

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Cnoc Mhuire Secondary School
Granard, County Longford
Roll number: 63730S**

Date of inspection: 23 April 2015



**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 April 2015 in Cnoc Mhuire Secondary 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

Cnoc Mhuire, a voluntary secondary school in the Catholic tradition, was opened to girls in 1947 by the Sisters of Mercy and became a co-educational school in 1959. The school was extended in 1970 and again in 1983 to cater for growing numbers of students. The school's first lay principal was appointed in 1996 and the school transferred to the trusteeship of CEIST in 2006. The school caters for over 440 students who come from a large catchment area and from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds. The school currently employs in excess of thirty staff members.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board has worked effectively to oversee the ongoing development of the school.
- The principal and deputy principal work effectively to support and facilitate the work of both students and staff.
- Post-holders and other staff members work effectively to manage their responsibilities.
- A broad and balanced curriculum is provided which is designed to meet the needs of the students.
- School accommodation is maintained to a high standard.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good to very good in almost all lessons. In a small minority of lessons, preparation was poor and students were not sufficiently engaged by the teaching and learning process.

Recommendations for Further Development

- It is recommended that subject departments, in collaboration with senior management, implement an evidence-based programme for improvement with a focus on improving outcomes for students.
- It is recommended that a more systematic use of *Assessment for Learning* (AfL) techniques be planned for and implemented and that teaching strategies be used that facilitate additional forms of differentiation.
- It is recommended that the provision of written developmental feedback to students on their written work become a habitual part of teachers' work.
- It is recommended that the board, senior management and subject departments engage in action planning as a means of efficiently planning for improvement.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management, appointed in September 2014, is properly constituted and board members have received training in their responsibilities. The board maintains an appropriate level of contact with both the trustees and senior in-school management to ensure effective discharge of its duties. Decision making at board meetings is by consensus. The board issues an agreed report following each of its meetings. It is recommended that these reports be published on the school's website to maximise access by parents.

The board has adopted all required policies and a range of additional useful policies. Policy development is ongoing in response to the changing educational landscape and to the needs of the school. It is recommended that the date of approval and of proposed review be included in the text of all policies. It is noted that a number of policies have become outdated or are incomplete and need to be reviewed in the short term to maintain their relevance, including the Internet Acceptable Use policy, the Admissions and Special Education policies. It is also recommended that a Transition Year (TY) admissions policy be developed.

The principal and deputy principal have clearly defined roles and work in a mutually supportive manner. Both have received substantial training for their respective roles. They work effectively to support and facilitate the work of both students and staff. They strive to maintain the ethos of the school in all its daily routines and operations. Leadership roles are effectively shared with middle management and relevant, appropriate and clearly defined duties have been assigned to post holders.

A student council is in operation. However, its mandate is unclear and it does not have a constitution. It is recommended that the structure and functioning of the student council be reviewed and a system for the election of members be put in place to maximise representation at meetings. A constitution should then be agreed which supports a meaningful role for the council. Student leadership is also effectively promoted by the mentoring system where sixth-year students provide support for in-coming first years and help them to make the transition from primary to post-primary school.

While an effective parents association contributed significantly to the school in previous years, there is no parents association currently in place. A review of the responses to parents' questionnaires and discussion with a group of parents strongly suggests that there are gaps in the quality of communication between the school and parents. Thus, it is strongly recommended that appropriate steps be taken to re-establish a parents' association.

The board has prioritised the development of the school's information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and substantial progress has been made. Progress has also been made in promoting energy conservation and this is reflected by the school having received five green schools flags to date. Staff professional development has been prioritised and progress is ongoing. Fundraising for the development of the school's playing pitch is also currently underway.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The senior management team strives to provide effective leadership of learning and teaching and to support ongoing improvement. Staff members are given opportunities to lead projects and initiatives and they avail of such opportunities. Post holders work effectively to manage their responsibilities and assistant principals, who are all year heads, provide senior management with an annual report on the operation of their posts. Teachers, for the most part, are deployed in line with their qualifications and expertise and there is continuity in

assigning classes to them. The small number of instances where teachers have been assigned duties outside their areas of expertise should be avoided in future.

A broad and balanced curriculum is provided which is designed to meet the needs of the students. Incoming first-year students follow a number of core subjects. A taster programme gives these students an opportunity to experience additional subjects and a final choice of subjects for junior cycle is made at Hallowe'en. The time allocation to junior cycle subjects is appropriate. However, it is noted that Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is not timetabled for third-year students and it is recommended that this be rectified at the earliest opportunity. For senior cycle students, the provision of a high quality Transition Year (TY) and of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) serves to further enhance choice. Both of these programmes are optional and both are well supported by students.

The school is open for the required minimum number of days each year and provides instructional time in keeping with Department of Education and Skills requirements. Designated teaching hours provided by the Department are used for their intended purpose. The recent introduction of an *eportal* system has begun to streamline the recording of attendance and it is recommended that an attendance strategy be developed at an early date in order that the full potential of the system can be exploited in relation to, for example, liaising with parents regarding pupil absences and monitoring of students during lunchtime.

The code of behaviour, which is clearly structured and has a clear ladder of referral, is currently under review to ensure it continues to meet the needs of the school. Parents' responses to behaviour-related questions, in the questionnaires administered during the evaluation process, indicated that difficulties exist. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that both parents and students are consulted appropriately and their views and concerns considered as part of this review. In order to promote positive discipline, much greater use should be made of the students' journal to record and affirm positive behaviour and students' achievements. Journals should be closely monitored by year heads and class teachers to make sure they are maintained in an orderly manner and to ensure that they are used consistently by students.

The effectiveness of the code of behaviour is enhanced through the operation of the student-support system where students in difficulty are monitored and supported. Frequent and meaningful contact is maintained between all elements of the student care system including the senior management team, the year heads and the guidance counsellor. Referrals to outside support agencies are possible due to effective links that have been maintained with such agencies. It is important that the Religion, Guidance, SPHE and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policies are brought up to date and integrated to underpin the good work already being carried out to support students and to ensure that the work being carried out is reflected in relevant school policies.

Personal, educational and career guidance is available to students at all levels. Individual meetings with the guidance counsellor are available on request and a programme of classroom and other supports, relevant to the stage of progress of the students, is in place. Guidance is timetabled for senior cycle students. Extending this provision to third-year students, for at least part of the year, should be given serious consideration. The input of the guidance counsellor to the LCVP should also be documented in both the Guidance and the LCVP planning documents.

The school rewards and celebrates the success of students in a variety of meaningful ways, ranging from smaller class group activities to whole-school activities, including religious ceremonies in keeping with the school's ethos. The colourful displays of past events in the school corridors contribute to a positive ambience in the school.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

1.3 Management of facilities

School accommodation is maintained to a high standard and specialist rooms are used for their designated purpose. Up-to-date high-quality material resources are available to all teachers to support learning and teaching. Classrooms, specialist rooms and circulation areas are clean and well maintained. Many classrooms have displays of subject-specific charts and posters including student-generated work. The school grounds are maintained to an equally high standard. An up-to-date health and safety plan is in place.

1. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Subject department plans are in place for all subjects. Most of these plans outline the topics to be taught in each year of the relevant course. The more comprehensive plans include weekly schedules for the delivery of these topics and are presented in the form of learning outcomes. Remaining subject departments should adapt their planning documents to include such time-bound schedules and learning outcomes. For the most part, teachers were well prepared for their lessons, with required resources and supports to hand.

The quality of teaching and learning, as observed, was good to very good in almost all lessons. Some very good practice was seen where lessons were well structured, with a clear introduction, sharing of learning outcomes, exposition of the new material using appropriate methodologies, provision of opportunities for students to put their learning into practice, and a review in terms of the learning outcomes at the close of the lesson; and a student-centred active-learning approach was adopted. The frequency and extent of the use of ICT to stimulate students was very encouraging. In a small minority of lessons, preparation was poor, students were not sufficiently engaged by the teaching and learning process and there was little or no attempt to carry out meaningful assessment.

Classroom interactions in almost all lessons viewed were respectful, inclusive and supportive of good quality learning, although few examples were seen of students asking questions. Students were affirmed and encouraged for their efforts and contributions in class. Students' written work, including homework, was monitored. However, in only a small few instances was this affirmation and encouragement applied to students' written work through the provision of written developmental feedback.

A formal assessment policy has been developed and there are appropriate systems for keeping parents informed of students' progress. However, subject plans contained very little in relation to assessment. Classroom observation suggests that assessment of students on a day-to-day basis is essentially confined to monitoring homework and questioning students in class. Most frequently observed was lower-order, recall type questioning with little opportunity for students to demonstrate in-depth learning and understanding. Planning for classroom activities that afford students such opportunities was not evident and feedback opportunities to support improvement were thus limited. Likewise, rather than being planned for, differentiation was largely confined to the provision of individual support when students were in difficulty during class. It is recommended that a more systematic use of AfL techniques be planned for and implemented and that teaching strategies be used that facilitate additional forms of differentiation.

It is encouraging to note that many, but not all, subject departments have carried out an analysis of Leaving Certificate examination results. However, there is substantial scope to use the outcomes of such analyses, along with other evidence, to inform planning and set targets for improvement. It is strongly recommended that such an approach to generating improvement be adopted by all subject departments.

In a number of lessons, it was apparent that teachers had high expectations of students and students responded positively in these lessons. Classroom layouts were appropriately adapted to accommodate teaching styles and facilitate less rigid classroom dynamics in some lessons. In the majority of lessons, students were well challenged and they responded by engaging well in the learning process. In these lessons, there was evidence of good quality learning.

In order to examine the quality of teaching, it is notable that teachers have engaged in peer observation. This is a wonderful initiative but, as implemented, lacks the structure needed to achieve a defined purpose. Partner teachers should prepare a lesson together, for example looking at effective group work. Observation could then focus on issues such as the quality of student engagement, student learning and the achievement of stated learning outcomes.

Overall, there is more of an emphasis on teaching than on learning. A greater focus on outcomes for students and on what helps them to learn best, a shifting of emphasis from teaching to learning and the learner, is needed. Teaching and learning must become more student centred and active learning should be promoted to encourage and enhance student engagement. The school needs to review its approach to how improvement is sought in teaching, learning and assessment. Careful planning is needed to implement activities which will facilitate learning and assessment, and provide teachers with valuable feedback on students' progress that can then be used to further support learning.

Students have access to a variety of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to support their learning and to provide a holistic learning experience. It is commended that activities of a sporting, social, religious and cultural nature are provided. The work of teaching staff to provide these opportunities is a good example of the mission statement of Cnoc Mhuire being lived out.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Due attention has been paid by school management to following up on recommendations from previous inspections and very good progress is evident in many areas. For example, students with Irish exemptions who are in receipt of learning support and students who receive language support are now taught separately; individual education plans have been put in place for students with special educational needs; a competency test in Mathematics has been introduced for incoming first-year students; a student evaluation of TY is taking place; and a range of additional recommendations has been implemented.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Many teachers have engaged in following up on recommendations at both subject department level and in their classrooms. Observation suggests that there have been improvements in some areas but not in others; positive examples include the range of student-centred, active-learning methodologies that were in evidence in lessons in the sciences and an encouraging increase in the uptake of History in senior cycle. It is suggested that the work of teachers in fulfilling recommendations be recorded in subject department folders.

While some recommendations have yet to be addressed, for example the addition of team teaching to the range of interventions to support students with special educational needs and the development and use of AfL strategies, overall, there have been improvements in the quality of provision for students. It is suggested that recommendations in future subject inspection reports be examined at whole-school level to identify improvements that may be implemented across all subject departments.

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

The senior management team has worked diligently to review and develop the management and administrative systems within the school and has demonstrated skill in managing and leading a complex and constantly changing organisation. Further work is needed in relation to developing the pedagogic function of the school and in establishing and maintaining positive communications with the partners. At this time of transition, the board should take a lead role in overseeing the improvements outlined in this report and it is recommended that the board, senior management and subject departments review their work and set targets for improvement on an annual basis. Progress should be assessed at appropriate intervals and be reviewed at the end of each year.

It is recommended that the board, senior management and subject departments engage in action planning as a means of efficiently planning for improvements outlined in this report and for implementing and monitoring change. This process of action planning is at the core of school self-evaluation as currently promoted by the education partners and the Department of Education and Skills. Key areas for development include the promotion of a more student-centred approach to teaching and learning and integrating literacy and numeracy development into classroom practice. Greater emphasis should be put on the further development of active methodologies and the use of assessment strategies.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

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

1. Subject departments met on Tuesday 15th September 2015 and are addressing plans to include weekly schedules for the delivery of each topic before the next staff meeting – Wednesday 7th October 2015.
2. The P.D.S.T. has been approached to give further CPD on AFL and developmental written feedback.
3. Senior Management and Literacy, Numeracy and Teaching and Learning teams have met to engage in action planning as a means of efficiently planning for improvement.
4. The Board of Management Agreed Reports will be available on the school website 2015/ 2016.
5. The Transition Year Admissions Policy is advanced.
6. The Student Council Constitution is agreed and will be ratified at the next Board of Management meeting. Elections are held at assembly and representatives sought for each class group.
7. A parents meeting was organised by Management on September 23rd 2015 with the aim of establishing a Parents Association.
8. At the parent meeting, parents will be consulted re Behaviour Code review.
9. S.P.H.E/ R.S.E is available to all school groups from 2015/ 2016.
10. 4 teachers and the Principal and Deputy Principal have signed up for the TL21 project with Carrick-on-Shannon.
11. The attendance strategy is extended to include a text to parents each day re. absences.
12. Greater use is being made of the Student Journal. A merit system is being used to encourage all learners to engage in their learning and improve.