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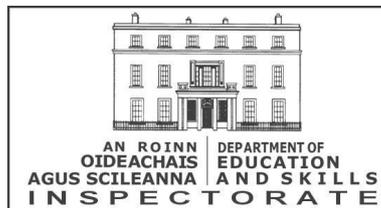
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Moyne Community School
County Longford
Roll number: 91436D

Date of inspection: 8 December 2011

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INSPECTORATE

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in December 2011 in Moyne Community 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, 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response

Introduction

Moyne Community School operates under the joint trusteeship of Ardagh and Clonmacnois diocese and County Longford Vocational Education Committee (VEC). It serves a wide area which spans three counties, Longford, Cavan and Leitrim. The school was established in 1973, following the amalgamation of a vocational school and a voluntary secondary school. Enrolment is currently 601 students. The curriculum affords access to cultural, academic, scientific and technological subjects. A range of programmes facilitates students of differing interests and aptitudes. The school supports students with special educational needs.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- Well-informed and proactive approaches characterise senior management's diligent and committed engagement.

- Good management of the student community is strongly evident.

- The board of management ably supports senior management.

- Teaching and ancillary staff are dedicated and professional.

- Very good teaching and learning was seen during the evaluation.

- Senior management has very successfully focussed on key issues, including strategies to improve attendance and punctuality, as part of a documented action plan.

- Recent maintenance works have ensured that school's facilities are in optimal usage.

- Recently upgraded, the school's information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure is impacting positively on the delivery of courses and programmes.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should formalise feedback to parents, diocese, and VEC, and develop its research and advisory role further.

- The re-establishment of an effective parents' association and a students' council should be a priority for the board.

- Good teaching, planning and assessment practice should continue to be formalised further across the subject departments, with the implementation of subject inspection recommendations an ongoing focus.
- Improvement of student outcomes should continue to be prioritised, to include literacy and numeracy.
- Reorganisation of the school development planning process is recommended.

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 of management is appropriately constituted, all members have received training, and several have served on successive boards. Board members are dedicated to the school, and cohesive in their interest and commitment to its welfare and success. The board collaborates supportively with senior management, with whom communication is good. Board members are kept well advised by the principal.

Good records of board meetings are kept. It is recommended that the board develops more complete and extensive communication of its activities with the generality of parents, and with the joint patrons. Establishing a formalised parents' association should be a priority for the current board.

The school has a documented action plan, which is being implemented incrementally. The board has been kept aware of how this has been progressing. It is recommended that the board monitors, reviews and records progress more formally including the preparation of a brief progress report of what was achieved in implementing the action plan during every school year.

The board is interested, as a priority, in re-establishing an adult-education role for the school.

Senior management intends to reformulate current priorities into a fully documented three-year action plan. The board should continue to keep itself informed about this and to act in an advisory capacity.

In educational policy-making activities, the board is currently an under-used resource. It is recommended that the board supports both policy making and senior management, through research and information gathering from a variety of networks and sources.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools* (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006. School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* as a matter of priority.

The school's priorities for development

The school's priorities for future development have been outlined as an action plan to address current issues. Many priorities have been realised, others are being worked on, and others are as yet aspirational. Senior management defines the school's priorities and goals.

Current senior management has been in place for three years. Informed by its proactive self-evaluation stance, and by the complementary strengths of principal and deputy principal evident in their personal approaches to their roles, they have defined and executed a range of key priorities. Central to these priorities are the improvement of the management of students, more effective teaching and learning, and long-term and short-term actions to improve student attainment and outcomes. Student punctuality and attendance have, since September 2011, been prioritised through new strategies and systems, presenting new expectations and challenges for students and parents alike.

Posts of responsibility are now due for review, re-delineation and reassignment. It is a priority for senior management that the school's current developmental needs are accommodated in the changes that will occur as a result of the reassignments of post-holder duties.

Building works and ICT infrastructural development have been prioritised and considerable progress has been achieved. E-portal is being developed.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

Senior management have brought a high level of professionalism and effectiveness into the management of staff and students. Their management style is open and consultative, directive, clear and well communicated. Clear-cut leadership decisions have been made. Senior management have complementary strengths in leadership and management, effective both for day-to-day and long-term running of the school. Together, principal and deputy principal have enhanced the already strong work ethic of staff, with an approach strong on respect and clarity of expectations, and featuring a network of supports for staff and students. Continuous professional development has been facilitated and is ongoing. Parental satisfaction is high, reflecting the effectiveness of teaching, learning, and holistic support. A sense of community and common purpose is palpable; staff have responded well to changes. Consultation is good: staff interests and views are taken into consideration in the development and assignment of responsibilities and duties to post holders. Staff are given, or assume, leadership responsibilities and roles, often independent of holding a post.

Senior management demonstrates a positive and effective approach to the management of teaching and learning in the school. Directive and goal-focussed management for learning, school improvement and future strategy making is strongly evident. High-quality management endeavour includes: repair and maintenance of building infrastructure; a move to mixed-ability class-group formation; and improvement of management of students so that order and clarity provide a basis where teaching and learning can become more and more effective. Strategies have recently been put into operation to tackle significant long-endemic student absenteeism and punctuality issues. A review of these has indicated improvement, a clear reflection of the will of senior management to challenge shortcomings in a direct, practical way.

The middle-management team contributes to the management of students and the operation of the school. Post holders feel empowered and appreciated in their roles. Posts are currently due for review and re-delineation; it is recommended that the school's current needs are accommodated as optimally as possible through the process. A focus on the reality of school needs is necessary to re-invigorate and appropriately utilise the post resources available, reflecting stated priorities.

A more formalised and extended approach to whole-school planning in key areas should be adopted and roles, with responsibilities, shared across the school community.

Subject department planning is embedded in school culture. It should be further developed with an emphasis not only on literacy and numeracy, but also on clarifying goals and

procedures to improve outcomes for students of all aptitudes. Planning for teaching methodologies and for learning empowerment should be a theme across all subject department planning.

Increasing candidature at higher level, and better grade attainment in state examinations, needs whole-school planning. Current attainment might be expected to be stronger, given the school's broad catchment, good teaching, and the pro-social attitudes of students.

Subject departments have begun to analyse their certificate examination results. It is important that teaching and learning processes, across subjects, reflect and actively utilise insights gained from these analyses. Targets should be set, in brief action-plan format, for all departments, to bring about improvements and refinements in teaching, and higher engagement, attainment and aspiration in learning. Progress achieved as a result of such action plans should be evaluated on an annual basis by subject departments and senior management. The board should keep up to date with developments.

Subject planning documents need further development, by inclusion of the expected learning outcomes. Indications of appropriate resources and methodologies would enhance the planning process and, ultimately, classroom practices. Planning for assessment was often the least articulated or considered part of planning. Learning outcomes should be the basis of assessment criteria to ensure a close fit between teaching, learning and outcomes. Overuse of marking schemes and some under use or inconsistency in use of *Assessment for Learning* (AfL) techniques needs to be addressed.

The school offers a broad curriculum, with scientific, linguistic, cultural and technological subjects. These are organised with different emphases in the programmes offered, LCA, LCVP, and TY.

Time allocated to subjects is appropriate. Timetabling has been a vehicle for leadership and management of learning; students now benefit from twenty-eight hours contact time. As a result of this, mathematics has been over-generously provided for. This should be reviewed. Double class periods are generally seen as less efficient for languages, but these are stitched into options with subjects for which some doubles are essential.

Physical education (PE) provision in senior cycle is problematic. Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) students don't have timetabled PE. In the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), students opt for study or PE; thus, neither programme therefore conforms to requirements. In light of psychological and physical health issues, these issues should be addressed.

TY is largely streamed for core subjects. This undermines the facility for equitable access, as befits the potential exploratory nature of the TY programme. TY ideally should not conform to higher and ordinary categorisations, which are examination, not learning, structures.

The TY programme is in general very good, providing strong educational experiences. In bridging senior and junior cycles, the TY programme should facilitate the experience of all subject categories provided at senior cycle by the school. The absence of modern language provision for TY students needs urgently to be reassessed.

It is recommended that the status and profile of the LCA programme is raised to position it as an attractive senior cycle option. More integration should be a priority so that LCA participants have less to distinguish them from their Leaving Certificate (Established) peers, creating a better image, and self image, for those who opt for the programme. Specifically focussed planning to develop current provision further should be undertaken for the LCA and LCVP programmes.

Leadership of students

Leadership of students has been very good. Recent initiatives underline the importance, for senior management, of undertaking real change and improvement in this aspect of school life. Student outcomes have been focussed on by management to a new degree, and within subject departments. The current focus on attendance has already begun to have impact. Use of e-portal is likely to strengthen current management of students further in this regard. Mixed-ability teaching is now the norm.

There is good leadership in the holistic area as well as in the academic. An extensive network of pastoral-care structures operates to support students. Meaningful links exist with students' homes. There are cohesive links between school, home, NEPS, support stuctures for students with special educational needs, and guidance support. School clerical staff provide an important and efficient link between school and home.

The code of behaviour is effective. Student representatives considered the code to be fair. A reward system affirms improving behaviour and engagement. A system of text messaging to parents keeps attendance, behaviour and welfare issues updated. Supervision is good and principal and deputy principal have a high profile in this direct management of students.

There is an admirable sensitivity to student needs. Student representatives affirmed the school's caring, nurturing and supportive role, and praised teachers for this. Varied extracurricular opportunities exist. Staff are generous in providing support, time, expertise and genuine personal interest to the sector. Due to the shortage of resources, there is currently an interruption in the running of a student council. Despite an active Young Social Innovators programme, the student voice is not as strong as it could be. Students, nonetheless, have some leadership roles as mentors and in the Green Schools programme.

Management and leadership in relation to students with special educational needs is well organised. Team teaching is a dominant model of support, allied to small class groups, withdrawal, and one-to-one attention. Good practice is evident in regular testing and re-testing of students, productive and caring-focussed links with feeder primary schools prior to enrolment of first year students, and integration with mainstream classes. The core special-education team maintains productive links and communication with the teaching staff. Guidance provides direction and leadership for students in the vocational and further-education domains. Good supports are in place for students in transition phases of their school life. Effective links are in place between the special-education team, the pastoral care providers and with the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS).

2.3 Management of facilities

Maintenance and enhancement of existing buildings has been achieved through use of summer works schemes. Some further improvement is planned for rewiring and alarms. The gymnasium in particular has had maintenance and upgrading and this has ensured that it is fit for its primary purpose, as well as an examination facility. The school grounds have recently been enhanced.

The ICT infrastructure has been extended and developed. General maintenance and hygiene is to a very good standard. The school environment is litter free.

Specialised classrooms were well utilised and maintained. The school's health and safety statement was recently reviewed externally. Formalised procedures for annual review and regular risk assessment, particularly in those classrooms where specialist tools and equipment are used by students, should be put in place.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

In almost all of the lessons seen, the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good. In the remainder, it was fair to poor.

Very good lessons were characterised by effective planning, integration of stimulating and appropriate resource materials, and a focus on learning outcomes, active-learning methodologies and integrated assessment. In such lessons, students were engaged and often active, and the differing needs and aptitudes of the class catered for. It is commendable that the teachers knew their students' strengths, potential and attainment well.

Where teaching was weak or poor, it tended to be overly textbook driven and it failed or neglected to stimulate student interest. There was marginal focus on learning outcomes or learners' needs with a passive, but dutiful, atmosphere usually prevailing amongst students. In poor-to-medium quality lessons, there was too little emphasis on higher-order skills and a prevailing imbalance between teacher talk and student input. To counter these shortcomings, more attention to the facilitation of learning through interest, age-appropriateness, active methodologies and differentiation needs to be frontloaded in teacher planning. Lacklustre lessons would benefit from changes of pace, approach and methodology to keep students engaged.

However, in many lessons a good range of methodologies were seen. ICT was frequently used. A majority of lessons used the digital whiteboard to support the lessons' activities by encouraging student engagement, and aided with changes of content and pace.

Good questioning techniques supported the assessment of attainment and progress. In some lessons there was a tendency towards global questioning, making evaluation of individual student progress incomplete. It is recommended that this be addressed.

As mixed-ability grouping is predominant, greater use of practical strategies for differentiation at the upper and lower level of the aptitude and motivation continuum now need to be prioritised in planning, delivery and assessment of learning activities.

Practices vary for enhancing literacy and numeracy. Best practice integrated specialist subject terminology, spellings and explanations. Higher worth should be ascribed to the numeracy-enhancing potential of all subjects on offer; this needs planning emphasis. Literacy and numeracy is prioritised in the school's action plan. It is recommended that this is soon furthered in some form. The quality of assessment and feedback provided in the teaching process varied considerably. It is recommended that consistent AfL strategies are actively implemented in all subjects.

Classroom atmosphere was notably good. Praise and affirmation were widely utilised as part of reward and motivational strategies. There is a need to enrich the learning environment in some classrooms through displays of visual materials and student work.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Good, proactive approaches are evident in the application of recommendations from subject inspections. Utilisation of the recommendations is part of the senior management vision for ongoing improvement of teaching and learning and the enhancement of outcomes for students. Commendably, a shared resource database of all subject department planning has been set up to encourage across-department use of recommendations to develop existing good practice.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Lesson observation in the course of the evaluation suggests that good progress is being made in implementing recommendations.

In future, more direct review of how the recommendations from school inspection reports have been applied to habitual classroom and department practice, and how planning documentation has been upgraded, should be made clear to the board through a short annual report by the subject departments.

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

The school has engaged in self-evaluation processes and shows great capacity for improvement in a number of important areas, for example academic achievement and student management. The principal is engaged in ongoing training, research and personal reading to bring best practice to bear on the quality of education at Moyne Community School.

ICT infrastructure development has been significant. Further training for staff to allow a more optimised use of the ICT available to support learning has been indicated through the self evaluation of ICT by senior management.

Current self-evaluation practice is at a nascent stage. It is commendable that the quality of the insights and of the actions planned for or initiated to date is very good, realistic and constructive. For the future growth and development of self evaluation, a wider sector of the school community should be included.

School self evaluation is integral to the senior management team's approach. The principal and deputy principal have a vision for the school, focussed on enhancement of all aspects of school business, improving current standards, extending student horizons and utilising available resources in a complete and effective way.

Well-informed and proactive approaches characterise senior management's work. Their diligence and commitment has already brought about successful outcomes and improvement. The board should take steps to evaluate its own efficacy in the school-improvement process.

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