

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Coláiste Iascaigh
Easkey, County Sligo
Roll number: 72320A**

Date of inspection: 11 April 2014



**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 April 2014 in Coláiste Iascaigh. 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 of the school 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 Iascaigh is a co-educational school operating under the auspices of Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board. The school is the sole provider of post-primary education in the locality and serves a diverse and dispersed rural community. The school has been participating in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), an action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion, since 2009. Current enrolment stands at 145, representing an increase of twenty four percent in student numbers since 2010.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The school is inclusive in principle and practice and is committed to meeting the needs of all its students.
- The board of management operates effectively and is very supportive of the school.
- The new senior management team displays consultative leadership qualities and has a clear vision for school improvement.
- The commitment of staff is a key strength of the school and many members have embraced continuing professional development (CPD) and leadership opportunities.
- Improved attendance, retention and partnership with parents are successful outcomes of the school's DEIS planning, however the integration of literacy and numeracy strategies across the curriculum and student attainment remain key areas for development.
- The curriculum provided is enhanced by a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- A high level of care for students is evident across the school community.
- Senior management encourages continuous improvement of teaching and learning through lesson observation and the promotion of subject planning.
- Good or very good quality plans are in place for all subjects and programmes.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in the majority of the lessons; there was scope to improve the teaching and learning techniques used in a quarter of the lessons evaluated.
- There has been good engagement with school self-evaluation (SSE) and the school has the collective capacity to advance the process of improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development

- In consultation with the holders of posts of responsibility, senior management and the board should carry out a whole-staff review of the schedule of posts based on school's current needs and its developmental priorities.
- The school's action planning process should be used more strategically to progress an improvement agenda which reflects its developmental priorities, its DEIS planning and its SSE process.
- A key focus for whole-school planning and subject department planning should be developing approaches to literacy, numeracy and assessment for learning with a sustained emphasis on improving student attainment.
- Formal procedures need to be established to ensure adequate mechanisms are in place for the sharing of pertinent information between all stakeholders.
- The school's health and safety statement should be ratified by the board.
- To support students' learning, greater emphasis should be placed on the effective use of learning outcomes and on co-operative learning approaches in lessons.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management fulfils its statutory obligations in an effective manner and is committed to and takes an active role in the development of the school. The board has engaged well with all aspects of school management including policy development and review, finances, the development of school accommodation and facilities, teaching and learning and student-related issues. To further build on the very good level of partnership with stakeholders it is recommended that communication with staff and parents be formalised by means of an agreed written report following board meetings. The board should consider meeting annually with representative of the parents' association and the student council. An annual report on the operation and performance of the school could also be made available to the school community. Some policies have not been reviewed for a number of years; a timeframe to guide policy review into the future should be devised by the board for all key policies. As policies are updated they should be presented to the parents' association and the student council for their views.

The board in consultation with staff has identified a range of educational and infrastructural priorities for development. These include progressing DEIS planning, supporting the school's SSE process, managing the increased enrolment and changes in student profile, improving subject and programme choice, developing information and communication technology (ICT) and the acquisition of new classrooms. In this context a strategic plan should be devised that sets specific realistic targets and identifies actions to achieve all the agreed priorities over defined timeframes. This is necessary to guide the school's development over the coming years. This engagement with more strategic action planning should include the provision of formal progress reports on developmental priorities to all stakeholders.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The newly appointed principal and deputy principal work in close partnership and provide effective leadership to the school community. They set high standards, demonstrate a strong work ethic and lead by example. They carry out a very broad range of duties, many of which have accrued due to recent personnel changes. Their collaborative leadership style and democratic management approach have successfully inspired and motivated staff to

participate in a collaborative and manner dedicated to the holistic education of the students. There are open lines of communication between the two members of senior management and staff, parents and students and they have a clear vision and agenda for school improvement based on maximising educational outcomes for students. The senior management team in co-operation with staff has successfully implemented changes in a number of areas of school life: promoting continuing improvement in teaching and learning, raising student attainment, inculcating high expectations for subject planning and reflective practices among department members and across departments as well as improving curricular provision.

The in-school management structure comprises: two assistant principal and one special duties post. One of the assistant principal posts had not been filled at the time of the evaluation. The post-holders undertake their duties in a diligent manner and there is some evidence of distributed leadership in in-school management team. Since time has elapsed since a review of the post schedule was last carried out, a whole-staff review of the schedule of posts based on school's current needs and developmental priorities needs to be conducted. This review should also agree procedures for the reporting on performance of duties by post-holders to senior management on a termly basis and to the board at specific times of the year. Non-post holders have taken up key roles to ensure the co-ordination of activities and to lead new initiatives which provide essential support in the running of the school. This is commended.

A key strength of the school is its committed staff. A strong spirit of goodwill and volunteerism supports the delivery of both curricular activities and a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. This is valued by management and parents. Teachers display a strong commitment to their own continuing professional development (CPD) and a number have gained additional qualifications across a range of specialisms. Staff CPD is actively supported. Whole-staff in-service training has been provided on a range of topics over the past number of years. A practice of disseminating knowledge and good practice to colleagues in a structured manner when teachers return from external CPD is well established. There is an effective induction process to support new teachers and a comprehensive staff handbook has been developed.

The school has engaged with DEIS planning since 2009 and has a three-year DEIS plan (2011-2014) which forms the main basis for school improvement across targeted areas. All teaching staff have been assigned to work in sub-groups on the various DEIS strands and termly whole-staff DEIS meetings are convened. Good progress has been made in achieving the targets set in attendance, retention, staff development and partnership with parents. The six-step DEIS action planning process, including focused use of base-line data, needs to be used more strategically to progress the school's improvement agenda on a whole-school basis in relation to literacy, numeracy, student attainment and progression. A structure should also be put in place to address the current deficiencies that exist in monitoring students' progress and adjusting targets appropriately based on evidence gathered. An overall evaluation of DEIS 2011-2014 should be undertaken so that insights gained can improve planning for DEIS 2014-2017. Regular updates should be provided to the staff and to the board on whole-school progress including revised targets and associated strategies.

As part of the school's engagement in the SSE process a school improvement plan has been devised for the 2012-2014 period. Good progress has been made in this area though it is suggested that it be refined further and that its aims focus on one area of teaching and learning. To do this, it will be necessary to collect base-line data from students and parents. The three AfL strategies already identified by the teaching staff: sharing of the learning intention, differentiated questioning techniques and, in particular, the use of grade and comment marking for tests should provide the focus for this work. The strategy in relation

to the provision of formative feedback on students' tests should be extended to include substantial pieces of work completed by students as homework tasks. In advancing SSE, the school is advised that the recommendations made in relation to the more strategic use of the six-step action planning process for DEIS planning are equally applicable to planning for SSE.

The school has an active parents' association. On an ongoing basis, the association makes a significant contribution to supporting the school in a range of ways.

The school offers a broad curriculum in the context of its size and additional subjects have been added in an effort to offer further breath to the curriculum in recent years. The development of the curriculum is an ongoing priority of school management. The board recognises that such educational developments are hampered by a lack of accommodation and space. All junior cycle students are enrolled in the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). Student achievement is celebrated through the annual awards evening and celebration events for JCSP students. An eight-week taster programme is offered to first-year students. At senior cycle students are provided with an open choice of subjects and the Leaving Certificate Applied and the established Leaving Certificate programmes are offered. Senior management consult with staff on an annual basis in relation to timetabling considerations.

One of the key strengths of the school is its strong commitment to the welfare and care of all students. A well-managed transfer and induction programme supports students and their parents in the transition to post-primary school. The School Completion Programme (SCP) provides a comprehensive range of supports for targeted students. The school's on-going commitment to anti-bullying initiatives, including student-led projects, provides further evidence that it prioritises the welfare of its students. The composition of the care team ensures very good links between key personnel, however, the guidance counsellor should also be facilitated to attend this meeting in line with best practice outlined in the recent publication *Student Support teams in Post-Primary Schools*. The tutor system plays a key role in managing and caring for students and, although the role of the tutor is documented in the staff handbook, it is recommended that this information be included in the student journal. In light of the findings that resulted from the meetings held and the questionnaires administered during this evaluation; other ways of raising the profile of the class tutor among the student and parent cohorts should also be explored. Appropriate provision is made for Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE).

The co-ordination and planning of additional supports by the JCSP team and the special educational needs (SEN) team is carried out in a very effective and systematic manner tailored to students' needs. Examples of very good practice include: the early testing of first year students in literacy, numeracy and in general ability, the development of education plans for individual students, the dissemination of relevant information and resources to staff, a register of allocated SEN hours and a very high level of engagement by staff in CPD opportunities professional development.

The guidance and counselling service is a central support structure for senior cycle students in the school. However, there is a lack of clarity around the provision of guidance in junior cycle. This should be reviewed and the guidance plan should be further developed in a collaborative manner to reflect a whole-school approach to guidance.

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*.

1.2 Management of facilities

The building and grounds are well maintained. There is a limited range of specialist rooms and sports facilities. Senior management reported that the school is at maximum capacity, that there is a notable shortage of students' circulation space at break time and that the absence of a canteen compounds this difficulty. School management and staff are commended for their ongoing programme for repair and refurbishment of school facilities and the acquisition of the additional space in the Court House.

The school has successfully participated in the Green-Schools programme of *An Taisce* and is in the process of acquiring the school's fifth Green Flag. The endeavours involved in achieving these accolades are highly commended.

The school's health and safety statement has been reviewed and updated in line with the *Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools (2010)*. The annual risk assessment audits should be extended to include the recently acquired Court House. The reviewed statement should be ratified by the board and brought to the attention of the parents' association and the student council. This statement should be updated on an annual basis.

The need to maintain and upgrade the ICT infrastructure is a priority for management. The development of an e-learning plan is encouraged so that future investment in ICT is appropriately targeted to maximise the potential benefit for students' learning across the curriculum.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Subject department planning is well established and actively led by school management. The quality of subject planning is overall of a good standard and some exemplary practices were observed in relation to detailed schemes of work and reflective practices which included target setting for improvement. These approaches should be extended to all subject and programme plans. It is commendable that senior management provides each subject department with a template to guide effective improvements to planning for teaching and learning and to promote self-evaluation. It is recommended that this template be further developed so as to foster specific linkages between subjects and the schools' whole-school DEIS and SSE action planning processes.

Teaching and learning in twenty class periods across a range of subjects and programmes was observed by the evaluation team. The quality of teaching was good or very good in the majority of the lessons observed. In a quarter of the lessons the overall finding was there was scope to develop the teaching and learning techniques used. Preparation for all lessons was good in so far as due consideration had been given to the sequencing of lesson activities. Additional resources to support teaching and learning had been prepared and teachers made good use of the ICT facilities in the majority of lessons.

Significant strengths were evident in short-term planning when clear, differentiated learning outcomes were identified in 'can do' statements at the start of almost all lessons and these were revisited at the end of lessons. All teachers should aim to expand upon this good practice by ensuring students use the learning outcomes to self-assess their knowledge and understanding of topics, with a view to identifying gaps in their knowledge and obtaining direction for their own learning.

Well-chosen methodologies to engage students were observed in most lessons. In the majority of lessons a very good variety of active learning methodologies was used with good circulation by teachers to scaffold students' learning. Good use was made of group and pair work in some lessons though in a number of cases these practices required pre-set time frames, the assignment of distinct roles to students and a feedback session. All lessons were conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect and positive rapport.

Across all lessons questioning strategies were generally used to good effect to check on students' progress and understanding and to recapitulate the content of the lesson. Questioning was most effective when distributed across the class and where it promoted higher-order thinking.

In most lessons observed there were some very good examples of differentiation strategies which ensured that students of all abilities were challenged. In a minority of lessons there was good evidence of literacy support, with the main focus on subject terminology through the use of keyword notebooks.

Based on the inconsistencies noted in classroom practices, it is recommended that the three literacy strategies agreed at whole-school level—keywords, wait time on questions, and 'comment and grade marking'—should be reviewed. No evidence of an agreed whole-school strategies to promote numeracy was gathered during the evaluation; such strategies should be agreed and implemented without delay.

Homework is regularly assigned as a means of consolidating learning and it was recorded by the majority of students in their journals. Homework should be set for all year groups to reinforce and extend the learning that has taken place in lessons. Samples of students' written work indicated that their work is monitored by teachers as a matter of course. Good oral feedback and formative commentary on students' work was evident in some lessons only.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

All recommendations made with a whole-school dimension in the four previous subject inspections that have issued to the school to date have been very well progressed by senior management especially those recommendations made in relation to subject and programme planning. Action plans with specific targets to improve student attainment and strategies agreed to meet these targets have yet to be devised in a number of subject areas. This work should be progressed in the context of agreed whole-school targets for attainment.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Very good progress has been achieved in the increased use of active teaching and learning methodologies, differentiation, ICT as an integral part of teaching and learning and AfL strategies. Significant weaknesses were observed in the use of in-class numeracy strategies and weaknesses outweighed strengths in the use of in-class literacy strategies.

Some examples of peer-assessment by students were observed during classes evaluated. The sharing of criteria for assessment and marking schemes as a way of inculcating the use of peer-assessment and self-assessment should be explored. Since the recommendations made in subject inspection reports in relation to teaching and learning can often have

implications for other subject areas, these recommendations, currently discussed at whole-staff level, should actively feed into planning for the improvement of teaching and learning.

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

In the context of planning for DEIS and for SSE and to realise the school's developmental priorities; it is recommended that the school engage in more specific, measurable and realistic target-setting that is evidence-based. It should also implement a more robust system of monitoring and of review to evaluate the progress achieved.

The school demonstrates a high level of capacity to implement the recommendations of this report and is very well placed to progress an improvement agenda.

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 of Coláiste Iascaigh welcomes the positive and encouraging WSE-MML report.

The Board of Management would also like to acknowledge the dedication and commitment of all staff and parents in promoting and maintaining the high standards evidenced in this report.

The Board welcomes the key findings which emphasise

- The inclusivity of Coláiste Iascaigh
- The effective and supportive Board of Management
- The clear vision for school improvement
- A committed staff many of whom embrace continuous professional development
- Successful outcomes of DEIS planning relating to attendance, retention and partnership with parents
- A wide range of co-curricular activities
- A high level of care for students
- Continuous improvement of teaching and learning which is encouraged by senior management
- Good or very good plans for all subjects and programmes and good or very good quality of teaching and learning in majority of lessons
- Good engagement with School Self Evaluation

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

Follow-up actions undertaken

- Whole-staff review of posts-introduction of Junior/Senior Year heads and School Planning (DEIS/SSE) Co-ordinator.
- Whole school numeracy in-service delivered by PDST- common strategies are being issued across subjects to improve student attainment.
- Improved mechanisms of communication between stakeholders.
- Safety statement has been ratified by Board of Management.
- Effective use of learning outcomes reviewed at Whole Staff level and subject departments have devised methods of integrating this approach in classrooms.

Follow-up actions planned

Evaluation of DEIS cycle 2011-2014 will be used to guide and inform strategic action planning for DEIS 2014-2017 and SSE process.