

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Pobalscoil Iosolde
Palmerstown, Dublin 20
Roll number: 91302F**

Date of inspection: 13 January 2014



**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 2014 in Pobalscoil Iosolde. 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; a response was not received from the board.

Introduction

Pobalscoil Iosolde is an urban co-educational community school situated in west Dublin and was founded in 1982. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in our Schools (DEIS) action plan. A full range of curricular programmes is on offer in the school including the Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The current enrolment is 536 students and the enrolment has been increasing steadily over the past three years.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The school is well managed and well run and significant improvements in this regard have been made since the last whole school evaluation (WSE) in 2005.
- The curriculum provided to the students is excellent.
- Student behaviour was very good and a positive rapport between teachers and students was clearly evident.
- The care for students and the whole-school approach to student welfare is very good.
- The quality of teaching and learning was very good or good in the majority of lessons, but in a minority of lessons there was considerable scope for improvement.
- Poor attendance and punctuality is impacting negatively on some students' attainment.
- There is scope to develop the student voice, student engagement and students' expectations.

Recommendations for Further Development

- It is recommended that positive short-term strategies to improve student attendance be put in place and that a whole-school approach to ensuring good attendance be adopted.
- There should be a strong whole-school focus on integrating the strategies of assessment for learning (AfL), on increased oral participation by students and on the use of higher order questioning into the daily classroom practice.
- DEIS planning needs to be based on SMART targets which are translated into action at a classroom level and integrated fully into teaching strategies on a daily basis.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The management structures of the school are very good. The board of management of the school is properly constituted and demonstrates significant commitment to the school. The work of the board in the recent past focused on the development and ratification of policies and all mandatory policies are in place. All policies should include the date of ratification and the proposed date of review. The board is commended for the very inclusive enrolment policy.

The board has established a number of appropriate priorities which focus on planning, teaching and learning, and improving the infrastructure of the school. The board has already overseen considerable investment in information and communication technology (ICT), which is a very good resource in the school. The board now needs to prioritise all aspects of DEIS planning with a strong focus on improvement in student attendance and examination attainment.

The board has good links and communication with other members of the school community. In order to enhance these it is suggested that the board meet formally from time to time with members of the in-school management team and the student council. It is also recommended that the board prepare an annual report for parents and the wider school community on the operation of the school.

A significant number of days of attendance are lost due to the suspension of students. The board should examine closely the school data in relation to suspension. The effectiveness of this strategy as a deterrent to poor behaviour, the negative impact on educational attainment for the students in question and possible alternatives should be taken into account in reviewing the school's current practice.

The parents' association meets on a regular basis and is very supportive of the school. The association organises speakers to give talks to parents. The home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator works closely with parents and helps to facilitate such talks. Parents reported a welcoming atmosphere in the school. In line with best practice the board and management of the school consult with parents in the development of policies. The results of parent questionnaires administered in the course of the evaluation are very affirming of the school.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal form the senior management team in the school and both have clear roles and responsibilities. A strong partnership approach to school management is evident and the members of the senior management team communicate very effectively regarding all aspects of school life. The school is well managed and well run on a day-to-day basis, and this was borne out by the student and parent questionnaires. It is noteworthy that there have been significant improvements in this regard since that last WSE. It is recommended that senior management now focus on developing a strong leadership for learning role with a focus on the development of a learning community throughout the school.

A good middle management structure is in place. The team of assistant principals and special duties teachers carry out a range of duties and their roles are clearly defined. As most post holders have been carrying out the same role for several years, it is recommended that posts be reviewed. It is recommended that each post holder prepare an annual report on her/his work, how the duties carried out fit into the overarching DEIS plan, how targets have been met and suggestions arising from self- review. Senior management should hold a formal meeting with each post holder as integral part of school self-evaluation.

Staff are very well supported to participate in continuing professional development (CPD), senior management make whole-staff presentations and whole-staff in service is organised. It is suggested that more opportunities for peer CPD be created, particularly in relation to effective teaching and learning strategies. It is also suggested that, in order to distribute leadership roles across the teaching staff, opportunities be given for staff to lead committees, in particular those with a focus on teaching and learning, for example an AfL committee. The voluntary uptake among staff of many roles including subject co-ordination demonstrates the professionalism of the staff.

Management and staff are very committed to school development planning. A number of plans have been developed, including the DEIS plan, the school action plan and the school improvement plan. It is important that all plans be integrated into the DEIS plan. This plan needs to include all baseline data and the targets set need to be SMART. A considerable amount of time has been dedicated to subject department planning, and staff are commended for the collaborative approach adopted. It is important that the DEIS targets be translated into concrete action points in subject planning. This will ensure that classroom practice reflects DEIS planning.

The curriculum provided by the school is excellent. The school is to be commended for offering all of the curricular programmes possible and a very wide choice of practical and academic subjects. It is noteworthy that there is a good gender balance in the uptake of the practical subjects. Students stated that the possibility of trying out new subjects in the course of TY was of great assistance in choosing subjects for the senior cycle certificate examinations. However, student questionnaires indicate that fewer than half of students agree or strongly agree that they got helpful advice when choosing subjects. In this context, a review, including a survey of students, of how subject choices are offered in first year should take place. Consideration should be given to offering a short taster programme of optional subjects for first-year students.

A wide range of extra-curricular activities is on offer in the school due to the willingness, interest and volunteerism of staff in giving extra time to strengthen this very valuable aspect of the students' education.

Teachers are deployed mainly in line with their subject specialisms. The school offers placement to a small number of students who are following the Post-Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE). The arrangements for the lessons content which PGDE students cover need to be reviewed to ensure that the schemes of work developed by subject departments are followed.

Currently, the school does not meet the requirements of circular M 29/95 'Time in School'. The minimum required instruction time of 28 hours is not provided to all year groups and the school does not provide instruction on 167 days in the year. This compliance issue must be addressed. The timetable submitted to the Department of Education and Skills should be accurate in this regard.

Other timetabling issues that need review are the scheduling of double periods of English in senior cycle and the low provision of two periods a week in junior cycle for History and Geography. All junior cycle classes should be assigned a daily class of English in line with circular 0025/12. In addition, the school should review the time of morning break, the time at which tutor time takes place and the length of the lunch break.

Very good use was made of the electronic recording system in almost all lessons to monitor students' attendance. It is vital that all staff become familiar with and use this system in every lesson. In the course of lesson observation and as a result of review of attendance data, it became evident that poor attendance and punctuality is a serious cause for concern and is impacting negatively on student attainment. It is strongly recommended that a number of short-term and long-term strategies be put in place to promote attendance in a positive manner. Students should also track their own attendance.

Student behaviour during the inspection was very good and students in the focus group had very clear knowledge of school rules. Staff and management are to be highly commended for the improvement in this aspect over the last number of years. It is suggested that the school's code of behaviour be reviewed in order to place a stronger emphasis on promoting positive behaviour.

The student council has been reactivated very recently. The members should receive training, and every effort should be made to strengthen the role of the council, as student questionnaires indicate that the majority of students do not feel they have a say in how things are done in the school. Some excellent strategies are in place to develop leadership skills among students, including the buddy system, class captains, a paired reading initiative, a Comenius partnership, the Student Leadership and Mathematics (SLAM) club.

An exemplary student support system is in place and the organisation of care for students in the school is excellent. Year heads and tutors exercise an effective role in supporting students. A very committed care team meets on a weekly basis to review individual cases and to identify supports for students in need. The special educational needs assistants (SNAs), School Completion Project (SCP) co-ordinator, the home-school-community liaison co-ordinator, the guidance counsellor and the chaplain play a vital role in the care of students. Students are very well supported at times of transition, for example by the first-year induction programme. Retention is very good and significant efforts are made by the care team to retain all students. Senior cycle students are also offered one-to-one guidance to assist them in making informed decisions regarding progression to further education. Very good support in terms of access programmes to third level education is also made available.

The provision for students with special education needs is very good. There are very good mechanisms for identifying students with such needs and for putting in place appropriate strategies to ensure the best possible outcomes. It is recommended that a general cognitive ability test be used to obtain an accurate assessment of all students' potential. This will assist in the tracking of students' progress and in putting in place measures to ensure that they reach their full potential.

Increasing student attainment is an identified priority for the school. Good progress has been made to increase the number of students taking higher level in the certificate examinations. Management has demonstrated commitment to this priority by creating extra classes, and courses in study skills are provided. However, student attainment has not yet improved sufficiently. A review of student attainment needs to focus on increasing achievement in examinations. In line with effective DEIS planning, achievable targets should be set and all subject departments should have a detailed action plan which includes

a strong focus on the recommendations regarding learning and teaching outlined in this report and in previous inspection reports.

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

There has been good investment in information and communication technology (ICT) throughout the school. Classrooms are mainly subject based and quite well kept, although some areas would benefit from decluttering. It is suggested that all out-of-date material be removed from walls and that some new posters, maps and other such materials be acquired as resources permit. A review of the health and safety signage should take place in the rooms where practical subjects are taught.

The canteen is not in operation currently and students, other than first years, have cannot purchase food or drink in the school. This situation needs to be reviewed as a matter of priority. The school is committed to improving and upgrading facilities and a new extension is planned for the near future which will comprise additional classrooms and a new library.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality of learning and teaching was good overall. In some lessons it was very good, but in a minority of lessons there was considerable scope for improvement.

Where the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good there was competent and clear delivery of lesson content and good opportunities for students to be active in their own learning. In these lessons clear learning outcomes were communicated to the students, active methodologies were employed to achieve the learning outcomes and teachers used a range of techniques to assess learning.

The lessons where the quality of learning and teaching required considerable improvement were characterised by less active teaching methodologies and a lack of higher order questioning. In a small number of instances, there was a lack of knowledge on the part of teachers of the syllabus or of the distribution of marks in the certificate examinations. It is recommended that in these instances teachers become very familiar with the aforementioned. It is also recommended that the Chief Examiners' reports (available at www.examinations.ie) be consulted and the recommendations for teachers be implemented in classroom practice.

The quality of learning and teaching in lessons would be enhanced by a greater and more consistent use of the techniques of AfL as recommended in a previous inspection report (2013). A whole-school approach is needed whereby lessons begin with a link to previous learning and a clear focus on intended learning outcomes. Students would benefit from their progress being assessed throughout lessons and at the end of lessons and from greater use of student peer and self-assessment.

In some lessons the good practice of emphasising key words was noted. To build on this, strategies which encourage a greater active use by students of key vocabulary and of strategies which develop their oral communication skills need to be used. In this regard,

consideration should be given to rearranging desks into group settings when discussion is part of the lesson plan. Where students are learning a second or third language, they should be given every opportunity to hear and speak the target language.

In the majority of lessons homework was assigned, but not in all. A review of students' journals indicated that homework is not being recorded consistently. In some copybooks the excellent practice of giving formative feedback was noted. However overall there is scope for development in this area. It is recommended that, in order to raise student attainment, a whole-school approach to assigning, recording and correcting homework be adopted and implemented consistently, that written homework be assigned to all classes on a regular basis and that written formative feedback be provided by teachers, as recommended already in previous inspection reports.

In all lessons, a very good rapport between students and teachers was noted and the atmosphere was very positive. The SNAs supported student learning well and contributed positively to the learning environment. In some classrooms there were nice posters and very good displays of students' work. It is suggested that this practice be extended to all classrooms and that materials should be kept up-to-date.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

As a follow-up to inspections, school management engages in the good practice of reviewing inspection reports, meeting with teachers and seeking an action plan from subject departments. Management needs to ensure that where recommendations are applicable to all subjects that all teachers be made aware of the necessity to implement such recommendations. General recommendations about teaching and learning should be discussed at staff meetings so that a whole-school approach can be adopted. Peer collaborative review among teachers should be encouraged by management.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Some progress has been made in the area of implementing recommendations in teaching and learning. However, the recommendations regarding AfL, increased oral participation by students, longer written assignments for students with formative feedback given, the use of the target language, and the use of higher order questions all have yet to be implemented on a whole-school basis. As there is still progress to be made on the implementation of previous recommendations at classroom level, it is recommended that senior management observe teaching and learning with a view to supporting staff in implementing the above recommendations.

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

The school has established a school self-evaluation (SSE) committee. Very good practice has been established in surveying students, parents and staff to gather baseline data. The school has chosen literacy as the focus of SSE. It is recommended that as well as all the very good initiatives that exist in the school to promote literacy, a stronger emphasis on the development of literacy skills be integrated into day-to-day classroom practice across all subjects.

The school has shown capacity for improvement in organisational matters since the last WSE (2005). However, the focus of improvement should now be on a whole-school approach to improving learning and teaching strategies, improving student attendance, raising students' expectations and increasing attainment.

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