

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

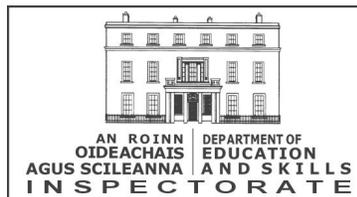
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Heywood Community School,
Ballinakill, County Laois
Roll number: 91427C**

Date of inspection: 24 September 2014



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in September 2014 in Heywood 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 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

Heywood Community School was established in 1990 as the result of an amalgamation of three religious schools and one vocational school which brought together a great richness and long tradition of providing education in Co Laois. The school's trustees are the Brigidine Sisters, Salesian Fathers and the Laois-Offaly Education and Training Board.

The school serves a very wide catchment area and students travel quite a distance to attend the school. It is a large co-educational post-primary school and the enrolment has been consistent over the last number of years and is currently at 685. The curricular programmes offered by the school are the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- A strong commitment to excellence was evident at all levels in the school from board of management, senior management and members of the teaching staff.
- The quality of management and leadership provided by the senior management team (SMT) is excellent.
- The middle management team is a highly functioning and effective structure in the school.
- The commitment of teachers who give so generously and voluntarily of their time to promote learning outside the classroom contributes enormously to the quality of education that the students receive in this school.
- The school building, facilities and extensive grounds are managed and maintained to a very high standard.
- The quality of teaching observed ranged from good to excellent and in a few lessons there was scope for development.
- The school self-evaluation (SSE) process is very good and is facilitated by a strong culture of engagement in continuous professional development (CPD) and collaboration at subject department level.

Recommendations for Further Development

- In light of very good work being carried out by post holders it is recommended that they prepare an annual report on their work and that duties attached to all posts be kept under review to ensure that the evolving needs of the school are met.

- All teachers need to gain a full understanding of the rationale underpinning Assessment for Learning (AfL), plan for the use of AfL in teaching and learning and implement AfL strategies in the course of daily classroom practice and in the correction of students' written work.
- In order to extend the very good SSE practices in place teachers should engage in peer collaborative review in order to share the excellent practice observed in teaching and learning.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The Board of Management of the school is appropriately constituted and comprises representatives from the four amalgamated schools. The various trustee bodies are very supportive of the board and of the school. The board has received training, displayed a very thorough knowledge of the school and is deeply committed to its development. The board's practice in relation to policy development is very good. All mandatory policies are in place and have been ratified by the board. The process of development of policies is also very good as input is sought from all stakeholders.

The board provides very good leadership for the school and has identified an appropriate range of developmental priorities. Maintaining and developing the school's physical environment is an ongoing priority as is the development of the information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure in classrooms and throughout the school. The priorities identified through the SSE process regarding literacy and numeracy feature in board discussions as indicated by a review of the minutes of board meetings. To enhance its leadership role in relation to leading learning, it is suggested that updates on learning and teaching feature regularly on the agenda of board meetings.

The board communicates well with stakeholders and is extremely supportive of the work of the principal. Members of the board attend important school events such as the Leaving Certificate graduation evening. The board is supportive of teachers' requests to avail of CPD courses and allocates some finance for this when possible. To enhance communication with all stakeholders it is suggested that the board considers meeting annually with the student council.

The in-school management structures are very good. The principal and deputy principal collaborate very well together and both are hardworking and deeply committed to excellence in all aspects of their work. The daily management of the school is exemplary. The SMT are supported by post holders who comprise the middle management team. The post holders carry out a wide range of duties effectively and make a great contribution to the management of the school.

There is a democratically elected student council and the student voice is fostered through this. Members of the council are engaged appropriately in school activities.

Partnership with parents is central to the ethos of the school. The results of parent questionnaires administered as part of this evaluation indicate that parents feel welcome in the school and that their views on school matters are sought regularly. Communication with parents is very good. The school has a very informative website and the parents' handbook is an excellent source of information for parents. The parents' association (PA) is very active in the school and the principal attends PA meetings regularly. The PA is invited to bring any issues of concern to the principal. In the course of meeting with inspectors

members of the PA expressed great satisfaction with the school. Partnership with the local community is excellent, for example the new gymnasium is a result of outstanding collaboration with the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA).

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The quality of leadership for learning as demonstrated by the principal and deputy principal is excellent. The SMT use a wide range of skills to motivate, manage and support staff and students. The principal is very supportive of staff engagement in CPD and there has been a long standing culture of commitment to participating in CPD in the school. Due to the high level of expertise among the teaching staff in relation to innovation in teaching and learning it is suggested that more opportunities be provided for the delivery of peer CPD. It is recommended that the future focus for the SMT should be to lead the embedding of new and existing teaching and learning good practices on a whole-school basis.

The teaching staff is highly self-motivated and many teachers display excellent leadership qualities and initiative. It is particularly noteworthy that some teachers have taken on leadership roles in a voluntary capacity. Teachers are enabled to lead projects in the school and do so successfully. The middle management team carry out their roles in a very effective manner and there is evidence of very good distributed leadership at this level. In light of the very good work being done by post holders it is recommended that they prepare, for the principal, an annual report outlining aspects of their work that went well and areas for improvement. It is also recommended that the duties attached to posts and other leadership roles be kept under review in order to ensure that leadership and professional capacity is maintained and developed among all staff members.

Subject coordinators display great leadership for learning in their subject areas. Their commitment and dedication to this role is noted. Subject coordinators are involved in the analysis of examination data and in some instances in the setting of targets for improvement. In one instance, a coordinator of a core subject set targets for senior cycle students who had taken ordinary level in the Junior Certificate, to take higher level in the Leaving Certificate. This was achieved successfully. This is an example of outstanding leadership for learning and exemplifies teacher belief in student potential and a deep commitment to raising educational standards.

The curriculum provided in the school is broad and balanced and there is a wide range of subjects on offer. Students currently choose optional subjects prior to entry into the school. The provision of a taster programme merits consideration in order to enable students to experience a range of subjects and make more informed choices.

There is a wide range of curricular programmes on offer. The TY is optional but is oversubscribed every year. It would be valuable to review the subjects available in TY on a yearly basis. The uptake of LCVP is also good but there is a need to review the coordination, selection of students and timetabling of this programme. Work experience is a feature of both TY and LCVP and it would be useful for the school to look at how links with the community can be further developed to support this component of these programmes.

The quality of timetabling is very good and optimal use is made of the teaching resources allocated to the school. Attendance and retention are monitored in a systematic way. It is suggested that consideration be given to setting short term goals for a small number of students who have a poor attendance record.

There is a comprehensive code of behaviour in place which includes a charter of rights and responsibilities. In line with best practice there is an emphasis on positive behaviour and a clear ladder of referral for use in the case of breaches of school rules is delineated in the code.

Guidance, counselling and care strategies are in place including Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programmes to support students. The quality of care for students is exemplary and the structures in place to ensure that individual students with care needs are identified and assisted are very good. The dedication of the tutors, chaplain and all teachers to student welfare is acknowledged.

The provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) is very good. There is a core team of highly qualified teachers in place who have a wide range of subject specialisms including practical subjects. However the overall number of teachers involved in the delivery of learning support is quite large and it is recommended that every effort be made to reduce the size of the team to ensure that those with the most expertise teach the relevant students. In addition consideration should be given to introducing team teaching, as an additional method of delivering learning support. It is recommended that opportunities be given to the SEN core team to share their wealth of knowledge regarding effective and appropriate teaching and learning strategies on a whole-staff basis.

The quality of leadership for learning provided to students is excellent, in particular through the myriad of extra and co-curricular activities. The quality of learning afforded to students through participation and success in a wide variety of competitions related to the environment, debating, music, sport and several subject areas is also excellent. The commitment of teachers who give so generously and voluntarily of their time to promote learning outside the classroom contributes enormously to the quality of education that the students receive in this school. Students also gain valuable leadership and learning experiences through participation in the Meitheal and prefect systems.

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*.

1.2 Management of facilities

The school building, facilities and extensive grounds are managed and maintained to a very high standard. The contribution to the maintenance of the school by the caretaker is noted. The principal has played a vital role in ensuring the upkeep of the school by constantly seeking to upgrade the existing facilities and planning for new ones. The classrooms and specialist rooms are all very well equipped and the school has outstanding sports facilities.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning observed ranged from good to excellent. In a few lessons there was scope for development. Student questionnaires indicate that the majority of students find their classes interesting and most students believe that teaching is good in the school.

The quality of long term planning for the delivery of subjects, evidenced by the subject plans, is very good. Best practice in subject planning was noted where the intended learning

outcomes, methodologies, resources and modes of assessment to be used were clearly delineated. In most subject plans the agreed general whole-school targets for the development of literacy and numeracy have been adapted to individual subjects. There is scope to develop this aspect of the plans particularly in relation to planning for the development of students' oral literacy across all subjects. Statistical analysis of state examination results was included in subject plans. It is recommended that teachers provide an analytical commentary on the results and an action plan regarding targets for future development.

In most lessons observed the learning intentions were shared with the students. Lessons were well structured and teacher input was very clear. In the lessons where the quality of teaching was best there was a strong emphasis on active methodologies, pair work, group work, problem solving, good use of ICT and variety of approaches. In these lessons also there was very good use of strategies associated with AfL. In a few lessons there was scope to decrease the amount of teacher talk and to use a wider variety of methodologies to ensure the active participation of students.

A good range of assessment techniques was used within most lessons. Mini white boards were used to very good effect in a few lessons to assess individual student learning. As these are effective in promoting learning and since students stated they enjoy using them, it is recommended that more widespread use be made of them. In line with good practice homework was assigned in lessons. An example of excellent practice noted in the school's homework policy is the commitment by teachers to give regular feedback using the AfL approach. To fulfil this commitment it is recommended that all teachers gain a full understanding of the rationale underpinning AfL and become familiar with and implement AfL strategies on a daily basis in lessons and in the correction of students' written work.

Classroom management in all lessons was very good and student behaviour was excellent. The rapport between teachers and students was very good and conducive to a positive classroom atmosphere. The learning environment in all cases was very good and the print rich environment in all classrooms was supportive of student learning. The layout in almost all classrooms is traditional and it is recommended that consideration be given to arranging the desks into group settings where possible. This layout would better facilitate implementation of AfL strategies, emphasis on the development of students' oral skills and the use of active teaching methodologies.

Student engagement in lessons was very good and students were on task at all times. Student learning is strongly enhanced outside of the classroom by participation in extracurricular activities such as exchanges and school tours related to a variety of subject areas. Students are encouraged to reflect on their experience of such events by completing reflection sheets. Students are asked to write about the personal, social and academic benefits of educational outings and how they might improve in some aspect the next time. This is an example of outstanding practice.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Senior management has effectively overseen the work on the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations and plays a role in ensuring that the work is ongoing through the subject department structure. Action plans were developed following inspections and these plans are included in the subject department folders. This is good practice. Overall very good progress has been made on the implementation of

recommendations as is evidenced by the introduction of the competency test in Mathematics for first-year students and the improvement in timetabling in History.

3.2 Learning and teaching

The main recommendations regarding teaching and learning in previous reports relate to increasing the amount of active teaching methodologies and the need for teachers to give written developmental feedback in student copybooks. In the course of this evaluation it was clear that these recommendations have been partially implemented but there is scope for development on a whole-school basis.

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

There is a culture of reflective practice in the school and the SSE process is very good. A lot of data is gathered through assessment of students, analysis of state examination data, information transfer from feeder primary schools and through the use of surveys. Commendably the process that has been established in the school ensures that the views of all stakeholders are included when data is being gathered. Having analysed data and used the national priorities the school has identified the development of student literacy and numeracy as the focus of its SSE report. Whole-school targets have been identified in the school improvement plan and individual subject departments have worked on adapting the targets at subject level. The SSE process in the school is greatly enhanced by the very good collaboration at subject department level. Progress in achieving targets is reviewed and monitored at subject level and by the SMT. It is suggested that the next step in the SSE process should be for staff to engage in peer collaborative review in order to share best practice in teaching and learning.

The school has great capacity for development and improvement. It was clear in the course of this evaluation that the school management and staff constantly seek to review practice, upskill and are open to a change agenda, to meet the ever evolving educational needs of their students in a holistic manner.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

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 L.C.V.P. is currently being reviewed. A.F.L. talk is planned from September 2015 at the start of school year. A report from post holders has been requested. Peer C.P.D. is continuing. A session on I.T. was completed 9th Dec 2014.

The S.E.N department will be given the opportunity to share expertise with all staff in September 2015.