An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Killorglin Community College
County Kerry
Roll number: 70460G

Date of inspection: 7 April 2011
Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April 2011 in Killorglin Community College. 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 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

Killorglin Community College provides post-primary education to the young people of Killorglin and its rural hinterland and currently has an enrolment of 160. The school is a co-educational, multi-denominational post-primary school operating under the trusteeship of Kerry Education Service (KES). The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department of Education and Skills’ action plan for educational inclusion. A significant adult education programme is also provided.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- Killorglin Community College is an inclusive school, catering for the needs of students of all abilities.
- The school has a broad, balanced curriculum and has very strong links with the local community.
- Senior management displays excellent leadership qualities and teachers willingly embrace leadership opportunities.
- The vibrant, enthusiastic and well-motivated teachers provide up-to-date teaching methodologies in a very positive atmosphere that enhances the learning experiences of the students.
- The care structures are very good. However, the school currently has no qualified guidance personnel.
- The quality of learning and teaching was, in the main, good and very good in many lessons.
- A culture of reflective practice pertains in Killorglin Community College.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- A relationships and sexuality education (RSE) policy should be devised.
- Arrangements should be made for Guidance to be delivered by a qualified guidance counsellor.
- Work on the whole-school guidance plan should be progressed, to provide a coherent overview of guidance.
A whole-school policy on literacy and numeracy should be developed and implemented.

All subject department plans should include specific timeframes for syllabus completion and should record links between content, teaching and learning methodologies and resources to be used.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

The current board of management is properly constituted and fulfils its statutory obligations and responsibilities. To facilitate this work, members of the board have participated in training on a range of issues. The board functions very effectively, has a very good knowledge of what is happening in the school and strongly supports whole-school development planning. To support the overall strategic effectiveness of its work, the board should develop an action plan with specific time-bound short and medium-term objectives.

While the board has very good communication arrangements with KES, there is no formal communication structure with the other nominating bodies. Therefore, it is recommended that at each meeting the board agrees a report that should be disseminated to all nominating bodies.

The school has an actively engaged parents’ association which is supported in its work by its links with the parent forum operating under the auspices of KES. The parents’ association should consider using mechanisms such as the school’s website to maintain ongoing communication with the general parent body of the school.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (Published September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

The school’s priorities for development

There is a shared vision for the future of Killorglin Community College. The school has prioritised a number of areas for further development. These include the continued increase in enrolment, the further development of the school plan and extending the use of new teaching and learning strategies. The further development of the school’s playing pitches is also a priority.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The principal and deputy principal work very well together in leading the school, communicate very well with each other, illustrate a strong sense of team spirit and exhibit a clear sense of direction for the school. It is evident that the principal provides effective
instructional leadership. He has a clear understanding of what is happening in the classrooms and, in conjunction with the deputy principal, provides good opportunities for capacity development within the teaching staff.

Distribution of leadership is an important element of the work of in-school management and many teachers have undertaken leadership roles with enthusiasm and energy. Currently, the school has one assistant principal and one special duties teacher. As a result many staff members have willingly undertaken responsibility for the organisation and management of a large number of the school’s activities and programmes in a voluntary capacity.

Educational achievement of students is promoted by making instructional quality the top priority of the school. The staff’s participation in CPD assists in bringing that vision to realisation. A collaborative learning environment is encouraged by school management. The high level of involvement by management and teachers in a significant number of teaching and learning projects has contributed to the very good practice observed in the classroom.

The current senior management team has led the significant recent advances that have been made in whole-school planning, in a collaborative process that included all stakeholders. Much work has been done on identifying and prioritising policies that should be re-examined and a number of policies, including the code of behaviour, have been reviewed to correlate with best practice guidelines and to reflect the core values of the school. Building on this good work, it is recommended that any draft policies should be finalised. In line with circular letter 27/08, a relationships and sexuality education (RSE) policy should be devised. This policy should outline clearly how RSE is delivered across all year groups.

The practice of reviewing school policies is indicative of a culture of reflective practice under current management. To assist in the process of reviewing policies, it is suggested that, in addition to the current practice of including ratification dates, proposed review dates could also be included on the policies.

Subject planning has significantly advanced in the last number of years. Subject-planning folders have been developed and include programmes of work, some that are very comprehensive. As evidenced in some instances, it is recommended that all programmes of work be broadened to include specific timeframes for syllabus completion and to record links between content, teaching and learning methodologies and resources to be used.

It is recommended that a whole-school policy on literacy and numeracy be developed. This would provide a unified approach to the enhancement of literacy and numeracy in lessons across all subject areas.

An opportunity exists for a member of staff to lead the development of an increased awareness and use of Junior Certificate School programme (JCSP) strategies across the whole-school community. The effective use of JCSP strategies such as the identification of key words and progression in sentence development should be incorporated into subject plans.

**Leadership of students**

There is significant focus on the care of all students and the student care system in the school is very good. The weekly meeting of the care team facilitates effective communication among all those involved in the care of students and ensures co-ordination of all activities. The warm and friendly atmosphere and the very positive relationships between staff and students are indicative of the very high level of care that is afforded to
the students. Class tutors and year heads have a fundamental role in supporting students. Almost all parents surveyed say the school makes students feel welcome and students stated both in the questionnaires and in interviews during the evaluation, that they feel safe and well-cared for at school. The home-school-community liaison teacher has a pivotal role in support for students and parents, in the co-ordination of activities such as the mentoring programme, in visiting primary-schools, and in liaising with the community. This level of involvement is very good.

There are many very good education support structures in place. The UCC+ university access programme has an important role in raising students’ expectations and providing extra support to facilitate uptake of higher levels at Leaving Certificate. It is noteworthy that the school has introduced guitar and piano lessons for students in the past two years. This was achieved through the assistance of the School Completion Programme (SCP).

Management is conscious of the need to remain vigilant regarding student absenteeism and there is evidence that recently introduced strategies such as sending text messages to parents, the daily assembly with the class tutor and DEIS planning are beginning to have a positive affect. Implementation of other strategies to further enhance attendance is encouraged.

There are very effective procedures for admissions and management of transitions from primary to second level, which is assisted by a student induction programme. Student transition from third year to fourth year was also well supported.

Students have opportunities for leadership created through the elected student council which functions effectively and is well supported by staff.

In Killorglin Community College, there is a clear understanding of the curricular needs of the students and the focus is on academic, social, personal and physical development. A broad curriculum is offered. Subject sampling and subsequent student input are fundamental to the provision of the optional subjects. The school timetable is well balanced and makes very effective use of available resources. A broad range of subjects and programmes is available to students and a number of students follow the JCSP. A broad range of optional subjects is also offered for Leaving Certificate and students also have the option of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

Students’ use of ICT is facilitated in all subjects and to support this all students, with the exception of those in their Leaving Certificate year, have computer lessons. This is very positive. A good level of co-curricular and extracurricular activities is also provided to enhance in-class learning, as is significant adult education programme.

The current focus of the school is on raising academic standards and a clear strategy to achieve this has been devised. A database has been developed to track the ongoing academic progress of the students and the number of reports to parents on students’ academic progress has been increased. This is very good. Achievement in the certificate examinations is carefully monitored and the school strives to ensure that students are appropriately encouraged and challenged to sit the certificate examinations at the highest level to which they can aspire. This approach should increase the proportion of students taking certain subjects at higher level.

A very good start has been made in the development of a DEIS plan. Progress is very good, particularly in the area of literacy. Areas for further development in the plan include; the setting of measurable targets to increase participation at higher level in the certificate examinations and a parallel reduction at foundation level. In the area of educational progression and partnership with parents and others, the gathering of data to measure the
achievements of targets should be more specific. Management has identified increasing students’ academic expectations as one element of increasing educational attainment. This is positive.

The structures and strategies to support students with additional educational needs are a clear, and are an obvious strength of the school. There is a very strong additional educational needs department which is very well co-ordinated. Effective assessment procedures for incoming students, communication with the feeder primary schools and meetings with individual parents, ensure that appropriate supports are put in place at the earliest possible time. A range of teaching modes, including team teaching, is used to provide support to the students. The use of team teaching should be extended, as appropriate.

Communication with parents is good. Very strong links have been developed with the local community and these have further enhanced students’ experiences in the school.

2.3 Management of facilities

School management and all staff are commended for the good quality of care taken to preserve the physical environment of the school. Facilities are well managed and very well maintained. This view is endorsed by both the parent and student questionnaires. Current improvement projects include the further development of the sports field and the enhancement of the electrical infrastructure. The school’s website is a useful source of information about the school and is currently being updated. There is a good focus on environmental responsibility. The health and safety statement should be updated in line with the recently issued guidelines for post-primary schools. The school has a laptop initiative and all students will have a laptop by September 2011.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of learning and teaching observed was in the main good and in many lessons very good. On the one occasion when the quality of teaching was poor this was notably the exception.

Students were appropriately made aware of the purpose of each lesson from the outset. Occasionally, when intended learning outcomes were shared with the students at the start of the lesson, students were helped to appreciate more fully the teacher’s expectations, leading to increased awareness of their own learning. When these intended learning outcomes were revisited in a review stage at the end of the lesson, students’ learning was further reinforced. The structuring of all lessons in this way is encouraged.

Most lessons showed evidence of good or very good preparation and planning. This resulted in lessons that were predominantly well paced and coherently presented. A very good range of teaching methodologies was observed across the lessons. As a result, most lessons supported an appropriate diversity of learning styles among students. There is evidence that many teachers actively sought out new teaching approaches and strategies that were successful. Increasingly, the sharing of such innovation is leading to improved learning experiences for all students.

Questioning was used effectively in most of the lessons to ascertain students’ learning and to reinforce newly acquired knowledge and understanding. In these lessons, higher-order
questions were used effectively and provided an appropriate degree of differentiation to ensure suitable levels of challenge for students.

The atmosphere in the classrooms was supported effectively by positive, mutually respectful interactions between teachers and students and between the students themselves. This atmosphere was conducive to learning and provided a very suitable context for effective classroom management. Students were very well behaved and discipline was unobtrusively and sensitively maintained, on the rare occasion it was required.

Where students were provided with appropriate opportunities for discussion and to express themselves, this added to the effectiveness of their learning. Such opportunities should be central to the students’ experience in all lessons. The physical learning environment in almost all classrooms was print-rich, having subject-related materials displayed very effectively to further support and enhance learning. The use of key-word posters in many classrooms added to the effectiveness of literacy support. The active use of these posters to enhance current learning is recommended.

In many lessons, there was clear evidence of the teachers’ awareness of the need to develop students’ literacy and use was made of the available resources for this purpose. Additional progress in this regard should be advanced. This could be achieved by teachers sharing of best practice and devising appropriate strategies to be adopted. Such strategies could be included in expanded sections dealing with literacy development in each of the subject plans. The development of numeracy was well supported in areas such as the technologies and in mathematics lessons where numeracy can be at the core of students’ learning. In line with DEIS planning, it is recommended that teachers develop opportunities and devise strategies for the structured integration of numeracy development in all subjects and include these strategies in the respective subject plans.

Teachers generally made very good use of the teaching aids available in the classroom. ICT was used effectively in most lessons; the use was very effective in a number of instances. When most successful, the use of ICT involved the projection of digital materials, including text, live on the screen, in response to inputs or suggestions from students. The introduction of new equipment, specifically a visualiser, observed being used very successfully in one lesson, is an indication of the open and positive approach to innovation in teaching adopted by many teachers in the school. This indicates very good practice with regard to further development of the use of ICT in teaching which should be emulated in all subjects.

Regular informal assessment of progress and formative feedback to students were a constant element in almost all the lessons observed. This good assessment-for-learning (AfL) practice, together with regular setting and marking of written work, maintains an effective context within which students’ learning is supported effectively

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Many of the main recommendations and suggestions made in previous subject inspections have been implemented. These include the introduction of subject sampling, the holding of subject information nights for parents, the refurbishment of the home-economics room and the development of a new construction studies room.
A good start has been made on developing the whole-school guidance plan. While there is a good description of some of the supports available, these have not yet been fully integrated in line with a recommendation outlined in a guidance inspection report. It is recommended that this work be progressed in order to provide a coherent overview of guidance. This work could be led by the care team. Management reported that this is work in progress.

Currently, there are three aspects of guidance provision in the school. While acknowledging that supports for students are of a high quality, it is recommended that the school appoints a qualified guidance counsellor for the duration of the training being undertaken by a current member of school staff.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Good work has been done in implementing recommendations from previous evaluations in this area. For example, students in most of the lessons observed were provided with opportunities to work together in pairs and small groups. These collaborative activities were often very well prepared and appropriately structured and thus supported high-quality learning. Most students surveyed with questionnaires during the evaluation stated that they were provided with opportunities to work co-operatively in class.

5. THE SCHOOL’S SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS AND CAPACITY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

5.1

From the outset current senior management has led school self-evaluation and improvement with support from the board and staff. This is evident in the significant number of changes that have taken place during the last two years. The board, senior management and staff-led focus on striving to enhance teaching and learning are a key feature of the school’s self-evaluation process. The capacity of the school for further improvement is illustrated by its pro-activity in anticipating and responding to the evolving needs of the students.
Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

Killorglin Community College would like to thank the Inspectorate for the very professional approach taken on the occasion of the WSE/MLL visits. The Inspectorate have identified and acknowledged key aspects of the recent developments within the school. Killorglin Community College appreciates this very positive report which gives us confidence, boosts morale amongst Staff and Students and allows us to continue our growth and development into the future.

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

Taking account of the recommendations of the Inspectorate:

- The Care structures within the school have been further enhanced by the employment of a Guidance Counsellor in 2011.
- The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) sub-section of the SPHE policy has been further developed and is now a policy independent of SPHE.
- The Whole School Guidance Plan is processing well towards its final stage and will be completed in 2012.
- Work on a Whole School Policy in Literacy and Numeracy is underway. JCSP strategies are now in use in every subject area.
- Subject department plans now include identification of how new teaching methodologies and resources will be used and appropriate time frames for curriculum delivery.
- The Board of Management has begun issuing an agreed report to all nominating bodies at the end of each Board meeting. New policies approved by the Board now include a review date.