An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ballinode Community College
Ballinode, Sligo
Roll number: 72360M

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AN ROINN
OIDEACHAIS DEPARTMENT OF
AGUS SCILEANNA 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 January,2014 in BallinodeCommunity 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. Lessons provided on the Post-Leaving Certificate Courses (PLC) available in this school were not included in this evaluation. 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

Ballinode College is a co-educational, multi-denominational school under the auspices of Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board. The school is a participant in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the Department's action plan for educational inclusion. Its inclusive enrolment policy results in a diverse population of students with a range of abilities and additional educational needs currently attending the school. Second-level enrolment comprises 150 students, representing an increase of twenty-six per cent since 2010.There has been significant expansion of the school's Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) sector over the past number of years with 572 students enrolled in a wide range of courses. The PLC sector while now a distinct entity in itself, having been renamed Sligo College of Further Education, operates under the same roll number and in the same building as Ballinode Community College. The growth and success of the school is reflective of the commitment of management and staff.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings
- The profile of the school has now changed to be eighty per cent PLC provision and twenty per cent second-level provision.
- The school is inclusive in principle and practice and is committed to meeting the needs of all its students.
- The board of management operates effectively and is very supportive of the school.
- The senior management team displays consultative and proactive leadership qualities and has a clear vision for school improvement.
- The commitment of staff and the willingness to embrace leadership opportunities are key strengths of the school.
- Improved attendance and retention are key successes of DEIS planning; student attainment remains a priority area for development.
- The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- A high level of care for students is evident across the school community.

- The significant integration of iPads as teaching and learning tools is reflective of the school's openness to embracing new initiatives.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in most of the lessons observed; there was considerable scope to improve the teaching and learning techniques employed in a small number of lessons.
- There has been good engagement with school self-evaluation and the school has the collective capacity to advance continued improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development
- The board in consultation with stakeholders should progress its articulated objective to develop a long-term plan for the future provision of post-primary education in Ballinode Community College.
- DEIS planning should be used more strategically in driving school improvement.
- A whole-school strategy to improve the current uptake by students of higher level in Junior Certificate is a necessary pre-requisite to raising attainment at Leaving Certificate.
- Subject departments should evaluate the effectiveness of the agreed literacy and numeracy strategies currently employed in order to inform the school's improvement agenda in these areas.
- The school's health and safety statement should be reviewed.
- Strategies for differentiation need to be further developed by teachers to cater for the range of student abilities.
- There should be an agreed cross disciplinary approach to assessment for learning practices supported by the development and implementation of a whole-school policy on assessment.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management
The board of management is appropriately constituted and carries out its statutory obligations effectively. The board is strongly committed to the school and has engaged well with all aspects of school management including policy development and review, finances, the development of school accommodation and facilities, teaching and learning and student related issues. To further build on the very good level of partnership with stakeholders it is recommended that communication with staff and parents be formalised by means of an agreed written report following board meetings. An annual report on the operation and performance of the school should also be made available to the school community.

Through the DEIS planning process the board has identified a number of key priorities for development as well as extending school accommodation, enhancing student support systems and developing information and communication technology (ICT) structures to support the administration of the school. The board has high expectations for the ongoing development of the PLC sector and the growth of a larger and more vibrant second level school. Notwithstanding the uncertainty in relation to the external factors influencing future educational provision in Sligo town at various levels, the board has articulated the need for a long-term development plan to be put in place to provide an overarching framework to achieve this.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning
The newly appointed principal and deputy principal are committed leaders, work well as a team and model a strong work ethic. Maintaining what is working well and promoting continued improvement in teaching and learning, inculcating high expectations among all

stakeholders and raising student attainment are central to their shared vision for school improvement. The introduction of a number of organisational changes in relation to pastoral care, student behaviour, and school administration are evidence of their proactive leadership style.

Teaching staff are empowered through a process of distributed leadership, consultation and involvement in decision making. The school's middle management team as well as the non-post holders who undertake significant responsibilities provide crucial support for the organisation and management of school activities. The posts of responsibility were reviewed two years ago. However there is an acknowledgement among staff and management that there is a need to streamline duties attaching to some posts to ensure closer alignment with the current needs and developmental priorities of the school. There is also scope to provide greater equity between posts in the levels of responsibility delegated.

There is a high level of staff participation in continuing professional development (CPD). The practice of peer tutoring as a means of disseminating skills and good practice among staff is highly commended. Staff morale is high and a very good spirit of volunteerism is evident in the facilitation of a wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities as well as the Easter study programme and additional tuition provided by teachers outside of school time.

The introduction of iPads into practically all year groups has had a positive impact on student learning, organisational skills and communication between students and teachers. Increased student motivation and engagement in learning are reported as key benefits. The advanced integration of ICT in the area of administration is also facilitating the school in moving to a paperless environment.

Subject department planning is well established and overall very good quality plans are in place for subjects and programmes. Policy development is very well advanced and underpinned by a rolling cycle of review. The consultative process evident in the recent review of the code of behaviour is a good model for how the planning process should be conducted in the future.

The school has engaged with DEIS planning since 2008 and the current three-year DEIS Plan (2012-2015) forms the basis for school improvement across targeted areas. The DEIS co-ordinator has made good progress. However, it is now time to develop a more strategic approach to planning and to do so on a whole-school basis. Key conclusions should be drawn from the collated baseline data in a summary format and used to inform realistic target setting for improvement. This should also facilitate the implementation of more focused interventions to achieve the targets set. A structure should be put in place to address the current deficiencies that exist in monitoring progress and adjusting targets appropriately based on evidence gathered. In this context, working groups consisting of personnel working in relevant areas should be assigned to the various DEIS strands. Regular updates should be provided to the staff and the board with regard to whole-school progress including revised targets and/or strategies.

Effective strategies to support student attendance and retention are in place. The overall trend in retention, attendance and progression to further education has been improving since 2008. Student attainment in the certificate examinations has been identified as a key priority area for attention. Whilst student achievement in certificate examinations has improved at ordinary level the uptake of subjects at higher level in some cases remains an area of concern. It is recommended that the certificate examination results analyses undertaken by subject departments be extended to include a commentary on the results and that they outline targets and action planning for improvement. The action planning for improvement should be guided by planned whole-school DEIS targets. All departments

should use the aggregated data of student attainment in certificate examinations to build an awareness of student capabilities and trends in achievement across subject areas.

The parents' association makes a significant contribution to supporting the school. However, it has very few active members. Notwithstanding a number of initiatives organised by the home-school-community liaison co-ordinator, including courses, maths support classes and social events to enable parents to take a proactive role in their children's education, the limited engagement of parents remains an ongoing challenge.

Overall the school offers a broad curriculum in the context of its size. All junior cycle students are enrolled in the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). Student achievement is celebrated through the annual awards evening and celebration events for JCSP students. At senior cycle students are provided with an open choice of subjects and the LCA and the LCVP programmes are offered. The information evening for subject and programme choice is currently held in September. It is recommended that such information sessions be facilitated at an earlier stage so that students have adequate time to make informed choices.

An analysis of the school timetable revealed a number of issues. Currently fourth year and fifth year students are combined for optional subjects. There is unequal class period provision to the core subjects across the three years of the junior cycle. In some subject areas, lessons would benefit from greater distribution across the week and not all class groups have access to a double Physical Education (PE) period. It is a priority of senior management to address the above anomalies and to consult with staff in timetabling considerations.

There is a very strong commitment to the welfare and care of all students. The introduction of mixed-ability class groups in first year is commended. A well managed transfer and induction programme supports students and their parents in the transition to post-primary school. The School Completion Programme provides a comprehensive range of supports for targeted students. The composition of the care team ensures very good links between key personnel and the tutor system plays a key role in managing and caring for students. The findings of parent and student questionnaires indicate very high levels of satisfaction with the level of care for students. There is good provision for guidance and counselling. The guidance plan should now be updated and further developed to reflect the whole-school approach to guidance.

The recent changes to the code of behaviour were reported to be clearer for students and the identification of key personnel and procedures at each stage of the ladder of referral has facilitated earlier interventions to address behavioural issues. Students are favourably disposed to its positive focus and reward systems for improved behaviour. Further additions to the positive dimension of the code are to be explored and the school plans to access the external supports available, as appropriate, in this regard.

The co-ordination and planning of additional supports by the JCSP team and the special educational needs (SEN) team are very effective and characterised by a variety of models of provision. Examples of the very good practice in place include close liaison with primary schools, regular meetings of SEN team, dissemination of relevant information and resources to staff, schemes of work, a register of allocated SEN hours and a very high level of engagement with professional development. Standardised tests in literacy and numeracy are used to guide decisions regarding students' learning needs. In the context of developing a whole-school assessment policy consideration should be given to re-introducing a test of cognitive ability to provide additional reliable information on learning needs. In line with DEIS planning, the outcomes of the retesting in literacy and numeracy should be shared with staff and used to modify the school's literacy and numeracy strategies both at a whole-

school and classroom level. It is now timely for each subject department to evaluate the effectiveness of the explicitly agreed literacy and numeracy in-class strategies as part of the school's self-evaluation process.

Student leadership is actively facilitated through the student council, the mentoring system and participation in recycling activities. The student council feels it has a voice and has progressed positive changes in the school.

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*
Ballinode College is a modern school building with excellent ICT facilities and a wide range of well-equipped specialist rooms and classrooms. A comfortable reading room has been provided for students and is proving to be a valuable resource. The school corridors were decorated tastefully with impressive displays of students' art work and photographs of students' successes across a range of areas. The significant increase in enrolment and the concerns in relation to the mixing of second level and PLC student cohorts in the same building have created a pressing need for additional accommodation. School management is progressing further development of the school's facilities to address these issues.

The school building and grounds are well maintained. To build on the current system of recycling in place, the school might now consider participating in An Taisce's Green-Schools programme.

The school's health and safety statement should be reviewed and update in line with the Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools (2010). The annual risk assessment audits carried out by staff in specialist working areas should be extended across all areas of the school.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 *The quality of learning and teaching*
The level of preparation for the lessons observed was uniformly good. A very good range of resources and stimulus materials had been prepared in advance to support student learning.

Significant strengths were evident in short-term planning for lessons that were characterised by a purposeful pace, an appropriate sequential structure and where high expectations were set for learning. Learning outcomes were identified at the start of all lessons and were in many cases revisited at the end of lessons to recapitulate on the learning achieved.

The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in most of the lessons observed. There was considerable scope to improve the teaching and learning techniques employed in a small number of lessons and this was indicated in the feedback given to individual teachers.

In the majority of lessons observed a very good range of effective methodologies was employed to actively engage students in the learning. A characteristic feature of these lessons was the very good modelling of skills centrally by the teacher, effective use of ICT,

appropriate punctuation of instruction with student tasks, and the consolidation of learning through well selected activities and differentiated questioning. In a few lessons there was exemplary use of collaborative learning activities. These very good techniques supported teaching and learning effectively and should be extended to other lessons.

While there was some good evidence of differentiation in half of the lessons observed it is recommended that a greater level of differentiation be implemented to cater more fully for the whole range of learning abilities. Questioning strategies were generally used to good effect to check on learning. These were most effective when well distributed across the class and where they promoted higher-order thinking. These effective practices should be implemented across all lessons.

In the majority of lessons there was good evidence of literacy support through a focus on subject terminology as well as "the word of the day". The further development of the current keyword strategy used is recommended to assist students in the acquisition of subject vocabulary in the long term.

Homework was regularly assigned in almost all lessons observed and recorded by students in their journals. Homework should be set for all year groups to reinforce and extend the learning that has taken place in lessons.

There was considerable variation in the quality of work reviewed in students' copybooks and folders. In this context a focus on students' presentation skills is recommended both in terms of the layout of work and the quality of the handwriting. Good oral feedback was provided in some lessons and observation of students' work showed some good examples of teacher monitoring and written commentary on strengths and areas for development. Given the considerable scope for improvement in this area a whole-school assessment policy should be developed to guide the implementation of best practice in relation to the correction of students' work. There is also a need to explore how feedback can be provided to students electronically. The practice of redrafting pieces of work based on teacher feedback is a skill that should be inculcated across all subject areas, particularly in the context where course work materials are submitted for certificate examinations. The practice of sharing the criteria of assessment and marking schemes to support student self assessment should be developed.

The learning environment ranged from exemplary to classrooms where there was scope for development. In all the lessons observed students' behaviour was very good and teacher-students rapport was very positive.

3. **IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

3.1 Management
Senior management has made very good progress in addressing the recommendations made in the five previous inspections. There has been a significant investment in the purchase of additional age-appropriate reading materials and the development of a reading room to promote reading. In practically all cases recommendations in relation to subject planning documentation have been fully addressed.

3.2 Learning and teaching
Significant improvements were noted in the greater implementation of methodologies to facilitate active learning and also, learning outcomes were shared in all lessons. Strategies for differentiation need to be further developed to cater for the range of student abilities.

There is considerable scope for improvement in relation to the implementation of assessment for learning (AfL) practices. Planning in this area should inform the development of a whole-school policy on assessment.

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

A well-established culture of self-evaluation is evident in the school underpinned by the willingness of management and staff to implement change and embrace new developments for improvement. Many example of self-evaluation were evident during the course of the evaluation including the recent changes to student support structures, analysis of certificate results, an audit of CPD participation and needs, programme evaluation and surveys to obtain the views of students and parents. A three year school self-evaluation (SSE) report (2013-2016) has been developed in the areas of literacy, numeracy and assessment.

To advance the good work that has already been done, the next step for the school is to engage in more specific, measurable and realistic target-setting that is evidence-based and to implement a more robust system of monitoring and review to evaluate the progress achieved.

The school demonstrates a high level of capacity to implement the recommendations of this report and is very well placed to engage in continued improvement.

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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 Ballinode Community College welcomes the very positive findings of this WSE-MLL report. We are satisfied that the report reflects the school accurately and we are pleased that the following areas were described in the report:-

- That the school is inclusive in principle and practice and is committed to meeting the needs of all its students. A high level of care for students is evident across the school community. The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

- That the commitment of staff and their willingness to embrace leadership opportunities are key strengths of the school. The growth and success of the school is reflective of that commitment. There is a clear vision for school improvement.

- That the school has engaged well with school self-evaluation and displays a collective capacity to advance continued improvement. Enhanced attendance and retention have been key successes of the school's DEIS Planning. The many examples of self-evaluation evident in the school show the school is very well placed to develop into the future.

- That the significant integration of the iPads as a teaching and learning tool is reflective of the schools opened to embracing new initiatives. There is a high level of staff participation in continuing professional development and the practice of peer mentoring among staff is highly commended.

The Board is pleased that the inspectors have described teaching and learning as being good to very good with some excellent practices observed. Our teachers plan their lessons with a focus on learning outcomes while also integrating and supporting literacy and numeracy. Effective methodologies are employed to actively engage students in the learning.

The Board is also encouraged that the inspectors noted how student leadership is actively facilitated through the student council, the mentoring system and participation in recycling activities. The student council feels it has a voice and has progressed positive changes in the school.

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 focus of the school's planning and self-evaluation has moved towards raising achievement, and a narrower focus in planning is being employed to facilitate closer measurement of school improvement.

Timetable anomalies have been addressed through curriculum planning, and student choices regarding senior cycle options have been made earlier in the academic year to facilitate this planning.

Work has begun on assessment practices with a target group to facilitate the further development of the school's assessment policy.