

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

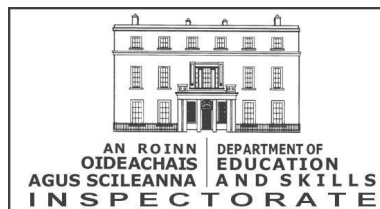
**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Coláiste Cholmáin  
Fermoy, County Cork  
Roll number: 62260C**

**Date of inspection: 11 March 2011**



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

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

Coláiste Cholmáin is Catholic voluntary secondary school for boys under the Diocese of Cloyne. The school was established as the Cloyne Diocesan Seminary in 1858 and acted as a boarding school until 2003. Enrolment has been gradually increasing to a current level of 423 day students. The school mainly operates in two conjoined buildings, the original school building completed in 1859 and a newer building completed in 1968. The student cohort is drawn from the urban area of Fermoy and the surrounding rural hinterland of the Blackwater valley.

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

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

- Very good quality leadership and management are provided by the principal and deputy principal.
- School development planning requires direction by senior management and should be progressed within a strategic action-planning cycle.
- The school provides very good quality guidance, education support, and care for students.
- Subject department planning is advancing but needs a clear focus in relation to teaching and learning.
- In most lessons, teaching and learning was observed to be good or very good. In a small number of lessons, there was scope for improvement.
- Student achievement is good and uptake of higher level is consistently high in many subjects.
- Some subject areas require an analysis of the outcomes of certificate examinations to address lower levels of performance.
- Most recommendations from previously completed subject inspections have been implemented, while some recommendations relating to health and safety in the science laboratories still require implementation.

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

- The good practice relating to teaching and learning identified in most lessons should be shared and promoted across all subjects.
- Subject planning and whole-school development planning should be advanced with a particular focus on teaching and learning.

- A health and safety committee should be formed in the school and any outstanding issues relating to health and safety should be addressed.
- The current shortfall in the provision of 167 instruction days for students on the school calendar should be addressed.
- Timetabled Physical Education lessons should be provided for all year groups.

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

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

#### **Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations**

The board of management is appropriately constituted and is actively engaged in its work. The agenda and minutes of board meetings are detailed and comprehensive and reflect the level of work and engagement of the board in its management of the school. The principal's report to the board is focused on the quality of the students' experience in the school and significantly, on the quality of outcomes for students. The board is engaged in school planning and a range of key policies has been developed over time. The upgrading and improvement of school facilities has also been a particular priority for the board in recent years. The parents' association plays a significant role in the school community and is currently informed of the work of board through the school principal. The board should now adopt the practice of developing an agreed written report to staff and the parents' association that would enhance appropriate communication and linkage between the board and the school community.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (published September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

#### **The school's priorities for development**

The work of the board and senior management is informed by a mission statement, grounded in the caring values of the gospel that stresses academic and social development, self esteem, mutual respect and good relationships. Arising from this mission statement, the board articulates a broad vision for the school community. Priorities within this vision include an improvement agenda focused on the quality of teaching and learning, management and leadership, the improvement of the school's physical infrastructure and interaction with the wider school community.

To achieve this vision, a particular focus on school development planning is required by all members of the school community. The board and senior management, in leading this process, should update and ratify, where necessary, existing policies including health and safety, relationships and sexuality education (RSE) and the admissions policy. They should also agree with staff and senior management a strategic planning direction for the school with achievable and time-bound outcomes. This strategic direction should focus on planning for teaching and learning and subject-department planning.

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

### **Leadership of staff**

The principal and deputy principal provide very good quality leadership and management to the school community. They each have clearly defined roles but collaborate as a very effective team. They both demonstrate a very positive and collegial approach to their work and to relationships with students, staff and parents. Both the principal and deputy principal have been staff members in the school for many years and were appointed to their current roles in 2007. As a management team, they have a clear vision for the continued improvement of the academic achievement of students that is underpinned by the creation of a caring supportive and respectful school community.

Their leadership of the school has focused on the immediate issues of increasing enrolment, the changing perception of the school in the community following the closure of the boarding school, and the improvement of the school building. Middle leadership and key staff members have also been empowered by senior management. Capacity building is visible within the post-holder structure and in the leadership of key areas including education support, Guidance and programme co-ordination. Of particular note, is the recent inclusive audit of the code of behaviour and the focus on strategies to engage more able and gifted students. This has acted as an entry point into a focus on differentiation and mixed-ability teaching. Key staff members were facilitated to develop these and other valuable initiatives.

A sense of team, at whole-school level, has been achieved and nurtured by senior management and this is supported by good quality communication structures including a well-developed staff handbook and school website, and regular staff meetings, staff briefings and presentations from staff members. Leadership of learning is characterised by the encouragement of whole staff and individual continuing professional development (CPD) to meet the changing needs of the school. An analysis of the patterns of students' achievements in certificate examinations has also begun.

Strategic decisions relating to curricular provision have ensured the maintenance of a broad and balanced curriculum including the ongoing provision of Music, Art, History and Economics. Programme planning has also ensured the provision of a very good quality Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme. As a whole staff, it was decided recently to discontinue the provision of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. Significant developments in the information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure in the school and its integration into teaching and learning are also ongoing. These developments represent a very significant emphasis on leading learning by senior management.

To build on these achievements in the leadership of learning, senior management and the board should particularly focus on subject planning in order to develop the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Some very good subject department plans were observed to be reflective, strategic and evaluative. However, there was also scope for development in a number of subject plans. Senior management and teachers should focus on the examples of good practice in planning, particularly in terms of their impact on students' learning and their experience in the classroom.

A strategic annual action-planning cycle focused on teaching and learning is therefore recommended. An individual or team should be identified to lead this process. Targets, timeframes, roles and responsibilities should be identified and agreed. A framework to reflect on practice in the classroom should be used. Teaching for understanding (TFU), assessment for learning (AfL) or instructional leadership strategies could be useful in this

regard. Specific time-bound targets should be agreed for each subject department and examination data analysis should be used to inform the process.

TY and LCVP are well planned and co-ordinated, experience consistently high uptake, and are very positive experiences for students. It is recommended however that a focused review of the current TY programme should be undertaken. This review should examine the provision of modules in all senior cycle subjects to support subject choice, the impact of some complementary modules and the content and methodologies used in some core subjects in TY. Parents and students should be included in this review.

Senior management should also address the current shortfall in the provision of 167 instruction days for students on the school calendar to comply with Circular Letter M29/95. Students not taking LCVP should be provided with timetabled provision during periods allocated to the link modules. Timetabled Physical Education (PE) should be provided for all class groups as recommended in a subject inspection report on PE completed in 2004.

### **Leadership of students**

It is clear that school management and teachers have appropriately high expectations for the students in their care. Transitions are well managed including enrolment, subject sampling in first year, and subject and programme choice in senior cycle. In this way school management ensures continuity in students' learning throughout their school life.

Students' learning is further enhanced by the very good care provided through the pastoral-care structures and the work of the chaplaincy. Education support and Guidance for students are very good. Facilities for after-school study and extra inputs by individual teachers in particular subject areas are also offered to students in support of their learning. To build on the very good quality systems in place and to enhance their sustainability, it is recommended that more formality be brought to the care structure, under the umbrella of whole-school guidance. A care team should be formed that includes representatives from guidance personnel, year heads, the education-support team, and the chaplain. When established, the care team should meet regularly, define particular roles and responsibilities, and record discussions and decisions taken. The role of the tutor and year head in the care structure could also be further developed within this process.

Opportunities for student leadership are provided through the student mentoring and prefect system. The student council is also actively engaged in purposeful activities in the school. Both structures provide opportunities for students to enhance the leadership of learning in the school. Curricular provision and the care and support for students are also complemented by the wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities on offer and the sustained sporting heritage of the school. The commitment of individual teachers and school management to these activities is acknowledged in this report.

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

School facilities are well maintained and include general classrooms, science laboratories, an art room, computer rooms, education-support rooms, a school library, an assembly hall, a technology room and a Design and Communication Graphics (DCG) room. These rooms are mainly situated in the building completed in 1968 while some specialised facilities are housed in the original boarding school building. The technology and DCG rooms, an indoor sports hall and the school's playing pitches are located adjacent to the main campus. The board of management should continue to progress its improvement agenda in relation to the school building that has prioritised insulation, the replacement of windows, improvement of the main doorways and foyer, and resolving identified health and safety issues.

The ICT infrastructure in the school has been significantly advanced through the development of the computer rooms, the equipping of classrooms with computers and data projectors, and through the provision of wireless broadband internet access.

Plans to remove an old prefabricated classroom, now used as a store room, and plans to upgrade the doorways and foyer should improve the visual quality of the school's entrance area. While the school uses a central heating system, issues relating to insulation, windows and doorways contribute to cold classrooms and corridors. At the time of the evaluation the board was actively engaged in addressing these issues. These efforts are also supported by the responses to student and parent questionnaires, issued by the evaluation team, as a significant number of the respondents disagreed with the statement that school facilities were good.

A number of safety issues, some of which were outlined in a subject inspection of Science completed in 2006, were highlighted to senior management during this evaluation. Gas and electricity safety cut-off switches and an appropriate fume cupboard are required in the chemistry laboratory while a gas safety cut-off switch is also required in the biology laboratory. A push bar or other appropriate emergency exit mechanism should be provided for the doorway adjacent to the biology laboratory. Access to toilet facilities should be provided in or near the indoor sports hall. Some attention should also be given to the safe storage of students' school and sports bags to limit any possible hazard that these might create on school corridors.

School management should address these issues and, in this context, a safety committee including a member of senior management and a staff health and safety representative should be established. This committee should complete subject-specific risk assessments leading to a revision of the current school safety statement. Provision should also be made for an annual update of the safety statement. *Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools (2009)* should be used to guide this process.

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

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

In most lessons, teaching and learning was observed to be good or very good. In a small number of lessons, there was scope for improvement. Good practice in lessons included differentiated approaches, good use of visuals and the use of a variety of resources and methodologies. The intended learning outcomes were clear. The very good quality classroom activities observed were aided by the use of graphic organisers, visuals-stimulus material, audio resources and ICT. There was clear and effective sequencing of activities and a focus on basic concepts and terminology. The homework provided to students was purposeful and varied and was used to progress learning. However, copies were not always annotated or monitored by teachers. This should be addressed at both classroom and whole-school level.

The good classroom management observed was achieved through effective planning of activities, appropriate time management, pacing, and very good quality questioning strategies. In the very positive atmosphere of these lessons, the students were motivated. They were eager in both asking and responding to questions and engaged in very good quality dialogue with their teachers. Students were actively engaged in these mixed-ability classrooms. These findings are also supported by the very positive responses of both students and parents to questions relating to teaching and classroom atmosphere in the questionnaires issued during the evaluation.

In a small number of the lessons observed, students were passive and not fully engaged in the lesson topics or in learning. Teacher inputs dominated and questioning strategies had not been well developed.

It is recommended that the good and very good practice in evidence in lessons be developed and shared by individual teachers and subject departments. This process should centre on: the development of questioning; the use of graphic organisers; the use of differentiated teaching and learning strategies; the sharing of the learning intention or intended learning outcomes. It is further recommended that the quality of communication and feedback to students and their parents through formative assessment of homework in copies and through the student journal should be improved. This recommendation is also supported by the analysis of parent questionnaire responses showing that a majority of parents do not sign the student journal on a weekly basis.

There was clear evidence of high levels of achievement in many subject areas and a consistently high uptake of higher level that reflected very positive expectations for students in the school. In some subject areas however, a deeper analysis of outcomes in certificate examinations is required to address lower levels of achievement. Issues arising from this analysis should be addressed in individual teacher's planning and in the context of the recommendations already made relating to subject-department planning.

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

##### ***4.1 Management***

Most of the recommendations from previous inspection reports have been implemented by school management. Recommendations relating to Music, LCVP and Guidance have been implemented. Some of the recommendations of a Science subject inspection report completed in 2006, and referenced earlier in this report, have not been implemented. School management were in the process of addressing these issues during the period of this evaluation. The provision of PE to all class groups, as recommended in 2004, has not been achieved. The current senior management team and the board should address these issues as a matter of priority.

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

Recommendations made to the teachers of Irish in a subject inspection report completed in 2008 relating to subject planning and the development of annual agreed programmes of work for all class groups have not been implemented. These should be progressed primarily by the teachers of Irish and supported by the senior management team and the board.

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

##### ***5.1***

The work of the school community of Coláiste Cholmáin is characterised by team work, commitment, professionalism and a shared vision. Leadership and management are very good. Middle-leadership has been very well developed. Teaching and learning is good. Systems relating to student care, student management, guidance and education support are well developed. The experience of students and parents in the school is very positive as evidenced in the very positive responses to the questionnaires administered as part of the WSE-MLL process. Under the leadership of the current school management team, and with the commitment and team work of all staff members, the school has the capacity to further

develop based on its own school self-evaluation processes. Building and sharing good practice in the classroom should be a key entry point to this process.

## **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. Colman’s College, Fermoy welcomes the very positive Whole School Evaluation/Management, Leadership and Learning report. The Board wishes to acknowledge the professionalism, courtesy and support of the inspection team in carrying out the evaluation.
- The Board of Management would also like to acknowledge the dedication and commitment of the teaching staff; the honest and thoughtful responses of students and parents; and the great work done by secretarial, caretaking and cleaning staff to maintain and promote the high standards as evidenced in the Evaluation report.
- The Whole School Evaluation was a positive, collaborative experience. The school community as a whole, working with the guidance of the inspectorate team, is committed to a process of meaningful self evaluation in order to further progress its improvement agenda.

## **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 School Calendar for 2011/12 provides for 167 instruction days for students to comply fully with Circular Letter m29/95. (1.2 and 2.2)
- Timetabled Physical Education (PE) has been provided for all senior pupils. All pupils, with the exception of Third Years, are now timetabled for PE. (1.2, 2.2 and 4.1)
- The Board has now adopted “the practice of developing an agreed written report to the Staff and the Parents’ Association.” (2.1)
- The Board has undertaken that, by June 2012, with senior management it will “update and ratify, where necessary, existing policies including Health and Safety, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and the Admissions Policy”.(2.1)
- A team will be put in place, prior to Christmas 2011, to lead the process of putting “a strategic annual action-planning cycle in place”. The primary focus of this team will be on subject planning in order to develop the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. (2.2)
- A “focused review of the current TY programme” has begun. (2.2)
- Students not taking LCVP are now provided with timetabled instruction during periods allocated to the link modules. (2.2)
- A care team is being put in place to bring ‘more formality’ to the ‘very good care’ already provided. (2.2)
- In terms of management of facilities the Board succeeded in getting funding from DES (Jobs Initiative Scheme) for insulation of the North West face of the school building, the replacement of windows and the improvement of the main doorways. (2.3)

- The prefabricated classroom, mentioned in the report, has been removed.(2.3)
- Gas and Electricity safety cut-off switches and an appropriate fume cupboard have been installed in both the Chemistry and Biology laboratories. (2.3 and 4.1)  
Electric Safety cut-off switch has also been installed in the Physics Laboratory.
- A push bar/ emergency exit mechanism has been provided for the doorway adjacent to the Biology Laboratory (2.3).
- Access to the toilet facilities have been improved near indoor sports hall (2.3).