

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Mc Egan College
Macroom, County Cork
Roll number: 71030J**

Date of inspection: 11 November 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 November 2013 in Mc Egan 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 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

Mc Egan College is a co-educational vocational school set in the grounds of Macroom Castle. It is managed under the auspices of Cork Education and Training Board (ETB). The school is part of the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. It has a current enrolment of 301 students which includes 110 students enrolled in Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. The school offers Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- Students and parents very positively endorsed the work of the school through questionnaire responses provided as a part of this evaluation.
- The board is actively engaged in its role and provides appropriate management and leadership to the school.
- The principal and deputy principal provide very high quality leadership for the school.
- Leadership at all levels of the school is informed by professionalism, teamwork, communication, loyalty and volunteerism.
- Key staff teams, including a care team, a DEIS team, a senior management team, and a special educational needs (SEN) team, among others, are central to successful leadership of learning.
- Interventions and supports for students are very well structured and organised, and are effective.
- Timetabling, deployment of staff, curriculum provision and physical resources have been organised to maximise outcomes for students.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Achievement in certificate examinations and levels of uptake of higher levels are improving.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The reporting and communication structures of the board should be enhanced to further develop linkage with on-going school initiatives.
- The TY programme should be reviewed to refocus its current positioning and organisation within the wider school curriculum.
- Current self-evaluation processes across all school initiatives should be integrated to develop a shared strategic plan for the future development of the school.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management, acting as a sub-committee of Cork ETB, is actively engaged in its role and provides appropriate management and leadership to the school. Representatives of teachers, the parents' association and nominees of Cork ETB are members of the board. All appropriate procedures and practices are in place relating to meetings, organisation and oversight. To enhance linkage and communication between the board and school community, it is recommended that, while maintaining confidentiality, a short agreed report be issued to the teachers and parents' association following board meetings. It is also recommended that representatives of key teams and the student council be periodically invited by the board to report on their activities and progress. This should foster closer links between the board and the range of teams that are engaged with key initiatives in the school.

An active parents' association is linked to the board and is very supportive of the school. An executive has been nominated and regular meetings are organised. The association has taken a key role in fundraising to support school initiatives and more recently, to fund more basic maintenance of the school building. The association also views its role in policy development and ratification as significant. To further develop the visibility of the parents' association within the wider school community, a section on the school's website could be used to outline association activities and also encourage increased parental involvement.

Communication systems that allow for linkage between all the interacting elements of the school community are very well developed. A regular school newsletter to parents provides a comprehensive outline of school activities. Regular features and photographs in local newspapers are used to celebrate students' achievements and to build the school's reputation in the local community, while the school website provides on-going and updated information about the school. Internal communication systems within the school include text messaging to parents, internal email and a newly developed intranet that facilitates the sharing of school policies, subject planning documents, records of on-going activities and teaching resources.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal are a very effective and complementary team which provides very high quality leadership for the school. Their leadership is characterised by vision, a clear commitment to students' learning and achievement, to the engagement of all staff members, and to the centrality of positive and collegial relationships. Their leadership is supported by an established policy framework that includes appropriate and required policies, and an on-going process of policy development, review and update.

Planning informs leadership at all levels in the school. DEIS planning is embedded within the school and the recently completed planning cycle has been appropriately documented and provides outcomes in terms of retention, progression, achievement, literacy, numeracy and linkage with parents. The current cycle of DEIS planning has outlined further targets that have been communicated to staff and that inform key elements of the work of the school.

Targets and strategies in relation to achievement, uptake of higher level in subjects, the associated planned reduction in numbers opting for foundation level, and the integration of literacy and numeracy strategies, inform individual teacher planning, collaborative subject planning and wider whole-school development planning. It is clear that these interacting strategies are currently co-ordinated to maximise their impact on students' learning.

Strategic leadership is channelled through the operation of key staff teams that actively oversee, monitor and manage both the planning and delivery of interventions. The DEIS team comprises key personnel in the co-ordination of JCSP, the School Completion Programme (SCP), the SEN co-ordinator, the Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) teacher and the guidance counsellor. The operational elements of DEIS actions include a very effective and well organised SCP that provides individualised supports to students and offers a breakfast club, homework club and a range of after-school activities. The work of the HSCL, focusing on linkage with parents, is equally effective and significantly complements and interacts with the SCP. The JCSP and the available resources to support students with special needs provide further classroom supports for targeted students. The operation and interaction of these supports reflects very good practice.

The launch of a book club initiative in the school during the evaluation clearly demonstrated this co-ordination of DEIS supports. This in-school event, attended by second-year students and their parents, was focused on a student literacy initiative to be supported by parents. The obvious success and effectiveness of the event was a result of collaboration and teamwork by the SCP, HSCL and the English teachers towards the common goals of supporting students' literacy and establishing learning-based links between school and home.

Other staff teams meet regularly to further support the engagement and participation of students. These include the SEN team, the special needs assistants (SNA) team that has a weekly scheduled meeting with the principal, and a senior management team that acts as a management forum for assistant principals, the deputy principal and the principal.

The work of all of these teams is informed by professionalism, collaboration, communication, and volunteerism. Whole-school guidance planning that is centred on student care, support and well-being, underpins the work of these teams. However, it is the presence of senior management and the guidance counsellor at team meetings that acts as the fulcrum around which these teams operate, resulting in their targeting of resources towards effective student support and learning.

The overall contribution, commitment and loyalty of staff members and those who support the school in associated roles are fully acknowledged in this report, as is the very effective work of the SNA team, the school office staff and the caretaking staff. A wide range of extracurricular activities is organised and supported by teachers and other staff members in addition to their work with students in the context of curricular and co-curricular classroom activities. The responses of parents and students, who completed questionnaires as part of this evaluation, very strongly endorsed the work of school management and teachers in providing a safe, caring and inclusive learning environment for students in the school.

Students are offered a range of programmes at junior and senior cycle in the school. The current limitations of resources will prevent the provision of the LCA in the school year 2014/2015. Deployment of teaching staff and timetabling of subjects and programmes are appropriate to the resources available to support students' learning.

Curriculum provision has been extended to include Art and Music. However, the provision of History, Chemistry and Agricultural Science remains a challenge for school management. The sharing of teaching resources with other nearby second-level schools in Macroom could be explored as a means of widening curriculum provision for students.

Routine student management procedures are very well established and are very effective. A ten-minute pastoral-care period on each morning allows contact between class tutors and their tutor groups. At this time, morning attendance and homework journals are checked, individual issues are addressed and school events are discussed. The provision of this time and the work of tutors in supporting students are viewed as very good practice. Attendance is also recorded in the afternoon and appropriate tracking and attention to poor attendance by a very small group of students has ensured good overall patterns of attendance in the school.

Particular attention is paid to student journals by all teachers and tutors to ensure that homework is recorded by students. This journal that must be signed by tutor and parent is emphasised as an important element of home-school communication.

Subject choice arises initially from individual student preferences that subsequently lead to the creation of subject-option blocks from which students must make their final choice of subjects, based on available teaching resources. Good quality support for students in making these subject and programme choices is provided and key transitions are well organised.

Assessment strategies at whole-school level are comprehensive and combine with on-going communication with parents regarding student achievement. However, some review of assessment strategies within the TY programme should be undertaken towards the inclusion of an increased range of coursework and portfolio-based assessment experiences for students.

Assessment of students' individual needs has been significantly advanced by the SEN team. Individual plans have been created for some students and classroom strategies appropriate to their needs are communicated to teachers. All such documents and records are available to staff members through a personal identification number (PIN) on the school's intranet.

The school is engaged with a range of initiatives to support students' engagement and participation in the classroom. These include team teaching, the Instructional Leadership Programme and the Learning School Project. A number of teachers have engaged with each initiative and evidence of the positive impact of teaching and learning strategies associated with these initiatives was evident in the lessons observed during this evaluation. The outcomes of, and learning from, these initiatives are shared with other staff members. This process of sharing professional learning experiences, whether from internal or external sources, is very positive as it facilitates the development of reflective collaborative capacity among teachers in the identification of best practice in the classroom.

A further range of senior-cycle initiatives referred to as the 'academic council' by school management, were in place on a pilot basis in September 2013. These initiatives, that aim to raise levels of uptake of higher level, to limit the number of students opting for foundation level, and to increase overall achievement in certificate examinations, are a very positive development. Strategies introduced into the TY programme provide a strong academic focus on Leaving Certificate Mathematics, English and Gaeilge at all levels. In fifth year, an identified group of students is targeted with additional study supports and mentoring by teachers to raise expectations and academic challenge for these students. While the overall aims of the 'academic council' are laudable and subject to ongoing review, there are a number of issues that should be reviewed. The rationale for the selection of the targeted students should be transparent. The issue of the potential negative labelling of these students by their peers which emerged from discussion with students during this evaluation should also be explored. The question of compliance with Department of Education and Skills TY guidelines in relation to teaching strategies for Mathematics, English and Gaeilge within the programme should be considered.

While these initiatives were in a very early stage of implementation at the time of this evaluation, a review of some aspects of the work of the 'academic council' should be undertaken towards the end of the school year. Engagement with the voice of all senior cycle students in relation to their perception and experiences of these initiatives should be a first step in any such review.

A related, but more fundamental review of the positioning of the TY programme within the school curriculum is recommended. This review should focus on how the aforementioned recent changes, and the provision to allow some students, based on their age, to continue directly to fifth year, thus avoiding TY that had been deemed compulsory, is impacting on parents' and students' perceptions of the programme. The review therefore should focus on the school's positioning of the TY programme within the curricular options provided to students. It should also focus on compliance with Department guidelines referencing the Leaving Certificate focus in some subjects, module planning and assessment strategies, and the provision of work experience. In the current programme students spend one school day per week on a work experience placements outside of school. Such a provision should be reconsidered in the context of Circular M29/95, 'Time in School'. This extensive work experience provision should also be reconsidered in the context of the overall philosophy of the TY programme, which is to provide students with varied and enriching learning experiences throughout the year, including those made available through the work experience module.

An active, representative and well-organised student council provides a meaningful voice for students in the school. The council communicates with school management on a range of issues and proposed actions, and it has an appropriate role in policy formulation and ratification. The organisation and level of engagement of the council reflect very good practice.

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

School facilities are in very good order and are well maintained. In recent years, there has been a systematic upgrading of particular rooms and a visible and effective integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into all teaching areas. Base classrooms for teachers have been developed to provide a rich learning environment for students. However, there are obvious limitations in space for staff preparation and study. While plans for the expansion of the school are in place, the historic nature of the site has placed some restrictions on the realisation of these plans.

Appropriate systems are in place relating to health and safety in the school. An active safety officer monitors these issues and the Health and Safety Authority has recently undertaken a health and safety inspection of the school. Issues relating to safety markings around machines in the practical rooms were in the process of being addressed at the time of the evaluation. This work should now be completed.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty lessons across a range of subjects were observed in the course of the evaluation. Very good quality teaching and learning was observed in these lessons. All lessons were informed

by very good planning that reflected the mixed-ability classroom contexts and this was translated into active syllabus-appropriate classroom experiences for students.

Clear lesson structure and appropriate pacing informed the very positive classroom experiences for students. The learning intention was made clear in lessons and the learning was assessed through questioning, the completion of tasks, feedback from pair and group work and through the individual attention provided by teachers. The very good pedagogical practice observed included strategies that actively engaged students in collaborative tasks and informed discussions. Differentiated approaches were evident and students interacted with their teachers in classroom environments informed by mutual respect and a positive inclusive atmosphere. Students were challenged by the teaching and learning strategies employed in lessons. Relationships between students and teachers were very positive in the lessons observed and students were very well behaved both in classrooms and on the school campus.

Students' learning was evident in their responses to teacher questioning, in the quality of feedback from collaborative activities and from their engagement and participation in classroom discussions. Established routines in classrooms clearly supported students' learning. Attendance and punctuality were a particular focus while homework was discussed, monitored and corrected in lessons.

To maintain and sustain this very good practice, it is recommended that a thematic discussion on pedagogy be placed on the agenda at subject planning meetings. Topics for reflection and discussion could include questioning strategies, co-operative learning, the further integration of ICT and a discussion of appropriate TY teaching and learning methodologies. The experiences garnered from engagement with team teaching, the Instructional Leadership Programme and the Learning School Project should be shared among the teaching team within this forum.

Student achievement in certificate examinations is tracked at subject department level and at whole-school level in line with the requirements of DEIS planning and general oversight of patterns in student achievement. Achievement in certificate examinations and levels of uptake of higher level reflect the mixed-ability classroom contexts. Levels of uptake and achievement are generally improving, while levels of under achievement in Gaeilge have been addressed and patterns of achievement are also improving.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

The wording, and some aspects of the structure of the admissions policy, should be reconsidered in the context of the recommendation from the inspection report relating to special educational needs, completed in 2011. This recommendation related to an overall inclusion policy that would include the current admissions policy. The board should progress this recommendation beyond the recent revision of the admissions policy undertaken in the context of the establishment of the units for students with special educational needs.

The recommendation from the English subject inspection report (2010) relating to the establishment of literacy group meetings has been implemented.

3.2 Learning and teaching

A range of recommendations relating to lesson structure, reading and writing activities, literacy integration, and the use of the target language has been implemented.

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

Senior management and key team members demonstrate a clear understanding of the importance of linking and dovetailing available supports to maximise the use of resources to impact positively on the students' experience in the classroom. This understanding is evidenced in the structures that are in place, in the practice observed and in the embedded position of reflection, evaluation and review within elements of the school. The school clearly has the capacity to harness the full value of school self-evaluation.

A clear direction and focus for the work of the school is evident and a recommended strategic plan that is already on the school's developmental agenda, based on robust school self-evaluation of all of its structures, is the obvious next step. Such a process of self-evaluation and planning should link DEIS action planning, teaching and learning practice, and student support structures. This should result in the formulation of a strategic plan that will map a shared future direction for the school.

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 welcomes this very positive WSE-MLL report and wishes to thank the whole school community for its contribution to the process. The Board congratulates all involved on the excellent findings in the management, leadership and learning practices that occur in McEgan College. It is delighted with such a positive endorsement of the school and the affirmation of the excellent work being done by everyone involved in the school community.

The Board also acknowledges the courteous and professional manner in which the inspectors interacted with the Board, management, staff, students, parents and auxiliary staff of the school.

The comments referred to in the report reflect the true characteristics of the school and serve to highlight the school community as a place which promotes reflective practice and learning for all, are very welcome:

“Leadership at all levels of the school is informed by professionalism, teamwork, communication, loyalty and volunteerism. ...All lessons observed were informed by very good planning that reflected the mixed-ability classroom. Clear lesson structure and appropriate pacing informed the very positive classroom experiences for students...An active, representative and well-organised student council provides a meaningful voice for students in the school. The organisation and level of engagement of the council reflects very good practice. Students stated that they were proud to attend McEgan College and that they felt safe and cared for in the school...an active parents’ association is linked to the board and is very supportive of the school. 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...A clear direction and focus for the school is evident and a recommended strategic plan that is already on the school’s developmental agenda, based on robust school self-evaluation... is the obvious next step”.

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 has already made progress in relation to the comment on Transition Year and circular M29/95, “Time in school”. Agreement has been reached to keep TYs in school one extra day in the month instead of work experience. Students will embark on a full day modular Transition Year topics once a month.

The admissions policy will be separated to include one section for entry into main school and another section for the Special classes. This work will be completed shortly.

A presentation from the Attendance committee of the DEIS team has presented their findings, over three years, to the Parents Association and are due to address the Board shortly. Further presentations from key DEIS team are planned as well as presentations from the Student Council.