

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Scoil na mBráithre  
Dungarvan, County Waterford  
Roll number: 64880T**

**Date of inspection: 26 April 2012**



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

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April 2012 in Scoil na mBráithre, Dungarvan. 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

## ***Introduction***

Scoil na mBráithre is a voluntary secondary school for boys, under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). It has been an integral part of the educational provision for the greater Dungarvan area since its foundation in 1807. The school endeavours to promote the key elements of the ERST Charter; faith; partnership; excellence in teaching and learning; a caring school community and inspiring transformational leadership. The school operates from two adjacent buildings, the original building completed in 1835 and a newer building completed in 1982.

The school provides the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year Programme (TY) and the established Leaving Certificate. Enrolment has increased steadily over the past three years to a current level of 291 students. A Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) course in Information Processing is also run by the school, with an enrolment of nineteen students. The student cohort is drawn from the urban area of Dungarvan/Abbeyside and the surrounding rural hinterland.

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

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

- Scoil na mBráithre endeavours to be inclusive of students of all abilities and backgrounds and works to promote a sense of community.
- Members of the board of management have a strong commitment and loyalty to the school and its ethos.
- Senior management works hard to ensure the school operates effectively, an orderly environment is maintained and all education partners are appropriately consulted on school matters.
- Structures to support students with additional educational needs are well organised.
- Sport plays a considerable role in the life of the school and a significant majority of students engage in extra-curricular activities.
- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from satisfactory to very good.
- Most lessons engaged students effectively and interactions between students and teachers were positive and affirming.
- In a minority of lessons, there was scope for improvement as students were mostly passive and were not always engaged by the lesson content.
- Good progress has been made in implementing recommendations from previous inspection reports.

- The school has the collective professional capacity required to progress priorities identified for future improvement.

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

- A systematic approach to school self-evaluation should be implemented to inform future planning, develop the quality of teaching and learning and to monitor students' progress.
- The pastoral care structures and practices should be reviewed.
- Teachers should ensure an appropriate balance between instruction and student activity in all lessons.
- Teachers should adopt the principles of assessment-for-learning (AfL) and a whole-school assessment policy should be developed and implemented consistently by all teachers.
- The allocation of some of the Croke Park hours should be revisited to ensure compliance with Circular Letter 25/2011.

## **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 current board of management is in its first year of operation. It is appropriately constituted, meets regularly and communicates effectively with the school community. ERST has provided, and continues to provide, considerable support to the board and the school. Board members displayed a strong commitment and loyalty to the school and its ethos. They are fully aware of the school context, its strengths and its future challenges. The current board possesses the knowledge and skills to provide direction and educational leadership to the school.

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 school's priorities for development**

The school has experienced a period of change in recent years. During that time, little progress has been made in advancing school development planning. Members of the board, senior management and staff stated that the school is now ready to engage in forward planning and whole school improvement. The chairperson of the board has initiated a systematic approach to reviewing all existing school policies and advancing those that remain unratified.

The establishment of a shared and common vision for school improvement should be supported by a coherent and systematic approach to development planning. The present school plan is incomplete and does not include a developmental section. In leading this process the board and senior management should agree a strategic planning direction, with achievable and time-bound outcomes.

The board and senior management aspire to maintain the current curriculum provision and ensure that all students achieve their academic ambitions. A number of priorities have been identified for further development: increasing enrolment; improvements to the physical infrastructure; a review of school policies and the introduction of ePortal. The identification of strategies that support teaching and learning should also be included in the list of

priorities. To achieve this, the board should initiate a brief consultation process with the school community to establish relevant additional priorities.

An active Parents' Association (PA) provides valuable support to many areas of school life. Members of the PA are appropriately informed, through regular principal reports, about the work of the school and have been consulted recently on matters of policy development.

## ***2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

### **Leadership of staff**

The senior management team ensure that the school operates effectively on a daily basis. The principal and deputy principal work closely together and have established a collaborative and systematic approach to the execution of their respective duties. Both members of the senior management team maintain a visible presence on the school corridors and work to ensure that an orderly environment is maintained throughout the day.

Since assuming the role, the principal has worked sensitively to develop a supportive and collaborative approach to the management of the school. He operates an open door policy and is readily accessible to staff, students and parents. In order to focus on longer-term planning and to support instructional leadership, the principal should consider delegating some of the duties that he is currently undertaking. The vast majority of parents responded in questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation that they were happy with the school and agreed that the school is well run. They also indicated that students are made feel welcome, the discipline system is fair and there is a good atmosphere.

Members of the middle management team share a number of duties as part of their respective posts of responsibility. Some post holders willing to extend and develop their leadership roles reported that they are supported to do so by the principal. At present, there is no scheduled meeting between senior management and the middle management team. Consideration should be given to providing middle management with an opportunity to report on their duties and to discuss areas for further development. This process should aim to enable post holders to contribute to the effectiveness of the schedule of posts in relation to meeting the needs of the school.

Senior management praised the work ethic of staff, their dedication and their duty of care to students. Senior management's leadership of learning is characterised by supporting whole staff and individual continuing professional development (CPD). To build on this, consideration should be given to the development of the professional capacity, amongst post holders and interested staff members, to lead specific elements of school self-evaluation and improvement, including the development of the school's literacy and numeracy strategy.

Communications within the school are effective and consultative. Staff meetings are held regularly and provide opportunities for staff to contribute to the decision-making process. Opportunities for teachers to address colleagues during staff meetings are provided on occasion. Consideration should be given to expanding this practice to include brief presentations by colleagues with particular expertise and interest in areas that enhance teaching, learning and assessment, including sharing of experiences from CPD events.

Subject department plans varied in their quality and presentation. Some plans examined were reflective, strategic and evaluative. However, there was scope for development in a number of subject plans. Subject departments should aim to further develop their programmes of work based on the specific knowledge and skills that students should know and be able to do at specified intervals over their course of study. An action-planning cycle should be implemented with a focus on teaching, learning and assessment and supported by

a framework to reflect on practice in the classroom. To advance subject planning and planning overall, it would be useful if an individual, or team, could be identified to lead the area of school development planning.

### **Leadership of students**

The school endeavours to be inclusive of students of all abilities and backgrounds and works to promote a sense of community. Interviews with parents, students and staff highlighted the relatively small size of the school as a key strength. The vast majority of students indicated through questionnaire responses that they get on well with other students, feel safe and secure and feel there is a good atmosphere in the school.

Transitions, including enrolment and induction of incoming students, as well as programme and subject choice in senior cycle, are well managed. A subject sampling programme in first year supports students in making informed choices about their Junior Certificate subjects. Additional information evenings support parents and students at important stages of school life.

Management decisions on curricular provision have ensured the maintenance of a broad and balanced curriculum. A collaborative arrangement with a neighbouring school has resulted in the retention of option subject choices to meet the needs of students in both schools, while maintaining the professional capacity to deliver these subjects. The provision of Agricultural Science as an additional subject after school, in addition to after-school study and extra inputs by individual teachers in particular subject areas or projects, also extend and support students' learning. School management's proposal to re-establish a curriculum advisory group should be progressed, as a useful means of informing and advising the board and staff on future curricular and timetable developments.

A guidance and counselling programme is appropriately provided. Timetabled classes at senior cycle and scheduled guidance inputs at junior cycle provide support for students' personal, educational and vocational development. The learning support programme is well organised and resourced. Allocated resources are appropriately used for their intended purposes. Individual education plans (IEPs) are drawn up for students receiving support and students' progress is carefully monitored and documented. The special educational needs team is available to provide advice and support to mainstream teachers. Consideration should be given to expanding the models of support to include in-class support, where appropriate. The valuable contribution of Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) was also highlighted by senior management and teachers during the evaluation.

Student behaviour was observed to be good throughout the period of the evaluation. Nevertheless, the code of behaviour is overdue for review and should be advanced as a priority in line with the guidelines of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB). While the year-head system operates well and provides a valuable point of contact for students, it is recommended that more formality be brought to the pastoral care structures, including the establishment of a care team. Half of students surveyed were uncertain or disagreed that they could talk to an adult in the school if they were having problems. The role of a class tutor would be beneficial for all class groups, supported by a year head.

Teachers in the main are deployed to their subject specialisms and across the range of programmes and levels. The timetable delivers the required weekly instructional time for students. Staff, planning and parent-teacher meetings are appropriately arranged. A number of hours have been allocated to cover some school activities not intended under the Croke Park agreement. The future use of these hours should be revisited in accordance with Circular Letter 25/2011.

High standards are achieved by the school in relation to rates of attendance, punctuality and retention. Occasional assemblies and an annual awards evening are held to reinforce procedures, to monitor and encourage students' progress and to affirm their efforts and achievements. Students achieve relatively well in state examinations and the vast majority progress to third level. Recent trends indicate an increase in the numbers of students taking higher level in many subjects, with some increases in attainment. While student achievement in state examinations is reviewed by management, these results are not yet discussed formally with individual teachers or subject departments, nor do they form the basis of a whole-staff discussion on student attainment. A system of target setting and attainment tracking should be developed to formalise the collection and use of data to monitor students' progress and to inform a review of teacher planning and approach.

A range of additional opportunities is provided for students to assume leadership roles. An active student council and the student mentoring programme provide opportunities for students to lead their peers. A greater awareness of the role of the student council amongst the student body would be beneficial in strengthening the student voice. Other areas within the curriculum and within extra-curricular activities also support student leadership. Involvement in the Comenius Project has provided some students with valuable opportunities to collaborate with their peers and those from other nationalities.

A significant majority of students indicated that they engage in extra-curricular activities. Sport plays a considerable role in the life of the school. The school community is justifiably proud of the sizeable contribution of its students, as part of the Coláistí na nDéise Thiar team, in winning the prestigious Dr. Harty Cup final. This is a very significant milestone in the sporting achievements of the school and all involved deserve much credit for their hard work and dedication. Pride in the achievements of students in the variety of cultural, sporting and academic events is evident through the display of trophies and photographs on corridors and in school publications. The work of staff in organising and delivering the various extra-curricular and co-curricular programmes is highly commended.

### ***2.3 Management of facilities***

Management of school facilities is good. A number of significant improvements have taken place over the last number of years that greatly enhance the appearance and energy efficiency of the school. However, the original building requires regular attention. The building is listed and this imposes some restrictions on what is possible. The board are currently working towards improvements in this building. The health and safety statement has been identified for review and should be progressed.

The information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure is good and most rooms are fitted with a data projector. Senior management encourages staff to use ICT to support their teaching and all teachers have been supplied with a laptop.

The school lacks a suitable indoor facility for Physical Education. However, it avails of a local sports centre and optimises the use of its outdoor pitches and hard court.

Consideration should be given to participating in the Green Schools Programme, an endeavour that would add considerably to environmental awareness in the school.

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

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

During the course of the evaluation a total of twenty lessons were observed, including all year groups and comprising a wide range of subject areas.

In almost all lessons, a positive rapport was evident between students and teachers. Student behaviour was good and was maintained through a combination of effective classroom management strategies and positive interactions.

The quality of teaching ranged from satisfactory to very good. Most lessons were well planned and structured to scaffold students' learning by building on prior knowledge. Many teachers prepared a selection of suitable resources to stimulate students' interest and to engage them in purposeful tasks. Examples of innovative resources included vibrant visual presentations, podcasts, interactive quizzes and parametric models to explain and animate mechanical assemblies.

The majority of lessons began with the teacher outlining the content of the lesson. Best practice was observed when teachers also explicitly established the intended learning outcomes. This practice should be extended to all lessons. Half of the lessons observed included a focused summation of learning. At the end of lessons, all teachers should endeavour to include a structured recapitulation, including the assessment of learning outcomes.

Teaching methodologies varied considerably from traditional didactic approaches to innovative facilitative approaches. While the former can be effective, student interest, engagement and participation were considerably higher during the latter. Most successful lessons supported students' learning through well-structured and purposeful independent or collaborative tasks. These approaches should be extended, as appropriate, to ensure there is a good balance between teacher instruction and student activity. Discussion and sharing of effective pedagogy by teachers should be facilitated and encouraged by senior management.

There was evidence of good quality learning in most lessons. Students demonstrated good recall when questioned. In some lessons, good practice was observed where students were applying their language skills or engaged in problem-solving tasks that required the application of prior knowledge. Such approaches affirmed students' competency and encouraged responsibility and accountability for learning. Overall however, opportunities for students to apply and consolidate their learning were relatively limited.

A range of assessment modes were employed in the lessons observed. These methods included question and answer, facilitated discussion, oral feedback and the practical application of skills. Oral feedback, to individuals and entire class groups, was a common feature of most lessons. This feedback helped to provide some advice and direction for future improvement. The practice of providing students with written, formative feedback was not evident in the majority of students' copybooks examined. This is an essential element in supporting the learning process and should be implemented consistently across all subject areas. A review of the school's homework policy and the development of a whole-school assessment policy should be undertaken. This should aim to improve students' responsibility for their learning and improve the presentation of their work, which in many cases was unsatisfactory.

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

#### ***4.1 Management***

Good efforts have been made by school management to address the recommendations made in previous inspection reports. The implementation of key recommendations focusing on curricular areas such as introducing new modules to the school's TY programme and implementing aspects of the revised Junior Cycle Physical Education syllabus have progressed well. To maintain this impetus, TY planning should be further developed and structured according to Department guidelines, with a yearly plan identified and communicated to parents, students and staff. Recommendations made in the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) subject inspection report have resulted in the development of a good quality draft Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy. This policy should now be formalised and ratified.

#### ***4.2 Learning and Teaching***

Some progress has been made in developing subject department planning. A common element of previous inspection reports was improvements in assessment procedures and developing teaching and learning methodologies. While progress has been made by individual teachers and subject departments, they remain as areas for development on a whole-school basis. A greater focus on instructional leadership and the consistent implementation of a comprehensive assessment policy will yield considerable benefits in realising the school's aim of excellence in teaching and learning.

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

#### ***5.1***

After a period of change, the school is now well placed to initiate and implement a robust model of school self-evaluation. In addition to the board's priorities for school improvement, the recommendations in this report should provide a clear direction for school improvement.

The school has the collective professional capacity to realise meaningful school improvement. The focus should now be setting clear goals for development. This process should be structured, informed by reliable data and targets and incorporate regular reviews of progress. To expedite this process the school should utilise the *School Self-Evaluation Draft Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools*.

*Published February 2013.*