

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning
REPORT

Mohill Community College
Mohill, County Leitrim
Roll number: 76089V

Date of inspection: 06 December 2012



**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 December 2012 in Mohill Community 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

Mohill Community College was inaugurated in September 2008 following the amalgamation of two post-primary schools. It currently has an enrolment of 380 students, 205 girls and 175 boys. It provides the following programmes: the established Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), an optional Transition Year (TY) and the Junior Certificate programme. The school has an Autism Unit.

Key Findings

- The board of management displays great commitment to the school.
- Senior management has a collegial approach to leadership and has a very visible presence in the school.
- Teachers have engaged in continuing professional development (CPD) and this is supported by senior management.
- A high level of care for student welfare is evident.
- A good range of academic subjects is offered.
- All lessons observed were purposeful and well structured.
- Facilities in the school are excellent.
- The school has responded well to recommendations from previous subject inspections.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The school should now re-assess current priorities and draw up a plan of action for each identified priority.
- Individual duties should be reviewed and clear job descriptions drawn up for all post holders as well as the senior management team.
- The current allocation of time to TY work experience should be reviewed.
- Training should be provided to all staff regarding the Child Protection Guidelines.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is appropriately constituted and presented as an informed body with a strong commitment to the school. Very good links are maintained with the trustees to ensure the effective provision of education in the school. No formal training is provided by the VEC to the board. It is important that the board, especially new members, be given training in order to ensure that it is kept up-to-date with ongoing educational and curricular developments. The board has adopted all mandatory policies and has undertaken a review of a selection of these. However, as the school develops, a cycle of ongoing policy review and development will need to be established.

The school has considered some priorities for development but much time has been devoted to managing the amalgamation of the two post-primary schools. This has been successful. Going forward, this is now an opportune time to set out a vision for the school's development and, in this context, to re-evaluate the priorities for the school and to draw up a specific action plan for the achievement of each identified priority. The board is kept informed of ongoing school activities through the principal's report. As is good practice, an agreed report is communicated to the teaching staff while the principal provides a report to the parents' association (PA) following each board meeting.

The PA actively engages in the organisation and funding of many school activities. Its members are appropriately consulted in policy formation. As a support for parents, the PA organises talks on topical issues. These contributions to the life of the school are highly commended.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The senior management team has a collegial approach to school leadership, communicates effectively and uses a range of skills to manage and support others. Both principal and deputy principal have an active on-the-ground presence in the school. Decision-making processes are led by this team and shared and discussed with teaching staff at meetings. Leadership roles are distributed at middle-management level and assigned in accordance with agreed procedures. Currently, there is an equitable workload attached to each post of responsibility and it is good to note the level of volunteerism among non-post holders.

As the needs of the school are constantly changing, individual duties should be regularly reviewed and clear job descriptions drawn up for both senior management and all individual post holders. To support the work of senior management in the strategic development of the school, there is scope to develop a middle-management identity in the school.

The senior management team displays a strong commitment to the promotion of excellence and quality improvement in leading teaching and learning. For instance, the school has followed up on recommendations from previous subject inspections and established structures which facilitate collegial and collaborative work practices. A very detailed and comprehensive analysis of examination results is carried out. Notwithstanding this, there is a need for senior management to provide increased educational leadership to subject departments. Strategies could include the following: input to agendas of subject meetings; guiding the process of subject planning through regular meetings with subject co-ordinators; and providing clear direction regarding the integration into lessons of literacy, numeracy and assessment for learning (AfL) strategies. It is very good to note that members of staff are encouraged and facilitated to access continuing professional development (CPD) courses as needs arise. However an audit of whole-staff CPD needs

should be undertaken and a programme of in-service provided. It is suggested that future professional development should prioritise the areas of information and communications technology (ICT) to include E-portal and to revisit teaching for mixed-ability and differentiation.

Teachers are deployed in accordance with their qualifications, skills and expertise. Members of staff are empowered to avail of the opportunity to lead projects and to assume leadership roles. All staff members display a high quality of care towards students and this is borne out in responses to student questionnaires where students stated that they feel safe and cared for in school.

The school's enrolment policy is clear and contains prioritised criteria for admission. It is very apparent that the school is inclusive. The code of behaviour is positive in tone and based on respect. Of the parents surveyed through questionnaires, almost all agree that the school is well run. The behaviour of students during the evaluation was exemplary and is commended.

The school has a pastoral-care system in place and a care team has been established. This is a further example of the school's commitment to the welfare of its students. There is a need to build in structured formal meetings of this team to allow for ongoing reflection, evaluation and monitoring within the school. Each class is assigned a class tutor who remains with the class group as it progresses through the school. Tutors act as advocates for the student.

Year heads have some pastoral duties and are responsible for most disciplinary functions. Year heads remain with their year group as it advances through the school. Regular meetings of year heads are held, which ensures there is a consistent approach to the implementation of the code of behaviour. They are strongly supported in this regard by tutors who have clear, delineated duties. The student council provides a further layer of support to students. This council is democratically elected, meets regularly and is an effective conduit between students and senior management. Strengthening the link between the council and the board of management would further enhance its role. Additional mentoring programmes include the Big Brother Big Sister programme involving TY, fifth-year students and first-year students and the autism awareness training in junior cycle.

Incoming first-year students complete a well-organised induction programme. This ensures that there is a smooth transition from primary to post-primary education. Students are provided with the opportunity to sample all subjects for the full academic year. The length of this sampling period should be reviewed with a view to shortening the current allocation of time. Third-year students are provided with guidance regarding programme and subject choice and an information night is provided to parents. However, a significant number of parents stated in questionnaires that they did not receive good advice. The school should explore the reasons for this and address them.

There is a broad and balanced curriculum and efforts are made to meet the needs of most students. Overall, the school provides instructional hours in compliance with DES circular M29/95, except for TY students who are allocated one day per week for work experience. This provision should now be revisited prior to the next academic year.

Systems are in place to provide educational support to students with special educational needs (SEN) and all teachers involved in this provision display a high level of dedication and care. Students may be withdrawn from class if they are exempt from a particular subject or from a non-examination subject, if appropriate. Small-group work also takes place. An Autism Unit has also been established and is well managed. Informal communication is maintained among members of the special education team. However,

there is a need to create formal time for regular meetings of these teachers so they can share and record methodologies, assessment and tracking strategies. This will also help to ensure that all support being provided is increasing student attainment across all subjects.

In general, timetabling provides sufficient and suitable class contact time for most subjects in line with syllabus requirements. However, it is recommended that the school revisit the timetabling arrangements for Physical Education and work towards providing timetabled lessons in senior cycle.

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*. Although all members of staff have been made aware of these guidelines, no formal training has been provided. This should be addressed as a matter of priority.

1.3 Management of facilities

The school acquired a new building in 2009. Facilities and resources are excellent. Of the students surveyed, almost all believe that the facilities in the school are good. Subject departments are very well resourced. Teachers have good access to ICT equipment to aid teaching and learning. E-portal has been installed in the school but this is confined to the tracking of attendance by some teachers. The school is encouraged to provide training so that this valuable resource can be further optimised.

Senior management has allocated a classroom to all teachers. These classrooms contain charts, posters and some students' work on display and this is good practice.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

In all subjects, planning documentation which contained long-term and short-term content was made available. All plans that were viewed contained homework and assessment policies. However, the quality of planning documentation viewed varied. Best practices included the following: topics were linked to agreed learning outcomes, methodologies and assessment strategies; a list of resources was provided; literacy and numeracy strategies were described; certificate examination data and a list of CPD events were included. It is suggested that under the leadership of the senior management team, a common template be drawn up to encourage a whole-school approach to planning which should incorporate the good practices already in place in some departments. The alignment of this template with a subject developmental plan should also be considered. The structuring of the schemes of work in this integrated way will facilitate improved collaboration and discussion within subject departments.

Effective planning and preparation for lessons was a feature of all lessons observed. This included the preparation of worksheets, ICT presentations, experiments and some information handouts. These were well integrated into the lesson to support students' learning and were often used as a trigger for student activity, such as discussion or explanation. In some lessons, these were also used for discovery learning. In classes where there is a wide range of students' abilities, teachers need to develop differentiated worksheets and handouts, as well as applying a more strategic approach to the use of pair work and group work.

Twenty-two lessons were visited during the course of the evaluation. The quality of teaching and learning overall was good to very good, with some exemplary practices seen. In most lessons, very good practice was noted in lessons where the aims of the lesson were stated explicitly and revisited at the end of the lesson. This approach helped to engage students and ensured that lesson time was used in a productive manner. All lessons were purposeful and well structured and in many, clear links were made to previous learning.

In all language lessons, very good use was made of the target language and attention was paid to the development of students' vocabulary. Students were encouraged to use the language and this is good. Very good efforts were made at integrating the different components of language.

In several lessons, varied questioning strategies were used, including good use of higher-order questions. This encouraged students to think analytically and critically for themselves. In over half of the lessons observed, ICT was used effectively. In all lessons, teachers were very respectful of students and encouraged and challenged them to work to the best of their abilities. Pair-work and group-work strategies were used in over half of the lessons observed and helped to stimulate students' engagement and interest.

In many of the lessons, learning was evaluated using assessment for learning strategies but in some lessons, insufficient assessment of students' learning took place. This is an area for development. In a number of lessons, it was evident that homework copies are regularly monitored and in many cases constructive comments to support students' learning are provided. It is equally important that students' folders and notebooks are also monitored. Assessment practices include whole-class corrections and individual marking by teachers. Peer assessment and student self-reflection are strategies worthy of consideration. Meticulous attention is being paid by teachers to maintaining records of students' assessments. It is important, from time to time, to record progress in homework in order to develop a broader profile of student achievement.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Commendably, management issues identified in previous inspections have been addressed and this is very good.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports relate to planning as well as teaching and learning. From an examination of planning folders, it was evident that work is ongoing. The recommendation regarding planning made earlier in this report will also support the good work that is being carried out.

Most of the recommendations that were made regarding teaching and learning have now been addressed. Commendably, the outcomes of all subject inspections are shared by management with all staff.

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

It is evident that the school is in the initial stages of formalising its review and self-evaluation processes and, based on its approach to the implementation of recommendations in previous inspection reports, displays a capacity for school improvement. The senior management team is committed to school improvement. Management has undertaken an annual review of some areas. This is now an opportune time to revisit the school's vision and development priorities, in line with the changing needs of the school, and to set fresh priorities that are realistic and measurable and which are agreed at whole-school level. Their achievement should be supported through action plans identifying lead personnel and setting appropriate time boundaries. Where appropriate, the views of parents and students should form part of this process.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

Mohill Community College Board of Management welcomes this very positive Whole School Evaluation Management Leadership and Learning Report, findings and recommendations. The Board is pleased that the commitment of all partners in MCC is acknowledged and that due recognition and affirmation for those partners is received.

The Board is pleased that note was taken of

- The commitment of senior management to the promotion of excellence and quality improvement in leading teaching and learning
- the high level of care for student welfare
- the inclusiveness of the school
- the broad and balanced curriculum offered
- the quality of teaching
- teacher engagement in CPD
- the empowerment of staff to avail of opportunities to lead projects and to assume leadership roles
- the excellent facilities in the school
- very well resourced subject departments
- the successful management of the amalgamation process
- the school's response to recommendations from previous inspection reports
- the active and supportive engagement of the Parents' Association and their positive contributions to the life of the school
- the equitable distribution of workloads attached to posts of responsibility
- the level of volunteerism among non- post holders
- the positive Code of Behaviour and the consistent approach to its implementation
- the exemplary behaviour of students
- the work of Student Council
- the school's well organised Induction Programme
- systems to support students with special educational needs, and the high level of dedication and care displayed by teachers involved in this provision
- well managed Autism Unit
- compliance with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*
- effective planning and preparation for lessons
- purposeful and well structured lessons with some exemplary practices
- support of student learning, encouraging and challenging students to work to the best of their abilities
- effective use of ICT
- meticulous record keeping of students' assessments

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

- Training has been provided to all staff on Child Protection Guidelines (25th January 2013)

- Formal training will be provided by Co. Leitrim VEC for the Board of Management (15th March 2013)
- Revision of the length of sampling period for First Year taster subjects has been undertaken
- Special Education Team meetings have been formalised
- The further development of the school's self-evaluation processes is supported by DES formal training of staff (26th February 2013)

The Board accepts the recommendations of the Inspectorate, and is fully committed, within the constraints of present economic circumstances, to addressing them. The Board acknowledges the dedication of all partners through whose commitment MCC can fulfil its role in the education of our young people – students, staff, parents, BOM, Trustees: Mercy Sisters Western Province and Co. Leitrim VEC, and DES. The Board thanks the Inspectorate for its professionalism and support.