

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning
REPORT

Coláiste Chill Mhantáin
Wicklow, County Wicklow
Roll number: 76099B

Date of inspection: 8 May 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 May 2014 in Coláiste Chill Mhantáin, Wicklow. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Introduction

Coláiste Chill Mhantáin is a co-educational Designated Community College under the patronage of Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB) and the Archdiocese of Dublin. The school was opened in 2011 resulting from the amalgamation of De La Salle College, Wicklow and Abbey Community College, Wicklow. The school has positive enrolment trends and has a current enrolment of 795 students. Coláiste Chill Mhantáin is located adjacent to Wicklow town and attracts students from Wicklow and the surrounding areas.

The school offers the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Additional focused programmes which support the school include the school completion programme (SCP) and the home school community liaison (HSCL) initiative. The school also employs the services of an attendance officer.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is fully cognisant of its legislative and statutory obligations and with the support of the trustees executes its responsibilities in a diligent manner.
- The principal provides clear educational leadership and together with the deputy principal has delivered on a successful agenda for change over recent years.
- There are high levels of commitment to the care and well-being of students co-ordinated by a dedicated and committed student support team.
- Attendance and retention are monitored in an organised and systematic way, however, poor levels of attendance of some students has contributed to their under-achievement.
- The overall quality of teaching in the lessons ranged from good to very good in most lessons, with scope for improvement in a significant minority of lessons.
- The school has a broad and balanced curriculum which endeavours to meet the needs of the diverse cohort of students, though ongoing curricular review is necessary.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should strengthen its governance role in forging the way forward for the school and should progress a focused strategic plan for future school development.
- Factors underlying poor attendance levels of some students should be fully investigated and corresponding intervention strategies initiated.
- Decisions regarding the provision and implementation of some senior cycle curricular programmes, including TY, LCA and LCVP require careful review and consideration.
- The effective integration of information and communications technology (ICT) as a teaching and learning tool should now be progressed and extended across all subjects.

QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is appropriately constituted, is fully cognisant of its legislative and statutory obligations and with the support of the trustees executes its responsibilities in a diligent manner. The board has met legislative requirements regarding policy formation. The board reviews draft policies thoroughly before ratifying them. Effective procedures are in place for policy review. There is a board representative on all policy development working groups which is good practice.

The representatives of the trustees together with the other members of the board have been wholeheartedly committed to making the amalgamated school a success. Members of the board and senior management sought to meet the needs of teachers and students in a supportive way during the amalgamation. This approach has worked well.

The board is kept well informed on school business by senior management. Many educational initiatives come from senior management and teachers. In this context, the board should strengthen its governance role in forging the way forward for the school and should with school management and staff progress a focused strategic plan for future school development.

Staff nominees on the board prepare a report for teachers and act as a communication link between the staff and the board. There is also an agreed report for parents. It is praiseworthy that the student council has presented to the board on its work.

The board is very supportive of the decisions made by senior management in relation to overall student welfare and attainment. Board members emphasised the caring nature of the school community and indicated that the balance between positive discipline and sanctions is appropriate. It was reported that the fairness of the board's decisions regarding serious breaches of discipline was recognised by the students involved. There has been a significant drop in poor behaviour incidents over the past year. The present strategy, which implements the code of behaviour in a fair and consistent manner, is working well.

The principal presents an analysis and report regarding state examination results to the board. Senior management has prioritised improved uptake of levels and student attainment at senior cycle and it is acknowledged that improved trends in senior cycle were in evidence at the time of the evaluation. Similar strategies for attainment at junior cycle should now be prioritised.

The board has been fully briefed on the school self-evaluation (SSE) process and the development of the school improvement plan (SIP). The SSE process, led by senior

management, is ongoing and has identified appropriate teaching and learning priorities in the SIP.

There are effective on-going links with the trustee bodies. The board is supportive of teacher continuing professional development (CPD) and teachers are availing of KWETB-led training programmes including the on-going instructional leadership programme. The board has also supported teachers with the introduction of computer tablet devices for first-year students. This has been identified by school management as a significant curriculum initiative.

A literacy core team has been established in accordance with best practice, to provide leadership and direction on planning and implementing a whole school approach to literacy. The school's literacy policy is well developed and identifies necessary actions and strategies. Management and staff actively promote student leadership through the student council, the prefect system and through the senior mentor system. Parents see these approaches as highly beneficial. Input from students during the WSE-MLL process indicate that it may be timely to strengthen the collective student voice in the school and to further develop dynamic opportunities for student development through various creative school activities. The further development of the student council role and the promotion of leadership opportunities for its members are encouraged.

The board promotes values and welcomes the contribution of parents. The parents' association is actively involved in the life of the school and parents are consulted on relevant policies.

The principal provides clear educational leadership, communicates effectively with the school community and has delivered on a successful agenda for change over recent years. In excess of eighty-five percent of parents surveyed during the evaluation agreed or strongly agreed that the school is well run. The senior management team consisting of the principal and deputy principal have successfully managed significant change during the amalgamation. Both members of the senior management team have an active on-the-ground presence and jointly manage the school effectively on a daily basis. The principal and deputy principal adopt a partnership approach to school leadership and communicate very effectively as a team. Both have well-defined roles, have identified the educational priorities for the school and actively promote the meaningful involvement of parents, which is central to the school ethos. It is praiseworthy that the deputy principal is kept well informed of all school business through attendance at board meetings.

Effective leadership for learning and teaching is based on a commitment to excellence and quality improvement by senior management. A significant amount of time and energy has gone into successfully creating a supportive learning environment, where all students are aware of relevant policies and procedures. It is now timely that senior management should lead a whole school approach in the identification and implementation of extensive measures to address students' full attendance, participation and performance in school. This should be framed as a whole staff initiative, aimed at improving positive student experiences for all and enhancing enjoyment of learning through active methodologies.

The school's admissions policy reflects its characteristic spirit and is grounded in the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion. The date of ratification of each policy should be clearly stated. Attendance and retention are monitored in an organised and systematic way. Concerns were expressed by school management about the attendance patterns of some students. Poor attendance levels have contributed to the under-achievement of these students. Factors underlying poor attendance levels should be fully investigated and intervention strategies initiated by school management with the support of the care team.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

There are high levels of commitment to the care and well-being of students co-ordinated by a dedicated and committed student support team who meet each week. The emphasis on recognising and acknowledging positive actions, through the merit system, is highly effective. The school chaplain meets with the care team each week, accepts referrals and ensures that first-year students have a positive experience while settling into the school. There has been a comprehensive review of the anti-bullying policy and it is reported that any bullying issues are dealt with effectively.

Year heads oversee the welfare of their year groups. Together with the academic co-ordinators they monitor and consult on academic progress and appropriate student behaviour. The role of academic co-ordinator is new and evolving. For example, to support the achievement of under-performing students, academic co-ordinators are responsible for collating and sending home individual student progress reports. These intervention strategies including target-setting are praiseworthy. The use of student progress reports should be implemented more extensively on an ongoing basis for identified students. The role of class tutor is voluntary and its key focus is the promotion of learning. This is praiseworthy.

In the main, meaningful and relevant roles are distributed to post holders who carry out their duties effectively. The need for a further post review has been accepted by the school community and staff show flexibility in this regard. Senior management creates opportunities for teachers to take on voluntary roles and this builds leadership capacity. Many teachers have availed of the opportunity to play leading roles in school development and have demonstrated a pro-active approach. The vast majority of teaching staff are deployed in accordance with their qualifications and expertise. In a minority of cases, teachers are timetabled for subjects where they are not qualified. This is not in line with Department guidelines and should be addressed by school management where possible.

The school operates a good induction programme for new teachers and the provision of a staff handbook is very praiseworthy. Some teachers have attended special educational needs (SEN) diploma courses. The school community demonstrates a willingness to engage with eLearning. All teachers are supportive of the introduction of tablet computers and were provided with a training day. An ICT strategy on the successful integration of this technology into teaching and learning should form a priority for the next academic year.

Many subject plans presented during the evaluation were well developed and were underpinned by detailed schemes of work, action plans and specific learning outcomes for each year group. Other subject plans were less developed and focused primarily on organising the syllabus content. Therefore, further development of some subject planning is necessary. Best practice dictates that all subject department meetings should include discussion on pedagogy. There is a substantial variation in the quality of subject planning in the TY programme. This should be addressed.

The broad curriculum offered is generally balanced and progressive. However, parents and students surveyed expressed some concerns regarding the advice received from the school on choosing subjects. The level of interest and uptake in LCA has dropped. LCVP is compulsory for all students who qualify. School management and staff should reflect on the LCVP policy in an effort to improve student attainment. Decisions regarding the provision and implementation of some senior cycle curricular programmes, including TY, LCA and LCVP require careful review and consideration. Physical Education is currently not provided for sixth-year students. This is under review and formed a key recommendation in a recent subject inspection report.

Curricular review should form a central strand of planning for the future. Such a review should be undertaken expeditiously to ensure that subject choice and timetable provision supports students' continuity of learning from junior cycle through to senior cycle. For some subjects, attention should be paid to the distribution of lessons over the course of the week. The school has extended its range of subjects on the curriculum and has introduced Applied Mathematics, Agricultural Science and Economics.

There is a comprehensive guidance programme in place for all year groups. Timetabled guidance is allocated to TY, fifth and sixth-year classes. Teachers expressed the view that there are good communication systems between everyone involved in the care and well-being of students. Counselling and care strategies and policies, including Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programmes, are in place and working well.

A well-organised, qualified and co-ordinated learning support team adopts a variety of models of support in line with good practice. The programme includes a reflective approach to the adoption of standardised assessments. The school is currently implementing an efficient tracking and monitoring system of student attainment in first year. Following testing, the SEN co-ordinator effectively communicates students' needs to mainstream teachers. Particular resources are allocated to fit the needs of individual students, while the SEN core team allocates specific hours to small learning support groups.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

1.3 Management of facilities

The new school building which was completed in 2011 has created a positive working and learning environment. Environmental responsibility and sustainability is promoted in the use of school facilities. Wireless ICT provision is in place.

1. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Thirty lessons including six double lessons were observed covering all year groups and programmes and including core, optional, practical and non-examination subjects.

The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in most lessons, with effective teaching evident in the majority of lessons. Features of exemplary practice were evident in some lessons. There was scope for improvement in a significant minority of lessons.

In general, lessons were well planned, prepared and resourced. Most lessons were focused and purposeful. Very good lessons were characterised by students' enjoyment of learning and participation, development of key skills, and high quality of feedback to the teacher.

Students were provided with opportunities for cooperative learning in many lessons through pair and group work and some very good practice was observed. Active learning was a feature of many lessons. The extended use of student centred and student-led learning activities should be incorporated into all lessons. These activities could include: role play, research projects, peer questioning and assessment.

There was a very good atmosphere in most lessons. Classroom management was generally characterised by good rapport and mutual respect between teachers and students. This facilitated a positive, supportive and affirming learning environment. In a small minority of lessons, some facets of poor behaviour of individual students' impacted negatively on learning. Teachers should review their classroom management, lesson design and instructional practices in these situations to motivate and engage students. Good attention was given to differentiation in many lessons through clear explanations of concepts, monitoring of students' work and one-to-one support by teachers. Very good practice was noted when there was an appropriate level of challenge to meet the needs and abilities of all.

A good variety of resources and materials was used to support learning. In many lessons, the white board was used very effectively to set out lesson themes and outcomes, to set homework, and on some occasions to record key words. ICT was used very successfully to stimulate, motivate and to engage students in some lessons. In these instances, the innovative and integrated use of ICT facilitated learning, enabling students to experience success and improve their levels of understanding and where applicable, aural skills. The effective integration of ICT should be extended across all subjects to engage and motivate students.

In some lessons, good attention was given to the development of students' literacy skills. The explicit development of students' literacy and numeracy skills should be further developed across all subjects. Good use of the target language was observed in most language lessons, where there was a good emphasis on the development of students' oral proficiency skills. This practice should be extended.

Questioning was used effectively by most teachers to develop students' understanding and was most effective when students were challenged to think for themselves through open-ended explorative questioning. Strategies to promote questioning by students should be developed and incorporated into all lessons.

Homework is given and corrected by most teachers however, greater opportunities should be provided for students to develop skills in independent learning through their homework assignments. In some subjects, a lack of significant written assignments was noted, leading to an absence of a substantial body of written work. Very good practice was evident when detailed formative written developmental comment was provided on students' assignments though this was not always observed in the copybooks examined.

Very good assessment for learning (AfL) practice was evident in some lessons when teachers explicitly stated the intended learning outcomes at the outset of the lesson and revisited the learning outcomes at the end to consolidate learning. This very good practice should be extended to all lessons. Strategies to facilitate the involvement of students in monitoring and assessing their own progress should be identified and implemented.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Good progress is evident in the implementation of recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports. An increasing number of English class groups are timetabled for library activities. Subject planning meetings are scheduled. While resources are shared, there is little evidence to suggest that pedagogy and active student learning are discussed by teachers. Improved schemes of work have been developed. The timetabling and class

formation for some subjects has improved. Staff members have received specific training in AfL.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Overall, teachers have attended well to the implementation of many of the recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports. Inspectors observed improved practice regarding the integration of ICT into learning though further improvement is necessary. There is scope for improvement in the use of pair and group work and in the overall structure of lessons. Improved use of formative written feedback on students' work is necessary.

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

Through the self-evaluation process, the school has identified a list of the prioritised areas for school development and improvement with a commendable focus on supporting the student learning experience through staff training. Learning priorities identified for the current year focus on literacy development and on AfL which are both timely and appropriate, with agreed actions and timeframes. Teachers have completed an audit of practice with second-year students using SSE questionnaires.

The school has the capacity to bring about improvement through self-evaluation. School self-evaluation processes have been established and determined in the SIP, which focuses on prioritised outcomes to be achieved in targeted timeframes. These outcomes should be reflected in every classroom. A culture of review and self-evaluation is establishing itself in many aspects of the school. School management demonstrates clear leadership and both management and staff demonstrate commitment to ongoing school improvement.

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 Senior Management Team of Coláiste Chill Mhantáin welcome this positive WSE-MLL report. We accept that the report is balanced and reflective of our school and its short history. We are particularly affirmed and enthused that over 90% of parents surveyed reported that “their child feels safe and is well looked after in our school.”

We are also delighted that during the Inspection the following areas were identified and affirmed by the Inspection Team:

- The Principal and Deputy Principal provide clear educational leadership and have delivered on a successful agenda for change over recent years. The Principal and Deputy Principal adopt a partnership approach to school leadership and communicate very effectively as a team.
- There was a good atmosphere in most lessons. Classroom management was characterised by good rapport and mutual respect between teachers and students. This facilitated a positive, supportive and affirming learning environment.
- Effective leadership for learning and teaching is based on a commitment to excellence and quality improvement by Senior Management.
- There are high levels of commitment to the care and wellbeing of students coordinated by a dedicated and committed student support team who meets weekly.
- Management and staff actively promote student leadership.
- The Parents’ Association is actively involved in the life of the school with parents consulted on relevant policies.
- A well organised, qualified and coordinated learning support team adopts a variety of models of support in line with good practice.
- Good progress is evident in the implementation of recommendations made in previous subject inspections.
- A culture of review and self-evaluation is establishing itself in many aspects of the school. Senior Management demonstrates clear leadership and both management and staff demonstrate commitment to ongoing school improvement.
- The Board of Management is fully cognisant of its legislative and statutory obligations and with the support of its trustees executes its responsibilities in a diligent manner.

The Board of Management and the Senior Management team would like to thank all members of the school community for their hard work and commitment to our 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

Some of the recommendations in the report have already been addressed while the others will form part of the Strategic Action Plan for the school. All partners in the school community will be involved in the development and implementation of this Action Plan which will be informed and supported by the SIP.

- The Board of Management will remain engaged in the review and design of a Strategic Action Plan for future school development.
- The factors underlying poor attendance levels of some students will be fully investigated and intervention strategies will be initiated which should enhance the

current system in place, ie weekly pastoral meetings, monthly communications, attendance meetings, home visits, agreed interventions and monitoring of same.

- The decisions regarding the provision of TY, LCA and LCVP are under review and do require careful consideration of the multiple issues regarding same.
- The effective integration of Information and Communications Technology as a teaching and learning tool is being extended across all subjects through the introduction of a tablet device to all incoming students and all teachers. This initiative is supported through inservice and Continuous Professional Development.