

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Ardcoil Rís  
North Circular Road, Limerick  
Roll number: 64201T**

**Date of inspection: 15 January 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 January 2014 in Ardscoil Rís. 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 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***

Ardscoil Rís is a Catholic voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The school has a current enrolment of 738 boys. The students come from a wide catchment in Limerick City and County and neighbouring South Clare. The optional Transition Year (TY) is taken by most students. An extensive building and renovation programme was completed for the start of the current school year. The school provides a wide range of subjects and of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

### ***Key Findings***

- The dedicated, hardworking board of management provides for very effective education and is active in the formulation, and regular review of a full range of policies.
- The principal and deputy principal work closely together to provide enlightened leadership.
- Leadership is distributed effectively to middle management.
- The well constituted parents' association plays a very active and effective part in the life of the school.
- The approach to formulating the developmental section of the school plan is very effective.
- Staff commitment and motivation ensures cohesiveness and success in achieving the school's aims.
- The staff's commitment to providing a wide variety of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities is considerable.
- Guidance provision for students across the school is a particular strength.
- Student care and support structures are very effective.
- Very good progress is being made in the area of team teaching in some subject areas.
- The student council, which is active, well organised and democratically elected, takes an active part in the life of the school.
- Aspects of teaching in a small number of the lessons observed were excellent, while in almost all lessons the quality of teaching was good or very good.

- Preparation for lessons was of a high standard throughout and all lessons were well structured and paced.
- The quality of learning was good or very good in almost all lessons.

### ***Recommendations for Further Development***

- The planning group should prioritise the co-ordination of all task groups and committees involved in the formulation and implementation of developmental plans.
- In the completion of the school plan, the most immediate priorities for development should be highlighted along with success criteria and timescales.
- The basis on which entrance to TY is decided, in the event of oversubscription, should be clarified and explicitly stated in the TY policy.
- The school practises openness in relation to enrolment of students and the written admissions policy should be amended to reflect fully this good practice.
- A whole-school guidance plan should be developed.
- In those lessons where there is scope for further improvement of learning, greater use of student-centred, collaborative teaching approaches is recommended.
- Further development of the approaches used by teachers to provide written formative feedback to students on their work is recommended.

## **1. 1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

### ***1.1 School ownership and management***

The board of management provides for very effective education for students under the support and guidance of the trustees, all actively promoting the school's ethos in so doing. The board is appropriately constituted and its members are knowledgeable with regard to their roles and responsibilities which they carry out effectively. The board operates openly, fairly and collaboratively making well informed decisions in the best interests of the school community. It is active in the formulation and regular review of a full range of policies which includes all mandatory policies. The structures around the setting and recording of review dates for policies are commended.

Practice in the area of guidance for students across the school is seen to be a particular strength of the school. Evidence of this strength emerges from a reading of the written guidance department plan as well as school policies such as those on SPHE, Religious Education, special education, pastoral care and critical incidents, and through an examination of student care structures and practice. It is, however, recommended that a single overarching policy document, the whole-school guidance plan, be developed which provides an overview of structures while clearly describing the roles and responsibilities of all members of the school community in its implementation.

The board communicates very well with the school community and a written agreed report issues from each board meeting which is circulated to the parents' association and to the staff. This is good practice. The merits of also providing a written agreed report, though not necessarily the same report, to the student council should be considered.

The principal and deputy principal work closely together to maintain the educational strengths of the school and to provide enlightened leadership for further development. Decision-making is done in partnership following careful consideration of the issues and communication with staff, parents and students is coherent and consistent. Within this close senior management team, the principal and deputy principal also have clearly defined

responsibilities in specific areas which they carry out effectively and comprehensively, each adding particular strengths to the range of skills used to great effect to motivate, lead and support all members of the staff in successfully achieving the clearly identified aims of the school..

There is active distribution of leadership roles to middle management which has benefited from regular review of the duties to be allocated to meet the needs of the school. Clearly defined and agreed procedures are in place for allocation of duties and for monitoring performance. The distribution of middle-management roles is in line with a coherent shared vision of the priority needs of the students and the school.

The student council is elected democratically and transparently. Students indicate that the process is fair and that they are well represented. Various initiatives of the council have had successful outcomes and recently it had arranged a visit to the school by the student councils of some other local schools to discuss issues of common interest. Interest in serving on the council is high and it plays an active part in the life of the school. It has collaborated effectively and appropriately with senior management and the board of management.

The parents' association also plays a very active part in the life of the school. It is representative and reports a high level of attendance at meetings. Sub-committees are formed for specific tasks. Liaison is very effective and links include the assigned teacher, who attends each monthly meeting. The parents' association sees itself clearly as a support to the work of the school in a spirit of partnership working towards the achievement of shared aims.

A wide range of areas for further development has been identified by the board in close collaboration with the school involving students, parents, staff, and management. The identified developmental priorities are included in the school plan with targets for their achievement. This approach to planning is effective. It is recommended, however, as part of the completion of the plan, that the most immediate priorities for development be highlighted with success criteria and timescales.

Staff groups and committees play an active part in the implementation of plans and actions. In selected cases, as in the review of the anti-bullying policy, the review committee includes students, parents and board members in addition to staff. Progress is carefully monitored by management and the school is successful in meeting its targets. The school planning group, which is active and energetic in school improvement, should focus primarily on co-ordinating the work of the implementation groups.

### ***1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

The overall purpose of the school, as stated by senior management, is to achieve excellence in every aspect of its work. Effective leadership is given to achieve clear aims derived from the overall purpose. These expectations extend to teaching and learning where there is strong evidence of decisive leadership. Teaching staff are deployed according to their qualifications and expertise and work very effectively within well-structured subject departments.

Continuing professional development (CPD) is at the core of school development and it is aimed at responding to the needs of the school and teachers in meeting development priorities. In-school CPD sessions are facilitated both by outside presenters and by staff who generously share their insights and skills with colleagues. The recognition of the considerable skills present in the staff is a very positive aspect of CPD in the school.

Teachers are afforded ample opportunities to lead developments by choosing involvement in working groups and by taking on leadership roles.

Subject departments are very well supported through the provision of regular, focused department meetings. Discussion of recommendations made in subject inspection reports as part of this process is particularly valuable. Another strength is the compilation by each subject department of an annual report. These reports are then combined to provide an overview of progress across the school towards the achievement of its aims.

The curriculum offered by the school is generally well balanced and meets the needs and expectations of the students. Almost all students participate in the very successful optional TY programme and the response of the school to student demand by increasing the places on the programme in recent years is commended. When there is oversubscription it is necessary to apply selection criteria for entry to the programme. It is recommended that these criteria, along with the process involved in applying them, are clearly stated in the TY policy. It is important that the criteria are kept under review to ensure that they allow for the potential benefit to each individual student of participation in TY to be a priority consideration when deciding on whether, or not, to allocate a place to that student.

Timetabled instructional hours are in compliance with Circular Letter M25/95. The school does not fully meet the requirements of Circular Letter 25/2012, which asks schools to make every effort to ensure that students have one lesson of Mathematics and English every day. However, it has begun planning for the introduction of the Junior Cycle Student Award and is in a good position to ensure that students will continue to be supported in the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills. The allocation of time for subjects is generally in line with syllabus guidelines and recognised best practice. Teaching hours designated for specific purposes are used as intended.

The school practices openness in the enrolment of students. This good practice, which is grounded in the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion of all students, is not fully reflected in the current wording of the school's written admissions policy.

Attendance and instances of lateness are carefully and methodically monitored and appropriate follow-up procedures are in place. The code of behaviour is clear and provides both a rationale for good behaviour and a graduated series of interventions in the event of misbehaviour. The graduated rewards for positive behaviour are also stated. When this policy is being reviewed, consideration should be given to placing more emphasis on the rewards, perhaps moving this section to the top of the document.

Student care is managed very effectively through the year-head structure, class teachers, student mentors and subject teachers and there are separate weekly year-head meetings for junior classes and senior classes. These meetings are attended by senior management providing for discussion and consideration of individual and whole-school needs. Further very effective communication and collaboration is supported by weekly meetings dealing with special educational needs and religious education, and programme coordination including TY. Student progress is carefully monitored.

The special educational needs department is very well organised. Very good progress is being made in team teaching by a dedicated small group of teachers. The guidance department operates very efficiently to provide guidance and counselling support. However, although practice in the provision of student care is a particular strength of the school, as outlined above, a whole-school guidance plan has yet to be developed to describe the complementary programmes, structures, roles and responsibilities that combine to provide integrated student care.

The school has a long tradition of providing a wide variety of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and seeks to provide activities to suit the diverse interests of the students. The selfless commitment of staff is considerable and highly commendable. Management and staff fully appreciate the importance of the time freely given in many areas of activity to the educational outcomes of their students.

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 standard of care and attention to detail in the maintenance of the school buildings and facilities is exceptionally good. The equipment and resources used in teaching are of high quality. The physical environment throughout the school ensures that learning can be prioritised and supported.

The use of ICT in planning and teaching and learning is widespread. ICT facilities are fully accessible in each classroom and were seen to be used in all of the lessons observed. The school has prioritised the development of e-learning approaches and will be investigating the development of its infrastructure including the deployment of wireless networking. This is indicative of the capacity of the school to move ahead and take advantage of new trends in education.

Major building works, in train for four years, had been completed shortly before the evaluation. The current health and safety statement is comprehensive and detailed and has been in place for two years. A safety audit should now take place. Thereafter, the school should make provision for annual safety audits in line with advice in the Health and Safety Authority guidelines documentation, which should be used, together with the risk assessment templates it contains, to facilitate the process.

## **2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### **2.1 The quality of learning and teaching**

Subject department planning is very well developed. Plans are well structured and good records are kept of subject department meetings. Programmes of work are coherently presented. Where not already the case, teaching methodologies should be more specifically linked to particular content and learning outcomes in the subject plans. A good way of achieving this can be by presenting the plan in a tabular layout which links elements such as content, methodology, resources, planned learning outcomes and assessment in an easily amendable format. Where necessary, a second folder for supporting material should be used to maintain the focus of the subject plan as a working document.

Each of the lessons observed had been very well prepared. Lessons were well structured and paced. The use of ICT as a teaching aid benefited from careful preparation and integration in the teaching of lessons, thereby providing an effective vehicle for teacher presentations.

In almost all lessons the overall quality of teaching was good to very good. The quality of aspects of teaching in a small number of the lessons observed was excellent. This was the case particularly where thoroughly well planned innovative approaches and strategies were deployed, as in a team-taught lesson to a junior-cycle business studies class. A wide range

of suitable teaching approaches was used in almost all lessons. Some very good instances of collaborative pair and group work were observed where activities had been carefully prepared and implemented. However, in a very small number of lessons, where approaches were more teacher led, students would have benefited from a greater use of active teaching methodologies to engage them more fully in their learning.

The school policy of sharing expected learning outcomes with students was implemented in each of the lessons observed. Implementation was most successful where learning outcomes were reviewed towards the end. Students were made aware early in most lessons of the homework to be set. This was a useful strategy that helped student focus and learning.

Almost all lessons began with a review of students' prior knowledge and this was elicited by skilled teacher questioning. In a small number of lessons there was scope for increased higher-order questioning to challenge more able students and to enhance their understanding, knowledge and skills. Particularly in such lessons, and generally, teacher questioning should be used to increase the opportunities for students to make more extended contributions and to develop their oral skills further.

The quality of interaction in lessons was at all times very high, characterised by respect and rapport which is modelled by management and staff and emulated by students. Within the respectful learning environment thus maintained, classroom management was of a very high standard throughout with full advantage taken of positive relationships to successfully encourage best behaviour in students.

The assessment and monitoring of students' work was generally good with well-structured continuous assessment across the curriculum on a monthly basis. However, in some cases, there was scope for improvement in the quality of written formative feedback provided to students. This merits further investigation and development at whole-school level.

The quality of students' learning was good or very good in almost all lessons. The constant encouragement and affirmation of success that permeates the school clearly had a very beneficial effect on the students, who were generally confident and engaged well with their own learning. Teachers' expectations of students were high and students generally achieved expected outcomes. Where, in a very few lessons, there was scope for further significant improvement in learning, more student-centred, collaborative approaches should have been explored.

### **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

#### ***3.1 Management***

Management has been thorough in ensuring implementation of the recommendations of previous evaluations. Appropriate actions have been taken at each level from senior management to individual teachers. Recommendations made in previous subject inspections have been systematically addressed both in the subject departments inspected and across the school. The clear strategy adopted for the implementation of the recommendations includes consideration at staff meetings and reporting back by each subject department of the action it has taken.

#### ***3.2 Learning and teaching***

Clear evidence was seen of substantial actions taken to address the implementation of recommendations made for the further improvement of learning and teaching. This was so in subjects that had recently been involved in subject inspection and across the other departments. Teachers and subject departments have responded by further expanding the range of assessment for learning strategies, by increasing differentiation to meet students' individual needs and by increasing the use of ICT.

The actions taken on recommendations has led to effective implementation of improvements. This systematic approach is highly commendable.

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

Engagement in the process of self-evaluation in Ardscoil Rís is substantial at whole-school, subject-department and teacher level. School review and self-evaluation processes are in place and were focused on the prioritised themes of literacy and numeracy at the time of the evaluation. The processes are effective and also involve parents and students. They are evidence-based, with specific measureable and achievable time-bound goals.

Considerable progress has been made by the school in recent years due to the systematic approaches taken with regard to school development planning, curriculum change, teaching and learning, and support for students. With the further development of the implementation and review processes arising from the introduction of school self-evaluation (SSE), continued progress is assured. This school has very significant potential to continue to meet the needs of its students to a very high standard and to respond effectively where possibilities for improvement are identified.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

Cuireann Bord Bainistíochta Ardscoil Rís fáilte roimh an tuairisc an-dearfach seo faoi imeachtaí na scoile. Is aitheantas agus spreagadh iontach é seo don Bhord agus do phobal na scoile. *(The Board of Management of Ardscoil Rís welcomes this very positive report on the school. It is recognition and wonderful encouragement for the Board and the school community.)*

The Board of Management welcomes the findings of the WSE-MLL report by the Inspectorate of the DES. The recognition of the excellence of Management, Leadership and Learning evident across the entire spectrum of school endeavours is exceedingly gratifying. The BOM is pleased that the report contains strong evidence that each of the five key elements of the ERST Charter permeates the day to day life, activities and energy of the school. It found strong evidence of Gospel-based values, partnership, excellence in teaching and learning, a caring school community and transformational leadership. The Board congratulates the whole school community for its contribution to the continued excellence in education in the school which is reflected in this report.

The acknowledgement of the leadership, dedication and vision of the Principal and Deputy Principal is especially pleasing. The BOM warmly commends the school staff on its outstanding dedication to teaching and learning and acknowledges the generosity and expertise of the teachers in nurturing a large number of extra-curricular activities to a very high standard. It is gratifying the Inspectorate highlighted the respectful rapport which hallmarks the relationship between management, staff and students. The report noted the very high academic expectations of the staff for their students and the students' positive response to this.

## **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 Planning Group has co-ordinated all task groups and committees in school development planning and is overseeing the separation of the existing guidance plan into the subject plan and whole-school plan heretofore presented as one document. The BOM will continue its programme of reviewing policies and will gladly take on board recommendations in this area. The Board notes that innovative and collaborative student-centred approaches to teaching and learning attracted particular commendation and will continue to extend this approach wherever appropriate.