

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Dunmore Community School  
Dunmore, County Galway  
Roll number: 91414Q**

**Date of inspection: 4 December 2014**



**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 December, 2014 in Dunmore Community School. 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***

Dunmore Community School was founded in 1990 with the amalgamation of Incarnate Word College and St Patrick's Vocational School and operates under the joint trusteeship of Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board (ETB) and the Mercy Sisters. This standalone co-educational school serves the town of Dunmore and its rural hinterland. The mainstream enrolment currently stands at 278, with a further twenty students enrolled in Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. The school provides a broad range of curricular programmes including the Transition Year (TY). The decline in enrolment in recent years, due to changing demographics in the catchment area, has been a key challenge for the school. Students' needs are prioritised in all aspects of educational provision and of school life and the school's ethos is underpinned by the key principles of inclusion and respect. The school's identity is intrinsically linked to its position within the community and good links are evident with the wider school community.

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

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

- The board of management is committed to the school and its ongoing development.
- The school is well managed by a dedicated senior management team, however, a greater focus on the leadership dimension of its role is required.
- Some of the duties of middle management are not appropriate to meeting the current needs of the school.
- There is a strong spirit of collegiality, volunteerism, and commitment among staff and the range of extra-curricular activities is laudable.
- There is scope to further develop school planning at a whole-school level as well as at subject department level.
- The maintenance of a broad and balanced curriculum is a key priority in the context of declining enrolment.
- A commendable range of student-support structures exists.
- There are good supports for students with additional educational needs.
- In almost all the lessons observed the quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good with elements of exemplary practice noted in a number of instances.
- In a very small minority of lessons there was considerable scope to improve the teaching and learning strategies employed.

- Good progress has been made in implementing recommendations from previous inspections.

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

- A school plan should be compiled to include a clear action plan to drive forward the school's developmental priorities in a strategic manner with regular monitoring by the board to ensure its effective implementation.
- The posts of responsibility should be reviewed and aligned strategically to the school's current needs and developmental priorities.
- The leadership responsibilities of senior management and middle management should be exercised more strategically in order to drive school improvement.
- The existing special educational needs policy should be reviewed and expanded to reflect fully the school's procedures and practices.
- To enhance student learning and attainment: strategies for differentiation should be used more frequently, homework should be assigned regularly in all subjects and assessment for learning (AfL) strategies should be embedded in practice.
- Agreed literacy strategies should be implemented in a consistent manner across all curricular areas.

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

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

The board of management functions effectively and is very supportive of the school. The board is appropriately constituted, holds regular meetings and a finance sub-committee is in place. Diverse expertise and long-serving commitment are key features of the board's membership. Board members have an active role in policy development and review, accommodation refurbishment, curriculum review and staff recruitment and redeployment. The educational leadership role of the board is evident from the overview it takes in relation to Junior and Leaving Certificate examination results and previous inspection reports. Good communication between the principal and the board is evident. As a means of communicating the school's priorities and its progress in their achievement, the principal's report should be further developed into an annual report on the operation and performance of the school and be made available to the school community. Partnership with the various stakeholders could be further enhanced by the dissemination of an agreed report following board meetings.

Current priorities for development include: increasing enrolment, ensuring high quality teaching and learning, developing assessment expertise and practices, promoting literacy and numeracy, maintaining a broad curriculum, maintaining a strong ethos of care and safety, and updating school building and facilities. To support the management of change, the board in consultation with the senior management team and teachers, should oversee the development of a time-bound action plan with appropriate targets and timeframes so that identified developmental priorities can be advanced in a strategic and focused manner. In addition, outcomes of the school planning process should be regularly reviewed at board meetings so that progress can be monitored.

The parents' association has an active role in supporting school initiatives. However, it should have a greater role in policy formulation and review. Responses from student and parent questionnaires conducted as part of this evaluation indicate some positive aspects about the school, for example, good attendance, behaviour, and care structures. However,

the responses also contain some feedback which requires further analysis and discussion at school level.

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

The senior management team demonstrates a strong commitment to the school and its continued improvement. Both are well established in their management roles and they have good levels of consultation with staff. The day-to-day running and administration of the school is well managed by the senior management team. However, their duties should be strategically linked to their leadership roles and to the school's developmental priorities.

The middle management team is an important structure in supporting senior management. There is some evidence of distributed leadership in the middle management team and a range of duties are undertaken in a diligent manner. However, some duties attached to posts are not appropriate to the current needs of the school. A greater focus on the leadership dimension of the principals' role should be supported by the further development of the school's middle management team. In this regard, a whole-staff review of the schedule of posts is essential to build greater leadership capacity at all levels in order to meet the school's current needs and developmental priorities. Post duties should be documented by the board and principal to optimise the effectiveness of this resource and the practice of reporting on the performance of duties to senior management and the board at intervals should be developed.

A key strength of the school is its committed and hardworking staff. Good lines of communication have been developed across the school. There is a good level of individual engagement with continuing professional development (CPD) and staff members take opportunities to lead initiatives to support school improvement. Whole-staff in-service has been provided on a range of topics. In-house expertise is used to up-skill teachers in a number of areas, which is a commendable model of training. Teachers demonstrate a strong sense of goodwill and care for students. Ancillary staff also contribute in supporting school activities.

School planning is supported by a core planning team. Good progress has been achieved across a number of areas of school life, for example, mentoring, enrolment and the first-year transfer programme. A formal school plan should be compiled in line with the Education Act (1998). The permanent section of the school plan should incorporate information with regard to the operational procedures of the school including policy statements. The developmental section of the school plan should identify the school's planning cycles and should outline baseline data, record developmental priorities and targets set and include rigorous action planning and ongoing monitoring and review.

While all mandatory policies are in place, many need to be further developed to reflect more accurately the school's current practices and procedures. A prioritised cycle of review and update of policies should be devised and this process should be conducted in appropriate consultation with stakeholders to ensure shared ownership of policy development. A tracking mechanism would support such a rolling review for policy development.

There are good levels of consultation and communication between senior management and staff, as is evidenced by weekly year head and care team meetings as well as regular staff meetings and informal staff briefings. Good quality staff and parent handbooks are in place. A variety of mechanisms support good communication with home.

The school operates an open and inclusive admissions policy. Practices in relation to the management of students are very good and are facilitated through the school's code of

behaviour. Very good standards of behaviour and positive student-teacher relationships were evident during the evaluation. Attendance, punctuality, retention and progression are closely monitored.

Student leadership opportunities are facilitated effectively through such mechanisms as the student council, the mentoring system, and the Green-Schools programme. The student council is active, well organised and democratically elected.

The maintenance of a broad and balanced curriculum is a key priority in the context of declining enrolment. The principal has managed, through the careful and strategic allocation of teaching resources, to maintain a broad curriculum for students. Teachers provide extra support to students on a voluntary basis; this is commendable. The optional TY is a successful programme and uptake is high. Timetabling construction is good and class period allocation is generally appropriate. Provision for the link modules in the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) should be kept under review. Provision for the TY programme, including work experience, should be reviewed to ensure that an appropriate balance is maintained between the four layers of the programme.

Students' learning is further enhanced by a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. The high levels of goodwill and volunteerism of staff supports school activities well and is laudable. Celebration of achievement is valued.

The welfare and educational needs of students are key priorities for the school community. A commendable range of student-support structures exist, including a weekly care team meeting. These supports were positively endorsed by students and parents. There are good supports for students and parents at various transition times and year heads, tutors and Leaving Certificate mentors play essential roles. The role of school chaplain is very effective. While nurturing school ethos in daily school life, the school chaplain also co-ordinates the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programmes which are appropriately delivered. A range of retreats and liturgical celebrations is undertaken in line with the school ethos.

There are very good supports and flexible models of provision tailored for students with additional educational needs. Provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) is characterised by a high degree of dedication from the key personnel involved. An education support team is in place; however formal planning time should be provided for the co-ordination and planning of supports. Work is ongoing with regard to individual learning plans for students. To enhance existing good practice in additional educational needs, structures should be put in place to facilitate the sharing of information between learning support teachers and mainstream teachers in relation to students' needs, suitable methodologies to address these needs and the monitoring of students' progress. Resources allocated to students with additional needs should be deployed for their intended purpose from the start of the school year. Furthermore, the school's SEN policy should be further developed to reflect the school's actual procedures and practices and in line with Circular 70/2014.

A well-managed induction programme supports students during their transition to post-primary school. There is good provision for guidance and the existing department plan provides an overview of the guidance service. A whole-school guidance plan should be brought to completion through the collaborative input of personnel across key areas of school life such as pastoral care, the year head system, SEN and transfer supports. Once agreed the whole-school guidance plan should be ratified by the board of management.

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**

Management of school building and grounds is to a high standard and a regular maintenance schedule is adhered to. A good range of facilities and resources is available to support teaching and learning as well as very good sports facilities which are well utilised. Information and communication technology (ICT) facilities throughout the school are very good. However, the school website should be updated. The six Green Flag awards are laudable and reflect the school's commitment to its environmental responsibilities.

Risk assessments are carried out in all classrooms and general areas. The school should ensure that the regular review of its health and safety statement is in line with current guidelines and legislation.

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

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

Programme and subject planning is firmly established and well advanced in a number of areas. The majority of plans are well developed and some positive features of the best subject plans reviewed included: time-bound outline and detailed schemes of work, learning outcomes, methodologies, resources, assessment, supports for students with SEN, literacy and numeracy strategies, ICT, CPD, records of meetings and evidence of self-evaluation. To further enhance provision for teaching and learning, collaborative discussion should lead to plans being expanded, as necessary, in relation to the above areas.

The area of assessment and particularly AfL should be further developed in most plans. The analysis of Junior and Leaving Certificate examination results should be devolved to subject departments and a more detailed analysis of results is recommended, comparing the results at each grade level to the national average on an annual basis to identify trends in attainment. Analysis of results should also include commentary and outline targets and action plans for improvement where areas for development in attainment have been identified. This commentary should be submitted to the board on an annual basis.

In almost all the lessons observed the quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good with elements of exemplary practice noted in a number of lessons. There was considerable scope to improve the teaching and learning strategies employed in the very small minority of lessons found to be less than good.

All lessons had an appropriate sequential structure, were generally well-paced and there was some good linking to prior learning. In many lessons the intended learning outcomes were clear and shared with students. In some cases these were reviewed at the end of the lesson to assess and consolidate the learning achieved. This good practice should be adopted in all lessons.

Individual planning and preparation for lessons was generally of a high standard. A variety of well selected, good quality resources were prepared in advance to develop instruction and support student learning. In the majority of lessons ICT was integrated and in almost half of these cases it was used as a dynamic teaching tool. There is scope to further develop the potential of ICT as an effective teaching and learning resource.

In the majority of lessons observed a good range of effective methodologies was employed to engage students in the learning including group work, pair work and peer presentations. Collaborative learning was well managed with clear time-bound tasks set, roles assigned to group members and the plenary feedback session facilitated the sharing and consolidation of key learning points. In the small minority of instances where there was scope for improvement, greater attention should be given to: students' prior learning, questioning skills, active and differentiated strategies to support learning, development of literacy skills, setting and monitoring of homework as well as ongoing monitoring of students' learning. The use of overly didactic approaches such as students' transcription of notes should be avoided.

There was evidence of differentiation by the use of resources, questioning and where an incremental approach was adopted to support students' understanding of key concepts. Given the mixed-ability composition of class groups further differentiation of class tasks through the use of extension activities is recommended to adequately challenge students across the full range of abilities. Overall a good range of questioning strategies was interspersed with instruction to develop lesson content and to provide clear explanations where gaps in students' knowledge were identified. In some cases greater use should be made of directed questions to named individuals.

In the majority of lessons there was evidence of literacy support through a focus on subject terminology. In line with the school's self-evaluation improvement plan for literacy, agreed strategies to support students' literacy development should be implemented across the curriculum in a more consistent and targeted manner. Teachers should make use of the resources compiled in the teachers' handbook to support this work.

A positive atmosphere underpinned by respectful interactions was observed in all lessons. Student behaviour was exemplary and individual learners were well affirmed and encouraged by teachers in their learning. Some very stimulating learning environments with good displays of subject-specific content including some student work were noted.

Students were engaged well in their learning and participated actively in lesson tasks. Students displayed good levels of knowledge, understanding and skills commensurate with their ability. Homework is regularly assigned in almost all subjects. However, in a minority of cases there is inadequate setting of homework. Homework should be set on a frequent basis to reinforce and extend the learning that has taken place in lessons. While whole-class correction of work is ongoing, best practice was observed where teachers' written comments identified strengths and guided students towards improvement. Such practices, known to be effective, should be applied across all subject areas. In addition, strategies to promote follow-up on feedback, self-assessment and peer-assessment should be further developed to strengthen AfL approaches in the classroom. This focus on assessment should be formalised and supported by the development of an agreed whole-school policy on homework and assessment.

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

#### ***3.1 Management***

Subject departments submitted progress reports to management in relation to addressing the recommendations made in previous evaluations. The school has made very good progress in the implementation of recommendations related to whole-school provision; this is

indicative of the good quality of support given to all subjects in this regard. Senior management actively encourages subject departments to implement the advice provided in inspection reports. The board should seek progress reports on the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations.

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

Some good progress has been made in implementing teaching and learning recommendations. However, given the pedagogical nature of some of the recommendations, continuing work is necessary to address them adequately into the future. Therefore areas such as: greater implementation of differentiation strategies; increased use of AfL practices, particularly formative feedback; and greater implementation of agreed literacy strategies, continue to be areas for development across subjects.

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

The school has good capacity to engage in self-evaluation and has an agreed school improvement plan for literacy as well as experience in policy review, surveys, end-of-year reviews and some results analyses. The next step for the school is to implement a robust system of action planning for improvement using evidence-based target-setting and a focussed system for monitoring and review to evaluate the progress achieved. To bring about effective school improvement there needs to be more progressive leadership at senior management and middle management level supported by the contribution of all stakeholders. Overall, the school demonstrates a good level of capacity to implement the recommendations of this report and is well placed to engage in continued improvement.



# **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 of Dunmore Community School, on behalf of the staff, parents and the entire school community wish to acknowledge receipt of the WSE-MLL report.

Among the many positive findings made by the inspectors in their report we are particularly encouraged by the following:

- The high level of commitment of the board of management to the school and its ongoing development.
- The commendable range of student supports that exists in the school.
- The high level of teaching and learning observed in almost all lessons during the inspection.
- The high standard of behaviour and positive student teacher relationships which were observed throughout the evaluation.
- The strong spirit of collegiality, volunteerism and commitment which was evident among staff and the range of extra-curricular activities available.

## **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 recommendations made by the inspectors and some work has already commenced:

- A review of the posts of responsibility structures is presently in progress.
- Literacy strategies have been agreed and implementation across all curriculum areas is in progress.
- Preliminary work has begun on the review of the school's special education needs policy.
- The board will ensure that the other recommendations will be addressed in as timely a manner as is practicable.