

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Roscommon Community College
Lisnamult, Roscommon
Roll number: 72290R**

Date of inspection: 13 November 2013



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
AGUS SCILEANNA** | **DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
AND SKILLS**
I N S P E C T O R A T E

Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in November 2013 in Roscommon 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, 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

Roscommon Community College is one of three post-primary schools located in Roscommon town. The school operates under the auspices of the recently established Galway, Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB). In the past ten years the school has experienced considerable change, especially in terms of a significant increase in enrolment and the recruitment of many new teachers to replace teachers who retired. The student population is diverse, reflecting the school's status as the only co-educational second-level education provider in Roscommon town and its recognised commitment to meeting students' learning needs. In addition to mainstream provision at second level, the school provides a small range of Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department's action plan for educational inclusion. There are currently 225 students enrolled in the school.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The senior management team is very effective, having a vision for the school's development and the capacity to progress the school's developmental priorities.
- There is an evident high level of goodwill towards the senior management team who provide effective leadership to the whole-school community.
- The school's staff has engaged positively with the change agenda that the board of management and the senior management team has progressed in recent years.
- Considerable work has been done to develop the school's systems and processes including those for special educational needs (SEN).
- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in almost all lessons, with excellent practice evident in a number of lessons.
- In a few lessons there was scope for development in the structure of the lessons and the strategies used to promote students' engagement.
- The progress made by the school in developing its DEIS plan is one clear indicator that the capacity for self-review and evaluation exists at school level.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The school should develop an e-learning plan that takes a comprehensive look at the needs of the school and strategies for the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) as a tool for teaching and learning.
- Teachers should ensure that lessons incorporate teaching methodologies that support differentiation and actively engage students of all ability levels.
- The very good assessment and literacy strategies used by some teachers should be shared within and across subject departments and be included in subject plans.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The school's board of management is recently appointed and many of the board members are new to the role. During the evaluation the members of the board demonstrated an active interest in the school and its development. The board is anxious that its work should enhance the operation of the school and support the wider school community. In that respect all board members are advised to avail of training opportunities to be provided by the GRETB.

To date the work of the board and that of recent boards has focused on issues relating to student welfare and the development of the school's curriculum provision. The board in cooperation with the senior management team has a view for the development of the school that includes maximising the use of the school's resources, both human and physical, and developing mainstream provision to cater for 300 second-level students. Among other priorities identified by the board are developing links with local third level providers and maximising the potential created by the school's facilities, in particular its working farm, for the development of curriculum-related activities and programmes. This is very relevant in the context of the schools existing provision of the Transition Year (TY) programme and PLC courses in horticulture. Additionally, the board has also been considering the potential that the facilities may provide in the context of upcoming changes in junior cycle. The developmental priorities identified by the board are indicative of the board's overall aim of building capacity across the school to meet the needs of current and future students.

The parents' association works in partnership with the school, particularly in supporting the management of school events including the school show. The board and staff are cognisant of the important role played by the parents' association. The school's website provides an important means by which it can communicate with a wider audience including the main parent body. In addition, the student council works very effectively in supporting students in the school.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

This is a well-run school. The principal and deputy principal work very effectively in managing the school. Working in close partnership they provide very effective leadership to the school community. They set high standards, have a strong work ethic and lead by example. Having guided the school through a period of significant change, most especially the retirement of many staff, they have concentrated on developing the school across a number of key areas. Most specifically these areas include developing the school's systems and processes, expanding student numbers and recruiting new teachers. They have led, and continue to lead, a whole-school focus on school improvement. In this respect they have been well-supported by staff.

The collaborative leadership of the senior management team includes a shared vision for the school's development supported by agreement on roles and responsibilities. At the time of the evaluation the deputy principal was in an acting capacity. The ease with which the acting deputy principal had absorbed the duties and responsibilities associated with the post is indicative of the effective management systems and good working relationships that exist at school level.

This high functioning senior management team has significant support from staff. The middle management layer of the school is very small and in addition to the good work done by those teachers with posts of responsibility the school benefits from an exceptional level of volunteerism among all staff. Across the school, staff members take on additional duties that incorporate all aspects of school life including student welfare and administration as well as teaching and learning.

The school's staff is committed to promoting a positive school environment and improving attainment. The school also benefits from a culture of personal and professional development among staff that centres on supporting school priorities for development. Many staff including senior management have engaged in professional development up to and including doctoral studies.

In recent years the school has become more focused in developing its DEIS planning processes, through target setting and data gathering across a number of areas. The main focus to date has been to develop a whole-school focus on promoting improvements in attendance, attainment and students' literacy skills. In respect of each of these three areas, improvements are ongoing with significant improvements evident in attendance in recent years. Among the other DEIS planning priorities where development is ongoing is in the area of improving parental involvement in the school. The school is advised to maintain its focus on developing this priority as involving parents actively in their children's learning will be critical in advancing other DEIS priorities including attainment and progression.

The school offers a broad range of subjects to both junior and senior cycle students. The process of curriculum review is driven by the school's senior management team and involves discussion at staff level. The driver for curricular change has been the rapid expansion of the school's student numbers and a recognition of the need to frame the curriculum to meet the needs of the school's changing student profile. The expanded second-level curriculum that has resulted from this increase in student and teacher numbers has enabled the school to compete on a more even basis with other second-level providers in the area.

The revised curriculum provides good opportunities to meet most students' needs and interests. It also provides a timely opportunity to consider reviewing the supports available to students in making subject choices. The school has a flexible approach to accommodating students' subject options including during the taster programme in first year. However, given the small number of students in some senior-cycle optional subjects, the school should remain cognisant of how it will need to work within the resources available to it in order to maintain and maximise subject choice for students into the future.

More recently the school has initiated developments to extend opportunities for higher attaining students through the focused use of resources. Among the interventions is the provision of dedicated higher-level classes for students in key subjects including Mathematics. This is consistent with the objectives of the school's DEIS plan. The plan in addition to focusing on improvements for students of weaker abilities should also include indicators for promoting attainment among more able students. An improvement in higher-

level participation rates in key curricular subjects in recent years indicates that progress in relation to these outcomes is ongoing and that there has been a degree of success.

The school provides regular opportunities for student teachers to complete their teaching practice modules within the school. This work should be further strengthened by the development of a whole-school policy and subject department protocols for the mentoring of new and trainee teachers.

The school's management is commended for its decision to change the way in which junior cycle classes are organised. In recent years junior cycle class groups have been organised on a gender basis. However, as the number of girls enrolling in the school has increased this has allowed a phased change to mixed-gender groupings. In conjunction with the school's approach to mixed-ability groupings this is a positive step in promoting the objective of improved attainment through class provision.

Overall, the school is advised to monitor and evaluate, as part of its self-evaluation process, the curricular interventions and changes that have been introduced to improve attainment. In doing so the senior management team should reflect on the needs of staff in meeting objectives and on the supports that are required to ensure success. Areas to consider in this regard include supports around raising student expectations and ensuring the appropriate range of teaching methodologies are used.

The promotion of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities is an area of ongoing development in the school's provision. Traditionally co-curricular activities have centred on individual subject departments and reflected the strengths and interests of the subject teachers. In extending the learning experiences beyond the formal classroom, subject teachers have endeavoured to engage students' learning through activities that include projects, competitions, field trips, seminars and outside visits, including theatre visits.

More recently the school's management has encouraged the development of a whole-school approach towards improving the range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. The extension of subject options, for example the introduction of Music, has provided the impetus for the production of a school show which had been greatly supported by the involvement of parents.

The school's provision for students with additional educational needs is very good. There is a considerable number of students who receive additional support and the actions of management and teachers in providing for the needs of these students shows great commitment and understanding. It was evident that the school has adopted a range of inclusive practices to meet the needs of its student population. To begin with, there are well-established links with the main feeder primary schools. In-coming first-year students are assessed and the results of these assessments, along with information provided by feeder primary schools, are collated to identify students who require additional support. The special educational needs team work together to profile the students and develop individual education plans (IEPs). Detailed records are maintained regarding the allocation of additional support to students. The documentation provided by the SEN department to the inspectors clearly sets out how each student who had been allocated additional support was receiving that support.

The school has a number of staff with specialist qualifications who work closely together and as part of the SEN team in planning for provision. Systems and procedures are in place to provide teachers with essential information and advice on the needs and abilities of the students in their classes who are receiving additional support.

The school's management has a very hands-on approach to student care and, given the school size, is able to respond quickly on a needs basis to issues as they arise. As the school expands and the needs change it will be necessary to formalise the care structures. The work that is ongoing on the development of policy and structures will support this. Care must also be taken to retain the positive features of the system as it currently exists at school level, and which parents and students indicate is a very positive feature of the school.

The school benefits from the support to its care systems provided by the availability of a home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator and School Completion Programme (SCP) co-ordinator. Part of their work is to co-ordinate the range of supports they can provide to the care team to support individual cases. Senior management's understanding of the appropriate linkages and interactions of the range of supports available to the school has been critically important in ensuring that the supports provided by HSCL and SCP work effectively in targeting the priority areas and in supporting the DEIS action plans.

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*.

1.2 Management of facilities

Among the board's priorities is the further development of the school's facilities to cater for the increased student numbers and the wider curriculum provided. In this respect the school has recently completed a new music room and additional classroom facilities. ICT provision is very good throughout the school and with this in mind work is beginning on developing an e-learning strategy. Further development of the school's facilities, especially its sports facilities, remain a priority for the board and this is consistent with the school's emphasis on providing Physical Education (PE) for all students and enhancing its extra-curricular programme. The school has a health and safety statement. Risk assessments, while carried out regularly in the sciences, should be extended to all classrooms.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Good progress has been made in relation to the development of subject plans and the associated schemes of work for each subject. Generally, both subject planning and lesson planning was of a consistently high standard. Attainment in certificate examinations is being monitored at subject department level and compared against the national norms for the subjects.

In almost all lessons observed the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good. In a number of lessons some excellent approaches were observed where teachers' practice successfully engaged students through active teaching and learning opportunities. The successful strategies observed included negotiated learning outcomes, well-structured group work, student-led activities and teacher and student demonstration.

Overall, there was variety in lesson activities and good balance was achieved between teacher-led and student-led activities. The use of learning outcomes and lesson summaries were observed in most lessons and this approach provided a useful framework for focusing on students' learning. Students worked purposefully during lessons though there is scope to provide increased opportunities for cooperative learning.

Given the expansion in student numbers in the school in recent years, there are variances in class size between junior and senior cycle with smaller class size in senior cycle especially in optional subjects. In almost all cases teaching methodologies were correctly adapted to class size. The increase in student numbers and the broader ability range within class groups means that teachers will have to continue to adapt their teaching strategies, in particular to ensure upward differentiation to challenge more able students. Teachers are very cognisant of students with additional educational needs, though there is need to adapt SEN teaching strategies more effectively into mainstream classroom settings.

Questioning was frequently used in lessons to assess students' learning and as a technique for differentiation. Some very good examples of student questioning were observed often accompanied by positive oral feedback to students on their contributions.

A whole-school approach to the use of homework as a core element of reinforcing and assessing students' learning was evident. In a small number of lessons exemplary assessment for learning approaches were applied by the teachers in the evaluation of students' learning. Among the very effective approaches observed were teacher-developed criteria for students' use of self-assessment and peer assessment approaches. Also observed were instances where teachers used comment-only feedback or where the teacher developed subject-specific performance criteria references for students. Otherwise corrections were mainly whole-class with some use of peer assessment. Further work is required on developing a whole-school approach to comment-based assessment of students' work.

Classrooms were print-rich learning environments with a clear emphasis on literacy development. While the physical learning environment was adapted for pair and group work, the full benefit of these active-learning approaches was not always availed of.

Teachers were observed to be affirming and pastoral in their interactions with students, both in the classroom and in the wider school environment. In addition, there was a very high level of self-discipline, organisation and behaviour observed in students' movement within the school.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Good progress has been made in implementing recommendations from previous inspection reports that have a whole-school dimension.

3.2 Learning and teaching

A number of areas in relation to teaching and learning were selected from previous inspection reports for specific follow-up during the evaluation. In most lessons learning outcomes were used to introduce and recapitulate the lesson content.

In the majority of lessons ICT was used interactively to engage students with the lesson content. In addition, many lessons had a range of effective strategies used to promote students' literacy skills. In reviewing the range of homework tasks assigned, inspectors judged that in the majority of lessons the homework assigned consolidated and enhanced students' learning and skills in the subject. While, in around half of the lessons observed the content was differentiated appropriately to meet the varying needs of the ability range within the class group, there is scope to further develop these techniques.

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

There is a high degree of involvement by senior management and the teaching staff in the process of school improvement. Therefore, given that there is a well-developed culture of striving for continuous improvement, the capacity for school improvement is very strong.

Up to now the principal and deputy principal have been central to driving the development and progression of the school's planning priorities. The board's role has mainly been an overseeing role to date. It should now take a more proactive role in respect of the progression of school development priorities.

There is significant evidence that the school is effective in applying the school self-evaluation process to the DEIS planning priorities. In addition, the school has to date focussed successfully on literacy and its application in the classroom, as a priority for developing its literacy and numeracy strategy. This is all very positive.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The MLL conducted in November 2013 was a very positive experience for all involved in the school. The MLL pointed out that the vision of the school was practiced by all and that high levels of goodwill were seen in all areas of school life. The report highlighted the very effective nature of management in the school and commented on the very good and excellent practices of all the teachers in the delivery of their classroom lessons. The report also recognised that Roscommon CC was a progressive school who embraced positive educational change. The children with special educational needs were catered for expertly and this kind of practice was witnessed throughout the school.

In terms of the recommendations, Roscommon Community College views as valid the suggestions for further development and in fact has begun the process of developing a more comprehensive e-learning plan for its students. This will be done with its partners in the GRETB to develop ICT strategies that will integrate, with the relevant technologies, teaching practices at classroom level and allow students to explore learning through a number of appropriate technologies. Our medium term plan in this respect suggests the possibility of limiting the use of text books within the school and emphasising the use of hand-held devices as a main resource for learning. This plan will make accessible a range of good learning practices as suggested in the MLL and link in with the variety of abilities and learning styles of our students.

The Board in recognising that good assessment and literacy strategies have been used throughout the school accept that a system that distributes these good practices should be formalised and as such has instructed school management to make provision for this in the next school semester. Teachers will discuss this during the last term of the academic year 2013-2014.

The Board is very happy to note that the MLL recognises the actions taken by the school in regard to previous inspections. This reflects the willingness of the school to engage with continuous professional development and embrace the ideas of good educational change. With the promotion of new literacy and numeracy strategies as prescribed by the Department of Education it is clear that the school not only understands the significance of these strategies in the context of student learning but also how to implement these practices on a day to day basis – a circumstance that makes these strategies very effective.

The Board acknowledges that this report reflects accurately the very high standards of educational practice in Roscommon Community College. It also acknowledges that the management system in the school enhances the emotional, intellectual and social opportunities of its students. In doing this the Board also recognises through the MLL that the student is the centre of all that goes on in the College and like the Inspectorate, wishes to commend the school on its excellent report. It fully accepts the need to continue to develop best educational practices and believes it will continue to do this through the highly effective guiding frameworks as laid down by school management and teachers. The Board has no doubt that the school will endeavour to maintain the high standards of its practices as outlined by this report in an environment of collective responsibility between all stakeholders in the school community.