on current practices and to gradually implement change and improvement by consensus. The school is increasingly using qualitative and quantitative evidence to set targets for improvement within the context of DEIS action planning and school improvement planning.

An action based planning strategy needs to be developed at board and senior management level to deliver on the recommendations of this whole-school evaluation and on previous inspections especially in relation to ongoing improvement in teaching and learning. This will ensure that improvements recommended will be shared across the school.

School management is well placed to continue critically examining its practices in relation to teaching and learning, student and parental engagement, attainment and progression. It is essential that the board of management, in-school management and teaching staff continue to embrace change and to lead school self-evaluation, strategic planning and improvement in teaching and learning.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report.

Kylemore College and CDETБ welcomes the very positive WSE-Management, Leadership and Learning report and wishes to acknowledge the professional and courteous manner in which the inspection was carried out.

CDETБ and the Board are delighted that the professionalism and commitment of teachers was recognised and affirmed.

We are pleased that the report acknowledged the excellent quality of teaching and learning.

It is most welcome that the inspectors identified the comprehensive network of support systems/teams during the evaluation.

The recommendations laid out in the report will serve to guide the Board and Senior Management within the school in the coming years.

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

Since the inspection, arrangements for students' choice of subjects have been reviewed and a greater range and choice of subjects have been provided.

The school is already engaged with embedding AFL practice in day-to-day teaching and learning.

Recommendations from previous subject reports have been implemented on an ongoing basis. Recent inspection reports have been revisited and any outstanding recommendations have been prioritised for implementation.

The Board will enthusiastically promote the establishment of working groups to progress further, the ongoing school's action plan for improvement.

