

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

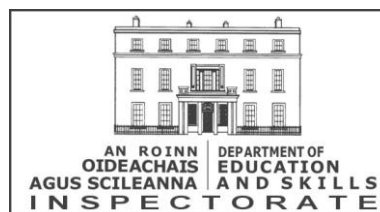
**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Scoil Mhuire  
Strokestown, County Roscommon  
Roll number: 65100S**

**Date of inspection: 19 January 2012**



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

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in January 2012 in Scoil Mhuire, Strokestown. 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 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***

Scoil Mhuire is co-educational voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 433 students. Under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST) the school is the sole provider of post-primary education in the town of Strokestown and its rural environs and serves the needs of students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The school's catchment area has increased over the last few years and demographic patterns indicate a stable trend. The school building currently in use opened in 1967 and a new extension will open at the beginning of the next academic year consisting of a four specialists rooms and a separate physical education facility. Christian values of care and respect along with a commitment to the holistic development of students are at the core of school as an organisation.

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

### ***1.1 Key Findings***

- The board of management is committed to developing and improving the school's long tradition of providing a holistic education for members of the local community.
- Effective leadership is provided by the principal. This has resulted in sustained improvement of practices and procedures in many key areas of school life. This school improvement agenda is strongly supported by the deputy principal.
- Most of the subject and programme planning documentation reviewed was of a good quality.
- High quality student care and support is a core characteristic of the school community.
- The range of subjects and programmes offered by the school is broad and balanced in the context of the size of the school.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good in the majority of lessons observed.
- The majority of recommendations from previous subject inspection reports at a whole-school level and in relation to teaching and learning have been implemented.

- Some good practices and procedures are in place in relation to self-evaluation at student and subject level.

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

- The board of management in consultation with senior management and the teaching staff should ensure that action plans are devised and structures are developed for the implementation and review of identified school development priorities.
- There is a need for urgent attention to be paid to ensuring compliance with health and safety requirements.
- A review of the posts of responsibilities should be carried out and procedures for reporting to the school's management on progress made in relation to posts of responsibility should be agreed.
- A whole-school information and communication technology (ICT) plan should be devised to support and promote the increased integration of ICT into teaching and learning.
- To support higher student achievement, there should be further sharing of pedagogical strategies within and between departments.
- Engagement with the school's self-evaluation process should extend to include all teachers and improvements in self-evaluation procedures should be introduced accordingly.

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

### ***2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management***

The board of management is appropriately constituted and fulfils its statutory obligations in an effective manner. Board members demonstrate a complementary range of skills, experience and expertise and are very supportive of school management. Notwithstanding the valuable contribution made by the principal's report to the board on the operation and performance of the school it is recommended that a more structured format be employed for this purpose.

A very good level of communication exists between the board and the teaching staff. The board makes good contributions to policy development and review and a range of school policies has been completed. There is also good collaboration with parents and students in relation to policy development. To further enhance policy development a rolling structure for policy review should be initiated. All policies should include a date of adoption and a purposed review date.

The current school safety statement was written in the context of 2005 health legislation. The board should progress the review of its health and safety statement as a matter of urgency in line with the Health Safety Authority's (HAS) 2010 *Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools*. Furthermore, each subject department should carry out an annual risk assessment of its teaching area for submission to the school's safety officer.

The parents' association is supportive of the school and has taken an increasingly active role in supporting particular initiatives through its fundraising activities. Its commitment

and work over the years is appreciated and valued by school management. To enhance the level of communication between the board and the parents' association in relation to common priorities it is recommended that both groups meet at the beginning and the end of the year. An annual input from the student council would further support this collaboration.

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*.

### **The school's priorities for development**

The priorities for development articulated by the board include the maintenance of the school's ethos, the ongoing continuing professional development (CPD) of staff and the improvement of staff morale. Other priority areas include policy development and review, improving the quality of teaching and learning, supporting curriculum developments, developing current financial and administrative systems and further improvements to plant. Actions to progress developmental priorities have been initiated in some of these strategic areas and a school development planning team, consisting of the principal and deputy principal is in place.

The board should arrange for a more systematic approach to action planning so as to achieve short, medium and long-term strategic goals. To assist in this process a task group, representative of all stakeholders and with an elected chairperson, should be assigned to progress each strategic area. Each chairperson would also be a member of a planning steering group to be co-ordinated by the deputy principal.

To embed the practice of self-evaluation at whole-school level, robust performance indicators to appraise progress at particular intervals should be developed as part of each action plan. In addition progress reports on school planning should become a regular item on the agenda of board meetings

## ***2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

### **Leadership of staff**

The principal carries out a broad range of duties in a dedicated and diligent manner in terms of the day-to-day leadership of the school and in relation to the sustained improvement of the educational provision for the school community. The principal maintains a strong visible presence around the school grounds during all times of student movement. Using his collaborative and hands-on management style, the principal has overseen the introduction of an effective code of behaviour which supports teachers in their work.

Since his appointment the principal has led the improvement of mechanisms for communication and consultation between staff and senior management, fostered improved partnership with students, parents, the board and CEIST, and overseen the introduction of structures and systems to support policy development and subject planning. He has also discharged a key role in the development of the school's physical infrastructure and resources, including ICT. A review of supports for students has been led by the principal in conjunction with pertinent staff. During his tenure he has also managed effectively the transitions resulting from the retirement and recruitment of staff.

The deputy principal was appointed early in the current academic year and is clearly committed to the development and improvement of the educational provision in the school. At the time of the evaluation, the role of the deputy principal was evolving with specific duties in the areas of pastoral care, attendance, the development of ICT in the school and liaison with feeder primary schools. It is recommended that the principal and the deputy principal clearly delineate individual duties and areas of collective responsibility in line with their individual strengths and expertise.

The principal and the deputy principal are committed to ongoing engagement with CPD in conjunction with the relevant professional associations. Teachers are encouraged and facilitated to participate in external CPD. Structures to facilitate sharing of information gained at external in-service should be developed at subject department level and, where relevant, at whole-staff level. A good whole-school CPD programme has been provided in recent years. It is recommended that this programme be based on a needs analysis of staff and be used strategically to support progress in the school's priority developmental areas.

Members of middle management carry out their respective responsibilities in a diligent and committed manner. Post holders interviewed articulated that they feel empowered, consulted and afforded autonomy in their roles and that roles are assigned according to their interests and skills. A sense of ownership and collegiality has been generated among post-holders and it is evident that possibilities for building leadership capacity among non-post holders also exist. Although recently reviewed, it is recommended that the schedule of duties be further streamlined to enhance the input and impact of posts in relation to implementing the developmental priorities as well as meeting the current needs of the school. It is important that equity is achieved within and between posts, that overlap is reduced, and that posts are commensurate with the level of remuneration and relate to key areas of school life. Procedures for the reporting on posts, at agreed intervals, to senior management and in turn to the board should be developed. The schedule of responsibilities attached to all posts, including senior management, should be displayed in the staff room.

Subject departments meet formally throughout the school year and good quality subject plans were made available in the majority of subjects and programmes offered on the school's curriculum. This planning work has impacted positively on student learning through the delivery of planned common programmes in almost all subjects and through common assessments and marking schemes in some subjects. This practice should be extended to all subjects.

### **Leadership of students**

The school has a democratically elected student council and the student body exercises its voice through its elected representatives. The students interviewed demonstrated leadership qualities and have effected positive changes. Looking to the future, it is recommended that the student council be involved in policy development at an early stage. The school's admission policy is open and inclusive and in line with best practice.

The quality of student care and support is a key strength of the school community. Very good supports and procedures are in place to support students and inform parents at key transition times. First-year students are assisted in their transfer from feeder primary schools by a comprehensive mentoring programme and examination year groups are supported by a year head. All students benefit from a very good student-centred guidance and counselling service which has fostered very good links with the social, political and health education (SPHE) department.

Very good support structures, procedures and processes have been developed to deliver additional supports to students with identified special educational needs (SEN), including

those attending the school's special class. A comprehensive policy and an overall plan is in place and the learning support team, co-ordinated by an assistant principal, maintains very effective links with outside agencies and parents.

The guidance and learning-support departments are represented on the school's pastoral care team facilitating a cohesive and joined up approach to student care. The deputy principal is also a member of the care team that endeavours to meet weekly outside of the teachers' class contact time. It is recommended that provision be made for regular formal meetings of the pastoral care team.

The principal has dedicated much time to leading the development and improvement of the school's code of behaviour. This sustained effort has involved an annual whole-staff review of the code since 2009. Among the beneficial results accrued are greater consistency in the application of the code and the introduction of rewards for positive behaviour. Parents and students unanimously endorsed the code and the 'firm but fair' approach espoused in it. Teachers also commented favourably on the improvements in the code and in its implementation and the resultant positive contribution to classroom management and teaching and learning.

Effective procedures are in place to monitor student punctuality. Attendance data recorded in the morning by teachers are used to generate a whole-school absence list which is held in the school's office. It is recommended that this list be made available to the teachers, to provide a daily benchmark against which can check their class rolls. It would also provide a medium through which a greater awareness of student attendance and non-attendance can be generated across the school community. Currently, parents receive an absence letter when students have accumulated more than fifteen days absences. It is recommended that further methods to track and target set in relation to improved attendance be introduced.

Students are provided with a broad and balanced curriculum. Incoming first-year students undertake a subject sampling programme during the first term and then choose their subjects from pre-set option bands. Senior cycle students complete a compulsory and comprehensive TY programme and then, they are provided with an open subject choice for the leaving certificate programme. In the vast majority of cases the number and distribution of lesson periods to subjects is very good. This leaves a small number of subjects where improvements to timetabling are needed when they become practicable. Efforts should also be made to remove study periods from students' timetables to ensure twenty-eight hours' instruction for all students.

Students' learning and holistic development is supported by an extensive range of extracurricular activities that are made possible through the commitment of teachers in giving of their own time.

## ***2.2 Management of facilities***

The board and senior management have been engaged in extensive planning for expansion and refurbishment of the school buildings and grounds while ensuring that the facilities currently available are maintained to good standard. The school is commended for its commitment to a litter-free environment and to recycling initiatives. ICT infrastructure is well developed in some classrooms and in all specialist rooms. A whole-school ICT plan should be devised to meet the current and future CPD needs of teachers in a sustained manner in relation to the increased integration of ICT into teaching and learning.

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

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

Planning and preparation for lessons was uniformly good. It is recommended that short-term planning for lessons seek to differentiate the learning outcomes to cater for the range of abilities that exists in all student groupings.

The quality of teaching and learning was good in the majority of lessons observed. A minority of lessons were characterised by exemplary practice whilst scope for considerable development in teaching and learning was identified in a number of other lessons during the evaluation.

Best practice in teaching and learning techniques included differentiated learning outcomes, a comprehensive range of questioning techniques, meaningful links with prior learning, a judicious balance between student activity and teacher-led instruction, excellent use of the board, well managed task-based learning and very good facilitation of lesson recapitulation. Teachers across a range of subjects demonstrated an awareness of the literacy needs of students. However, attention to students' numeracy needs was confined to mathematics lessons. All subject departments should also identify and agree their strategies to meet the varying needs of students in relation to both literacy and numeracy. The approaches within departments should be consistently implemented and guided by a whole-school framework to promote higher outcomes for all students in relation to literacy and numeracy in line with the *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy 2011-2020*. Furthermore, it is recommended that all teachers engage further in the review of teaching and learning at classroom level so that indicators of best practice such as those identified above, and other tried and tested teaching and learning techniques, guide the development of classroom practice in relation to pedagogy.

In just under half of the lessons evaluated ICT was used effectively to increase student learning. Notwithstanding the challenges posed by unreliability in broad band connection; it is recommended that departments devise strategies whereby ICT can be further employed to improve teaching and learning.

Classroom management and students' behaviour was of a high standard in all classes. It was evident that the very good teacher-student rapport that existed was underpinned by mutual respect.

Exemplars of stimulating learning environments were evident in some rooms and along corridors. Efforts should be made to ensure that all classrooms provide a relevant image and print-rich learning environment on an ongoing basis

Homework was regularly assigned in the majority of lessons observed and the level of completion by students was very high. Very good practice was observed in the assigning and correcting of homework. The application of assessment for learning principles was evident in some students' work. The extended use of these techniques is recommended.

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

### ***4.1 Management***

Very good progress has been made in relation to the implementation of recommendations from previous subject inspection reports at a whole-school level. However recommendations made in the subject inspection report for Science in 2010 regarding health and safety have not been implemented. Although improved chemical storage will be provided in the new extension it is imperative that the board make arrangements for the implementation of the practice of annual risk assessment by departments and for ensuring the schools' full compliance in relation to all health and safety matters.

### ***4.2 Learning and Teaching***

At subject department level very good progress has been made in regard to the implementation of recommendations. Commendably relevant recommendations from subject inspection reports have been shared across departments. Recommendations in the improved use of assessment for learning techniques, the increased integration of ICT to improve teaching and learning and the development and use of strategies for the inclusion of SEN students are ongoing areas for development across all departments.

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

There is evidence of school engagement with self-evaluation in terms of the ongoing and collaborative evaluation of school policies, practices and procedures including the analysis of certificate examination results. Subject departments and programme areas are also engaged in ongoing curricular planning and review. Evidence of good reflective practice was noted in Guidance, in SPHE, in the mentoring programme for new teachers and in the learning support department. It is recommended that such reflective practice be extended to all subjects and programmes. Procedures should be put in place in order to ensure that the outcomes of future analysis and review inform action planning at all levels of the school. The practice of self-evaluation and consequent action planning should seek to include all stakeholders.

Student self-evaluation of learning initiatives has been introduced with leaving certificate students, and in the teaching and learning of French to promote learner autonomy among students. Such practices offer beneficial possibilities across all subjects and programmes and should be explored with all learners.

The school is committed to the further development of self-evaluation processes at all levels of the school community and has the capacity for school improvement and development including the implementation of all recommendations of this report.

*Published December 2012*



# **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 Scoil Mhuire welcomes the positive and encouraging WSE MLL report which affirms the dedication, hard work and commitment of all members of the school community. The Board would like to thank the Inspectors who carried out the WSE MLL for the professional and courteous manner in which they conducted the inspection.

The Board is very pleased that the WSE MLL report recognises the many good practices and systems in Scoil Mhuire as well as the high quality of teaching and learning which is documented throughout the inspection report. The report also acknowledges the active involvement and supportive role of the Parents Council and the Board of Management.

The Board is particularly pleased that the inspectorate complimented and noted

- High quality of student care and support provided
- Good quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons observed
- Good practices and procedures in place in relation to self-evaluation and good quality subject planning evident
- Provision of a holistic education
- Effective leadership by school management
- The collaborative approach to the running of the school adopted by the senior management team and the evidence for distributed leadership within the middle management structures
- Commitment of the BOM to on-going development of the school
- Well maintained and well resourced school
- Well structured timetable with a abroad and balanced curriculum
- Good progress made in implementing recommendations arising from previous inspection reports
- Well developed and good use made of ICT
- Highly motivated and dedicated teachers
- Very active parents council
- High standard of student behaviour in all classes.

## **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 accepts the recommendations of the inspectorate and is fully committed to addressing them. The majority of the recommendations have already been implemented and we will endeavour to implement outstanding recommendations as soon as possible.

- The school safety statement has been revised and a current risk assessment is included
- E-portal is established and has had a very positive impact on communication within the school, monitoring of attendance and efficient collation of house examinations
- A programme for literacy and numeracy is being put in place with the help of a designated Link teacher who is attending PDST seminars
- School policies are being reviewed on an on-going basis
- Making the allocation and effectiveness of Posts of Responsibility more appropriate to the changing and development needs of the school is currently on-going

- The Board of Management would like to highlight the enormous contribution that teachers give in the provision of extra-curricular activities and the benefits that accrue.