

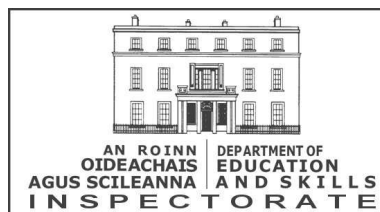
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**REPORT
Árdscoil Phádraig
Granard, County Longford
Roll number: 71710I**

Date of inspection: 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 Árdcoil Phádraig. 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

Árdcoil Phádraig is one of two co-educational second-level schools in Granard. The school, under the trusteeship of Co. Longford VEC, caters for 136 post-primary students who come from Granard and a large rural hinterland. The school is inclusive in its enrolment practices and student numbers have been increasing in recent years. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative and it provides a range of programmes to meet the needs of students.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board of management is properly constituted and committed to the future development of the school. It is functioning very well in terms of policy development, ratification and review. Consultation with the school community is well developed.
- The principal and deputy principal demonstrate a very thorough and professional approach to their work and they provide clear leadership to the school community.
- Very good management of students is evident. Mutual respect was obvious between teachers and students. Students demonstrated exemplary behaviour during the evaluation.
- The quality of teaching and learning observed was good, and very good in a number of instances. High expectations by teachers for student engagement, participation, behaviour and attainment were evident.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- It is recommended that the board take on a more significant educational leadership role.
- The school's DEIS plan should be prioritised for completion at an early date. It is particularly important that whole-school literacy and numeracy strategies be developed and implemented in the short term.
- It is recommended that the roles of the post holders be reviewed regularly and reconciled with the changing needs of the school.
- Subject department planning should be reviewed and plans should be adapted to support the achievement of the full range of DEIS targets.

- It is recommended that a core planning team be put in place and that procedures to formalise the work of this team be drawn up.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

The board, which is a subcommittee of Co. Longford VEC, is properly constituted and meets regularly. It is kept fully informed of all in-school developments and events by the acting principal who is secretary to the board. The board is fully supportive of in-school management. Decision making is by consensus.

The board communicates well with the partners. However, much of this is carried out informally. It is recommended that the board issue an agreed report following its meetings. In addition, developments such as meeting formally with the parents' association and with students' representatives, to consider common issues, would significantly enhance communications and increase the profile of all those involved.

To date, members of the board have not received training and it is recommended that training be provided for board members on their role and statutory obligations at an early date.

In matters relating to educational leadership, the board defers to the expertise of senior in-school management and to the teaching staff. It is recommended that the board adopts a more significant leadership role in engaging with issues relating to learning. Training will assist the board in developing its role as educational leaders. In the process of delegating responsibility to senior management, it is recommended that the board adopts a more proactive, critical approach to its work and that self evaluation and review become a normal aspect of its deliberations, to augment the work of senior management. Programme and subject department co-ordinators and post holders should submit an annual report to the board on the performance of their duties. The board should oversee the school's response to subject inspection reports and monitor progress in implementing recommendations.

The board is functioning very well in policy development and ratification. A school plan has been prepared and those policies not already in place are currently being developed. For example, it is intended to ratify policies on Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) at an early date. Consultation with the school community in relation to policy development is very good. It is suggested that the date of ratification and a proposed review date be stated on all policies.

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*.

The school's priorities for development

The board has identified a number of priorities for school development, including school expansion, development of facilities, raising the profile of the school in the local community, enhancing information and communication technology (ICT) facilities and continuing to adapt to the changing needs of the school community. Good progress has been made on the development of the ICT infrastructure and on providing or refurbishing a number of specialist rooms. New subjects have been introduced, for example Art, Music and PE; and *Cluain Eala*, a specialised unit to support students on the autistic spectrum, opened this year. There is evidence from increased enrolment that the school's profile in the community is changing.

There are no clear developmental plans in place to achieve stated improvements. The provision of adequate accommodation is a significant issue at present. Should the pattern of increase in first-year enrolments continue, there will be insufficient accommodation for the resulting additional class groups. It is recommended that the following issues are prioritised in the short-term: investigation of options for the development of the necessary infrastructure to enable the expansion of the school; continued promotion of the school in the community and engagement in educational dialogue with feeder primary schools; and completion of the school's ICT infrastructure.

Given the school's participation in the DEIS initiative, it is imperative that a plan for improvement be completed at an early date. The board should lead the development of DEIS planning. The process of compiling baseline data, setting targets for improvement and selecting and implementing interventions to achieve these targets should be progressed as a matter of urgency. Progress towards achieving targets should be closely monitored and interventions adjusted as necessary. While much work is ongoing in relation to improving attendance and engaging with parents and others, there is no working plan in place. Other priority DEIS issues such as retention, progression, educational attainment and literacy and numeracy have not been satisfactorily addressed. It is particularly important that whole-school literacy and numeracy strategies be developed and implemented in the short term.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The acting principal and deputy principal demonstrate a professional approach to their work, have good complementary skills and work very well as a team. They provide clear, proactive and effective leadership to the school community and they have overseen recent significant improvements in the school.

High morale amongst the teaching staff was evident and teachers were motivated and prepared well for their work. The level of collegiality was high and a warm, caring and supportive atmosphere prevailed. Positive working relationships between and amongst staff, management and students were obvious and there was an ethos of educational inclusion. Teachers are appropriately deployed and their continuing professional development needs have been appropriately managed.

Management is strongly supported by staff and there is a good sense of ownership of all aspects of the school's work. This is evident from the good order in the school, the commitment of the post holders and non-post holders and the work of the care team. Post holders and non-post holders work hard to fulfil a variety of administrative, curricular and pastoral roles. Distributed leadership and shared responsibility are evident. Programme co-ordinators have planned for the efficient and effective management of programmes. To maintain the current effectiveness of the middle-management team, it is recommended that the roles of the post holders be regularly reviewed and reconciled with the changing needs of the school.

Students are well cared for in a variety of ways including the year-head system, the care team, guidance provision and the learning-support team. The work of the home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator contributes significantly to student welfare and to maintaining strong home-school links. There is an appropriate system of internal referrals and appropriate contacts are maintained with external voluntary and statutory agencies.

Learning-support and resource allocations are appropriately used. It is recommended that the model used to support students with additional needs, mainly based on individual and

small-group tuition, be further developed and an approach which includes team teaching be considered where possible.

Policy development may be initiated at different levels within the school and the principal is effectively the planning co-ordinator. It is recommended that a core planning team be put in place and that procedures to formalise the work of this team be drawn up. An overarching policy statement should be developed to co-ordinate the work of the care team, learning-support department, guidance department, and the wide range of initiatives that constitute the student-support system.

Subject department planning documents are consistent and thorough. It is particularly commendable that the teaching of all courses has been scheduled in detail for the duration of each cycle. In order to progress this work further, it is recommended that attention be extended to planning for improvement, in particular in the context of the school's inclusion in the DEIS initiative. Targets for improvement, in line with those of the school's DEIS plan, should inform this process as should close liaison with the learning-support department. A particular focus should be placed on how each subject can contribute to students' literacy and numeracy development. Subject departments should identify the significant strengths that can be built on and areas where improvement is required. An ongoing analysis of outcomes in the certificate examinations will add to the evidence base and will assist in setting targets regarding examination attainment. In addition, a focus on learning outcomes and planning for the use of the enhanced ICT infrastructure should feature in subject department plans.

Leadership of students

The school operates an open and inclusive admissions system and the transfer programme to support incoming first-year students is good. Parents' questionnaire responses reflected positively on the quality of support provided.

Incoming students follow a full range of subjects for their first year. On entering second year, students must choose four from a total of eight subjects and all possible efforts are made to facilitate students with their preferred choices. It is recommended that the length and scope of subject sampling be re-evaluated to ensure that the benefits of the sampling process are not negated by the reduction in overall time available to each subject over the three years of the junior cycle.

Junior cycle classes in core subjects are, for the most part, streamed and the JCSP students are in one stream, facilitating the concentration of resources. Classes in all other subjects are mixed ability.

Students progressing to senior cycle are given appropriate support when choosing programme and subjects. Comprehensive guidance support is provided to students at all levels. Appropriate provision is in place, in a manner that is balanced between transition stages, junior and senior cycle needs and individual and group work.

A student council has recently been re-established, comprising elected members from all year groups. The council was consulted regarding the code of behaviour. It is recommended that the council be assisted in developing a constitution and be given a clear and relevant role.

Very good management of students was evident during the inspection. There was good order on the corridors at all times, students behaved responsibly and with courtesy and demonstrated a sense of pride in their school.

The management of the timetable is a challenge as a significant number of teachers are shared with other schools within the Co. Longford VEC scheme. The VEC is urged to rationalise this situation, as far as possible, to facilitate optimum distribution of classes across the entire week.

Students' journals are well used for the most part. However, from time to time, a whole-school effort to ensure that all parents and students are using the journal as intended would be useful. In addition, it is suggested that positive comments be used more frequently to encourage and affirm students. Likewise, the use of the commendable attendance reward system should be extended to as many students as possible.

Parent-teacher meetings, in-house examinations and reports to students' homes are all well managed. Although there is no early morning breakfast club, snacks are made available to students during morning break, at lunchtime and prior to the evening study club. There is very good provision of extracurricular and co-curricular activities. Students are invited to participate in clubs which operate at lunchtime, including the walking club and the board games club. The teaching staff is commended for supporting a wide range of sporting and cultural activities that promote the holistic development of students.

2.3 Management of facilities

School facilities are very well maintained and a calm, warm and inclusive atmosphere was apparent throughout the school. *Cluain Eala*, the special support unit, is housed in purpose-built accommodation. Significant improvement work was undertaken recently on the school roof. All rooms were clean, appropriately equipped, well maintained and fit for purpose.

The school is participating in the *Green Schools* initiative, has achieved one green flag to date and is currently working towards a second flag. The entire school community is commended for this valuable work.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in the lessons observed. Learning objectives were shared with students at the outset of many lessons. In some lessons however, these learning outcomes could have been more clearly communicated. A review of the learning outcomes took place in the final phase of some lessons but overall practice was inconsistent. It is recommended that a consistent approach to sharing and reviewing lesson objectives be implemented across the school.

High expectations by teachers for student engagement, behaviour and attainment were evident. Students responded well and worked hard to meet these expectations. The strong classroom routines observed reflected the good level of order throughout the school. Classrooms were well managed and the quality of interactions was good in all instances and very good in quite a few. The positive learning atmosphere in all the lessons observed was underpinned by the good relationship between teachers and students. Affirmation of students was frequently observed.

Teachers utilised an appropriate variety of methodologies to guide and support learning and good use was made of resources. Overall, there was a good balance between teacher-led and student-centred phases in lessons and active learning was a feature of many classrooms.

The quality of the displays of charts and posters in classrooms was varied. It is recommended that greater and more consistent use of supporting charts and posters be

adopted in order to create print-rich environments, to provide informative illustrations and to stimulate students' interest. Charts, including students' own work, should be changed regularly to maintain the attractiveness and usefulness of such displays. Some classrooms had keyword charts on display. However, this was very much underused as a means of supporting students' literacy development.

The good quality of students' learning was evidenced by a high level of student engagement during the lessons observed and by the quality of student-teacher interactions. The majority of the sample of students' copybooks reviewed during the evaluation also contained neat and good quality work. Teachers' good practice of providing affirming and developmental feedback when correcting the students' written work was noted in many instances. The provision of constructive feedback by teachers as standard practice across all subjects is recommended as a means of promoting improvement.

Teachers made good use of the target language in the language lessons observed, although there is scope to develop the practice further by ensuring, for example, that simple instructions are always stated in the target language. Students should also be challenged to make greater usage of the target language when replying to questions.

Questioning of students was used as an ongoing teaching methodology in most lessons. Questions were addressed both to named individual students, to promote engagement and to gauge their understanding of the lesson topic, and to the class as a whole, as appropriate. Questioning was also used to review prior learning at the start of some lessons. The use of directed questions should be further explored as means of securing the contributions of reticent students.

Differentiated teaching was achieved mainly through teacher circulation, questioning and the provision of attention to individuals. Aspects of *Assessment for Learning* were apparent in some lessons but evidence of its systematic use was lacking and further development over time, at whole-school level, is recommended.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Evidence demonstrates that in-school management has overseen the implementation of recommendations at whole-school level. A number of changes and improvements as a result of earlier subject inspections are noted, for example the provision of a fully-qualified teacher of Irish on the permanent staff. The current arrangements for the taster programme have been reviewed. Planning time has been made available to the subject departments. Where recommended changes have not been implemented, the inspectors are satisfied that sufficient consideration was given, in the context of other school priorities, to the issues concerned.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Observation suggests that there have been improvements in some areas but not in others, for example there have been significant improvements in content and in ICT provision and use in Art; learning outcomes are being shared with students at the commencement of some lessons and provision of quality feedback to students on their written work is apparent in many classrooms, though in both cases practice is inconsistent. The use of desired learning outcomes as a basis for subject planning has been mentioned elsewhere in this report.

It is suggested that recommendations in future subject inspection reports be examined at whole-school level to identify improvements that may be implemented across all subject departments.

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

The current senior management team has demonstrated the necessary skills, knowledge and outlook to manage and lead a complex and constantly changing organisation and their retirement will be a loss. At this time of transition, there is an opportunity for the board to fully brief the incoming senior management team on the identified strengths of the school and areas for improvement.

The board should take a lead role in overseeing the improvements outlined in this report. It is recommended that the board, senior management and subject departments review their work and set targets for improvement on an annual basis, especially in the context of DEIS. However, all key areas for development should be considered: policy development and review, curriculum provision, integration of DEIS targets and interventions into teaching and learning, monitoring of progress in achieving DEIS targets, and planning for the future needs of the school. The assistance of the VEC might be explored as a means of contributing to the self-evaluation and review process.

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 of Ardscoil Phádraig welcome the very positive report on the WSE-MLL inspection. We would like to thank the inspection team for their professionalism, courtesy and thorough report on the running of the school.

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

The Board of Management and Staff are currently working on the recommendations of the Report. Significant work has since been undertaken on the DEIS plan. Progress has been made on post responsibilities, although further progress is difficult due to the moratorium on posts of responsibility.

Subject plans are currently being reviewed.