

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Ballyhaunis Community School  
Ballyhaunis, County Mayo  
Roll number: 91461C**

**Date of inspection: 4 February 2015**



**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, 2015 in Ballyhaunis Community 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 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***

Ballyhaunis Community School was founded in 1977 when the Mercy Convent, Vocational School and St Patrick's College amalgamated. The present school is the sole provider of second-level education in the local area and is an integral part of the community. It offers a comprehensive education programme reflecting the traditions of the previous schools. The school is managed under a deed of trust of which the trustees are the Archdiocese of Tuam, the Mercy Sisters, and the Mayo, Sligo, and Leitrim Education Training Board (ETB). The enrolment currently stands at 536, including ten students enrolled in a post-leaving certificate (PLC) course. The school has a long tradition of multiculturalism and proudly embraces and celebrates cultural diversity. A positive school environment based on the provision of a holistic education, respectful relationships and the affirmation of students and teachers is central to the school's inclusive ethos.

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

### ***Key Findings***

- Ballyhaunis Community School is very well managed, with effective leadership of staff and students in evidence.
- The board of management is well informed, progressive and supportive of the school and it engages effectively in its work.
- A very good spirit of collegiality and volunteerism is evident and students' needs are prioritised in all aspects of educational provision and school life.
- Pastoral care, the wide curriculum, and the range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities organised for students are particular strengths of the school.
- While a culture for school improvement is well established, there is scope to further develop school planning and some policies at a whole-school level as well as subject department level.
- There is very good collaboration in supporting students' welfare and a cohesive range of student-support structures exists.
- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good, in almost all the lessons observed, with aspects of excellent practice noted in some.
- The experience of students in the school is generally very positive.
- The parent body views the school positively, however there is further scope to build partnership relationships.

- Very good progress has been made in implementing recommendations from previous inspections and the school has very good capacity for managing change.

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

- A more strategic approach to school planning should be developed, and specific action plans to advance the school's developmental priorities should be formulated and implemented.
- Partnership with stakeholders should be further developed through the parents' association and the student council.
- Subject and programme planning should be fully utilised as drivers of school improvement; in particular, schemes of work should be expanded where necessary.
- A range of whole-school and subject-specific approaches to assessment for learning (AfL) should be agreed and implemented.

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

### ***1.1 School ownership and management***

The values of the school's three founding patrons underpin the work of the board of management and educational expertise, strong community links, and long-serving commitment are key features of the board's membership. The board is well informed, progressive and very supportive of the school. It is appropriately constituted, functions collaboratively, and engages effectively in its work.

The board has both an operational and an educational focus. Board members have an active role in policy development and review, finances, accommodation refurbishment, school self-evaluation (SSE), curriculum review and staff continuing professional development (CPD) and recruitment. The educational leadership role of the board is evident from the board's engagement with the review of examination results and previous inspection reports.

There is very good ongoing communication between the principal and the board. As an additional means of communicating the school's priorities and its progress in their achievement, the principal's report should be further developed into an annual report on the operation and performance of the school and be made available to the school community. The reintroduction of an agreed report to be disseminated following board meetings could further enhance communication with the various stakeholders. The organisation of occasional meetings with the executive of the student council, and the parents' association would help the growth of partnership relationships. To further support school developments, the student council and the parents' association should share their respective priorities.

A range of developmental priorities has been identified: extending and refurbishing the school building; enhancing communication links, reviewing the post structure; curriculum review in line with the new junior cycle; enhancing teaching and learning; and aligning school development planning with SSE. These priorities reflect the forward-thinking focus of the school. To support the management of change, the board in consultation with the senior management team and teachers, should oversee the development of a more strategic approach to school planning in order to advance its developmental priorities. Action plans should then be developed to support the achievement of targets and success criteria should be designed to monitor progress. Existing planning structures will support this work well. This work should become a key component in the school's self-evaluation process.

The parents' association takes an active role in supporting many school initiatives, however, they should have a greater role in such areas as policy formulation and review. The senior management team links effectively with the parents' association. Parent and student survey returns gathered during this evaluation indicate mostly high levels of confidence in and support for the school.

## **1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning**

The principal and deputy principal provide high quality and very effective leadership for the school with both discharging an extensive range of duties. They work well in partnership, their individual talents and abilities are complementary and their management style is open, collaborative and consultative. Both share a clear vision for school improvement based on maximising educational outcomes for students and enabling them to develop to their full potential in a holistic manner. The principal is innovative, progressive and ambitious in his approach to school development and has managed a number of positive changes and advancements since his appointment. The deputy principal is pivotal in the day-to-day management of the school, contributes strongly to the school's organisational structure and is a key support to the principal in driving the school's change agenda.

A key strength of the school is its committed and hardworking staff, who demonstrate high levels of collegiality and goodwill. Teachers have embraced leadership opportunities across a number of areas of school life. They demonstrate a high level of professionalism in these roles and have engaged in in-service and ongoing review to guide and inform their work. There is evidence of collaborative work practices and a high level of engagement with CPD, the outcomes of which are shared at whole-school level. Whole-staff training has been provided on a range of topics with some delivered by staff. Ancillary staff are also highly valued across the school community.

There was evidence of good levels of consultation and communication between senior management and staff. Regular year head meetings, care team meetings and staff meetings support this. A variety of mechanisms support good communication with home. The ongoing redevelopment of the school's website is commendable and provides potential to further enhance communication.

The middle management team is an important structure in supporting senior management, and non-post holders also make a valued contribution. However, some duties attached to the posts of responsibility are not appropriate to the current needs of the school. In order to build greater leadership capacity, a much needed review of the post structure was initiated recently and is ongoing. The review of the posts should be expedited in a collaborative and consultative fashion to address existing inequities regarding some of the duties and to ensure that they meet the school's current needs and developmental priorities. In order to optimise the effectiveness of this resource, final decisions regarding deployment of duties to post holders should be overseen by the board. Annual reporting on the performance of duties to senior management and the board should also be developed.

The year head structure is well linked to the voluntary class tutor structure and it is an important support for academic, pastoral and discipline issues. It is timely to review all aspects of the operation of year heads and class tutors, including class tutor time, in the context of the overall review of posts. In order to enhance existing good practice, possibilities should be explored for expanding and formalising academic monitoring.

Good progress has been made in planning across some areas, for example the recent SSE report and the school improvement plan (SIP) for literacy. Existing structures to support school planning involve the assistant principals leading task groups to advance various

initiatives and policy review is ongoing. It is envisaged that the future role of the school planning co-ordinator will be overseeing the tracking of planning. A tracking mechanism would support a rolling review for policy development. The further development of appropriate consultation mechanisms with stakeholders such as parents and students should aim to ensure shared ownership of policy development. The school plan has a permanent section, which includes a range of school policies, however, it is necessary to further expand on the school's operational procedures. The developmental section includes realistic developmental priorities which are set out over three years. Sets of action plans for the achievement of these priorities, as well as monitoring and review mechanisms, should be detailed in a more rigorous developmental section of the school plan.

Student leadership opportunities are facilitated effectively through such mechanisms as the student council, the mentoring system, and the Green-Schools programme. The re-established student council has the potential to increase the voice of students. The student council requires greater gender balance and the existing constitution should be updated.

The school operates an open, inclusive admissions policy and embraces the diversity of the religious backgrounds and cultures of all its students. The code of behaviour is a detailed document which would benefit from being further streamlined, to align it more closely to the school's student support structures. Positive measures such as the merit and commendation systems should be upfront in the document. Very good standards of behaviour and respectful student-teacher relationships were evident during the evaluation. Attendance, punctuality, retention and progression are closely monitored.

The school offers a very broad and balanced curriculum. The optional Transition Year programme is highly regarded by the school community and uptake is high. The construction of the timetable is good, the process is both consultative and student-focussed and it provides for some concurrent timetabling. The provision of an appropriate programme of Physical Education (PE) for Leaving Certificate students should be explored, as resources permit. A curriculum review should be undertaken at junior cycle, in line with Circular 20/2014, to address future subject provision and the current time-shortfalls in first year. A review of PLC provision is also recommended in light of resource constraints.

The highly commendable range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities provides excellent support for students' holistic development and for the celebration of their achievements. The high levels of collegiality and volunteerism demonstrated by teachers support school activities well and are laudable.

The school attaches high priority to the pastoral care of its students and its whole-school commitment to this aspect of students' development is praiseworthy. A commendable range of student supports exists, including an active care team; these supports were positively endorsed by students and parents. The core members of the care team should be facilitated to meet weekly and link with the larger care team at their monthly meeting. The mentoring programme, year heads and junior cycle tutors play essential roles. Social, personal and health education (SPHE) and relationships and sexuality education (RSE) programmes are appropriately delivered. Chaplaincy plays an integral part in the school's support system, and is very effective in focusing on the care of the whole school community. In addition, a range of retreats and liturgical celebrations is undertaken.

A whole-school approach to Guidance is evident and support is provided through a well-developed programme of personal, educational and vocational guidance. The guidance counsellor in conjunction with the deputy principal provides very good supports for students and parents regarding subject choice at various transition times. The existing guidance plan provides an overview of the guidance service. In order to reflect a whole-school approach to Guidance, this should be further expanded collaboratively to include the

very good range of procedures contained within the pastoral care documentation. Once redrafted the whole-school guidance plan should be ratified by the board of management.

There is very good planning and communication in the area of special educational needs (SEN) and a well-organised education support team is in place. Comprehensive testing of students is ongoing and good work has been done profiling students and appropriately allocating resources. There are flexible models of provision tailored for students with additional educational needs, underpinned by ongoing review and improvement. Work is ongoing with regard to individual education plans for students. The school has successfully built capacity in this area, having a number of teachers with formal qualifications. More CPD for whole staff in areas of additional needs and wellbeing is advised. Furthermore, the school's SEN policy should be further developed to reflect the school's actual procedures and practices and to be in line with the *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs Guidelines* (2007) and Circular 70/2014.

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**

Management of school facilities is very good and maintenance issues are addressed as they arise. A good range of facilities and resources is available to support teaching and learning. Environmental responsibility is promoted and the school is working towards its first Green Flag. The school's information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure has been significantly extended and substantial work has been carried out in supporting the increased integration of ICT across the curriculum and in redeveloping the school's website.

Risk assessments are carried out and the school should ensure that the regular review of its health and safety statement continues in line with current guidelines and legislation. A new extension and extensive refurbishment has been sanctioned by the Department of Education and Skills and is to commence in the near future. Any existing health and safety issues will be addressed by the provision of the new accommodation.

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

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

Programme and subject planning is ongoing with some plans more advanced than others. The majority of plans are well developed and some positive features of the best subject plans reviewed included: time-bound outline and detailed schemes of work, learning outcomes linked to methodologies, resources, assessment, supports for students with SEN, literacy and numeracy strategies, ICT, CPD, records of subject meetings and evidence of self-evaluation. Collaborative discussion should lead to plans being expanded, as necessary, in relation to the above areas. The analysis of certificate examination results should be devolved to subject departments to identify trends in attainment. Analysis of results should also include commentary and outline actions for improvement where areas for development in attainment have been identified and this should be submitted to the board on an annual basis.

From the sample of twenty-four lessons observed the quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good, in almost all the lessons, with aspects of excellent practice

noted in some. In a very small number of lessons there was scope to strike a better balance between teacher instruction and student activity. The intended learning outcomes were used in many lessons and in the best lessons there was recapitulation to consolidate students' learning. Individual planning and preparation was very good and appropriate resources supported students' learning well. In the majority of lessons ICT was integrated, however, there is scope to make greater use of ICT as a more dynamic teaching and learning tool.

Teachers set high expectations for learning and were affirming in their interactions with students. There was very good teacher-student rapport during all lessons, which led to a positive classroom atmosphere which was conducive to effective learning. Student behaviour was exemplary and students were attentive, purposeful, and positively motivated.

In the majority of lessons a very good range of effective methodologies was used to engage students in the learning including group work, pair work, project work and peer presentations. Almost all lessons had appropriate structure and pace, and some had very good links with prior learning. Differentiation was facilitated well in many classes through questioning, one-to-one assistance and group tasks. Good questioning strategies reflected the use of wait time, directed questions and a very good mix of higher and lower-order questions. Where there was scope to further incorporate more of the effective practices observed, recommendations were offered in relation to: linking to students' prior learning, questioning skills, active and differentiated strategies to support learning, opportunities to enhance literacy skills and ongoing monitoring of students' learning.

Homework was set, where appropriate, and there was evidence of ongoing monitoring of students' work in most cases. Some very good examples of oral and written feedback were noted. While whole-class correction of work was ongoing best practice was observed where teachers' written comments identified strengths and guided students towards improvement. Thus the implementation of a whole-school approach to assessment for learning (AfL), including formative feedback is recommended. Teachers should also develop strategies to promote follow-up on feedback, self-assessment and peer-assessment in line with AfL practices. A greater focus on assessment should be formalised by the further development of the existing homework policy into a whole-school policy on homework and assessment.

Students displayed good levels of knowledge, understanding and skills commensurate with their ability. In line with the school's self-evaluation improvement agenda for literacy, good implementation of agreed strategies to support students' literacy development was evident in the majority of lessons. Stimulating learning environments with good displays of subject-specific content including some student work were noted.

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

#### ***3.1 Management***

Subject departments submitted progress reports to management in relation to addressing the recommendations made in previous evaluations. Very good progress in the implementation of recommendations related to whole-school provision was noted and this is indicative of the high levels support given to all subjects.

#### ***3.2 Learning and teaching***

Very good progress has been made in implementing most of the teaching and learning recommendations. However, given the pedagogical nature of some of the

recommendations, continuing work is necessary to address them adequately into the future. Therefore increased use of AfL practices; particularly the provision of formative feedback and more consistent use of learning intentions continue to be areas for development across subjects.

Senior management with the support of the board should monitor the quality of subject planning, including the further development of schemes of work, on an ongoing basis and, where relevant, should seek progress reports on the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations.

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

Senior management and staff are energetic, motivated and ambitious for the further success of the school. A key priority for the principal is teaching and learning and the ongoing promotion of excellence and quality improvement. The school has very good capacity to engage in self-evaluation and has gained good experience through policy review, student and parent surveys, end-of-year reviews, examination results analyses and more recently the SSE report and SIP for literacy. The analysis of the data gathered is utilised well to inform the school's developmental priorities. Action planning should now be formalised and further developed to support the implementation of the school's developmental priorities and a focussed system for monitoring and review to evaluate the progress achieved should be employed. The school is very well placed to manage change and engage in continued improvement.



# **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 Ballyhaunis Community School, on behalf of all the stakeholders, wishes to acknowledge receipt of this very positive WSE-MLL report. The report affirms many of the excellent practices in existence in the school and the teaching staff and management were encouraged by many of the findings but particularly the following:

- The board is well informed, progressive and supportive of the school.
- The school is well managed, with effective leadership of staff & students.
- Student's needs are prioritised in all aspects of educational provision.
- A very good spirit of collegiality and volunteerism is established in the school.
- A range of cohesive student-support structures exist.
- Aspects of excellent teaching and learning practice were observed.
- The parent body views the school positively.
- The school has very good capacity for managing change.

### **Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

Since the initial feedback phase of the WSE-MLL process the school has already made some steps to address a number of the recommendations:

- Review of the in-school management team has further progressed through the engagement of an external facilitator in May 2015.
- Provision has been made to allow the expansion of subject and programme plans through the allocation of the 'Croke Park Hours' for the next academic year.
- Time has also been allocated for school planning to allow for a more cohesive approach to this area.
- The school has developed a smartphone App to allow for enhanced communication with parents and the wider community.