

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning
REPORT

Coláiste Eoin
Finglas West, Dublin 11
Roll number: 70180A

Date of inspection: 9 May 2013



**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, 2013, in Coláiste Eoin. 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 Eoin is a co-educational school operating in the Finglas West area of Dublin under the auspices of the City of Dublin Vocational Educational Committee (CDVEC). The programmes offered in the school are the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the established Leaving Certificate (LC). The school is one of six post-primary schools in the Finglas area and current enrolment stands at 140 students, three quarters of whom are boys. The school participates in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) for educational inclusion.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- School management has a strong focus on school improvement, is open to innovation and is deeply committed to the school: leadership is also distributed among staff, who take up opportunities to lead projects and initiatives.
- The admissions policy underpins the school ethos, which is clearly inclusive.
- There is a very wide range of supports for students, which continue to be developed and extended.
- Teaching and learning observed was good overall and there was good preparation for lessons: students actively engaged in lesson activities and their contributions were encouraged.
- Teacher-student interactions were positive and respectful and the learning environment was supportive.
- The school's capacity for improvement is very good.

Recommendations for Further Development

- Partnership with students and parents should be strengthened.
- Timetabling should be reviewed to ensure the school is providing the required twenty-eight hours' tuition time and to obtain maximum benefit from resources allocated.
- Consideration should be given to rationalising the very large number of support initiatives operating in the school.
- Care needs to be taken to ensure that there is an appropriate focus on students' academic progress and that students of higher ability are sufficiently challenged in lessons.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management, a sub-committee of CDVEC, was constituted in 2009. Membership is appropriately wide, but since September 2012 there has been only one parent nominee to the board and this needs to be addressed. While it has been customary for the parent nominees to originate from within the parents' association (PA), the election of a new nominee should be extended to the general parent body.

Key priorities identified by the board include the addressing of falling school enrolment and the progressing of requirements for DEIS, the national literacy and numeracy strategy and school self-evaluation (SSE). Other priorities emerge in the areas of management, planning, curriculum and teaching and learning, as they are discussed at board meetings. It is good practice that discussions include many different perspectives and decisions are made by consensus.

It is recommended that feedback from board meetings be agreed by the board and disseminated to parents, perhaps through the PA, as well as to teaching staff. The board should also consider providing an annual report to parents on the work of the school. In line with good practice, reports from school evaluations are circulated among board members.

The in-school senior management team, consisting of the principal and deputy principal, has agreed roles and responsibilities. They communicate on a daily basis and support each other in their work. They are members, along with the assistant principal post-holders, of the school's long-standing leadership team, which has scheduled weekly meeting time. The senior management team has a strong school improvement agenda and is open to innovation. Both principal and deputy are guided in their work by a deep commitment to the school. They practice distributed leadership and operate an open door policy. They are realistic about the challenges facing the school and, commendably, remain positive role models for all staff.

The schedule of posts had a whole-staff review a number of years ago and is appropriate to the middle-management needs of the school. In more recent years, posts have been reshuffled following individual discussions with post holders. In order to ensure that posts continue to match the school's ever-evolving needs, it is recommended that the schedule undergo more regular review. Consideration should also be given to an annual evaluation of post-holders' work, to include a process of self-reflection.

Two teachers share responsibility for school planning, one of whom has a designated post of responsibility in the area. It is good practice that school planning, DEIS planning and SSE are being integrated. Whole-staff collaboration and input to planning is facilitated through the establishment of planning teams and the two teachers periodically provide information on planning at staff meetings. This is a good example of distributed leadership in action. While there have been instances of consultation with students and parents on planning matters, this should be strengthened.

The parents' association meets at regular intervals, supported by the school. Difficulties in persuading parents to get actively involved in the PA were highlighted by those interviewed. It is suggested that a broadening of the role of the PA may persuade parents of the value of such involvement. Increased communication with the parent body by the PA may also have a positive impact. The PA has influenced the development of some school policies and had other initiatives realised. Currently the PA is not informed of the outcomes of evaluations that have taken place in the school and this should be reviewed.

The student council (SC) is democratically elected and normally meets on a monthly basis. Students' inputs have been sought on some school policies. The board of management has

discussed inviting officers of the SC to meet with the board. This would be good practice and the board is encouraged to proceed with this proposal.

It is commendable that strategic planning in the school is consultative and democratic. Furthermore, management structures facilitate collegial and collaborative work practices. These and other activities are strongly supported by senior management through the allocation of scheduled meeting, planning and co-ordination time and through their attendance at meetings. While there are some examples of good communication between teams and the general staff, there is currently no consistent system for feeding back information. In order to maximise effectiveness, it is recommended that scheduled meetings be followed, as a matter of course, with a brief report for staff.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Teachers are encouraged to engage in continuing professional development (CPD) and there was evidence of subject-specific and whole-school courses being undertaken, including the TL21 project that focussed on implementing assessment for learning strategies. The promotion of improvements in teaching and learning are strongly linked by the school to the promotion of good behaviour habits and much effort has been put into addressing this aspect of school life.

Staff members are afforded and avail of opportunities to lead projects and initiatives. This is an additional and noteworthy means of enhancing teachers' professional development. Many members of staff are self-motivated and display this in their approach and the quality of care and initiative they show in their work.

Subject planning, too, is facilitating collaborative practices for the teachers, many of whom have invested significant time and energy in developing subject plans. Of those reviewed during the evaluation, only a very small number included programmes of work that were expressed in terms of learning outcomes for students. As this approach puts students at the centre of the planning process, all remaining subject plans should follow this example. There were some plans that referred to literacy and numeracy development and how it might be supported within the subject. This should also be extended to all subject plans.

Most subject plans included a summary of students' performance in recent certificate examinations. This will be more valuable as a tool for planning and reflection when data are not only presented but also analysed, as was done in a small number of instances. Particularly good elements of subject planning included the presentation of differentiated learning outcomes, a report following up on a subject inspection, and the use of SWOT analyses. These analyses should now be accompanied by time-bound action plans to address issues identified.

The curriculum offered in the school is generally broad and balanced and deliberate efforts are made to meet the needs of the students. The school has a JCSP demonstration library and a full-time librarian, both of which are tremendous assets in promoting literacy and numeracy among junior cycle students. As a means of establishing progress in literacy and numeracy, standardised tests are administered to all first-year students during their first term and re-administered at the end of that year. This is good practice.

The school is currently not meeting the required minimum 28 hours' tuition time. This needs to be addressed. In addition, a small number of teachers are timetabled for extra-curricular activities as part of their teaching timetable. It would be timely to conduct a general review of teacher deployment in the school to ensure that maximum benefit is being made of allocated hours in all cases.

The admissions policy, commendably reviewed following a previous evaluation, reflects the school's inclusive ethos. It is notable that the induction programmes for incoming first years and for first-year LCA students have had a significant positive impact on student retention.

Student attendance and punctuality are also closely monitored in the school. Strategies put in place for junior students have had such a positive impact that consideration is now being given to their extension to senior students.

The code of behaviour is clearly understood by students and parents, as evidenced by responses to questionnaires. The code, recently reviewed, identifies clearly the roles of each member of the school community in the maintenance and promotion of good behaviour. The excellent behaviour of students on corridors during the evaluation period was notable. The school is also commended for the reduction in the number of student suspensions in recent years.

The school operates a year head and class teacher system for supporting the care and academic needs of students. It is good practice that all year heads are members of the school's care team, which has scheduled weekly meetings. Year heads and class teachers monitor behaviour, progress, notes in diaries and any issues arising for students or their parents. It is particularly noteworthy that students attend parent-teacher meetings with their parents. The role of the year head and class teacher in monitoring students' academic progress involves them in meeting with individual students where issues arise. It is suggested that students be encouraged to set personal targets for achievement so as to involve them more closely in the monitoring of their own progress.

The school has adopted the Step Up programme as a means of broadening the horizons and aspirations of students of higher ability. In addition, there are a number of instances of teachers providing additional lessons for students. A student awards system, led by the deputy principal and year heads, acknowledges, in the main, positive behaviours, attendance and punctuality. There is scope to bring an increased focus on students' academic progress in the awards system.

Students with special educational needs (SEN) are identified through an appropriate assessment process that begins in the year prior to their entry to the school. A team of teachers working under the guidance of the qualified special needs co-ordinator, along with a small number of special needs assistants (SNAs), provide additional supports. It is commendable that most members of the team have a qualification or expertise in working with students with such needs. The co-ordinator makes information available to all staff, thus raising the consciousness of the general staff body to SEN issues. This is good practice. Support modes have diversified in recent years and now include team teaching, in-class support and withdrawal. Work on developing individual education plans for students with SEN is ongoing and is in accordance with stages set out by the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) of CDVEC. Students' success in meeting stated targets is tracked by the special needs department, as are their results in mainstream class tests and progress is discussed with parents.

The school hosts a classroom for students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). Since its establishment, it is notable that ongoing efforts towards integration have been made. The role of the teacher managing the ASD classroom includes maintaining strong links with parents and students' progress on meeting agreed targets is, commendably, discussed with their parents on a weekly basis. There are informal links with the special needs department and there is scope to develop these further.

There is a very wide range of support initiatives in place in the school, including home-school-community liaison (HSCL) and school completion programme (SCP). Another of these is the behaviour for learning initiative that promotes positive student behaviour. This was formally established in 2011 under the auspices of the national behaviour support service (NBSS). Friendship, anti-bullying and team-working weeks have taken place, commendably followed by an evaluation process. Behaviour for learning operates to clear priorities, embraces frequent communication with teaching and other staff and regularly monitors its effectiveness. Teachers' commitment to supporting students is highly evident and there is great willingness to take on board new initiatives. However, given the management and ongoing monitoring demands

arising from involvement in such a wide range of activities, some rationalisation may be of benefit.

The role of the guidance counsellor is targeted mostly at the senior cycle. Due to the importance for third-year students of receiving guidance and advice in relation to subject, programme and career choices at senior cycle and beyond, it is recommended that a stronger focus be implemented at this level. The whole-school guidance plan should be prioritised for review and links with social, personal and health education (SPHE) regarding the implementation of a guidance programme should be clearly evident.

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*.

1.2 Management of facilities

Ongoing improvements have been made to the school building and facilities in recent years, including the upgrading of woodworking machines. Classroom and corridor painting projects are being progressed year on year, helping to give a fresh feel to the learning environment. The presentation of art work and photographs on the walls is creating a welcoming and positive atmosphere.

The school infrastructure has been updated with the installation of information and communications technology (ICT) hardware in classrooms and in the entrance foyer, and a tablet computer and Wi-Fi project is in the planning phase.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Teaching and learning observed ranged from fair to very good but overall was of good quality. There was good preparation for all lessons, including the advance preparation of materials to support students' learning. All lessons were purposeful and most had clear learning intentions that were shared with students. Particularly good practice was seen when the learning objectives were revisited during or at the end of the lesson.

Most lessons included strategies that were effective in promoting the active engagement of learners. This helped students to remain motivated and ensured an appropriate balance between student and teacher input. In most lessons, a focus on literacy or numeracy was evident, usually through an explanation of key words or the use of subject-specific terminology.

ICT was integrated into most lessons and, in a majority of these, enhanced learning for students. Teachers provided support for individual students in almost all lessons and in some, differentiated questions were posed. However, there was not always sufficient challenge for students of higher ability. This needs careful consideration and the drawing up of targeted strategies.

Students' progress during lessons was checked predominantly through the use of questioning. Good practice was seen when both higher-order and lower-order questions were used and when they were distributed to a range of students. The quality of assessment of students' written work was variable. It was evident that, in the majority of cases, work was regularly monitored. However, the identification of errors and the addition of comments indicating strategies for improvement were seen in fewer than half of lessons.

Classroom management was very good in all lessons and a supportive learning environment was always in evidence. Teacher-student interactions were positive and respectful, and students' contributions in class were encouraged. Good routines were established in practical lessons.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

All main recommendations made to school management in previous evaluation reports have been implemented.

Main recommendations regarding planning have been, or are in the process of being implemented. The recommendations around presenting programmes of work in terms of learning outcomes for students and on developing strategies to challenge students in the upper range of ability are applicable to all subjects and should be included in all subject plans.

3.2 Learning and teaching

The main recommendations regarding teaching and learning in previous evaluation reports are being implemented.

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

The most striking example of the school's self-evaluation process can be seen in the preparation of the latest DEIS plan. While targets were set and strategies agreed in the last school year, a deeper understanding of school self-evaluation (SSE) attained during the current school year has prompted further review. The DEIS planning team is now reworking targets to make them more clearly defined and measurable, while at the same time gathering data to ensure the targets are underpinned with solid evidence. This is very good practice.

School management and staff have clearly demonstrated a willingness to undertake initiatives that are believed to be in the best interests of students and other members of the school community. In this regard, the school's capacity for improvement is very good. Success currently being achieved in the creation of an optimal environment for teaching and learning should allow greater energy to be focused on academic progress into the future. This, along with better developed systems of consultation and collaboration with parents and students, will see the school's capacity for improvement become even better.

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 Eoin and CDETБ wish to acknowledge receipt of the WSE-MLL report.

We recognise the very positive nature of the report and welcome the report's acknowledgement of the efforts of the principal, staff, parents and students in creating an excellent learning environment in Coláiste Eoin.

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 Board of management notes the key recommendations. Some of these have already been implemented and all recommendations will form elements of a school action plan for this academic year and in the future.