

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

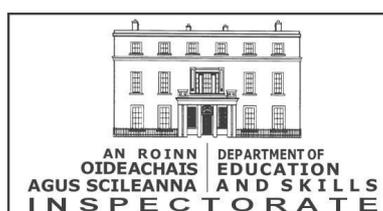
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Coláiste Chraobh Abhann
Kilcoole, County Wicklow
Roll number: 76076M**

Date of inspection: 11 May 2011



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in May 2011 in Coláiste Chraobh Abhann. 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.

Introduction

Coláiste Chraobh Abhann is a co-educational multi-denominational post-primary school under the patronage of Co. Wicklow Vocational Education Committee (VEC). The school was established in 2003 on a green-field site and has expanded rapidly to a current enrolment of 586 students. Students are offered a range of programmes including the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme (LCA). 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.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board of management presented as an effective team committed to the school and to the provision of excellence in education for the community.
- School development planning is of a very high standard; there is a comprehensive school plan in place and the board and senior management are commended for the work completed to date and for the current review of all policies and procedures.
- The school is efficiently and carefully managed and organised.
- Senior management work as a highly motivated team.
- There is good distributed leadership leading to motivation among staff and a willingness to engage in new initiatives such as mixed-ability teaching.
- There is a broad and balanced curriculum in place.
- Good or very good teaching and learning was observed in a majority of classes visited.
- Coláiste Chraobh Abhann is a reflective school and is committed to self-evaluation and improvement.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- Notwithstanding the agreed arrangements for staff meetings and other commitments within the school calendar year management should continue to exercise its ongoing responsibility to safeguard the integrity of the minimum 167 teaching days for all students.

- The use of the target language in relevant classes should be further developed.
- It is recommended that more active and varied methodologies be employed where relevant.
- Greater and more effective use should be made of the school's ICT facilities.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

The board of management is a subcommittee of County Wicklow VEC and is properly constituted with ten members, comprising of four trustee nominees, two local nominees, two parent and two teacher nominees. The principal acts as secretary to the board and the deputy principal also attends board meetings. The board has availed of opportunities for training provided by both the teachers' unions and by the VEC, and is well aware of its legislative functions and responsibilities. The board of management and school staff are strongly and effectively supported by Co. Wicklow VEC through a wide range of networks, partnerships and other initiatives.

Coláiste Chraobh Abhann is a relatively new school and has had an accelerated whole school planning process, including the devising of a range of procedures and policies, since its establishment. School development planning is of a very high standard and this is highly commended. The board and senior management have produced a very comprehensive school plan and are currently engaged in a systematic review of all policies and procedures in the school. This pro-active and effective approach to review and revision of elements of the school plan is commended. There is an excellent range of ratified school policies in place and a small number of policies in draft form ready for ratification by the board. The principal provides an excellent comprehensive annual report for the board.

The school community has identified eleven areas for development and has established working committees to deal with each of these areas, which include the following: methods of grouping students; the code of behaviour; student support guidelines and a relationships and sexuality education policy; special education needs, the development of a TY core team, a LCVP core team and an LCA core team; teacher induction; ICT; a sports policy; and the development of a special need assistants' (SNA) group. There is broad recognition among staff and management that the work of these committees now needs to be progressed and this is recommended as soon as feasibly possible.

There is a vibrant and committed parents' association in place. An interview with the parents' association and the questionnaires administered to some of the general parent body during the evaluation, showed parents to be enthusiastic about and appreciative of the education their children were receiving in Coláiste Chraobh Abhann.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

Senior management, comprising the principal and deputy principal, were seen to work as an extremely diligent and effective team. The school is carefully and efficiently managed and organised by senior management. The principal leads the school community in a reflective and motivational way. There is significant distributed leadership in the school through the post system and through the creation of other key roles which empower individuals and groups. Staff presented as a dynamic and motivated group of teachers who were strongly committed to taking leadership and developmental roles.

The schedule of posts is reviewed regularly and was seen during the evaluation to be meeting the current needs of the school. Senior management holds regular meetings with year heads and with other key groups of staff. There are effective formal and informal channels of communication in place and senior management endeavours to ensure that staff members are consulted in the decision making process and are informed of events. Staff members were seen to be co-operative and open to new initiatives.

Senior management is strongly committed to raising academic standards in the school. This subject has been the focus of recent staff training and a central focal point at staff meetings. Assessment for learning (AfL) strategies have been adopted in the school to support student learning and were seen to be implemented during the evaluation. Management is ambitious for the students' academic progress as well as being committed to the principles of providing a holistic education for every student. The principal holds annual reflection and planning meetings with each individual teacher. These meetings cover a range of issues ranging from reviewing examination results to how the teachers are progressing in their work.

Collaborative subject planning has progressed well in the school and many well-presented comprehensive subject plans were observed during the evaluation. A small number of subject plans would benefit from further development. Continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities are provided for teachers at staff training days and through the many supports provided by Co. Wicklow VEC.

Leadership of students

A broad and balanced curriculum is offered in Coláiste Chraobh Abhann. Management and staff are commended for the decision to move to mixed-ability teaching in recent years, as part of the focus on raising academic standards, and for their engagement in this process. There is an effective transition programme from primary school to post primary in place between Coláiste Chraobh Abhann and the local feeder schools. Students reported, in answers to questionnaires, to being happy in the school and to feeling well supported. Senior management devotes considerable time and effort to ensuring that both members are highly visible in the school entrance and exit at key times during the day. They were seen during the evaluation to engage actively with individual students throughout the school day. A friendly, calm and orderly atmosphere permeates all areas of the school. Students attested to the visibility and accessibility of senior management and other key members of staff during an interview with a randomly selected group.

A diverse range of pastoral care and educational supports is in place for students. These include an effective and supportive tutor and year-head systems. Parents receive four reports on their children's progress per year. Each student is met formally or informally by the class tutor after receipt of each report. A new academic mentoring programme has been implemented for sixth year students and teachers are commended for their willingness to engage in this programme. Formalising the tracking process for monitoring student progress is recommended as is a move to target setting where students would identify clear attainable targets for achievement at key times.

There is also an effective prefect system in place and a vibrant student council. A comprehensive parent and student handbook is available. There is satisfactory guidance and counselling provision for students. Students interviewed during the evaluation spoke very positively of the information and direction provided for them in relation to careers, third-level options and other opportunities for further study.

The delivery of the curriculum and timetabling in general are good in the school. However, some areas of timetabling are in need of attention and review, these include study periods for some students in senior cycle and the provision of Physical Education for all senior

cycle students. It was noted during the evaluation that while the school provides the minimum 167 days on the school calendar, there is some erosion of teaching time during the school year. Notwithstanding the agreed arrangements for staff meetings and other commitments within the school calendar year management should continue to exercise its responsibility to safeguard the integrity of the minimum 167 teaching days for all students.

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.

2.3 Management of facilities

Coláiste Chraobh Abhann has excellent modern educational facilities including a range of sports facilities. The school building is bright and welcoming and is very well maintained. Examples of student art and project work can be seen in different areas of the school. Both staff and pupils were appreciative of the excellent facilities and of a quality environment in which to work and learn. There is a notable absence of litter and graffiti.

The school was built for approximately 560 students. Student enrolment has just exceeded this number in the last couple of years. School management mentioned the fact that there is capacity, and a willingness, to further extend the school on the current site if that should be needed.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Good or very good teaching was observed in the majority of lessons. Effective lessons had good pace, structure and clearly fitted into a sequence or plan, covered an appropriate amount of material and the topic was contextualised for students. In the main lessons were well structured. In a few instances, lessons lacked appropriate structure and sometimes it was not always clear to the student what the learning intention of the lesson was. The practice of sharing learning outcomes or the lesson objective with students was noted in some lessons and this technique merits broader application.

A wide range of student aptitude and attitude was evident during the evaluation. The level of challenge presented for the range of students was, in general, appropriate. In the majority of lessons, teachers varied the teaching and learning methodologies to support a wide range of learning styles. In many lessons, teachers adopted a student-centred approach to cater for the needs of individual students by incorporating well-chosen tasks that provided opportunities for active and experiential learning methods, including many opportunities for co-operative learning. There were many examples where students demonstrated a good work ethic and responsibility for their own learning. Teachers fostered the achievement of potential and gave affirming guidance to students. At times, however, during a minority of lessons, there was an over-emphasis on teacher-directed activity, which resulted in students being passive in their learning.

In most lessons, good emphasis was placed on getting students to speak, either through presentations, answering questions or giving feedback on tasks. Further development of this approach across the school is recommended. In-class tasks and homework gave positive support to developing students writing skills. Written tasks were differentiated for the ability of the student or class group and there was generally good evidence of productive monitoring and correction by teachers. In terms of whole-school development, collaborative discussions on student literacy and written work would be useful including determining standards for presentation of work, re-drafting work and procedures for correction.

Good attention was given to promoting subject-specific terminology and the quality of teacher explanation of key terms was high. In most instances, good efforts were made to ensure students were presented with visual as well as written clarifications, often by placing key words on the board. In a number of language lessons, however, there was an over reliance on the use of translation to ensure student comprehension. There was also scope for development with regard to students' use of the target language with fewer than desirable opportunities for them to practice or apply their language skills. It is recommended that the target language be used as the language of management, teaching and communication and that students be required to produce complete sentences for ordinary classroom interactions and tasks.

In some lessons, teachers made very good use of the excellent ICT facilities in integrating resources from different media, such as well-chosen animations, news and internet clips and the presentation of very good visual reinforcement and notes. Use by students and teachers of the school's e-learning facilities is increasing and in some instances, students email their homework to teachers. Overall, however, ICT facilities were underutilised. Developing the skills and strategies to effectively use ICT should be considered through whole-school CPD.

Lessons were characterised by a positive learning atmosphere. Classroom management was effective and students, on the whole, engaged well with their teachers and with the learning process.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Previous subject and programme inspections included History, English, Science, French, Irish and the TY programme. Timetabling issues in History and French have been addressed. More widespread provision for ICT and its further implementation as a valuable tool in teaching and learning has also been addressed to a large extent but a more focused use of ICT could further developed in some instances. The development of more functional subject department plans and schemes of work has been addressed in recent years and this is commended. The inclusion of a TY admissions policy in the school's enrolment policy has been addressed. Teachers of English have been facilitated to attend in-service. The development of the school library is a work in progress. However, the area of debating and encouraging students to read more widely is being addressed and this is commended.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

The development and implementation of active learning in the classroom through a range of methodologies was seen to addressed and progressed in the areas of English, Science and

French and TY classes, with some scope for further development in a small number of lessons. The promotion of Irish as a living language in the classroom and in co-curricular activities is being addressed through active use of the target language and a range of laudable initiatives and is reported to be having a positive effect on student engagement with the language. The use of the target language in French is being addressed with considerable scope for further development. The school has adopted AfL strategies in relation to the assignment and correction of homework and these were seen to be implemented in some cases during the evaluation. However, this area merits some further work in order to ensure that homework is effective in supporting student learning.

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

Coláiste Chraobh Abhann is a reflective school with both management and staff committed to the pursuit of excellence and the raising of academic standards. The school is responding well to the demands of the current student cohort and senior management is well placed to evaluate educational provision and to anticipate changing demands and trends. The implementation of mixed-ability classes in recent years is testimony to the school responding to the students' best interests.

The school community have engaged very well in the subject inspection process and a laudable focus on improvement, based on recommendations arising out of that process, was observed during the evaluation. All recommendations have been examined with a view to implementation. Recommendations were presented during the evaluation as having been progressed or as a work in progress with a small minority yet to be implemented for valid reasons.

There is a notable emphasis on partnership in the school community, encompassing all the educational partners: school management, Co. Wicklow VEC, senior management, teachers, parents and students. All partners have been canvassed for their ideas and recommendations with a view to school improvement through discussion, comment cards for parents, questionnaires for a random sample of students and parents and through continuous evaluation of all school activities. Senior management is commended for its commitment and integrity in creating a school community that is focussed on self evaluation and school improvement.

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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 at Coláiste Chraobh Abhann is very satisfied with the report on the Quality of Management, Leadership and Learning at the school issued by the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate as a result of a WSE-MLL (Whole School Inspection - Management, Leadership and Learning) held at the school from Monday 9th to Wednesday 11th May 2011.

The Board acknowledges the commendations and very positive comments made by the Inspection Team in its report. The Board and staff members feel encouraged and valued by the very definite strengths which were identified and either commended or highly commended in the report.

The school would like to thank the visiting Inspection Team for their professionalism shown during the inspection period. Board members and teachers found the process and subsequent report an acknowledgement of their enthusiasm, commitment and dedication to the delivery of a high quality education provision at Coláiste Chraobh Abhann.

Staff members are very affirmed by being described as ‘a dynamic and motivated group of teachers who are strongly committed to taking leadership and developmental roles’, being ‘seen to be co-operative and open to new initiatives’ and providing a ‘diverse range of pastoral and educational supports’ for students. The Board and Senior Management note the high praise for its effective teamwork, leadership and management as well as its commitment to self-evaluation and reflection.

The Board is particularly satisfied with the comments from the Inspection Team on the ‘notable emphasis on partnership in the school community’. The analysis of the student and parent questionnaires ‘showed parents to be enthusiastic about and appreciative of the education their children were receiving’ in the school while ‘students interviewed during the evaluation process spoke very positively of the information and direction provided for them in relation to careers, third level options and other opportunities for further study’.

The ‘accelerated whole school planning process’ as identified by the Inspection Team has resulted in the school achieving such a standard of excellence in its short existence. This successful planning process will continue to be central to all future self evaluation, reflection and school improvement.

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

All relevant partners have had an opportunity to review and discuss this inspection report. A full and comprehensive review of the recommendations has taken place and an Action Plan will be developed to ensure the recommendations are addressed under the School Development Planning process.

Some of the recommendations in the report have already been addressed while the others will form part of the Action Plan. All partners in the school community will be involved in the development and implementation of this Action Plan.