

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

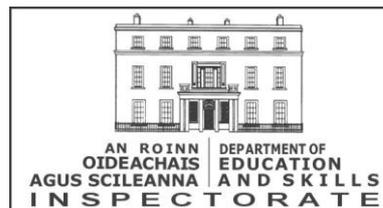
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Castlerea Community School
Castlerea, Co Roscommon
Roll number: 91493P**

Date of inspection: 21 September 2011



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in September 2011 in Castlerea 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 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

Castlerea Community School was established in 1993 through the amalgamation of St Joseph's Vocational School and the Convent of Mercy. The school offers a very broad range of subjects to leaving certificate level and provides the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied, and Transition Year (TY) programmes. It also has a post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) programme.

Students attending Castlerea Community School have a wide range of abilities and interests. An indicator of the school's commitment in the area of additional educational needs is its special education unit. Since losing its disadvantaged status in 2008 the school has had to adapt to the loss of its home-school-community liaison teacher. The school has a high level of retention to leaving certificate level. The most frequent destination for students is university with a number going to the institutes of technology. Some take the school's post-leaving certificate course (PLC) and other PLCs.

The school principal and the deputy principal have been in those positions since the opening of the school. The school's enrolment has been declining slowly for a number of years due to a decline in the number of students available for enrolment. The challenge now is to maintain the current level of enrolment and if possible to increase it.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board of management is committed and experienced and is closely involved in the life of the school.
- The school has a dedicated and committed management and staff.
- The principal leads the school community in a committed and professional manner.
- Mutual respect and very good relationships were evident between teachers and students.
- While subject planning is well established, there is scope for the development of the whole-school planning process.
- Some aspects of the school's curriculum are in need of review.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in almost of the lessons observed.

- Management and care of students is carried out in an effective manner.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The board of management should lead the further development of a whole-school planning process that is focused on school self-evaluation leading to review and improvement. Action planning for development should form a key part of this.
- The school's curriculum should be reviewed with reference to: setting of classes from first year in Irish, English and Mathematics; the number of subjects in the junior cycle curriculum; the time allocation for subjects in junior cycle; and the possible inclusion of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) in the senior cycle curriculum.
- Teaching and learning should be further developed through the use, by all teachers, of learning outcomes, of formative assessment, and of differentiation.

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 committed, dedicated, knowledgeable, and is involved in the school. Members of the board have received training for that role. The board has the appropriate composition, is carrying out its statutory functions, and is supportive of the school. To further develop communication within the school community the board should have a short agreed report for staff and for parents following its meetings. The board should consider having a meeting with the chairperson of the student council each year and a meeting with the parents' association executive each year.

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

Among the priority areas that have been identified for development, is the re-establishment of the parents' association. The board is working to achieve this through increasing parental involvement through information nights and other activities.

While continuing policy development and review has also been prioritised, the board's main role in relation to planning is to consider policies and plans that are developed in the school. The board should develop further its planning role through having school planning as a regular agenda item.

The board leads in addressing the continuing professional development (CPD) needs of members of staff through supporting them in accessing further study. The school is also in the early stages of developing a whole-school approach to literacy and numeracy. A further

priority for the school is to build on existing links with the local community and with further education providers.

As part of its oversight of the curriculum the board should lead in developing a document that describes the school's curriculum and that relates it to the developing needs of students. This should form a basis for making decisions on the school's curriculum. It is noted that work has already commenced in this area.

In the meeting with the parents' representatives on the board of management parents expressed their general satisfaction with the school. It was felt that having a connection with the school could be challenging for parents in the absence of a parents' association. Parents also expressed a need to be more fully informed about new programmes coming into the school, and about the school's assessment test for incoming first-year students and its consequences for students. The responses to the parents' questionnaire supported these indications that there is scope for improved communication.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The principal and deputy principal are dedicated and committed. The principal has overall responsibility for the management of the school and the deputy principal shares in the day-to-day management with a specific responsibility for student subject options and timetabling. They maintain a strong presence and are readily available to staff, students, and parents. Their vision for the school is that it would give the best possible education service to its students with a far greater involvement of parents. They want to maintain the school's existing high standards and inclusivity.

The school's middle management team functions effectively and the duties of post-holders are regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain in line with the needs of the school. When the duties are next reviewed, a whole-school planning process, which should include a survey of parents and students, should be used in the identification of the key needs of the school to be addressed by the post-holder duties. As well as the weekly meeting of senior management with the assistant principals in their role as year heads, assistant principals should have a meaningful role in regard to the overall management and the future direction of the school. Detailed descriptions should be developed of the duties of post holders, including the principal and the deputy principal.

Strong support exists for staff CPD. To build on this, CPD should be linked to the school's development priorities as well as taking place in response to needs identified by staff and management. Whole-school CPD should be followed up with subject-department planning that focuses on action planning for development. To further develop teaching and learning the school should plan for further whole-school CPD on differentiation that complements the previous input in this area.

The school plan includes a large number of policies and gives a comprehensive overview of the school. School development planning is organised by senior management and centres on school planning days and the inclusion of planning in staff meetings. To further increase the impact of the school's planning process there should be a greater emphasis on development-oriented action planning. A planning team representing all levels should be established to organise this.

Subject department planning is well established with all teams communicating well and meeting regularly. It is detailed and comprehensive and is in many cases of a high quality.

Leadership of students

The school's admission and enrolment policy is comprehensive and is supported by an information booklet for parents. Consideration should be given to including in the policy the provision that the school has for a transparent in-school appeal or review process.

The school has a comprehensive and broad curriculum that includes LCA at senior cycle and from this year TY also. The school should give consideration to the introduction of LCVP in senior cycle. The fact that Physical Education (PE) at senior level is optional and that just one lesson is provided in PE each week in junior cycle should be re-examined.

The school, in its curriculum planning, treats the junior cycle and the senior cycle curricula as a unit and sees the junior cycle as a preparation for senior cycle. The school's junior cycle curriculum is based on students having a wide range of experiences as a preparation for wise choices at senior level. As a consequence of this students take a higher than average number of subjects. The school's first-year taster programme is valued by students and their parents. However, as a result of the number of subjects taken, the time allocation for virtually all junior cycle subjects is lower than the recommended amount. This issue should be kept under review.

Students are set into groups by ability for Irish, English, and Mathematics on entry as determined by the results of the assessment test before entry to the school. The number of lessons each week for these subjects in the junior cycle is somewhat on the low side. The school is of the view that whatever impact that this may have on students' literacy and numeracy development is offset by the support for literacy and numeracy gained through the other subjects on the curriculum. These issues should be kept under review.

The school's curriculum includes many opportunities for sporting and extracurricular activities as well as for co-curricular activities that benefit students in many ways. They are a result of the dedication and time commitment on the members of staff involved.

Care of students is a central part of the ethos of the school. The year heads, working with the class tutors, form the key day-to-day elements of the care system. From their responses to questionnaires and in interviews it is clear that students and their parents consider students to be very well cared for. The work of the group that is developing an overall policy with regard to student care, to supplement other policies in that area, should be progressed.

The guidance plan lays out a framework for the delivery of guidance. The guidance department has produced a booklet for students to assist them in making their subject choices. Given the responses of students and their parents it is suggested that the effectiveness of the schools' whole-school guidance especially in relation to subject and programme choice should be evaluated.

The education of students with special educational needs is a long-established high priority of the school and students with additional learning needs are fully included. There is high quality teamwork evident among the members of the special needs and learning-support team that includes the special needs assistants. The team is taking a commendably thorough and professional approach to its work.

Planning and coordination for Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE) including resource planning and the support of SPHE teachers, is good. SPHE is linked to the school's tutor system and is taught by a large team, which makes coordination challenging.

A key element of the commitment of the school to the holistic development of its students is the student council. The students involved receive training each year and are commended on their commitment. Recently however the student council has not been as active as in other years and the school has plans to revitalise its operation this year.

The school is complying with the statutory requirement to have strategies to improve attendance and school attendance is promoted through annual awards. School records suggest that absenteeism is an issue for a proportion of its students. The school should continue to explore strategies to improve attendance.

2.3 Management of facilities

The school building is in very good condition, well maintained, bright and clean. After a long wait the acquisition of playing fields for the school is now almost finalised. Good use has been made of the summer work scheme, most recently to refurbish the student toilets.

The ICT infrastructure is very good with all classrooms equipped with a data projector.

A safety statement was prepared in 2006 and one of the post-holders has responsibility for safety. The staff is reminded of its entitlement to appoint a safety representative.

The school's participation in the Green-schools scheme indicates its commitment to addressing environmental issues.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning in the classes observed was good in almost all cases and very good in a number of classes. All lessons were very well planned and prepared for.

Subject departments are well coordinated and work effectively in planning for teaching and learning. Subject departments have common programmes of work and there is widespread use of student learning outcomes in subject planning.

The principal methodology in use in the lessons observed was teacher explanation, using the board or the data projector, followed by questioning of students. Students' contributions were valued in almost all lessons.

There was regular use of questioning of students as a teaching and learning approach. The effectiveness of this approach could be increased through making use of a range of question types and using wait time before calling on students to answer.

In some lessons observed there was very good use of active-learning methodologies although in the case of many lessons there was too great an emphasis on the teacher. To encourage more active learning there should be a greater focus on such activities as group work, student research and presentation, and other student-based learning practices.

In judging the extent of student learning in lessons, inspectors took into account students' contributions to lessons, their answers to questions, examination of some of their work and discussion with the students. While it was clear that high quality student learning was taking place in lessons, in the case of some lessons this would have been helped through giving students greater opportunities to contribute.

Some examples were seen of good practice in relation to learning outcomes being shared by the teacher with students. In other lessons reference was made at the outset to the topic of the lesson. Where learning objectives were well used they were referred to again during the lessons and were also used for assessment and summarising at the end of lessons.

Almost all classrooms were stimulating learning environments with good displays of relevant materials that helped students' learning. In several cases these were referred to during lessons.

Information and communication technology (ICT) was used in most lessons and was almost always well integrated into teaching and learning. As the use of ICT is further developed, its use should be extended from presentation of lessons into such areas as consolidation of students' learning and student assessment in class and out of class.

While reference was made to differentiated approaches to curriculum and to teaching and learning in some of the subject planning documents reviewed, few examples were noted in the lessons observed. Given the mixed-ability nature of virtually all classes, teachers should employ a range of differentiated strategies to support the learning of all students.

In virtually all lessons classroom management was effective, there was an excellent student-teacher relationship evident, and the use of students' names in questioning facilitated a good learning atmosphere.

Assessment of students is largely conducted through brief class tests and more formal in-school examinations as well as the state examinations. Examples were seen of very good use of formative assessment of students' work, both written and oral. In these cases students were given positive feedback that made clear to them the strong points of their work and gave them guidance on how they could improve. This should be further developed at a subject-department and an individual teacher level.

The school's practice of analysing its Leaving Certificate examination results and comparing them to national norms should be extended to the Junior Certificate examination. The proportion of students taking subjects at higher level and the proportion receiving the highest grades should be monitored and the data should be presented annually for review by the board of management.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Previous inspection reports reviewed for the evaluation were in the Business subjects, German, Geography and Art. The principal management-related issues arising from them were in relation to curricular planning. Collaborative curricular planning is now well established and in some cases the excellent practice of year-end review was noted. Recommendations made in reports in relation to ICT have also been addressed.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Many of the recommendations made in previous inspection reports with regard to teaching and learning have been addressed.

ICT resources were used to enhance student learning in the case of the majority of lessons. Active learning methodologies were in use at some point in the majority of lessons and questioning strategies were in use in all lessons. There was some variation in the question types used in a majority of the lessons. In nearly two-thirds of lessons students were provided with some form of feedback on their performance and progress. In a small number of classes where students were performing individual tasks they were given individual feedback and guidance. In language classes evaluated the target language was the predominant language used.

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

5.1

Several of the school's policy documents include provision for review and in some instances this review has taken place. A strong culture of self-evaluation and review was noted in the case of the special needs team. Informal review also takes place within the student care area involving the year heads, tutors, chaplain and guidance counsellor. The principal annually reviews their posts with post-holders. At a whole-school level the school has made use of the Department of Education and Skills publication *Looking at Our School* for self evaluation. While self-evaluation has begun there is need for it to be further developed and established.

It is clear that the school has a good capacity for change and improvement. This judgement is based on the leadership that has been shown to date and the school's responses to previous inspection reports. In building further on the work to date with regard to whole-school planning for development an intermediate structure such as a planning team should be set up that would guide this process and that would facilitate the inclusion of parents and students in school planning and development.

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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 of Castlerea Community School welcomes the findings of the WSE MLL.

The Board is particularly pleased that the inspectors highlighted the commitment and dedication of the Board, management and teaching staff, the positive relationships which exist between teachers and students, the quality of teaching and learning, the quality of care for students and the schools capacity for self evaluation.

The Board is delighted that the high quality of provision and support for SEN students, the comprehensive curriculum available to students, the very positive and affirming views expressed by the students and parents, the excellent facilities and the range of extra-curricular activities were recognised and affirmed.

The Board would like to thank the inspectors for their thoughtful and considerate approach. The Board also thanks all members of the school community for their commitment and diligence on behalf of the school.

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

- The Board will continue to work towards the re-establishment of the parents Association and will continue to consult and engage with parents as is our present practice.
- Whole school Professional Development on differentiation has already taken place. It is recommended that teachers embed the practice of differentiation into all their lessons.
- A review into the role of Assistant principals in regard to the overall management of the school will commence immediately.
- Formative assessment will be further developed at both individual, subject – department and staff level.
- Within the context of school self evaluation and planning the Board will review and evaluate whole school guidance provision.
- Review of the Junior Cycle curriculum will take place in tandem with the revised Junior Cycle whilst research into the inclusion of LCVP into the curriculum has already begun.