

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Carndonagh Community School
Lifford, County Donegal
Roll number: 91406R**

Date of inspection: 27 September 2012



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in September, 2012 in Cardonagh 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, 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

Carndonagh Community School will mark its fortieth anniversary in 2013. For a number of years the largest post-primary school in the state, it recorded 1513 students and 100 teachers in 1999/2000. The opening of a second post-primary school in the Inishowen peninsula in 2001 saw enrolment fall by 42% to a low of 885 in 2005/06. A gradual resurgence has followed to the current year 2012/13 enrolment of 957 students.

The school provides the full range of programmes, including the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), optional Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate Vocational programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) in addition to the established Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. The school participates in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion, and the School Completion Programme (SCP).

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board of management has a clear profile, it plays an active role in the monitoring, review and updating of key policies, and enjoys good relations across the school community.
- The introduction of iPads for first-year students and the focus on developing a school-specific virtual learning environment (VLE) are important steps in realising the modernisation of learning of which senior management are strong advocates.
- Senior management communicates high expectations of staff in the quality of teaching and related duties. Affirmation and support are provided alongside the establishment of a strong culture of professional accountability.
- School development planning (SDP) is well led by the senior management team.
- The quality of learning and teaching was overwhelmingly in the category of good to very good and, in some instances, excellent.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The board of management is urged to consider publishing an annual report on the operation and performance of the school for the school community, as a means of communicating the school's priorities and progress in their achievement.

- It is desirable that the schedule of duties attaching to the post-of-responsibility structure be further reviewed in the interests of achieving a closer match to the current needs of the school.
- The quality of communication should be regularly reviewed in order to assure optimal performance as the experience for all staff members.
- The review of the code of behaviour should be advanced and undertaken in line with National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) published guidelines.
- The planning and delivery of lessons should make more allowance for accommodating the mixed-ability needs of students through differentiation.

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 appropriately constituted. Meetings are frequent, well attended, and involve significant agenda. The detail presented to the board is considerable, as evidenced by the principal's comprehensive reports. Proceedings are well recorded and agreed reports are communicated to the nominating bodies.

The board has a clear profile and enjoys good relations across the school community. Particular efforts are made to develop these further with representatives of student and parent bodies. The well-appointed boardroom, where much internal school business is transacted and visitors received, is an indicator of the high standards set by and for the school.

The board plays an active role in the monitoring, review and updating of key policies. Relevant mandatory policies, including the school plan and the DEIS plan, have been approved. Board-meeting minutes show that it is fully apprised of progress in the achievement of DEIS targets.

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 Parents' Association (PA) is an active body with input into school policies. It is very supportive of the school and shows an equal interest in achieving improvements in the quality of teaching and learning as with enhancing resources. The introduction of iPads as a learning tool with first-year students was first promoted by the PA.

The school's priorities for development

The school's priorities for development are well conceived and complement each other. These include a campus upgrade, achieving the drive towards excellence set by the mission statement, and improvements in teaching and learning. The current-year introduction of iPads and the focus on developing a school-specific VLE are important steps in realising a key aim of the modernisation of learning of which senior management are strong advocates.

Regarding the campus, the 2002 feasibility study option of rationalising accommodation into a more unified structure remains the goal. A further set of teaching and learning priorities presents a wide front of action. This includes consolidating the curricular choice for students within the Junior Certificate Framework review, developing a culture of self-evaluation, promoting classrooms as learning environments, raising expectations of

achievement among parents, targeting literacy and numeracy development, gathering reliable baseline data, setting realistic targets for improvement and supporting teachers. The DEIS plan contains further targets for improvement.

The board's agenda of priorities is comprehensive but requires rationalisation. It is recommended that the board distinguish between objectives and priorities and identify immediate, medium-term and long-term timeframes for their achievement. In communicating with the school community on the achievement of the priorities, the board is urged to consider publishing an annual report on the operation and performance of the school as contemplated by section 20 of the Education Act, 1998.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

High quality is evident in the leadership of staff by the senior management team of principal and two deputy principals. They are motivated leaders who model a strong work ethic. They are deeply committed to the school and to the pursuit of excellence in learning. They are well organised, each with discrete areas of responsibility. The timetabling of staff is equitable. The deputy principals enhance the team's instructional leadership capacity following secondment to the Project Maths development team, serving on national curriculum course committees, and continuing to work as classroom practitioners.

Staff continuing professional development (CPD) is strongly supported by senior management. Recent examples include student management, special educational needs (SEN), teacher-ICT proficiency, whole-school literacy, educational leadership, and leading the mentoring of newly-qualified teachers. The teacher's handbook provides an excellent professional reference guide to staff. A considerable number of teachers hold additional post-graduate qualifications and the significant number already holding SEN qualifications continues to grow. There is a high involvement of staff in extra-curricular activities.

Results of a recent stress-in-the-workplace survey among the teaching staff show, in almost all cases, very positive satisfaction levels with being a member of staff in Carndonagh Community School. E-portal access is provided for parents, students and staff. The challenge of achieving effective communication in the multiple-building campus, with the seventy-member staff dispersed across three staffrooms is addressed by an internal e-mail network for staff. Notwithstanding these measures, there was some evidence during the evaluation to suggest that a whole-staff exploration of the effectiveness of communication within the school community would be beneficial.

Management communicates high expectations of staff. Affirmation and support are provided alongside the establishment of a strong culture of professional accountability. Underperformance in teaching, when identified, is challenged and support offered. Clear expectations of the quality of subject department planning are communicated and management maintains an oversight of attainment trends in all subjects in the certificate examinations.

The quality of senior management communication with staff is high, with several channels operating effectively. Staff advisory committee (SAC) meetings complement communication at staff meetings and records included examples of respectful and robust exchanges. An open-door access to senior management was affirmed by the contributions of almost all staff members interviewed. In the interests of assuring that communication is of high quality for all, its effectiveness should be subject to regular review.

Distributed leadership is evident in duties assigned to the holders of posts of responsibility (PORs). Most assistant principal (AP) post holders feel their voice is valued and included in decision-making. There are reasons to revisit the schedule of duties attaching to POR

positions. A closer match to the current needs of the school is desirable, with greater equity possible in the levels of responsibility delegated. Management should consider the introduction of an annual report by post holders to the board of management to inform the annual report recommended elsewhere.

Senior management has developed leadership capacity beyond the POR structure and beyond the teaching staff. This was especially apparent among the School Completion Programme (SCP) and school library staff.

School development planning (SDP), including DEIS planning, is well led by senior management. Mandatory policies are in place, with evidence of ongoing review. A whole-school focus has been established from the DEIS plan and SCP personnel receive excellent support from staff and management in leading, monitoring and reviewing areas of DEIS targets. DEIS initiatives involve approximately half of the members of staff in the delivery of supports to targeted students, who comprise 25% of the total enrolment, with more focused interventions targeted at 6%. Senior management maintains regular and close liaison with SCP interventions and both deputy principals lead particular strands of the DEIS plan. Year heads are similarly closely involved in overseeing and monitoring.

Leadership of students

The leadership of students by management and staff is of very good quality and the management of supports for targeted students under SCP is a particular strength. The general student perspective is captured in the particularly high response of students who agreed that they were proud to be in the school.

The Enrolment and Admissions Policy encourages open access to students of all abilities and promotes inclusion and respect for all traditions. As a DEIS school, these inclusive principles might be expressed as guarantees in a future revision of the policy. A more reader-friendly approach in the layout and tone of language would enhance the policy. The criteria used by the school to determine admission, and the order of priority in which they are applied, should also be more clearly listed.

Procedures for admission of first-year students are managed by a dedicated transfer team; there is close liaison with the feeder primary schools and statutory agencies. The wishes of parents are, commendably, specifically acknowledged in the Enrolment and Admissions Policy in regard to the placement of students in JCSP.

A properly constituted student council develops leadership and ensures the student voice is heard. Students play significant roles at school functions. Leadership and responsibility are further developed among senior students as prefects. Student awards celebrate and encourage effort, achievement, and the fullest participation in school life.

Reshaping a culture of absenteeism and early school leaving is a legacy challenge that the school addresses with all available resources. Over nine years NEWB data show very encouraging trends; the proportion of students absent over twenty days annually has been halved, suspensions reduced by a third, and the number of expulsions reduced to zero. The work of the DEIS core team, SCP supports, Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) and attention to recording and rewarding attendance have brought about a marked improvement.

The current code of behaviour, with its rules-based focus, does not at all reflect the positive approach to student management that is an integral part of the school culture. It is now timely to advance the review of the code of behaviour in line with NEWB guidelines.

SDP has involved securing a broad curriculum throughout a protracted period of school downsizing and staffing contraction. Guidance provision has recently been protected among the key supports that are in place for students. Leadership of JCSP is in transition and the programme's contraction indicates a need to cultivate an understanding of the benefits of participation within the school community. Optional TY is very popular, effectively led and renewed, and has direct senior management involvement. A planned higher profile for LCA has the potential to benefit a wider cohort of students. There is strong demand for LCVP.

The care team functions well and senior management is closely involved. A dyslexia-friendly school initiative is currently being introduced. Effective procedures are in place to identify students with SEN. All teachers involved in the delivery of learning support and resource are appropriately qualified. The allocated resource hours are fully utilised for their intended purpose. Educational plans are drawn up for students who receive support. To build on this good practice, it is recommended that identified students' progress be formally tracked on a regular basis. This will assist in targeting future interventions.

The school is compliant in providing students with twenty-eight hours' weekly instruction. Raised expectations and ongoing encouragement of higher-level uptake is a DEIS plan target and subject-department focus across the school. Student-centred school reports have been developed to support the personal message to students. The expectation of students to record all homework in journals received almost unanimous confirmation in student questionnaire responses.

The enrolment and admissions policy detail on subject choice for students is general and does not fully specify the curriculum available. Further details could be included as an updated appendix to the policy annually. Student and parent questionnaire responses on advice provided on subject choices suggest attention to this area.

2.3 Management of facilities

The management of facilities is very good. All works schemes open to application have been fully availed of. The school is clean, well maintained, with excellent stimulating learning environments created in a number of departments.

A very ambitious refurbishment and development of sports facilities has been incrementally effected, with changing rooms, shower and toilet facilities as the remaining target. This will be substantially self-financed by the school. The further development and integration of the campus, prioritised by the board, remains beyond its capacity to complete at the present time.

A health and safety statement has been ratified following a risk and safety audit to which all subject departments contributed. A Green School Committee is active in environmental awareness and recycling. A composting project has recently begun. The Green Flag award has been attained. It is recommended that this achievement be publicised by flying the flag.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Thirty-three lessons were observed across the curriculum. The proportion of teachers involved comprised almost half the entire teaching staff. The quality of learning and

teaching was overwhelmingly in the category of good to very good and, in some instances, excellent. There was scope for development in a very small minority of lessons.

Significant strengths were evident in preparation and planning across the full range of subject areas observed. These strengths included the use of learning outcomes to frame lessons and evaluate learning. Appropriate resources, including teacher-designed and ICT resources, were planned and used to good effect. This included advice on accessing learning resources on particular websites independently to reinforce classroom learning.

Attention was given to the development of literacy across many lessons. In the best instances, student awareness and use of subject-specific language was impressive. In a number of lessons, key words were displayed, were referred to in the course of the lesson, and were integral to the content of the lesson.

In a very small minority of lessons, the learning outcomes were poorly identified and were in turn lacking in appropriate challenge or were overly ambitious for the capacity of the learners. Opportunities to establish links to prior learning and to encourage students with the task ahead were missed.

The quality of teaching in all practical subjects was very good, with some excellent practices observed. The balance between theoretical and practical activities was appropriate. All activities were purposeful, were relevant to lesson content and successfully linked to everyday concepts. The pacing of a single-period laboratory lesson was exemplary in covering challenging material with a mixed-ability group against time constraints, while also effectively accommodating differentiation.

In most lessons, whole-class input was balanced very well with the provision of individual support, and students were challenged to think independently. Questioning strategies overall were good and adequate time was provided to students to respond. A good level of student engagement in learning was evident and, in the best cases, students were encouraged to make informed contributions and to think independently. ICT resources were generally effective, particularly in providing prompts for discussions or used to display pertinent images relevant to the topic.

In most English lessons, good teaching practices were observed. Such practices included encouraging students to develop their language skills, reinforcing literacy development, the display of key words at the start of the lesson and frequent reference to them throughout. Second-language lessons in most cases exposed students to the use of the target language as the routine language of instruction and interaction. This included excellent and sustained use throughout by most teachers. To build on this excellent practice it is recommended that further opportunities be created for students to practise and reinforce newly-encountered vocabulary in free conversation.

A good level of student engagement was evident in the learning process. In the strongest examples, active-learning experiences were integral to the students' routine. Students were given opportunities to make informed contributions to the lesson topics. The development of independent learning and higher-order thinking was evident in a number of lessons. A warm relationship between teachers and learners characterised the classroom atmosphere in almost all lessons.

To build on the good practices observed, it is recommended that further attention be paid to planning for differentiation in learning in order to accommodate the mixed-ability needs of students. All language lessons should provide learners with meaningful opportunities to develop oral capacity. All subject plans should include aggregated examination data as a baseline reference for targeting improvement and informing the collaborative evaluation of

methodologies. Peer observation of lessons is worthy of consideration as a valuable tool in the sharing and development of good teaching and learning methodologies.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

The board of management has made a detailed response to all published subject inspection reports (SIRs). The board has sought and obtained confirmation from subject departments on the implementation of recommendations. The board has invested resources in subject departments beyond the recommendations made in the reports, on foot of assurances that they would further support improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Subject departments have addressed recommendations on learning and teaching collaboratively. The good practice identified in individual subject inspection reports has been disseminated to all staff. The morale boost of positive SIRs has been reinforced by senior management.

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

The school is well placed to undertake the school self-evaluation process. DEIS planning has brought familiarity with collecting and analysing baseline data to frame improvement targets. There is demonstrated capacity in school improvement. Senior management personnel, the drivers of school planning, are strong advocates of self-evaluation. Subject inspections have led to self-evaluation among subject departments on the quality of their work. Management, teachers, parents and students involved in the current evaluation were fully co-operative and confident in the quality of the school's work and open to the process of self-reflection and enquiry. These are good indicators of capacity in self-evaluation and improvement.

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 Carndonagh Community School accepts and welcomes this WSE-MLL Report as a positive reflection of the school management and staff's commitment to high standards of teaching and learning and provision for the pastoral care needs of our pupils. The Board is pleased at the very high satisfaction levels recorded by the pupils and parents for their school.

The Board applauds the progress on School Development Planning, Policy Development, and the energies of the staff community devoted to achieving the Mission Statement, particularly in a difficult economic climate that has impacted on all areas of school life.

The Board acknowledges the supportive nature of this School Inspection and the courtesy and professionalism of the Inspection team and the resulting opportunities for reflection and school evaluation.

The Board notes the overwhelmingly positive evaluation of teaching and learning and will continue to promote professional accountability and address any areas where there is scope for development.

The Board acknowledges the recognition of the complex physical environment of the school campus and the efforts of the Board to meet the needs of the school. The affirmation of the integral role of School Completion Programme personnel and the School Librarian is very welcome.

School management will continue to provide support for teaching and learning strategies and promote good practice. It would be helpful if the feedback provided to individual teachers could be made available to school management.

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

Since the WSE Inspection the Board has convened to review and prioritise aims and objectives. Timeframes for review of targets will be agreed over the next series of meetings. The Board remains committed to the development of the school in all areas and recognises the opportunities offered by the self-evaluation process.

The Enrolment & Admissions Policy is under review. All material relevant to subject and programme choice will be copied onto the Programmes page of the school website. The school is actively aligning its Code of Behaviour to reflect the child-centred and Restorative Practice philosophy of current structures.

The Board will continue to support staff development and Continuing Professional Development.

The Board will consider an annual report and is currently evaluating enhanced opportunities for engagement with the parent and student representatives. The Board is committed to a review of communication.

The Board undertakes to align Post of Responsibility Duties to the specific and immediate needs of the school, to ensure equity and will seek an annual report from all Post of Responsibility holders.

The School Management will continue to advance School Self Evaluation.