

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Coláiste Chomáin
Ros Dumhach, County Mayo
Roll number: 72140V**

Date of inspection: 2nd April 2014



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
AGUS SCILEANNA** | **DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
AND SKILLS**
INSPECTORATE

Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April 2014 in Coláiste Chomáin. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Introduction

Coláiste Chomáin provides post-primary education in Irish for boys and girls in the Iorras Gaeltacht in north west Mayo. It is the only all-Irish post-primary school in the area. The trustee of the school is Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board (ETB). The school participates in DEIS, the action plan for educational inclusion.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- Very good progress has been made in recent years in reviving the Irish language as the language of administration, teaching and communication in the school.
- The number of students in the school is increasing.
- School accommodation has been greatly improved recently.
- The board of management are completely supportive, rooted in the community and diligent regarding the development of the school.
- The principal is an energetic, inspiring, far-sighted leader and the fruits of his talents are seen in the significant changes made during his leadership.
- The principal and vice-principal work together as a strong and effective senior management team.
- Senior management shows excellent leadership to the whole staff in facilitating a high standard of learning.
- The entire school, both management and staff, is dedicated to achieving the highest possible standard of learning.
- A broad and balanced curriculum is provided, especially given the size of the school.
- The staff is commended for its diligence and generosity in providing a very broad range of curricular and extracurricular activities for its students.
- Teaching was occasionally excellent and of a very high standard in most of the other lessons observed.
- Certain teachers are clearly carrying out excellent self-evaluation on their teaching and on the methodologies they use.
- The self-evaluation process is well underway, arising from the school's long-established DEIS planning.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board of management should hold meetings more frequently.
- An agreed, written report from all board meetings should be sent to the parents' council.
- The whole-school guidance plan should be further developed, detailing staff responsibilities and provision of guidance across the school.
- The broadening of the curriculum should be continued, investigating digital remote teaching possibilities, especially with other Gaeltacht schools.
- The best ways to provide or develop professional skills in guidance counselling and learning support in the school should be investigated.
- It is recommended that the time allowed for optional subjects in the senior cycle is balanced and in accordance with the requirements of the syllabus.
- Teaching and learning could be substantially developed in a very small number of lessons, especially regarding interactivity, questioning and differentiation strategies.
- The recommendations made in respective subject inspections should be discussed at the level of all subject departments to agree and implement cross-curricular actions.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The trustees of the school, Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim ETB, give every support to the board of management to ensure an effective provision of education. There is good communication between the board and the trustees. A formal annual report is provided by the board to the ETB. The board of management is rooted in the community and is diligent regarding the development of the school. Members understand their roles and responsibilities and some are experts in certain aspects of the board's work and have much experience in the field of education and in local government. They fulfil their duties as a board thoroughly. The board should, however, hold more frequent meetings. In general, a minimum of five meetings per year is recommended.

The board has adopted a range of policies that fulfil the school's responsibilities, including an enrolment, attendance and participation policy, a behaviour policy, a child protection policy and a health and safety policy. The board regularly reviews the policies in conjunction with other school partners. The whole-school guidance plan should be further developed, however, detailing staff responsibilities and provision of guidance across the curriculum.

The board provides agreed reports of its meetings to staff and this is a good practice. The parents' committee would welcome such agreed written reports. It is recommended that the board provide them. Consideration should be given to provision of suitable agreed reports to the student council also.

Board decisions are openly made and shared for the benefit of students and the school community in general. The principal and vice-principal work together as a strong and effective senior management team providing leadership to the school. They have a shared vision for the future of the school and share work, roles and responsibilities effectively and coherently to achieve that vision. Leadership roles are assigned to school staff at a central

management level. Teachers are given relevant, appropriate and clearly defined duties according to agreed procedures.

The school's broad vision includes the revival of Irish, not only in the school but in the locality, as well as strengthening community spirit and developing the social life in Iorras. Very good progress has been made in reviving the Irish language as the language of administration, teaching and communication in the school.

The good relations between all parties, including the parents' council and the student council, reflect well on the school. Partnership with parents is central to the school ethos and the parents' committee actively participates in school activities.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The board has identified the major development priorities for the school. These were decided in conjunction with the school community. These are appropriate priorities that prioritise increasing the number of students in the school. They focus on partnership with enterprise in the locality, linking with neighbouring Gaeltacht primary schools, developing students' literacy and numeracy, making Irish the teaching and examination language in the senior cycle, further developing assessment for learning and on aspects of self-evaluation. The list of major priorities is comprehensive and relevant and is a very good basis for progressing the development of the school.

To facilitate and ensure the improvement of the school, it would be worth agreeing a shortlist of these priorities according to importance, specifying appropriate actions and timelines for their achievement.

The entire school staff and management has commenced using the school self-evaluation process (SSE) to review progress and as a guide for future planning. Self-evaluation is embedded in the school's approach, based on DEIS planning and now on the SSE process. Actions are decided under the guidance of good school management and clear and effective procedures are followed to develop, review and formally adopt policies.

The principal and vice-principal are an inspiring team who show excellent leadership to the entire staff. The whole school, management and staff, is committed to achieving the highest possible standard of learning and teaching.

The central importance of the quality of learning in the school is understood, not only to enable provision of excellent education to the students, but to ensure an increase in enrolment.

The small size of the school is a constraint in assigning staff according to their qualifications. Senior management is skilled, however, in managing and encouraging teachers to use their qualifications and expertise to provide a broad curriculum. The best ways to provide or develop professional skills in guidance counselling and learning support in the school should be investigated.

Opportunities for staff to avail of continuing professional development (CPD) are exploited. School management encourages participation and staff members share what they have learned with colleagues on their return to school. An example of this is the work of the staff team on instructional leadership. Staff members are closely involved in and cooperate in the professional work of the school. The internal structures of this small school assist in encouraging collegial work practices among staff.

A broad and balanced curriculum is provided, especially given the size of the school. Every effort is made to meet the needs of the students and the school usually succeeds. The school's main priority depends on its ability to provide the curriculum the students want and the broadening of the curriculum should be continued. The possibilities of remote teaching using the school's broadband connection and digital resources should be examined.

An extremely wide range of curricular and extra-curricular activities is provided, including sport, arts, sciences and much more. The school has been actively developing links with schools overseas for a number of years under the Comenius programme and this greatly enriches students' learning. The staff is commended for its diligence and generosity in providing these activities to students.

Full instructional hours are provided in accordance with Department of Education and Skills Circular M29/95. Appropriate teaching time is assigned to the majority of curriculum subjects, but the allowance for optional subjects in senior cycle should be balanced and in accordance with the advice of the syllabus. Designated hours assigned by the Department are used for the intended purpose.

The school's enrolment policy is based on equality, diversity and inclusion of all students. Students' attendance is monitored and a systematic record is kept and made known to parents. Appropriate strategies are in place to support the achievement of regular attendance and completion of the school cycle.

The school's policy and code of behaviour is positive, comprehensive, sensible and understandable to students, parents and school staff. It is particularly commended that the response to infringements is dealt with in the second part of the code, after the reasons for the rule are clearly and positively explained in the first part. Response is incremental and balanced and the code clearly contributes to the creation of a respectful and pleasant atmosphere.

The support structures for students in the school are well organised and well-coordinated. Students are divided into 'houses', with students from every year group sharing a house, rather than being divided according to year group, as in other schools. This system works well. All teachers are part of the system. Provision of guidance is good, with advice and care of students at the heart of the school. The Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programmes are provided to support all students as is required. These aspects of the school should be clearly detailed in the whole-school guidance policy that is to be developed. This whole-school policy will facilitate monitoring of the progress of students in receipt of support.

A student representative council is democratically elected and appropriately involved in school activities.

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

All school accommodation and facilities are carefully maintained by the dedicated caretaker, staff, students and the entire school community. There is a range of appropriate resources available in classrooms to facilitate teaching. The professional creativity of the teachers is especially evident in some classrooms, with layout and furniture facilitating active learning methodologies.

Environmental responsibility is actively nurtured in the school, in the use and maintenance of facilities and resources. The school community is aware of environmental issues and the school has achieved green flag status.

Good use is made of information and communication technology (ICT), especially as a teaching resource in the classroom and in planning. The school has a broadband connection. ICT is a facility that can assist in overcoming certain difficulties related to the size of the school and its distance from other schools.

An appropriate, up to date health and safety statement, based on risk assessment, has been prepared by the school in conjunction with the ETB. All staff, visitors and students are familiarised with this statement.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

There was a high standard of written planning. Subject department plans were provided. These were done collaboratively and most were comprehensive. In some cases, short-term programmes of work should be further developed, including details on learning goals, corresponding teaching methodologies, teaching resources and assessment modes. Appropriate equipment, materials and resources were sourced for lessons, including ICT hardware and resources. Assessment of the students' work and learning was completed well following the good planning that had been done.

Certain aspects of teaching were of an excellent standard. Teaching was of very high standard in most of the other lessons observed. In these lessons learning goals were stated early in the lesson and teachers made connections between previously learned material and new learning. Lessons were correctly structured and well paced. Preparation was very good and a very good range of resources including worksheets and ICT materials.

Active learning was well utilised and a wide range of methodologies was used. Suitable questioning strategies were implemented and students participated in the work of the lessons. During these high quality lessons work was differentiated according to students' ability. Homework based on the day's work was given early in the lessons. Students' work and homework were well monitored and assessed. Literacy and numeracy were emphasised according to good practice. Basic skills were appropriately highlighted in language lessons and the use of the target language was excellent overall.

Teaching and learning could be substantially developed in a very small number of lessons. In particular, in these lessons, more opportunities should be provided to allow learning through interaction, organising group work and improving questioning strategies to encourage the students to speak. Although differentiation was well developed in some lessons, as mentioned above, there was scope to further develop differentiation strategies in other lessons. In these lessons, thought should be given to the best methodologies to ensure student learning, undertaking planning accordingly.

A good physical learning environment was created, with printed materials and students' work often on display. The atmosphere was supportive and students were relaxed. Teachers showed respect and appreciation for all of the students' efforts.

Most of the learning observed was high quality. Certain teachers are clearly carrying out thorough self-evaluation of their teaching and on the methodologies they use. These teachers have high expectations of their students and the students' achievements are correspondingly high. In a very small number of lessons, thought should be given to the best methodologies to ensure student learning and planning should be carried out accordingly.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

School management and teaching staff fully accepted the recommendations made in subject inspections and they were presented to the respective subject departments for implementation. Substantial progress has been made on implementation, in the subjects that were inspected at any rate.

The recommendations should now be discussed at the level of all subject departments or with the entire staff. While this work is in progress, it is recommended a record is kept of the actions proposed for each subject department, the time to be taken for each action and who will be responsible for the action.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Most of the recommendations made regarding teaching and learning have clearly been implemented, at any rate in the subject departments that were inspected. In addition, many improvements have been implemented as a result of teachers' CPD, with the support of the school. The sharing of knowledge with their colleagues by teachers who attended CPD sessions on their return is highly commended. They shared teaching methodologies, approaches and strategies that now enhance teaching and learning.

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

The school's self-assessment process is well underway, arising from the school's long-established DEIS planning. The school community understands the self-evaluation approach and it is being implemented under the good leadership of senior management. Relevant data is collected from parents and students. Knowledge of students' ability is obtained by testing. Students' progress is monitored. A school improvement plan is in place. The development of self-evaluation in the school is greatly enhanced by the excellent leadership of the principal and the close relationship, cooperation and communication of the staff.

Definite processes are in place in the school to manage, implement and review new developments. The school has made sufficient improvements in recent years to show its capacity for improvement. It is capable of tackling the improvements that must be implemented in future, including the recommendations of this report, through self-evaluation and appropriate actions.