

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

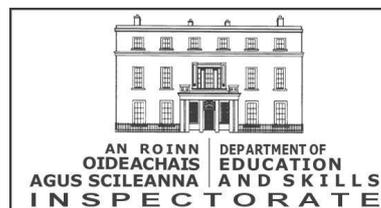
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Ard Scoil na nDéise,
Dungarvan, County Waterford
Roll number: 64900W**

Date of inspection: 20 October 2011



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in October 2011 in Ard Scoil na nDéise. 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, 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

Ard Scoil na nDéise was established in 1990 following the amalgamation of two secondary schools for girls in Dungarvan, Coláiste Mhuire and St. Joseph's Secondary School, run by the Sisters of Mercy and the Presentation Sisters respectively. The school is now under the trusteeship of CEIST. The current student cohort of 326 girls is representative of the broad socio-economic characteristics of the locality. The school strives to uphold its Catholic ethos and successfully promotes through its organisation, structures and programmes, the principles of respect, community, personal growth and achievement. This inclusive school provides for students of all ability levels including gifted and talented and those with special educational needs. There is a high level of parental commitment and support.

The school provides the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- Ard Scoil na nDéise is a high functioning school with effective leadership of staff and students.
- The school has a strong professional capacity to pursue and implement its identified priorities.
- Distributed leadership, amongst staff and students, is successfully promoted in the school.
- High expectations are set for students in all aspects of their attendance, participation and attainment.
- Learning and teaching is of a very good standard overall.
- The school offers a broad curriculum and a range of extracurricular activities.
- Significant progress has been made in progressing subject department and school development planning.
- Facilities are well maintained, with very good attention to improving the environmental efficiency of the buildings.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The completion and ratification of any outstanding policies should be prioritised and progressed.
- The school self-evaluation process should be strengthened, formalised and more routinely embedded in practice through a systematic approach, with identified priorities achieved through strategic action planning.
- The allocation of study periods on the timetable for some senior students should be reviewed in accordance with the requirements of circular M29/95.
- Management should review the optional nature of Physical Education for fifth year and sixth-year students, and work towards providing the subject for all students in accordance with the recommendations of the Department of Education and Skills.

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 appropriately constituted and is an informed and committed body. It meets regularly to discuss all aspects of school management and provides agreed reports on its work to all school partners. Members possess a broad range of skills and expertise that greatly enhance the board's capacity to manage and lead the school effectively.

Board members demonstrated a keen understanding of the school's practices, policies and protocols and are deeply committed to upholding the school's ethos. This is achieved by ensuring that the structures in place support good quality outcomes in learning and teaching and high standards of attendance, participation, care and behaviour.

The board has been supportive of the school development planning process and has overseen the development of a school plan, which contains a list of the school's policies and ratification dates. To build on this good practice, a systematic approach to developing a schedule of review would ensure that all policies continue to reflect the current practice of the school. A small number of policies are in draft form and require ratification, such as the whole-school guidance plan, while the board should ensure that a Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy is developed to support the delivery of its RSE programme.

In addition to the core elements, the school plan also includes a number of key developmental priorities. Planning for the achievement of these priorities should be expanded through the development of action plans to guide their attainment. These action plans should identify specific and measurable targets for success within agreed timeframes.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools* (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006. School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* as a matter of priority.

The school's priorities for development

Current priorities, as identified in the school plan, aim to maintain and further develop the quality of educational provision in the school and include: increasing enrolment; policy review and development; monitoring and improving academic outcomes; and the further

use of information and communications technology (ICT). To support the achievement of these priorities the school should develop a whole-school, systematic approach to the self-evaluation process. This will provide benchmarks for the school in terms of its current outcomes and will gauge the effectiveness of its procedures and practices.

A committed and well-informed parents' council is actively encouraged by the board and senior management. It makes a meaningful contribution in supporting the work of the school through its fundraising efforts, support for school events, policy review and as a conduit for the wider parent voice.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

Leadership of staff is highly effective. Diligence, application, loyalty, courteousness and care are the key tenets of the management styles employed by both the principal and deputy principal. They bring complementary skills to their work, characterised by clear roles and responsibilities and frequent communication and collaboration. They maintain a visible presence throughout the school, are open and accessible to all and work conscientiously to promote quality educational experiences through an ordered, caring and respectful learning environment. Over the course of the evaluation, parents, staff and students expressed their admiration and appreciation for the work and support of senior management.

Management successfully devolves leadership to staff through the post of responsibility structure and through empowering and supporting teachers to lead initiatives that support the school and students' engagement in school and community life. A positive, cohesive and supportive atmosphere exists amongst the staff. The willingness and flexibility of teachers to undertake additional supportive roles in the school was clearly in evidence.

Internal communications are well developed and of a high standard. A weekly meeting between senior management and year heads, the TY co-ordinator and the guidance counsellor, provides an appropriate forum to discuss and support student welfare, engagement and progress. Frequent staff meetings are appropriately organised in accordance with agreed procedures and provide a forum to discuss many aspects of school organisation and development, and to facilitate elements of school development planning. A number of milestones have been achieved recently including a review of the schedule of posts of responsibility and the development of a comprehensive guide to promoting consistency in classroom management, all of which support the administrative, pastoral and curricular organisation and delivery in the school.

Continuing professional development (CPD) is appropriately supported by management. Further development to expand professional capacity in the area of learning support should be considered in future CPD plans. The principal also visits classrooms to support and advise new teachers. This is exemplary instructional leadership. In addition, the school welcomes undergraduate teachers and supports their training through co-operative mentoring. This was reported to be a very valuable reciprocal relationship for both the mentor and mentee. Additional initiatives, such as peer-mentoring, should be considered to further share and promote professional practice within the staff.

The quality of subject department planning was generally very good, with exemplary work in some subject departments. An excellent TY programme is very well documented, with well organised and clear module descriptors to support the effective delivery of the programmes of work.

Leadership of students

Results from parent and student questionnaires, together with discussions with parents and students, indicated very high levels of satisfaction with school life. Parents unanimously agree that the school is well run, while students are proud of their school, feel cared for, encouraged and well supported to achieve to their potential.

Transition of students from their primary schools is well managed. The Cáirde team, a student-mentoring initiative, was also lauded by students, parents and teachers for its role in assisting with the smooth transition of incoming students. Mixed-ability classes are formed for most subjects, with setting occurring for some core subjects from second year. The extensive first-year curriculum ensures that students have a very sound basis for their Junior Certificate subject choices.

Management is commended for the efforts made to support the broadest curriculum possible. Of particular note is the collaboration with another local secondary school to ensure senior students' access to preferred subjects and also the arrangements made to provide Accounting as an additional subject after school. The TY programme enjoys a very high uptake amongst students and provides a broad range of innovative and developmental modules. The uptake of the LCVP has been quite low in recent years raising doubts about its future viability on the curriculum.

Teachers are appropriately deployed to their subject specialisms and across the range of programmes and levels. In a limited number of cases, study periods are provided for some students in senior cycle. Management should review this practice to ensure that all students are provided with the minimum twenty-eight hours instruction in the curriculum in accordance with Circular Letter M29/95. The time provision for Physical Education at junior cycle and TY is adequate to support the delivery of a comprehensive programme. However, management should review the optional nature of the subject for fifth year and sixth-year students.

A guidance programme is provided within the limits of the allocated resource. Individual career, educational and personal counselling is appropriately provided by appointment or referral, in addition to timetabled classes at senior cycle. A comprehensive and well structured learning support programme is in place. Standardised educational assessment tests are administered by the learning support and guidance service on entry into the school. Results from these tests, in addition to teacher referral, help to identify students for additional learning support. Of particular note is the system for identifying exceptionally able, gifted and talented students, and the provision of advice to parents to access the Centre for Talented Youth in Dublin City University. Resource hours are appropriately used for students with diagnosed special educational needs.

Student behaviour was exemplary throughout the period of the evaluation. Effective pastoral care structures, including the role of year heads and class teachers, in addition to the Board of Discipline, ensure that students are appropriately supported in their schooling. High standards are achieved by the school in rates of attendance, punctuality and retention. Occasional assemblies and the annual awards evening are used to reinforce procedures and monitor and encourage students' progress and affirm their efforts and achievements.

Student outcomes in certificate examinations are of a good standard overall. Good quality reports are sent home, focused on constructive advice and positive feedback, based on students' attainment in a range of formative and summative assessments. A study skills programme, in addition to after-school study also supports students' learning. To build on the existing monitoring system, consideration should be given to implementing a system of target setting and attainment tracking. The student journal may be used to promote students' intrinsic motivation through self-directed goal setting and monitoring.

A range of additional opportunities are provided for students to assume leadership roles and responsibilities, for example through the student council and the Cáirde team. Appropriate structures and opportunities are in place for students to report to management and to their peers on many aspects of school organisation and management. Management is encouraged to continue to develop ways to include the student voice and sense of ownership in relevant aspects of the school.

The level of participation in the school's cultural and sporting extracurricular activities endorses the important role that these activities play in school life for the majority of students. Pride in the activities and achievements of students are evident in the photographs and work displayed on the corridors, school website and publications.

2.3 Management of facilities

The school operates in two buildings on opposite sides of a street, a challenge that is effectively overcome through efficient organisation, timetabling and systems that support the safe movement of students and staff between buildings. The buildings are well maintained and significant upgrading has been undertaken to improve their energy efficiency and appearance. The school's library provides a valuable resource to support students' learning. The deficit of adequate facilities for Physical Education is overcome by arrangements with the local community sports complex. The science laboratories and home economics rooms, whilst very well maintained and resourced, would benefit from refurbishment and modernisation.

An excellent range of ICT facilities and electronic resources is now available to support planning, administration and teaching and learning. The school has an informative website which gives detailed information on its work and is regularly updated.

Very good attention is paid to health and safety practices and a detailed health and safety statement has been developed. The school has recently achieved its second International Green Flag which endorses its environmental responsibility.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The overall quality of learning and teaching in the twenty lessons observed was very good. The majority of lessons were well structured and planned to promote learning and to motivate students. Teachers were very knowledgeable in their subject areas and used appropriate resources to challenge and engage learners. In a significant majority of lessons, teachers identified and shared learning outcomes with students and revisited them at the end of the lesson to summarise and to evaluate learning. This good practice should be extended to all lessons.

Teachers were caring and supportive of their students who in turn were courteous and respectful of their teachers. In all lessons, a very positive atmosphere prevailed and a good rapport between teachers and students, and among students, was very evident. Teachers know their students well and hold high expectations for both student achievement and behaviour. Students responded positively to these expectations.

Most lessons promoted students' self-directed learning, often through group work, pair work and practical activities. There was a good balance between teacher instruction and student activities. The pace of lessons was good overall.

Where relevant, a clear focus on the use of subject-specific terminology or vocabulary was evident, often reinforced by students' oral responses and by visualisation on the board or through ICT. In many lessons, teacher focus on clarifying and explaining key terms and equations supported students' literacy and numeracy skills. Good use was made of ICT to support teaching and learning in many lessons, and the continued development and use of this approach, where applicable, is encouraged.

There was clear evidence of high levels of student learning being facilitated and achieved in the lessons observed. Students displayed very good aptitude in applying their learning, whether in the use of language, the completion of experiments and tasks, or the solving of practical problems. The most effective teachers were innovative in their use of technology, key words, mind maps, and active learning.

Students were encouraged to think, to reflect and to provide considered responses to questions posed. In some circumstances, not all students were equally forthcoming in their responses. The further use of directed questions, wait time and opportunities for peer consensus to frame responses should be considered to enhance overall participation.

The majority of class groups comprised students with a range of abilities. Some teachers successfully included all of these students through a range of practices including differentiated instruction. This was noted particularly in the use of both higher and lower order questioning, and the individual attention afforded students. This good practice should be extended to include greater use of differentiated tasks.

A range of assessment modes were employed including questioning, facilitated discussion, oral feedback and in-class testing. The development of self assessment and peer assessment would further support overall assessment strategies. Teachers maintain good records of student attendance, attainment and effort. All students surveyed agreed that homework was regularly assigned and corrected. Teachers frequently give verbal and written feedback to students, which is good practice. The development of this practice should be discussed and implemented by subject departments to further enhance the quality of feedback and guidance to support students learning.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Previous subject inspections in Irish, German, Business, Special Educational Needs and Home Economics were reviewed. Management has supported and enabled the implementation of many of the recommendations in these reports. These improvements include updating of relevant policies, analysis of uptake of levels and achievements in certificate examinations, increased opportunities for co-operative and team-teaching, the provision of ICT facilities and supporting CPD opportunities for the greater integration of ICT into teaching and learning.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Recommendations from previous reports focused on improvements in the areas of planning, greater use of active learning strategies and the implementation of a broader range of approaches to assessment.

Considerable progress has been made in developing comprehensive subject plans, with learning outcomes specified for the common programmes of work in many of the subject areas. Additional resources to support the delivery of the programmes of work have also been developed. Good examples of active learning were evident in many of the lessons observed. ICT was effectively used in many lessons. Written and oral formative feedback has been effectively used, in many areas, to provide guidance and encouragement to students on areas for improvement. Continued development and implementation of assessment for learning, assessment of learning and assessment as learning practices is encouraged.

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

Many examples of reflective practice were evident over the course of the evaluation, including the review of posts of responsibility, analysis of attendance and retention patterns and examination results. The board, senior management and the teaching staff have been pro-active in relation to identifying priorities for school improvement. The continued development of strategies and interventions to achieve these goals, in conjunction with clear easily assessable targets will help to further ensure a high level of success. A systematic approach to the school self-evaluation process should be further developed to continue to support the high quality of education provision in the school.

The high level of experience and expertise among school management and teaching personnel ensures that the school has the professional capacity to pursue and implement its identified priorities.

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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.

R.S.E. policy now at draft stage.