

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Donabate Community College  
Donabate, County Dublin  
Roll number: 761040**

**Date of inspection: 9 March 2016**



**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 March 2016 in Donabate 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 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***

Donabate Community College is a multi-denominational and co-educational post primary school under the patronage of Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board (ETB). The school opened in 2008 and moved to the present building in 2011. The school provides the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and an optional Transition Year (TY). The school caters for 794 students and includes an Autism Centre.

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

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

- Board of management members have a good awareness of their roles and responsibilities and have received training from the Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB.
- The principal and deputy principal adopt a collegial approach to the running of the school; their commitment to their work is clearly evident in how they carry out their duties.
- The senior management team makes deliberate efforts to build leadership capacity among all staff and areas of leadership extend beyond the formal post-of-responsibility structure.
- Student care is a high priority in the school and very good structures are in place to support students.
- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in all lessons visited with some instances of excellent practice observed.
- Good progress has been made in addressing recommendations from previous subject inspections.

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

- The board of management should incorporate a strategic review of school policies amongst its priorities over its three-year term of office.
- While acknowledging efforts by school management to secure suitably qualified teaching personnel, deficits in some subject departments should be rectified at the next available opportunity.
- Given the range of student abilities present, teachers should explore differentiated strategies to make lesson content more accessible to all.
- In progressing the school self-evaluation (SSE) process, the school should now compile its improvement plan and SSE report for literacy and share this with the school community.

## 1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

### 1.1 *School ownership and management*

The recently appointed board of management is appropriately constituted. In line with good practice, board members have received training from the Dublin and Dun Laoghaire ETB and have a good awareness of their roles and responsibilities. They have had three meetings to date and each meeting included reports from the principal and from the parents' council. Appropriately, key feedback is agreed and disseminated to the relevant bodies following meetings.

In line with ETB practice, the board will compile an annual report on the operation of the school at the end of the school year. In responses to teacher and parent questionnaires, approximately half agreed that the board keeps them informed about its leadership and management role. The provision of an annual report, the first from this board, should further help to foster communication and the sharing of information with the school community. The board has strong links with the parents' council through the work of its two parent nominees. Commendably, the board has established links with elected members of the student council.

As a next step, the board should identify short term, medium and long-term priorities for the school with a particular focus on what can be reasonably achieved in their three-year term of office.

Mandatory policies are in place: some in varying stages of review and many awaiting ratification. The board should now adopt a systematic cycle of policy review to ensure that school policies are current and relevant, reflecting day-to-day life in the school. The legislative and regulatory checklist in the SSE report template should be used as a guide for this purpose.

There are good links between the board and the senior management team. The board is kept well informed of initiatives underway in the school including the recent and very successful move to teacher-based classrooms and school involvement in the *Bridge 21* initiative. The board promotes teachers' engagement with continuing professional development (CPD); in discussion, the board commended the committed, caring and enthusiastic work of the teachers.

The principal and deputy principal adopt a collegial approach to the running of the school. While they have defined roles, they share most of the management and leadership responsibilities and support each other successfully in their work. They express appreciation for the dedication of the school staff and share a strong vision for the school. Their commitment to the school is clearly evident in how they carry out their duties. They endeavour to provide opportunities for students to reach their full potential. While part of the school mission statement promotes excellence through encouragement and effort, '*Ad Astra*', the mission statement does not entirely reflect the positive approach of the school. There is scope for the staff, in collaboration with the school community, to review the mission statement so it accurately reflects their vision for Donabate Community College.

Staff members interviewed during the evaluation confirmed that senior management operates an open-door approach with staff. Additionally, the staff notice board and the deputy principal's notice board provide regularly updated information. However, some staff indicated concerns at occasional delays in relaying information. In the interests of enhancing communication between management and staff, possible developments to the communication process should be discussed at whole-staff level.

Leadership roles are distributed among the middle-management team which consists of six assistant principals, a programme coordinator and three special duties post-holders. Appropriately, duties are assigned according to the needs of the school. It is good practice that management has planned a review meeting with post-holders at the end of the year in order to discuss their roles. The senior management team makes concerted efforts to build leadership capacity amongst staff and areas of leadership extend beyond the formal post of responsibility structure.

Student leadership is highly encouraged. A democratically elected student council is supported by a liaison teacher. Currently, the council is involved in planning for a fun-day at the end of the school year. Responses to questionnaires indicate that students would like more say in how things are done in the school; this is an area that could be discussed and explored at future student council meetings.

Parent's council meetings are held on a monthly basis and are attended by the deputy principal. The parents' council reports that it is very proud of the collegial manner in which the school community assists the school. However, it is their view also that opportunity exists to further utilise the potential of the parent body. Responses to parent questionnaires indicate that there is scope to broaden the avenues of communication between the school and the home.

### ***1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

The principal and deputy principal place a strong emphasis on providing a programme of CPD to support improvement in teaching and learning. A number of working groups have been developed; one such example is the information communication technology (ICT) committee. In response to a survey carried out by this committee, management has facilitated input for staff in the use of electronic tablets. In addition, teachers have been afforded, and avail of, opportunities to lead projects and initiatives, greatly enhancing their professional development.

During the inspection, teachers were observed to work in a highly motivated and dedicated manner. Subject departments are given opportunities to meet as a team. The various subject department teams produce planning documentation collaboratively. Teachers reported the need for more time for collaborative planning. Responses to teachers' questionnaires indicate that many share good practice with each other and believe that the subject department structure supports improvements in teaching and learning effectively.

In planning folders examined, the minutes of team meetings indicate a strong focus on the organisational aspects of planning. In some cases, there was appropriate detail too of discussion and sharing of methodologies to improve teaching, learning and assessment. Almost all subject department plans referenced strategies to develop students' literacy skills and some plans referenced strategies to promote numeracy. In addition, some planning folders included short and long-term developmental plans for subjects; this is very good practice. In such cases, there were good links with the SSE process; these links should be more widespread among subject departments.

The school timetable is broad and balanced. The school provides a very good range of academic and practical subjects and appropriate instruction time. Management should be mindful to ensure a good spread of lessons throughout the week for each subject, where at all possible. Teaching staff are generally deployed according to their qualifications. However, despite acknowledged efforts by school management to secure suitably qualified teaching personnel, there are deficits in some subject departments which should be rectified at the next available opportunity.

The optional TY programme has attracted increasing numbers of students in recent years. The programme provides a number of core subjects with the opportunity for students to sample all optional subjects on a rotational basis. The recently appointed TY coordinator has incorporated new modules such as self-defence, and has planned a review of the programme for the end of this school year. In senior cycle, the school also offers the LCVF for which uptake is good and, currently, there is one group of sixth-year LCA students. While there was no uptake of the LCA programme in the current year, the school should explore its provision on a year-to-year basis.

Student care is a high priority in the school and very good structures are in place to support students. The critical incident policy is under review and every effort is being made to ensure that it reflects the community-based response team currently in place. The school benefits from the services of two guidance counsellors to whom students can self-refer or be referred for counselling. Very good supports are provided to students in the transition into first year and into senior cycle. Students in senior cycle are provided with career guidance classes. It is good practice that a formal meeting of the care team is timetabled and this could be structured to focus on particular year groups or programmes as the needs arise.

The school provides supports for students in the area of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE). Policies in these areas are under review; this review should include reflection on the process for providing information to parents on the RSE policy. The school also supports students through supervised evening study for all students and a well-organised induction programme for first-year students.

The year heads monitor student behaviour, attendance and academic progress effectively. A weekly meeting of year heads has been used as an opportunity for them to meet in small groups or with management. There is scope to formalise this meeting to focus on the current overall needs of the school, individual year groups and future planning. It is very positive that training has been provided for some year heads by the ETB; plans are in place to extend this to all year heads. The role of the tutor is voluntary and contributes significantly to the support and care of students. Tutors meet with their class group each day on an informal basis.

In line with the inclusive ethos of the school, a number of students attending the Autism Centre are integrated with mainstream classes. In addition, the facilities in the Centre are utilised by mainstream classes on a rotational basis. A recent restructuring of the special educational needs (SEN) provision has ensured that all designated hours are used for their intended purposes. The SEN department is coordinated effectively by the SEN anchor-person who oversees the timetable for the Centre, the individual student resources and co-ordination of the special needs assistants (SNA). In response to a previous SEN inspection, the school is in the process of reviewing the best approach to staffing in respect of SEN.

The admissions and enrolment policy reflects the characteristic spirit of the school. The school accepts all students from its immediate catchment area and further afield. A review of the admissions and enrolment policy is planned and should reflect practice currently on the ground and clarify the criteria regarding the catchment area. Good systems are in place for tracking attendance using electronic means, and responses to student questionnaires indicate that attendance is recorded in almost all lessons. However there is scope to clarify the procedures regarding the tracking of students who arrive late to school.

In discussion, the code of behaviour was identified as an area for development by a number of parties during the evaluation. While it is a very detailed document, there is scope to place greater emphasis therein on reinforcing positive behaviours. Responses to teacher

questionnaires indicate that the majority believes the behaviour of students to be good. However, less than half of the teachers surveyed agreed that the code is implemented consistently. The code of behaviour should be reviewed in parallel with revisions to the mission statement.

The dedication of staff to the provision of a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities is most praiseworthy. These activities are of a sporting, artistic, cultural and social nature.

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 has very good facilities and the infrastructure is of a high standard. All areas are well maintained. The board and school management are very appreciative of the ancillary staff in this regard. All classrooms are well resourced with ICT facilities. The move to teacher-based classrooms has proven to be a very positive development and stimulating learning environments have been created in many classrooms.

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

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

The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in all lessons visited. Excellent practice was observed in some instances.

In every lesson, it was evident that teachers had a clear schedule of work planned and all materials to be used had been sourced in advance. Intended learning outcomes were shared with students at the outset; best practice was observed when the intended outcomes were used to structure the lesson. In general, teachers provided students with clear instructions to enable them to carry out the assigned tasks. However, in a minority of lessons, there was scope for instructions to be more specific, in particular where group work was being organised.

A positive learning environment was observed in every lesson and student behaviour was very good. In some lessons collaborative work was facilitated. Excellent practice was observed where students were facilitated to work with their peers as tutors and evaluators of each other's work. In such cases, students were given responsibility for their own learning and were enabled to show their learning. Teachers should, where feasible, incorporate opportunities for students to take more responsibility for their learning and identify areas where they can improve.

Student activities were well managed and students were engaged actively and purposefully in set tasks. Students demonstrated well-established routines in practical classes and a good awareness of health and safety procedures.

In some lessons, teachers incorporated a variety of activities to actively engage students. Best practice was observed where lesson content was differentiated to make it accessible to all learners. However, there were some lessons where the same content was delivered in the same way for all students. Given the range of student abilities present, teachers should explore differentiated strategies to make lesson content more accessible to all.

ICT was used in the majority of lessons. All junior-cycle students use electronic devices and many teachers have developed and sourced a variety of resources to augment their lessons. In other lessons, good use was made of electronic presentations to clarify complex concepts, promote engagement and allow students to relate to the material.

Questioning of students was seen to be most effective in lessons that incorporated a good balance between direct recall questions and more open-ended higher-order questions. In these instances, the students were challenged to think, recall, analyse and synthesise material with the more-able students being allocated more challenging tasks. An appropriate wait-time was allocated for students to respond.

There is scope for teachers to reflect on their questioning style to ensure that they are assessing students' learning adequately and challenging students to achieve their potential. An additional area for development would be the use of student-self assessment; for example, students could be provided with specific success criteria or develop the success criteria as a class group at the outset of an activity.

Homework was allocated in all lessons. Some teachers corrected homework in class as a group activity and others did so on an individual basis. In a small number of instances, there was a need to ensure that students recorded homework in their journals more carefully at the end of lessons. Teachers should be mindful to provide students with feedback in order for them to improve their work and encourage students to follow-up on all feedback given.

At the conclusion of lessons, some teachers provided a comprehensive consolidation of learning, using a variety of means which included games, quizzes, questioning, discussion and student feedback to the class. Teachers should be careful to leave time for a meaningful reinforcement of learning at this stage of lessons.

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

#### ***3.1 Management***

Almost all of the main recommendations made in previous evaluation reports have been implemented. Management is in the process of addressing some of the outstanding recommendations; for example, the number of teachers in the SEN team remains to be addressed.

#### ***3.2 Learning and teaching***

Most of the main recommendations from previous reports in respect of teaching and learning are in the process of being addressed by subject departments. However, the inclusion of differentiated learning strategies was recommended previously and remains an area for development.

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

The school has engaged in the process of SSE with an initial focus on developing students' literacy skills. A number of whole-school literacy strategies have been developed and are being implemented in lessons. Strategies are documented in some subject department plans. The school should now compile its improvement plan and SSE report for literacy and share

this with the school community. At the time of the evaluation, the school reported that its numeracy strategy was being reinvigorated; the strategies that have been put in place should now be progressed further.

The level of engagement with the recommendations from the recent subject inspections in SEN and Home Economics, the good-quality action planning in some subject department folders and the reflective approach to student attainment in the Certificate Examinations all indicate that the school has a good capacity for improvement. In addition, various working groups have been set up to review some areas of operation in the school; a similar approach could be adopted in response to the recommendations in this report.



**Appendix**

**School response to the report**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

**Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management welcomes the affirmation of the good to very good teaching witnessed in all lessons in Donabate Community College. We are pleased with the Inspectors acknowledgement of the high priority placed on the care of our students that permeates all aspects of school life. The commitment of our Senior Management Team was noted in the Inspection report alongside their effort to build leadership capacity in the school. As a Board, we support our school leaders in their efforts to promote distributed leadership. The recognition of the school's progress in addressing recommendations from previous inspections affirms the commitment of our staff to always strive to improve teaching and learning in Donabate Community College.

**Part B: 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 welcome the recommendations contained in the School Inspection Report. The Board will oversee the review of school policies. Since the Inspection, a review of the schools code of positive behaviour has begun as a priority. This will be a central aspect of the Board's strategic plan for the school for its three-year term of office. The Board is currently reviewing the priorities it set out for 2015/2016 but will develop this into a three-year strategy. The school will continue to make every effort to hire suitably qualified teachers in the single subject area where currently there is a deficit. Continuous professional development will be provided to teachers to build on the differentiated teaching already in place in the school to ensure that it is school wide. In the time since the Inspection was held, teachers have had further professional development from the Special Education Support Services. The school is currently compiling its school improvement plan and this involves consultation with the school community and the dissemination of the priorities agreed.