An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ballinteer Community School
Ballinteer, Dublin 16
Roll number: 91305L

Date of inspection: 11 February 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 February 2016 in Ballinteer 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

Ballinteer Community School was built on a green field site in 1974 under the trusteeship of the Brigidine Sisters, the Carmelite Fathers and the then County Dublin Vocational Education Committee. A new building was provided on the same site in 2008. The school is co-educational and multi-denominational and participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative. Ballinteer Community School provides education for the community in Ballinteer but also attracts students from a much wider catchment area. The school has a current enrolment of 423 students and provides the following programmes: the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate. An Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) unit is in place since 2013. The school is still growing and expects to reach projected enrolments of 500 students over the next four to five years.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is properly constituted, and its members are highly committed to the school and provide important direction and support for the senior management team.
- The roles of the senior management team are clearly defined and agreed and the team works extremely effectively to manage and lead the school community.
- Senior management leads by example and has effected many positive changes and initiatives in the school in recent years.
- The school has a range of initiatives and programmes in place to promote student welfare, supported by an effective care team.
- Arrangements for students with special educational needs are very well organised and planned.
- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from very good in the majority of lessons to good with some scope for development in a small number of lessons.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should consider ways in which it could improve communication mechanisms with parents and staff.

- The schedule of posts should be reviewed to ensure consistency and to ensure that the needs of the school are being appropriately met.
- The possibility of taster subjects being introduced for a short period in first year should be considered.
- DEIS planning needs some further development in relation to the setting and tracking of realistic and attainable targets.
- It is recommended that all teachers implement differentiation strategies in lessons to maximise the learning of all students.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is properly constituted and meets regularly. Board members have availed of training and are aware of the board's legislative and financial responsibilities. Board members demonstrated a commendable commitment to the school and many are long-serving members. The board is well-informed about the daily running of the school and is aware of national and school-based educational initiatives such as school self-evaluation (SSE), the national literacy and numeracy strategy, the Trinity Access Programme (TAP) and the College for Every Student (CFES) initiative. Board members serve on teacher appointment panels in the school and are committed to employing teachers who will best serve the needs of all the students.

As the school is under the joint trusteeship of three separate trustee bodies, certain administrative duties can take considerable amounts of time. The board has commendably initiated formal engagement with all the trustees in recent times in order to simplify and improve organisational and appointment procedures such as ratifying teacher appointments. The board reviews and ratifies policies and all policies required by legislation are in place. The board is very committed to the principles of a community school and Ballinteer Community School is a very inclusive school. The board is to be highly commended for the establishment of an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) unit in the school in 2013. The promotion of the school in the community and the local media by senior management is supported and encouraged by the board. The board could give some additional attention to strategic planning for the long term future of the school.

The principal gives a comprehensive oral report to the board at every meeting. Issues of concern and areas for development, as identified by senior management, are discussed and progressed. The board provides very effective support to senior management. Currently, the following areas have been prioritised by the board following consultation with senior management and extensive discussion at board level: SSE, monitoring homework following the provision of a new homework policy in 2015, improving teaching and learning, introduction of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies, increasing uptake of higher levels in state examinations and increasing student enrolment.

The board has a good relationship with the parents' committee and the principal meets regularly with the chairperson of the committee to ensure ongoing effective communication. However, the board should explore ways in which it can communicate more effectively with the wider parent body and also with the teaching staff. Parents interviewed during the evaluation and parental questionnaires administered at the same time expressed the view that overall parents were satisfied that the school is well run and were happy with the education their children were receiving.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The senior management team, comprising the principal and deputy principal work very effectively as a team to lead and manage the school community. The team has clearly defined roles and meets regularly to ensure efficient and effective communication. Senior management leads by example and has effected many positive changes in the school in recent years. Both members of the team have a strong motivating presence on school corridors which has led to marked improvements in student wellbeing and engagement.

The principal has prioritised good student management structures and student care and has extremely effective support from the deputy principal in relation to progressing these priorities. Senior management, supported by the board of management, now intends to focus on promoting standards of excellence in teaching and learning.

Senior management is committed to effective in-school planning. Considerable time and effort has been spent on DEIS planning and SSE and this work is commended. However, DEIS planning in the context of SSE needs some further attention in relation to the setting and tracking of realistic and attainable targets. The progression of the targets should be clearly visible in the planning documentation and should be shared with staff annually so that improvements in uptake of higher levels and student attainment are clearly visible and can be celebrated.

Subject planning has been progressed considerably over recent years and there was commendable evidence of collaborative subject planning during the evaluation. While the quality of subject planning was good overall, some subject plans need further development in terms of the following: additional information on methodologies, use of a range of teaching resources including information and communications technology (ICT), learning intentions and methods of assessment including planning for differentiation. The use of a common template could incorporate the very good practice observed in some subjects where the plans were devised in terms of time-bound learning intentions, incorporating teaching methodologies, links to resources and formative assessment strategies. Schemes of work should be used as working documents, to inform yearly planning and provide guidance on best practice.

Staff members are supported by senior management and are given opportunities to engage in continuing professional development (CPD) and to attend relevant CPD events. The school is involved in the National Induction Programme for Teachers. There is a school-based handbook for new teachers which is very good practice. This handbook could usefully include some direction for new teachers on best practice in relation to a range of questions around teaching and learning.

The pastoral care and disciplinary support structure for students are organised through a system of class tutors for each class group and an overall dean for each year group. The school currently has four assistant principal posts and five special duties posts. Some of the assistant principals and special duty post holders take on the role of dean to a year group. Others are responsible for a range of organisational and administrative duties. Some posts are more demanding than others in terms of time commitment. A review of the schedule of posts would be timely to ensure consistency and that all duties are commensurate with the level of responsibility involved. Senior management meets with post holders on a monthly basis which is good practice.

Ballinteer Community School has a broad curriculum and provides a range of programmes to suit a diverse cohort of students. The JCSP is focussed on certain targeted students in junior cycle and supports these students very well. Initiatives being run in the school to improve student progression to third level include TAP and CFES. CFES includes a series of mentoring programmes to motivate and encourage students to think critically about their

life choices for the future. The guidance counsellor and principal are committed to increasing the number of students in TY with a view to improving educational outcomes and progression to third level. Many students and parents were complimentary about the opportunities presented during the optional TY programme, while others identified scope for improvement. The planned review of the programme should be progressed in order to ensure that a varied and innovative experience is available which should lead to increased uptake.

Good links exist with feeder schools. The guidance counsellor and special educational needs co-ordinator visit primary schools annually to ensure effective transfer of information. Appropriate emphasis is placed on a smooth transition to post-primary school for first-year students and a mentoring system for first-year students is in place. During the evaluation, both parents and students expressed a wish to see a system of taster subjects for first-year students. It is recommended that the school look at the possibility of providing this choice for students as it could be ultimately beneficial to students in facilitating correct subject choice. This recommendation had been also made in a previous subject inspection.

Assemblies have been introduced for year groups and have proved very beneficial in providing an important support and communicative channel for students and teachers. A very effective care team, including members of senior management, is in place which meets weekly and seeks to identify and support students experiencing difficulties. There are a number of programmes and initiatives in place to support students including the School Completion Programme (SCP), a breakfast club and a homework club, targeted interventions for students participating in the JCSP and the support of the home school community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator. Some effective work has been led by the deputy principal around suspension intervention leading to a marked decrease in the number of suspensions and this is commended.

All classes are timetabled for Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) in junior cycle. SPHE is also provided in fifth year which is excellent practice, as well as the appropriate provision for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). The school is involved in the health promoting school initiative which has included introducing healthier food in the canteen.

There is a student council which is democratically elected and which meets regularly. Students interviewed during the evaluation were firmly of the view that they were well looked after in the school and that teachers were available to help and advise them with their school work. While students have the opportunity to meet with senior management about issues which come to the attention of the council, questionnaires administered during the evaluation showed that many students in the school stated that their voice is not being heard. The school should work to develop a meaningful role for the council and to strengthen the student voice.

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.*

1.2 Management of facilities

The new school building has "state of the art" facilities for students and teachers with adequate room for school enrolment to grow in the coming years. There is a bright welcoming atmosphere in the building. The parents' association has a notice board just inside the main door which is used to communicate with students and parents. There has

been significant investment in ICT facilities which are utilised to very good effect in some classrooms. There is some scope for development in the use of technology in others.

Sports facilities are very good and there is a range of extra-curricular sporting activities available to students. However, some parents and students interviewed during the evaluation were of the opinion that these facilities and other facilities in the locality could be more extensively used for the benefit of the students. Students also expressed a wish to have more activities available during lunchtime. Senior management should liaise with the students' council and with the parents' association in order to discuss appropriate options.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty-three lessons were observed during the course of the evaluation. The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the majority of lessons, good practice was noted in some lessons and there was scope for development with regard to active learning in a few lessons.

Individual preparation by teachers was very good in the majority of lessons. Active learning was a key element of most lessons with many good examples of pair and group work. In these lessons, a variety of methodologies was used to support learning and to ensure a good pace throughout. As a result, students were actively engaged in learning. A few lessons were primarily teacher-led with little opportunity for student engagement; it is recommended that in these instances teachers focus on planning for active learning.

Learning intentions were shared with students in almost all lessons and were reviewed again at the end of some lessons. Some other good assessment for learning (AfL) strategies were observed in lessons, but these could be further developed. Overall, teachers explained new concepts and topics well and checked for understanding while circulating in class. There were good links to prior learning in many lessons and in some cases links were explored between curriculum content and students' lives. These strategies could be further exploited to interest all students in subject content. In general, students were engaged in learning and there was a good atmosphere in lessons. Formative comment marking was used to very good effect in some of the copybooks and these AfL marking strategies should be used by all teachers.

Differentiation strategies were used to good effect in a very small number of lessons. In these lessons, the more able students were facilitated and appropriately challenged while others were supported to fully engage with the curriculum content. It is recommended that these strategies be shared and further developed at whole school level and that all teachers implement differentiation strategies in lessons to maximise the learning of all students.

The homework journal was used very effectively, particularly at junior cycle. Other elements of the school homework policy should be implemented in a more uniform manner. ICT was used to support learning in the majority of lessons. In some lessons there was considerable scope for development with regard to the use of ICT. The whiteboard and a visualiser were used to very good effect in some lessons observed.

There was some excellent use of the target language by teachers in the language lessons observed. However, in other lessons there was an over-reliance on translation at times. It is recommended that translation be avoided where possible and that other strategies to ensure student comprehension of the subject matter be used. In almost all language lessons, there was scope for development in relation to student use of the target language with each other and with the teacher. Teachers should ensure that students are continually encouraged to

make use of the target language and should be supported in doing so by strategies such as pair work, games and role play.

Classroom management was very good overall as was student behaviour. In some instances, classroom layout was conducive to collaborative learning and this is commended. There were good print-rich displays of information and student work in many classrooms but these could be more effectively exploited during lessons to support literacy and numeracy development. There was good focus on keywords and on vocabulary development in some lessons but it was unclear as to whether this focus was across all classes.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Subject inspections have taken place in the following areas over the past five years: Business Studies, English, SPHE, and Science. Management has made good progress with most of the recommendations and this is commended. Timetabling issues for first-year English have been resolved. All teachers have received in-service in SPHE. The RSE policy has been updated and ratified by the board of management. A policy on visiting speakers has been devised and an SPHE co-ordinator has been appointed. Science has been introduced for all junior cycle students including students involved in the JCSP. A portion of marks from in-house school examinations is allocated for the completion and accurate recording of practical examinations.

3.2 Learning and teaching

As already stated significant work has been carried out in many subject departments on developing and updating curricular plans and schemes of work. This is commended, although there is still scope for development in some areas. Analysis of state examination results are undertaken by all departments which is good practice and this analysis was observed in some subject folders. It is recommended however, that this analysis be accompanied in all subject folders, by action plans and targets in line with overall DEIS planning and SSE goals. There have been significant improvements in the use of ICT in teaching and learning but this should be further developed in some lessons

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

SSE is a priority for the board of management and for senior management. Staff members have spent considerable time discussing SSE and DEIS planning. Significant amounts of documentation exists in relation to information gathering and analysis in recent years. What is lacking is specific targets and the tracking of those targets within specific time frames. It is recommended that this be addressed so that the specific targets and their attainment can be shared with all relevant stakeholders.

Following in-school CPD on areas such as the use of AfL strategies in teaching and learning, senior management has set up staff subcommittees to look at trialling some aspects of these. This is commended. Overall, staff members are committed to the school and to striving for excellence. Senior management is leading the way in terms of staff motivation and encouragement. The school capacity for improvement is at a high level.

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 welcomes the positive key findings which acknowledge the high level of commitment and dedication of the senior management team and teaching staff of Ballinteer Community School.
- The Board welcomes the acknowledgement of the positive role of the stakeholders in the school,
    - A Board of Management that is highly committed
    - A senior management team that works very effectively and leads by example
    - The wide range of programmes and initiatives that help support the students these include: School Completion Programme, JCSP, Home School Community Liaison, College for Every Student, Trinity Access Programme, Very well organised SEN Department.
    - The very good classroom management and student behaviour
    - The very good teaching and learning observed by the inspectors
    - The students, parents, special needs assistants, ancillary staff and board of management who work together to ensure that the students have very good educational opportunities.

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 of Management acknowledges the recommendations made by the inspectors.
- Taster subjects for first years are being introduced from 2016.
- The Board of Management in consultation with the Principal will monitor the implementation of the other recommendations outlined in the report.