

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Davis College  
Mallow, County Cork  
Roll number: 71020G**

**Date of inspection: 8 March 2013**



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS  
AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION AND SKILLS  
INSPECTORATE**

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

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in March 2013 in Davis College, Mallow. 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

### ***Introduction***

Davis College is a co-educational community college under the auspices of County Cork Vocational Educational Committee (VEC.) It serves an urban and rural catchment area in North Cork and has a current enrolment of 523 second-level students. The school is a participant in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative.

The school was originally founded as Mallow Vocational School in 1932 in the town centre. It moved to a new location in the 1940s, and was renamed Davis College in 1990. The school's new building on its current site in Summerhill was opened in 2001. Enrolment in the school has increased considerably in recent years and this rise in numbers is expected to continue. Increased enrolment will be facilitated by the planned extension to the school. Mallow College of Further Education, which is the school's further education section, is situated in the original school building close to the town centre and 486 Post-Leaving Certificate students currently pursue their studies there. However, this WSE-MLL is concerned solely with the education provided in Davis College.

The school's mission statement of *Educate that you may be free* is taken from the writings of Thomas Davis who was born in Mallow. The school plans to celebrate the bicentennial of his birth in 2014.

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

### ***Key Findings***

- The board of management is very supportive of the work of the school.
- The principal and deputy principal form an effective and dedicated management and leadership team.
- Committees and teams are key parts of the school's structure and staff members demonstrate high levels of commitment and leadership.
- The quality of supports for students is very good.
- Parents and students, in their responses to questionnaires, were very positive with regard to the quality of the education provided.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good in the lessons observed.
- School self-evaluation is firmly established in the school and the school demonstrates a very good capacity for improvement.

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

- There should be a focus on the consolidation and streamlining of internal school structures and systems in order to facilitate the planned increase in student numbers.
- Members of the student council should be elected democratically by their peers.
- In light of the benefits accruing to students from participation in the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme, serious consideration should be given to the introduction of this programme.
- Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies should be further developed and extended.

## **QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

### ***1.1 School ownership and management***

The board of management is appropriately constituted and meets regularly during the school year. The members of the board are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and have a very good knowledge of the school and its history. The board is committed to the delivery of a high quality of student learning and is very supportive of the senior management team.

The board has adopted a wide range of policies which are monitored and reviewed. Its priorities for the future include a focus on teaching and learning, the enhancement of the student's learning experience, and the planned new extension. The board is supportive of teacher professional development and of the opportunities provided to staff to develop their roles and areas of interest.

The principal and the deputy principal form a very effective team. They are responsible for the overall management of both Davis College and Mallow College of Further Education and for a staff of more than eighty teachers, some of whom work on both campuses.

The principal was appointed to the position in Davis College at a time when the school's numbers were much smaller. As a result of strategic leadership and planning, together with positive school promotion and a focus on improving student achievement, the school has doubled in size over the past few years and has significantly improved its public profile.

The principal and the recently appointed deputy principal communicate a clear vision for the future development of the school. They provide effective and decisive leadership and demonstrate an openness to new ideas, skill in the management of change and an ability to motivate staff and students. Among their strengths as a team is their experience and involvement in the Instructional Leadership programme and their belief in the importance of ongoing professional development for staff. They are committed to the promotion of high standards in all areas of teaching and learning and they aspire to make the school a centre of excellence.

While the decision-making process rests primarily with the principal and deputy principal, a system of committees and teams forms the backbone of the organisational structure of the school. These committees cover all aspects of school life from the Academic Council which is responsible for student attainment, to the Policy Development committee, to new committees such as the Arts and Culture committee and the Literacy and Numeracy teams. The school's senior management team is comprised of the principal, deputy principal and the assistant principals. This team meets to consult before key decisions are taken.

Good communication is evident between senior management and staff. A weekly staff memo is issued at the start of each week, while the electronic notice boards in the staffroom are used to keep staff informed of relevant issues. Senior management also display a visible presence on the school corridors and in the staffroom, and this facilitates informal communication.

School management values and seeks to develop the role of parents as part of the school community. The school has an active parents' association which is in the process of seeking affiliation to a national body. The parents' association is consulted when relevant policies are drafted and the views of the wider parent body are ascertained through the use of questionnaires and through informal and formal contact. Parents were very positive in their views, and their responses to the questionnaires issued during the evaluation demonstrated a very high level of satisfaction with the school.

### ***1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

According to its mission statement, Davis College aims "to provide a quality, holistic and inclusive education" and promotes an environment in which "students can fulfil their potential in an atmosphere of mutual respect." The creation of a school culture where a high standard of teaching and learning is expected, and where students are empowered to achieve their potential is given priority by the principal. These expectations are supported by the board of management, the deputy principal and the school community.

There is a very positive emphasis on developing leadership skills among staff and students. Opportunities are offered to all staff, including new teachers, to take on leadership roles within committees or in setting up new initiatives. Such roles include membership of interview panels, responsibility for the school's College House System, involvement in the Academic Council, and the Arts and Culture committee and in developing projects or events at subject-department or at whole-school level. New initiatives in the area of teaching and learning include the development of a research repository of academic articles and the introduction of peer observation. Members of staff are self-motivated and display this motivation in their approach to their work and in their commitment to their students. The emphases on collaboration and consensus, and on a culture of distributive leadership are strong motivating factors in creating an environment where the energy and enthusiasm of staff is utilised to create a vibrant and hard-working learning community.

However, in light of the many changes that are taking place, both at a national level with the reform of the junior cycle, and at school level where the number of students and staff is increasing rapidly, it is suggested that management should look at how best to sustain and support the high level of commitment and effort shown by staff with multiple roles. The streamlining and consolidation of the work of core teams and committees, and the identification of key roles and systems is recommended as a way of ensuring a smooth transition to becoming a much larger school.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum and new subjects have been added recently. Given the complications arising from some staff teaching in two different campuses, the timetable makes good use of the hours available and the resource hours allocated to the school are used appropriately. Even though the school caters for students with a broad range of abilities and provides the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and a well-organised Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), it has never offered the LCA programme. This programme provides an alternative to the established Leaving Certificate and is designed to allow the less-academically inclined students to reach their potential. In light of the compulsory TY programme and the increased enrolment, it is recommended that the school seriously examine the benefits that

the introduction of the LCA programme would bring and the ways in which it would complement the programmes already on offer in junior cycle.

While the school has offered a Transition Year (TY) programme in the past, it was not offered to the current Fifth Years. However, the TY programme is to be reinstated and will become compulsory for all students entering senior cycle in the 2013/2014 school year. This is positive as TY will provide students with an opportunity to broaden their skills and develop their talents. Nevertheless, changing the TY from an optional to a compulsory programme may not be appropriate for all students. This should be reviewed in light of experience within a reasonable timeframe.

A well-organised student support structure, coordinated by a pastoral care team, is in place and the quality of student support is very good. Supports are appropriately targeted to individuals and groups. The year heads have responsibility for student behaviour and they work well with the assistant year heads, class teachers and student support teams for the benefit of the students. A significant number of staff is involved in the care of students and their work is acknowledged and commended.

Student attendance and their retention are key elements of the DEIS initiative and are monitored in a systematic manner. DEIS status provides a range of supports and interventions for the school including a Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) teacher and a School Completion Programme (SCP) co-ordinator. As a result, the school is able to offer a breakfast and homework club, and seven-day supervised study so as to encourage and improve attendance, retention and achievement.

Students are able to avail of opportunities for leadership in a variety of ways including through participation in the student council. The council meets regularly and it is very positive that two members of the council were invited to address the board of management during the course of the year. However, not all members are elected democratically by their peers with a number of appointments made by the class teachers. This system should be changed so as to allow for the democratic election of all council members.

It was clear from interaction with students that the relationship between staff and students is positive. During the evaluation, students were observed to be well-behaved and polite. In their responses to questionnaires completed as an element of this evaluation, students stated that they were proud to be attending Davis College and that they feel safe and cared for in the school. Their responses indicated a high level of satisfaction with their experience in 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*.

### ***1.3 Management of facilities***

The school building is maintained to a high standard and the space available is well managed. Good use is made of the entrance areas for displays of photographs celebrating students' achievements and activities, and the public area is also used for food demonstrations on the mobile kitchen unit. Resources for information and communication technologies (ICT) are very good and include a virtual learning environment (VLE) or Moodle technology. An electronic notice board provides daily updates on school events while a television screen displays a constant feed of international news. While there is some limited use of the Irish language in displays in the entrance area of the school, there is scope for highlighting and increasing the use of the language throughout the school, on the

school website, and on external signage. Environmental responsibility is promoted through the Green School programme. An appropriate health and safety statement is in place.

As the building is now too small to allow for further increases in numbers, the school has acquired permission from the Department of Education and Skills to proceed with planning for a new extension.

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

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

Subject plans were available for all subjects. The quality of the planning documentation was very good with yearly plans in place for each subject as well as an extensive range of supplementary material. Detailed cross-curricular planning and collaboration in the areas of literacy and numeracy was also evident. Innovative practice within subject departments was documented in the work on peer observation and evaluation, while ongoing reflective practice was also evident.

Planning and preparation for lessons was very good. A range of materials and resources such as worksheets, handouts, games and video clips were prepared for use during the lessons. The intended learning outcomes for lessons were displayed on designated whiteboards as well as literacy and numeracy references and the assigned homework.

The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good in the lessons observed. Lessons were generally well structured with established classroom routines. The expected learning outcomes were shared with students at the start of lessons while brief introductory activities such as a brainstorming activity were used to catch the students' interest and to prepare them for the lesson topic.

A varied range of methodologies was used in the lessons observed. This included whole-class teaching, pair and small group work, games and experiments. The pair work was well organised and encouraged peer learning. Good practice was seen in the use of visual material including images, video clips, musical instruments and props to explain and to illustrate new ideas and concepts. Graphic organisers and concept maps were also employed to support and to consolidate learning.

The use of data projectors was widespread in the delivery of lesson content and it was positive that students had the opportunity to explore the potential that ICT offers in a small number of lessons.

Examples of very good practice were seen in lessons where the delivery of content was complemented by a focus on relating the new information to students' own lives and to their prior learning. Examination preparation was done thoroughly but in a way that still allowed for active learning. In language lessons, there was extensive use of the target language and students were encouraged to use the language in communication with the teacher and each other.

Varied questioning strategies were used including some examples of higher-order questioning. Where practice was very good, skilful questioning challenged students to think more deeply about the idea being taught. Good practice was also seen in the interweaving of content, questions and video clips in a way that invited student response and encouraged reflection. As students are taught in mixed ability class groupings, it was very positive that there was differentiation to meet the individual learning needs of students.

Where there was scope for improvement, feedback to teachers indicated a need for more opportunities to be provided for students to report on and explain their own learning. It is recommended that, as part of the development of AfL strategies, there should be an increased emphasis on questioning techniques and on the monitoring of learning during pair and group work.

An examination of a sample of students' copybooks indicated that homework is assigned and corrected regularly with constructive comments included in some cases. Further use of constructive feedback is recommended as part of AfL. Students note their homework in their journals and can also note the learning outcomes and references to literacy and numeracy. As the latter is a recent innovation in the journal, individual student practice varied but it was noted that practice was consistent among students in the JCSP programme.

Information regarding students' application to work in each subject is communicated to parents on a weekly basis through the recently introduced progress report card. This card is completed by teachers in each subject, and acts as a motivational tool to encourage students to improve their performance on an ongoing basis. Information from the cards is collated and forms part of the evidence base available within the school. An analysis of results in the certificate examinations is carried out annually and students' levels of achievement are good.

Classroom management was very good and the rapport between teachers and students was relaxed and positive. The teachers have high expectations for students with regard to engagement with learning during lessons and the completion of homework. Students receive encouragement and affirmation during lessons. The classrooms provide a visually stimulating learning environment through displays of posters, charts including key scientific terms in a number of languages, and samples of students' work. It is noted and commended that additional opportunities for students to enhance their learning is provided by teachers on a voluntary basis through "drop-in" lunchtime clubs and through involvement in a wide variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities including sport, drama, music, fund-raising activities and competitions.

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

### ***3.1 Management***

Subject inspections in Biology, Physical Education, Art, Music, English and Irish have been conducted in the school since 2006. Good attention has been paid to the whole-school recommendations from previous evaluations and management issues such as timetabling have been addressed.

### ***3.2 Learning and teaching***

Inspection reports are discussed with the subject departments concerned and priority is given to implementing the recommendations made. Good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations from the most recent report. Recommendations on good practice in teaching and learning are shared within and across subject departments.

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

Management and staff have a proactive approach to school improvement and have experience in action-planning. New ideas and initiatives are researched and then developed to suit the school context. The practice of ongoing school self-evaluation is well established in the school. Subject departments and teachers have demonstrated a willingness to engage in self-evaluation while the views of students and parents are gathered through the use of questionnaires. Developmental priorities are identified in the school plan and yearly targets are set out annually in a number of areas including teaching and learning reflecting the DEIS initiative.

The school's capacity for improvement is very good and the school is in a strong position to bring about further improvement. It has already demonstrated the capacity to successfully undertake significant change, and management and staff are committed to continued school improvement.