

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Coláiste Mhuire
Ratoath Road, Dublin 7
Roll number: 60450U**

Date of inspection: 5 December 2014



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S
I N S P E C T O R A T E

Whole-School Evaluation

Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in December 2014 in Coláiste Mhuire. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Introduction

Coláiste Mhuire was established in 1931 as an Irish-medium, city-centre Catholic secondary school for boys. The school moved to the current permanent location in 2011. Coláiste Mhuire has been a co-educational school since 1997 and it has a current enrolment of 236 students. The school has grown and developed in recent years and students come from a wide range of socio-economic and socio-linguistic backgrounds.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key findings

- The board of management is very committed to the school and gives valuable guidance and support to senior management.
- There is broad experience and a valuable range of skills among the members of the board and the level of communication between the stakeholders in the school is in accordance with best practice.
- The principal and the vice-principal operate as a united and effective management team.
- Senior management has a common, clear vision for the future of Coláiste Mhuire, for the development of Irish-medium education and for the place of the Irish language as the school's main language of communication.
- The quality of leadership and the guidance for learning insofar as it relates to management is of a very high level.
- There is a high level of respect between all parties in the school—students, parents, teachers and management—and a positive, open and co-operative atmosphere was observed in all areas of the school.
- A lot of work has been carried out in the school over the last couple of years on the development of information and communications technology (ICT).
- The teachers demonstrate flexibility with regard to taking different management and development roles for the benefit of the school and the students.
- An effective pastoral care system is in place and great attention is paid to the full development and well-being of the student.
- Excellent planning takes place on a whole-school basis.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning ranged from excellent to very good, with some scope for improvement in a small number of lessons.
- The school's capacity for improvement is at an excellent level.

Recommendations for Further Development

- It is recommended that further discussion be carried out among the staff on Irish-language literacy and that strategies for improvement be agreed to develop staff and student awareness of this.
- It is recommended that school decisions in relation to school self-evaluation are implemented systematically on a whole-school basis.
- It is recommended that further emphasis be placed on accurate written and oral sentence construction systematically throughout the school.

QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board is well established and the school is operating under the patronage of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). There is regular contact between school management and the patron's representative. The board holds regular meetings and valuable support and guidance is given to senior management. The board members have broad experience in issues relating to Irish-medium education as well as a range of valuable skills that are an important help to the school. The representatives of the board are very committed to the school and some of the members have been on the board for a number of years. It is ensured that there is good continuity in board personnel. Appropriate training is given to board members and there is a good understanding among them of the legal responsibilities relating to school management. All of the appropriate policies are available in the school and the board has a central role in reviewing and approving these policies.

The board is fully committed to the school's growth and development. With regard to the school's history, the past few years have been a relatively difficult period in Coláiste Mhuire's history as the school had to abandon a permanent city-centre location and move to a temporary building and then to a new location in 2011. The school has expanded and grown in the last couple of years and further development is one of the main priorities identified by the board. The board is also committed to preserving and maintaining the Irish language as the main language of the school and a good example is shown by organising board business exclusively through the medium of Irish. Other priorities mentioned by the board during the evaluation included: pastoral care development; student health and well-being; improving the school's communication systems; and being informed of statutory changes as they relate to education. The board requires that a wide curriculum be made available to students and, to support this aim, the provision of extra subjects is being paid for. It is planned to add the subject of Music to the school curriculum next year.

A three-year development plan for the school has been set out by the board. The plan comprises action statements on various aspects of the school's work, for example: teaching and learning; staff supports; student life; Irish-language strategies; and an effective partnership system. The plan is updated regularly as the prescribed targets are achieved.

Best practice is found in the level of communication between the board and the parents committee. Agreed reports from board meetings are provided to school staff and to the parents' committee. There is a very active parents' committee that provides strong and valuable support to senior management. The committee has a fundraising role and a more general supportive role. The parents were extremely positive about the school and about the general educational experience of their children. These opinions were consistent with the evidence from the responses to questionnaires given to a number of parents. These responses were extremely positive about every aspect of school life.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and the vice-principal operate as an effective and united senior management team. Both have particular attributes and complementary skills that allow them to organise and develop the school for improvement. Both have a common clear vision for the future of the school, for the development of Irish-medium education and for the place of the Irish language as the main language of communication and teaching in the school. Great praise goes to senior management for the excellence of communication, the standard of planning and the school's general organisation.

The principal is committed to the development of the college and to the provision of a high standard of education through the medium of Irish. He is a responsible, motivating leader who inspires the staff to achieve high expectations for teaching and learning. The vice-principal provides extremely effective and valuable support to the principal and the staff. She has specific attributes and responsibilities that contribute beneficially to the provision of various supports to the students. It was clear during the evaluation that there is a high level of respect amongst all of the parties in the school, from management and teachers, teachers and parents to teachers and students. The positive, open and co-operative atmosphere that was to be found in the school was noted during the evaluation..

The schedule of duties attached to posts of responsibility is meeting the needs of the school. There are two assistant principals as well as four teachers with special duties. These teachers cover a wide range of responsibilities as part of their roles and nearly all operate as a year head for a year group or two also. The teachers accept a wide range of responsibilities and duties for the benefit of the school and the students and their flexibility in accepting these roles is commended.

The staff is encouraged to undertake continuous professional development (CPD) and the board provides financial support to staff members who undertake various postgraduate courses. The principal holds an annual meeting with every staff member. This meeting gives him the opportunity to discuss teaching and learning, among other things. There is a proven strong tradition in relation to systems of support and encouragement for teachers. Peer assessment has been in progress for a number of years. This gives everyone the opportunity to view teaching methodologies and strategies and to learn from each other. A commendable reflective system is in place to give teachers the opportunity to share feedback with one another after peer assessment or after attending in-service courses; this is extremely good practice. It is planned to develop the peer assessment system in the future in order to build on the good practice already in place.

Sub-committees have been established among the staff to look at aspects of the school's educational provision. Excellent planning takes place on a whole-school basis. A sub-committee was established recently to examine the best possible use of personal tablets with regard to use of *apps*. It is expected that this research will add to the merit of using this technology in class and in the home. It was clear during the evaluation that a lot of work has been carried out in recent years on subject plans. A high standard was to be seen in the majority of plans, with a little work needed in relation to work schemes in a very small number of subjects.

The management and the staff know each student well. Praiseworthy attempts are made to focus attention on the full development of each student. An effective pastoral care system is in place under the guidance of a pastoral committee. According to senior management, pastoral care is at the top of the list of priorities in relation to health and well-being. A range of supports is provided for students, supervised study for example, and a breakfast club is currently being explored for next year. A mental health week is organised and significant

emphasis is placed on the school's position in relation to bullying. Evidence from the students' and parents' questionnaires show that both groups are in agreement that an excellent level of support is available in the school. The chaplain supports both the staff and the students. The chaplain is a valuable resource and her support helps to preserve ERST's ethos in the school's daily life.

The student council plays a significant role. The students, who were interviewed as part of the evaluation, showed a very positive attitude towards all aspects of school life. The students said that they are listened to and that they have a recognised voice. The evidence from the students' questionnaires supported the view expressed at the evaluation meeting.

A wide range of cross-curricular and extra-curricular activities is provided to students. They participate in a very wide range of competitions and debates. Students are given the opportunity to play different types of sports. The teachers are commended for their interest and enthusiasm in organising all of these events inside and outside of school. It was mentioned that a very creative and innovative Transition Year is provided. Students and parents referred to the high quality of the programme and the range of experiences that were available at little cost. It is recommended that the Transition Year programme is outlined in writing in a way that will demonstrate the worthwhile work undertaken during the year.

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 school community moved into a new location in 2011 after spending a couple of years in pre-fabricated classrooms. The school building is bright, comfortable and welcoming. An effective learning environment has been created and a lot of the classrooms are decorated in a very attractive way with material that is very suitable for supporting students' learning.

The school has an effective ancillary staff and all aspects of the daily running of the school and facilities are extremely well organised. There will be certain challenges to overcome in the future when the student numbers grow and when additional accommodation will be required.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning ranged between excellent and very good, with some scope for improvement in a small number of lessons. The level of planning was excellent for the vast majority of lessons. The learning targets were shared with students at the beginning of lessons and, in many cases, they were written on the whiteboard. It is recommended that learning outcomes be expressed in terms of what students will be able to do as a result of their learning.

The school staff has done a lot of work with regard to the school self-evaluation process. Great emphasis is placed on assessment for learning (AFL) strategies in the classes, dictionaries and thesauri are used in classes and the attention of the students is focussed on the use of keywords. There was evidence in all of the lessons observed that these strategies are used regularly.

During a large number of lessons, great emphasis was placed on the development of literacy. The attention of the students was focussed on keywords and on other aspects of literacy and numeracy during the majority of lessons. In a couple of cases, opportunities were missed to

focus on keywords and correct sentence constructions that would support students when putting pen to paper. It was felt that not enough emphasis was placed on the strategies agreed as part of the school self-evaluation process to support literacy development. These strategies must be promoted by every teacher in every class every day. In that way, the strategies will have an improving influence on teaching and learning and students' progress in the various subjects. It is essential that due consideration is given in an Irish-medium college to Irish language literacy and that students' learning is supported through the school self-evaluation process. It is recommended that further discussion be carried out among the staff on Irish-language literacy and that strategies for improvement be agreed to develop staff and student awareness of this. A policy in relation to additional reading material in Irish and English would be a great support to literacy development.

A good learning environment was created in almost all of the classrooms. The layout of the furniture helped to facilitate and promote collaborative learning during the lessons. In all lessons, regular use was made of pair and group work and students had plenty of opportunities to participate fully in their own learning. It was clear that the students enjoyed the lessons and learning. Good relations were noted between the teachers and students and discipline was excellent.

A wide range of teaching resources was used in many lessons and this is greatly commended. Use of personal tablets was observed in certain year groups and it was clear that much work has been done by certain teachers to make the best use of this worthwhile technology to enhance students' learning. Very good use of ICT was observed in some lessons, where it greatly added to the students' interest in the lesson content and the learning process in general. In other lessons, however, it was felt that the use of technology could be enhanced and that more interesting and up-to-date material be used.

Students were given the opportunity to work on their own initiative on projects and other work during certain lessons. Students were provided with opportunities to engage in discussion and debate in a number of lessons, where they had a chance to express their own opinions and present them in front of other students. This is good practice. Higher-order questioning was used in a large number of lessons to encourage students to express their own opinions. Assessment for learning (AfL) strategies were evident in a number of lessons also and it was clear that the school community had discussed this issue in detail. A lot of work had been done in the copybooks observed and there were regular and comprehensive corrections. The effective and comprehensive use made of school diaries as a bridge between the home and the school and as a record of the students' general progress is commended.

The use of Irish as the language of teaching and communication was excellent in the school in general. In the language lessons observed, the use of the target language among teachers was excellent and all had an extremely high level of proficiency in the languages they were teaching. The students were encouraged to use the target language as well and this approach is recommended. It was felt, however, that opportunities to facilitate the students to talk were missed in a couple of cases and it is recommended that strategies are implemented in all language lessons to ensure that students have to communicate naturally and to the best of their ability in the target language on a regular basis. The correct grammatical terms were used in the target languages, a practice that is to be highly commended, and a number of small grammar points were interweaved through the lesson material.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

It was mentioned during an English inspection that there was a need to review the students' access to English classes in second and third year. This issue has been addressed and there is now appropriate provision for the subject. It was also mentioned that there is an issue with student absence in the Transition Year. An attendance policy has been put together and is being operated by the school on a continuous basis. It was mentioned during the evaluation that this issue is improving among a certain cohort of students. The school has a commendable approach in place in respect to recommendations from evaluations. The decisions and recommendations are discussed at staff level so that each teacher can learn from the recommendations as they relate to teaching and learning in particular.

3.2 Learning and Teaching

Subject inspections have been undertaken in the following subjects in recent years: German, History and English. Very good progress was observed in the following areas based on the recommendations in the inspection reports: high expectations for the number of students undertaking higher level in the state examinations; common classroom examinations; active learning and self-guided work among the students; regular subject meetings; and development of work schemes. Significant progress has been made in German in respect to encouraging students to use the target language from first year onwards.

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

Discussion and debate on the school self-evaluation process has been ongoing in the school for a number of years. The management and staff have analysed the views of the school community regarding teaching and learning and a range of other issues. There is a strong focus on improving teaching and learning in the school through a range of activities including the following: improving subject planning; emphasis on raising expectations among the students; use of ICT; emphasis on dialogic teaching; emphasis on collaborative learning; and layout of the classrooms to facilitate active work. The school's three-year development plan is followed insofar as it relates to achieving the targets identified by the board. The state examinations and students' progress are analysed on a regular basis. There is a strong commitment among the management and staff to achieve excellence in work areas such as the holistic development of the student, high expectations among the students and achievement in state examinations. Self-evaluation and analysis of all aspects of the school are central to the discussions and decisions of the board and staff. The school's capacity for improvement is at a very high level.

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 Mhuire feels that this positive report, which confirms our excellent school practices, is a source of encouragement.
- It is also a source of encouragement for the board that the report recognised (i) that in general the overall quality of teaching and learning was in the range of very good and excellent, and (ii) that “the quality of leadership and direction for learning, as it pertained to school management, was at a very high level.”
- As the student is central in all aspects of school life, the board is very pleased that the following was reported (i) the interest and diligence of the staff in organising a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, (ii) an effective pastoral care system and (iii) the provision of a range of different supports for students.
- The board is pleased also that it was mentioned in the report that “there is a positive and open atmosphere” in the school emanating from “a high level of respect among all of the relevant stakeholders”.

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

Priority will be given in the short term to the main recommendations

- Irish Literacy – students. Instead of trying to address a wide range of targets, it is intended to focus on two specific targets which will be identified by staff for the school year 2015-2016.
- Irish Literacy – teachers. It has been decided by the teachers that they are going to focus on improving their own grammatical accuracy. The first strategy recommended is an online course. Other strategies will be discussed also.
- SSE on a whole school basis – this will follow from the above mentioned targets. There will be a need to develop strategies to monitor this area.
- In relation to teaching oral and written sentence constructions systematically, this will be discussed at the next staff meeting to see what are the most effective ways of teaching these systematically through the whole school. A plan will be prepared for the next school year.

The other recommendations from the report will be addressed in due course.

{The above text is a translation of the school response to the report submitted by the Board of Management.}