An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Duiske College
Graiguenamanagh, County Kilkenny
Roll number: 70590T

Date of inspection: 11 March 2011
Whole-School Evaluation  
Management, Leadership and Learning  

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in March 2011 in Duiske College, Graigueamanagh, County Kilkenny. 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 and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data held by the Department of Education and Skills. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas were inspected.

Introduction  

Duiske College is a small, co-educational vocational school that provides post-primary and post-leaving certificate (PLC) education for students in its rural catchment area. The school is involved in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. The current student cohort of 109 post-primary students comprises of students from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Since 2003 there have been four principals in Duiske College. These changes at senior management level have resulted in a degree of uncertainty and a lack of consistent leadership. School enrolment has increased in recent years. As part of its curriculum, the school provides the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT  

1.1 Key Findings  

- Duiske College is a caring school that strives to enable the students to achieve their potential.  
- A large number of developmental priorities have been identified and in a number of instances have been progressed appropriately.  
- Significant improvements have been made in relation to the school’s facilities.  
- DEIS action planning is progressing very well in the school.  
- Learning support and resource allocations are not fully utilised for their intended purposes.  
- Most senior cycle students receive significantly less than the required twenty-eight hours tuition time.  
- Effective distributed leadership is evident in the range of academic and pastoral supports for students.  
- Overall, a good standard of teaching and learning was observed during the evaluation.  
- The school has responded fully to recommendations made in previous subject inspections.
1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The school’s curriculum and timetabling structures should be fully reviewed.
- All students must be timetabled for at least the minimum twenty-eight hours tuition time in compliance with circular M29/95.
- The use of learning support and resource allocations should be reviewed to ensure that they are fully utilised for their intended purposes.
- The board should implement a SMART planning system to prioritise, structure and evaluate ongoing developments in the school.
- The board should prioritise a review of the school’s admissions policy and the ratification of the special educational needs policy and whole-school guidance plan.
- Efforts should be made to progress specific literacy and numeracy initiatives at subject level and to embed assessment for learning practices.
- The regular scheduling of guidance should also be prioritised with a particular focus on provision for senior cycle students.

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 of Duiske College presented as a committed and active body with the diversity of knowledge and skills required to manage the school on behalf of County Kilkenny Vocational Educational Committee (VEC).

Communication between the board and the VEC is appropriate with good links maintained through the four trustee nominees and through the regular submission of board of management meeting minutes to the VEC. To build upon this good practice, similar action should be taken to provide students, parents and staff with formal agreed reports of board meetings. The plan to utilise the proposed school website to furnish parents with an annual report on the operations of the school will also be a positive initiative.

A planning document has been developed to formalise the scheduling of the review of school policies and the development of new policies. This helps to provide a framework for ongoing policy formation and review. The ratification of the draft special educational needs policy and whole-school guidance plan should now be prioritised by the board. It is also essential that the board reviews the current admissions policy to ensure that it reflects the inclusive ethos of the school.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with post-primary circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (Published September 2004). 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 has been proactive in identifying a significant number of areas for development including enrolment, curriculum review, facilities, and student attainment. These priorities for development have recently resulted in considerable change which, in the main, has been positive. To provide an overarching framework for school improvement, it is recommended
that the board take a more strategic approach to achieving identified goals. One method of achieving this would be to further prioritise the school’s goals and then, through the use of SMART planning processes, identify specific, measurable and time bound targets. By implementing this form of planning, a level of consistency will be ensured that will allow each board, after its five-year cycle, to pass on a legacy document outlining its achievements, ongoing projects and the areas that require further development.

The board is committed to embedding DEIS practices in the school. Once baseline data has been accrued for all possible areas of development, the board should consider prioritising and focusing on the areas in need of most attention in Duiske College.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff
Senior management is committed to school improvement and has identified and pursued a number of key objectives. In doing so, staff have been provided with ample opportunity to engage in the implementation and delivery of a variety of supports and interventions. Examples include the school’s JCSP, DEIS action planning, educational support and guidance provision. This distributed leadership approach, particularly in relation to DEIS action planning, has been empowering for those involved and will help to further promote educational inclusion in the school. The encouragement of staff to engage in new initiatives and to take a leadership role in the delivery of specific initiatives is commended.

Since being appointed in 2008, the principal has provided a level of direction that has been important in progressing and improving the school. In addition to teaching duties, the deputy principal’s role involves some aspects of day-to-day management and liaison with parents, particularly in relation to disciplinary issues. It may now be an opportune time to further develop the shared leadership responsibilities for the senior management team. This should be progressed through the Leadership Development for Schools Forbairt initiative.

The post of responsibility structure consists of four special duties teachers. The duties attached to these roles include examinations secretary, co-ordination of the book-rental scheme and co-ordination of the LCVP and PLC programmes. These roles are carried out effectively. To fully utilise the skills and experience of post holders and teachers with specialist expertise, senior management should explore the possibility of forming a cohesive management tier that would assist in the research of specific areas for development such as the recommended curriculum and timetable review outlined later in this report.

A number of subject department plans are well advanced with a strong focus on desired learning outcomes for students and the identification of suitable methodologies, resources and assessment techniques. These models of good practice should be utilised to inform subject department planning. This collaborative approach would be beneficial and would encourage more consistent practices across all subjects.

Leadership of students
A caring atmosphere permeates through the school’s daily routine creating a warm and friendly environment. The vast majority of the student questionnaire responses support this view and present a very positive picture of the student body’s perspective. Initiatives such as the weekly whole-school assemblies, home-school liaison services and regular class tutor interventions help to maintain this positive atmosphere.

Leadership of student learning is being progressed in a number of ways. The school has recently introduced the JCSP and this programme is being integrated into the junior cycle
curriculum on a phased basis. At weekly profiling meetings subject teachers and the JCSP co-ordinator identify students’ achievements as well as their areas for development. Both parents and students commented favourably on the positive affirmation received as a result of student profiling. The realisation of the objectives common to JCSP and DEIS action planning such as literacy and numeracy development, should now help to enhance students’ achievements in these areas.

Classes are primarily mixed-ability with the exception of some setting arrangements in Irish and Mathematics. With the exception of first year, Mathematics groups are timetabled concurrently to facilitate the transfer of students between levels. Irish classes are also divided occasionally in second and third year and at senior cycle.

As most senior cycle students choose four optional subjects from the five optional subject bands, their access to the minimum required twenty-eight hours tuition time is undermined considerably. To address this situation, it is imperative that a root and branch review of the school’s curriculum takes place in conjunction with a full review of the current timetabling procedures. This review should be undertaken within the limitations of teacher allocations, students’ minimum tuition requirements and current best practices.

The school has developed effective procedures to manage student transition from primary school and between junior and senior cycles. Prior to entry and in conjunction with the School Completion Programme, prospective first-year students participate in organised activities in the school. On admission, students are provided with a year-long optional sampling programme.

Students were very well behaved throughout the evaluation. The school’s code of behaviour has been recently reviewed in line with the National Educational Welfare Board’s guidelines.

Students’ attendance is well monitored and procedures have been introduced to inform parents of students’ absences in a timely manner. As part of DEIS action planning a number of key actions have been identified to achieve an improvement in overall attendance and a reduction in the incidence of chronic absenteeism. This outcomes based approach is commended.

Learning support and resource hours are allocated using either individual withdrawal or group withdrawal systems. To further develop the models of provision, and to support the sharing of specialist expertise among colleagues, co-operative teaching strategies should be explored with a view to further developing this practice.

The school is allocated 2.78 whole-time equivalents for learning support and special educational needs. A significant amount of this allocation is used to support the school’s broad curriculum. This practice should be discontinued as all learning support and resource allocations should be utilised for their intended purposes.

Guidance provision in the school has developed in recent times resulting in a significant improvement in resources and facilities. Commendably, a whole school guidance plan has been drafted. The regular scheduling of guidance should also be prioritised with a particular focus on provision for senior cycle students.

2.3 Management of facilities
The school’s facilities are very well maintained. Recent improvements include the provision of new facilities and developing the overall aesthetics of existing buildings. Plans are also in place to develop an adjacent site in collaboration with a local community group with a view to providing an outdoor pursuits centre for school and community use.
Significant improvement of the school’s information and communication technology (ICT) resources has also occurred recently and this will be further progressed with the planned utilisation of additional ICT funding. To supplement this infrastructural development, management should identify areas for continuing professional development particularly in relation to developing e-learning in the school.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching
Twenty-one lessons were observed during the evaluation. The range of lessons encompassed all year groups, levels and programmes and included core, optional and non-examination subjects. The quality of teaching and learning was good overall and exemplary practice was observed in a number of lessons. There was scope for the further enhancement of teaching practice and student learning in some instances.

The questionnaire responses from parents reflected a high level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and their children’s progress. Similarly, the responses to the questionnaire issued to students indicated that the vast majority of students felt that their teachers encouraged them to work to the best of their ability and they felt that they were doing well in school.

The pace and structure of all lessons was supported and underpinned by the effective planning and preparations that had been undertaken by teachers. Praiseworthy practice was observed where teachers informed the students of both the focus of the lesson and shared the learning outcomes with them at the outset.

Commendably, active learning methodologies were a notable feature of the lessons observed. The active learning tasks given to students included written assignments, problem solving, experiential learning tasks, role play and tasks to support the development of students’ personal skills such as their artistic, linguistic, musical and computer skills.

Effective pair and group activities were frequently observed. Individual teachers organised paired work for learning activities as diverse as the consolidation of students’ understanding of key words, the solving of mathematical problems and the organisation of teams for a competitive orienteering activity. Group work had a wider application and involved students undertaking scientific experiments, conducting and participating in a meeting, sporting activities and the playing of musical pieces. Clear terms of reference were always given at the outset of these activities yet, on occasion a recap on the completed activity was overlooked. There was also scope in some lessons to explore the use of group work as another means of supporting students’ learning.

There was very good use of resources and subject materials to impact on student learning. For example, data projection was used in various instances to introduce the subject of the lesson, to study a specific aspect of the lesson, to set the context for a particular task, to demonstrate the solution to mathematical problems and to recap on the lesson. The format of some lessons would have benefited from the incorporation of visual imagery and the use of supplementary audio-visual media. Furthermore, the use of ICT for learning activities was highlighted by some students as an area for development. The classroom board was also used effectively to impact on student learning. Commendably, the display of information on the board was most often very neatly and clearly presented.

Questioning strategies were used in the majority of lessons to guide and gauge student learning. Good practice was observed when teachers combined the use of low-order and
high-order questions and addressed questions globally to the class and to named individuals. The varying of the teachers’ questioning techniques in this manner facilitated effective interaction with the students and the development of lessons. With regard to the latter, the questioning of students was observed being used effectively at different stages of lessons such as the introduction of the students to the subject of their study, recapitulation of the subject at the end of the lesson, the correction of homework, and by way of encouraging students to use the target language. Notwithstanding these positive examples, the use and application of questioning could have been more effectively employed in some lessons.

Strategies to enhance the literacy and numeracy skills of the students were incorporated into a few lessons. These included the reinforcement of key words at the start of the lesson that were critical to the study of the lesson topic, the setting of numerical and written tasks, reading aloud, the answering and asking of questions and the undertaking of computer-based assignments involving reading and typing. The display of visually stimulating materials on the walls of the classrooms also supports the literacy and numeracy skills of the students. However, the identification of strategies to support the development of students’ literacy and numeracy skills should continue to be explored.

The samples of students’ copies perused during the evaluation were generally neat and well maintained. The practice of individual teachers regularly correcting and commenting on the students’ homework assignments was noted. This practice is commended. Moreover, the constructive feedback comments provided by individual teachers on students’ written assignments should be universally adopted in order to provide students with clear direction as to how to maintain ongoing improvement in the quality of their work.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Previous subject inspections in French, Science and Biology, English and Social Personal and Health Education were reviewed. Considerable efforts have been made to address the various recommendations made in the applicable reports. Examples include the expansion of the Relationship and Sexuality Education team, the allocation of five periods of English at junior cycle and the ratification of the health and safety statement for the science laboratory by the board of management. Management’s swift response to these recommendations is commended.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

The increased use of curricular planning focusing on desired learning outcomes was recommended in each inspection report reviewed. The relevant subject departments have made a concerted effort to address these recommendations and have reviewed subject planning documentation accordingly. All subject departments should now focus on developing their subject plans in this manner to further promote the utilisation of assessment for learning strategies.

In subject areas where specific recommendations were made in relation to methodology and student learning activities, lessons exhibited quantifiable development in these areas. These included increased levels of student participation, active learning methods and increased student interaction.
5. THE SCHOOL’S SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS AND CAPACITY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Duiske College has initiated some self-evaluative practices. This is a positive departure for the school and has occurred primarily through the adoption of the DEIS action planning model. In order to further embed effective self-evaluative practices, this model should be pursued, particularly in relation the school’s overall strategic plan. To formalise this approach, the board, through a strategic planning model, should prioritise its key objectives and identify realistic measurable targets. This will allow focused school improvement to form the basis of ongoing school development.

The school has the capacity to implement the recommendations made in this report. A considered approach to the changes required will result in improved planning, structures and ultimately enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

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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

Duiske College welcomes this Management, Leadership and Learning Whole School Evaluation Report.

The inspection was carried out in a very collaborative, professional and courteous manner. We wish to sincerely thank the inspection team for their courtesy and sincerity which helped to make the whole MLL process a very positive experience for the school community.

Our key focus at Duiske College is endeavouring to improve our school with particular emphasis on improving student outcomes. This report commends the self evaluating processes already in place at Duiske College and we are confident that this report gives focus and direction to these practices and also will give impetus to further school improvement. As in previous inspections management will respond both swiftly and in a considered and reflective way to fully implement the recommendations of this report.

We welcome the very many positive findings in the MLL report. The report confirms our strongly held view that Duiske College is a caring school community endeavouring to enable all students reach their full potential. This report confirms that our Mission Statement is being lived out in reality in everyday school life.

The MLL Report identifies and commends the many improvements which have and are presently taking place at Duiske College. These range from the significant improvements in school facilities to the commended self evaluating outcome based approach of DEIS Action Planning; from the effective distributed leadership to the commitment of the B.O.M. and Senior Management to school improvement; from the significant improvement in Guidance resources and facilities to the swift response of management to all previous inspections commended by the Inspectorate; from the significant improvement in ICT resources to the exemplary and overall good teaching and learning taking place at Duiske College; from the friendly, caring and positive school environment to the active learning methodologies in teaching and learning. These very positive findings confirm us in our belief that we are firmly right track and the report encourages us in our efforts towards continual school improvement as a self evaluating school.

Finally the Board of Management wishes to sincerely thank all partners in the school community for their commitment to ensuring that our mission statement is a reality in every day school life and also for their commitment to the vision of ongoing pro-active improvement at Duiske College.
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 report makes recommendations which when implemented will enhance and compliment the many positive practices and realities of school life already in place at Duiske College.

- Duiske College will continue with the many commended practices outlined in this report to ensure our Mission Statement continues to be a reality in the day to day life of our students
- In April, May and June 2011, Duiske College carried out a full review of our Timetable and Curriculum.
- All students at Duiske College now receive a minimum of 28 hours tuition time as per Circular M29/95.
- Changes were implemented on Timetable and Curriculum in August/September 2011. The full range of changes will be implemented for Academic Year commencing August 2012.
- All Learning Support and Resource allocation is now used for that purpose.
- In recent years Duiske College has put much effort into building up our Learning Support and Special Educational Needs department. A fully furnished Resource Room, teacher training, dedicated resource staff coupled with many numeracy and literacy initiatives have contributed to this. However, in the past we have had difficulty with time allocation due to the small size of our school and the parental wishes in some instances not to have children withdrawn on a one to one basis. This year we have adopted the recommendation of the Inspectorate to take on board co-operative and team teaching strategies in conjunction with the strategies already in place. This has enabled us to allocate all resource and learning support hours for that purpose. We will evaluate the effectiveness of team teaching at the end of academic year 2011/2012.
- The Admissions policy is currently being reviewed by the school community
- The Board of Management ratified the Special Educational Needs Policy and the Whole School Guidance Plan in May 2011 and the end of year B.O.M. Report was circulated to all partners in the school community. It is posted on our new school website. A S.M.A.R.T. Strategic Plan for future development and policy evaluation has been adopted by the B.O.M.
- Many numeracy and literacy initiatives are taking place at subject and cross curricular level in the school at present.
- Guidance is timetabled for all senior cycle students for academic year 2011/2012.