

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Coláiste na Sceilge
Caherciveen, County Kerry
Roll number: 76068N**

Date of inspection: 29 September 2010



**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 September, 2010 in Coláiste na Sceilge. 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, groups of teachers and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Introduction

Coláiste na Sceilge was formed in 1999 by the amalgamation of three post-primary schools, Saint John Bosco Secondary School, Waterville Vocational School and Scoil Uí Chonaill, Caherciveen's Vocational School. The school is a community college under the joint patronage of CEIST and the Kerry Education Service (KES). Coláiste na Sceilge continues a close association with the O'Connell Adult Education Centre through the operation of Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) accredited courses on a range of levels. The school's location close to the tip of the Iveragh Peninsula and its success in attracting students has meant that it has responsibility for the education of virtually all students from a wide catchment area, including those of the nearby Uíbh Ráthach *Gaeltacht*. The school provides for the needs of students who wish to pursue their studies through Irish through *An tAonad Lán-Ghaeilge*. The current enrolment of students is 533, including Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) students, and is relatively stable at this level.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- Very good quality learning and teaching was observed.
- The board of management has identified and prioritised a number of planning issues that support instructional leadership and a developmental focus on teaching and learning.
- The board and senior management have also prioritised the management of facilities, the expansion of ICT access throughout the school and the general maintenance and improvement of the school buildings.
- The senior management team has proven leadership qualities with its focus on instructional leadership and management.
- Collaborative approaches to the running of the school are in keeping with the school's mission of partnership, respect and care.
- A culture that supports and encourages ongoing planning, review and evaluation is promoted in the school.
- The individual needs of students are well supported by staff.
- Learning is a particular leadership priority in the school and some very good practices arising from this whole-school focus were observed.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- In light of the quality of teaching observed in the course of this whole-school evaluation, teachers are encouraged to consider their own and their colleagues' good practice as models to be observed and shared.
- Planning should be advanced for the development of subject-specific and programme-specific teams to foster subject specialism and cross-curricular collaboration.
- Middle-management structures should be reviewed with a focus on tasks and duties.
- Existing baseline data should be used in the development of indicators of success in areas such as attendance, retention and gender equity.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

The board of management is properly constituted, comprising three nominees each of the CEIST and KES, and two nominees each of the school's teachers and parents. Two additional members have been co-opted to bring valuable local, professional and personal knowledge and skills to the work of the board. The board is strongly supported in its work by KES through initiatives and structures associated with the KES *Education Plan 2006 – 2010* that include teachers, parents and management. The board normally meets on five or six occasions annually, however, at the time of the evaluation, fewer meetings than normal had taken place. In this context, it is recommended that the practice of more frequent meetings be re-established. It is also recommended that an agreed report be drafted following each board meeting to ensure consistency in reporting on the key discussions and decisions of the meeting to the nominating bodies.

The board has fostered a collaborative approach to school management which is inclusive of staff, students and parents. The work of the board involves regular review and updating of policies and, in fulfilment of a requirement of the Education Act 1998, the publication of an annual report to parents. This is good practice. It is suggested that the inclusion of the annual report on the school's website is an effective method of publication which should be reinstated as soon as possible with the development of the website.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (Published September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

It is clear that the board is aware of its responsibilities not only to the school but also to the community. The board has identified the following most pressing factors which impact on the effective operation of the school: the high rate of student absences; the context of rural disadvantage; and the provision of education through the medium of Irish in an area outside the remit of Roinn na Gaeltachta. The *Aonad Lán-Ghaeilge* provides core subjects and, where possible, optional subjects through Irish.

The school's priorities for development

A wide range of priorities has been recorded by the board and senior management. Four major, linked areas have been identified. Firstly, a focus on learning and teaching; secondly, the provision of the physical facilities in which learning and teaching might be optimised; thirdly, the development of the school's supports for students, particularly in the area of additional educational needs; and, fourthly, the development of information and communication technology (ICT) as an effective learning and administrative tool. These form the positive basis on which short-term, medium-term and long-term planning is progressing and developments in all four areas are ongoing. The inspectors acknowledged the relevance and the timeliness of the identified priorities during the course of the whole-school evaluation.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The senior management team of principal and deputy principal has a complementary range of skills and both have made considerable contributions to the development of the school through their various roles in middle and senior management. Senior management has proven leadership qualities with its focus on instructional leadership and in bringing the school to its current position at the leading edge of school development planning. The fundamental structures of mission, policies and subject departments have been well established. School reviews are regular and ongoing, as evidenced by the range of policies and procedures that have been reviewed, amended and ratified on a cyclical basis. It is particularly noteworthy that the opinions of staff and students about the school have been surveyed to provide more complete information on which school planning may be based. Subject-department plans show that review is well ingrained and, significantly, includes the review of teaching practices.

The principal has engaged with new staff as a mentor and has made significant progress not only in teachers' self-evaluation but also in the sharing of good practice through classroom visits. In light of the quality of teaching observed in the course of this whole-school evaluation, teachers are encouraged to consider their own and their colleagues' good practice as models to be observed and shared. Staff engagement with CPD has been substantial, providing a firm foundation on which this suggestion might be implemented. Significant progress has been made in the development of a culture of instructional practice that has included the participation of staff and senior management in externally facilitated continuing professional development (CPD). The knowledge accumulated at those CPD sessions has been disseminated to staff through subsequent experiential sessions in the school, organised and delivered by staff and senior management. This model of delivery, using existing expertise within the school, is commended.

It is recommended that planning for the development of subject-specific and programme-specific teams be advanced. Examples might include the development of cross-curricular approaches to literacy and language development, to student supports, and to numeracy. In considering the formation of core teams and departments, it is recommended that allowance be made for the broadening of teachers' interests and experiences both within teams and across the curriculum, as appropriate.

Communication among staff and management is effective and includes ongoing informal contacts as well as communication at regular staff meetings and through well-presented documents, such as the comprehensive staff handbook. Collaborative approaches to the running of the school ensure that meetings are well planned and regular, both at the whole-school level and at the subject-department level. The goodwill of staff is evident in

significant work that is accomplished informally and semi-formally, in addition to formally convened meetings such as the weekly middle-management and student-support meetings.

The year-head system is currently linked directly to the post-of-responsibility structure. In the light of recent retirements, it is recommended that the middle management structure be reviewed with a focus on tasks and duties and on the uncoupling of duties and posts of responsibility.

Communication with parents is good. Senior management has been proactive in advancing plans for the introduction of a web-based system that will enable secure access to comprehensive information about the school and about students. It is envisaged by management that the system will serve to enhance communication with parents about the school in general and about student progress and attendance. This is a welcome development, as both parents and students raised some issues regarding communication in the questionnaires administered during the course of this evaluation. To enhance communication regarding student progress, a decision was made recently by the school to issue some comment-only reports. The decision has been received favourably by students and parents.

Leadership of students

The school is inclusive, accepting all students who apply for entry. Clear procedures for the admission, support and management of students are in place and are well documented in school policies. The individual needs of students are well supported by staff, both in practice and in policy. Practice is based on the school's clear value of care and support, which is encompassed in its mission and placed prominently in policy documents. Policies, including the admissions policy and the code of behaviour, have been appropriately and collaboratively developed by the board, by staff, by parents and by students.

The school's provision for students with low-incidence special educational needs, at post-primary level, in the transition to further education and in further education itself, is an example of very good practice. Developments in this area being considered by the school include plans for the introduction of assistive technology, the compiling of concise individual education plans for students and the development of an electronic database of students, their needs and provision for them. This is in an easily modified form and its development is recommended by, for example, the inclusion of links to individual education plans and to relevant information.

Among the supports available to students are the services of the guidance and counselling department, the special educational needs and learning support departments and the chaplaincy. These departments work collaboratively through the school's care team. Students are included in the systems of support through the active student council and the scheme of trained peer mentors. This work is complemented by the system of year heads and class teachers whose work, in addition to supporting students, includes student-management and administrative duties. It is noted that some overlaps exist in the student-support functions and, in light of the value added by these supports to the teaching work of the school, it is recommended that the roles and responsibilities associated with student support be clarified in the context of whole-school planning.

The school timetable is well balanced and makes effective use of available resources. In addition to the range of core subjects, including a modern language, studied by all students in first year, two other subjects are chosen from a list of seven optional subjects prior to entry. Observations made in the course of the whole-school evaluation confirmed a strong tendency to subject choice on gender grounds. It is recommended that issues, such as gender equity and students' future decision making, be considered and that a system be

devised, whereby students make informed decisions regarding optional subjects following the experience of those subjects.

Students have positive attitudes to the school and to their teachers and feel that their opinions are valued. A review of the disciplinary system has taken place with appropriate inputs from the student council. An elected student council functions effectively and is well supported by staff. Communication between the council and senior management is direct and open, and issues raised by students have been acted upon by management. Students participate in the review of policies, as appropriate. Students are also active in the local community through work with the parish council and with various charitable and sporting organisations. Students' achievements in team and individual sports have been considerable at local, regional and national levels. The support of teachers in these and in other extracurricular and co-curricular activities is acknowledged by students.

2.3 *Management of facilities*

The school building is spacious and well maintained. Structural changes within the building have enhanced the range of rooms available for various purposes. A comprehensive health and safety statement has been drawn up and has been revised recently. Subject-department plans, particularly in the technological and scientific areas, refer in some detail to the procedures in place for the prevention of accidents and for the promotion of healthy attitudes. Occasional audits are carried out to ensure the safety of the building and facilities. The information generated is held by senior management for the attention of maintenance staff or external agents as appropriate. This is good practice. Defects in the building structure have been identified by management and resources required to address this issue have been allocated recently by KES.

The development of ICT is a school priority. At the time of the evaluation, wireless broadband facilities and a suite of computers of high specification had been recently installed. A number of rooms are equipped with permanent data projection facilities and plans are in place to extend these facilities throughout the building. Plans were also well advanced for the addition to the school's electronic administrative system of a web-based gateway to school information that is to be accessible securely by parents and staff. The use of the school's website to provide podcasts of passages for the Leaving Certificate oral examinations is a good example of the potential of the technology to enhance teaching and learning. The continuation of this development is encouraged.

In the administration of the school, much information continues to be gathered, and stored electronically, which may be used for the establishment of baselines and indicators of success in, for example, the monitoring and improvement of student attendance, retention and equality. This is recommended.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 *The quality of learning and teaching*

Very good quality learning and teaching was observed. Students were engaged by the planned learning activities and participated well in lessons. It was clear that teachers had high expectations and their students were challenged to learn in a manner appropriate to their needs and capabilities. Learning is a particular leadership priority in the school and some very good practices arising from this whole-school focus were observed.

Where such strategies were central to the planned learning, the learning intention was shared with the students from the outset. In these lessons, good quality questioning and the use of an appropriate wait time for the students to formulate their answers was observed. Teachers used a variety of visual aids to illustrate the learning and these were built up as these lessons progressed. In all cases, the students were engaged by the planned methodologies and were actively engaged in their own learning. The use of these teaching and learning strategies represents very good practice. All teachers should develop these strategies over time, including a focus on questioning, and reflect on the effectiveness of their approaches within their individual class contexts and within their subject departments.

Active methodologies were observed in all lessons. Language lessons used the target language and integrated approaches as the main focus of learning. In lessons in the sciences and in practical subjects, students were actively engaged by diagrams, visual stimulus materials and practical demonstrations. ICT was very effectively integrated into some lessons, while all lessons used a combination of white-board, visual materials and teacher-directed discussion and questioning. All these approaches combined to produce active, participative and stimulating learning environments.

The classroom atmosphere in all lessons was calm, supportive and attentive to students' individual needs. Classroom management illustrated established routines, consistency in approach, good student-teacher relationships and high expectations of students to respond and learn. A culture of care, very good quality teaching and high but realistic expectations relating to learning underpinned the students' experience in the lessons observed.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Recommendations made in previous reports have been addressed. The upgrading of the ICT facilities is in progress, which will enable staff to address the recommendations of reports regarding the use of ICT by staff and students in the course of lessons. In another instance, a flame-resistant cabinet for the safe storage of flammable chemicals had been installed following a recommendation in a science inspection report.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Recommendations made in previous reports, regarding differentiated teaching, active learning methods, and the promotion of student self-assessment are under active consideration. In the course of the school's current focus on teaching methods, recommended approaches are being implemented widely by staff. It was clear in all observations of language lessons that teachers had acted upon the recommendations regarding the use of the target language and the development of students' oral-language skills.

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

School self-review and self-evaluation have been at the core of the school's developmental process. The basic structures that support effective teaching and learning have been established. These include a comprehensive suite of policies, well-formed subject

departments and active supports for students. In addition, it is clear that, led by senior management, policy review and formation are ongoing and that these processes include students and parents, when appropriate.

Coláiste na Sceilge is a good example of how developments in review and evaluation provide the foundation for the active consideration of teachers' professional practices. Led by senior management, the school has engaged in a major drive to improve teaching and learning with concomitant benefits for students. In tandem with the professional development of staff, the school's management continues to be active in the provision of facilities that optimise good practice. The active and ongoing participation of staff in these developments, the quality of the outcomes to date and the current trend of development are clear indicators of the school's constructive capacity for self-improvement.