

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Mayfield Community School
Mayfield, Cork
Roll number: 91400F**

Date of inspection: 25 January 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 January 2016 in Mayfield Community 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 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

Mayfield Community School is a co-educational school that operates under the joint trusteeship of the Diocese of Cork and Ross and the Cork Education and Training Board. The school is located on the north side of Cork city and its student population generally comprises those who live locally. While enrolment has remained relatively stable since 2008, recent years have seen an overall rise in student numbers, owing in part to a greater number of girls attending the school. Enrolment currently stands at 321 students. The school participates in the action plan for educational inclusion (DEIS) programme.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- A clear vision, that creates a strong sense of purpose, guides the work of the school.
- Effective and worthwhile partnerships, both within the school itself and with members of the greater school community, underpin much of the very good work that is done in the school.
- While modes of communication are generally very good, there is scope for the board of management to improve its information-sharing mechanisms.
- The senior management team work well together and the renewed focus being placed on optimising opportunities for all to learn is laudable and suggests a strong capacity as school leaders.
- Leadership roles are distributed with many members of the teaching staff taking responsibility for key areas of the school's operation.
- Approaches to the day-to-day running of the school are student-centred with noticeably high levels of understanding among staff members of how best to work with students and their families.
- High levels of student achievement, across a range of learning areas, are pursued and many opportunities are created for students to assume leadership roles.
- The quality of teaching and learning varied from examples where student engagement was optimal and learning was evident to all, to examples where more considered planning and a greater emphasis on student-centred approaches would have enabled students to participate more purposefully.
- A culture of self-evaluation is well established and the capacity to drive further school improvement is strong.

Recommendation for Further Development

- Ensuring full and meaningful engagement by all students in all lessons should be a key developmental priority for the school and should be pursued through an action plan that promotes dialogue and the sharing of professional skills so that the very good practice that was evident during some lessons will be extended to all lessons.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The school's board of management is appropriately constituted and all members have a clear understanding of their collective and individual roles in ensuring the effective provision of education in their school. Regular meetings are convened and there is continual focus on driving improvement in areas that have been identified as key to school improvement. Commendably, such developmental priorities, while informed by the DEIS themes, have been fuelled by their relevance to students' needs. Similarly, the board is proud of the school's many strengths and actively advocates on behalf of all members of the school community so as to ensure the best possible outcomes for all learners. Effective partnerships underpin much of the work in the school, and board members are commended for the constructive role they play in establishing and supporting many of these strategic alliances.

A systematic and consultative approach towards policy formation and review is reflective of the school's general decision-making processes. The formation of working groups to address priority areas is an effective mechanism for driving change. The participation of board members in some of these groups is indicative of a commitment, at board level, to working constructively in the interests of school improvement. While the range of initiatives in which the school participates is considerable, each one has been carefully selected based on its proven value in terms of supporting the school's vision of ensuring optimum student learning, wellbeing and achievement.

Modes of communication are very good and more recent developments, including the enhancement of in-house communication systems, are proving particularly successful. Nonetheless, communication by the board should be further strengthened through the issuing of an agreed statement following each meeting, as well as the provision of an annual report on the operation of the school. The board should also avail of opportunities to have students, as well as members of the general teaching staff and parent body, address them from time-to-time. It is good that efforts are being made to maximise the school's online presence.

Both the principal and the deputy principal were appointed to their respective positions in the summer prior to the evaluation. They report a very good working relationship to date. Their commitment and leadership capacity in ensuring a successful partnership was evident to inspectors. It was also apparent that they both have adapted well to their new roles and that they have a good sense of their individual and joint responsibilities. Of particular note during the evaluation was their pro-activity in ensuring the smooth day-to-day operation of the school as they interacted in a purposeful manner with students, parents, staff and with guests to the school.

The school's general vision has been condensed into three words, *Learning – Well-being – Achievement*, and owing largely to the strong leadership displayed by the senior management team since their respective appointments, this mantra now informs practice at all levels of the school's operation.

Members of the middle-management team as well as other staff members assume responsibility for key areas of the school's provision. Responsibilities are clearly assigned and duties are undertaken both professionally and efficiently. The convening of weekly meetings ensures a clear and consistent focus on priority areas and allows for information-sharing. The emphasis placed on self-evaluation has led to improvements across a range of areas and particularly in the area of student management and pastoral care.

Students are encouraged to become involved in school life and members of the *Meitheal* team and the student ambassadors are commended for taking responsibility for a range of duties. Opportunities for leadership are also enabled through membership of the student council although the convening of an election to select members is recommended.

The significant emphasis placed by the school on nurturing worthwhile partnerships is evidenced in the positive manner in which it engages the general parent body. A pivotal role is played by the Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) coordinator in this regard and parents spoke very positively of the various initiatives that enable them to support their sons and daughters in their journey through post-primary education. The plan to rebrand the school's parents' association in an effort to increase participation levels is evidence of further pro-activity. Providing the parents' association with a designated area on the school website is suggested as a means of increasing awareness of their work. Responses by parents to questionnaires distributed, as part of the evaluation, suggest very high levels of satisfaction with almost all aspects of the school's provision.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Commitment to optimising the quality of the school's provision across a range of areas is high among staff members. Levels of collaboration are significant and the co-ordination and delivery of many operational tasks has been devolved to teachers who possess a relevant skill or who have an interest in a particular area of the school's work. Staff's discernment in selecting projects and initiatives that are tailored to meet the needs of the school's cohort of students was noted. Moreover, teachers' capacity to reflect more generally on the impact of the school's collective effort to provide a fitting educational experience for all students was considered to be very effective. The contribution made by a broad range of teacher-led co-curricular activities to school life is considerable. Their significance in promoting positive relationships between various members of the school community is substantial.

Robust communication systems and ongoing consultation suggests a democratic approach to leading and implementing change. Its value is especially evident in the school's successful engagement with DEIS planning where improvements are evident across a range of areas.

Teachers are deployed in accordance with their qualifications, expertise and professional interests. Opportunities to develop further expertise in a range of areas are numerous and many teachers avail of opportunities to complete courses that will enable them to better serve the needs of their students. Indeed, a number of staff members were identified as highly adaptive, having honed existing practices or acquired additional skills in response to their students' and the school's needs.

To date, many whole-staff continuing professional development (CPD) activities have centred largely on the DEIS planning themes. The senior management team is keen to sharpen the focus of whole-staff CPD and to look specifically at student learning. Steps taken and ideas mooted to date are positive and what is now required is a constructive

action plan that will promote dialogue and the sharing of professional skills so that the very good practice that was evident during some lessons will be extended to all lessons.

Of particular note is the extent to which the needs of its students inform the day-to-day running of the school. A very comprehensive curriculum that includes an array of programmes and subjects is provided. Compulsory participation in Junior Cycle School Programme (JCSP), Transition Year (TY) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is in the best interests of students and the taster systems in first year and TY support informed decision-making with regard to subject choice. Timetable allocation is generally good although a better weekly spread of classes could be achieved in some areas. Provision for junior-cycle History should also be improved as was recommended in the previous whole-school evaluation in 2008. It is very good that considerable emphasis is placed on Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) with consistency in teacher deployment and coordinator involvement across all junior cycle year groups. The formation of small class groups as a means of maximising levels of student participation is also good.

The allocation of students to mixed-ability classes is supportive of inclusion and is commended. Effective communication systems ensure that mainstream teachers are aware of students' additional needs. While some use is made of the school's general learning support allocation to meet the differentiated needs of learners in mainstream settings, learning support is largely provided through small group withdrawal. Given that many of the students in receipt of support face a range of challenges, some of which are subject specific, adjustments to the existing model that allow for the provision of more targeted support should be considered.

Effective management and leadership of students is promoted at all levels of the school's operation. A well-established system of class tutors underpins the very good work done by 'house heads', at both junior and senior cycle. The additional assistance provided in the areas of Guidance, chaplaincy and HSCL is informed by a high-quality guidance plan that outlines an array of supports that have been tailored to meet the needs of the student cohort and their families.

Every effort is made to support students' transition into post-primary education and their active participation in school life is encouraged through regular attendance tracking and the implementation of a fair code of behaviour that places a commendable emphasis on promoting responsible behaviour. A wide range of initiatives also strengthens students' links with the school and instil in them a sense of belonging to the school and its community. Vocational preparation of students is comprehensive and efforts to prepare them for their role as adults in their community are extensive.

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*.

Responses to questionnaires, distributed as part of the evaluation and completed by both students and their teachers, support inspectors' contention that relationships in the school are very good and that work being done to protect the well-being of all members of the school community is highly laudable.

1.3 Management of facilities

School accommodation is maintained to a high standard and the school community has access to a wide range of facilities. All of the specialist rooms have been upgraded in recent years and the range of sporting facilities available to students is very impressive. Plans to reconfigure the display of photographs and samples of student work so that student achievement can be acknowledged and celebrated in central areas of the school are very worthwhile.

Teacher-based classrooms allow for the storage of resources and for the creation of a print-rich environment. The recent investment by the school in improved broadband provision presents all teachers with an opportunity to make greater use of information and communications technology (ICT) as a learning tool. The establishment of a working group comprising teachers with expertise and interest in this area should prove a positive step.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning, as observed across nineteen lessons and including a wide range of subject areas, varied. It is particularly encouraging that in some lessons teaching and learning was of a very high quality and, at times, exemplary. In these cases, levels of student engagement were optimal and learning was evident to all. While there was evidence of successful practice in the majority of lessons, simultaneously, areas for improvement were identified. In these instances, more considered planning for actual lesson delivery would have enabled more active, equal and purposeful participation by all learners in lesson activities.

In a small number of lessons, clear weaknesses, particularly with regard to management of students, were apparent. Given the general capacity that exists within the school to promote active and purposeful participation by all students during lessons, it is now incumbent on staff to look to each other and to direct their collaborative effort towards optimising the classroom experience for both teachers and learners. In this regard, the introduction of peer observation would be very beneficial.

There was clear planning and preparation for most lessons. At times it was of a high quality, but on other occasions it required deeper consideration. High-quality planning had a very positive impact on lesson delivery as demonstrated through appropriate sequencing, the inclusion of resources to support learning, the provision of tasks that optimised levels of student engagement as well as the accommodation of varying learning styles and varying abilities. The plan for lessons was often shared with students at the outset. In some of these very good lessons, this had been distilled and, using student-friendly language, articulated as a learning intention. Such an approach proved very effective as it set an immediate expectation with regard to desired levels of participation and learning. This is further encouraged.

In lessons which were considered to be very effective, teachers also demonstrated high levels of flexibility as they adopted a wide range of roles, accommodating and responding to the differing needs of individual students within a single lesson. In these instances, clear verbal instructions and explicit teacher modelling supported student-centred tasks in which teachers assumed a secondary role, monitoring progress and providing differentiated support as necessary. On these occasions, individual student contributions, be they in whole-class or small-group settings, were thoughtful and informed. Such contributions often prompted fellow students to respond in an equally conscientious manner.

In other lessons, levels of student engagement, while adequate, should have been higher. Inspectors were of the view that, in these lessons, students' passivity should have been addressed constructively by their teachers and that a greater range of tasks, that were appropriately challenging and that promoted the development of a wide range of skills, should have been set. Hence, it is strongly recommended that approaches to classroom management seek to ensure that all students engage in an appropriate range of lesson activities in a productive and responsible manner.

Most teachers made a deliberate effort to make new learning areas accessible to all students by creating constructive links with prior learning and with students' everyday lives and experiences. Such a strategy was deployed most effectively when teachers worked with students to uncover these links. This was most successful when a range of investigative, experiential and explorative approaches gave students the space to engage with new learning areas, utilising a range of skills and acquiring new knowledge from a variety of sources.

Tasks that required students to work collaboratively were provided for in some lessons. When afforded the opportunity to work together, many students responded favourably, particularly when clear parameters had been set, additional resources provided and when teachers adopted a monitoring role, providing support and guidance as needed. Thus, collaborative learning is suggested as a potential area for exploration at whole-staff level.

Questioning was a feature of all lessons and often proved the primary means of incorporating student voice into lessons. Where response levels were good, students demonstrated clear understanding of new learning areas and work done by these teachers to develop students' subject-specific knowledge is commended. Nonetheless, a whole-school focus on questioning in general would be beneficial as it would encourage all teachers to be mindful of the need to distribute questions more evenly, to promote and support responses from all learners as well as to use a wider variety of questioning techniques. Another worthwhile feature of some lessons was the highly-developed systems for supporting revision and organisation of notes, and its school-wide extension should be actively encouraged and facilitated.

Attainment in state examinations is monitored very closely at all levels of school organisation. A clear focus on increasing the number of students opting for higher-level in state examinations is yielding promising outcomes and all parties are encouraged to continue the very good work being done to raise students' confidence levels and expectations of themselves.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Overall, progress with regard to implementing recommendations is very good with significant achievements in areas such as strategic planning, policy formation and review, student attendance and provision for SPHE. Provision for History in junior-cycle has yet to be addressed and there is scope to refine targets included in DEIS action plans to ensure that they are more specific.

3.2 Learning and teaching

While many of the key recommendations made were subject-specific, the overall extent to which recommended practices, such as greater reference to learning outcomes and intentions, were in evidence, varied considerably.

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

Self-evaluation is strongly embedded in the school's culture and has been used very successfully to bring about improvement across a range of areas. Notwithstanding the success of many of the actions taken, there is scope to revisit the targets specific to teaching and learning in order to ensure that all strategies are actionable at classroom level. Some staff members have adapted their roles, availing of relevant training when necessary, in response to agreed actions and initiatives that have arisen from this collective reflection. Such dedication and professionalism is readily acknowledged. The highly effective collaborative approaches utilised so effectively in other areas of provision, and particularly in the far-reaching area of student support, should now be harnessed to facilitate a professional dialogue focussing on teaching and learning and its expression in classroom practice.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board welcomes the acknowledgement of the “commitment and leadership capacity” and “pro-activity” of our Principal and Deputy Principal in “ensuring the smooth running of our school”. This leadership has ensured that our school has a “clear vision” creating a strong sense of purpose in guiding the work of the school. The Board notes that “leadership roles are distributed” with many teachers” taking responsibility for key areas of the school’s operation”. We are affirmed by the inspectorate’s view that the school continues to “optimise opportunities for all to learn and that “the needs of the students inform the day-to-day running of the school”. The Board is pleased to see that the inspectorate have identified instances of high levels of student achievement in our school and the many opportunities to nurture student leadership qualities. The Board is pleased to note that the inspectorate have commented on the significant contribution being made by our teachers “to a broad range of co-curricular activities”. The Board notes that the “responses by parents to questionnaires, suggest very high levels of satisfaction with almost all aspects of the school’s provision”. Furthermore, our Board is affirmed by the inspectorate’s view that teaching and learning was at times “exemplary”.

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

The inspectorate’s finding that our school “culture of self-evaluation is well established” is very well received, particularly in the light of the inspectorate’s assessment of our school as one where the “capacity to drive further school improvement is strong”. Working with this significant strength, the Board will support and facilitate the ongoing process where teachers are given the opportunities to share the “exemplary practice” evident in our school. The Board is aware that our teachers are “highly adaptive” and have the necessary skills set to “respond to their students and school need”. We will continue to support the on-going work being done in the school in the area of peer collaboration. We will continue to support our teachers “CPD in areas such as Instructional Leadership and Droithead. The Board is aware that teachers have been invited to participate in a Peer Collaboration project in the school. The Board accepts the recommendation regarding the “enhancement of in-house communication and now publishes an agreed report after each meeting and has invited members of the wider school community to our meetings such as our Students Council. The board welcomes the report as an opportunity to inform the ongoing development of our school.