

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Leixlip Community School
Leixlip, Co. Kildare
Roll number: 91371B**

Date of inspection: 5th April 2011



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April 2011 in Leixlip Community School. 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

Leixlip Community School is a co-educational, multi-denominational second-level school within the parish of Leixlip. The school was established in 1980 under the joint trusteeship of the Presentation Order, the Archbishop of Dublin and the County Kildare Vocational Education Committee. It is the school's stated mission to educate the whole person in an atmosphere of trust and respect.

The school has 590 students enrolled and renewed growth is forecast. Students come from the full range of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The school provides an optional Transition Year programme and the three leaving certificate programmes. There is a very active adult education programme which provides an important service to the local community.

A busy, ordered and welcoming atmosphere was apparent during the evaluation. The school is justly proud of its strong pastoral care system and its partnership with parents.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board of management is properly constituted and it is led by a very able and committed chairperson.
- The principal and deputy principal are able, hard working and committed and they work effectively as a team to provide clear and proactive leadership.
- Members of staff work in a collaborative and professional manner.
- There is a commitment to policy development and school improvement.
- Very good management of students is evident. Students were mannerly and exhibited exemplary behaviour during the evaluation.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good in all classes observed and in quite a number of instances was very good, with many examples of excellent practice evident.
- The appropriate use of information and communication technology (ICT) was evident in a range of subject areas.
- High expectations for student engagement, participation, behaviour and attainment were apparent.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should oversee the development of an overarching framework document for the development of the school that will combine the plans and policies already developed and focus on school improvement and school self-review, identify priority areas for development, and set targets for the achievement of these priorities.
- A whole-school literacy and numeracy plan should be developed to promote earlier identification of students experiencing difficulties, and to structure a system of support and monitoring of progress.
- The school should carry out regular reviews of the duties of post holders to more accurately reflect the school's changing needs.
- In relation to the practice of marking students' class work and homework, a consistent approach should be taken to providing supportive written feedback.
- There is a need for significant improvement in the planning of some subjects to focus more on differentiated learning outcomes and to establish links with varied teaching methodologies and assessment modes.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

The board of management is properly constituted. The board is ably led by its chairperson and is very supportive of in-school management and staff. The board is well aware of its statutory obligations and ensures that the resources necessary to support teaching and learning are provided. Decisions are made by consensus and after consultation. There is an appropriate level of communication between the board and the parents' association. The parents' association is appreciative of the links with school management especially in relation to policy development. The parents' representatives on the board report back to the parents' association. Communication with staff and parents is enhanced through a short agreed report following board meetings.

A range of plans, policies and procedures is in place. Much has already been achieved. The review of the code of behaviour is a good model for how the planning process should progress and for how consultation with stakeholders should be achieved. The board should meet with the students' council, at least once a year.

The school plan describes procedures and policies. An initial future planning document has been drawn up. However, there is need for more information on the future plans for the school and on how improvement is to be achieved. A number of policies need to be finalised and deadlines established. When policies are ratified by the board, the date of ratification and a review date should be stated on the policy documents.

The board should oversee the development of an overarching framework document for the development of the school, in order to link together the existing plans and policies, to focus on priority areas for development, and to set targets.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff

(including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

The school's priorities for development

The board has outlined a number of priorities including the establishment of a purpose-built classroom for a designated class of students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and the revitalisation of the school library. The review of the code of behaviour is well underway. It is recommended that the board strengthen the positive behaviour aspects of this code. A written commitment to its implementation in a fair, compassionate and reasonable manner should also be included in the code.

The development of ICT and its use in classrooms has also been prioritised. It is recommended that shared folders of resources, planning documents and policies of subject departments be used more widely. More opportunities should be given to junior cycle students to learn and practise their computer skills.

The school has made advances in the development of policies and practices. An overarching policy statement should be developed now to co-ordinate the work of the year heads, tutors, care team, learning-support, guidance, English as an additional language (EAL), and student supports.

The school caters for a diverse population including students with literacy and numeracy difficulties and a high percentage of students from abroad. A whole-school literacy and numeracy plan should be developed to promote early identification of students' needs, and to put in place a system of support and progress monitoring. While the learning-support, English and mathematics departments will be instrumental in this, all subject departments need to plan for how they might contribute to overall literacy and numeracy improvement.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The principal and the deputy principal demonstrate a dedicated and collaborative approach to their work. They work very well as a team. Both maintain a high visibility around the school. They provide pro-active and effective leadership.

Morale amongst the staff is high. Their dedication is valued both by management and parents. Teachers are motivated and generally well prepared. Their level of collaboration is high and a caring and supportive ethos is evident. There is very good support for senior management from the teaching staff.

Positive working relationships are evident between management, staff, and students. Teachers are appropriately deployed and their continuing professional development (CPD) needs are well managed. Members of staff engage in professional development. The support of the board of management for staff CPD is welcome. New teachers are mentored by more experienced colleagues.

Post-holders work hard and co-ordinators are managing programmes effectively. Assistant principals' duties are primarily concerned with student support, for example, as year heads. There is a strong year-head system and the tutor system was recently re-introduced.

The school should carry out regular reviews of the duties of post holders to more accurately reflect the changing needs of the school. There is a need for a planning co-ordinator to lead a new school planning team in subject and strategic planning.

Students are well cared for by a variety of support systems, for example the guidance provision, the year-head system, the tutor system, the chaplain and a newly-established care team.

Subject departments are to be congratulated on their analysis of examination results. Subject department and programme plans are in place. While acknowledging the work that has taken place, subject plans require a greater focus on learning outcomes, and a greater emphasis on teaching strategies; learning outcomes should be linked with assessment modes. A consistent approach to maintaining records of students' abilities, progress and achievements should be adopted. An impressive annual awards scheme is in place that covers both academic and extra-curricular achievements.

Leadership of students

Incoming first-year students are supported by means of an appropriate transfer and mentoring programme. First-year classes are mixed ability and an inclusive and sensitive approach to arranging junior cycle classes is pursued.

Subject options and the process of student selection are being re-examined. This is a positive development. Timetabling of subjects is well planned with the exception of the absence from the curriculum of Physical Education for fifth and sixth years. The school should address this issue.

The retention of students is supported by the programmes that are available in the senior cycle. Open nights are held every two years and parent evenings are held annually. Selection criteria for the programmes are developed and communicated to the school community.

A student council is in place, and is open to students from second to sixth year. First-year students should also be included. The council is consulted regarding policy development in areas such as behaviour, CCTV monitoring and the dress code. This consultation should be undertaken on a wide range of policies as they are developed or reviewed. An effective prefect system is in place to assist in managing social areas at break times. Social areas contribute to a sense of responsibility amongst students. Very good order was observed during the evaluation.

Attendance is monitored twice daily through the swipe-card system, roll calls, and checks by year heads. Student absenteeism is an issue for a minority of students and more targeted attendance strategies need to be developed. Records of board meetings suggest that there are a significant number of suspensions. Efforts should be made to reduce suspensions. It is encouraging that positive behaviour initiatives and reward systems are being explored and that training in restorative justice practices has been provided.

The means of supporting students with additional needs should be re-examined and a move away from withdrawal be considered. A more inclusive approach, including team teaching, would help decrease withdrawal, reduce the need for small support classes, and enhance communication between the learning-support personnel and mainstream teachers. The school has responded to the challenges presented by students for whom English is an additional language. English language needs are assessed and appropriate support is provided.

Parent-teacher meetings, in-house examinations and progress reports to parents are adequately and appropriately managed. The responses to questionnaires showed that parents are generally positive about the school and feel that their children are well looked after.

The creation of a care team is a noteworthy achievement. The care team, ably led by the school chaplain, has developed a comprehensive care policy. Student and parent questionnaire results suggest that there is an ongoing need for constant vigilance with regard to bullying and to links with families when difficulties regarding bullying are suspected or identified.

The level of support for a wide variety of extracurricular and co-curricular activities is impressive. These activities enhance the physical, social, and personal development of students and are highly commended.

2.3 Management of facilities

The school building is well maintained. The secretarial, caretaking and ancillary staff, and special-needs assistants play a significant role. Wide corridors and designated social areas are helpful to the orderly running of the school. The vast majority of classrooms are teacher based. The movement of students between lessons is well supervised.

Classrooms are appropriately equipped and fit for purpose. Displays of student work, awards and photographs are impressive. Internal signage could be improved. Better external signage and traffic management would improve safety as the school is located near a very busy road.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning was generally good in the classes observed and very good in quite a number of instances. Some excellent practice was observed and there was a high level of competence amongst all of the teachers. High expectations by teachers for student engagement, behaviour and attainment were evident. Students responded well to teacher direction. A positive working environment was promoted in every classroom.

Very good rapport between staff and students was observed in all classrooms visited and classrooms were well managed. The quality of interaction in the classrooms was good in all instances and very good in many classes visited.

Some teachers have shown a capacity to innovate. Differentiated teaching and learning was evident in many classes and students were encouraged and assisted in their learning. This was achieved mainly through focussed questioning and the provision of individual support.

Some classes engaged in group work and pair work. Such co-operative practices should be adopted across the school. In the language classes visited, the target language was used effectively. A greater focus on the development of literacy and numeracy is required in many classrooms and a whole-school approach to literacy and numeracy is recommended.

Monitoring of student work was regularly undertaken. While there were some examples of providing supportive written feedback to guide student improvement and reward effort, the practice is inconsistent across the school and needs to be addressed within the context of

the homework policy that is currently under review. This would assist the school's efforts to promote effective assessment for learning (AfL) processes of teaching and learning.

Assessment of learning practices include the assessment of incoming first years, term tests, class tests, mock examinations, and questioning of students. Some good quality practice was evident. There was good oral feedback to students. Students' input was sought and valued in most lessons. It is commendable that common assessments for year groups are being developed. A more consistent approach should be adopted to maintaining records of students' abilities, progress and achievements.

Inclusion is promoted through an open admissions policy and integrated classroom practices. A good range of autism-friendly practices are in place in the ASD unit. Most of the students with autism spend a significant amount of time in mainstream classes. Gifted students are identified. There should be a written policy relating to their identification and support.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

The findings and recommendations of previous inspection reports have been carefully considered by the school in a whole school context.

A number of improvements as a result of earlier subject inspections are noted. An effective care team has been established and the guidance plan has been circulated. Additional provision and appropriate use of ICT to enhance learning and teaching is also in place.

Considerable progress has also been made in subject planning in many subject areas but there is still a need for improvements that focus less on content and more on varied teaching methodologies, differentiated learning outcomes and written feedback for improvement. A common framework needs to be established that gives structure to and promotes improvement in subject planning and delivery.

Homework policy and practice, identified as an issue in some previous inspection reports, is now being addressed. There is a need to give more detailed written comments that point towards improvement especially at junior certificate level.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Previous subject inspection reports recommended strategies to enhance learning and teaching such as the sharing of learning outcomes, activity-based learning and co-operative learning. The inspection team found an increased use of these and other recommended strategies, but their use is not widespread across the school. The school has targeted teaching methodologies as a theme for future professional development and this should now be prioritised.

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

The school is delivering a quality service in line with its mission statement. The school is on a journey towards self reflection, improvement and self-review. A range of structures, policies and procedures is in place, or are being developed, to promote planning, review, reflection and improvement. Substantial progress has been made in specific policy and planning areas.

The level of self evaluation has increased recently. Action planning for improvement based on setting targets and defining steps to achieve them should be pursued by the board, senior management and planning teams. The development process for the recent care plan can inform future action planning for improvement.

There is positive impetus in planning and policy development including the recent review of the code of behaviour, the admissions policy, the reintroduction of the tutor system and the development of a care team.

The school is well placed to continue its journey towards becoming a more reflective and innovative learning organisation. The board of management, management and staff have the necessary positive outlook to continue to lead improvement and self-evaluation.

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 and Staff welcome this positive Whole School Evaluation/Management, Leadership and Learning Report. The Board is particularly pleased with the affirmation of the tremendous work being done by the whole school community.

The board is particularly pleased with the following findings:

- The school is justly proud of its strong pastoral care system a caring and supportive ethos is evident.
- Members of staff are collaborative and professional.
- Morale is high amongst staff. Their dedication is valued both by management and parents.
- The creation of the Care Team is a noteworthy achievement.
- Students are mannerly and exhibited exemplary behaviour during the evaluation. There are positive working relationships between students, staff and management.
- There are high expectations for student engagement, participation, behaviour and attainment.
- The level of support for a wide variety of extracurricular activities is impressive.
- There is a very active Adult Education programme that provides an important service to the community
- The Board of Management is very supportive of in-school management and staff. There is very good support for senior management from the teaching staff.
- The Board of Management supports continuous professional development (CPD). Teachers CPD needs are well managed.
- Post holders work hard and co-ordinators manage programmes effectively.
- The secretarial, caretaking and ancillary staff and the special-needs assistants play a significant role in the school.
- There is a commitment to policy development and school improvement.
- The school is well placed to continue its journey towards being a more reflective and innovative learning organisation.

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

The Board is committed to addressing all the recommendations contained in the report. The Board and Staff have already made progress in the following areas:

- A full review of Posts of Responsibility has been carried out. A Planning Coordinator has been appointed.
- Subject Department planning is being further strengthened and the Teaching Staff has undertaken training in 'Assessment for Learning' in developing a wider range of methodologies in teaching and learning.
- The Board has met with representatives from the Students Council and this process will be ongoing. The inclusion of 1st years on the Students Council is being addressed by the Council.
- Senior Management and some staff have attended seminars on Literacy and Numeracy as the first step in planning a whole school strategy.
- The draft Code of Behaviour has been updated to reflect the inspectors recommendation.
- The Open Night is now an annual event.
- The issue of traffic management has been addressed by the Parents Council. The council worked with the Town Council and the County Council to install a pedestrian crossing and warning signs and lights outside the school.

PE for 5th & 6th year students was removed from the timetable as a result of the decision of the government to increase the pupil/teacher ratio which had the effect of reducing the number of teachers in the school. The Board is committed to reinstating the subject as soon as resources permit.

The Board and Staff are committed to addressing the remaining recommendations and will do so through School Development Planning.