

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning
REPORT

Collinstown Park Community College
Clondalkin, Dublin 22
Roll number: 70041J

Date of inspection: 16 January 2014



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in January in Collinstown Park Community College. 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

Collinstown Park Community College operates under the trusteeship of the Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB). The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department of Education and Skills action plan for educational inclusion. All Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes are provided. Transition Year (TY) is compulsory for students. In addition, the school offers Post Leaving Certificate (PLC), Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS), and Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) courses.

Current enrolment in the mainstream school is 306 boys and 297 girls. Students come from two main feeder primary schools and also from further afield. The school maintains strong links with the local community and with outside agencies and is committed to equality of opportunity for students. Through initiatives like Caring About Society Together (CAST), the school facilitates students in making a contribution to improving local communities nationally. There are 45 PLC students, 39 VTOS students and 132 BTEI part-time students enrolled.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management and DDLETB are supportive of the school and are a valuable source of experience and expertise.
- The principal and deputy principal are an outstanding senior management team and are very effective leaders of learning.
- The middle management system provides excellent support to the operation of the school.
- The quality of care provided for students is excellent.
- There are many valuable interventions in place to support students in developing their literacy skills.
- The quality of support for students with special educational needs is very good.
- The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum and makes every effort to meet the needs of students.
- The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator maintains very good links with the school, parents, the local primary schools and outside agencies.
- Overall, a high standard of teaching and learning, which included examples of excellent practice, was observed in the evaluation.

- The school demonstrated very good capacity for improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should include teaching and learning on the agenda of each meeting and should engage in long-term strategic planning for the school.
- The school's website should be used to communicate the board's main decisions to parents and the wider school community and opportunities should be provided for the student council to communicate directly with the board.
- The principal and deputy principal should observe lessons as an additional means of providing on-going feedback and encouragement to teachers.
- Second and third-year students should be represented on the student council and should be given additional suitable roles of responsibility.
- The teachers should further the very good practices already in place by developing a process of creating collaboratively planned lessons that are then taught, observed, evaluated and amended as necessary.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is supportive of the school and is a valuable source of experience and expertise. The board is properly constituted and conscientiously fulfils its statutory obligations. The board makes a very good contribution to policy and decision making. It has adopted and ratified all the mandatory school policies with the exception of the data protection policy, which is currently being drafted. Given that student learning is at the core of decision-making in the school, it is recommended that teaching and learning be included on the agenda of each board meeting.

The board communicates with the wider school community through the teacher and parent representatives on the board and by displaying board minutes in the staffroom. There is a parents' group in the school, who contribute to policy making. The Parents' Association is currently being re-established. The board should use the school website to communicate its main decisions to parents and the wider school community. Opportunities should also be provided for the student council to communicate directly with the board.

The school is approaching the thirtieth anniversary of its founding and is also due to complete the second full cycle of very high quality DEIS planning. The school self-evaluation (SSE) process has been successfully introduced this year also. It is recommended that the board takes full advantage of this valuable opportunity to reflect on the work of the school so far and to engage in long-term strategic planning.

The DDLETB supports the school very well through the provision of training and resources. Collaboration between teachers and between senior managers of schools under the trusteeship of the DDLETB is also facilitated very well.

The principal and deputy principal are an outstanding senior management team. They work very well together and communicate regularly. They self-evaluate and engage in short, medium and long-term planning. They have established very effective systems for involving students and staff

in decision making and planning for the school. They regularly survey students and conduct a yearly survey of staff asking them to suggest areas for priority attention in school planning. They value ideas and have fostered a culture of creativity, initiative and innovation. Through reflection and collaboration they ensure that the school is continually improving. Student learning is a shared high priority of the senior management team. They know the students very well and have a great awareness of their individual needs. Their open and approachable style of leadership supports, empowers, and encourages leadership among the staff. The compassion and dedication that they show in their work brings out the best in the people they work with.

The middle management system provides excellent support to the operation of the school. Most post-holders are assistant principals or special duties teachers and some posts are filled on a voluntary basis. The post-holders have appropriate autonomy. They all meet together bi-weekly and capably carry out their duties. The meetings of the middle management team are open to all teachers and it is common for teachers to attend them. The posts have been reviewed recently and the school's needs are very well met by the post structure. Every post-holder provides the senior management team with an annual report evaluating the post-holder's performance in carrying out the responsibilities attached to the post. An annual meeting between senior management and all the post-holders is held also to share expertise and to engage in strategic planning for the school.

It was evident throughout the evaluation that the teachers share a strong commitment to caring for the students and to encouraging them to achieve their potential. They are actively involved in the life of the school through their work as tutors, class teachers and year heads, through their participation on school and subject planning consultation groups, and through their contribution to the school's broad extracurricular programme. The teachers view themselves as part of a whole-school pastoral care team and work together to support the students and each other. They very generously provide additional tuition after school for students, whenever this is necessary.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal provide very effective leadership for learning through ensuring that the timetable is well organised, that teachers are supported in undertaking continuing professional development(CPD), and through the provision of resources for teaching and learning. They actively celebrate and encourage good student behaviour. They share a common objective, which is to remove any impediment to success that a disadvantaged context might bring by ensuring equality of opportunity for all students.

The principal and deputy principal strongly value the teachers' efforts and contributions. They are cognisant of the importance of affirmation and appreciation in leading learning in the school. It is, therefore, recommended that they observe lessons in order to provide further feedback and encouragement to teachers. This will contribute to the maintenance of very high levels of teacher motivation.

The school has engaged very well with subject planning. In keeping with very good practice, each plan includes a section for reflection and action planning. Schemes of work for each subject have been developed and best practice was noted where they clearly outlined the intended learning outcomes, the methodologies, resources, and modes of assessment to be used. Appropriate timeframes for the completion of work were also a feature of the good planning noted. It is recommended that the very good practice described above be extended to all subject areas.

In addition to engagement with a wide range of teacher CPD, the school is participating in Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century (TL21) a programme that promotes collaborative learning and

some teachers are completing further relevant study. The value of this to the school is enhanced by the existing culture of sharing expertise. It is recommended that teachers progress the very good practices that are already in place. To achieve this they should engage in developing a process of creating collaboratively planned lessons that are then taught, observed, evaluated and amended by the teachers themselves.

It is very good that the quality of learning is monitored on a student-by-student basis through a very thorough analysis of individual student attainment compared to national norms in the certificate examinations and in yearly-standardised tests. It is recommended that attendance, application and any other relevant indicators be added to this analysis in order to provide a more comprehensive perspective on each student's achievement.

The school's code of behaviour centres on positive discipline and the pastoral care of students. The school rules are communicated clearly and the code is implemented very effectively. There is a National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) teacher in the school, who very effectively supports students with serious behavioural issues. During the evaluation students were observed to be happy, confident and very respectful in their dealings with teachers and with each other.

Senior cycle students have a voice in the school through participation on the student council. They also represent the junior cycle students. In addition, senior cycle students are given a range of responsibilities that extends from mentoring first years through the 'Gluais' programme to organising and presenting at celebratory school events. First-year students' interests are brought to the student council through their 'Gluais' mentors and this works well for this year group. It is recommended that the leadership opportunities for second and third-year students be increased by involving them in organising school events, through enabling them to be represented on the student council and by giving them additional responsibilities. The school has high expectations for students and teachers are very affirming and encouraging.

The quality of care provided for students is excellent. The school's student care system is very well supported by the principal and deputy principal, care team, tutors, class teachers, year heads, NBSS teacher and the special needs assistants. The school chaplain and the guidance counsellors play a pivotal role in ensuring that the pastoral needs of students are met.

Improving students' literacy skills is given very high priority in the school. In order to ensure that this priority is addressed a learning and reading co-ordinator has been appointed as part of the post structure. Through the DEIS and SSE planning processes various valuable interventions for literacy have been implemented and evaluated. Examples include: a weekly timetabled library period for all first years, promotion of the use of key words in lessons, the 'SNIP' (Special Needs Information Press) programme for learning spellings, 'Inklinks' a writing workshop provided outside of school hours for interested students, and DEAR (Drop Everything and Read). In addition, a representative sample of first-year students was assessed by a speech and language therapist. Areas to be addressed were identified and a targeted programme for improvement in oral literacy was provided for all first years. A library and a full-time librarian have been provided under the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). This has been very effective in increasing student confidence with reading and in providing support for students' project work.

Very high quality learning support is provided for students with special educational needs. The main mode of delivery is the creation of smaller class groups. Team teaching is used with second-year students and one-to-one support is given in exceptional circumstances. The full range of programmes, which includes the JCSP and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme, is available. This provision assists the school in providing the majority of students with the best

options to meet their educational needs. Moreover, a recent self-evaluation of the LCA programme identified some students whose learning needs would be better supported by an alternative programme. The school is considering a Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) level four programme for such students. This is a very good example of the school's creativity in ensuring that students' individual needs are met.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum and makes every effort to meet the needs of students. Guidance lessons are provided for all year groups. Individual careers counselling appointments are also arranged. Personal counselling is available from the guidance team, school counsellor and the school chaplain. The guidance counsellors support students in making subject and level choices very well. They also play a key role in the induction of first-year students and in supporting students in transitioning from junior to senior cycle.

The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator maintains very good links between the school and parents, and with the local primary schools and outside agencies. The parents or guardians of each incoming first-year student are interviewed to identify any issues that may arise and to establish strong home-school links. Very good communication between the school and home is maintained also through the school journal and the school website. In addition, text messages are sent and phone calls home are made where necessary. The school produces a newsletter and there are various events such as information evenings and celebrations organised for parents. The TY student 'blog' is also a very valuable means of communication between the school and the wider community.

Admissions procedures are well structured and open and the school is very inclusive. There are very good systems to monitor and promote good attendance and punctuality. Yet, while there are many strategies in place to encourage students' attendance, this remains an area for concern. To improve students' attendance it is very good that plans for a breakfast club are under way and the club should be operational in the near future.

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*.

1.3 Management of facilities

There is very good provision of sports facilities, resources for teaching and learning and information and communication technology (ICT). The building is maintained to a very high standard. The administration and ancillary staff play a vital role in supporting the school.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty-nine lessons were evaluated and the standard of teaching and learning was high overall. Many examples of very good or excellent practice were noted. Recommendations for improvement were given in most lessons and in a minority of lessons there was significant scope for improvement. The students in their meeting with the inspectors expressed much appreciation for the hard work and commitment of their teachers.

The majority of lessons were well structured and planned. Achievable learning objectives were shared with students at the start of these lessons and learning was assessed as the lessons progressed or at the end. Very good resources were prepared to facilitate student learning. Relevant examples and exercises that captured students' interest and imagination were chosen. Students' responses were anticipated and planned for. In some lessons, however, the learning objectives were not all achieved or were not appropriately assessed. It is, therefore, recommended that the very good practices outlined above be extended to all lessons.

Students were confident, attentive and motivated in most lessons. They demonstrated understanding of the lesson content in their answers to teacher questions and in their discussions. Methodologies such as group or pair work, individual work, practical activities, improvisation, role-play, and personal reflection were observed during the evaluation. Strategies to develop students' oral and written literacy were also well integrated into some lessons. In the best lessons students personally engaged with the lesson content, used resources to enhance their learning, and were encouraged to think for themselves. There was scope in some lessons for a better balance between student and teacher input and in those lessons listening was the main student activity. It was evident that students enjoyed learning most in lessons that included higher-order activities such as thinking, writing, doing and discussing.

The quality of assessment of students' work varied in the lessons observed. Most teachers regularly correct their students' written work. Some of the teachers' corrections highlighted positive aspects of the students' work and provided advice on how to improve. Teachers also gave high quality verbal feedback to students individually during the lessons observed. Very good examples of student peer-assessment were also noted in the evaluation. The students in their discussions with the inspectors outlined the above practices as being very beneficial to their learning. These strategies should become the norm in all lessons.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

The whole-school recommendations that were made in previous evaluations have all been implemented. Examples include the change from student-based classrooms to teacher-based rooms, the provision of training for teachers of the LCVP link modules and the creation of a core Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) team.

3.2 Learning and teaching

An increase in the use of active methodologies was recommended in previous evaluations. While a range of activities was observed during the evaluation, this is an area to be developed further.

A number of evaluations already carried out in the school recommended an increase in the use of ICT and for ICT to be integrated into the work of lessons to support teaching and learning. All classrooms have access to either personal computers and data projectors or interactive whiteboards. This recommendation was partially implemented, as the use of ICT in this evaluation mainly comprised the use of the interactive whiteboard as a support for teacher exposition and the use of

PowerPoint presentations. Very good practice in the use of ICT was noted, for example, where videos or news articles were shown, relevant images were presented or music was played.

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

The school demonstrated very good capacity for improvement. This is evident in the comprehensive manner in which data is used to inform and support teaching and learning, in the quality of the school's DEIS planning, in the school self-evaluation process that has been introduced and in the variety of student surveys. There are very effective and well-established systems in place to capture the views and ideas of all members of the school community. This ensures that the school is continually evolving and adapting to ensure that it meets changing needs and future challenges.

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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 regarded the report, undertaken by the Inspectorate in January 2014, as a tribute to the hard work and dedication of all members of the school community including students, parents, staff and school management. In relation to Teaching and Learning, the Inspectorate commented on a high standard of teaching and learning and noted “that the students were confident, attentive and motivated”. The Inspectorate praised the very thorough analysis and monitoring of individual student attainment and applauded the numerous initiatives and interventions which underpin the whole school’s commitment to teaching and learning. The board welcomed the Inspectorate’s comments on the effective and supportive role of the school’s library and librarian. The report also noted staff engagement in a wide range of CPD including the school’s involvement in the Transfer of Learning Initiative and acknowledged very high quality DEIS planning.

The board was pleased that the report recognised the school’s excellent student care programmes and observed the positive relationship between students and teachers, stating that “the teachers share strong commitment to caring for the students and to encouraging them to achieve their full potential”, while student feedback expressed “much appreciation for the hard work and commitment of their teachers”. The very good links, maintained by the Home School Community Liaison Co-ordinator, between school and parents were also noted, as was the excellent support provided by the middle management system. The board was pleased that the report understood the effective holistic approach adopted by the school in relation to caring for both the students’ pastoral and academic needs.

Finally, the board of management congratulated everyone involved on their contribution to an excellent 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 board acknowledge the recommendations which build on established good practices in the school and are committed to:

- including teaching and learning as a separate point on its agenda, including long term strategic planning and using the website to further develop communication between the Board, parents and student council
- to further develop the role of second and third year students’ responsibility and role on the student council
- facilitating the practice whereby teachers create collaboratively planned lessons to be observed by the Principal and Deputy Principal in order to provide feedback and encouragement to teachers thus building on existing good teaching practice in the college.