

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Ardgillan Community College  
Balbriggan, County Dublin  
Roll No: 76129H**

**Date of inspection: 20 January 2016**



**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 2016 in Ardgillan Community College. 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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

### ***Introduction***

Ardgillan Community College is a multi-denominational and co-educational post-primary school under the patronage of Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board (ETB). The college opened in September 2009 and serves the community of Balbriggan and surrounding area. The school provides the Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate as well as an optional Transition Year programme and is attended by 710 students.

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

### ***Key Findings***

- The school management, in association with the ETB, is strongly committed to school improvement.
- The principal and deputy principal adopt a style of leadership that incorporates the core values of teamwork, respect and pursuit of excellence.
- Distributed leadership is considered a critical success factor by school management and deliberate efforts are made to build leadership capacity within the staff.
- The work of subject teams has impacted positively on teaching and learning, evidenced by enhanced collaborative planning, the implementation of common programmes of work and the sharing of resources; however, some of the subject plans are in need of further development.
- The staff works in a very committed and highly motivated manner.
- The quality of teaching and learning, as observed, mainly ranged from good to excellent with some areas for development.
- Students' behaviour in classrooms and on corridors was exemplary.
- Student leadership is cultivated to good effect through the activities of the student council, prefects and peer mentoring programme.

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

- While very good structures are in place to support students' wellbeing, there is a need for an overarching formal timetabled meeting to oversee the range of care that is needed in this growing school.
- Best practices in differentiation, assessment for learning and collaborative methodologies should be targeted at whole-school level and shared among the teaching staff with a focus on the areas of development noted in this report.
- There is scope to review the peer observation practice in order to place greater focus on the observation of key areas of teaching and learning.

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

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

The recently appointed board of management has received training from Dublin Dun Laoghaire ETB. At the time of the evaluation, one formal meeting of the new board had taken place. As appropriate, a report on Child Protection and Anti-bullying was on the first meeting's agenda and will be on the agenda for all board meetings.

The board, guided by the ETB, is developing its role in the enhancement of the quality of educational provision in the school. A set of development priorities has been identified by the school and is being addressed.

The board has adopted all mandatory policies and has a structure in place for their regular review. The responses to teacher questionnaires indicated that many were aware of the leadership and management role of the Board of Management. The Board is in the process of establishing formal practices for dissemination of relevant information from board meetings to the school community. This is to be encouraged.

There are good links in place between the board and the senior management team. The board is well informed of the initiatives underway in the school, particularly with regard to school self-evaluation (SSE). Going forward, the board might engage in a reflective review of its own work in line with the school's SSE practice.

The principal and deputy principal adopt a partnership approach to school leadership and communicate effectively as a team and with the school community. Their style of leadership fosters teamwork, respect and pursuit of excellence. These three areas have been agreed by the staff as core principles to guide the operation of the school.

During the evaluation, the principal and deputy principal maintained a visible presence on the corridors; they reported that this is important in supporting the smooth operation of the school. All teachers surveyed believe that the core values of the school are being implemented well in the day-to-day life of the school. The senior management team believes in leading by example and has high expectations of both students and staff. The team places a high priority on progressing teaching and learning in the school.

Distributed leadership is evident. Appropriate leadership roles have been devolved to middle-management level. Following a review of the needs of the school, all post-holders have been assigned significant responsibilities comprising one main role and a number of subsidiary roles. The senior management team makes deliberate efforts to build leadership capacity among all staff and areas of leadership extend beyond the formal post of responsibility structure.

The roles of the year head and tutor are pivotal to the smooth running of the school. The year head is involved in monitoring students in both a pastoral and disciplinary capacity. The role of class tutor is both pastoral and administrative in nature. The school has developed very good systems and procedures to monitor and reward good attendance and behaviour. Examples include the secret student and merit system where class groups are rewarded for positive actions of note. These examples reflect the core values of the school motto, *Mol an Óige*, and are fundamental to the effective management of students in the school.

Student leadership is highly encouraged. A democratically elected student council is in place and is well supported by liaison teachers. The student council has been consulted on

some school policies and involved in a number of very positive initiatives including working with the parents' association. There is a head boy and girl, a prefect system and first-year students are mentored by Transition Year (TY) students. Responses to questionnaires indicate the majority of students are proud to be in the school but that they would like more say in how things are done in the school.

In discussion, the parents' association representatives were appreciative of the commitment of staff and of the leadership provided by the senior management team. Almost all parents who returned a survey agreed that the school is well run. The parents' association has been actively involved in fundraising and have also led a very successful careers' fair for senior students.

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

The senior management team demonstrates commitment to excellence and quality improvement. The school places particular value on maintaining a programme of continuing professional development (CPD) to support improvement in teaching and learning. Most recent inputs have focused on training for staff in the use of iPads. Staff are provided opportunities to initiate, develop and lead projects.

The principal and deputy principal promote a reflective approach across subject departments through the provision of templates for subject department meetings with a structured agenda to include items such as SSE, peer observation and reflection on student achievement in the certificate examinations.

The senior management team promotes an open-door policy. In responses to staff questionnaires, all staff surveyed agreed that the school is well run and almost all agreed that there is a good atmosphere in the school. Committees have been set up to represent the three strands undertaken by the school as part of SSE. These areas benefit from a whole-school focus and form part of the agenda for staff and subject department meetings.

Many teachers work in a highly motivated and dedicated manner. All teachers surveyed agreed that the subject department structure supports teaching and learning effectively. The subject coordinator is responsible for administration within the subject department and also oversees the SSE targets and collates records of peer observations. This involvement demonstrates the high level of commitment of staff to providing quality teaching and learning.

The school timetable is broad and balanced and teaching staff are deployed appropriately. Designated hours are used for their intended purposes. The school provides a very good range of subjects and deliberate efforts are made to meet the needs of the student cohort. For example, Religion and Applied Maths have been added to the curriculum at the request of students and their parents. The optional TY is co-ordinated effectively by a post-holder and the programme provides a good range of subjects and modules.

The admissions policy reflects the characteristic spirit of the school. The College accepts all students from its catchment area, regardless of ability or special educational needs. Very good systems are in place for tracking attendance and include tutor roll call and the use of appropriate software.

The code of behaviour encourages and rewards positive behaviour. Students, in discussion with the inspection team, reported it to be fair and reasonable. In responses to questionnaires, almost all parents agreed that discipline is good in the school. It was observed that the behaviour of students in classrooms, on corridors and outside the school during the evaluation was exemplary.

Subject department plans were generally of a very good quality and there is a strong focus on the use of learning intentions for students. SSE is evident in subject department planning with high focus on the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills. The majority of subject department plans contained an in-depth analysis of achievement in the Certificate Examinations, which informs target setting and action planning for the subject. This analysis and formal review are highly commended and should be extended across all subject department plans.

The dedication of staff to the provision of a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities is most praiseworthy. These activities are of a sporting, artistic, cultural and social nature and take place at lunch times and after school.

The special educational needs (SEN) department is effectively coordinated by an appropriately qualified teacher. The SEN planning folder provides details of the team of teachers involved, the students involved and their specific learning need. Individual education plans (IEPs) are available for students assessed as having SEN. The school has recently opened a *Suaimhneas Centre* which caters currently for students with a range of learning needs. The school also benefits from the services of a number of special needs assistants (SNAs) whose work is overseen by the SEN department and co-ordinated by a lead SNA.

The student-care programme is based on respect, tolerance and understanding and it is closely linked to the school's mission statement. It includes the services of a guidance counsellor. Students in senior cycle are provided with careers classes and students can be referred for counselling to the guidance counsellor. Very good supports are provided to students at times of transition into first year and into senior cycle and the guidance counsellor is also available to provide advice to parents where necessary. While very good structures are in place to support students' wellbeing, there is a need for an overarching formal timetabled meeting to coordinate the different care that is needed in a growing school.

Supports for students are also provided through SPHE and RSE classes, a first-year induction programme, homework club and tutor time. Currently, the student council is exploring the demand for and feasibility of a breakfast club.

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 are very good facilities and the school infrastructure is of a high standard. All areas are well maintained and great credit is due to the ancillary staff. There is a good sense of order and respect, as observed in the well-organised movement of large numbers of students on corridors and stairways. All classrooms are well resourced with good information communication technology (ICT) facilities. Environmental awareness is promoted and the recently established green schools committee contributes to this.

Student facilities are good; there is a canteen and lunch area for students with an adjacent classroom used as a sixth-form common room. At the time of the evaluation, the library was being developed and a committee was established to progress this very good initiative.

## 1. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

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

The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to excellent in the majority of lessons. The quality of teaching and learning in a minority of lessons was found to be fair with scope for development. Where quality was best, lessons were meticulously planned. All materials to be used were ready in advance and the lessons had a clear structure or sequence of activities based on learning intentions shared with the class.

Classroom management was very effective. There was a very good rapport between teachers and students and interactions were respectful.

There are good-quality ICT resources in all classrooms. Best practice in the use of ICT was evident where electronic presentations displayed an appropriate volume of information. One particularly good example was where a presentation consisted of questions which guided the class discussion. Other examples of very good practice was where prompt questions were displayed on the board or worksheet for students to complete when watching a video clip so that the students had to watch and listen closely in order to answer the questions.

A number of very good *assessment for learning* techniques were observed. In lessons where excellent practice was evident, there was a very clear focus on developing students' ability to study and learn by themselves using the textbook and notes as a resource. Students made their own summary notes and this encouraged a high level of engagement with the material. During some lessons, the questions asked and the way the responses were handled encouraged the students to think deeply about what they were learning; this exemplified reflective, well-considered guidance from teachers. However, there were lessons where the style of questioning used often required only very brief answers from students and, in some instances the teachers tended to finish or expand on the answer themselves. There is scope for teachers to plan carefully for questioning sessions looking at the balance between global and directed questions and closed versus open questions. Some teachers should also be mindful of the wait-time provided to students. There was good use of the traffic-light system and mini white-boards, which are found in the students' journals.

Formative assessment was most commonly seen in the verbal interactions during lessons where students were provided with good directional feedback on their work or responses to questions. A number of teachers used the newly introduced literacy code and provided written feedback for students. Examples of formative feedback on the exam coversheet were observed.

Formative assessment is the most recent SSE initiative undertaken by the school; it is in the process of being embedded and should become integral to the classroom experience of students. Some very good examples of formative review were observed. These included students watching a video of their activity followed by a discussion on how it could be improved. In another lesson, students were asked to review their peers' work.

There were some very good examples of differentiated methodologies observed in lessons. One excellent example was where work was presented in terms of *must do*, *should do*, and *could do* while in another lesson, there were more challenging extension questions for the more able students. In one practical lesson, there was an alternative version of the task for the students with greater learning needs. However, there were also instances where the lesson provided the same content and the same homework for all students. Teachers should

discuss and share good practices in this area with the possibility of targeting this as an area for action in peer observation.

Very good active learning and examples of students learning by doing were observed in some practical classes; therein, students practiced a skill they were learning in a variety of ways. In another lesson, students attempted many versions of the problem themselves. Very good collaborative learning occurred where students worked in pairs or small groups; it was observed that this was most effective where the classroom was organised to facilitate this practice.

In some language lessons, students were encouraged to use the target language and used ICT presentations, pictures, games, mini-whiteboards and dramatisation to promote student engagement with the language. However, there were lessons where student input was limited to a few phrases and teachers did most of the talking.

The creation of a print-rich environment both in the classrooms and corridors was noteworthy. Keywords were displayed in all classrooms. Teachers explained the word of the day and in language lessons translated it into the target language. In some lessons, teachers used mnemonics skilfully to help students learn and recall.

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

### ***3.1 Management***

School management has addressed all recommendations made in previous inspections and all have been implemented.

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

Very good progress has been made in addressing the recommendations made regarding teaching and learning. The school has established good practices for dissemination of feedback from subject inspections and incidental inspections to all staff.

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

The school has actively engaged with school self-evaluation and is at an advanced stage in the process. Specific improvement targets are in place for all three strands of the school self-evaluation (SSE) process based on robust baseline data.

The SSE strategies are well underway within the areas of literacy and numeracy and are being implemented in the majority of lessons. The school is addressing *assessment for learning* as their third area of focus and has planned some very good strategies in the areas of formative feedback and student review. The full benefits to students will be realised when the strategies have had the opportunity to embed.

The practice of peer observation by teachers has been ongoing for a number of years and all parties met at the time of the evaluation endorsed it as being very beneficial. Peer observation is used as one of the methods of fostering and monitoring SSE actions in the classroom. Given the developed stage of SSE in the school, it is now an opportune time to

review the peer observation practice in terms of number of observations, as well as the template for observations, with a view to focusing on a specific area within teaching and learning or for a portion of a lesson where a specific skill is being demonstrated.

The school community displays openness, willingness and commitment to the SSE process and is well positioned to implement, monitor and review the success of the areas identified for targeted improvement. The teachers demonstrate great commitment to optimising the learning experience for students. Parents' and students' responses to questionnaires indicate that there is a need to devise further strategies to incorporate the views of the wider student and parent body.

## **Appendix**

### **School response to the report**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

**Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management of Ardgillan College accept in full the inspection report on Management, Leadership and Learning which took place in the college in January 2016.

The Board is delighted that the inspection affirms that management is strongly committed to school improvement and that staff at the college are very committed and highly motivated.

The Board is also very pleased that the report praises the exemplary behaviour of the students and recognises that the core values of teamwork, respect and the pursuit of excellence are at the heart of the leadership of the college.

**Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection**

The Board acknowledges and accepts the recommendations made in the inspection report and is committed to implementing them.