

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**The Royal and Prior Comprehensive School  
Raphoe, County Donegal  
Roll number: 81011L**

**Date of inspection: 3 April 2014**



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF  
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION  
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS  
INSPECTORATE**

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

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April, 2014 in The Royal and Prior Comprehensive School. 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***

The Royal and Prior Comprehensive School is a co-educational day and boarding school under the patronage of the Donegal Protestant Board of Education. Enrolment has increased over recent years to the current level of 544 students. Though formally established as a comprehensive school in 1971, the school can trace its development back to the establishment of the Royal Schools in 1608. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools (DEIS) action plan for educational inclusion. As well as the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year, and Leaving Certificate programmes, the school provides the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

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

### ***Key Findings***

- Very good management and leadership is underpinned by a strong commitment to the school community.
- Leadership for learning is strongly focused on support for students and improving the quality of provision.
- Distributed leadership is evident in the creation of core teams to lead key aspects of the school such as DEIS planning and student support.
- The school has a very broad curriculum but first year provision requires review.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was good or very good in almost all lessons but there is scope for greater involvement of students in the learning process.
- The school has a very good capacity for managing and leading school improvement.

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

- The school should review the schedule of posts of responsibility in order to ensure that the relevant responsibilities match more clearly the priorities and needs of the school.
- The first-year curriculum and the arrangements for subject choice for Junior Certificate should be reviewed.
- More opportunities for students to demonstrate and reinforce their learning and understanding should be incorporated into lessons.
- An agreed approach to the assignment, recording and correction of homework should be documented and implemented.

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

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

The board of management is very engaged with and committed to the continuing development of the school. The members of the board have a strong sense of ownership and responsibility for the continued success of the school. Through their combined efforts they provide very effective leadership to the school community.

The board has been actively engaged in the development and ratification of a wide range of mandatory policies. They are well informed about school matters and have good systems for informing the wider community of their work. The board has very strong links with the parents' association and the patron body.

Through a process of self-evaluation the board has identified clear priorities for school development such as maintaining increased enrolment and promoting staff development. Actions implemented in recent years, in collaboration with senior management, include the development of the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) department, and the re-organisation of special educational needs provision, and the enhancement of the school's information and communication technology (ICT) facilities. The priority of continuing to promote a defined and active Christian ethos is reflected in the appointment of a school chaplain. Planning is underway for other prioritised areas such as the further development of the school infrastructure and a post-holder review. The overall aim of the school's development planning is to maximise the potential of students, staff, and the school's role within the community.

The senior management team, consisting of the principal and deputy principal, provides very effective leadership and management to support both the day-to-day operation of the school and its ongoing development. They have a clear vision of the role of the school within the wider community and are highly committed to continuous improvement in the educational provision for students. They are very supportive of staff development and have implemented very good communication structures within the school. Regular bulletins keep staff informed of current events and the accessibility of the senior management team was noted by staff and parents.

Leadership roles are formally distributed at middle management level through a defined schedule of posts of responsibility. Additional management and leadership opportunities, such as DEIS and JCSP co-ordination, are supported by the board of management. The process of filling two new assistant principal posts will provide a good opportunity to review the schedule of posts and ensure that the relevant responsibilities match more clearly the priorities and needs of the school.

Over and above the formal roles associated with middle management, staff make a significant contribution to students' experience of school in many other ways. For example, many staff are engaged in providing co-curricular activities for students and some provide extra tuition after school. Ancillary staff play a significant role in the day-to-day operation of the school. Students spoke very highly of the support they received from all staff.

Students have very good opportunities to contribute to school life through the students' council, prefect and mentoring system. A survey of students shows that the great majority get on well with other students, and feel safe and cared for. However, over half disagreed with a statement that they had a say in how things are done in the school. In order to raise awareness of their role, it is suggested that the student council be encouraged to increase its profile in the school.

The parents' association plays an active and important role in school life. Parents are kept very well informed and work closely with the board and senior management. Their views are sought on many issues relating to the school, including policy development. A key priority for the

association is the development of a community of parents. They encourage parental involvement through various events, some of which involve fundraising. The school's texting system and website are used to communicate with all parents.

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

The school provides a very wide range of subjects and curricular programmes. The JCSP and LCVP programmes are very well organised. Parents and students spoke very highly of the TY programme and the positive outcomes it achieves.

The senior management team has taken an active role in supporting the development of teaching and learning in the school and has used a range of skills to motivate, manage and support staff. Teachers' professional development is encouraged and a particularly innovative approach in this regard is the link that has been developed with a neighbouring school. The students' experience has been enhanced over recent years by the upgrading of ICT facilities, the reorganisation of the SPHE, RSE and learning support provision, and the significant emphasis the school has placed on promoting mental health.

The creation of core teams to lead on significant areas of school life such as DEIS planning and student support has led to a sharing of responsibility and has empowered staff to make a meaningful contribution to the improvement agenda. Though these teams take a leading role, it was strongly felt that responsibility is shared by all staff. This vision has placed DEIS planning and support for students at the centre of school improvement.

Clear well-structured systems, with significant roles for form teachers and year heads are in place to promote positive behaviour. These systems are guided by the principles of restorative justice which reward achievement and gives students a chance to 'start again' after a period of good behaviour. The great majority of students surveyed indicated a high level of understanding of the school rules: a lesser number said that they felt students were treated fairly and respectfully. It would be worthwhile asking the student council to conduct further research into why students felt this way.

Regular staff and subject department meetings allow for dissemination of information and discussion of issues. Subject planning is well established and subject plans provide a good record of practices and policies. For example, all departments implement common schemes of work and conduct common assessments. Some reference to DEIS planning was seen in subject plans but this is an aspect of planning that should be enhanced. All plans contained detailed analysis of examination outcomes. However, there is scope for a greater level of reflection on the strengths and challenges this analysis highlights in order to agree relevant actions needed to sustain improvement over time.

The school's provision for students with special educational needs is very well organised. Detailed plans are created both for individual students and for groups of students working together. Good practice is evident in the specific steps being taken to enhance the level of expertise among a smaller learning support team. Consideration has been given to a more formal system for tracking student progress and it is recommended that such a system be introduced as soon as possible.

An excellent support structure for students involving many staff is provided through initiatives such as the school completion programme and DEIS. Students identified as being at risk of early school leaving are targeted for extra support and this support extends to parents through the work of the HSCL coordinator. As part of its ongoing evaluation of student outcomes the school should continue to explore all options to maximise outcomes for targeted students.

The school's timetable has been adjusted in order to provide the appropriate instructional time. However, the time allocated for some junior cycle subjects over the three years of the

programme does not reflect syllabus guidelines. Some subjects have very reduced allocation in first year as a result of the timetabling of seventeen subjects per week and twenty one subjects over the year. Before entering second year, students choose three optional subjects from set option bands. This allows early specialisation in some curricular areas. For example, they can opt out of the study of a modern language or they can choose all three technology subjects. While the benefit of exposure to a range of subjects is acknowledged, it is recommended that the school review its first-year curriculum with a view to identifying clearly the purpose of the current arrangements and assessing whether or not it is achieving that purpose. In addition, the school should review the arrangements for subject choice so that students are required to take a more balanced range of subjects in junior cycle, mindful, too, of requirements for progression to third level.

The school has very good systems to support new students including a “Transfer Day” when they get a chance to become familiar with the school and are mentored by senior students. Visits to feeder primary schools ensure that relevant information is gathered before students commence first year. Such visits have also served to raise the profile of the school and have contributed to increased enrolment.

The school has well-organised guidance systems in place to support students and parents in making subject and programme choices. Timetabled and non-timetabled careers support is available to all students with a particular focus on supporting the transition from junior cycle to senior cycle and on support for Leaving Certificate students. The organisation of a careers convention in co-operation with a neighbouring school has been a very innovative and successful venture. Mock interviews are held with the support of parents and local businesses. Most parents and students expressed satisfaction with the support received but surveys showed that some parents and students would like more support in this regard.

Attendance and retention are monitored in an organised and systematic way. The introduction of electronic systems have enhanced the timeliness and accuracy of attendance monitoring and improvements have been noted. Retention rates are high and are tracked against current targets as part of DEIS planning.

The school has provided good resources to support teaching and learning. Very good ICT facilities are available and a virtual learning environment is currently being established. Electronic folders are used to support subject planning and the sharing of resources. The school’s website and texting are used to disseminate relevant information

The school has taken a very proactive approach to implementing measures to counteract bullying behaviour and to promote positive mental health through the organisation of a series of relevant initiatives for staff, parents and students. All students receive instruction in RSE.

A wide range of co-curricular sporting and cultural activities complements the formal curriculum. The school has a long and distinguished tradition in badminton and hockey. Students’ achievements are affirmed and highlighted as part of the daily life of the school.

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 school has a good range of general and specialist rooms. All classrooms are well equipped with ICT. Good facilities for sport include a gymnasium and an all-weather hockey pitch. Student welfare is supported through the provision of canteen facilities. All of the facilities are

well maintained and considerable effort has been made to make the best use of the available space. An up-to-date health and safety policy is in place.

The board has identified improvements in the school building as an urgent priority and has submitted an application for capital works to the Department.

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

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

The overall quality of teaching and learning in almost all lessons observed was good or very good. Lessons were very well prepared and good advance planning was evident in the variety and sequencing of learning activities during lessons.

Classroom management was very good and lessons were conducted in a positive and supportive atmosphere. Students were attentive and co-operated well with their teachers. Classrooms provided attractive learning environments with many displays of students' work and subject-specific information.

All lessons had a clear aim or focus. In many lessons, learning outcomes were discussed at the start of the lessons and were used to engage students with the learning process. Best practice was seen where students' progress towards achieving the outcomes was explicitly assessed during the lesson. This practice should be extended to all lessons.

Teachers used a range of resources including the whiteboard, worksheets and ICT to support teaching and to communicate lesson content. ICT was mainly used as a means of presenting information. In some lessons, it was also used to enhance student engagement and to support learning through the use of videos, simulations and other subject-specific electronic resources. Teachers should consider sharing good practice regarding the use of ICT in teaching.

There was good support for the development of literacy and numeracy skills. Key words were identified at the start of most lessons and in some cases, students' understanding of key words was explored and extended through the classroom activities. Teachers should ensure that students understand and are able to use new vocabulary in all lessons.

Good use of the target language was observed in language lessons. In some lessons, students were confident in their use of the language and clearly understood the teachers' instructions. Very good practice was seen where resources designed to support students' use of the target language were displayed on each desk. Teachers should continue to extend students' opportunities to use the language that is being taught.

A good variety of teaching methodologies was evident across all the lessons observed: group and pair work were used to support participation by all students; practical activities provided students with hands-on experience; brainstorming was used to elicit prior knowledge; and a problem solving approach was used to facilitate independent learning. The most widely used methodologies were teacher-led instruction and the development of content through question and answer sessions. Where active methodologies were used there was more student engagement with the topic and learning was more evident.

Questioning was the main method of assessing students' progress. Best practice was evident when students were required to demonstrate their understanding. However, in many cases, only very brief, simple answers were required and there was scope for a greater use of higher-order questions to challenge students. It is recommended that teachers incorporate more opportunities for students to demonstrate and reinforce their learning through greater use of more challenging questions and extension activities, and by encouraging more student input during lessons.

Some very good examples of self-assessment practices were observed where students were asked to plan and evaluate their own progress using pre-defined criteria. This practice could be extended to encourage students to develop their own success criteria and, particularly at senior cycle, to encourage students to track their own progress through a topic or a project.

Techniques for differentiation included targeted questioning and support for individual students. In some lessons, there was scope to give more consideration to the range of learning styles and abilities in the class group to ensure that the content would be accessible to all students.

In most lessons, homework was checked and also assigned. However, homework journals and copybooks examined during the inspection did not reflect a consistent approach to the recording of homework. The homework policy is due for review and it is recommended that as part of this review an agreed approach to the assignment, recording and correction of homework should be implemented.

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

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

Very good progress has been made in implementing recommendations within the remit of management. For example, health and safety resources in the science laboratories have been enhanced and learning support structures have been reorganised.

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

Following inspections, subject departments have met to discuss the recommendations and decide on actions to be implemented. Good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations. For example, in Mathematics, students' understanding is being supported by a focus on keywords relevant to the subject. However, it would be useful to incorporate ongoing evaluation of the effect of the agreed actions as part of subject planning. For example, a subject department could review the outcomes of a particular action at the end of the school year and report their findings to management.

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

Management has taken clear actions to improve the quality of provision in areas such as ICT and learning support over recent years. Very good systems have been established, including the setting up of core teams, to ensure that responsibility for leading change is distributed among staff. The school has valued open communication and consultation, for example with parents, as part of school development planning. Senior management brings a research based and reflective approach to dealing with issues and the board is proactively involved in the life of the school. There is a great commitment to, and from, the school community to the continued success of the school. In light of the above, it is evident that the school has a very good capacity for managing and leading school improvement.

## **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 The Royal and Prior Comprehensive School are delighted with the affirmative and encouraging report issued by the inspectorate. This report endorses the solid work of the students, staff, board and parents of The Royal and Prior and provides a clear focus for the School's development planning over the year ahead.

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