

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Coláiste na Carraige
Carrick, County Donegal
Roll number: 71150T**

Date of inspection: 12 May 2016



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

Whole-School Evaluation

Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in May 2016 in Coláiste na Carraige, County Donegal. 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

Coláiste Carraige is a multi-denominational and co-educational post-primary school under the patronage of Donegal Education and Training Board (ETB). The school provides the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and an optional Transition Year (TY). The school caters for 232 students and has a unit for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The principal and deputy principal manage the school very effectively and provide excellent leadership for learning.
- The holders of posts of responsibility have strong leadership roles and make a significant contribution to the work of the school.
- There is exceptionally good practice in relation to supporting students to reach their full potential and the school seeks, values and acts on students' views.
- Very high-quality support is provided for students with special educational needs (SEN) and the care systems in the school are very effective.
- The quality of teaching and learning was very good overall with many instances of excellent practice observed.
- Teachers have adopted the methodologies espoused by the teaching and learning team and the information and communication technology (ICT) team in the school; there is scope for an integration of these two initiatives.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The school should develop its website as a means of communicating the main decisions of the board, the school improvement plan (SIP) and other relevant information to the wider school community.
- Lessons should incorporate a combination of the valuable teaching strategies espoused by the teaching and learning and ICT teams in order to ensure a more integrated approach to promoting innovation in the classroom.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The quality of school ownership and management is very good. The recently appointed board of management is appropriately constituted and demonstrates a very good awareness of its responsibilities. The members of the board are very committed to the school and have enthusiastically embraced their leadership roles. The board is well informed of the school's day-to-day work by the principal's report. Additionally, the students' council representatives have met with the board where they outlined issues important to them. The board reported that this input was very valuable to it. The board adopts a reflective approach to its work and the work of the school.

The board meets regularly and the agenda for every meeting appropriately includes a report on child protection. One of the initial undertakings of the board was to establish a systematic review of all school policies. This benefited the board in terms of familiarising its members with the processes and practices in the school. This review also informed the board's developmental priorities. The quality of teaching and learning is the main area of focus for the board. The board members discuss student achievement regularly and they endorse the school's focus on encouraging high standards and ongoing improvement in teaching and learning.

Donegal ETB provides training and resources to support the work of the school. Collaboration is facilitated between senior managers and teachers in schools under the trusteeship of the ETB. At the school level, highly effective systems and procedures are in place to ensure that the views of staff, parents, students, and the board contribute appropriately to the continued success of the school. For example, the school is examining its vision and mission statements currently; the consultation process involved the whole-school community at all stages of this work.

The parents' association (PA) makes a significant contribution to various aspects of the school's work. The members of the PA fulfil a valuable advisory role, have been very successful in raising funds and also assist with school events. The PA members serve for a term of one year and are chosen by lottery. While the parents selected are not obliged to participate, they are welcome to do so; the school strongly welcomes and values their participation. School management reports that this method of appointing parents to the PA has ensured that the school benefits from the insights, skills and ideas of as wide a cohort of parents as possible.

Communication between all of the stakeholders in the school is very good in general. However, it is recommended that the school develops its website as a further means of communicating the main decisions of the board, the SIP and other relevant information to the wider school community.

The senior management team, comprising the principal and deputy principal, leads the school community very effectively in serving the needs of its students. They employ their complementary skills to ensure that the school is very well organised and well run. This was strongly endorsed by the positive responses to questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation. Their collaborative approach contributes to the smooth operation of the school and its successful development on a long-term basis.

The principal and deputy principal use a range of skills to motivate, manage and lead the school community. Through their commitment to the distribution of leadership, they foster an enjoyable and challenging work environment for staff. The senior management team is committed to inclusion and takes a partnership approach. They share a common philosophy

which is to ensure all members of the school community work together to encourage students reach their potential, in an atmosphere of support, welcome and kindness.

The middle-management team comprises three assistant principals and one special duties teacher. It provides very high-quality support to the operation of the school. Its members have a strong leadership role; they have appropriate autonomy and are given many opportunities to lead projects and development teams. Their contribution to decision making is highly valued by the principal and deputy principal. A review of the posts of responsibility is underway currently and there is evidence of appropriate whole-school consultation in the review process. This review will ensure that the post structure continues to meet the needs of the school.

Teachers are involved actively in the life of the school through their work as tutors, class teachers and year heads, through their participation on school and subject planning consultation groups, and through their contribution to the broad extra-curricular programme. They are open to innovation in the use of varied and creative teaching methodologies and ICT in the classroom. They generously provide additional tuition to students in their own time. Additionally, very good supports are in place for mentoring newly qualified teachers.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership for learning is excellent in the school. The principal and deputy principal promote a culture of innovation by welcoming ideas and by supporting teachers in trying new approaches with a view to improving the learning experience for students. They strive to lead by example through, for example, implementing innovation in their own classrooms, through ongoing reflective practice in respect of student achievement in the school, and through facilitating peer observation by teachers. They ensure that teaching and learning in the school is informed by the expertise of the local primary schools, outside facilitation of continuing professional development (CPD) for staff, internal facilitation of CPD by school staff, and through the school self-evaluation (SSE) process.

Teaching and learning teams have been established to provide useful and structured support to staff. These teams ensure that teachers can benefit from the courses attended by the large core group of teachers through the facilitation of shared learning sessions. These teams are focusing currently on incorporating a variety of methodologies in teaching and learning and on enhancing the use of ICT, particularly in *assessment for learning*. Teachers make presentations at staff meetings as a means of sharing expertise. Additionally, a notice board in the staffroom is used to notify teachers when new approaches are being used in classrooms and to invite them to peer observe. These measures have contributed positively to the quality of students' learning experience in the classroom.

There is extensive consultation between the school and the feeder primary schools. Visits are conducted to gather information about incoming students' needs. Additionally, meetings are held with teachers and school managers of both sectors to collaborate on approaches to teaching various aspects of the curriculum; best practice from both sectors is shared. For example, the science department assists in designing science modules for the primary schools and the primary schools share their methodologies for Mathematics, English, Irish and History. This exemplary level of cooperation has many benefits for students' learning and for their smooth transition from primary to post-primary school.

The school is not compliant with the requirements of Circular Letter M22/95 with regard to providing instruction time of twenty-eight hours per week for students. Recent measures have been taken to increase tuition time although there remains a shortfall. The issue has been recognised by the school and measures such as limiting the provision of a tutor period

to one per month have been implemented to optimise the value of class contact time. It is recommended that continued and concerted efforts be made to comply fully with the circular.

The subject departments are well established and they have engaged very well with curricular planning. It is particularly valuable that the documentation includes analyses of student achievement and that these are used to inform planning for all subjects. Programmes of work for each subject have been developed and best practice was evident where the programmes outlined clearly the intended learning outcomes, together with the methodologies, resources, and modes of assessment to be used. Such an approach should be undertaken by all departments.

There is exceptionally good practice in relation to supporting students to reach their full potential. Each fifth and sixth-year student is assigned a teacher mentor to help them in setting study and achievement targets, to motivate and encourage them to study and to support them pastorally. Student progress and achievement are closely monitored through the comprehensive analysis of attainment compared to national norms and standardised tests that are carried out each year. The uptake of subjects at higher level and attainment in the certificate examinations is very good.

The school rules are communicated clearly and are implemented effectively. There is a well-structured ladder of referral for managing student behaviour. The school emphasises a pastoral approach, which includes the use of restorative justice practices. The code of behaviour is under review currently to ensure that it fully reflects the practice on the ground and the school's ethos. During the evaluation, the students presented as courteous and very co-operative learners; they were respectful to their teachers and each other.

The school atmosphere was warm and friendly. Due in good part to the size of the school, everyone knows each other well and this has contributed to the positive relationships that exist. The canteen area is well located and used by students as a hub for socialising at lunch and break times.

The school seeks, values and acts on students' views. Students have a voice through participation on the students' council. They complete surveys on various aspects of school life and are consulted appropriately in the development of policies. They provide valuable assistance to first-year students in settling into post-primary school through the buddy system. Members of the student council make presentations to the board of management and to their class groups at tutor time, and they present at open nights and award ceremonies. It is suggested that further opportunities be provided for students to make presentations to larger groups, for example at assemblies, to assist them in developing public-speaking skills.

Care systems in the school are very effective. The guidance counsellor supports students very well in making programme, subject and level choices. Personal counselling is available for students through the guidance department. Students can speak readily to members of the care team, tutors or teachers, if they should need support. Additionally, the school benefits from the services of the ETB psychologist who provides personal counselling and advice for students and who provides advice also to the care team on delivering support.

Very high-quality support is provided for students with special educational needs (SEN). The provision is very well organised and is delivered by a fully qualified team of teachers. Very good records are kept and regular reviews are carried out to ensure the SEN provision continues to meet students' needs adequately. Individual education plans are maintained for all students with assessed SEN. Learning support is also provided for students experiencing

difficulty. Communication between learning-support and mainstream teachers is very good. The special needs assistants were observed to play a very important role in supporting students.

Given the size of the school, the curriculum is very broad and balanced. A variety of programmes is provided and very good effort, including the provision of additional subjects outside of the timetable, is made to meet the needs of students.

The school has a specialised unit for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Students availing of the ASD unit are integrated into mainstream class groups in line with best practice in meeting the needs of such students. The school reports the beneficial support of staff as a key strength in providing for the needs of the students.

Admissions procedures are well structured and the school is very inclusive. There are very good systems to monitor and promote good attendance and punctuality and the school is successful in realising both.

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 school and its facilities are maintained to a very high standard. The administration, cleaning and caretaking staff make a significant contribution to the school. There is very good provision of resources for learning including information and communication technology (ICT). The school participates in the Green-Schools initiative and has been awarded two green flags.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of learning and teaching was very good overall in the lessons observed, with many instances of excellent practice noted. There were few areas for improvement in the lessons observed.

A wide variety of strategies was used to engage learners in all lessons. Teachers have embraced the methodologies espoused by the teaching and learning team and the ICT team. However, there was scope for an integration of these two initiatives. Therefore, it is recommended that the school take a more integrated approach and that teachers strive to incorporate a combination of the valuable strategies of both teams in their lessons.

All lessons had a clear focus and widespread use was made of learning intentions to structure lessons. Links were made to previous learning experiences through the correction of homework or everyday examples in order to build on students' prior knowledge.

Observed lessons were planned meticulously with a particular focus on including student-centred activities. Across the school, students were provided opportunities for thinking, discussing, writing, engaging in practical activities and engaging with technology in the classroom. Students were observed to enjoy their learning. Additional resources were well chosen and readied in advance of lessons. Electronic presentations contained high-quality visuals; these proved effective in clarifying lesson concepts, especially complex concepts such as genetic engineering. Best practice was observed where presentations included opportunities to summarise and to check learning.

Most lessons included opportunities for students to collaborate and debate with each other. Group-work strategies were observed to be very effective triggers for promoting higher-order thinking and for providing challenge for the range of learners in classrooms. In the main, teachers' questioning was skilful; most questioning strategies included a blend of higher and lower-order questions. There were many instances where teachers successfully supported students in answering a question with direction and prompts; sometimes, however, there was a need to be mindful of over-supporting students and consequently reducing opportunities for independent learning. It was observed that the layout of some classrooms, with desks arranged in pods of four or more, facilitated and encouraged effective group work. In these instances, oral communication and discussion among students were very strong.

There was exemplary use of the target language by students and teachers in the language lessons observed. These lessons were dynamic and fun and were dominated by natural and lively student discussion. In French, for example, very good use was made of the French assistant in promoting learning. Irish was observed to be used throughout the school in everyday conversations between students and their teachers; this is a very valuable support in promoting high standards in this area.

Practical lessons were very well managed. Thorough instruction was provided to students, which was focused on good and safe working practices. Expectations were well communicated to students; as a consequence, they undertook their work confidently and competently.

A variety of very effective strategies was used to monitor progress and assess learning. In all lessons, verbal feedback was provided to students on an ongoing basis as they worked. Extensive formative feedback is provided routinely by teachers in respect of students' written work; the level of effort undertaken in doing this work is indicative of the commitment of teachers to encouraging students to improve and do well.

In some lessons, highly effective use was made of ICT to assess learning and to provide opportunities for students to evaluate the teaching approaches used; this included electronic assessment tests using students' mobile phones in one lesson and the use of an electronic *learning log* in another. The electronic assessment tests were particularly effective in providing the teacher with specific and detailed information on student progress. The *learning log* required the students to articulate what they had learned and areas for further development and also to indicate which teacher strategies helped them learn best. These innovative approaches are being shared with other staff in the school and with the wider teaching community through videos posted on the website of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).

During observed lessons, teachers demonstrated very high levels of enjoyment in their work and a positive disposition towards engagement with the students. Their enthusiastic approach to teaching greatly enhanced students' learning experience.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Very good progress has been made on the implementation of all main recommendations made in previous evaluation reports in the area of whole-school provision. Examples of revised practice include the provision of double periods for science and the inclusion of relevant care personnel in care-team meetings.

3.2 Learning and teaching

All of the main recommendations in respect of teaching and learning are being addressed by subject departments. For example, the inclusion of active methodologies and ICT in lessons was recommended and this is being implemented very well on an ongoing basis. In addition, the science department has developed a policy on common marking practice, and general subject-department meetings now include the sharing of best practice and discussion on student achievement.

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

The school has embraced the SSE process and has been very successful in using it to drive improvement. It has articulated its focus on student achievement clearly and uses data very effectively to inform practice. There is an exceptionally high level of consultation between all members of the school community and outside agencies. A large cohort of teachers are involved in promoting change and in adopting and developing new methodologies and approaches. There is an openness amongst teaching staff to engage with peer observation and to share expertise and experience. Additionally, plans are underway for teachers, including members of the senior management team, to video and review each other's lessons. School management promotes innovation by encouraging teachers to take appropriate risks in a supportive and non-judgemental manner.

The school has very good capacity for continued school improvement. There is a strong commitment to ensuring that practice in the school continues to evolve to meet the changing needs of its students.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

Coláiste na Carriage welcomes the very positive and encouraging comments of the inspector in relation to Teaching and Learning and general School Management. The feedback received ranged from 'very good' to 'excellent' in areas of School Management, School Leadership, Teaching and Learning, Special Educational Needs and the School Care System.

The Inspectors recognise and acknowledge the emphasis on consultation with all members of the school community to ensure the continued success of the school.

The middle-management team provides high quality support to the senior-management team and this contributes significantly to the operation of an effective and efficient school.

Teachers are progressive and innovative leading a high quality teaching and learning environment in the school. This has been created through a wide range of initiatives inclusive of: continuing professional development; peer observation; and shared learning sessions. The school places very strong emphasis on supporting students to reach their full potential. In all our activities within the school we keep the best interests of our students as the overriding theme in all our decision making. We actively seek and act on students' views and opinions consulting with the student body on a regular basis. There is ongoing collaboration with feeder primary schools on teaching approaches and students are supported academically and pastorally by teacher mentors.

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

Action on recommendations:

1. The principal has consulted with Donegal ETB in relation to instruction time for students. Following these discussions, plans are now in place to increase tuition time for students.
2. The school has completed its post of responsibility review. The reassigning of duties now provides scope for the school to develop its website as a medium of communication with the school community. This issue will be addressed in the 2016/17 academic year.
3. The school plans to further the integration of various teaching strategies and ICT into classrooms by facilitating staff with CPD and with innovative teaching and learning. Coláiste na Carriage is also now part of a wider Donegal ETB initiative to support and encourage shared resources among teachers.
4. There is scope for the further development of some subject plans in line with the best practice identified by the inspectors. The school plans to share this good practice during subject planning sessions. A written guide will be provided to support departments with this work.