An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Elphin Community College
Elphin, County Roscommon
Roll number: 72280O**

Date of inspection: 7 December 2015

AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | 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 2015 in Elphin Community College. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management 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

Elphin Community College is a co-educational, multi-denominational school which operates under the auspices of the Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB) with a current enrolment of 132 students. Programmes offered currently are the Junior Certificate (JC), a compulsory Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate (LC). The principal resumed her role just over one year ago following secondment to Roscommon Vocational Education Committee (VEC).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings
- Senior management is committed to the school and the members are heavily engaged in the day-to-day running of the school.
- A key strength of the school is its dedicated and caring staff and a broad range of effective care supports are in place.
- The quality of teaching was good or very good in most lessons observed.
- Subject planning in the majority of subjects is in need of improvement.
- A very good-quality school improvement plan (SIP) is in place for literacy and numeracy.
- The school buildings and grounds are maintained to a very good standard and a very good-quality print and visual-learning environment is evident throughout the school.

Recommendations for Further Development
- The board of management should make arrangements to facilitate the involvement of all stakeholders in the development of a strategic school plan.
- A robust structure to support the action-planning process should be developed and proactively led by senior management.
- Urgent attention needs to be paid to compliance with health and safety management and documentation requirements.
- Subject planning process should be utilised effectively as a vehicle to guide and improve teaching and learning across subjects and programmes and a whole-school

assessment policy should be developed to guide developments in this area across all subjects and programmes.
- The allocated teaching hours, to support students with additional educational needs, should be used for their intended purpose.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is properly constituted and is committed to fulfilling its statutory responsibilities. The board meets regularly and is very supportive of management, staff and students. It also endorses, supports, facilitates and encourages community collaboration with the school. Communication lines exist between the board and the GRETB and the board and staff. However, there is scope for improvement in the quality of this communication including the provision of an agreed written report to staff and the parents' council (PC) and a more comprehensive annual report for GRTEB.

The board discusses and ratifies school policies as they are presented to it. However, the board should establish a more systematic procedure to develop and update all policies according to agreed targets, in a timely and collaborative manner, which will then be forwarded to the GRETB. The child protection policy and procedures require regular updating and review with all stakeholders. The current whole-school health and safety policy and practices are not adequate and should be prioritised for immediate attention.

The developmental priorities articulated by the board include increasing enrolment, developing school facilities, expanding the curriculum and the programmes on offer to meet the needs of student cohort, implementation of the SIPs, improving outcomes in certificate examinations and embedding the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in all areas of teaching and learning. The board, in consultation with students, staff and parents, should review and rank order these priorities to encourage a shared ownership and vision for school improvement. A strategic and time-bound plan should be developed for each of these priorities with responsibility taken by staff members, in task groups, using the six-step action-planning process. Progress reports from each task group should be agenda items at meetings of all the stakeholders.

The board should broaden its role in the area of educational leadership. For example, the board could undertake a more comprehensive review of the outcomes of certificate examinations across all subjects, discuss the findings of inspection reports in detail and track progress in relation to the recommendations made in such reports.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal have a strong commitment to the school and have a collaborative management style. They maintain a visible presence and are heavily engaged in the day-to-day running of the school. There is a sparse and limited record of management's continuing professional development (CPD) and it is recommended that a programme of CPD be availed of annually by both members of the senior management team.

It is recommended that there should be clear delineation of the roles of principal and deputy principal to reduce overlap and match assigned roles to individual strengths. A more proactive leadership role by the principal will be a critical success factor in progressing the developmental priorities and improvement agenda of the school in a more systematic and expedient manner. The need to oversee improvement in subject planning, to provide a solid

foundation for improving learning, should also be included in the roles of senior management.

The middle-management team comprises one assistant principal and two special duties teachers. There is evidence of distributed leadership amongst the post holders and voluntary post holders alike and their diligence is commendable. The contribution of voluntary post holders is highly valued also and provides a good example of the commitment to the school. Notwithstanding the current practice whereby the duties attaching to posts are discussed annually at staff meetings, a whole-staff review of the schedule of posts is recommended, as per circulars 29/02 and 20/98, to ensure the developmental priorities of the school are met. It is important that the input of the middle-management team be utilised in an optimum manner to collaboratively support senior management. Duties attaching to the reviewed posts, including those of principal and deputy principal, should be displayed in the staff room.

The 'Golden Rule' of respect that underpins the code of positive behaviour was lived out in interactions between staff and students during the evaluation. A key strength of the school is its dedicated and caring staff. In general, the staff are afforded a great deal of trust and autonomy to lead projects and initiatives. Good supports are in place to facilitate CPD. There has been a good focus on up-skilling teachers in the use of ICT. The practice of sharing in-house expertise as a model of training is commended and should be further encouraged. It will help to ensure that the benefits of CPD are fully realised without unduly affecting tuition time. A whole-staff consensus on the CPD priority needs of the school should be reached and reviewed to guide a training programme in teaching and learning and other areas of need.

Staff commitment to acquiring teacher-based rooms has proved fruitful in the context of the exemplary learning environments evident throughout the school. A number of good suggestions from staff can be seen in the minutes of meetings, many of which have yet to be acted upon. Management of time at staff meetings should ensure that adequate time is provided to reach decisions on key issues and identify actions required. Subsequent meetings should begin with updates on progress made. Updates to subject and programme planning as well as recommendations made in subject inspection reports and incidental inspections should also be included on the agenda.

Plans for subjects and programmes are at varying stages of development. In over half the plans evaluated, poor practice was observed: for example, plans were primarily content driven, adequate minutes of meetings were not being maintained and results analysis did not include targets for improvement despite this being a whole-school priority for improvement. There is an immediate need for most departments to review their existing plans to ensure consistency and continuity for the students' learning experiences. The previous whole-school evaluation also made recommendations in this regard, many of which are yet to be met effectively. Very good practice was noted in a few of the plans, which included templates devised for curricula delivery with a focus on learning outcomes linked to methodologies, resources and assessment planning. A small number of plans showed evidence of being working documents with reflective notes and results analysis informing subsequent planning.

A system should be put in place to ensure that planning processes are utilised effectively as a vehicle to guide and improve teaching and learning across all subject areas. A whole-school strategy to improve the current attainment in the majority of subjects at Junior Certificate will be a necessary prerequisite to raising attainment at Leaving Certificate. Results analyses should lead to action planning for improvement.

There is evidence of very good leadership in relation to school self-evaluation (SSE). Work is already underway for the third area of teaching and learning in relation to homework and *assessment for learning* (AfL). Commendably, insights gained from the work on literacy informed processes for numeracy.

A broad curriculum is provided. Agricultural Science was introduced for the first time this year to meet the changing needs of the student cohort. Although the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) was introduced in 2013, insufficient demand meant it was not offered since. It is recommended to keep this under review as it may become a viable option again. There is open choice for optional subjects in Leaving Certificate and it is recommended that the provision of optional subjects in first year, chosen from pre-set bands, be reviewed to provide a more open choice or more balanced band options. TY is mandatory. The sampling and modular layers of the TY curriculum should be reviewed. The provision for Physical Education (PE) only meets the required guidelines for TY. The deficit for all other years should be rectified without delay. Transitions from primary school are very well organised and indicate ongoing review and improvement. A diverse range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, provided voluntarily for the most part, complements the curriculum. There is good progression to third level.

A non-attendance rate of 12 percent was noted during the evaluation period. The daily collection of attendance data should be analysed to identify patterns and inform planning for targeted interventions.

A democratically elected and representative student council (SC) exists. The PC was re-established in 2014 and is very committed to the school. The lines of communication should be further developed to improve communication between the SC and the PC and between both councils and the board of management.

Strong commitment to the welfare and care of the students is a key strength of the school and is confirmed by the positive responses from the questionnaires. There is a good guidance plan in place with links to the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) department to support the delivery of Guidance at Junior Cycle. Consideration should be given to creating a student-care team in line with best practice as set out in *Student Support Teams in Secondary School* (Dept. of Education and Skills, 2014). The team should be facilitated to meet on a formal basis.

Evidence was not produced during the evaluation period to show that the full school allocation of teaching hours for additional needs was being used for its assigned purpose. A core team comprising three teachers provides the additional support to small groups during Irish. The other models of provision include small classes of Mathematics, English and Agricultural Science. The introduction of team teaching should be re-explored and all staff should receive inputs into strategies for the inclusion of students with special educational needs (SEN). It is recommended that the hours for SEN be used for the purpose intended.

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*

The school buildings and grounds are maintained to a very high standard. The school has participated successfully in *An Taisce's* Green Schools programme and is beginning its endeavour to get Flag Five status for Biodiversity. The school has prioritised the development of ICT for many years and it has a very well developed ICT infrastructure.

Further training on attendance-recording software needs to be undertaken to ensure it is utilised to its maximum capacity in supporting the school's data management systems.

Student work and relevant posters are displayed throughout the school and help provide a high-standard learning environment. All classrooms and areas within the school should have up-to-date evacuation procedures on display. As part of the health and safety statement review, the annual risk assessment audits for all areas should also be included in the documentation.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

There was a very good level of individual planning for the majority of lessons observed. The best individual lessons were where the intended learning outcomes were clear to both teachers and students, and their attainment was supported by the use of relevant, differentiated methodologies and resources. Best practice was observed where ICT was used to support learning and teaching. Short film clips and music combined with teacher-generated worksheets, opportunities for students to input information on a collaborative ICT programme and concise examples prepared in advance to enhance the topic of tuition were among the best uses observed.

Overall, monitoring of copies was inadequate with evidence of good formative feedback in only two classes. The current assessment practices need to be reviewed. Consensus and collaboration to produce and implement an effective whole-school assessment policy will support and enhance students' academic progress. It will also provide a framework to support the school's work in relation to the agreed strategies for SSE.

Questioning was used well in a number of classes to assess learning, tap into students' prior knowledge and monitor homework. The most effective use of questioning was where there was a combination of higher-order and lower-order questions directed globally in some instances and individually in others.

Classroom interactions were respectful and inclusive. Classroom management was very good in all lessons. Students' efforts were regularly affirmed and teachers circulated to monitor progress during the majority of lessons. The teacher voice was the most prominent in almost all lessons. It is recommended that more discussion, explanation and presentation from the students be facilitated to help develop their skills of formulating answers and their oral literacy, as was seen in a few instances.

There were good examples of promoting students' literacy skills observed in less than half the lessons. The most common literacy-support strategy employed was the use of keywords. Exemplary practice in relation to the student identification of numeracy awareness, also promoting literacy, was facilitated in one lesson. There were a number of missed opportunities to encourage the development of numeracy skills, particularly the focus on estimation which was deemed to be a current priority for SSE purposes.

Although students worked purposefully in most lessons, there is a need to expand the practice of active learning and the use of targeted group activities. Group activities work best when roles are assigned, there is a clear focus on the learning outcome and students purposefully share their results. There were very good examples of peer assessment and peer collaboration used to consolidate learning in a few lessons. This also facilitated students to review their own work. This practice is commendable and should be shared with the entire staff group.

In line with best practice, it is recommended that adequate time be afforded in planning for a recapitulation session to conclude lessons. Adequate time should be allowed for this debriefing session to accrue the many benefits that can be gained for both teaching and learning.

Homework review was a feature in less than half the lessons observed. The practice of reviewing homework soon after it has been assigned should be extended to all lessons as it reinforces in the mind of the student the need for its completion and value.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

The three most recently published subject inspection reports were taken into consideration during this evaluation. Overall, there has been good progress made in implementing the recommendations relating to subject provision.

3.2 Learning and teaching

There was evidence of very good sharing of learning outcomes with students during the evaluation period. Although many of the subject plans examined contained a generic document relating to differentiation in the classroom, there was little evidence of it being specifically integrated into the methodologies planned. Despite this, there was good evidence of differentiation as well as the effective use of questioning in some of the lessons observed. Assessing the level of student learning in relation to intended learning outcomes needs improvement in most subject areas. The sharing by teachers of best practice in these methodologies should be facilitated as a means of enhancing and improving teaching and learning.

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

School management and staff are committed to the school and they demonstrate a readiness to engage with progressing the school's developmental priorities. To harness this goodwill and to bring about effective change and improvement in areas of most need, it is recommended that a much more focused, formalised and progressive approach be developed. This is needed to drive change and bring about improvement in an effective and expedient manner.

Very good progress has been made since 2013 in relation to the SSE process. Although certificate examination results are analysed by the subject departments, the information garnered should form the basis for target setting and action planning for improvement in relation to student attainment and the percentage uptake of higher level in certificate examinations. Senior management and the board should take a more proactive role in monitoring this process.

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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Elphin Community College wish to thank all the stakeholders for their engagement with the inspectorate during the recent WSE-MLL.

The Board is satisfied that the report acknowledged;
- The supportive role of the Board to management, staff and students
- The commitment of Parents' Council & Students' Council to the school
- The good or very good quality of teaching and learning
- The very good-quality school improvement plan (SIP) and good guidance plan
- The good standard of maintenance of school buildings and grounds.
- The exemplary learning environments evident throughout the school.
- The well organised transitions from primary school.
- The diverse range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- The good progression to third level.
- The school's very well developed ICT infrastructure.
- The Board is particularly gratified that the inspectorate noted the 'Golden Rule' of respect that underpins the code of positive behaviour and which was *"lived out in interactions between staff and students during the evaluation."*

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

Follow-up Actions undertaken since the inspection to address the recommendations of the report

- The schedule of Posts & post holders duties are now displayed in the Staffroom
- Since December 2015, following BOM Meetings, the Board has provided an agreed report to staff and to the Parents Council
- Senior Management is currently participating in a Risk Management programme organized by the GRETB. Procedures are in progress to insure that all areas are compliant with HSA 2010 Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools.
- Following analysis of JC results by staff in October 2015, it was agreed that JC students must take all except core subjects at HL until after the Mock Exams with certain exceptions.
- CPD on using the PDST template for Subject Department Planning was provided during Croke Park hours on 13/01/2016.
- In consultation with staff, senior management is currently setting out a prioritized CPD programme for 2016/17 in teaching and learning which will feed into SDP.

Follow-up actions planned

- As an initial step in the development of a strategic school plan all stakeholders are being consulted on identifying and prioritizing areas of school development. The six step action planning process will be implemented.
- In conjunction with the School's Policy Development and Review procedure;
  A Whole School Policy on Assessment is prioritized for development 2016/17
  An Attendance Policy will be developed in 2016/17
- In the next academic year in collaboration with the GRETB, we will endeavour to use the allocated teaching hours to support those students with additional educational needs
- Both members of senior management will continue to avail of CPD offered on an annual basis by the GRETB & other relevant programmes offered by PDST
- A review of child protection policy and procedures with all stakeholders will take place annually

- A review of post holder roles and responsibilities is planned in preparation for the next academic year