

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Margaret Aylward Community College
Whitehall, Dublin 9
Roll number: 70321P**

Date of inspection: 16 November 2011



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in October 2011 in Margaret Aylward 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

Margaret Aylward Community College is a small community college for girls under the management of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (CDVEC). It participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department of Education and Skills action plan for educational inclusion. The school attracts students mainly from the Ballymun area and is in competition with a number of schools locally. Enrolment is stable at 260 students, including many newcomer and special educational needs students.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board of management, the parents' association and the CDVEC provide good support for the work of the school.
- The principal and deputy principal form a very effective senior management team.
- The middle management team of assistant principals (APs) and special duties teachers (SDTs) provides very good support in the running of the school.
- The quality of school development planning and subject department planning is very good.
- The school is very inclusive and has been awarded the yellow flag for diversity.
- High quality learning support is provided for students with special educational needs.
- There are excellent attendance and retention strategies in place.
- The quality of care provided for students is excellent.
- The school ethos is based on respect and this is reflected in the school rules which are student-centred and fair.
- The student council is active and has a strong voice in the school.
- The quality of teaching and learning in all twenty lessons observed was consistently good and in many cases, very good.
- The majority of recommendations made in previous evaluations have been implemented.
- The school has very good capacity for school self-evaluation and improvement.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- To consolidate their vision for the school, the principal and deputy principal should make time for reflection.

- The school should develop a critical incident policy, a policy covering outside speakers, and a substance use policy.
- An audit of school needs should be completed and a review of the posts of responsibility should be carried out.
- The practice of streaming junior-cycle students should be reviewed in favour of a more mixed-ability system.
- The school should develop a whole-school plan for Guidance.
- Subject department planning should include more collaboration.
- The expertise available from participation in ‘Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century (TL21)’ and ‘Instructional Leadership’ should be used to increase student activity in lessons and to optimise group work.
- All student written work should be regularly monitored and comments advising students on how they can improve the quality of their work should be included.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

CDVEC supports the board of management of the school. An Education Officer is a member of the board and CDVEC plays a strong role in policy making and DEIS planning in the school. In addition, the cluster groups organised by CDVEC provide a valuable forum for the principal to collaborate with the principals of other schools in the scheme on common issues such as policy making, planning and improving teaching and learning.

The board of management is supportive of the work of the school. The members play a role in policy making and decision making and have an awareness of their statutory obligations. The board is very well informed by the detailed principal’s and teachers’ reports provided at each board meeting. Although there is good communication between the board and the wider school community, it is recommended that, at the conclusion of each meeting, the board agree the decisions to be reported back to each nominating body.

The Parents’ Association (PA) meets weekly and in addition to making a valuable contribution to policy making, the PA participates in many school events. The PA produces a very good newsletter, ‘Parents Connect’, which is distributed to the full parent cohort.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Primary Circular 0061/2006 (or Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006). School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools as a matter of priority.

The school’s priorities for development

The board of management has identified the maintenance of student numbers and the introduction of initiatives to support teaching and learning as priorities for development. Maintaining the school facilities, providing learning resources, and encouraging continuing professional development (CPD) among teachers are also priorities for the board. These were established in response to school needs and good progress has been made in each area to date.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The principal and deputy principal form a very effective senior management team who provide very good leadership for teaching and learning in the school. Teacher CPD is encouraged and facilitated. The principal is currently participating, along with a number of teachers, in training for 'TL21': this is an accredited course promoting active learning in the classroom. The deputy principal and other members of the teaching staff are training in 'Instructional Leadership', also encouraging positive classroom experiences for learners. This provides evidence of the hands-on approach of school management in leading teaching and learning.

The principal and deputy principal see their role in supporting students and teachers as a key priority. They have a very good awareness of the wide variety of student needs and provide for these with compassion and sensitivity. Both members of the senior management team are highly visible on the corridors, supporting good student behaviour. There are very good lines of communication between the school management, parents, teachers and students. All of this makes a significant contribution to the maintenance of the warm and caring atmosphere that characterises the school.

Promoting good classroom practice and ensuring that each student is encouraged to reach her potential is a common vision strongly held by the principal and deputy principal. However, it is recommended that they make time for reflection, for the purpose of consolidating their vision for the school and deciding on priorities in the form of long, medium and short term goals that will bring the school closer to the achievement of its objectives.

The middle management team of assistant principals (APs) and special duties teachers (SDTs) provides very good support to senior management in the running of the school. There is very good distribution of leadership with the middle management team having the autonomy to carry out its duties with support from the principal and deputy principal when necessary. There are no year heads in the school which means that class tutors play a strong leadership role. This role includes meeting the pastoral and discipline needs of their students. The duties attached to posts of responsibility have not been the subject of a formal review; therefore, an audit of school needs should be completed by senior management and a review of duties should be carried out in light of this audit.

The school plan comprises policy documents and a DEIS plan. There is a need to review some of the policies, specifically the health and safety policy and the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy. Dates of ratification and review should be included on all policies. In addition, the school should develop a critical incident policy, a policy covering outside speakers, and a substance use policy. Work has begun on creating a policy on practice in relation to trips out of school.

The school has made very good progress in target setting, strategic planning and evaluation in most areas covered by DEIS. To progress this work the school should ensure that the targets set are more specific and that the area of examination attainment be included. In addition, all interventions should be subject to systematic data-based evaluation: this is to ensure that the school can quantify the success of the many interventions it provides for students.

Leadership of students

The school is very inclusive and has been awarded the yellow flag for diversity. There are good structures in place to support students at transition points, including an induction

programme for first-year students and a mentoring programme. Almost all parents agreed with the questionnaire statement that their child was made welcome when she first enrolled in the school.

Classes are streamed, for the junior cycle, on the basis of test results from a range of incoming assessments and information from feeder primary schools. This practice should be reviewed and consideration should be given to a more mixed-ability system.

Optional subject choice is limited by the size of the school and the availability of resources and it varies from year to year. All junior cycle students follow the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and benefit from the range of interventions provided. Incoming fifth year students opting for the established Leaving Certificate choose their subjects from an open menu based on the available staffing resources. The subjects that best match student preference are then chosen. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme is highly valued and successful within the school and plays a very important role in student retention.

Students have access to Guidance through timetabled lessons in senior cycle. Individual counselling is also provided. The school benefits from the services of a psychologist provided by the CDVEC for a half day per week. The school should develop a whole-school Guidance plan.

High quality learning support is provided for students with special educational needs. The main modes of delivery are team teaching and the creation of small class groups. There is very good collaboration between mainstream teachers and learning support teachers. Students are supported on a one-to-one basis where necessary. In a small number of these cases, support in the same subject is provided by more than one teacher. In order to ensure that continuity is maintained for students it is best to avoid this situation. Therefore there should be a more coordinated approach to responding to the needs of individual students.

There are excellent attendance and retention strategies in place. The school has prioritised improving attendance this year and has introduced a reward system. Breakfast and lunch are provided and there is a homework club to support students. Attendance is very well monitored and tutors ring home when students are absent. The National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) officer plays an important role in ensuring that students at risk come to school. The Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator maintains very good links with parents. All of the above strategies contribute significantly to the good levels of attendance in the school. Student retention is very good in the school.

The quality of care provided for students is excellent. The school's care system is well supported by the care team, tutors, class teachers and special needs assistants. The atmosphere in the school is warm and respectful and there is a strong sense of community. Very good use is made of opportunities to strengthen the community spirit of the school. Events such as the Christmas carol service and the annual school concert are examples. In addition, various award ceremonies celebrating student achievement, good attendance and active participation in school are held each year.

The relationships among the students and between them and the teachers are excellent. Evidence of this was observed on many occasions during the evaluation. Students' questionnaire responses indicate that almost all students feel that they get on well with other students in the school.

The school rules are positively framed in line with NEWB guidelines and are effective in managing students. School documentation indicates that the 'Cantor Method', described as a very structured system of rewards and sanctions, is in place. There was no evidence of the

'Cantor Method' in operation in the school. Therefore it is recommended that the school rules alone be maintained as the code of behaviour.

The school ethos is based on respect and this is reflected in the implementation of the school rules which are student-centred and fair. There is a very clear ladder of referral. The questionnaire responses indicate that almost all students understand the school rules. While students are given sanctions for misbehaviour there is a strong emphasis on understanding the reasons for poor behaviour and on students taking personal responsibility. Restorative justice practices are recommended as a formal structure to support student management.

The student council is active and has a strong voice in the school. The majority of students agreed with the questionnaire statement that they have a say in how to make the school a better place.

2.2 Management of facilities

The physical facilities and access to resources to support teaching and learning are very well managed. ICT resources have been recently provided in many classrooms. The book rental scheme is very successful. The school is currently developing its library facilities. Teachers are classroom-based and this has facilitated the creation of stimulating learning environments for students.

The school's Health and Safety policy should be reviewed in light of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act of 2005. In addition, regular risk assessments should be carried out.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning in all twenty lessons observed was consistently good and in many cases, very good. Preparation for teaching was of a high standard, with attractive and relevant resources available. Learning was well differentiated to suit the variety of ability levels present. There was very good use of questioning to encourage students to explore concepts and to think for themselves. A large majority of students indicated in the questionnaire responses that teachers explain things clearly for them in their classes.

In most lessons students were actively engaged as learners. However in a small number of lessons there was scope to increase the level of student activity. Group work was a feature of a number of lessons. Some of the group work observed would have benefited from a more structured approach. It is recommended that the expertise available from participation in 'TL21' and 'Instructional Leadership' approaches to active learning be used to increase student activity in lessons and to optimise group work.

The school is working on introducing a whole-school approach to supporting literacy and various interventions have been chosen. Most teachers used keyword charts, wrote keywords on the board and provided easy-to-read handouts. Although these measures provided good support for learners there was scope for their more extensive use and the inclusion of additional strategies to support literacy across the school. In some lessons definitions and keywords were called out for students to write in their copybooks, a task that proved quite difficult for some students: this should be avoided. Additional strategies such as the use of word banks to support writing and the use of images to explain keywords should be included in lessons.

The quality of subject planning is very good. Almost all programmes of work set out content, on a common template, outlining learning objectives, methodologies, resources and modes of assessment. This very good practice should be extended to the few remaining subjects. Consideration should also be given to making the methodologies and resources sections more specific. Some planning folders contain the relevant policies for the subject; these should be included in all subject folders. Overall, subject department planning would benefit from more collaboration as a way of ensuring that students experience the full benefits of 'TL21', 'Instructional Leadership', the school's literacy and numeracy plan, and ICT in the classroom. In addition, teachers should collaborate on the provision of common tests for assessing students.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

The majority of whole-school provision recommendations made in previous evaluations have been implemented. Examples include the introduction of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in the senior cycle, the provision of the criteria for participation in TY to prospective applicants and the provision of English on each day of the week. This is evidence of senior management's openness to evaluation.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Many of the recommendations in relation to teaching and learning have been implemented. Most teachers shared the learning objectives with the students at the start of lessons and provided a recap on learning as lessons closed which addressed the recommendation in this area made in a number of previous evaluations. There is still scope to extend this strategy to all lessons.

An extension of the use of active methodologies was recommended in previous evaluations. The school's commitment to 'TL21' and 'Instructional Leadership' and the high level of student engagement and participation noted in the current evaluation provide strong evidence that this recommendation is being implemented.

The integration of ICT in lessons was previously recommended; this should now be prioritised for attention. Training in the use of ICT is currently being planned. It is suggested that a variety of supports be put in place to encourage teachers to use ICT. The range of supports should include subject department collaboration, peer mentoring and possibly the involvement of ICT-literate TY students.

Assessment for Learning (AfL) was recommended in the TY evaluation. There is still scope for some improvement in this area across the school. Therefore all student work should be regularly monitored and comments advising students on how they can improve the quality of their work should be included.

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

The school has very good capacity for self-evaluation and improvement. Over many years the school has adapted very well to meet students' needs in a constantly changing and often

challenging environment. The school has engaged very well in evaluation as part of the DEIS planning process. The principal and deputy principal are open to new ideas and are encouraging of initiatives to improve provision for students. Examples include, the 'Working Together' booklet introduced to encourage first year parents to become more involved in their daughter's education and participation in a wide variety of courses of study or research. It is evident that the school community places a priority on high quality outcomes for students and is committed to adapting to ensure that each student reaches her potential.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

We are very pleased that the inspectors caught the spirit of our school e.g. the comments on the quality of care to the students and the inclusive nature of the school. Teachers are also happy to see the recognition of the school adapting and changing in response to a 'challenging environment'.

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

- We have started on a policy covering outside speakers.
- We will have an increased no. of mixed ability groupings in the school year 2012-13.
- Other recommendations are being looked at before the end of this school year.