

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Loreto Community School
Milford, County Donegal
Roll number: 91500J**

Date of inspection: 25 April 2012



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April 2012 in Loreto Community School, Milford, Co Donegal. 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 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

Loreto Community School was originally established as a girls' secondary school in 1966, became co-educational in 1967 and a community school in 1996. It caters for a diverse catchment area and the vast majority of students avail of school transport. The school has a current enrolment of 756 students and provides the Junior Certificate programme, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- Relationships between the board of management, the senior management team and the staff are good and the school enjoys very good support from parents and students.
- Effective planning and care structures are in place, guidance is good, programme planning is good and subject planning is being progressed.
- The school has very good facilities and well-developed information and communication technology (ICT) provision.
- The quality of teaching and learning observed in classrooms was generally good, and in a small number of lessons, exemplary. There is scope for development in a few.
- Attainment is quite good overall, is very good in some subjects and some positive trends have been identified.
- The capacity for self-evaluation and school improvement is well developed in some individual instances but is not yet embedded at whole-school level.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- Action planning informed by evidence should drive the school agenda: particular areas for immediate attention are attendance and literacy and numeracy. Planning to improve learning outcomes should be a focus in subject planning and delivery.
- The post-of-responsibility structure should be reviewed to create greater equity in the allocation of tasks and to meet the school's most pressing needs.
- Future continuing professional development (CPD) events should focus on key teaching and learning areas.
- To ensure continuity of care and learning, and to develop literacy and numeracy competence, consideration should be given to restructuring work experience, particularly for LCA students.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

The board is appropriately constituted and is strongly supportive of the school and the senior management team. Most board members are relatively new to their role. Many have received training and this process is ongoing.

The board has overseen the development of the school plan and a number of policies, most recently, the school's enrolment policy and code of behaviour. It has dealt appropriately with all matters brought to its attention. A sub-committee established to evaluate canteen provision is a positive illustration of the board's engagement with the school.

The quality of communication between the board, the senior management team and the school community is good. An agreed account of board meetings is sent to the Parents' Association (PA) and to staff. The board should consider inviting staff members involved in leadership roles to make presentations on their work at regular intervals.

Responses to questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation find that the vast majority of parents and students are satisfied with most aspects of school life. Channels of communication such as open nights, information sessions, the school website and texting inform parents. However, the parent questionnaire responses indicate that a significant minority may be unfamiliar with the board's work. It is recommended that consideration be given to the publication of a newsletter to further enhance communication.

The PA is very supportive of the school and has raised significant funding for its activities. It is not affiliated to the National Parents' Council Post Primary (NPCPP). The PA should consider additional ways in which it can communicate with all parents as questionnaire responses highlight this need.

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's priorities for development

Among the board's current priorities are the school extension, ICT development, the implementation of the school's literacy and numeracy strategy and junior cycle review. The school's literacy and numeracy plan needs to be addressed with some urgency. The board should oversee the development of the three-year school plan with specific targets for improvement in literacy and numeracy in each subject department and in attendance.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The principal has successfully managed major changes in the school over the last twenty years. He is heavily engaged in a variety of day-to-day management duties. In his role as instructional leader, he has encouraged subject department planning and has led curricular initiatives. He maintains a visible presence around the school.

The principal and deputy principal work well together and meet regularly, formally and informally. Some roles are shared, for example, discipline and attendance at weekly meetings with year heads. The deputy principal has responsibility for designated administrative matters, for example, substitution and substitution. He issues the school

bulletin to staff and has been involved in the school's ICT provision. The deputy's role would benefit from greater clarity and it is suggested that the duties attached to each member of the senior management team be documented. In their leadership role, the principal and deputy principal need to develop a clear vision for school improvement in conjunction with the board, staff, students and parents.

Communication with stakeholders is generally good. The school's staff handbook is a very good resource. The staff advisory group, consisting of staff volunteers and the principal, is a useful forum for open communication. Staff sub-committees are established from time to time for specific purposes.

The post-of-responsibility structure was reviewed in 2010. Post-holders take ownership of their roles. Some areas of in-school management are effective. However, there is a lack of equity in the duties attached to some posts. In the context of action planning for school self-evaluation, the post structure should be reviewed and duties rebalanced to meet the school's most pressing needs. All post holders should have clear job descriptions and report regularly to the principal on the impact of their roles. Commendably, year heads submit reports to management twice a year.

The school has an effective planning group. Whole-school planning is well progressed. The school plan has recently been updated and represents very good work. Anomalies such as the reference to the role of the Home-school Community Liaison Co-ordinator need to be removed. Priorities have been identified in line with the needs of the school. All policies have been ratified by the board and are dated. There is a process of rolling review.

There is no coherent, strategic approach to literacy and numeracy development. Some worthwhile actions have been implemented. A steering group needs to be put in place, baseline data gathered on all students, achievable, measurable targets set and specific strategies devised to address a range of needs. Dates should be set for evaluation of impact and for review.

The school is very engaged in the development of ICT and good work has been done through the establishment of an implementation team and the development of a virtual learning environment. The school's success in a recent national competition has given considerable impetus to ICT development and will provide important learning opportunities that should be embedded in a strategic plan to promote learning for all students.

The focus of CPD provision of late has been on ICT. A day devoted to "Moodwatchers", a personal development course for teachers, was very well received by staff. Future CPD events should consider whole-school teaching and learning areas such as active learning, differentiation, assessment for learning and whole-school literacy and numeracy.

Leadership of students

The enrolment policy has been reviewed and as currently documented, is fair and open. The code of behaviour is a good document in most respects. While it records the steps that will be taken where breaches occur, it would benefit from iteration of positive behaviour reinforcement measures. There is a commendable expectation that students should be respected. A shorter version of the code is published in the student journal. Consideration should be given to including sanctions and the ladder of referral in the next publication. The student journal is an important medium of communication with home, a record of work done and homework set. Commendably, some teachers and class officers are communicating positive messages but the practice is not widespread and this needs to be addressed at whole-school level. Signing of the journal by staff and parents is not consistent.

Relationships between students and staff are good and the pastoral care system functions effectively. A dedicated team of year heads performs a variety of important functions in relation to student care and management. Consideration should be given to holding whole-year group assemblies on a regular basis. The class officer has designated time to register attendance. An alternative title should be agreed that reflects the school's caring ethos.

The school's care team provides evidence of its commitment to student support. Meetings are a useful forum for information exchange. The potential of the structure to actively manage specific cases including students returning from suspension should be utilised. Junior cycle year heads play a role in the early identification of students at risk of developing negative behaviour and attendance patterns. Building on this and other data, the care team should develop profiles, design specific intervention strategies, and measure impact.

The majority of students attend regularly. There are some good measures in place for tracking attendance. Data returned to the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) indicate a significant level of absenteeism; this applies to a minority. A strategy for whole-school improvement needs to be developed and an implementation team established. It is suggested that the deputy principal take a leadership role in this regard. Data gathered should be analysed to identify specific individuals and groups. Targets should be documented. Currently, awards for full attendance are presented at the end of the academic year. This strategy is unlikely to impact on students most at risk.

Good measures to manage the transition from primary to post-primary school are in place. Senior cycle prefects act as mentors. Consideration could be given to developing a targeted programme for students transferring to senior cycle who have established patterns of poor attendance or poor levels of attainment, or both.

The quality of personal, vocational and educational guidance is good. Commendably, a junior cycle guidance programme is in place and includes a specific study skills programme. Staff members mentor senior cycle students to encourage effort. A student-centred approach is adopted in the LCA programme. All of this work is commendable.

The annual awards ceremony acknowledges achievement across a range of areas. The student council plays an active role in school life and works well with the prefect system. The student council should be afforded the opportunity to formally present its work to the board on a regular basis.

The school makes good provision for students with special educational needs. Individual education plans are in place for those receiving additional resource hours. Some measures in place are designed to help students of exceptional ability achieve their potential.

The school provides a wide range of subjects and programmes. Programmes are well-coordinated. Particularly commended is evidence of reflective practice on the part of the teachers. Content is reviewed and planning is generally good. The optional TY programme is varied and is increasing in popularity.

Subject planning is being progressed and some subject plans have clearly documented learning outcomes. Best practice links outcomes, teaching methodologies, resources and assessment methods in each content area. There is evidence of data analysis. To build on this, data analysed should be used for target setting to improve attainment. Attainment is quite good overall, is very good in some subjects, and some positive trends have been identified. Increasing uptake of higher level should be a goal, especially in those subjects where participation rates in higher level are below national norms.

A Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme is in place. The Physical Education (PE) programme has a diverse range of activities. PE is provided for junior cycle and TY students. It is available for fourth and fifth year students on an optional basis but not for those in the LCVP programme. It is recommended that all students have equality of access to PE as advised in *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools*.

Timetabling allocation for subjects is, on the whole, adequate in the junior cycle and is good for Mathematics and modern European languages. Students receive good information on subject choices. Subject sampling in a range of options informs students in first year and is organised on a rotational basis over the year. Given the need for greater emphasis on literacy development, four periods of English in each of first and second years are less than might be expected. All students have timetabled ICT in first and second year.

Timetabling allocation is good in all Leaving Certificate subject areas and very generous in some. Some optional subjects have six periods a week in each of the two years of the Leaving Certificate programme and this is well above norms; others have five. The arrangement should be reviewed to ensure that all optional subjects have parity of esteem. English, Mathematics and Irish have above average provision with six periods a week in each of the two years. The LCA English and Communication allocation is in line with syllabus requirements.

Neither TY nor LCA students receive twenty-eight hours of tuition a week since each group is engaged in work experience once a week. This arrangement lasts over the two-year LCA programme. The vast majority of LCA students have identified special educational needs. Consideration should be given to restructuring work experience, particularly for this cohort, to ensure that they receive continuity in learning, care and support.

There is a strong commitment to the promotion of extracurricular and co-curricular activities. Students have opportunities to learn in alternative settings. This represents considerable dedication on the part of school staff. The school has won a number of accolades in various areas.

2.3 Management of facilities

The current building was completed in 2006 and the school has very good facilities. Plans are near completion for an extension.

A designated special-duties post is attached to health and safety, procedures are in place and fire drills carried out. A caring attitude to the environment is fostered, two green flags have been secured and a third is being sought. Grounds and interior are well maintained and conducive to learning. The school environment is visually rich and stimulating.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Thirty-one lessons over thirty-five class periods covering a range of subjects and programmes were visited during the evaluation. On the whole, teaching and learning was found to be good. Exemplary practice in all areas of teaching and learning was observed in a small number. Poor practice was observed in a few. It is recommended that good practice be shared.

Planning for learning was good in many cases. Particularly commended was the sharing of expected learning outcomes in some lessons. In all lessons, expected outcomes should be written on the board at the start of the lesson; in line with best assessment for learning practice, outcomes should be revisited at the end to evaluate the lesson's success in achieving its objectives.

A good range of resources was prepared in many cases. Good use of ICT to promote learning was observed in a majority. In a minority, resources used were limited or poorly used, did not engage students, and indicated low levels of planning.

Skills development was noted in some lessons but there is scope for improvement in the areas of literacy and numeracy development across the curriculum. The promotion of oracy needs attention in most lessons. Very good practice was noted in two cases when students orally presented their work to their peers. A very good level of interaction was noted in a few cases. In the languages, the promotion of oral communication was noted but there is some scope for further increase in the incidence of peer-to-peer communication. In some lessons observed, teachers spoke too fast and this was unhelpful especially for those who find learning challenging.

In many lessons, methods used were appropriate to the learning needs of students. Questioning strategy was good in some but in others, insufficient time was given to students to formulate answers or the level of questioning was pitched too low. Very good practice was noted where co-operative learning was facilitated. In the best lessons, challenging, stimulating but achievable tasks were set and this generated a perceptible level of enthusiasm for learning. A small number of lessons were overly teacher-led, approaches were didactic, and there was too little student input, resulting in passivity. Active learning methodologies should be used in all lessons. Very good differentiation practice was noted in one lesson but in general, there is scope for development in this area.

Classroom management was good. An atmosphere conducive to learning was created in most lessons and particularly commended were efforts made to create a vibrant learning atmosphere. Carefully mounted displays of students' work, visual and print, were a stimulus to learning and an acknowledgment of effort made.

Assessment for learning practice varied. For example, very good teacher feedback was noted in some copybooks but in others, there was little or no evidence of written teacher comments. Very good practice in the monitoring of student learning was noted in many lessons and exemplary practice in one case. However, in a few, students' learning was not monitored at all.

Homework is assigned on a regular basis in some subject areas; in others, little or no homework is recorded in student journals despite a recommendation in a previous report. All teachers and subject departments need to address this issue.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

The school has responded in a constructive manner to the findings of published reports.

4.1 Management

The evaluation finds that recommendations in relation to management have been or are being addressed. A recommendation that PE be provided for all students has not been implemented in the senior cycle.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Ongoing efforts are being made to progress recommendations made in areas relevant to teaching and learning and progress was noted in some areas. Further work across the curriculum is necessary, for example, consistent practice in the allocation of homework.

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

The capacity for self-evaluation and school improvement is well developed in some individual instances but is not yet embedded at whole-school level. In some cases, instruments such as surveys of stakeholders are used to inform planning, targets are developed based on evidence, and evaluation takes place; this represents good work. Many subject departments have begun to gather data on assessment outcomes. The board receives responses from staff on subject inspections and this is commended. Action planning in relation to the school's priorities is referenced in the school plan but there are some areas that need to be addressed. Greater clarity and detail are needed, for example in target setting for literacy and numeracy development and for attendance.

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 welcomes the very positive key findings of the Whole School Evaluation, Management, Leadership and Learning Report. In particular the Board is pleased that the Inspectors referred positively to:

- The good relationships between the Board, Principal and Staff and also between the Students and Staff.
- The very good support from Parents and Students.
- The excellent facilities and the well developed ICT structures.
- The fact that self evaluation and school improvement is well developed.
- That teaching and learning is generally good.
- The good provision for Special Education Needs students.
- The recognition given to our Junior Cycle Guidance Programme.
- The evidence of reflective practice on the part of teachers.
- The strong commitment of staff to extra curricular and co-curricular activities.

The Board recognises that all the staff, teaching and non teaching, are fully committed in their work and have the best interest of our students as their top priority.

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 of Management is committed to addressing the main recommendations. The following points should be noted:

- The attendance figure for the 2011/2012 academic year showed a vast improvement on the previous years' figures. The average absenteeism was 12.8 days, down from 14.6 in the previous year. The twenty day absence figure was 18.1% which is now in line with the national average. The Board have already set up a working group to further improve attendance.
- An action plan for literacy and numeracy is also being developed.
- Subject Departments will be focusing on improving learning outcomes with various action plans.
- The Board of Management are committed to reviewing the Post of Responsibility structure. However the moratorium on Posts of Responsibility is having severe adverse effects on the school management. Currently we have three Assistant Principals and not the nine we were entitled to before the cutbacks.
- With regard to continuing professional development it should be noted that the Staff had already received in-service on differentiation, assessment for learning and Skillspace

(virtual learning environment). Future CPD will continue to focus on key teaching and learning areas.

- The Board will consider the recommendations to restructure work experience for LCA students. However, the Board and Staff have very strong reasons for maintaining the status quo, particularly in the context of cutbacks.