

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Gaelcholáiste Luimnigh
Sir Harry's Mall, Limerick
Roll Number: 761011**

Date of Inspection: 5 December 2013



**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**

Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE – MLL) was undertaken in Gaelcholáiste Luimnigh in December 2012. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for school improvement. During the evaluation the inspection team met with the Board of Management of the school, the in-school management team and groups of teachers, parents and students. In addition, the inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation and the responses to questionnaires, and examined other facts in relation to the school's functioning. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons in a variety of subjects was inspected. The board of management of the school 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

Gaelcholáiste Luimnigh was established in 2006, with an enrolment of 31 students, as a result of parental demand in Limerick city and surrounding areas for an all-Irish education at second level for both boys and girls. There had been no such provision available for boys in the city of Limerick for many years. The school functions under the auspices of the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board. The Gaelcholáiste has experienced substantial growth and development since its establishment and has an enrolment of 510 students at present. The school is situated in city-centre site and is housed in a building comprising former offices and apartments, and rooms in a renovated old school building.

Main Findings

- The members of the board of management have had invaluable experience in the field of education and school management, and have an exceptional commitment to the development and future of the Gaelcholáiste.
- The board of management is extremely proud of the staff and students of the school and of what has been achieved in relation to the development of the school within a period of eight years.
- The principal and deputy principal work collaboratively as an excellent senior management team.
- The senior management team is committed to a high standard of communication and interaction between all the interested parties in the school.
- The principal is an innovative, inspired leader and his strong personal qualities support his role in the school.
- A substantial body of evidence was adduced during the evaluation indicating that the school's vision was being implemented systematically in all aspects of its work.
- Self-analysis and self-evaluation are central to all that happens in the school.
- The use of new technology plays a key role in the work of the school as an instrument of communication and a valuable teaching resource.
- All those involved in the school, including teachers and students, are encouraged and motivated to perform at the highest level of ability possible.
- An effective pastoral care system is implemented.
- Assistant principals and special duties teachers fulfil a wide range of roles and responsibilities and the schedule of posts matches the needs of the school.
- The lay-out of the building, the number of students and the divided school site create challenges for the senior management.
- The quality of learning and teaching ranged from excellent to very good.
- The school's capacity for improvement is at the highest level.

Recommendation for Further Development

- The literacy strategies devised for the correction of home work should be implemented more extensively.

1. QUALITY OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP OF THE SCHOOL

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management of the Gaelcholáiste is a sub-committee of the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board. The board members have had extensive experience in the area of education and in school management and they provide valuable support to the senior management. All the board members have been provided with appropriate training. Some board members have been associated with the promotion of the Irish language and the development of all-Irish education in Limerick City for more than fifty years; for these members, and indeed for all the board members, what has been achieved by the school community in a period of eight years is a great source of pride and satisfaction. The board is committed to the provision of education of a high standard through the medium of Irish for all. A welcome is extended to students from all educational and economic backgrounds, but an effort is made to accommodate students from the city's all-Irish primary schools first, as well as the brothers and sisters of former and current students. Places in the school are in great demand and it is a cause of regret for the management that the school has been obliged to turn away applicants in recent years.

The main priorities identified by the board of management for the development and the future enhancement of the school are the provision of a permanent site and building which will be centrally located for the convenience of the city's all-Irish primary schools and also the promotion of the school's self-assessment process. School self-assessment and critical analysis of all that happens in the school are core elements in the ethos of the gaelcholáiste. Transparency in relation to all that happens in the school is extremely important to the board and the senior management. By way of giving recognition to the importance of the students' place in the life of the school, representatives of the student council are invited to attend board of management meetings and this practice is commended. The staff and the parents' association are given oral feedback on matters discussed at the board meetings. It is recommended that an agreed written report on appropriate matters considered by the board should be made available to the staff and parents' association.

The school's parents' association functions effectively. Its members give valuable and necessary support to the senior management and the school, by organising social and educational events for the school community. In addition, fund-raising events are organised as a means of financing payment for the provision of substantial extra facilities in the school, for example the dining room, library and school yard. Members of the association reported that there is excellent communication between the association and the senior management, and that this is of great assistance to them. Interaction with parents, and the outcomes of questionnaires distributed among the parents of second year and fifth-year students during the evaluation, indicated that they are very happy with the educational provision of the school and the communication with management and with the teaching staff.

1.2 Effectiveness of Leadership for Learning

The principal and deputy principal operate collaboratively as an effective, united team having a common vision for the day-to-day administration and the future of the school. The senior management is dedicated to the achievement of high standards in all aspects of the life of the school. The management and the whole school community have an ambitious vision of innovation in education, which comprises the following: to provide education of a high standard through the

medium of Irish, to cultivate excellent communication between all interested parties, to operate with transparency, to take all decisions for the benefit of students, to conduct critical analysis on a regular basis and to make self-assessment a core element in all that happens in the school. A substantial body of evidence was adduced during the assessment which indicated that this vision is being realised in every aspect of the life of the school.

The principal and deputy principal fulfil roles which are distinct but complementary and they convene regular meetings in order to discuss the day to day business and the development of the school. The principal is an innovative and inspiring leader whose strong personal qualities and interpersonal skills support his role in the school. The deputy principal carries particular responsibility for providing pastoral care for the students. An effective anti-bullying system has been implemented in the school. In the questionnaires distributed during the evaluation, both students and parents reported that the students feel safe and secure in the school environment. The senior management is held in high regard by the board and staff members, parents and students. The principal sets high levels of expectation for the teachers and students. The school community, including teachers and students, responds to these high levels of expectation with diligence, hard work, high standards, general educational attainments and participation in a wide range of sporting competitions and extra-curricular and cross-curricular activities. Everyone in the school is encouraged and motivated to function at the highest level of ability possible.

It is of great advantage to the school that it has a wide range of posts of responsibility available to it, including assistant principals and special duties teachers. These fulfil an extensive range of roles and responsibilities. The nature and extent of these responsibilities and roles are discussed on an annual basis and their allocation is based on the needs of the school. The principal delegates aspects of administration and education in the school to staff members in accordance with areas of interest and expertise. This is exemplary practice and the staff members are commended on their flexibility and commitment to the school's welfare and to high standards in all aspects of the administration and organisation of the Gaelcholáiste. It was noted that the schedule of posts fully meets the needs of the school.

The self-assessment process is well established in the school and much effort has been expended on developing it. Questionnaires were distributed among teachers, students and parents in the school year 2011/12, as part of this process. It was noted, in responses from the parents' questionnaires administered by the school, that parents felt there was a lack of understanding among students of study skills. A study lesson is timetabled for each year group this year with a view to overcoming this deficit and this practice will continue in the case of first-year students in the future.

The principle of self-assessment is central to the work and spirit of the staff. Staff members are encouraged to undergo continuing professional development and there is a feedback process in place whereby the teachers returning from courses inform the staff as a whole on their return to the school. Teachers participated in a peer-review system as an element of the school self-assessment process. Team teaching is practised in certain classes in the school. The staff has been given additional training in general ability testing and in literacy and numeracy. The open attitude among teachers in relation to helping and learning from one another is commended. From a broader perspective, the dedicated commitment of management and staff to school improvement at every level is recognised.

A great deal of work has been done in recent years on subject planning and the teachers are to be complimented on this. This material, together with lists of teaching resources and materials are to be found on the *Virtual Learning Environment* or *SharePoint* web sites. Furthermore, a system for checking student attendance is implemented in the school and parents can get up-to-date information on examination results and their childrens' progress on a daily basis. Parents indicated, during an interview as part of the evaluation, that they were very happy with this service.

The staff participates in many different projects, including the Junior Cycle School Network for example. Comprehensive planning for the new Junior Cycle has already been undertaken in the

Gaelcholáiste and a newsletter has issued to parents. The school is registered with the *Droichead* programme for newly qualified teachers. Additionally, the Gaelcholáiste is registered for the *e-Portfolio Project* and the on-line *Database Project for Post-primary Schools*.

An effective pastoral care system is implemented in the school. Students meet their class teacher on a daily basis and the year head attends one of these meetings each week. There is a weekly meeting of year heads and the principal or deputy principal attends these meetings. Each student in the school is discussed in order to ensure that all are safe and happy and performing in accordance with their abilities. Support for students with additional needs is provided in the class setting at present. A decision on the most appropriate form of support is made from year to year, based on the nature of the students' additional needs. A clear code of behaviour is implemented, together with an appropriate ladder of referral and a system for acknowledging educational achievements. It was noted during the evaluation that the students' behaviour was of a very high standard. Despite difficulties caused by narrow corridors and stairs, the students move between classes in a polite and considerate fashion.

It was reported during the evaluation that the welfare of students lies at the heart of every decision made in the school and evidence of this objective was to be clearly seen. The school makes available a wide range of subject options and a considerable effort is made to ensure that fifth-year students are allocated the subjects of their choice. Due emphasis is placed on the process of transition from primary school to second level, and there is a mentoring system in place for first-year students. Both students and parents made reference to the positive effects of this system. A very good guidance service is provided for students and a highly comprehensive guidance plan has been drawn up. In addition to the timetabled guidance classes, an effort is made to organise at least two meetings with the guidance teacher for each student in both fifth and sixth 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 resources

The school is located on a city-centre site, which has both advantages and disadvantages. Classrooms, specialist rooms and the school's administrative offices are housed in a five-storey building in a mix of what were formerly offices and apartments, and in rooms in an old school building on a separate site. The physical layout of the school, and the large number of students on the move between classrooms, create challenges for the management and the school community as a whole. The school buildings and resources are well maintained. The buildings are tidy, clean and well-organised, considering their spatial limitations. The school's care-taking team and the secretary provide a service of a high standard and this is a valuable support to the school.

Strong emphasis is placed on the importance of new technology, and excellent teaching resources are made available to the teaching staff. iPads are used by Transition Year and fifth-year students, and by all teachers. New technology is effectively used in the school as a valuable teaching, learning and communication aid.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

Twenty-five lessons were observed during the evaluation, covering a wide range of subjects and programmes across all year groups. The quality of teaching and learning ranged from excellent to very good, with exemplary practice noted in many lessons. Learning objectives were identified at the beginning of the majority of lessons observed, and these were revisited to assess student learning in many instances. It is recommended that this practice should be extended to all lessons.

An effective learning environment has been created in the school, and there is a great deal of printed materials displayed on the classroom walls. An atmosphere of respect prevailed in all the classrooms and discipline was excellent.

Teachers had high expectations for their students and every effort was made to ensure that effective learning occurred during lessons. Active learning formed a key element of the majority of lessons and numerous opportunities were created for the students to work in pairs or in groups, in order to enable them to participate in and be responsible for their learning. It was acknowledged that good learning occurred during all the lessons observed. In a small minority of cases it was felt that opportunities could have been created for students to be more active in their own learning.

Teachers made very good use of questioning as a strategy to encourage students to talk and in order to assess students' knowledge and understanding of lesson content. Higher-order questions were regularly asked and appropriate learning challenges were set for students. It was clear that the students had a good understanding of lesson content and their general level of interest in learning was noted.

The lessons observed were well structured, with comprehensive prior preparation by teachers which included work sheets, notes and information and communication technology (ICT) material being prepared beforehand. An extensive range of teaching methodologies was utilised during lessons and effective use of ICT was a central element in some cases.

An appropriate emphasis was placed on teaching key words in the majority of lessons observed. However, in a minority of cases it was noted that more effective strategies could have been used with a view to strengthening student knowledge of key words. In addition, the majority of teachers went to great lengths to make use of subject specific terminology. The work of these teachers is highly commended. It was thought, however, that greater emphasis could have been placed on the cultivation of literacy, both oral and written, during lessons. As a first step, it is recommended that teachers' and students' language awareness be further developed. Strategies should be agreed and implemented in order to gradually develop an understanding of the importance of grammatical accuracy. It is important that oral literacy would be fostered by seeking full sentences as answers to questions and by modelling language exemplars as examples of good practice in language speaking. Teachers' expectations as regards the speaking of English by students in English language classes should be extended. However, it is acknowledged that this can be a challenge in the linguistic context of the Gaelcholáiste.

At an early stage of all the lessons observed, home work was allocated which was relevant to and focused on the work being done in the class. From a review of the copy books, it was clear also that home work is regularly assigned and corrected. It was reported that teachers take great trouble with this aspect of teaching and they are commended for this. However, it is recommended that a stronger emphasis should be placed on providing formative feedback in the copy books, giving guidance and advice towards improvement.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

No recommendations in respect of school management were made in previous evaluations. Senior management facilitates teachers in learning and benefitting from inspection reports when they are issued to the school. An internal procedure has been implemented so that information can be shared and the main findings and recommendations discussed and shared among staff.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Inspection reports are discussed and made available to the school community. The reports have been posted also on the Gaelcholáiste website. In the case of a subject report, the subject department is afforded an opportunity of discussing it and implementing its recommendations. It was concluded that recommendations in general are being implemented across the curriculum.

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

It was shown during the evaluation that the school self-assessment process is well established and functioning at an exceptionally high level of effectiveness. The senior management and staff show great diligence and interest in the process and it has been undertaken willingly and with significant energy. Questionnaires were distributed among the whole school community by school management and the results of these are being collated and assessed on an ongoing basis. The questionnaires distributed among the students and parents of the school during the evaluation revealed that they regard all aspects of the educational provision with a very high level of satisfaction. Comprehensive information is compiled on student ability so as to ensure that they are performing in accordance with their potential. The progress of students is continuously monitored and each student is discussed at meetings between the year heads and senior management. A school self-evaluation report has been drawn up and a school improvement plan devised and implemented. A critical analysis is carried out on all aspects of educational provision and pastoral care for the students. The school's capacity for improvement is at the highest 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 Gaelcholáiste Luimnigh welcome the results of this report. The board is exceedingly pleased with the overwhelmingly positive report on Management, Leadership and Learning in Gaelcholáiste Luimnigh. The board warmly congratulates the management and school staff on the evidence of good practice and the strong commendation by the Inspectorate which is reflected in this report.

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

The school board are ensuring that a system for homework correction will be agreed by the whole staff and implemented in due course.

The whole college staff are undertaking to progress the theme of “language awareness” in their subject planning and teaching, in the future.

(This is a translation of the School Response submitted by the Board of Management.)