

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT ISSUED FOR SCHOOL RESPONSE

**Bush Post-Primary School
Dundalk, County Louth
Roll number: 71750U**

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**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 2016 in Bush Post-Primary 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 of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report.

Introduction

Established in 1934, Bush Post-Primary School is a co-educational school under the patronage of the Louth Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB). Enrolment has increased over recent years and there are 567 students attending the school currently. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department's action plan for educational inclusion and it offers the full range of curricular programmes.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management has a wide range of expertise and is very committed to school development.
- Senior management provides very good leadership to the school community.
- The school provides a broad curriculum, which meets the needs of the community it serves.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in most lessons; a few lessons had scope for development.
- Recommendations from previous evaluations have received good consideration and most have been implemented.
- DEIS and school self-evaluation (SSE) planning is of a high quality and the school has a very good capacity to manage and promote school improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should engage more pro-actively with issues such as student attainment, attendance and follow-through on recommendations from evaluations.
- Students and parents should be facilitated to have a more in-depth engagement in policy development: a Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy is required.
- The timetable should continue to be reviewed with a particular focus on the allocation of double-periods to non-practical subjects.
- Good practice on aspects of teaching and learning such as the use of learning intentions, differentiation, questioning strategies, and active student-centred methodologies should be further promoted across all subject areas.
- Review of student attainment by subject departments should lead to concrete plans for improvement where necessary.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

Appointed in May 2015, the board of management has a wide range of expertise that will serve the school very well. The board is very well supported by the LMETB which has provided training and organises support networks for management and teachers. The board has a good understanding of its governance role in terms of policy setting, strategic planning and supporting senior management. Minutes of meetings show a high level of engagement with issues. However, the board should take a more pro-active approach to the monitoring of areas such as student attainment and attendance. The board should also issue an agreed report after each meeting.

The board sets out the over-arching framework for the school through its policies and DEIS plans. Many policies, including a code of behaviour and admissions policy, are in place. However, a RSE policy is not currently in place and this deficit should be addressed as a matter of urgency. A new cycle of DEIS planning is underway in the current school year.

It is good practice that the development or review of policies is led by staff. Parents' and students' views are generally sought towards the end of the development process. However, a more meaningful engagement should be achieved by involving these stakeholders earlier in the process.

Investment in infrastructure, and the development of instructional leadership are among the key priorities the board has identified. Good progress in achieving these priorities is already evident with plans for a significant extension to the school building well progressed and many staff participating in training provided by the LMETB.

The senior management team of principal and deputy principal take a partnership approach to school leadership and work very effectively, both individually and as a team. They are highly organised and are very reflective, progressive and pragmatic in their approach both to everyday issues and to the long-term development of the school. As a result, the school is very well managed and high levels of satisfaction were expressed by students, parents and staff. Their vision for the school is as one that serves the local community to the best extent possible and they provide effective leadership for learning and teaching through the DEIS and SSE processes.

Leadership roles are formally distributed at middle-management level with defined duties assigned to posts of responsibility. It is good practice that the schedule of posts is regularly reviewed as the needs of the school change. Assistant principals play a collective role in the management of the school through frequent meetings with senior management. Distributed leadership is also evident in the role that various teams, such as the care team or DEIS team, play in the running of the school. In addition to formal posts, staff also make a significant professional contribution to the running of the school through participation in various initiatives.

A student council and prefect system facilitate student leadership. Extra-curricular activities, sports, and TY projects such as mini-companies and Gaisce Awards also provide many opportunities for personal development. Surveys show that the great majority of students are proud to be in the school. They feel safe and cared for and get on well with other students.

The parents' association is very supportive and actively engages in fund raising for various initiatives. The majority of parents surveyed feel that there is a good atmosphere in the school and they feel welcome there. They feel that their children are safe and well looked after, and that they are doing well in school.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Senior management has a commendably strong focus on promoting improvement throughout all areas of school life. It has actively led the DEIS and SSE planning processes and works closely with subject departments. Teachers' ongoing professional development is supported. The recent introduction of initiatives such as peer observation and team teaching will facilitate the ongoing sharing of good practice and thus further promote good-quality teaching and learning. A planned building programme will address infrastructural issues.

Staff are encouraged to lead various initiatives and they are to be commended for their commitment and enthusiasm in this regard. Regular whole-staff and team meetings facilitate good communication and collaborative work practices.

Teachers are deployed appropriately and are consulted in the framing of the timetable. Overall instructional hours are appropriate and the timetable has evolved over time in line with needs and available resources. However, some aspects of timetabling such as the provision of two double periods per week to non-practical subjects should continue to be reviewed. Reducing the number of double periods would increase the number of teacher-class contacts throughout the week and also lessen the impact of absences for a student who misses a double period rather than just a single lesson.

The broad curriculum, including the full range of programmes, serves the local community well as it caters for the full range of student abilities. Students have a very good choice of subjects, and subject bands are based on their choices. While the school has good systems in place to inform parents and students about subject choices, survey results indicate that some more work is required in this area.

The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Transition Year (TY) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes are well organised. The close involvement of the learning-support department and home-school-community liaison (HSCL) teacher with the JCSP and LCA programmes in particular assists in coordinating overall support for the relevant students.

The admissions policy sets out clear procedures and criteria for enrolment. Visits to local primary schools, open evenings, and assessment days support the enrolment process and parents are informed of their rights. Clear admissions procedures for TY, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the LCA are also in place.

The code of behaviour sets out clear expectations under broad themes such as attendance, and uniform. Disciplinary actions are also set out clearly in a separate code of discipline and operate through a ladder of referral in which year heads play a significant role. Positive affirmation is provided through an awards system and the giving of 'good' notes in home-school journals. The journal is a very useful support for students and parents, allowing an exchange of information and feedback on students' progress.

Attendance and retention are well monitored and there are strategies in place as part of DEIS planning to maximise attendance and retention. However, poor attendance has been a concern for some year groups and is an area that requires continued effort.

Very good coordination of the various support structures for students such as guidance, HSCL and learning support is provided by the care team. Very good guidance and counselling structures are in place and a high level of support for parents and students is facilitated by strong links between home and school. Considerable care has been taken with

the implementation of the anti-bullying and critical incident policies. The caring ethos of the school is reflected in the high satisfaction ratings from students and parents.

Learning-support provision is very well organised and meets the needs of students in a variety of ways. Designated hours are used for their intended purpose and plans are in place for the assignment of some remaining hours. Withdrawal from mainstream subjects in small group settings is the main method of delivery of support. However, this is increasingly being complemented by team teaching. Various initiatives such as paired reading and an organisational skills programme supplement more subject-specific support. Individual students' needs and provision are well documented and all teachers, and special needs assistants, are provided with advice on how they can support such needs.

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*. The lack of an RSE policy has already been noted as a matter which should be addressed as soon as possible.

1.3 Management of facilities

The school is well maintained and provides a bright attractive place in which to work and study. The wide range of specialist classrooms is well equipped with information and communication technology (ICT) resources. In addition, the school has two canteen areas, a fully equipped gymnasium, sports field and an all-weather running track.

The school building has expanded in an incremental manner since it was first built. Rooms have been adapted to new purposes and three extra classrooms were added in 2015. Plans are well developed for a major extension which will create a more cohesive infrastructure and address some of the deficits in the current school building.

The Green Schools committee, composed of teachers and students, has developed practical means of reducing litter and waste and has examined ways of reducing energy consumption. The school has also had great success in promoting environmental responsibility through an annual recycling competition: *Junk Kouture*.

The health and safety statement has been prioritised for review. Evacuation procedures are practiced at regular intervals.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning in most lessons was good or very good. Many examples of exemplary practice were observed. However, there was scope for development in a few lessons.

Parents indicated very high levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching. Students were also very positive, with a majority indicating that their lessons are interesting and that they are getting on well with their schoolwork. However, survey results showed some scope for a greater level of student voice in lessons.

A very good level of preparation was evident in the wide range of resources such as worksheets, notes, and electronic presentations used during the lessons observed. Lessons generally had a clear focus, new content was linked to prior learning and learning activities followed a logical sequence.

The learning intentions were noted in some way at the start of nearly all lessons. This approach worked really well when assessment during and at the end of lessons was explicitly measured against the goals that had been set out at the start. In such cases, students knew what success looked like and were able to engage in self and peer assessment tasks. However, the level to which students took ownership of, or responsibility for achieving, the lesson's learning intentions varied. In many cases, the list of learning intentions served mainly to structure lesson content and they were not referred to again and were not explicitly used to assess students' progress. Thus, teachers should review why, and how they use a learning outcomes' approach to teaching.

Lessons were very well managed with well-established classroom routines. A high level of affirmation and encouragement was evident in teacher-student interactions. Classrooms were decorated brightly with displays of relevant material: much of which had been produced by the students themselves.

Differentiation for students of varying abilities was mainly observed when teachers worked one-to-one with individual students. Some good examples of providing extension work for more-able students was observed: for example, when work was presented as that which 'must, should and could' be done. However, in many lessons, the same content and assessment activities were set for all students. Teachers should review how mixed-ability groups are provided for, so as to ensure sufficient challenge is provided for students of all abilities.

In many lessons, students were required to actively engage with new material. Such high levels of engagement were evident when students had to do something that showed their learning. In many lessons, students were set written tasks; in other cases, students had to participate in practical activities, discussions, presentations and group work. Such student-centred methodologies allowed the teacher to step back and put the spotlight on the students' participation. These approaches allowed the students' voice to be heard in the lessons and was particularly evident in TY lessons. It is commendable that the school has initiated team teaching and peer-observation initiatives as these will allow teachers to share and increase the use of active learning methodologies.

Questioning as a means of probing and expanding students' knowledge was used extensively. This methodology was very successful when sufficient 'wait time' was allowed and where there was a good balance of directed, supplementary and higher-order questioning. However, students were often only required to give very brief answers and teachers tended to expand on the answer themselves. In some instances, there was an overuse of broad global questions with a minority of students providing some response before the lesson moved on. A review of questioning strategies would be a useful exercise in the *assessment for learning* (AfL) initiative currently underway in the school.

Those lessons where learning was less successful were characterised by a more teacher-centred approach and a focus on the delivery of content rather than on the achievement of learning. Assessment strategies did not adequately reveal the level of learning achieved, and the lesson proceeded without due regard to students' progress. In such cases, a greater focus on how students will learn, and how their learning will be assessed, is required in lesson planning.

Subject planning is well established in the school. Senior management is very supportive of such planning and attends department meetings as often as possible. It is also good practice that minutes of department meetings are submitted to senior management for review. Some very good practice was evident in the regular meetings, the development of detailed schemes of work and the sharing of resources.

Detailed analysis of student attainment in state examinations is also very good practice. Some departments have developed very clear actions plans aimed at improving student outcomes. However, there could be clearer plans to improve attainment in some curricular areas. In curricular areas, where there is scope to do so, subject departments should develop clear action plans to support improvement in student attainment.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Good consideration has been given to the recommendations from previous evaluations. The majority of recommendations have either been addressed or plans are in place for their implementation. For example, meetings of a new LCA core team will be implemented in the next academic year.

Many of the previous recommendations related to planning. As noted previously, subject planning is well established and ICT is being used to facilitate the sharing of resources. A review of planning documentation showed that collaborative schemes of work have been developed in all areas and links with the DEIS plan have been incorporated in these plans.

Some recommendations relating to specific subject or programmes have been implemented on a wider basis. For example, a text-rich environment has been created in all classrooms. Learning intentions were noted in the majority of lessons observed.

Several recommendations related to assessment practices such as the use of formative feedback and the correction of students' work. While some very good practice was observed in this regard, review of student journals showed inconsistent assignment of homework. It would be useful to look at this aspect of teaching as part of the AfL initiative.

The main responsibility for following through on recommendations from previous evaluations lies with the relevant department and senior management. It is recommended that the board take a more proactive role in following through on evaluations. For example, subject or programme departments could be asked to report to the board of management.

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

The key driver of school improvement in Bush Post-Primary School is its DEIS planning which is well organised and systematically coordinated by a core team. A strong focus on self-evaluation is evident in the extensive review of baseline data and targets from the previous plan. A whole-school approach was shown in the requirement that subject departments updated their plans before the new DEIS plan was completed. Clear targets and actions are set out in the plan with responsibility assigned to specific staff.

A particularly self-evaluative approach has been taken over recent years to the areas of literacy, numeracy, and assessment for learning. A key strength of these SSE initiatives has been the attention to collecting and analysing data and the level of consultation with stakeholders.

The DEIS team monitors and promotes the actions set out in the plan and are very conscious of the need for regular review of progress. While some areas such as attendance continue to require attention, tangible improvements have accrued from the work and commitment to DEIS planning such as increased progression to further study.

In light of the organised and systematic approach taken to DEIS and SSE and the commitment evident in the work of senior management and staff, the school has within its own resources a very good capacity to manage and promote school improvement in the coming years.