

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

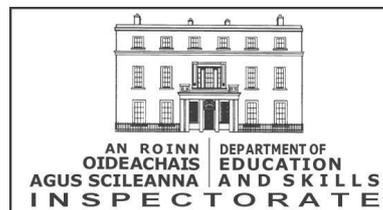
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Scoil Phobail Bhéara
Castletownbere, Co Cork
Roll number: 91387Q**

Date of inspection: 9 March 2011



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in March, 2011 in Scoil Phobail Bhéara. 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, groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Introduction

Scoil Phobail Bhéara is a co-educational community school. The school caters for a large geographical area consisting of most of the Beara peninsula in West Cork. The school was established in 1980 following amalgamation between Méan Scoil Naoimh Íosaif and Castletownbere Vocational School. The joint trustees of the school are the Mercy Congregation and County Cork Vocational Educational Committee (VEC). The current school enrolment is 309 students with a projected enrolment of 340 students for future years. The school is seen as being an important resource to and part of the community.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The school has an open enrolment policy and good engagement with parents.
- The senior management team shows effective and reflective leadership. They share a similar vision for the development of learning and teaching in the school.
- The overall quality of learning and teaching observed was good. Some very good practice was also observed with scope for further development required in a very small number of observed lessons.
- The board and senior management in the school are very supportive of continuing professional development (CPD) of the staff.
- Considerable expertise among the staff provides a strong foundation on which to base a planning focus on learning and teaching.
- The atmosphere in the school is enhanced by good relationships and openness to development among staff, management, students and parents.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should look at ways in which communication and engagement with the school partners can be enhanced.
- Existing planning structures should be used to advance a planning focus on learning and teaching which draws upon the strengths and expertise in professional practice available.
- The completion of the whole-school guidance plan should be a priority.

- The focus of self-evaluation should be on classroom practice as well as whole-school practice.
- Senior management together with students should explore ways to further develop the student voice in the school. Links should be created with the parents association and the board of management to promote and further develop student leadership within the school.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

The board is commended for the manner in which the school's motto embodies a very positive ethos that permeates all aspects of daily life in the school. This is particularly evident in the provision which the school makes for students who have additional educational needs.

The board of management is properly constituted, meets regularly and is aware of its statutory obligations. The board members have significant expertise and demonstrate a sense of pride and commitment to the school. Appropriate training has been accessed by members to aid them in their duties. All members of the board work well together with good internal communication among members evident. It is recommended that after each of its meetings, a short agreed report outlining key discussions and decisions be disseminated from the board to the nominating bodies. The board should also explore ways in which communication and engagement with all school partners can be enhanced.

The board is very supportive of the senior management team. Board members have an understanding of school improvement and school self-evaluation. The board should encourage further development and support school self-evaluation practices in the school.

The board is engaged in policy development and review. Continued engagement with policy development with a more defined timeframe for completion, review and evaluation of policies on an annual basis needs to be developed. In addition, the board should prioritise the completion of the whole-school-guidance plan.

The school's priorities for development

Educational development is a priority area identified. The board sees as very important the maintenance of the current level of subject provision and, through ongoing curriculum review, is examining the possibility of providing additional subjects to the students over the next number of years. There is a long established tradition of supporting staff in various continuing professional development (CPD) activities. School management is firmly of the view that CPD contributes to school improvement. The continuation of the development of literacy and numeracy across all subjects is also a school priority. These are praiseworthy development priorities.

Continued maintenance, improvement and development of the plant both internally and externally is an ongoing priority of the school. The continued improvement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the school and efforts for its further integration into learning and teaching is noted with data projectors and computer equipment available in all rooms.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The senior management team is effective and reflective. The principal and deputy principal work as a team with complementary roles and approaches. They have a professional relationship of high quality. Both have participated in training for senior management and are members of the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) and the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS). Good relationships with staff, students, parents and the board were evident in the course of the evaluation. Senior management facilitates individual meetings with all staff members near the completion of the academic year. This initiates an evaluation process which is very positive. The school has a schedule of duties assigned to posts of responsibilities for the staff with middle management taking many lead roles in various aspects of school life, which is very good practice. Regular review of these roles and responsibilities should ensure they continue to meet priorities identified by the school's evaluation processes.

A culture of CPD is encouraged in the school. Currently, members of the school staff are involved in the Learning School Initiative and Instructional Leadership Programme. Both members of senior management are taking active roles in these initiatives, which create opportunities to foster leadership of learning. Internally, the school's assessment committee devised and led a literacy project in the first school term, the findings of which are currently being evaluated. To ensure optimal effectiveness and impact of the work completed, results of the evaluation process should be disseminated to the school community. Initiative and a sense of trying is encouraged. It would be important that mechanisms are developed further which facilitate the sharing of individual CPD undertaken. This would build the collective capacity of staff and promote leadership and self-evaluation. The instructional leadership programme may be of benefit in this area. In this context, ways to enhance communication between groups in the staff, for example, through a staff newsletter or ICT, should be explored. The handbook for staff could also be expanded to incorporate additional areas including that of teaching and learning.

The parents' association is affiliated to the Parents' Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (PACCS). The parents' association has good effective engagement with the school, which includes overseeing the book loan scheme open to all students and fundraising for specific school events. The majority of parents surveyed are aware of the work of the parents association in the school. Building on this good work, further areas of collaboration between the various stakeholders in the school, students, parents, staff and board should be identified. The resulting collaborative tasks would also help to promote and further develop student leadership within the school.

The school has a firm foundation in developmental planning, with many policies well established, some policies under review and some policies under development. Subject departments are well structured with plans and procedures well documented. Continued development in the area of teaching and learning is important and should link and support the areas the school has identified as priorities both now and into the future.

Leadership of students

Questionnaire findings indicate that the majority of students surveyed are proud to be in this school and feel that the school is very supportive. The rate of retention and attendance of students is high which bears testament to this fact. Enrolment practices are transparent and inclusive and are managed fairly and effectively by the school. Students are well supported in the transition from primary school. Students were well behaved. Students articulated that they feel supported by the staff in general and by senior management. Both

formal and informal systems of support and care are established. Planned programmes of the guidance department, special educational needs' department and chaplaincy provide structured supports in the school as well as providing specific identifiable student-support roles. The many personal interactions between teacher and student provide additional supports. The creation of a small student-support team is recommended to co-ordinate all student supports which should occur as part of whole-school guidance planning.

A well balanced timetable with an appropriate time allocation for subjects and programmes is present in the school. Some curricular subjects are offered after school to fulfil student demand for subject provision. The school should explore further as part of future curricular planning how the LCA programme could be facilitated to run yearly and not only bi-annually as is the current practice.

High levels of satisfaction were expressed by the parents about the running of the school. Parent-teacher meetings are attended by both student and parent which is very positive idea. Senior management is encouraged to consider some parent perceptions in relation to information about student subject choice and to regularly seek their views on school activities. Changing the format of information evenings, using the re-developed school website and the parents' association are suggested as ways of exploring possibilities further.

Extracurricular activities have a significant focus on sport in the school. Many of the extracurricular activities occur as part of the TY programme. It is acknowledged that logistics make it difficult for some students to stay after school to partake in extracurricular activities. Extending student participation and ascertaining student interests in extracurricular activities should be explored, to enhance contribution to overall student learning and development. The student council could have a role in this activity.

The school has a properly constituted student council. Senior management together with students should explore ways to enhance the student voice in the school.

2.3 Management of facilities

There is a clear commitment to development and maintenance of infrastructure. The plant is very welcoming, in good repair, clean and well decorated. Comprehensive ICT facilities are located in all rooms. The school operates subject-based rooms all of which are well resourced and organised. This makes the facilities a good and inviting place for the students to engage in learning.

Links with local bodies in the community are actively encouraged by the school. To this end both the school and the wider community collaborate on projects which benefit all, for example the current endeavour to improve some outside space for the development of a new astro-turf area in the school is very positive.

The current review of the school's website and its extensive redevelopment by key members of school staff will serve the school in the delivery of key information and messages. This important resource will be an effective mode of communication and should proceed to completion in a timely manner.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Overall, the quality of learning and teaching was good in the school with some very good practice observed. In a very small minority of lessons, areas for development were identified. Best practice observed included lessons that were well planned, as individual lessons or as part of a series of lessons, lessons where there were good positive relationships observed between teachers and the learners. In such lessons students were focused, engaged and appropriately occupied. Homework was assigned, monitored and corrected regularly by the teacher.

Lessons were well structured and incorporated established routines with a variety of teaching methods observed in most lessons. The effective use of ICT in some of the lessons was noted. Team teaching was also observed and is to be praised. The potential of this and other teaching methods observed, including student group work, should be discussed by the teaching staff to ensure their optimum use and benefit for the learner. In addition, the area of differentiation for the learner needs to be further explored and developed and should be linked with further whole-school and subject planning.

Teachers' questioning was in general good and including a range of directed and general questions as well as higher and lower-order questions. Where questioning by students was observed students exhibited good levels of understanding and the ability to apply learning. Generally, a good balance was observed between teacher inputs and student activity. In some lessons where this balance did not occur, students were observed to be more passive and less engaged. The ongoing development of self-evaluation strategies in the classroom for both teacher and learner should be explored and the findings used to inform future lesson planning and curriculum delivery.

Some lessons opened with the statement of learning objectives and closed with the assessment of learning outcomes. This is good practice. Students benefited from this approach. This could be developed as a whole-school approach extended to all lessons and linked with the school's use of ongoing formative assessment including the use of assessment for learning (AfL). In some lessons, key words were used to good effect. A whole-school approach to the use and integration of keywords into lessons should be considered. In addition, continued utilisation of the recent literacy initiative material and concepts developed and instigated by staff should be adopted by the whole staff. Regular review, evaluation and the setting of new targets will also be central to all literacy and numeracy initiatives at both an individual and whole-school level.

The AfL practices in the school should address factors like teacher questioning and feedback and match them with the ongoing promotion of literacy and numeracy. It would also be important that an overview of how all the different initiatives going on in the school are linked; the school staff should examine the challenges, the differences they would like them to ultimately make in student achievement and attainment.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

At the time of the evaluation, it was found that plant-related issues were implemented or pending application for funding. In relation to previous inspections the following

recommendations have been implemented; the organisation of information meetings for LCA students and parents; the formalisation of plans, regular meetings and cataloguing of resources in Geography; the introduction of an Irish oral for fifth year students, the establishment of seomra na Gaeilge and a bilingual approach to signage in Gaeilge; and the development of a programme of work for senior Home Economics and some refurbishment of the facilities in Home-Economics.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

There was much evidence from previous inspection reports that there was a good quality of learning and teaching in most subject areas. There was also evidence from the current evaluation that many of the recommendations in the previous inspection reports had been implemented, including; retesting of students and the development of team-teaching, and the development of formative assessment in English.

It is recommended that the board and school look generically at all subject inspection and programme evaluation reports that the school receives and see what valuable learning experience can be taken from each one to better the school's educational provision and not just the subject area targeted.

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

5.1

The school is well advanced in school development planning. There is a steering committee established to lead the process which is well placed to link what is happening at board level with the staff and in the classroom. Subject departments are in place and some policies have aspects of self-evaluation. The school is well-poised and well placed to engage more fully with reflection, sharing and evaluation of professional practice in learning and teaching.

The good will and atmosphere in the school demonstrated in-built capacity to implement self evaluation. The school's willingness to become involved in a team-teaching initiative and a project on instructional intelligence are clear indications of forward thinking in its approach to education.

School management and staff are very well placed to implement all of the recommendations in this report over time. The school-development-planning process is operating very effectively in the school and the board, senior management and the staff are proactive in anticipating and responding to the evolving needs of students.

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 Scoil Phobail Bhéara welcomes this report and is pleased to read that the inspectors were impressed with the effective and reflective senior management team and the obvious high quality of teaching and learning. It is also pleased with the acknowledgement of the expertise of the Board, the management of facilities along with the commitment by all partners to the enhancement of the motto: “Ní neart go cur le chéile”. This report affirms the Board’s commitment to the culture of CPD and the process of school development planning by all partners. The Board of Management is happy to use this report as a reflective tool for future planning and development.

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 issue of communication between partners is a priority for the future. Staff are committed to continuing and developing the very good practice of teaching and learning evident in the school. Since the WSE MLL staff have participated in delivering CPD to colleagues and a teaching and learning chapter is included in the staff hand-book. The whole school guidance plan is a priority for 2011-2012. A designated task group is timetabled weekly to progress this. Reflection and self-evaluation by each member of staff have been encouraged by structured meetings with the senior management team.