

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Errigal College
Letterkenny, County Donegal
Roll number: 712001**

Date of inspection: 17 November 2011



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in November 2011 in Errigal College, Letterkenny. 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

Errigal College is a co-educational and multi-denominational school under the patronage of the County Donegal Vocational Education Committee (VEC). One of the oldest vocational schools in the county, it moved to new buildings on the present site in 1987. Drawing its students from over 20 primary schools in the Letterkenny area, the current enrolment in junior and senior cycles totals 241, with a further 97 students taking Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. Errigal College is included in the Department of Education and Skills action plan for educational inclusion known as DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools).

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- Errigal College is a very well-managed school whose board of management works hard with all partners, and which has an effective senior management team.
- Enrolment and admissions policy is open and inclusive.
- The DEIS plan for the school is developing well, and student supports, from entry through junior and senior cycles, are good, well developed and regularly monitored.
- There is an emphasis on literacy and numeracy which is developing through the school.
- Teaching and learning are generally very good, and are delivered by an enthusiastic and innovative teaching team which makes good use of ICT.
- There is a positive code of behaviour, reflected in a clear ladder of referral and a restorative justice system.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The school should continue to develop the DEIS plan, including termly goals, and should advance subject department plans and their links to DEIS.
- There is a need to progress and implement further the recommendations made in previous subject and programme evaluations.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

The current Board of Management was appointed in 2010 and is properly constituted. In line with the instructions from County Donegal Vocational Education Committee (VEC), it meets four or five times a year. The board is keenly interested in the school and would like to meet more often and to be more involved. It works hard, in conjunction with senior management, staff, the Parents' Association (PA) and the students' council, to improve the school's facilities, programmes and standard of teaching and learning. It is involved in initiating, developing and updating policies, all of which are finally referred back, by the principal, for ratification. The board is also actively involved in identifying and developing priorities for the future of the school.

Board members attend the parents' induction and information meetings and there is one parent representative on the DEIS committee which meets frequently. This is very good practice.

The PA representatives who met with the evaluation team praised the school's inclusivity, support for students, and the range of programmes and activities. They are always welcomed to the school, appreciate management's 'open door' policy, and feel that teachers have a holistic approach to the education of their students. The PA keeps in touch through its representatives on the board of management and the attendance of the principal at its committee meetings. It is active in supporting development priorities for the school, and has had an input into the school's code of behaviour and to the Healthy Schools Project. It believes good communication is one of the school's strongest characteristics.

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*.

The school's priorities for development

The school's priorities have been identified as: increased enrolment; development and implementation of the DEIS plan; and improved teaching and learning (including continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers). Resource enhancement includes improving physical space, such as the reception area, the library and the FETAC office, in conjunction with the VEC five-year plan. The board introduced initiatives, through senior management, to improve teaching and learning, including mixed-ability teaching, cooperative learning, team teaching, differentiation, and a taster programme for first-year students. A current priority is the full implementation of the DEIS plan, which has been developing alongside School Development Planning (SDP) over the past two years.

All Department of Education and Skills programmes are available in the school, with Transition Year (TY) having been introduced in 2009. Future planning includes further teacher up-skilling through CPD; continued ICT development including the school website and e-portal system; and the full operation of the recently introduced Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) unit from September 2012. The board supports teacher CPD, the upgrading of ICT and aspects of infrastructural development.

The board, which stresses the importance of placing the student at the centre of school development, has formulated a strategy to increase enrolment, including a SWOT analysis, as part of the work of its core focus group. PR for the school is constantly on the board's agenda, and this is reflected in the work of the Parents' Association, management and staff. The School Completion Programme (SCP) for the Errigal/Mulroy Educate Together National School cluster of schools is based in Errigal College, and is strongly supported by the board and management.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

Senior management's vision for the school is that it should reflect all aspects of society, cater for multi-intelligences and that the school should be a core part of the community in which it is respected. The principal and deputy principal work in a collegial manner, consulting widely and delegating successfully to middle management. The emphasis on distributed leadership is exemplified by the team-work of the assistant principals (APs) who are also year heads, the care team, the DEIS organisation, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) team and the ASD teachers. A member of senior management takes part in most team meetings and communication and coordination are thus enhanced.

Members of staff are supported in their work and encouraged to undertake CPD. Senior management has led by example in taking CPD courses and many staff members have attended courses on classroom management, differentiation, ICT and Assessment for Learning (AfL). The college was one of the first to become involved with the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) which has helped to develop a clear ladder of referral and the introduction of a restorative justice programme in the school. Responses of students, staff and parents suggest that this has been a successful development. Staff initiative is encouraged, and the e-portal system is being used by an increasing number of teachers, which is positive.

Communication with the staff is very good. This is evident in the work of DEIS and SDP, the care committee where there is an emphasis on supporting students with educational needs (SEN), and in subject departments which hold regular meetings and link with the principal. Department coordinators and subject teachers are encouraged by senior management to plan for their subjects, to raise standards, to concentrate on literacy and numeracy, to focus on levels at which their subjects are taken and to implement AfL practices. There was evidence of many of these aspects in some subject department planning folders, and in the DEIS and SDP planning documents. In other subject planning folders there was still room for development.

Through the DEIS programme, and the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme, there are good links to homes and to the feeder primary schools. There is a high level of attendance at parent teacher meetings in the school. Every term a planning meeting is held for all staff, and teachers are encouraged to attend subject department planning meetings, to establish short, medium and long term plans. Many departments have done this, but there is room for further development as there needs to be consistency in, for example, setting attainment targets and further work on literacy and numeracy strategies. DEIS planning and outcomes have changed the focus of teachers and leaders, and yearly targets have been established. While the development of planning teams and committees represent good practice, it is recommended that termly targets should also be drawn up in the DEIS plans. This should equally apply to all subject departments where there is also room for developing self-evaluation and action plans. There is a need in some subject areas to analyse SEC results annually and plan accordingly.

Leadership of students

Errigal College has an open, transparent and inclusive admissions policy. Admissions and enrolment documents are regularly updated and the policy kept under review at board and management level. This is commended. The HSCL teacher, in conjunction with learning support (LS) and resource teachers, visits all feeder primary schools and meets the sixth-class teachers in the year before transition to post-primary school. First-year teachers are then briefed on a need-to-know basis and primary school pupils visit the school for Open Days in the months before admission. An intercultural policy is in operation in the school and there is good provision for students with English as an additional language (EAL).

Regular meetings are held between the principal and the HSCL coordinator, with an information flow to other teachers. The clearly-defined care team for students, which meets weekly, comprises HSCL, LS, SEN, Guidance and SCP behavioural support representatives. The code of behaviour, which has had inputs from parents, staff, students and management, is regularly updated and is regarded as fair by students. It also attracted positive responses in the parents' questionnaire. The restorative justice system, implemented in recent times, has been judged a success by students, staff and parents. This requires full statements by teachers and students of the issues, together with the steps leading to referral.

All students are required to have their student diary in all classes. This acts as a homework record and a communications channel between parents, students and teachers. While it appears to work quite well, it is somewhat inconsistently used by both parents and teachers, and it is recommended that fuller use be made of this process.

Students are being well managed in the school with a form teacher assigned to each class and year heads who are APs. The form teacher's role is essentially a pastoral one, with a registration class each morning and a year assembly every week by the year head. An effective peer mentoring system is in place between TY mentors and first-year students. This also involves TY students assisting first-year classes, notably in mathematics, and in weekly visits to the ASD unit. This is a positive example of distributive leadership and is commended.

The student council (SC) is appropriately constituted, elected by the students and meets regularly. Some suggestions made to senior management have been implemented, and the council makes a presentation annually to the board, which is a positive practice. The student focus group which met with the inspectors expressed support for the inclusive nature of the school and the breadth of the extra-curricular programme. Members of the group also appreciated the extra time given by teachers to assist students with their studies and in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. They described the school environment as safe, friendly, accepting of all students and offering good communications. Advice and help were provided for the selection of subjects in the taster programme in first year and in choosing subjects for senior cycle. Subject teachers, tutors and guidance helped with this process. Students also wished to improve facilities and put forward their views through the SC. This provided further evidence of distributed leadership, and good communication with and from students.

It was clear that support for students was caring. There are weekly meetings of the SEN team which liaises with an 'anchor' person for each year group. Literacy tests are carried out in first year; those students with a reading age of less than ten years are tested again and receive individual programmes. Parental input at this stage is vital and supportive. Support strategies include operating small groups and withdrawing students for one-to-one classes. This is good practice.

JCSP classes use the 'postcard' and other initiatives to encourage students' progress. Literacy and numeracy target sheets which include key words, learning objectives, and homework to be done, are displayed in many classrooms and are regularly updated. It was noted that JCSP students are integrated into as many mainstream classes as possible which is very positive. This also applies to the newly formed ASD group. Retention is very good among SEN students, those receiving learning support, and the JCSP cohort. Teaching and behaviour methodologies have been developed with support from Special Education Support Service (SESS), National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and NBSS. These also focus on improving literacy. It is noted that there is a whole-school approach to behaviour management, with CPD being accessed on differentiation, backed up by a positive rewards system, an example of which was seen during the evaluation.

The curriculum is managed well across all programmes, not least through timetabling. There are, however, some timetable issues which were discussed with management, and which will need further analysis, particularly regarding double periods, the spread of subject class periods, and the subject choice system.

The guidance service and classes are good and include timetabled lessons for years three to six. A balanced approach to the provision of both guidance and counselling in the future, and the tracking of student progression, is recommended.

2.3 Management of facilities

The school is clean and well maintained, inside and out, by a dedicated maintenance team. There have been building improvements in recent years, but management plans to replace the (single-glazed) windows and roof in the near future. The school keeps in contact with the VEC and the DES regarding these plans. Recent upgrading of the ICT and electrical facilities was noted. Safety and fire procedure notices are prominently displayed, and windows have been installed in all classroom doors. These are positive practices.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty-one lessons were observed comprising twenty-five class periods and sixteen subjects. Very high quality teaching and learning were seen and the classes inspected ranged from very good to good. Planning for lessons was thorough and preparation was very good across almost all subjects. The materials developed for the lessons were appropriate and well utilised, with good and often creative use of ICT in many cases. In most instances learning outcomes, topic identification and key words were in evidence. The JCSP-generated template with information on each lesson was in use in many classrooms and is commended, as it supports learning and assists in the management of the class.

Good resources were used in many classes with a variety of materials and methodologies deployed across the curriculum. Students were actively involved in many lessons and differentiated questioning was a key method observed in most cases. Where pair and group-work were used, the active involvement of the students enhanced their learning.

Classroom management was very good, and a positive rapport between teachers and students existed in almost all the classes visited. As many of the classrooms are teacher-based, there was ample opportunity for displays of subject-related stimulus materials.

Where this was the case, these were observed to enhance teaching and learning, and should be extended to all classes.

Lessons were generally well paced, with the introduction of new material and student-centred activities at appropriate times in several cases. Good use of present-day examples and parallels in many classes helped to reinforce the students' learning. Affirmation of students was in evidence across many subjects, and re-visiting the learning outcomes at the conclusion of lessons was used to complete the process in many cases. This good practice should apply to all lessons.

In the practical subjects observed, preparation of materials and tidying up afterwards was very good, with safety procedures being carefully observed and drawn to students' attention all through the lesson. A high level of discipline was in evidence in most practical classes, and this can be attributed in large part to good management and a collaborative atmosphere between teachers and students.

Assessment of students' work was good in most cases and some positive uses of AfL were observed. Formative assessment comments were written in many students' copybooks and there was evidence of written homework being assigned in almost all classes visited. Records of attendance and progress, where seen, were good and while there were many good examples of assessment, there was room for improvement in some instances.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Good progress had been made with some of the management recommendations contained in recent inspection reports, though others are taking more time.

Short-term planning in Music has been achieved, but still needs further work. In SPHE, some planning recommendations have been implemented. The core team, which has been discussed, has been replaced by the suggestion that a core planning team be established. Further training should help with the issue of delivering RSE as a 'block', an issue which needs to be addressed.

The size of the teaching team in LCA has been reduced, but there are still some issues concerning the timetabling and team-teaching aspects of the programme, which need to be addressed as soon as possible. The Art department has been working to comply with recommendations regarding art appreciation and consumer materials, and is progressing these matters at present.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

In Music, while the practical assessment recommendation has been addressed, there is more scope for delivering all of the aspects of the music curriculum in their fullness throughout the year.

While some of the learning and teaching issues have been resolved in SPHE, there is still the need to advance AfL and to finalise work on learning objectives, as well as the development of self-evaluation of material in students' folders. Other recommendations from the original SPHE report should now be progressed.

In Art, the process of self-assessment rather than peer assessment or group critique has been debated and should be kept under review.

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

Self-evaluation, while at an early stage in the school, is facilitated by the methods and processes in the DEIS plan, e.g. the setting of targets. Some subject departments are now following this policy and their planning folders reflect work towards this end. There is potential for other departments to follow suit.

The school already carefully monitors its annual intake of first-year students, and spends time and effort in evaluating progress in the areas of SEN and LS, for example. There is therefore the capacity to expand and develop this system towards whole-school self-evaluation.

It is clear that a level of self-evaluation already exists in the board of management, and in the PA, which is being developed by senior management. This is a community-focused school, where constantly interacting and linking with different activities and projects will greatly help the process of self-evaluation. The school's main stake-holders are already moving in this direction, which will assist with evaluative progress.

The school currently devotes time and effort to evaluating behaviour, student learning, restorative justice and other aspects of education. It will need to evaluate itself critically across all areas, but there is a positive attitude towards the process which is encouraging.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

Errigal College welcomes and is very pleased with the report. It is a vindication of the hard work and strategic planning that we have been undertaking for a number of years. We are delighted that the inspection recognises our readiness for self evaluation and we plan on further progressing this aspect of our school plan in the next academic year.

We are also delighted that the report recognises the dedication of all the stakeholders of Errigal College. This includes the BOM and the PA who work tirelessly to further the priorities for the development of the College.

The College is justly proud of its inclusive ethos and is glad that the report recognises this fact. We look forward to the addition of our new ASD unit, the building work on which will commence during the summer of 2012.

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

At a recent subject development planning session departments were asked to reflect on the findings of the report in relation to the following areas: short, medium and long term planning; clear termly targets that reflect the DEIS plan; incorporating literacy and numeracy; levels and general standard raising including annual evaluation of SEC results; continuing to implement AfL techniques; self-evaluation and action plans. As a staff we will be focussing on Literacy next year in line with guidelines from the PDST and we have appointed a link teacher in this regard.

The use of e portal by teachers has continued to increase.

A separate homework diary was introduced to first years and will be formally reviewed at the end of term.

The DEIS planning is continuing with recent re testing of all Junior Cycle students. Analysis of data will take place during June with action plans being drawn up.

A core planning team for SPHE has been established and has met. This team will meet on a monthly basis and feedback to the Pastoral Care team on a regular basis. The team will also share good practice in relation to experiential methodologies with colleagues who are teaching SPHE not on the core planning team at subject department meetings. The Career Guidance teacher is a member of the Pastoral Care team and is also now a member of the SPHE core planning team. RSE is no longer being delivered as a 'block' and TY SPHE/RSE is helping in this regard. At a recent SPHE core planning team meeting further work was done on learning objectives and self-evaluation material was sourced and will be included in students' folders for 2012/13.

The school continues to support team teaching where possible and this includes LCA.

Cutbacks will have a very significant impact on timetabling in general for the next academic year but the school will make every effort to address the timetabling issues mentioned in the report.

