

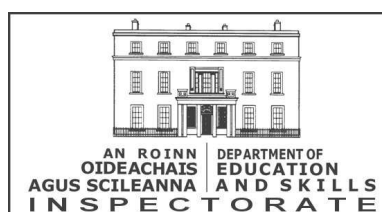
**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**Coláiste Choilm  
Swords, Co Dublin  
Roll number: 60383I**

**Date of inspection: 7 February 2011**



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

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in February 2011 in Coláiste Choilm. 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 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***

Coláiste Choilm opened in 1967 and has a current enrolment of 610 boys. The school offers the Junior Certificate (JC), an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and the Established Leaving Certificate (LC).

## **1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

### ***1.1 Key Findings***

- The board of management shows a strong commitment to the school and shares a common vision which has been communicated to the school community.
- Senior management is deeply committed to the school and forms a well organised and focused leadership team.
- A recent review of the schedule of posts of responsibility was carried out to respond to the most pressing needs of the school.
- School development planning is well progressed.
- The school operates an open and inclusive enrolment policy.
- The school offers a broad curriculum with a good range of academic and technical subjects.
- The school building is at full capacity and the provision of classrooms presents an ongoing challenge.
- The majority of lessons observed were well structured and engaged students in the learning process.
- The school has responded well to recommendations made in previous evaluations.
- Coláiste Choilm has the capacity to set and implement an agenda for school improvement.

### ***1.2 Recommendations for Further Development***

- Collaboration within subject departments needs to be developed with an emphasis on the further development of subject planning documentation.
- There is scope to develop the role of middle management beyond its current compass to include decision making on whole-school issues.
- The new code of behaviour should be the subject of a whole school debate at the earliest possible opportunity. Attention should be given to consistency in its

operation and to clarifying how the structures identified in the code should be followed by all parties in the school.

- The wider use of assessment for learning is encouraged.

## **2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

### ***2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management***

Coláiste Choilm is a voluntary secondary school under the auspices of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The school's board of management is properly constituted with members having received appropriate training in the functions and responsibilities of a board. The board members work as a cohesive unit and demonstrate a strong commitment to the entire school community. The current chairperson has experience of in-school management and this was stated to be of benefit to the board.

A raft of policies has been approved by the board. Its role in reviewing and overseeing the development of these policy documents is considerable. The board has identified a number of significant priorities for development, including a review of academic standards with a focus on homework, improving the quality of teaching and learning, the preservation of existing standards in light of changes in staff allocation and a review of the school's code of behaviour. These priorities have been identified through a collaborative process of self-review involving all of the relevant partners.

The board's action plan proposes an incremental approach to generating improvements in teaching and learning, initially through the homework policy. Questionnaires to teachers and parents have been used to gather information and the results have prompted a stronger emphasis on the allocation of homework. Through support from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) an audit of the learning environment has been carried out to establish baseline data on the school's student population. This has provided a good starting point from which to plan strategies for improvement.

The Parents' Association is well established and actively supports the school through fundraising. Its members are appropriately consulted in policy formation. The school has benefited considerably from the consistent and diligent work of the association.

### ***2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

A high level of leadership is evident on the part of senior management in the school. Both acting principal and acting deputy principal are long standing staff members and are deeply committed to the school. They form a well organised, focused and united leadership team.

Currently, among the teaching staff, there are five assistant principals and twelve special duties post-holders. The duties undertaken by these post-holders make a significant contribution to the day-to-day life of the school. A review of the schedule of posts of responsibility was carried out in 2009. It was reported that there was good co-operation from post-holders with the re-assignment of duties. The flexibility of staff in responding to the most pressing needs of the school is a good indicator of a shared commitment to school welfare.

Senior management has created the facility for regular consultation with those middle management post holders in the key positions of year heads. These weekly meetings are focused predominantly on year group matters. In the course of the evaluation, members of middle management expressed a desire for a stronger input into decision making. Concern was expressed over an inconsistency in support for year heads in implementing the

discipline structure. At a meeting with the evaluation team, some year heads stated that their opinions are not given adequate consideration by senior management. It is recommended that, within the weekly meeting structure, the involvement and consultation of the middle management layer in decision making related to whole school issues be developed beyond its current compass. To facilitate this, the role of year head needs to be clearly defined with the school's code of behaviour as a constant reference point.

An extensive programme of whole-school continuing professional development (CPD) has been delivered to staff in recent years including sessions on the role of the tutor, the Care Team and classroom management. Senior management also facilitates the attendance of teachers at centrally provided subject-specific CPD as it becomes available. Parallel with this whole school support for staff, the board of management administers an annual budget to assist individual staff members in pursuing further education and training. These are all positive measures. It is suggested that an appropriate focus now for senior management is the upskilling of staff in the use and integration of information and communications technology (ICT) in teaching and learning.

The quality of school development planning is very good. Legally required policies are in place and have been ratified by the board of management. As a preamble to each policy it would be helpful to indicate the stakeholders involved in its development. A practice of rolling review should be applied to the existing policies with a schedule set for each to be updated.

Procedures for students' admission and transfer are regularly reviewed. The school operates an open enrolment policy and acknowledges inclusion both in principle and in practice. Work needs to be done to ensure that admission and enrolment procedures are unambiguous as fewer than half of parents surveyed think the information about how to enrol their child is clear. Attendance data indicates good levels of attendance. Student attendance is monitored using swipe-cards with parents being alerted via text message when their son is absent. Several difficulties have been identified with the current system. It is recommended that the procedures in place for monitoring attendance be reviewed to ensure that they are both more efficient and more effective.

The role of tutor has been the focus of whole school CPD and has been supported by the provision of a weekly thirty-minute timetabled period. It is timely to review the effectiveness of the current arrangement in light of concerns expressed regarding the balance between the pastoral and administrative duties of a tutor. Of the students surveyed, fewer than half considered that they had an adult in the school to which they could speak if they were having problems.

During the evaluation good behaviour prevailed throughout the school. However, concerns at the disruption of learning and inconsistencies in the implementation of sanctions were brought to the attention of the evaluation team at a number of levels. This included the views of representatives of students themselves and included observations on low level but persistent disruption of learning in certain classes. Results from the parents' questionnaires indicate that some parents have concerns about discipline in the school. To improve the level of consistency in dealing with these concerns the steps outlined in the code of behaviour need to be followed more rigorously by all.

Both representatives of the parents' association and of the students expressed dissatisfaction with the use of early morning detention as a sanction. The school needs to review the effectiveness of this strategy.

The school offers a broad curriculum both at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate levels, with a good range of academic and technical subjects. It is recommended that the

introduction of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) be explored as a whole-school issue. Many of the subject choices made by senior-cycle students fit with the pre-determined subject groupings required for participation in LCVP and the students would therefore be eligible to follow this programme that now enjoys greater recognition for third level entry.

First-year students sample optional subjects during a short sampling programme. This provision is commended as a means of informing students' choice. Students make subject choices for senior cycle towards the end of third year or TY as applicable. Subject-option blocks are formed to meet, as far as practicable, the preferences of students. As a further support at these times of transition, parents are invited to information evenings where they are addressed by senior management and the guidance counsellor. Junior-cycle students are assigned to mixed-ability class groups within two bands. They remain within these class groupings for the majority of their core subjects throughout first year. Second-year and third-year students are concurrently timetabled for English, Irish and Mathematics. This good practice provides flexibility for students to change levels as required.

Learning support is provided for students who have been identified with special educational needs (SEN). Support is provided to these students by reducing their curriculum by one optional subject. Support for junior-cycle students is in the form of a literacy programme and is delivered by members of the SEN teaching team. Senior-cycle students receive support in literacy and numeracy. It is recommended that the special educational needs department consider re-testing identified students as they progress through the school. This would assist the tracking of students' progress and facilitate targeted interventions to address the specific needs identified.

A student council has been established in the school. It is properly structured and consulted, as appropriate, regarding policy formation. The student council strives to engage with, and involve the full student community in the school and it has had considerable success in doing so. This is borne out by evidence from the student questionnaires where the majority of students agreed that they have a say in how to make the school a better place.

### ***2.3 Management of facilities***

The existing school building was opened in 1999 and has been maintained to a very high standard. A warm welcoming atmosphere is evident on entry to the building. Student achievements and significant events in the school's history are well marked with photographs and displays throughout the school. Notwithstanding that the school accommodates its full capacity of students, the feasibility of providing each subject department with a base room should be explored. This would help facilitate the storage of subject-specific resources and materials in a single designated area. Furthermore, special efforts could be made in such rooms to produce a stimulating learning environment through the display of posters and student project work.

## **3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### ***3.1 The quality of learning and teaching***

Twenty four lessons were observed during the evaluation. The overall quality of teaching and learning in most lessons was good and was very good in some lessons. There was good evidence of careful short-term planning, including the preparation of resources for the lessons observed. Lessons had clear aims, were purposeful and in most instances were presented at a pace suited to the ability of the students. The good practice of sharing the

planned learning outcomes was evident in some classes and, where this occurred, it provided a clear focus for student attention.

Well structured lessons included an introduction and a conclusion with varied learning opportunities within the body of the lesson. The engagement of students with the learning process, through active learning methodologies, created interesting lessons and gave clear opportunities where students could show their knowledge. Students were encouraged to participate and their contributions to the lessons were affirmed. Of the students surveyed through questionnaires, the majority considered their lessons to be interesting. In some lessons observed, there was limited opportunity to verify learning due to the passive role of the students in the learning process. These lessons featured teacher-dominated exposition and recapitulation. Of the students surveyed, fewer than half felt that teachers listen to them and take notice of what they say. Teachers are urged to provide opportunities for students to express their understanding and engagement with the lesson content as a clearer way of demonstrating success in learning.

The limited use of ICT resources in the lessons observed indicated that there is considerable work to be done on the development of the use of ICT as a tool to enhance teaching and learning. In general, the level of technology equipment available in classrooms for delivery of course material is low. The provision of such equipment in as wide a spectrum of classrooms as possible is desirable.

The wider use of assessment for learning (AfL) principles and practices is to be encouraged across all subject areas. In the sample of copybooks viewed, the recognition and annotation of students' work lacked a thoroughness and consistency of approach. The responses to the parents' questionnaires indicate that fewer than half of parents agree with the statement that teachers regularly check written work. Best practice saw the assignment of homework which was connected to the current lesson or the next stage of work. The cross section of homework journals examined indicated that they were an underused resource in the management of students generally and in the recording and monitoring of homework. It is recommended that teachers insist on the proper recording of homework and the signing of journals by parents as written in the school's homework policy. Of parents surveyed through questionnaires only a few sign their son's journal weekly.

## **4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

### ***4.1 Management***

The majority of recommendations relating to whole-school provision have been addressed. The recommendation around the arrangement for the timetabling of SPHE in junior cycle has been partly implemented. Senior management must ensure that all students have one timetabled class period of the subject per week in accordance with the requirements of Circular M11/03.

### ***4.2 Learning and Teaching***

Many of the recommendations in previous inspection reports address areas for development in subject planning and the adoption of collaborative planning practices. The evaluation team looked at the planning folders which now exist for these subject areas and concluded that, while there has been some improvement in relation to the development of subject department plans, there is still considerable room for progress. It is recommended that subject department collaboration and planning be promoted as an area for early attention

with efforts made to increase the sharing of methodologies and good practice within and between subject departments.

Several of the recommendations made in previous evaluations focused on the area of assessment and the use of AfL principles and practices. Six members of the teaching staff have recently attended training in this area and are now ready to disseminate their knowledge to the rest of the staff. This whole school approach to the development of assessment strategies is commended.

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

In the identification of its strengths and areas for development the school shows a good capacity for self-evaluation. Sound processes have been implemented to date to support the school's self-evaluation and the implementation of an action plan. This work has been guided by senior management with considerable input from the other school partners. For example, the trustees have contributed to school self-evaluation by requesting the board of management to submit an evaluation of the board's performance at the end of its term.

Staff members have shown an awareness of the need for quality assurance in teaching and learning as a core area of the school's work. The Parents' Association is an active player in supporting improvement in the school with a specific aim of supporting teaching and learning. The focus group of students interviewed showed a maturity and awareness in their reflections on the school's strengths and areas for development. All of these factors point strongly to the capacity of Coláiste Choilm to set and implement an agenda for school improvement.