

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

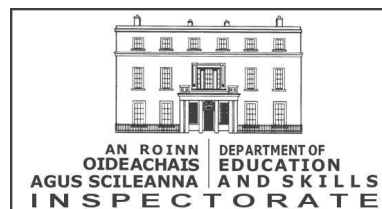
**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Lucan Community College  
Esker Drive, Lucan, County Dublin  
Roll number: 70080T**

**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 Lucan Community College. 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***

Lucan Community College is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, having opened in 1987 to replace the vocational school that was founded in the 1950s. The school operates under the trusteeship of Co. Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC). The school, which is co-educational, strives to be inclusive and currently caters for 824 students who come from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds. A range of subjects and programmes are offered to support the needs of the students.

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

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

- The board of management has adopted a significant and proactive role in leadership of the school. Members have received training and the board has demonstrated a high awareness of its statutory obligations.
- The principal and deputy principal demonstrate a very thorough, considered and professional approach to their work and provide clear leadership to the entire school community.
- Teachers demonstrate a professional approach to their work and are caring of their students. There is a good sense of ownership across the school of all aspects of the school's work and a culture of distributed leadership is evident.
- Students demonstrated a sense of pride in their school. The active students' council, the *Gluais* team and the recently introduced prefects contribute to the empowering of students.
- Teaching, which is largely teacher directed, is solid and examples of very good and innovative practice are apparent.

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

- It is recommended that the board put in place arrangements to provide instruction for the minimum required twenty-eight hours in line with circular M29/95 at an early date.
- Subject departments' focus should be extended to planning for defined improvements, to include how each subject can contribute to students' literacy and numeracy development and how to make best use of the enhanced information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure.

- To build on existing good practice, a description of what constitutes good teaching, in the modern context, should be explored and recorded and a coherent and planned approach to developing practice in the agreed direction should be implemented.

## **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 of Lucan Community College is properly constituted. All board members have received training for their roles and the board has demonstrated a high awareness of its statutory obligations. The board liaises extensively with Co. Dublin VEC from which it receives appropriate support and guidance. Decision making is by consensus and evidence suggests that issues dealt with by the board are examined and debated thoroughly and with the best interests of the school and its students as the most important determining factor.

The board has adopted a significant leadership role and its priorities for development indicate a high awareness of the present context of the school and its future needs and are indicative of the proactive manner in which the board deals with its responsibilities. Consultation with staff, parents and students in the planning process is good.

The board communicates well with the partners. In order to enhance communication and the spirit of partnership in the school further, it is suggested that the board issue an agreed report to stakeholders following its meetings and that it meets formally with the students' council to explore areas of mutual interest or concern.

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 board has demonstrated a high awareness of education developments at national level and is leading the process of planning for change. It is committed to providing the best possible educational experience for students in an appropriate environment and there is consequent ongoing review and development of policies and procedures and significant progress has been demonstrated in all areas of activity.

Currently, the code of behaviour and the enrolment policy are being reviewed. It is recommended that the diverse documents that comprise the code of behaviour be rationalised and compiled into a single comprehensive document. Planning for literacy and numeracy initiatives and for implementing the revised Junior Certificate programme has started as has planning for extending the school in view of the increased number of enrolments anticipated. The class-group arrangements for junior cycle students are under review and ways to promote increased parental involvement are being examined. The board is also considering the ongoing effects of the moratorium on posts of responsibility.

Examination of the school timetable indicates a shortfall of twenty minutes in the provision of instruction time to students. It is recommended that the board put in place arrangements to provide instruction for the minimum required twenty-eight hours in line with circular M29/95 at an early date.

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

### **Leadership of staff**

The senior management team is relatively new and both principal and deputy principal have availed of appropriate training. The principal and deputy principal demonstrate a very thorough, considered and professional approach to their work and have good complementary skills. They work very well as a team, provide clear leadership to the entire school community and are committed to an agenda of school self-evaluation leading to school improvement. Both maintain a high visibility on the school corridors.

Morale amongst staff members is high; teachers are well motivated and demonstrate a professional approach to their work. The teaching staff is very supportive of senior management, a high level of collegiality and co-operation was obvious and teachers placed a high value on the work of colleagues. There is a good sense of ownership across the school of all aspects of the school's work. The weekly staff newsletter is a commendable means of keeping all staff members up to date with ongoing activities and developments. Teachers were well prepared for their classes and they dealt with students in a caring and supportive manner. A high priority is placed on staff continuous professional development (CPD). Members of the teaching staff are encouraged to facilitate and lead projects in the school.

A culture of distributed leadership is evident through the middle-management structure and year heads and other post holders work hard to successfully fulfil a variety of curricular, pastoral and administrative roles. Post holders are accountable to the board of management for the performance of their duties. Programme co-ordinators work hard to manage their respective programmes and to support students.

At senior management and staff level, very well organised and consultative school development planning procedures contribute substantially to school development and to distributed leadership across the school's areas of activity. Staff are enabled and encouraged to take a lead role in and to engage in the planning processes and they contribute significantly to school development.

Care of students is managed through a system of year heads and class tutors. The work of the year heads, both the principal and those who hold assistant principal posts, is significantly augmented by the work of the class tutors whose role is not related to a post of responsibility. There is a clear system of internal referrals, for both disciplinary and pastoral issues, and contacts are maintained with external voluntary and statutory agencies. The work of the guidance and learning-support departments contributes to student care and regular meetings of year heads and others ensures that appropriate interventions are put in place and monitored as necessary.

Learning-support and resource allocations are appropriately used. Class groups are arranged in junior cycle to enable supports to be concentrated where most needed and the model used to support students with additional needs is based on a combination of team teaching, individual and small-group tuition, as appropriate and with the support of a team of committed special needs assistants.

Subject department and programme plans are in place and subject departments have prepared schedules for the teaching of all courses. In order to progress this work, it is recommended that attention be extended to planning for defined improvements. A particular focus should be placed on how each subject can contribute to students' literacy and numeracy development and there should be close liaison with the learning-support department. Subject departments should identify the significant strengths that can be built on and areas where improvement is required. The process of analysing certificate examination results, which is being extended to all subject departments, will add to the evidence base and will assist in setting targets regarding examination attainment. In

addition, the focus on learning outcomes, as seen in some subject department plans, and planning for the use of the enhanced information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure should feature in all subject department plans.

### **Leadership of students**

The school operates an inclusive admissions policy with clear criteria for enrolment of students. An appropriate transfer programme, based on information gathered from the primary schools and from parents, supports incoming first-year students. Students are assigned to one of two bands. Currently, one band comprises three mixed-ability classes while the other contains two class groups, a smaller one where extensive additional supports are provided to students with additional needs and a larger one in which supports may also be targeted. This arrangement continues throughout junior cycle. It is commendable that the full range of subjects and levels remains available to students in all bands and classes.

In the current school year, on entering senior cycle, all students follow the Transition Year (TY) programme and then choose between the Leaving Certificate (Established) (LCE) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes when entering fifth year. In alternate years, students may access the LCA programme directly as it is offered every second year. The option of following the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme is available to students following the LCE programme. Appropriate provision for Guidance is in place. Parents and students are well supported in a manner that is balanced between transition stages, junior and senior cycle needs and individual and group work.

Subject option bands, at junior and senior cycle, are well managed in order to maximise students' choices and to ensure that students, as far as possible, are offered their preferred subjects. Student attendance and retention rates are very good. The school is proactive in encouraging and monitoring student attendance. The range of subjects and programmes offered ensures that the students' educational experiences are fulfilling, challenging and appropriate to their needs. Timetabling of the various subjects is well managed. However, it is recommended that, on occasion in some subjects, the distribution of class periods across the school week be optimised.

Strong student-management routines were evident during the inspection. There was good order on the corridors at all times, students behaved responsibly and with courtesy and demonstrated a sense of pride in their school. An active students' council serves to represent the student body and has been consulted on a range of school policies. The council has been instrumental in bringing about a number of improvements. The *Gluais* team plays a prominent and commendable role in supporting first-year students. A senior prefect system has recently been introduced. However, the remit of this system is still under development. It is recommended that the prefects be assisted in developing a constitution and be given a clear, obvious and relevant role.

Parent-teacher meetings, in-house examinations and reports to students' homes are all well managed. A variety of means are used to maintain contact with parents in general and the support of the active parents' council has been very useful. The teaching staff is commended for supporting an extensive range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities, sporting, cultural and academic, to promote the holistic development of students. Success across a variety of themes and activities is recognised, shared and celebrated.

### **2.3 Management of facilities**

School facilities are very well maintained. The school is warm and welcoming. All rooms were clean, appropriately equipped, well maintained and fit for purpose. Extensive displays of photographs were evidence of the extent to which the school values its students and celebrates success. The displays of charts and posters were good in some of the resource

areas and classrooms. Overall, however, the potential for creating attractive and print-rich displays is under realised and it is recommended that more attention be paid to promoting and illustrating subjects by this means.

The school grounds are attractive and well maintained and give the school an attractive appearance from the outside. The school has recently joined the *Green Schools* initiative and is currently working towards its first green flag. The entire school community is to be congratulated for the manner of upkeep of the school and its grounds.

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

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

The quality of teaching and learning was good in the majority of lessons observed and very good in some with elements of very good practice evident in all lessons. In particular, very good practice was evident in the lessons where team teaching was observed. High expectations by teachers for student engagement, behaviour and attainment were evident and students worked hard to meet these expectations. The strong classroom routines observed reflected the good level of order throughout the school. Classroom management was good in all lessons, lessons were well paced and there was very good rapport between teachers and students. The quality of teacher-student interactions was best in those lessons where more student-centred methodologies predominated; while active learning was a feature of many classrooms, the use of teacher-led methodologies was significant.

Lesson content was always appropriate to the syllabus and to the needs of the students and teachers were working to planned schedules. The practice of sharing lesson objectives with students at the outset and reviewing the key points of the lesson at the close was a feature of many lessons. However, overall practice was uneven and it is recommended that a consistent approach to sharing and reviewing lesson objectives be implemented. The quality of differentiation, which was mainly achieved through teacher circulation, questioning and the provision of individual attention to students, was generally good and students' individual learning needs were generally well accommodated. The use of questioning was good with some very good practice apparent in some lessons. Such very good practice was characterised by the use of directed, higher-order, challenging questions, in an inclusive manner, while affording students time to think and compose their answers.

The use of ICT by teachers was very good in most lessons, as appropriate, and no doubt will improve further as the new technology beds in. It is suggested that some thought be given as to how best to promote the use of ICT by students in the classroom.

Practices regarding giving and correcting homework were good. Students' journals were well used to record homework and the use of positive comments by teachers is commended; affirmation of students was frequently observed, especially for in-class effort. Some very good individual practice in providing affirming and developmental feedback when correcting the students' written work was noted. The provision of constructive feedback by teachers as standard practice across all subjects is encouraged as a means of promoting improvement. Elements of *Assessment for Learning* were apparent in some lessons but there was no evidence of its systematic use. Further development over time, at whole-school level, is recommended.

Overall, teaching and learning are solid, with examples of very good and innovative practice apparent. However, there is scope for greater use of student-centred methodologies in many classrooms. As stated, teachers' CPD has been well managed and there is an obvious desire to improve teaching and, therefore, learning. However, a vision of what

improvements and outcomes are desired has not been articulated. It is recommended that these issues are explored at whole-staff and subject department level and that a consensus is reached on a definition or description of what constitutes good teaching in the modern context. A coherent and planned approach can then be adopted to improving teaching and learning.

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

##### ***4.1 Management***

The board is commended for the strong leadership demonstrated in overseeing the school's response to subject inspection reports and in monitoring progress in implementing recommendations. A number of changes and improvements are noted, for example the increased provision of History to TY students and the development of schemes of work by subject departments.

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

Observation suggests that there have been considerable improvements in learning and teaching, for example learning outcomes are being shared with students at the commencement of many lessons and the provision of quality feedback to students on their written work is apparent in many classrooms, though more so in those subjects where previous subject inspections had been carried out. Much good work has been completed in relation to preparing time-bound schedules for the teaching of courses by subject departments.

In order to support consistent good practice across the school, it is suggested that recommendations in future subject inspection reports, when examined at whole-school level, lead to identifying, sharing and the systematic implementation of good practice across all subject departments, as relevant.

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

##### ***5.1***

The board of management has demonstrated its capacity to proactively examine, review and develop the systems and procedures by which the school is led and managed. This is especially evident from the priorities it has identified for the development of the school into the future. Evidence demonstrates that robust and mature debate precedes decision making. The work of the board is mirrored in the reflective manner that the senior management team exercises its leadership function. The senior management team has demonstrated the necessary skills, knowledge and outlook to lead and manage a complex and constantly changing organisation.

The school development planning process, as implemented in Lucan Community College, encourages and enables the teaching staff to engage in reflection and evaluation on the needs of the school and its students and to be proactive in working towards change. To a lesser extent, consultation with the students' and parents' councils has also contributed to reflective processes.

The school, at all levels, has demonstrated a substantial capacity for improvement and is well poised to further develop its potential as a high-quality learning organisation as it moves into the future.



## 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, Staff, Students and Parents of Lucan Community College welcome this very positive Whole School Evaluation - Management, Leadership and Learning Report.

The board is particularly pleased with the following findings:

- The professional approach of teachers to their work, the high level of collegiality and co-operation, the recognition of the high morale amongst staff and the fact that teachers deal with students in a caring and supportive manner. The Board commends all teachers for their role in the pastoral care and referral system including the guidance staff and the special-needs assistants in this regard.
- The responsibility, courtesy and sense of pride of students in the school and the importance of student leadership in the successful running of the school.
- The support of our active parents' council is recognised and the importance to the school of having good communication with parents is noted.
- The extensive range of extra-curricular activities provided voluntarily by the staff and their importance in providing holistic development for students.
- The high expectations for student engagement, behaviour and attainment.
- The fact that the Board of Management communicates well with the partners and deals with its responsibilities in a proactive manner.
- The very good support for senior management from the teaching staff.
- The high priority placed on continuous professional development (CPD).
- Recognition of the Post holders and all staff who take on additional responsibilities, who work hard and successfully fulfil a variety of roles.
- The entire school community is to be congratulated for the manner of upkeep of the school and its grounds. The Board commends the caretaking and ancillary staff in this regard but recognise the fact that it is very much a whole school community effort that leads to this success.
- The commitment to policy development and school improvement with a focus on reflective practice.
- The recognition by the Inspectorate that the school is well poised to further develop its potential as a high-quality learning organisation. The Board is confident that any further development is based on the very firm foundations that have been laid over the twenty-five years of the school's history.

## **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 is committed to considering all the recommendations contained in the report and to engaging with the staff, students and parents to discern appropriate actions to be taken as a result.

Progress has already been made in the following areas:

- The Board has considered the WSE-MLL recommendation that arrangements to provide instruction for the minimum required twenty-eight hours are put in place at an early date and steps are being taken to meet this recommendation.
- Recent subject department planning included a focus on literacy and numeracy and a whole school focus on keywords and formulae has been adopted for 2012/13. A paired reading programme has also been initiated with our 1<sup>st</sup> year students. Co Dublin VEC have produced a detailed set of strategies for supporting language, literacy and numeracy in its schools and staff will engage in CPD to support further developments in this area. The process of school self-evaluation will inform this process.
- The Board has already met with representatives from the Students Council and this in addition to continued regular reports to Board meetings will strengthen the communication between the Board and the Student Council.
- The Board had already decided to initiate an agreed report to be issued after each meeting prior to the inspection process and welcomes the suggestion made in the report. Agreed reports from Board meetings are now published on the school website.
- The Code of Behaviour is being reviewed in line with the Inspection recommendations.
- Staff members have discussed the recommendations in relation to teaching and learning and are developing approaches that best combine the strong classroom routines, good classroom management, very good rapport between teacher and students and teacher-led methodologies with assessment for learning strategies, increased ICT usage and student-centred methodologies. Teachers recognise the value of a wide range of methodologies and are aware of the situational appropriateness of various approaches. Staff, through CPD, will work towards developing a description of good teaching, learning and assessment in the modern context to include planning for defined improvements.
- Recommendations in future subject inspection reports will continue to be examined at whole school level leading to identifying, sharing and systematic implementation of good practice across all subject departments.
- The Board has clear priorities regarding different year groups and there are clear procedures for gathering subject and individual requests as part of the timetable planning process. This, coupled with on-going review and evaluation, informs the design of the timetable. The Board will consider the inspection report remarks in the light of its priorities.

The Board commends each member of the school community for their role in ensuring that the school has been successful over the last twenty-five years. The Board welcomes the report from the inspectorate team as a sign-post to guide the school as it continues and develops its role as a high-quality learning organisation into the future.