

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Coláiste an Chreagáin
Mountbellew, County Galway
Roll number: 71290M**

Date of inspection: 10 May 2013



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
AGUS SCILEANNA** | **DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
AND SKILLS**
INSPECTORATE

Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in May, 2013 in Coláiste an Chreagáin. 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

Coláiste an Chreagáin, established in 1932 as Saint Jarlath's Vocational School, operates under the auspices of County Galway Vocational Educational Committee (VEC). The school is one of three post-primary schools within a threemile radius. The school serves a large rural catchment area. The mainstream enrolment stands at sixty-two, with a further twenty-five students enrolled in adult and continuing education courses. A positive school environment based on the provision of a holistic education, respectful relationships and the affirmation of students and teachers is central to the school's inclusive ethos.

This small progressive school has been active in seeking to change its traditional profile to that of a school which serves the educational needs of the entire community. The school with the active support of the VEC caters well for the needs of all its post-primary and continuing education students. The school continues to examine the potential for increased enrolment.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The school is inclusive, student-centred, and progressive.
- The board of management is well informed and is supportive of the school.
- The parents' association supports the school actively.
- All stakeholders demonstrated an agreed vision for the school and articulated agreed priorities during the evaluation.
- Increasing the enrolment figures and maintaining a broad curriculum are key priorities to ensure sustainability.
- The principal and deputy principal form a hardworking and highly effective leadership team.
- The generous and diligent commitment by staff to the provision of a broad curriculum as well as various extracurricular activities is laudable.
- The post of responsibility structure is in need of review.
- A commendable range of student support structures and various interventions to support student welfare is in place.
- The role of coordinator of special educational needs is currently underdeveloped.

- The high quality of teaching and learning observed ranged from good to very good with some exceptionally good practice noted in terms of student-centred activities in some lessons.
- Students benefit from a high level of personalised attention from teachers as a result of small class sizes.
- The school has engaged in various school self-evaluation (SSE) activities and demonstrates very good capacity for change and improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development

- A strategic time-bound plan to include specific action plans to advance the school's developmental priorities should be formulated.
- A review of the duties assigned to posts of responsibility should be undertaken and a formal review of how they have been fulfilled should be conducted at the end of each year.
- The coordination of resource and learning support activities should be improved through enhanced communication and the further development of the role associated with this responsibility.
- Assessment for learning (AfL) strategies should be further implemented by all teachers.
- The school should develop procedures for regular review of its health and safety statement in line with current guidelines and legislation.

QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The VEC provides an enabling and supportive framework for the school. The board of management is well informed and very supportive of the school. Educational expertise, strong community links, and long-serving commitment are key features of the board's membership. The board is committed to the school's ongoing development and oversees school planning and policy development.

There is very good communication between senior management, the board and the VEC and good informal communication between the board and other stakeholders. As a means of communicating the school's priorities and its progress in their achievement, the principal's reports to the board should be further developed into an annual composite report on the operation and performance of the school and be made available to the school community. Communication with the various stakeholders could be further enhanced by means of an agreed report following board meetings. Positive links have been developing between the student council and the board. To further support school developments it is recommended that formalised meetings among the board and student council and the parents' association be scheduled occasionally.

In order to further increase the board's focus on teaching and learning, it should engage with the school's analysis of students' examination results in the context of national norms. The board should also seek progress reports on the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations from subject departments.

The parents' association is very active and well-informed and it demonstrates high capacity to support school developments into the future. Responses from student and parent questionnaires indicate very positive attitudes towards the school.

The various stakeholders expressed an agreed vision for the school and collectively they have identified a range of developmental priorities: promoting high standards of teaching and learning, increasing enrolment figures, maintaining a broad curriculum and a wide range of extracurricular activities, developing school accommodation, celebrating student success and further developing the use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the school. These priorities reflect the forward-thinking focus of the school and significant progress has been made towards achieving many aspects of them.

To support the management of change, the board should oversee the development of a strategic time-bound plan to advance the achievement of its identified priorities. This should link together the plans and policies already developed, or in train, and set realistic targets for the achievement of identified priorities within specific time frames. A central focus on teaching and learning should form a key part of this development plan. Furthermore, action plans should then be developed to support the achievement of targets and performance indicators should be designed to monitor progress. This approach would facilitate a more focused process of review and self-evaluation and enable the school community to establish more readily its achievements and areas where further work is required. This work should become a key component in the school's self-evaluation process.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal are very committed to the school and together they form a highly effective senior management team. Both discharge an extensive range of duties and their substantial involvement as classroom teachers exemplifies the highly visible role they have in leading learning. Their individual talents and abilities are complementary and their management style is open, collaborative and consultative. They work well in partnership, lead by example and have successfully driven and managed change across a number of areas of school life. Building leadership capacity among staff, promoting collaborative work practices and setting high expectations are key characteristics of their management style. A key priority for senior management is teaching and learning and the ongoing promotion of excellence and quality improvement. They are professional in the way they work and they set high standards for themselves, the teaching staff and the students. They promote good quality communication with all stakeholders.

A key strength of the school is its committed and hardworking staff who are afforded, and avail of, opportunities to lead many initiatives to support school improvement. Teachers demonstrate a strong sense of goodwill and care for students. A number of teachers are shared with other VEC schools and this creates challenges for the school. Good lines of communication have been developed across the school supported by regular staff meetings and an informative staff handbook.

Senior management is building capacity effectively and examples of distributed leadership include the tutor system, which operates on a voluntary basis and teachers' involvement in extracurricular activities. Leadership opportunities are embraced and the contribution of non-post holders is very significant and highly valued. There is a high level of engagement with continuing professional development (CPD), as a feature of the school's improvement agenda. The special needs assistants (SNAs), secretarial and caretaking staff make highly-valued contributions to the school.

The middle management team is a key structure in supporting senior management. A collaborative review of the post of responsibility structure is recommended based on school's current needs and developmental priorities. The review of posts should focus on devolving appropriate leadership roles to middle management and should allocate areas of

responsibility commensurate with the posts concerned. In line with best practice it is recommended that procedures be developed for structured reporting on the performance of duties to senior management and a yearly report to the board of management. When contracts for posts are next reviewed it should be ensured that the duties of each post are clearly defined and that staff members take ownership of same.

The school community is engaged in ongoing collaborative planning at both school level and subject department level. Senior management are key players on the school planning team thus ensuring that a number of priority areas are progressed simultaneously. The permanent section of the school plan is well developed and outlines the school's operating procedures and all policies ratified by the board. The systematic rolling review for policy development is commendable. The developmental section of the plan should be further expanded to include the school's planning cycles and should outline baseline data, record targets set and include action planning and ongoing monitoring and review.

The school operates an open and inclusive admission policy. Practices in relation to the management of students are very good and are facilitated through the school's code of behaviour. Very good standards of behaviour and respectful student-teacher relationships were evident during the evaluation. Student leadership is facilitated effectively through such mechanisms as the student council, the mentoring system, Health Promoting Schools and the Green Schools programme. Attendance, punctuality, retention and progression are closely monitored. The school is committed to implementing strategies to enhance attendance. Retention has increased significantly and progression to further studies has almost doubled since 2010.

Students' welfare and educational needs are at the heart of the school and regarded as a responsibility of all staff members. A commendable range of student-support structures exists and year heads and tutors play a pivotal role. This was endorsed by parents and students during the evaluation. Social, personal and health education (SPHE) and relationships and sexuality education (RSE) programmes are appropriately delivered. Good communication serves to consolidate a whole-school approach to student care. While the homework journal is well utilised and supports communication with home there is scope to further utilise it for positive affirmation. The existing academic monitoring system should be further developed so that students may have a more proactive role.

A guidance plan is in place and has been ratified by the board. A whole-school approach to guidance is evident and support is provided through a programme of personal, educational and vocational guidance. There are good supports for students and parents at various transition times. All subject teachers have an important role to play in advising on subject choice regarding their own subject areas especially at key stages in conjunction with the guidance counsellor.

The school has a substantial allocation of additional teaching hours for learning support (LS) and special educational needs (SEN). These additional hours are well managed by senior management. Flexible models of provision for additional educational needs exist. Students with special educational needs are very well cared for and the SNAs have a key role in promoting inclusive practices effectively. While an SEN team exists, the role of coordinator of special educational needs is currently underdeveloped and this should be addressed. The SEN team should review current practice with regard to SEN provision with a view to updating the existing SEN policy to ensure alignment with current guidelines and legislation.

The coordination of LS and SEN should be improved and further developed as follows: the provision of detailed information regarding individual students' learning needs should be clearly communicated to staff from the outset, there should be ongoing communication

between the coordinator of special educational needs and teachers giving additional support as well as mainstream teachers, and monitoring and reporting on students' progress should be formalised. Standardised testing is ongoing, however timely retesting of students is recommended. Individual Student Profiles (ISPs) have been started and should be further developed in a collaborative way.

The maintenance of a broad curriculum is an ongoing priority in the context of a small school. The school has developed creative ways of arranging classes which allows the school to offer a broad curriculum. The curriculum is reviewed regularly and the needs of students are central to all decision making. Teachers engage in various levels of extra teaching and they support students on a voluntary basis; this is commendable. The school has made strenuous efforts to broaden the curriculum and is committed to further exploring various ways of using modern technology to support the implementation of a broad curriculum. The school authorities are aware that the voluntary input of teachers is a major factor in sustaining its broad curriculum. The school needs to evaluate its capacity to continue to provide such a broad curriculum in the context of the resourcing available to it.

The school is in compliance with the minimum weekly instruction time requirement, as well as the overall number of instruction days available to students as outlined in the Circular M29/95, *Time in School*. Timetable construction is good and includes positive examples of concurrent timetabling of some subjects. The school's capacity to bring the number of class periods up to the minimum recommended level in a small number of optional subjects should be kept under review. Students should have access to a mathematics lesson and an English lesson per day in line with Circular 58/2011 and Circular 25/2012. While games are currently provided, provision should be made to plan and deliver an appropriate programme of Physical Education (PE) to all students. The school should continue to consider Transition Year (TY) as a possible option. A very good variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities contributes to students' holistic development. The spirit of collegiality and volunteerism demonstrated by teachers supports school activities well and the celebration of achievement is valued.

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*.

1.3 Management of facilities

The school benefits from its large grounds and playing fields. The current building is pleasant and while it serves the needs of learners adequately, there are shortcomings such as the absence of a general purpose room and of a specialist area for the teaching of Art. Management of school facilities and grounds is very good and school management addresses maintenance issues as they arise. The school should continue to explore the provision of facilities and accommodation to better meet the needs of the school population. The school should develop procedures for regular review of its health and safety statement in line with current guidelines and legislation.

The Green Flag award reflects the school's commitment to its environmental responsibilities. Provision of ICT facilities throughout the school is very good.

1. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

There was a very good standard of planning and preparation for the lessons observed and the choice and use of resources were effective. ICT was utilised well as a visual learning aid and to illustrate and explain concepts, however, there is scope to make more innovative use of ICT to support student learning.

Subject department planning is well developed. There is positive work in progress with regards to the development of detailed electronic schemes of work. Following the interpretation of certificate examination results each subject area submits reports on students' attainment to senior management to inform future planning. To further enhance subject planning and to support learning teachers should agree strategies for the use of AfL approaches leading to the implementation of a whole-school approach to AfL.

Positive learning environments and respectful interactions underpinned classroom atmosphere. High expectations were set for learning in almost all cases. In all lessons observed students' behaviour was exemplary and they engaged well in a cooperative manner. Small class sizes supported teachers in providing high levels of individual support tailored to students needs.

The quality of teaching and learning was, almost without exception, very good or good. In the most successful lessons learning outcomes were clear and in some cases these were reviewed at the end to consolidate student learning. This practice should be extended to all lessons. Lessons were generally well structured and sequenced in line with the planned learning outcomes. Highly commendable practice was noted in some lessons where a variety of methodologies to promote active student engagement and ongoing assessment of learning were evident. Highly effective practice was noted in some lessons, where both lower and higher-order questions were well distributed and a good level of formative feedback was provided to students to enable them to improve the quality of their work. There was scope in some lessons for teachers to make greater use of directed questioning throughout lessons.

In some lessons a few outstandingly good examples of differentiation were noted. However, there was scope in some lessons for the increased use of differentiated questioning strategies and extension activities to cater for the wide range of abilities evident. There was a good focus on key word strategies and subject terminology was explained, reinforced and integrated in some lessons. The potential to further develop students' literacy and numeracy skills should be explored in all subject areas.

High standards were set with regards to the setting and monitoring of homework. Students generally displayed good levels of knowledge, understanding and skills commensurate with their ability. The positive benefits of continuous assessment were evident and all subjects should be included going forward. Some very good practice was observed regarding the provision of formative feedback to students. It was evident from the presentation and quality of student work that high expectations are set for learning in these cases.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

The school has made very good progress in the implementation of recommendations made in previous evaluations related to whole-school provision. This is indicative of the high levels of support given by school management to subject provision.

3.2 Learning and teaching

In most subject areas good progress has been made in implementing recommendations related to teaching and learning. Given the pedagogical nature of many of the recommendations, continuing work is necessary to address them adequately into the future. Therefore such areas as strategies for supporting literacy development, planning for differentiation to support varying abilities and the implementation of AfL strategies should be further developed.

A whole-school approach to monitoring the implementation of existing and future recommendations and to assessing the impact of their implementation on other subject areas should be adopted.

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

The school demonstrates very good capacity to initiate change and drive school improvement. It has been progressive in developing its curriculum, subject planning, accommodation, library facilities and its ICT facilities. The very good leadership of the principal has been central to the development and progression of the school's current planning priorities. The school has engaged in a commendable variety of self-evaluation activities across various aspects of school life. These include parent and student surveys, staff focus groups, curriculum review, policy review, and analysis of examination results. The analysis of the data gathered is used to inform the school's developmental priorities. Action planning should be formalised and further developed to support the implementation of the school's developmental priorities.

The school is proactive in anticipating and responding to the evolving needs of students and is very well placed to implement the recommendations of this report.

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 is extremely pleased to welcome this very positive Whole School Evaluation Report. We are delighted that it is such a positive endorsement of the school and an affirmation of the tremendous work carried out by everyone involved in the school community.

The Board is particularly pleased that the Report identified and acknowledged:

- The inclusive, student-centred ethos of the school with students' welfare and educational needs at the heart of the school
- The school is progressive and serves the educational needs of the entire community
- The quality of teaching and learning was, almost without exception, very good or good
- Positive learning environments and respectful interactions underpinned classroom atmosphere
- High expectations were set for learning, students' behaviour was exemplary and they engaged well in a co-operative manner
- Teachers provided high levels of individual support tailored to student's needs
- There was generous and diligent commitment by staff to the provision of a broad curriculum
- There is very good standard of planning and preparation for lessons
- Provision of ICT facilities throughout the school is very good
- A commendable range of student-support structures exists and Year Heads and Tutors play a pivotal role
- There are good supports for students and parents at various transition times
- A very good variety of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities contributes to students' holistic development
- The school benefits from its large grounds and playing fields
- Retention has increased significantly, progression to further studies has almost doubled since 2010 and the celebration of achievement is valued.
- The school community is engaged in ongoing collaborative planning and the systematic rolling review for policy development is commendable
- The school has engaged in a commendable variety of self-evaluation and activities
- The Principal and Deputy Principal are very committed to the school and form a highly effective senior management team
- A key priority for senior management is teaching and learning and the ongoing promotion of excellence. They set high standards for themselves, the teaching staff and the students. The middle management team is a key structure in supporting senior management.
- A key strength of the school is its committed and hardworking staff. Teachers demonstrate a strong sense of goodwill and care for students
- The spirit of collegiality and volunteerism demonstrated by teachers supports school activities well
- There is a high level of engagement with continuing professional development – CDP
- The Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), secretarial and caretaking staff make highly valued contributions to the school.
- The Parents Association is very active, well-informed and demonstrates high capacity to support school developments
- The Board of Management is well informed, supportive and brings educational expertise, strong community links and long-serving commitment through its stakeholding

- The VEC (ETB) provides an enabling and supportive framework for the school.
- Good quality Communications with all stakeholders is promoted.

The board is delighted that the Inspectorate acknowledged the school's very good capacity to initiate change and drive school improvement.

It is encouraging that the Inspectorate also acknowledged that the school has made very good progress in the implementation of recommendations made in previous evaluations related to whole-school provision.

The board wishes to commend the Inspectorate on a very thorough evaluation of the school and wishes to thank them for the very professional, consultative and encouraging manner in which they carried out the evaluation.

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 acknowledges the recommendations in the report and is committed to the implementation of the recommendations.

The board values the contribution that the implementation of these recommendations will make in informing future ongoing collaborative planning and the implementation of the school's developmental priorities.

Much progress has taken place since the inspection in May 2013 and in response to the recommendations the school has initiated the following actions:

- The development of an appropriate plan for P.E. was undertaken in September 2013 to further broaden the strands incorporated under the umbrella of the P.E. programme and developments will be ongoing
- A Health and Safety Audit of the school was carried out on the 21st October 2013 in order to further develop the School Health and Safety Statement in line with current guidelines and legislation
- A schedule to formalize meetings between the Board of Management and the Student Council has been put in place in October 2013
- A designated IT Co-ordinator role has been established in September 2013 to further implement the scope and integration of ICT across the school community. This role will be integrated into the reviewed duties of the Posts of Responsibilities.
- A preliminary review of the Posts of Responsibility at staff level was initiated in October 2013 and a collaborative review will be ongoing for the academic year 2013/2014
- Staff have agreed whole school strategies for the further implementation of Assessment for Learning (AFL) in October 2013 which will continue to be developed, monitored and reviewed.