

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Magh Éne College  
Bundoran, County Donegal  
Roll number: 76083J**

**Date of inspection: 12 November 2015**



**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 November 2015 in Magh Éne College. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

### ***Introduction***

Magh Éne College is a co-educational school which operates under the auspices of County Donegal Education and Training Board (ETB). The school opened in 1992 with thirty-six students and now caters for a total of 320 students. The school has a catchment area covering south Donegal, north Leitrim and north Sligo.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

### ***Key Findings***

- The board of management showed a deep awareness of the developmental priorities of the school and of teaching and learning as its central focus.
- The current acting senior management team shows a clear commitment to progressing teaching and learning initiatives and to keeping instructional leadership central to their newly acquired roles.
- Appropriate leadership roles have been identified through ongoing review of the school's needs and leadership roles are undertaken by staff members beyond the formal post-of-responsibility structure.
- The academic mentoring programme is an excellent example of the strong commitment of teachers to the students in the school.
- The quality of teaching and learning observed ranged between good and excellent, while a few lessons showed scope for development.
- The parents' association plays a very supportive role in the life of the school and holds frequent fundraising events to support the development of facilities.

### ***Recommendations for Further Development***

- A timetabled meeting between post-holders and senior management should be scheduled, at the end of each year, to review the portfolios of responsibility.
- Utilising the learning from whole-school continuing professional development (CPD) undertaken by staff to date, and the findings and recommendations of this report, the staff should choose certain areas to develop within teaching and learning, and ensure that the effectiveness of implementation is reviewed within a given timeframe.
- The school should share their school improvement plan and school self-evaluation (SSE) report with the school community.

## **1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

### ***1.1 School ownership and management***

The board of management is appropriately constituted and all members have availed of training in respect of their role and functions. Meetings of the board appropriately include a report on child protection and SSE as standard items on its agenda and agreed reporting procedures have been established. Mandatory policies have been adopted and revisions have been made to the school's code of behaviour.

The board has an identifiable profile in the school and members attend school functions: for example, *Awards Night* where they present some of the awards. Teacher questionnaires indicate a good level of awareness regarding the board's leadership and management role. In order to build on this, the board should consider providing an annual report on the operation of the school to the school community.

In discussion, the board showed a very good awareness of the developmental priorities of the school and of teaching and learning as its central focus. In particular, the board was supportive of the school's ongoing engagement with developing instructional methodologies and embracing SSE practices.

At the time of the evaluation, the senior management team of principal and deputy principal was new with both members operating in an acting capacity. The acting principal brought continuity to the team resulting from a number of years experience as deputy principal and both members have considerable experience in the school. The senior management team is held in high regard by board members, parents' representatives, staff and students. This view is supported by the parent and teacher questionnaire responses which very strongly endorse the view that the school is well run.

The acting principal and deputy principal show a clear commitment to progressing teaching and learning initiatives and to keeping instructional leadership central to their newly acquired roles. Both are committed to a collaborative and distributive style of leadership. They place particular focus on encouraging staff members to pursue their strengths and share expertise with the whole staff.

The senior management team has very good links to the middle-management team; for example, both members undertake the role of year head. Appropriate leadership roles have been identified through ongoing review of the school's needs and post-holders all have significant responsibilities in the running of the school. Areas of leadership also involve staff members beyond the formal post-of-responsibility structure. There is scope to schedule a timetabled review meeting at the end of the year where portfolios of responsibility can be discussed.

A democratically elected student council meets regularly and is representative of all year groups. It is good that the current council is seeking to broaden awareness of its role and improve access to the council; one such action is the provision of a suggestion box for students to be placed in a prominent location in the foyer.

The parents' association plays a very supportive role in the life of the school and holds frequent fundraising event to support the development of facilities. The association has contributed parents' view on school policies: most recently, the code of behaviour. In discussion, the association commended the open approach to students and parents that

operates in the school. Almost all parents who completed a questionnaire agreed that they feel welcome in the school.

### ***1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

Senior management places particular value on maintaining a programme of CPD to support improvements in teaching and learning. The CPD is part of a continuum of professional engagement with teaching and learning strategies that has continued over the past number of years. Most recent examples include a focus on classroom management and *assessment for learning* (AfL) strategies.

The formation of a 'leading learning' team from within the staff is a particular strength of this ongoing CPD programme. This team has focused on the areas of literacy, numeracy and, most recently, assessment. The acting principal and deputy principal are members of the coordinating teams for each of the three areas. A successful whole-school focus is evident in the comprehensive treatment of these areas in all of the subject department plans.

Subject department plans are of very good quality with a strong focus on the use of learning intentions for students. Whole-school policies on literacy and numeracy are specifically tailored to each of the subjects. Consideration of SSE is evident in subject department planning. The majority of subject department plans contained an in-depth analysis of attainment in the certificate examinations and included improvement targets for the subject department; this is excellent practice and should be extended across all subject department plans.

All staff members are appropriately qualified and are timetabled accordingly. Morale is high among the staff and, during the evaluation, a positive spirit was apparent in staff relations. Teachers are self-motivated and display a high level of commitment to whole-staff work. A good example of this was found in the academic mentoring programme for students; an excellent initiative, this involves teachers working closely as mentors for learning, with two students in a structured mentoring programme. The programme runs for the full school year and takes place in the teachers' own time. It is well coordinated and appropriate guidance and protocols have been established. The student mentoring programme is not confined to the certificate examination year groups and targets a year group based on whole-staff consideration of student need. A further example of staff commitment is manifest in the reported attendance by all subject teachers at first-year information night for parents.

There were many examples of staff members leading core areas of the curriculum through personal initiative and interest; these included instructional leadership and restorative justice practices. Good use has been made of internal expertise in the area of information communication technology (ICT); all teachers have electronic tablets and classrooms are furnished with whiteboards and data projectors.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum. It offers an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and uptake is very high. The programme is well co-ordinated and provides a good range of subjects and skills. Recent additions to the Leaving Certificate curriculum include the provision of Spanish, Agricultural Science, Chemistry, Accounting and Physics. The school offers the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and almost all students acquire their own placements for work experience. In the past, the school has provided a number of adult and continuing education courses and continues to promote these. However, despite ongoing promotion, there are no courses operating currently.

The school operates an open enrolment policy and is inclusive of the shared school catchment area. Enrolment figures have remained relatively stable over the past five years. The admissions and enrolment policy reflects the characteristic spirit of the school. At its next review stage, details of admission to TY should be included rather than appended as a separate document. Monitoring of attendance was recorded diligently throughout the period of the evaluation. In discussion, the parents' association commended the school's timely communication with parents on student absence.

There is a clear code of behaviour that the parents' association strongly endorsed. In responses to questionnaires, parents agree that discipline in the school is good. Good structures are in place to facilitate communication within the school; these include text-messaging, the staff notice board, VShare, blogs, the school app, announcements on the intercom, assemblies and tutor period. An electronic calendar has been introduced recently for staff notices. School newsletters are issued to parents and areas of the school website are updated regularly.

There is a strong commitment to the care and support of students. The student-support system is well organised and the link between tutor and year head was seen to operate very well. The weekly year head meeting ensures that the senior management team is provided with an accurate and up-to-date exchange of information. The student journal is effective and has been modified to incorporate practices in the school such as *traffic lights*, *writing wheel* and a study plan. Initiatives such as the *Belong2 Programme* and *Big Brother Big Sister* initiative serve to help better integrate students into the school. Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is co-ordinated by a link teacher and the school makes appropriate provision for SPHE and relationships and sexuality education (RSE).

The special educational needs (SEN) department is well co-ordinated. Learning support is mainly provided through co-teaching or team-teaching as well as withdrawal from class in some instances. Designated hours are used for their intended purposes. The SEN coordinator provides very good advice to teachers on strategies to help students with identified learning needs.

Good procedures are in place to support the transition of students from feeder primary schools into first year. These procedures include a familiarisation day and induction booklet, visits to primary schools, an information evening and open night. Information evenings are also provided to assist students in the transition to senior cycle. The guidance counsellor plays a key role at times of transition as well as in general student care and links with outside agencies.

Students are also supported through a comprehensive co-curricular and extra-curricular programme of activities and by the provision of supervised study after school. Achievements are acknowledged and celebrated by the school community at events such as *student of the month* and the end-of-year awards night. Teachers also enter positive comments regarding students in the homework journal. Student leadership is promoted through the student council, head boy and girl and the prefect system. One member of the student council is also a member of the Donegal Youth Council and another is a delegate for Ireland to the European Youth Parliament.

In many instances, classrooms provide stimulating learning environments. The school also has a library which is part of a classroom and is accessed as necessary by teachers.

A programme of induction for new teachers is co-ordinated by a link teacher. New teachers are encouraged to get involved in extra-curricular activities in line with their areas of interest and expertise.

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 school has very good facilities and the school infrastructure is of a very high standard. All areas of the school are very well maintained and great credit is due to the ancillary staff in this regard.

## **2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### ***2.1 The quality of learning and teaching***

Over the course of the evaluation, twenty-three lessons were observed in a range of subject areas. Teaching and learning in all of the lessons visited ranged between good and excellent quality. The majority of lessons showed competent, effective practice and included teaching and learning that was very successful and effective. A few lessons showed scope for development.

There was evidence of meticulous planning for many lessons. This included the selection of additional resources which provided student with visually stimulating and intellectually challenging learning experiences. Examples of the resources used include well-chosen video clips, posters, and worksheets.

Intended learning outcomes for students were generally well identified at the outset of the lesson. Best practice was observed where the teacher clarified the intended learning outcomes, used them to give structure to the lesson and reviewed their achievement with students before the conclusion of the lesson. This practice indicated to students how the lesson would evolve. Teachers should be mindful of including time for recapitulation and consolidation of learning at the end of lessons.

A variety of methodologies was used to good effect in many lessons. Explanations were clear and students' understanding was enhanced through the good use of everyday examples and topical material. Some very good differentiated methodologies were observed particularly where students could identify what must, should and could be done in the task set. Some teachers used paired tasks and small group work to differentiate the lesson content. Best practice was observed in this regard where teachers set very specific tasks to encourage engagement and students worked purposefully in their groups. This practice should be more widely used in lessons.

Generally, good questioning strategies were used by teachers with a range of question types and appropriate wait-time. However, in a minority of instances, teachers should challenge students' understanding more effectively, encourage students to reply with complete sentences and ensure the answer is not visible elsewhere in the room. There is scope to encourage students to ask more questions, particularly in language lessons.

With regard to teaching methodologies, a very good range of inputs has been provided to staff at whole-school CPD events. Utilising the learning from whole-school continuing professional development (CPD) undertaken to date by staff, and the findings and recommendations of this report, the staff should choose certain areas to develop within teaching and learning, and ensure that the effectiveness of implementation is reviewed within a given timeframe.

In a number of lessons, very good attention was given to ensuring that students were familiar with and used the correct subject-specific terminology. Methodologies such as pre-teaching key-words proved useful in supporting literacy in a number of lessons. In particular subject areas, where words have a confined meaning, teacher should enquire as to whether students understand the general meaning of the word as well. Students' numeracy skills was developed in some lessons through measurement and calculation of percentages.

Management of students was very good. Lessons proceeded in a mutually respectful atmosphere. A good level of student engagement was evident in most lessons. Students generally displayed a good knowledge of the subject taught. The practical lessons were well organised. Students were given clear tasks, defined time structures and guidance from the teacher. In some instances, teachers provided very good spot-demonstrations in order to teach a new skill or to promote best practice in a particular technique.

There was evidence of homework being set and corrected in almost all lessons. Monitoring and assessment of students' performance are ongoing. Best practice was observed in instances where written comments appropriately affirmed progress and provided guidance for improvement. There is scope to extend the use of this type of feedback to optimise student learning. Other AfL strategies, such as the use of *fish bone diagrams*, *traffic lights* and *mini-white boards*, were used to good effect. Strategies to further facilitate student self-assessment and peer-assessment should be developed and implemented to enable students to become more effective evaluators of their own work.

### **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

#### ***3.1 Management***

School management has addressed all recommendations made in previous evaluation reports, and all have been implemented.

#### ***3.2 Learning and teaching***

Very good progress has been made in addressing the recommendations regarding teaching and learning. The school has established good practices for the dissemination of feedback from subject inspections and incidental inspections to all staff.

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

The capacity for school improvement under the guidance of the board and the senior management team is very good. The school is addressing SSE actively and has developed a school improvement plan based on robust baseline data. Specific improvement targets are in place and are being well monitored. The school should now share the school improvement plan and SSE report with the school community.

The school community displays openness, willingness and commitment to the SSE process and is well positioned to implement and review the success of the areas identified for targeted improvement. The teachers demonstrate an emerging culture of critical reflection that can be further developed into a critical appraisal of teaching and learning in order to optimise the learning experience for students. In addition, parent and student responses to

questionnaires indicate that there is a need for the school to devise further strategies to incorporate the views of the wider student and parent body.

**Appendix**

**School response to the report**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management welcomes this positive evaluation report which affirms the excellent practices and good work carried out in the school. We are particularly encouraged by the following findings:

- The senior management team is held in high regard by board members, parents' representatives, staff and students which strongly endorse the view that the school is well run with management showing a clear commitment to progressing teaching and learning initiatives
- Teaching and learning in all lessons visited ranged between good and excellent with evidence of meticulous planning for many lessons. Subject department plans are of very good quality. The in-depth subject results analysis and improvement targets is an excellent practice.
- Morale is high among staff. Teachers are self-motivated and display a high level of commitment to whole staff work. The academic mentoring programme delivered during teachers' own time was described as an excellent initiative.
- The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum. The TY programme is well co-ordinated and uptake is very high
- The SEN department is well co-ordinated with the co-ordinator providing very good advice to teachers on strategies to help students with identified learning needs.
- The formation of a leading learning team is a particular strength of the ongoing CPD programme.
- There is a strong commitment to the care and support of students. Students are supported by a comprehensive co-curricular and extra-curricular programme and by the provision of supervised after school study.
- The school is addressing SSE actively and has developed a school improvement plan based on robust baseline data. The school community displays openness, willingness and commitment to the SSE process.

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

- A timetabled meeting between post-holders and senior management to review portfolios of responsibility has been scheduled to take place annually during the month of May
- We are delighted to acknowledge the successes with our range of instructional leadership strategies as a result of our ongoing CPD. Through whole school review, staff will now identify and prioritise specific areas of focus in teaching and learning, which will be reviewed annually.
- In order to share our school improvement plan and school self-evaluation report more widely, electronic versions of the documents will be uploaded to the school website, where they will be available to the wider school community. A link will also be posted on our school app.