An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Saint Kevin's Community College
Dunlavin, County Wicklow
Roll number: 70800E

Date of inspection: 7 February 2013

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 February 2013 in St. Kevin's 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 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

St. Kevin's Community College is a co-educational post-primary school, operating under the patronage of County Wicklow Vocational Educational Committee (VEC). It is a participant in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan for educational inclusion. The school welcomes students from all backgrounds and abilities. Enrolment has increased considerably in the last five years to a current population of 534 students. The school offers a broad range of curricular programmes including the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year Programme (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate. It also offers a one-year Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) Course in Business and Office Technology.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- Board members are well informed, loyal and committed to the school.
- Senior management provides high quality leadership and manages the school through an open, consultative, enabling partnership approach.
- Leadership roles are distributed to teachers across all areas of the school.
- School development planning and subject department planning is well advanced and of a very good quality.
- Students have access to a broad curriculum with a range of programmes and extra-curricular activities to meet their educational needs and interests.
- The timetable provision falls ten minutes short of the minimum 28 hours tuition required.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good, with very good and exemplary practice noted in a number of lessons; there was scope for improvement in a few instances.
- Structures to support students with additional educational needs are well organised.
- Good progress has been made in implementing recommendations from previous inspection reports.
- A number of effective school self-evaluation processes are established and the school has the collective professional capacity to progress priorities identified for future improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development

- Management must ensure that the timetable is fully compliant with the terms of the Circular Letter 29/95.
- The school self-evaluation process should be used to further examine the effectiveness of student supports.
- The extension of more active learning methodologies, where relevant, is recommended.
- The existing formative and summative assessment practices, including the tracking and monitoring of students' relative progress, should be integrated into a coherent whole-school assessment policy.

QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

Strategic leadership is of a high quality in St. Kevin's Community College. Management structures ensure the effective operation of the school at all levels. The board of management is appropriately constituted, meets regularly and communicates effectively with the school community. The board and the school enjoy a high level of support from Co. Wicklow VEC. a The considerable loyalty and commitment of board members to the school is evident. They are committed to providing inclusive, quality educational experiences that further develop students' attendance, engagement and attainment and share a common vision for school improvement.

The principal and deputy principal, who have clearly defined roles and areas of responsibility, work very well together and form a cohesive senior management team. Both share a vision for the school, built on open communications, respect, collaboration and a shared ownership for the day-to-day management and strategic development of the school.

A key strength of the school is the level of distributed leadership facilitated by the senior management team. Teachers with posts of responsibility have assumed substantial duties to assist in the academic and pastoral care of students and the administrative functioning of the school. Similarly, many other teachers fulfil a range of additional roles that contribute successfully to the overall effectiveness of the school's educational provision.

Policy development is on-going and all required policies have been ratified by the board. A number of priorities for development have been identified through a consultative process involving the board, senior management, staff members, students and parents. These include on-going policy review; revised targets for DEIS action planning; using information and communications technology (ICT); literacy; numeracy; teaching and learning; and curriculum planning. The structures and strategies established, such as working groups, action planning and target setting, should ensure these important educational priorities further contribute to students' engagement and attainment.

Partnership with parents is very well developed and communication methods with parents are comprehensive. A committed parents' council makes a significant contribution to supporting the work of the school. Response to questionnaires administered as part of this evaluation indicates that the vast majority of parents feel the school is well run, discipline is good and their children are safe and well looked after in the school.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy provide very effective leadership for learning and teaching. They ensure the day-to-day management of the school is highly effective. They maintain a visible presence in the school, operate an "open-door" policy and are available to respond to the needs of students, staff and parents, as necessary, an approach which was acknowledged and valued by all. They have a clear focus on raising academic standards and are fully committed to the school's motto *striving for excellence*. This focus has resulted in improved attainment in state examinations, very good retention rates of students to Leaving Certificate and good progression rates to further education. These improvements are the result of effective leadership and the collective efforts of all members of the school community.

Leadership roles are supported throughout the teaching staff. Post-holders are supported to develop their roles and to report back to management. The schedule of posts is regularly reviewed. Many additional leadership opportunities are also provided through a variety of roles to lead subject departments, class groups, various projects and initiatives in place.

Senior management meets formally on a weekly basis with their different teams, including the year heads and the care team, which provides a useful forum to discuss student welfare, engagement and progress. Year heads are also consulted during these meetings about priorities for future school development. Staff meetings are held in accordance with agreed procedures and also provide a forum to discuss many aspects of school organisation and development.

Teachers are appropriately deployed in accordance with their qualifications and subject specialisms. Teachers are appropriately consulted in the framing of the timetable and management endeavours to ensure all teachers have regular opportunities to teach all programmes and levels.

Teachers were observed to be highly committed to the school, hardworking and professional. There is a strong commitment to supporting staff continuing professional development (CPD) and professional learning is also a common element of many staff meetings. Teachers are encouraged and enabled to share their expertise and interests with colleagues. Of particular note has been the recent focus on co-operative learning strategies and the effective use of instructional skills, tactics and strategies to support learning and teaching.

Programme and subject department structures facilitate a collegial and collaborative approach to planning. Programme plans are organised and delivered in accordance with Department guidelines. Subject department plans reviewed as part of the evaluation were comprehensive. Best practice was found in subject plans that identified learning outcomes for each year group and module, and aligned these with methodologies, resources and modes of assessment. All subject departments are encouraged to continue to adopt this good practice and to fine tune plans, where relevant.

A good range of supports are provided to incoming first-year students as they make the transition from primary school. First-year students and parents praised the mentoring system in particular as a valuable support during this transition and integration phase.

A short "taster" programme during the first term in first-year provides students with direct experience of all of the available options subjects. The school's guidance service supports students at key stages in their transitions in their school life, and provides a comprehensive vocational and educational guidance programme through timetabled provision at senior cycle, and targeted interventions at junior cycle. To build on the existing service, the whole-school guidance plan should be reviewed to ensure a holistic and integrated approach to meet the needs of all students in St. Kevin's.

A very broad range of subjects and programmes are provided with very good efforts to meet the needs of students. The TY programme is well organised with a variety of core subjects,

modules and activities and good emphasis on meeting the interests of students and providing an element of choice. Resources permitting, consideration should be given to expanding the numbers currently able to access the TY programme. LCVP is promoted and availed of by a majority of students who have an eligible range of subjects. Work experience for TY and LCVP students is very well organised and monitored.

JCSP is integrated into classroom practice for a targeted group of students and many of the strategies have been adopted by teachers to support all students. Classrooms contain a variety of JCSP statements, visual materials and samples of students work. Very good efforts have been made to promote subject-specific literacy and numeracy in many of the classrooms visited. Furthermore, a number of literacy initiatives from JCSP, such as 'One Book, One Community' and 'Drop Everything and Read', have been adopted as whole-school supports for the development of students' literacy.

The establishment of a curriculum review group, to appraise and report on the range of programmes and subjects on offer, is good practice. Current timetabling arrangements fall ten minutes short of twenty-eight hours weekly class contact time in accordance with Circular Letter M29/95. It is acknowledged that considerable progress has been made in addressing the shortfall to date; however, management must now address the remaining time deficit to ensure that it is fully compliant with the terms of the circular letter.

Designated hours and resources allocated by the Department are used for their intended purposes. A considered approach is taken to providing for students with additional educational needs. Good models of support, including team-teaching and small group tuition, have been introduced and continue to evolve to meet the needs of these students.

A range of services are provided for students, through DEIS, to support their welfare and engagement with the school. The school completion programme (SCP) and the home school community liaison (HSCL) personnel provide a valuable link between school and home. Of particular note is the number of classes and events organised to increase parents' access to the school and to enable them to be better placed to support their child's education. Further supports provided under the SCP include the provision of a personal counselling service for students identified as in need.

An interview with a focus group of students and responses to questionnaires, administered as part of the evaluation, indicated that the majority of students were very positive about most aspects of their school; however, a sizable minority reported that elements of the pastoral care and discipline system required review. Management and staff should explore the reasons for these responses.

The pastoral care structure has now a greater focus on raising academic progress and attainment, achieved through the innovative development of a year team comprising the year head and class tutor, in addition to an assistant year head and associate teachers, with responsibility for monitoring academic progress. This new approach has many merits. The future challenge for the year teams is to ensure clarity for students and consistency in the execution of the various pastoral and academic roles at all levels and stages through this structure. A planned review of the current code of behaviour is also welcomed in order to address issues of consistency in its implementation.

Student leadership is actively promoted in the school through the student council, prefects system, head boy and head girl, mentoring programme and through the many co-curricular initiatives, projects and sports teams. Student success and achievement are actively celebrated not only for outstanding achievement but also to recognise and affirm student endeavour.

A democratically elected student council is supported to engage appropriately in a variety of school activities, initiatives and developments. It is particularly welcomed that the council is taking a lead in analysing the issue of cyber-bullying amongst the student cohort. Council members are invited to present on their work to the board and to the parents' council, which is very good practice. The further promotion of the student council should aim to enhance awareness of the role and work of the council amongst the general student body in representing the student voice on relevant aspects of school life. The further use of student surveys on matters of interest and concern to them would also increase their sense of input to school life.

A broad range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities are provided for students, including sporting, cultural and academic opportunities. Music plays a considerable role in the school, which hosts a dedicated school of music to provide additional tuition and support to students wishing to further their interests and competencies, across the broad spectrum of musical genres and instruments. Physical activities and sport are scheduled to accommodate students with various transport commitments. A number of activities are also provided to encourage students who may not be competitively orientated, to engage in regular physical activity. School shows, tours and cultural exchanges also contribute to the diversity of educational experiences provided for students. The commitment of all teachers to providing these opportunities and developmental programmes is highly commended.

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 new school building has resulted in a modern, high quality educational facility, which is excellently managed and well maintained. The school's library provides a valuable resource. There are also very good internal and external sports facilities for the provision of physical education and extra-curricular programmes. The school canteen is well managed, with seating that facilitates students' social interactions.

Most teachers are classroom based and this has resulted in bright, print-rich, and visually stimulating learning environments. An excellent range of ICT facilities and resources is available to support planning, administration, teaching and learning. The school website gives detailed information and the recent development of some subject-specific websites, a shared teachers' platform and virtual learning environment is exemplary.

Good attention is paid to health and safety practices and a health and safety statement has been developed. Participation in the International Green Flag is a positive endorsement of the school's focus on environmental responsibility.

1. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons observed was good or very good with some examples of excellent practice. In a small minority of lessons there was scope for development in the use of methodologies that promote student engagement and active learning.

All teachers began by outlining the proposed lesson plan. Best practice was noted where the plan was articulated in terms of learning outcomes for students and where these outcomes were

revisited during or at the end of the lesson. Exemplary practice was noted in one instance where students were afforded opportunities to provide feedback on the lesson and on their learning. It is recommended that these good practices be extended to all lessons to engage students as active partners in the teaching and learning process, to ascertain if the intended outcomes have been achieved and to assess student progress.

The majority of lessons were well structured and paced. Teachers used a variety of methodologies and most of these were effectively used. Questioning was an integral component of all lessons observed. This practice was most effective where teachers maintained a good balance between global and directed questioning and where higher-order questioning encouraged students to progress their thinking. Good attention to differentiation was noted in lessons where teachers circulated helping students in need of additional support.

ICT was integrated into most lessons. PowerPoint presentations served in many instances to present new material, to provide visual supports and to facilitate note taking by students. It is recommended that, over time, teachers further exploit their use of ICT to include more interactive resources and to access up-to-date materials. There were some instances where teaching and learning would have been enhanced by the use of ICT.

Active learning was promoted in the majority of instances through the use of mind mapping, think-pair-share, practical tasks and pair or group work. Students engaged very well with these tasks and their application, their findings and their responses to questions indicated good evidence of learning. Lessons involving team teaching were very effective in supporting students with additional needs and in the management of group tasks.

An appropriate balance was maintained between teacher instruction and student activity in the majority of lessons observed. There were a small number of instances however, where teacher instruction was the dominant methodology; this resulted in some students remaining passive throughout the lesson. In these instances, the use of more active methodologies is recommended to ensure greater student engagement and learning. For example, in some lessons students' learning would have benefited from involving students more in the work of the lesson in addition to affording them opportunities to build their competence and confidence.

Appropriate attention was paid to the development of literacy and numeracy skills in many lessons and there was good use of subject-specific terminology. The target language was used by teachers in most language lessons and this good practice should be further developed by giving students the necessary expressions for simple classroom interaction.

A positive learning environment prevailed in most lessons, supported by good classroom management where students were observed to be very well behaved and respectful. All classrooms had good displays of subject-related charts, students' work and posters of key words. In one instance very good affirmation of student work was evident in the use of their illustrations to support the work of the lesson.

Good quality formative feedback was provided in all lessons where teachers encouraged and affirmed students' contributions. Homework was assigned in all lessons and there was also good evidence of written formative feedback in many of the copybooks examined. Summative feedback is also provided to students in each subject. In addition, the whole-school initiative of academic monitoring and mentoring for students are very good practices in supporting overall progress and achievement. The whole-school emphasis on raising students' results in the Certificate examinations, with performance comparable with national norms in most instances, is praiseworthy.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

A clear strategy is in place to review and respond to inspections carried out in the school. A composite of findings and recommendations across all inspections has been presented to staff for discussion and action. Issues related to timetabling, subject department structures and chemical storage procedures have all been fully addressed. Good progress was also noted in developing the literacy and numeracy targets, in supporting CPD and in facilitating team teaching, where possible. Management is commended for its proactive approach.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Good levels of follow through were observed in areas identified for improvement, including the development of subject plans and the sharing of best practice among departments, particularly the use of active methodologies. Implementation of recommendations were observed during the evaluation in the use of learning outcomes, ICT use and the creation of print and graphic-rich learning environments.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

Review and self-evaluation, embedded in many aspects of the school, are fostered by the high quality leadership. The DEIS action planning process has also helped to establish a culture of evidence-based target setting and attainment.

Many examples of self-evaluation were evident over the course of the evaluation, including the recent SCOT analysis conducted by senior management with staff, seeking the views of parents and students on some topics and issues, the detailed analysis of student attainment in examinations and thorough monitoring of student attendance. Outcomes, such as changes to the posts of responsibility, the establishment of the year team and improvements to the TY programme, positively reflect on the effectiveness of the self-evaluation processes to date.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

A high degree of openness to change and development and a reflective approach to practice was evident amongst the board, management and staff. The school has the professional capacity, structures and commitment to continue to improve the quality of educational provision it provides and to improve students' learning experiences, attainment and progress.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of St. Kevin's is very pleased with the content of the Whole school evaluation report. The Board is pleased that the commitment of all partners in St. Kevin's is acknowledged and that due recognition and affirmation for those partners is received by the inspectorate.

In particular, the recognition by the inspectors that the collective efforts of the school community, our focus on raising academic standards and the commitment to our motto "striving for excellence" has resulted in improved attainment at state examinations as well as good progression rates to further education is welcome.

The Board of Management wishes to acknowledge that Co. Wicklow VEC provides many supports to St. Kevin's Community College in the areas of education advice and support, management support through principal's and deputy principal's networks, CPD for staff, Governance support for senior managers and the board of management, human resources management, management and finance for the provision of facilities and infrastructure, development of state of the art education, focussed ICT facilities and services, etc. All of the aforementioned contribute greatly to the efforts and high standards of educational provision provided to the student cohort.

The Board would also like to acknowledge the recognition of the many positive aspects of the school which were highlighted in the report, in particular:

- The highly committed, hard-working and professional staff in the college.
- The high quality of leadership.
- The quality of teaching and learning, including exemplary practice observed.
- The active teaching methodologies used, as well as the progressive efforts to expand opportunities for team teaching in the curriculum.
- The new innovating year team structure.
- Student achievement and success is actively encouraged.
- Student endeavours are recognised and affirmed.

- The positive and visually stimulating learning environment in the college.
- The excellently managed and maintained facilities.
- Excellent ICT facilities.
- The very broad range of programmes and subjects offered.
- The comprehensive range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities provided for students.
- The well organised Transition Year programme.
- The comprehensive guidance programme available for students.
- Valuable support afforded to junior students by the effective mentoring system.
- The open door policy available to respond to students, parents and staff needs.
- Distributed leadership among staff, who assume many academic, pastoral and administration roles.
- The level of volunteerism and commitment among non-post holders.
- The taster programme offered for first year students to enable subject tasting opportunities.
- Subject specific and whole school numeracy and literacy initiatives and strategies.

The recognition by the inspectors of the school's efforts to actively promote student leadership in the school is also welcome. The co-curricular activities, sports, the perfect system, mentor system and student council help achieve this objective.

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 Board is committed to its role of supporting the Management and Staff of the school in continuing its excellent work. The recommendations and suggestions contained in the report will further enhance the development plan of the school and the Board is committed to implementing the recommendations.

The College is now offering a second transition Year class for the new academic year therefore facilitating the increased demands from students for the optional programme. We are committed to maintaining this provision for future years.

The Board will continue to make every effort to comply with circular 29/95 and will provide the additional 10 minutes to the timetable as required. Acknowledgement by the inspectors of the considerable progress in addressing this shortfall to date is welcome.

As part of our on-going policy review and development process we will continue to review and modify programme and subject plans in line with best practice.

Plans to further develop the student council are underway and increased student involvement in this worthwhile body will be actively encouraged and supported.

We will continue to support staff to engage with on-going professional development including our on-going involvement in promoting instructional leadership methodologies.

In conclusion the Board would like to thank the Inspection team for their positive and constructive approach throughout the Inspection process.