

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Castleknock Community College
Carpenterstown Road, Dublin 15
Roll number: 76062B**

Date of inspection: 16 October 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 October 2013 in Castleknock 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

Castleknock Community College is a co-educational, multi-denominational post-primary school under the trusteeship of Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (ETB). The school was established in 1995, and its enrolment in the current school year stands at 1,136 students, drawn from the Dublin 15 area. It offers a wide range of subjects and curricular programmes, including an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The senior management team consists of a principal and two deputy principals, and there is a teaching staff of 94, including part-time teachers.

The school endeavours to model the three core values of courtesy, respect and responsibility and to provide a high-quality, holistic education for its students in a context that is firmly rooted in the local community. In addition to the curricular programmes, the school offers an extensive extracurricular programme.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management discharges its responsibilities in a highly efficient and effective manner.
- In-school management structures are exemplary and the day-to-day management of the school is outstanding.
- The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum which meets the needs of all its students.
- The quality of support and care for students is excellent.
- The leadership of staff is highly effective.
- The teaching staff has demonstrated willingness to embrace new initiatives to improve the breadth and quality of educational provision.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in most of the lessons observed, and in some cases it was excellent.
- There was scope for development in the implementation of assessment for learning (AfL) across the curriculum.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The school's draft policy on teaching and learning should be finalised and become the basis for whole-staff reflection on their professional practice.

- A systematic and carefully-monitored embedding of the principles and practice of assessment for learning is recommended.

QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management, which was appointed in 2011, is appropriately constituted and is well supported by the ETB in discharging its responsibilities. The members of the board understand their role and responsibilities and carry these out in a highly efficient and effective manner. The board's practice regarding the adoption and review of policies is excellent: all mandatory policies have been ratified and are reviewed on a regular basis after due consultation with staff, parents and the student council.

Much of the board's time and attention in recent years has been taken up with the school's enrolment policy, and it has overseen the drafting and implementation of a common enrolment policy with a recently-established neighbouring community college. The board has, very commendably, set up a sub-committee to attend to enrolment matters so that the board may give its full attention to the wider issues of school development.

The board of management takes a keen interest in all aspects of school life and keeps itself fully informed of the many activities and initiatives in which the school participates. It has identified areas where it wishes to be more fully informed and has invited members of staff to address it on these.

Clear priorities for school development have been set. In the current school year these include: monitoring the new common enrolment procedures, implementing the national literacy and numeracy strategy, and embedding the key skills and statements of learning for the new junior cycle.

The board of management publishes a comprehensive annual report, which provides a complete yet concise account of the academic year under various headings and sets out objectives for the coming year. This report serves a very useful purpose in communicating with the whole school community, the wider local community and the ETB. It is also a valuable tool for school development planning.

In-school management structures are exemplary and the day-to-day management of the school is outstanding. The highly committed and hard-working senior management team (SMT) has set up a range of systems whereby aspects of leadership and management are effectively delegated to middle management and other members of staff. These systems run smoothly and serve the complex needs of this large school very well. Decision-making processes at all levels are fully consultative and collaborative.

Partnership with parents is central to the school's ethos and relationships with parents are very good. There is a very active parents' association, which is fully involved in many aspects of school life and which is proactive in suggesting change and supporting school initiatives. The school communicates effectively with parents and the wider community through newsletters and an attractive, informative and up-to-date website.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum which meets the needs of all its students. Students and their parents expressed satisfaction with the range of options

available to them, and two new subjects have been recently added in response to demand from students. Timetabling is excellent: time and care are invested in ensuring that the school's allocation of hours is used to the best effect, that the full curriculum is delivered as intended and that students are enabled to access their subjects of choice.

The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities which offers opportunities for all students to participate. Staff members give very generously of their time and talents to make this programme a success.

The structures for student care and support are exemplary, as is the commitment of the care team and of teachers in general to students' well-being and academic progress. The chaplaincy, guidance and learning support teams work very closely together, and work with the year heads and class tutors to support students' learning and other needs. The individual attention and support given to students is very good. There is an excellent student profiling system in place: students' academic progress is monitored and tracked, and students are encouraged to set their own goals and targets. E-portal is used to record students' attendance and academic progress and these records may be accessed by their parents.

Management demonstrates a strong commitment to providing good quality support for students with special educational needs. The school maintains a register of all students in receipt of additional support, which details the amount and type of support provided and the designated teachers. Models of support for these students are flexible and tailored to individual needs. The school is commended for making available the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) programme to meet the needs of some of its students.

The student behaviour policy is underpinned by principles of care and respect, and seeks to maintain a positive focus. Affirmation of good behaviour, rather than the imposition of sanctions, is used to motivate students. During the inspection, students presented as well-behaved, courteous and friendly.

Student leadership qualities are promoted by the mentor and prefect systems and by the class captains and vice captains network. The student council is democratically elected and has a voice in decision-making. During the evaluation, most of the students who completed the questionnaire indicated that they did not have a voice in school improvement, or did not know if they had one. It is recommended that the student body as a whole be reminded that the student council is the vehicle through which their voice can be heard.

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 SMT is highly effective in leading, supporting and affirming members of staff. They model leadership and teamwork, and encourage staff initiative and leadership. Regular staff meetings and subject department meetings facilitate collaborative planning and the teachers' continuous professional development (CPD). Among the many areas where management has facilitated CPD for teaching and learning are co-operative learning, assessment for learning (AfL), literacy and numeracy strategies, and key skills for junior cycle. The school also participates in the junior cycle school network. Meeting time is very well utilised, not only for the purposes of routine administration and information-giving but also for professional dialogue.

Subject department planning is of very good quality, and the schemes of work reviewed during the evaluation set out learning objectives for each year group term by term or month by month.

The SMT is committed to achieving high standards in all aspects of the life of the school and maintains a strong focus on school development and improvement. The teaching staff is to be commended for their willingness to embrace new initiatives. A notable example is the school's own Transfer of Learning programme, which was launched last year. This initiative is intended to assist teachers of the incoming first-year classes to understand the students' learning experiences in primary school with a view to building on them and working with the students' learning styles and interests in their first year in post-primary school. The initiative also supports literacy and numeracy development and learner autonomy.

The challenge of embedding new teaching and learning ideas in day-to-day classroom practice should not be underestimated, especially in such a large school during challenging times. Crucial to successful change management is ensuring that all members of staff are clear about what is expected of them and are confident in implementing change. In addition to delivering CPD at whole-staff level, monitoring of implementation across subject departments and year groups is essential, as is the evaluation of outcomes. To take one example, AfL, which has great potential to enrich students' learning and which has been the subject of staff CPD, was not much in evidence at a practical level in the lessons observed.

A school policy on teaching and learning is in draft form, and this document should serve as a basis for whole-staff reflection on their professional practice. With a view to maintaining a focus on the quality of teaching and learning, it is suggested that one of the two deputy principals could take specific responsibility for leading change in teaching and learning. A good place to start would be with first-year students and their teachers, building on the information available from the Transfer of Learning initiative. This would sit well with the new junior cycle framework and its emphasis on key skills, learning statements and assessment of learning. A systematic and carefully-monitored embedding of the principles and practice of AfL in all first-year lessons, supported by peer observation and perhaps observation of best practice in other schools is recommended.

1.3 Management of facilities

The school premises are maintained to a very high standard and very good use is made of the corridors for the display of notice boards and photographs which celebrate students' achievements and milestones in the life of the school. Developing a first-class ICT infrastructure has been a priority for the school, and classrooms are equipped with computers, data projectors and interactive whiteboards.

To cater for the growth in student numbers and to provide improved indoor physical education facilities, the school sought and obtained permission to build an extension; work is to begin early in 2014.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

Thirty-four lessons were observed during the evaluation, comprising all year groups, levels and most programmes. The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in most of the lessons. Some of the lessons observed were excellent. There was also a small number of lessons where there was considerable scope for improvement in the quality of teaching and learning.

Most teachers outlined a general plan of work at the beginning of lessons. Best practice was observed where the intended learning outcome was clearly stated, where the students understood what was expected of them and where the structure of the lesson supported the learning intention. These lessons were focused, well paced and characterised by good time management which facilitated the revisiting of the intended outcomes in order to assess student learning. This should be the norm in all lessons

Instruction was clear in most lessons and was supported by good explanation and sometimes by demonstration. Good use was made of ICT, and the interactive whiteboard in many instances. There were some lessons, however, where greater use of visual supports and realia would have enhanced the learning.

In the majority of lessons an appropriate balance was maintained between teacher instruction and student activity. A range of methodologies was used which focused on the development and transfer of relevant skills and which encouraged active student participation and independent thinking. For example, the use of purposeful group work in some lessons and the subsequent reporting back of the students' findings facilitated very good skills development, higher-order thinking, reflection and autonomous learning. In some of the language lessons observed, the target language was used consistently by the teacher. Students should also be given the necessary strategies to interact spontaneously in the target language from the beginning of first year.

In a minority of lessons, teacher instruction dominated. While the students were receptive, they did not have sufficient opportunity to take ownership of their learning. In these instances teachers should integrate strategies such as 'think, pair, share' and purposeful student tasks into their lessons in order to improve the balance between instruction and independent learning. The implementation of active methodologies would also enable teachers to teach for understanding, while learners would acquire the capacity for independent life-long learning.

In many cases, scaffolding of students' learning was evident in the teachers' questioning strategies: they blended lower and higher-order questions in response to different learning needs. They also alternated between global and directed questions in order to optimise student participation. In some lessons, however, lower-order questioning prevailed. There were also instances where the uneven distribution of questions resulted in some students remaining passive throughout the lesson. To remedy this deficit, teachers should consider employing some of the questioning strategies associated with AfL, such as 'no hands up' and 'wait time'.

In lessons where team teaching was observed, the lead and support model was very effectively employed. This enhanced the quality of learning, while also providing opportunities for peer observation of teaching practices.

Very good rapport between teachers and students was evident in all of the lessons observed. Students were very well behaved and applied themselves to the work of the lesson. However, there were some lessons where a more differentiated approach would have enriched student learning and skills development, particularly for the more able students.

3 IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.2 Management

The board of management reviews all inspection reports and the senior management team ensures that the whole school staff is aware of recommendations. In the case of subject inspection reports, subject departments in addition to those inspected are asked to consider how recommendations may apply to their areas. This is very good practice.

3.3 Learning and teaching

During the evaluation, aspects of good practice recommended in recent inspection reports were noted in the majority of lessons observed. One example is the fostering of strategic or higher-order thinking by students. Another is the frequency with which students were given opportunities to engage in independent or collaborative learning. A third was the recommendation that lessons should conclude with a short review. It is recommended that the implementation of these and other, earlier recommendations be kept under review in the context of school self-evaluation and improvement.

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

There is a strong culture of self-evaluation in the school: self-evaluation and review are firmly embedded in the life of the school, and there are robust processes in place for reviewing the operation of all programmes and school activities. Senior management engages in regular consultation with staff, students and parents, and the results inform the planning process. Annual surveys of staff, for example, enable the management team to identify and address areas of concern and to gauge levels of satisfaction with aspects of the life of the school. Commendably, senior management makes a detailed analysis of Junior and Leaving Certificate results in every subject and compares the results with national averages and the school's own performance in previous years.

Further to the comments above regarding reflection on professional practice, the next step for the school in the process of school improvement is to engage in a focused professional collaborative review of teaching and learning, as described in Chapter 5 of the Inspectorate's guidelines on school self-evaluation. The sample checklists and questionnaires and the schedules for reflection and observation on teaching should prove useful in this process.

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 the very positive WSE-MLL report as undertaken by the inspectorate in November 2013. In particular, the Board welcomes the very affirming comments made by the inspectorate in relation to the teaching staff and their commitment to excellence. The Board was proud to read that the student body were described as “*very well behaved and applied themselves to the work of the lesson*”. Moreover, the Board welcomes the comments made in relation to the care structures which enables the College to honour its commitment to the core values of Courtesy, Respect and Responsibility. The report also recognises the valuable contribution made by the parents as partners and this acknowledgement is a positive reinforcement of the importance of the partnership that exists between parents and the school.

The report does justice to the many teacher-led initiatives that have been established in the College in recent years. “*The teaching staff is to be commended for their willingness to embrace new initiatives*”. The board welcomes the positive acknowledgement of these initiatives: The Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, the Transfer of Learning Initiative, Student Tracking Programme and the development of ICT structures.

The Board wishes to acknowledge the courteous and professional manner in which the inspectorate conducted their work.

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 acknowledges the two recommendations made in the Report. The College is committed to moving the “Teaching and Learning Policy” from Draft Stage to implementation. This policy will enable the College to embed the principles and practice of assessment for learning. The Board’s priority is to ensure that the Teaching and Learning Policy is ratified by the close of the school year.