

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Pobalscoil Inbhear Scéine**  
**Kenmare, County Kerry**  
**Roll number: 91503P**

**Date of inspection: 12 May 2016**



**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 May 2016 in Pobalscoil Inbhear Scéine. 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 accepts the report as the final inspection report available for publication and wished to respond formally to the report. The Board agrees that the response submitted will be included as an appendix to the published report. The board's response is submitted below.

### ***Introduction***

Pobalscoil Inbhear Scéine is a community school established in 2001 following the amalgamation of Holy Cross College and Kenmare Vocational School. The school occupies the renovated premises of Holy Cross College near the centre of Kenmare. As the sole provider of second-level education to the hinterland of Kenmare, the school has a current enrolment of 497 students and offers Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme, and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

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

### ***Key Findings***

- The board of management is actively engaged with the progression and achievement of a significant school-improvement agenda.
- The principal and deputy principal have provided very effective leadership in guiding and in supporting the achievement of the high quality outcomes of the ongoing school-improvement plan.
- Individual, collaborative and whole-school planning is embedded, is reflective of the needs of the students, and of the school, and is very effective.
- The principal and deputy principal, the teachers, and the wider school staff, demonstrate a deep commitment to supporting students' learning, well-being and progression.
- Issues relating to perceived inequity and stress were articulated by a significant group of teachers during the evaluation.
- Parents and students strongly endorse the work of the school and their experience of the school.
- Appropriate and effective student-support structures are in place.
- Teaching and learning of very high quality, with evident examples of excellent practice, were observed in lessons.
- Patterns of uptake of higher level in subjects, and patterns of achievement at all levels in certificate examinations, are strong.

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

- The board should further develop appropriate communication systems, particularly with the teaching staff and the wider community.
- The board must now prioritise the development of a health and safety statement and complete a risk-based audit and assessment for all areas of the school.

- The evident achievements and successes in strategic planning and school improvement, arising from the work and commitment of senior management and teachers, should now be articulated to the wider school community and celebrated appropriately.
- To sustain the growing positive impact of the very effective school-improvement plan and process, issues relating to stress and perceived inequity, as articulated by some teachers, should be addressed in an open, inclusive, dialogical and consultative manner.
- A review of the deployment of resources allocated to support students with special educational needs (SEN) should now be undertaken to ensure clarity relating to their deployment, and to ensure that these resources are used to maximise the positive outcomes for the students for whom they are intended.

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

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

The board is appropriately constituted, meets regularly, and is engaged with an on-going school-improvement agenda. A three-year school-improvement plan, with key time-bound targets, has been developed through consultation with teachers and students, and is facilitated by an external agency. This plan, at the time of this evaluation, was approaching the end of year two and a review of progress was underway. It is very positive and progressive that the board, in conjunction with senior management, has initiated this significant and successful school-improvement agenda.

It is clear that much has been achieved in this process. There is tangible evidence of school improvement in relation to outcomes for students in the context of pedagogy, student uptake and achievement at higher level, support for students, and links with the wider community.

The key challenge now for school leadership at board, senior-management and middle-management levels, is to sustain and to build upon these outcomes, through the identification of further strategic priorities. At this review stage, all involved articulated, in the course of this evaluation, both the successes achieved, and targets set that may have been over ambitious. Senior management, teachers and the board should now reset these targets, and also celebrate both the commitment of those involved and the successes that have already been achieved.

A clear and appropriate policy framework informs the work of the board and the school community, and a formal policy-review process is in place. The board has an annual policy review and ratification meeting that reflects very good practice in this area.

Communication channels with the parent association and with the trustee bodies are active and appropriate. However, a formalised channel of communication should now be established with the teaching staff. Questionnaire responses, gathered as part of this evaluation, point to some areas for development by the board and senior management in the context of communication and consultation. While a significant majority of parents, who responded to the questionnaire, felt that the school was well managed, a significant proportion of the parents also felt that the school and the board did not seek their views or report to them in relation to developments and achievements at school level. Also, a significant majority of the teachers, who responded to the questionnaire, did not feel that they were kept informed about the leadership and management role of the board. Appropriate consultation and communication systems relating to plans, current work-in-progress and achievements, should therefore be developed by the board to address these issues.

A very effective, supportive and developmental parent association is in place that links appropriately with the board and senior management. The association works with parents and the school community by engaging in a range of activities and supports for both parents and students. The parent association newsletter is of very high quality.

A well-organised and effective student council is in place. Students are active in a range of areas and the council is valued in the school community as a mechanism for student voice and active citizenship. Student leadership is also fostered through a range of activities, including a student-mentoring programme, mental health promotion activities that include the recent achievement of an amber flag for mental health awareness, and strategies relating to environmental sustainability.

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*.

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

The principal and deputy, as the senior management team, have provided very effective leadership in guiding the achievement of the outcomes of the high-quality, forward-looking and developmental school-improvement agenda. The principal and deputy principal form a cohesive team and work very effectively within their individual and collaborative roles. Positive and open communication with students and parents is a key strength within these roles. In their responses to the aforementioned questionnaires, both parents and students strongly endorse the work of the school and their experience of the school.

The significantly positive outcomes of the school-improvement agenda that has been led by the senior-management team, and developed and actioned by the teachers, include: the development of key staff teams and working groups with specific and focused school self-evaluation (SSE) agendas; the creation of a developmental agenda with pedagogy as a central focus; the development of a teaching and learning infrastructure through information and communications technology (ICT) integration, subject-department planning initiatives, and base-classroom development; the introduction of a timetable based on one-hour lessons, and the provision for engagement with continuous professional development (CPD) including work on teaching and learning frameworks by a small group of teachers and the sharing of learning with the whole staff.

Further tangible outcomes that have developed and enhanced the students' experience of the school, include: the provision of subject sampling in advance of subject choice in first year; the transition to shared collaborative planning and the creation of an interactive virtual-learning environment that includes student access; the maintenance of a broad curriculum and a full range of programmes that are open to all students; the provision and maintenance of key student-support structures including Guidance and a chaplaincy, and the timetabling of management, year-head, student-support and SEN team meetings, on a weekly basis.

Notwithstanding the obvious successes of this process, two related challenges for school management and teachers are now evident. Sustaining these processes into the future is a key challenge. The current and future reviews of the school-improvement plan should take the form of an open and inclusive dialogue leading to the identification of strategic priorities within a continuing action-planning cycle. In tandem with this process, the current achievements, successes and commitment of all involved should be articulated and celebrated, to acknowledge the efforts made and the positive outcomes already achieved.

A second challenge for school management and teachers centres on the need to address concerns in relation to perceived inequity and stress that were raised by a significant minority

of teachers during the evaluation period. Similar issues were raised with inspectors and were referenced in the whole-school evaluation (WSE) report published in 2008. These issues were addressed by the board following the publication of that WSE report but evidence from the outcomes of the teacher questionnaire completed during this inspection suggest that these issues remain unresolved. The board and the senior management team should now further explore and address these issues in an open, inclusive, dialogical and consultative manner.

An effective middle-management structure is in place that is centrally focused on student management and support. This group has been given a significant and strategic distributed-leadership role, particularly in the area of school-improvement planning but also in a range of other student-support areas that centre on the year-head role, and on specific initiatives and activities. The aforementioned weekly meeting of year heads with the principal and deputy principal, that also has a school-management function, is a very effective element of student support. It is very positive that a post-of-responsibility review has been initiated and is ongoing. The voluntary class-tutor role for teachers combines, in many cases, a student-support role and the teaching of social personal and health education (SPHE). This should be reviewed in the context of the limited, and yet appropriate, timetable allocation to SPHE and the demands that the student-support role can place on the class tutor within this time period.

A student-support team, comprising the guidance counsellor, the chaplain, the SEN co-ordinator and the principal and deputy principal, was observed to be very effective. This group also meets weekly. Almost all students, teachers and parents who responded to the aforementioned questionnaires endorsed the quality and effectiveness of the school's student-support mechanisms. To sustain current very good practice, attention should focus on increased formality relating to appropriate tracking, recording and reporting on actions common to both the student-support meeting and that of the year heads. The planned inclusion of the chaplain in the year-head meeting should assist in this area.

A broad and comprehensive curriculum is provided to students. Subject sampling in TY supports informed subject choice for senior cycle, while the recent introduction of subject sampling early in first year is very positive in that it informs students' choice of subjects in junior cycle. The very recent experimental timetabling of one-hour lessons throughout the school week was observed to be very positive in supporting students' learning in the lessons observed, notwithstanding the challenge this change can place on the duration of lessons for practical subjects. The planned review of the one-hour timetable structure, following the completion of one school year, should have a strong pedagogical focus.

Very good quality TY, LCA and LCVP programmes are provided and are accessible to all students. These programmes are well planned, well organised and co-ordinated, and are valued by students and their parents. An evaluation of the TY programme involving parents, and by students when they reach sixth year, should be considered in addition to current evaluation processes. The current cost of the TY programme should also be reviewed, while the planned adjustment to work experience in LCA, to expand available class-contact time, is very positive and should be implemented in the coming school year.

SEN provision in the school is significant and comprises interventions to support students with a range of learning needs, including students on the autistic spectrum. The provision of a centre to include and support students on the autistic spectrum is a very positive development. Significant resources are deployed to support students' learning and a withdrawal model, based on interventions on a one-to-one or small-group basis, and the creation of class groups mainly in Mathematics and English, is the main focus of provision.

A committed core team, including a co-ordinator, in addition to a large number of teachers with SEN support attached to their timetables, provide these supports. There are very good communication systems in place and it is clear that planning to support these students is now

evident in individual and collaborative subject plans. The valuable contribution of the special needs assistant (SNA) team, in supporting these students, is acknowledged.

At the time of the evaluation, it was unclear how all the resources provided by the National Council for Special Education and the Department of Education and Skills, to support the identified needs of students with SEN, were deployed. This should be clarified and documented, as a matter of urgency, as required by Circular Letter 0070/2014.

Some changes to current practice are recommended. A reduction in the number of teachers involved in supporting these students, and the creation of a larger core team, would reflect best practice in this area. The current withdrawal model could also be complemented by the introduction of team-teaching, where appropriate. Extra class groups, created using SEN resources, should be specifically targeted at students identified with SEN and those for whom the deployed resources were intended. A recommended review of SEN provision in the school should now focus specifically on these key areas.

All students are offered a broad range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. The commitment of teachers to this provision is acknowledged. Similarly, the commitment of the school caretakers, cleaning staff and administrative staff in supporting the school as a very positive learning environment is also acknowledged.

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

The very good quality and spacious school building combines newly built and older listed structures that are architecturally sensitive to the historic planned town of Kenmare. The board and senior management have initiated and overseen significant improvements to the school campus including the provision of an enhanced library, upgrading of classrooms and other spaces, and additional teaching areas, and the provision and upgrading of ICT. Significant work has also been undertaken by the board in enhancing the quality of the school grounds, and, in conjunction with Kerry County Council, work relating to ameliorating potential road-safety issues outside of the school gates. The board must now however, prioritise the development of a health and safety statement and a risk-based audit and assessment for all areas of the school campus, in line with Health and Safety Authority guidelines. This recommendation was made in the WSE report published in 2008, but has yet to be implemented.

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

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

Fifteen one-hour lessons were observed during this evaluation. Teaching and learning of very high quality, with many examples of excellent practice, were observed in these lessons. Lessons and learning took place within positive and mutually respectful classroom learning environments that had been created by teachers.

The high quality, and in some cases, excellent classroom learning experiences were characterised by very good planning and preparation by the individual teachers that created a coherence to the planned learning in the lesson. Clear, effective and varied strategies were then deployed that ensured the engagement and the participation of the students. These strategies included: very good quality and routine co-operative learning strategies; a range of tasks that linked to the learning intention and that were significant in advancing students' learning, and very good questioning strategies that engaged students and allowed for a review of the learning by both student and teacher.

The lessons observed had a planned and positive balance between the teacher voice of instruction and questioning, and the student voice of engagement, participation and dialogue relating to the planned learning. It was clear during the evaluation, that teachers have high expectations for their students and that they create challenging, differentiated, and varied learning opportunities in lessons. It was equally clear, in the lessons observed, that teachers are embracing new strategies that have positioned their students as active agents in the co-construction of their learning rather than passive participants in the lesson. This represents very good pedagogical practice that is both reflective and dialogical.

It was evident to the inspection team that one hour of teaching and learning time in lessons facilitated a slower pace but demanded significant planning by the teacher to maximise the outcomes for students in engagement, participation and learning. It was clear that these outcomes were achieved in lessons. Patterns of uptake of higher level, and patterns of achievement at all levels in certificate examinations, are strong in the school.

Recommendations made, in a minority of the lessons observed, focused on: the need to bring coherence to the learning intentions of the lesson; the need to introduce a variety of tasks that purposefully engaged students and scaffolded their learning, and the need to introduce specific written tasks to challenge and encourage some students appropriately.

In parallel with the aforementioned challenges, to support and sustain current very good practice, whole-staff attention should also focus on agreeing a systematic approach to formative written commentary on significant pieces of students' work, in line with some very good practice that is evident in this area of assessment. There is also a need to address the uneven recording of homework by many students in their homework journals.

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

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

Recommendations arising from previous evaluations have largely been addressed and implemented with the exception of the aforementioned recommendation regarding a health and safety audit and on-going risk assessment, as recommended in the WSE published in 2008.

A recommendation from the aforementioned WSE report concerning relationships, communication and morale among the staff was addressed by the board. Evidence from some teachers during the current evaluation suggests that these issues remain unresolved. These issues now require further attention from the board, senior management and staff.

A further review of some aspects of the admissions policy should include a focus on ranking the enrolment criteria, and on some wording that could indicate conditionality around the enrolment of students with additional educational needs.

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

Recommendations concerning, the development of aspects of teaching and learning, lesson planning, and the provision of subject sampling early in first year to inform subject choice, as recommended in previously completed subject inspections, have been implemented.

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

The school community has embraced SSE on a scale far beyond that initially mandated by the Inspectorate in 2012. The outcomes of the initial three-year school-improvement plan are very positive and, as articulated by the board, senior management and teachers, the current review of progress is identifying successes, challenges and further opportunities. The school community has clear capacity to sustain, and to extend, 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 of Pobalscoil Inbhear Scéine is delighted that the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate acknowledges the positive ethos and work ethic in our school. The report affirms the excellent practices that exist in the school. The staff and management are encouraged by many of the findings, but in particular the following:

- The board of management is actively engaged with the progression and achievement of a significant school-improvement agenda
- Senior management provides very effective leadership
- School planning is embedded and very effective
- Parents and students strongly endorse the work of the school and their experience of the school
- Teaching and learning is of very high quality and excellent practice is evident, which the board sees as the primary function of any school
- School self-evaluation is embraced far beyond that mandated by the Inspectorate.
- All students are offered a broad range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. The commitment of teachers to this provision is acknowledged.

This is an excellent report which independently verifies the excellent work that goes on in this school.

## **Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

- An agreed report on board of management meetings will be circulated to all board members so they can communicate with their nominees/trustees
- Health and safety will be prioritised by our infrastructure committee
- A new school website, the principal's attendance at parents' association meetings, and media/social media, will continue to be used to communicate with all stakeholders
- The board of management will continue to address the issue of perceived inequity and stress, in consultation with all staff
- A review of the deployment of resources in the area of special educational needs is currently being undertaken.