

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

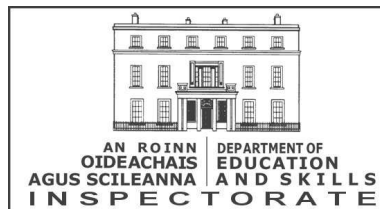
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Declan's Community College
Kilmacthomas, County Waterford
Roll number: 72230W**

Date of inspection: 19 January 2012



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in January 2012 in St Declan's Community College, Kilmacthomas. This report presents the findings 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.

Introduction

St Declan's provides co-educational post-primary education for 680 students, under the patronage of Co. Waterford Vocational Education Committee (VEC). Established in 1969, a substantial extension was added to the school in 2002 and a unit for students with autism in 2007. Students come from surrounding rural areas and the broad spectrum of student needs, abilities and interests reflects the school's inclusive enrolment policy. The curriculum incorporates the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), a compulsory Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board is well informed and committed to providing for the community.
- Planning for school development is strategic and is producing very good outcomes.
- Leadership for learning is developing well and recent whole-school innovations are impacting positively on learning.
- Senior management provides high quality leadership, managing the school through consultative communication and a partnership approach to development.
- Educational provision is inclusive.
- The school provides a broad, balanced curriculum with a range of programmes and extracurricular activities but scope exists for streamlining curricular co-ordination.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and some very good practice was observed, with good developments in team teaching.
- There is a need to examine the effect of teacher substitution on learning.
- Management of facilities is very good and there is a high level of environmental responsibility in the school.
- Very effective school self-evaluation processes are established.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The board of management's role in leading learning should be further developed.
- The establishment of a curriculum review committee should be considered.
- The duties and time allocations for programme co-ordination should be reviewed and greater streamlining and coherence in programme planning is required.
- An assessment policy should be developed, identifying summative and formative feedback processes and including mechanisms for tracking students' progress.

- To support substituting teachers, a more robust mentoring programme should be established; subject plans should also include expected learning outcomes for the students in each year.
- More efficient tracking of student attendance should be put in place to determine possible trends and patterns in non-attendance.

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 board is properly constituted and has a good awareness of its responsibilities. The board is well informed about day-to-day management issues, the school's strengths and areas for development. Board members are proud of the inclusive and broad education provided for the community. A good range of policies have been ratified by the board; for clarity, the dates of ratification and proposed review should be displayed on each. The admissions policy is open and supports equality.

The board monitors the quality of educational provision through analysis of the outcomes of certificate examinations and through school surveys administered annually to students, parents and staff. This is an example of very good practice. To measure progress, it would be useful to analyse the data from these sources over a number of years to establish trends. The board also supports continuing professional development (CPD), including the recent instructional intelligence initiative to develop teaching and learning. To further develop the board's role in leading learning, it should establish structures that would require post-holders and co-ordinators of subjects and curricular programmes to present annual reports on their work, focusing in particular on their contribution to improving student learning.

Communication between the board and the school community is achieved through agreed reports that are issued to staff and two-way verbal communication with the parents' council through the principal. The participation of the parents' council is valued and it is regularly consulted by the principal in relation to the work of the school. However, membership of the parents' council is small and it may be useful for the board to publish annual reports to parents, with particular reference to the achievement of objectives set out in the school plan, as provided in the Education Act, 1998, section 20. A student council is similarly enabled to contribute feedback to the principal on the performance of the school. A means of formalising communication between the board and the student council would prove fruitful.

Confirmation was provided that the board 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 Procedures. The school's child protection policy has been reviewed to incorporate the Procedures and been made available to school personnel with arrangements in place to inform all parents.

The school's priorities for development

A well-developed strategic planning process is in place. Priorities for development are established annually by the principal through the school planning process. The outcomes of surveys, feedback from educational partners and the VEC plan also inform the setting of priorities. Current goals and corresponding actions include the continued development of school infrastructure, information and communication technology (ICT), policies, staff skills, self-evaluation and literacy and numeracy. A review of yearly plans shows an increasing focus on promoting high quality teaching and learning.

Good progress has been made in achieving annual goals. The principal oversees the implementation of the school plan by enabling staff to develop certain areas. A post for school development planning co-ordination has recently been established and this is a positive development. Successful planning has led to the introduction of mixed-ability groupings in junior cycle, positive behaviour programmes, developments in inclusive education, the development of e-learning and the introduction of initiatives for teaching.

In partnership with staff, the principal has successfully led initiatives for change and whole-school development through a process of consultation, facilitation and CPD. Key to success has been the flexibility and willingness of teachers for change. The focus of CPD has extended to peer-led internal CPD and recently this included lesson planning and literacy. The introduction of team teaching as a means of building capacity has been a significant progressive step and is yielding benefits for the students involved and for teachers through the element of peer review.

The outcomes of whole-school developments are evidently impacting positively. An overview of yearly surveys indicates improvements in satisfaction with key areas and the physical environment and facilities have also improved. Impact is being made on learning also and it is noteworthy that there has been a considerable improvement in the uptake of higher level in subjects in the state examinations in recent years.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The principal and deputy principal form an effective team. They manage consultatively and maintain a highly visible presence enabling open communication with students and staff. The principal demonstrates clear vision and highly effective leadership, taking a partnership and progressive approach to change management.

Appropriate responsibility is devolved to middle management and the positions provide some good opportunities for leadership and management, particularly at assistant principal level. Leadership opportunities are also provided to subject co-ordinators and non-post holders. Teachers are enabled to develop capacity within their roles while also being required to demonstrate accountability. In this way, the instructional leadership element of middle-management posts is being enhanced. However, there is some scope for further development as the duties assigned to some posts are organisational in the main. Senior management meets formally with assistant principals and year heads on a regular basis providing a forum for establishing consistent approaches to discussing issues and priorities.

Time is given from the school's staffing allocation for the co-ordination of the LCA, TY and JCSP. However, a large number of staff is involved and programme co-ordination is currently fragmented. It is recommended that a review of the duties and time allocation take place. More cohesive co-ordination is necessary to better align programme and lesson planning with the guiding principles of each programme. In addition, the approach of setting targets, measuring and evaluating progress and reporting student outcomes in each programme should also be established as common practice, with particular development necessary for the JCSP.

The current school plan contains a goal to develop mentoring for new teachers. The concerns expressed by parents, students and teachers in relation to the impact of teacher substitution on student learning and progression should be explored. The development of a robust mentoring programme in addition to planned classroom visits by the principal to observe lessons taught by newly qualified teachers and those on substituting duties should be progressed. To provide clearer direction for substitute teachers, subject plans should also be developed. Subject plans should describe the expected learning outcomes for each year,

addressing the range of knowledge, skills and attitudes to be developed annually by students.

Leadership of students

Good structures are in place to ensure effective leadership of students and the creation of a caring and supportive environment. These include a well-developed year head and class tutor structure, a student mentoring system, learning support and guidance counselling. Programmes of induction are in place for relevant year groups. Guidance is provided at times of transition including information evenings. Policy and procedures for dealing with bullying are in place. The pastoral care policy supports respectful relationships.

Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is provided for first, second and TY students but it is not currently timetabled in third year. From next year, it will be reinstated as a core subject for all junior cycle classes. Arrangements are in place, however, for the provision of a module in Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in third year. A RSE policy is in place. A curricular programme for RSE in each year group should be appended to the policy.

Responses from questionnaires administered to students and parents indicate high levels of satisfaction in many areas. Most students responded that they are proud to be in the school and that there is a good atmosphere. Almost all parents responded that they are happy overall with the school. However, the questionnaire responses indicated diverse opinions about behaviour. Similar findings emerged from school surveys and management has been actively addressing this matter. In addition to programmes of positive behaviour management and the development of the student support system, the code of behaviour has been reviewed. This code should yield benefits for all in the school community.

The school reports regularly to parents on students' progress in subjects. Year heads monitor attendance and attainment. They meet with students to discuss progress and undertake follow up actions as necessary. Attendance is good for most students. However, there is a high percentage with absences of more than twenty days per year. While statistics show this cohort is reducing, analysis should take place to determine possible trends and patterns in student non-attendance. To build on existing monitoring systems and make best use of enhanced ICT facilities, electronic tracking systems should be developed for attainment and attendance. Consideration should be given to the implementation of a system of target-setting and attainment tracking through student journals.

The timetable delivers the minimum required weekly instructional time for students. It was clear from the calendar that meetings take place outside tuition time; however, there is a small shortfall in the total number of days. Management should continue to safeguard the integrity of the school year and ensure a *minimum* of 167 days tuition for all year groups.

The school provides a wide range of programmes to meet students' needs. Students spoke with certainty about the benefits of each programme for their personal development and learning. Consideration should be given to the re-establishment of a curriculum committee to review the quality of timetabling, support for subject choice and curriculum provision in programmes. Consideration could be given to the introduction of LCVP and scheduling an additional period for English in first year.

The approach to learning support is student-centred and provided through a mix of withdrawal and team teaching. Students attending the unit for autism are integrated at times into mainstream lessons to maximise contact with their peers. Some small group settings are provided in English and Mathematics. Individual educational plans (IEPs) are drawn up for students receiving support and are reviewed regularly to monitor progress and set new

targets. The special educational needs team is accessible for advice and support to mainstream and resource teachers and to those involved in team teaching.

A developing emphasis on literacy and numeracy is supported by internal CPD. Some literacy initiatives are implemented with JCSP students in first and second year and in LCA. To build on this good practice, it is recommended that testing of skills take place immediately before and after the implementation of an initiative to ascertain effectiveness.

2.3 Management of facilities

A high level of environmental responsibility pertains and the school has attained its fourth Green Flag. There is a strict anti-litter and recycling approach and students demonstrate respect for their environment. Management has implemented ongoing improvements to the infrastructure and services including the introduction of a canteen. Facilities, grounds and classrooms are very well maintained. The school is very well resourced with materials to support teaching and learning including modern ICT facilities for teacher and student use. Most classrooms are subject or teacher based and teachers have created stimulating learning environments enhanced by student project work and photographs. Management spends time carefully overseeing health and safety. Lockers are provided and accessed at break times. Students co-operate with the no mobile phone policy and this further supports anti-bullying.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Inspectors observed thirty-seven lessons in all years and programmes. The quality of teaching and learning was mostly good, with very effective practice noted in a number of lessons and scope for improvement in a few lessons. In general, possibilities exist for developing assessment methods. Inspectors noted the willingness and capacity of students for learning and productive participation, including very good engagement in co-operative learning tasks. Building on this good engagement offers the school much potential and continued focus on developing teaching and learning should yield very good outcomes.

Intended learning outcomes were explicitly shared at the outset in most lessons focusing students on what they should know and be able to do. Many teachers revisited the learning intentions to consolidate learning. This should be extended to all lessons. In almost all instances, lesson planning was very good. Teachers prepared a variety of teaching aids, ICT resources and materials to support engagement. Good preparation ensured lessons were appropriately structured and paced. In the few instances when pace was inappropriate there was insufficient time to consolidate learning.

Lessons were most effective when there was an emphasis on student activity as seen in the majority of lessons. Effective self-directed learning was promoted through the setting of purposeful tasks to be completed independently, in pairs or in small groups. Students were encouraged and challenged to apply their learning to further progress their knowledge and competency. Less effective lessons were dominated by teacher talk where students were passive for prolonged periods and there was a lack of variety in methodologies or resources. In such instances, greater use of active and experiential methodologies and the appropriate selection of resources are recommended.

Commendably, findings in relation to differentiation for mixed student ability were mostly good with high levels of differentiation noted in the majority of lessons. Many teachers successfully provided for varying abilities through differentiated instruction, levels of challenge in tasks, effective questioning and individual attention. Best practice was observed during questioning when teachers used sufficient wait time and follow-up questions and encouraged varying views on concepts.

In the majority of language lessons, there was good emphasis on promoting the target language as the medium of communication throughout, but in others there was scope to develop this. Some language lessons integrated oral, aural, reading and writing skills effectively through innovative and stimulating tasks.

While the range of assessment modes used was mostly good and it was evident that most teachers consider the assessment process when planning lessons, practices varied. Most teachers give frequent tests but in a few instances testing was infrequent. Homework was assigned in most lessons. Many teachers took time during lessons to provide verbal feedback on the quality of students' homework. Less frequently, there were good examples where teachers provided constructive written feedback on students' work. Substantial written assignments merit developmental feedback that is affirming and directional. Strategies to increase the frequency of written formative feedback on students' work should be agreed and implemented consistently. It is recommended that a school assessment policy be developed.

Teachers endeavoured to establish good rapport and created a positive and supportive learning atmosphere. Most had high expectations for student engagement, achievement and behaviour.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Following inspections in PE, Science and Biology, Irish, special educational needs and Graphics, developments have taken place in CPD and timetabling. The school now provides PE for all although the allocation should be double rather than single lessons. There has been a reduction in the numbers taking Irish at foundation level and the current school plan includes actions for the promotion of Irish language and culture. There has been commendable expansion of co-operative teaching and learning, ICT use and developments in the framing of IEPs, all of which were reported as productive.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Some good levels of follow through were observed in areas identified for improvement, including the development of subject plans and the sharing of best practice among departments. Improvements have also taken place in the use of learning outcomes, syllabus implementation and innovation in TY plans. It is noteworthy that all previous inspections made recommendations on some aspect of assessment practices. The recommended implementation of a whole-school policy on assessment and a review of assessment practices should be progressed.

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

Under the leadership provided by the principal, very effective self-evaluation processes have been established and these have been central to driving school progression. Self-evaluation surveys are administered to parents, teachers and students seeking opinions on a range of issues. The outcomes of these are discussed at staff and board meetings. Management also seeks evaluative feedback through student and parent councils and representatives of these reported that the school responds proactively to feedback.

The school has demonstrated considerable capacity for improvement, particularly in responding to the evolving needs of its student cohort and changing times. The outcomes of

self-evaluation are used to identify areas for strategic planning and consequently have impacted on the work of the school and the quality of learning. The school has also shown commitment to improvement through its response to subject inspections. It has extensive ability to implement the recommendations of this report.

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