

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Larkin Community College
Champions Avenue, Dublin 1
Roll number: 760770**

Date of inspection: 13 November 2014



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

Whole-School Evaluation

Management, Leadership and Learning

Introduction

Larkin Community College is a co-educational school under the auspices of City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETb). The school was established in 1999 following an amalgamation of Parnell Vocational School and Gairmscoil Uí Chonghaile. The school has a current enrolment of 458 second-level students. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department of Education and Skills action plan for educational inclusion, and the School Completion Programme (SCP). The school offers Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), established Leaving Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY), and Leaving Certificate Applied. 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.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is appropriately constituted, meets frequently and is very involved with the work of the school: formal procedures for providing an agreed report to staff and parent representatives remain to be established.
- The senior management team of principal and deputy principal work very well together and communicate effectively with each other but whole-staff collaboration is an area for development.
- Students are provided with many opportunities to assume leadership roles in the school.
- The school has engaged quite effectively with the DEIS planning process.
- Support structures in place for students are good but there is scope for further improvement in this regard.
- The quality of teaching and learning overall ranged between good and very good but there was significant scope for development in a small number of lessons.

Recommendations for Further Development

- In the context of the school planning and review processes, the board and senior management should now develop a time-bound strategic plan for the school.
- Senior management should ensure that decision-making processes are more whole-school in nature.
- The school should review current timetabling arrangements in light of experience and best practice and with a view to addressing shortfalls in instruction time.
- The school should devise strategies for the sharing of good practices in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The current board of management was formed in 2009 and is reaching the end of its term of office. Membership comprises those who have served on previous boards and those who are new. No formal training has been provided to this board. In order to allow the board to contribute more effectively to the management and direction of the school, it is recommended that future boards be provided with training on appointment. Regular meetings of the board are held. No formal procedures for providing an agreed report to staff and parents have been established. This issue needs to be addressed. The board is very supportive of and very familiar with the school. It is commendable that members take time to attend key events in the school.

The ETB is supportive in many key areas of the school. For example, opportunities are provided to the principal and or deputy principal to meet other principals and deputy principals each month. A number of teachers have availed of in-service courses also provided by the ETB.

The board has adopted almost all mandatory policies and has identified a timeframe for the review of a number of policies. The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy is currently in draft and due for ratification shortly. The board has identified some areas for development such as continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and enhanced ownership of the DEIS and school self-evaluation (SSE) processes. However, it has yet to develop a time-bound strategic plan, in collaboration with senior management, for the school to address these identified priorities. For instance, the board could deepen its analysis of certificate examination results as part of its engagement with the targets set under the examination attainment strand of the DEIS plan.

The senior management team of principal and deputy principal has changed twice in three years, culminating in the appointment of the current principal in 2013. Senior management roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and agreed. The principal and deputy principal have a partnership approach to school leadership and communicate effectively as a team with each other. However, there is a need to improve communication systems in the school so that the decision-making process is more whole-school in nature. The senior management team is highly committed to the school, the staff and the students. Significant time has been devoted to dealing with the day-to-day running of the school and it is clear that the school is being well managed in this regard. This is endorsed by the high level of positive responses in questionnaires by parents who are satisfied that the school is well run.

The school has established a number of planning committees which have effectively addressed a variety of important areas including student behaviour and homework. It is commendable that such a large number of staff are involved. Leadership roles are distributed at middle-management level. Posts covering a range of pastoral, administrative and curricular areas exist but a whole-school review of the schedule of posts has not been undertaken in recent years. It is important to conduct regular reviews of the posts of responsibility to ensure that the current and changing needs of the school are being adequately addressed and that the levels of responsibility delegated are appropriate and fair.

Students are provided with opportunities to assume many leadership roles in the school. There is a student council which is democratically elected, meets regularly and has represented the students' perspective very well. For instance, it has succeeded in bringing about positive changes in a number of areas in the school. A peer programme is also ongoing where TY students are trained to teach a Physical Education programme to

primary students in the locality under supervision. This initiative and others have led to very strong links between Larkin College and the local community.

There is a parents association (PA) structure but it has not operated regularly and has met only once since 2013. Good efforts are being made to reinvigorate the PA. The school has established effective communication structures with parents through open days, information evenings and parent-teacher meetings. The school also optimises its Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) position to liaise with parents.

The school has engaged quite effectively in the DEIS planning process. A planning committee has been established and a three-year plan is in operation for 2013-2016. This plan contains targets for all of the required eight strands, the actions to be taken and identifies those with responsibility for monitoring their successful implementation. The school has achieved improvement in some areas such as attendance and retention. However, a greater level of monitoring and implementation across all eight strands is needed. The increased involvement of parents, staff and students, where appropriate, would also create a greater sense of ownership of the plan.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The senior management team is new and in its second year of office. Significant time has been spent becoming familiar with the school. The team demonstrates a commitment to excellence and quality improvement and has made some progress in this regard. For instance, some inputs relevant to teaching and learning have been provided to staff and teachers are facilitated to attend in-service events and are provided with opportunities to share outcomes with colleagues. Teachers are also afforded the opportunity to manage and lead projects and initiatives and some good work is being done in this regard: a pilot peer-observation model was introduced which involved a small number of staff. Overall, teachers are deployed according to their qualifications and expertise. Members of staff are self-motivated and display this approach to their work both in and outside the classroom.

Notwithstanding the newness of the senior management team, there is further scope to provide more instructional leadership in order to address the school's priorities for development regarding teaching and learning. The following areas need to be explored further due to the wide range of learning needs in this school: differentiation; assessment for learning; consistency regarding the management of student behaviour and peer observation by management and staff with a view to enhancing quality and standards, and sharing good practice.

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 is providing a timetable which complies with DES circular M29/95 in regard to time in school. However, valuable teaching time is being eroded after morning and lunchtime breaks as students are required to attend junior and senior assemblies prior to lessons. While this strategy is worthwhile and designed to improve attendance and punctuality, the school needs to make every effort to address the loss of instruction time.

The school currently timetables all lessons for one hour. There are some disadvantages to this approach: regular and frequent contact with some subjects cannot be provided for students. In addition, the requirement to concentrate for a full hour was challenging for some students as observed in some lessons. The school should review the current timetabling arrangement in light of experience and best practice.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum with good efforts made to meet the needs of the student cohort. All junior-cycle students study the JCSP programme. The school has developed a model, the Larkin Scholars programme, which has been successful in raising expectations among students. Other worthy initiatives are in place such as the Arts and football scholarship programmes which have impacted positively on the retention of students in the school. Students who are not selected for these scholarships participate in a 'projects programme'. These students are provided with a programme of study, such as literacy, which is delivered by individual teachers for two hours each week. However, there is a need for a more coordinated approach to be taken to the 'projects programme'. This should be addressed in order to ensure that optimal use is being made of valuable teaching time.

A wide variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities is available to students. Pastoral, sporting and cultural activities that are on offer address their needs and interests. Students are brought on extramural visits which complement their curricular studies.

The admissions policy reflects the characteristic inclusive spirit and mission of the school. A clearly structured code of behaviour has been developed which details the rules of the school and is familiar to students as evidenced by responses in questionnaires. A ladder of referral has been established.

The school has many strategies in place to encourage and improve student attendance. Over the last four years, there has been significant improvement made in this regard but the school has not yet established a formal system to affirm achievement. It is commendable that a number of strategies have been already adopted to reward junior-cycle students in other categories such as behaviour and achievement in weekly and monthly assemblies. Such good work is not as prevalent in senior cycle. Therefore, the school should ensure that the positive student reward measures already in place in junior cycle continue into senior cycle and incorporate attendance. Whole-school award ceremonies take place at the end of each academic year.

A school completion programme is in place in the school and as part of this, the school intends to provide a homework club. In order to support student attainment, which is an integral part of DEIS planning, the school should establish a homework club from the start of each academic year.

The level of dedication and commitment of teachers to the welfare of students is very strong. There are many systems in place to support students. A care team is in place, meets weekly and benefits from a wide range of staff expertise but its potential is not being realised fully as some year heads are unable to attend regularly. Other systems in place include guidance and counselling services, Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and RSE programmes, tutor, chaplain and HSCL. A breakfast club is well established in the school. It is a testament to the school that a high percentage of students indicated that they are proud to be in the school.

Third-year and TY students, and their parents, receive information to assist them in making subject and programme choices. It is very good to note the involvement of former students in this process. In previous years, an induction programme has been provided to incoming first-year students. This should be provided annually so that these students are given every opportunity to settle in with ease.

A student-support system is in place to support students with special educational needs (SEN). Many teachers are involved in its delivery and in order to ensure a more co-ordinated approach to planning, the size of this team should be kept under review. The SEN

allocation is used to provide appropriate support to students in a variety of ways. In order to enhance provision, time should be made available for the SEN department to meet. The SEN department identified the need to track more closely the attainment of SEN students. Robust tracking systems should be implemented in order to ensure that the support being provided is meeting their needs. Furthermore, mainstream staff should be made aware of the learning needs of students in their care from the start of the year.

The school has a well-stocked, large and spacious JCSP library which is made available to students both during and after school. Many reading initiatives are in place such as the accelerated reading programme.

1.3 Management of facilities

The school building is maintained to a very high standard. Specialist rooms are being used for their intended purpose. The school has improved its information and communication technology (ICT) facilities in recent years and an iPad initiative has been established. The school is fully aware of its environmental responsibility and, commendably, has acquired its second Green Flag.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons ranged between good and very good. However, inadequate planning in a small number of lessons left significant scope for improvement. Lessons which were either good or very good showed many or all of the following identifiers: learning outcomes were established and communicated very clearly to the students; lessons were well structured so as to achieve the intended learning outcomes; learning was assessed during and at the end of the lesson; homework was set and linked to the intended learning outcomes and there was a coherence and clarity to the lesson.

Very good practices were also seen when the lesson was well planned in terms of structure and sequence and when students were first provided with opportunities to engage actively with concepts and then provided with the theoretical framework. An appropriate balance of teacher and student input in many lessons promoted student learning and initiative. An example of this was seen where the students made their own notes rather than waiting for the teacher to provide them with notes.

In some lessons, questions were used which aroused students' interest to a level where they actively asked questions. Good use was made of open-ended and higher-order questions. This encouraged students to provide reasonably comprehensive answers without any help.

A good variety of assessment strategies was used. This included questioning, individual reflective work followed by general feedback, self-assessment in a small minority of lessons and constructive feedback provided by the teacher on written work. A particularly good strategy was used when students were given the criteria on which to judge their success. This is an excellent example of assessment for learning in practice.

Good classroom management in most lessons meant that students were occupied in a meaningful and purposeful way. Challenging behaviour, likely to impact negatively on the learning environment, was dealt with firmly and sensitively.

Long-term and short-term plans were reviewed during the inspection. In some cases, best practice was seen when these subject plans linked topics to the planned learning outcomes, methodologies and modes of assessment. Common planning templates were used and statistical analysis of certificate examination data was included. Despite the development of whole-school targets in the area of literacy and numeracy, very limited reference was made to them in subject department planning documentation. All subject departments should ensure that very specific literacy and numeracy strategies are developed and recorded in their subject plans and implemented consistently in lessons.

Examination results have not yet been analysed across the whole school for this year. As part of DEIS planning, and in line with good SSE practice, senior management should ensure that an analysis of examination data is included in subject planning folders and that an action plan regarding the improvement of attainment in every subject is developed.

In a small number of lessons, inadequate advance planning resulted in lessons where students' learning was limited, insufficient material was covered, and students were not provided with meaningful active-learning experiences. There was a lack of clarity about the aim and structure of the lesson. Sometimes this exacerbated behaviour problems which contributed to poor-quality learning.

The school should now devise and explore strategies for the sharing of good practices regarding effective planning and delivery of lessons. In addition, senior management and all subject departments should ensure that the agreed DEIS targets for improvement such as examination attainment, numeracy and literacy are reflected in subject plans and, where appropriate, devise strategies to implement these in the classroom.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

The senior management team has adopted strategies to achieve the implementation of recommendations of previous inspection reports. For instance, the work experience arrangements in LCA have been altered and the RSE policy is now in draft stage and due for ratification shortly. The school is urged strongly to implement the remaining recommendations pertaining to management issues.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Senior management has facilitated the sharing of findings arising out of subject inspections with all staff. Some good progress has been made regarding the implementation of previous recommendations but there is scope for development in the areas outlined earlier in the report.

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

School self-evaluation and review processes are at an early stage of development in the school and some good work has been done in this regard. For instance, a review of the previous DEIS plan took place and areas for future development were identified.

The school community has experienced changes in the senior management team during the last three years. The senior management team displays a palpable commitment to school

improvement and has already addressed some issues. However, with a greater level of strategic planning, the increased involvement of the CDETb, the board, and the commitment of all staff, the school should have the capacity to bring about improvement.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

We welcome the report and thank the Inspectorate for their recognition of the good work being done in Larkin Community College.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

Many issues highlighted have already been addressed.

A new BOM will be appointed in April 2015. CDETБ will be providing training for this board and the Management team looks forward to collaborating with this Board to develop a time bound strategic plan inclusive of planning around Teaching & Learning, Differentiation, AFL and other areas highlighted by the inspection report.

We would like to highlight that our instruction time for all subjects is above or equal to the recommended times from NCCA. We have already begun addressing the eroded time with regard to lining up after break times.

The Management team is working on improved communication throughout the school and with stakeholders. A method of communicating BOM minutes has been implemented.

We welcome the suggestions by the Inspectorate regarding the planning of Project classes and are looking to create a more coordinated approach.

The Inspectorate highlighted the good practice in place regarding the DEIS and SSE process in Larkin Community College and acknowledge the need to increase the involvement of staff, parents and students in this process.