

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**Arklow CBS**  
**Arklow, County Wicklow**  
**Roll number: 61770U**

**Date of inspection: 16 October 2012**



**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 October 2012 in Arklow CBS. 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***

Arklow CBS is an all boys, Catholic, voluntary secondary school. The school first opened in 1961 as Ard Scoil Chaoimhin and now operates under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). Its mission is to provide education founded on Christian principles in a caring partnership of school, home and parish community and to prepare students for examinations, for third level, for the world of work and for life itself. The last six years has seen a gradual but significant increase in enrolment to 344 students. During this time the school has proactively raised its public profile and has forged mutually beneficial links with the community thus ensuring the future of the school.

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

### ***Key Findings***

- The board of management has provided positive support for the senior management and the whole school community during its term of office.
- The principal demonstrates considerable leadership skills and has effectively managed constructive change in the school.
- The principal and the newly-appointed deputy principal share a vision for the school and work effectively as a senior management team.
- Post-holders carry out their duties efficiently but they do not constitute an effective middle management structure.
- In a significant majority of the lessons observed, the quality of teaching was good or exemplary. However there were identifiable weaknesses in the teaching practices observed in a few lessons.
- Significant work has been done in advancing the quality of subject planning, but there is scope for further development especially in the Transition Year (TY) programme.
- It is evident that the school led by its senior management team and supported by the board has the capacity to fully engage with the school self-evaluation process for the good of the whole-school community.

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

- It is recommended that measures be taken to strengthen the involvement of assistant principals in whole-school decision making and to develop their role as a collaborative and cohesive management team into the future.

- Student engagement should be enhanced through the integration of *Assessment for Learning* principles and the promotion of active and independent learning methodologies.
- The future development of subject planning should focus on linking stated learning outcomes directly to specific methodologies, resources and assessment strategies, particularly in TY, and on the inclusion of strategies to promote attainment and the uptake of higher levels.
- Management and teachers should review and extend the current practices and procedures for promoting positive behaviour and extend the pastoral care system.

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

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

The outgoing board of management was appropriately constituted and benefited from the support of the trustees in ensuring the effective provision of education in the school. Over its three year term of office, the board successfully adopted a good range of policies to guide practice in areas such as enrolment, behaviour and critical incidents. To ensure clarity, it is advised that all policies be clearly marked with the date of ratification and a proposed date for review. The board's tenure has been characterised by clear and open decision-making procedures and positive support for the school's principal and staff. Following each board meeting, a written report is agreed and provided to both the teaching staff and the parents' association. This is good practice.

The work of the board focused primarily on operational matters and developing school accommodation. The board also identified appropriate areas for future development which include the implementation of differentiated teaching methodologies, additional infrastructural improvements, and increasing the involvement of parents in their children's education. As the board ended its term during this evaluation, the new board is advised to formulate an action plan with specific targets, strategies and timeframes for the achievement of the identified priorities. The board is encouraged to keep itself informed of progress towards targets through periodic updates from the management, staff, student council and parents' association.

The responses to questionnaires administered during the evaluation show that the vast majority of parents are satisfied with most aspects of school life. All parents are members of the school's parents' association which is led by an active group of dedicated parents who support the school community through a range of activities including assisting with the book rental scheme and fund raising. The association communicates effectively with the board through elected nominees and ongoing contact with the principal. The association is asked to comment on draft policies. It is recommended that parental views on policies be sought at an earlier stage. To develop the role of the parents' association further, school management should encourage the association to affiliate with the National Parents' Council Post Primary.

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

The principal demonstrates considerable leadership skills and has effectively managed constructive change in the school over the last six years. He is acutely aware of the causal link between school attendance and academic achievement and, as a response, a range of practices to promote regular attendance have been put in place. Parents receive attendance reports six times a year and are texted each time their child is absent. In his role as instructional leader, the principal has advanced subject department planning, led curricular initiatives and promoted improvements in teaching and learning, and literacy and

numeracy. Many subject plans now list learning outcomes and a minority include long-term, time-bound goals for subject development. This good practice should be extended. It is recommended that future work in subject planning focus on linking stated learning outcomes directly to specific methodologies, resources and assessment strategies.

The principal and the newly-appointed deputy principal share a vision for the school and work effectively as a team. Their agreed roles and responsibilities are detailed in the whole-school plan. Both are proactively engaged in a variety of day-to-day management duties and maintain a positive, visible presence around the school. The deputy conscientiously performs her many duties which include co-ordinating the attendance system and organising supervision and substitution.

Teaching staff are professionally competent, caring and committed to providing high quality education. They are deployed appropriately and consulted on a wide range of school issues. As part of the school development process, every teacher contributes to one of three task groups which target school improvement in the areas of student learning, school relationships and numeracy. The latter group is working to promote whole-school strategies in numeracy. A vocabulary of mathematical terms has been compiled for classroom use and each subject department has been asked to identify how numeracy can be promoted within their area. Literacy is promoted through the use of key words in every subject area and the recent development of the school library. These are good examples of school-level practices that are in line with national strategy.

The duties devolved to posts of responsibility are clearly defined and post-holders carry out their duties efficiently. These duties, however, require review on a whole-school basis to ensure that they reflect the current leadership and development planning needs of the school. Assistant principals do not currently work as a team or constitute an effective middle-management structure. It is recommended that measures be taken to strengthen their involvement in whole-school decision making and to develop their role as a collaborative and cohesive management team into the future.

The school's admissions policy is open and inclusive. The school enrolls students with a range of abilities and aptitudes from a broad socio-economic catchment. As the demand for places is increasing, the policy should clearly rank the enrolment criteria to clarify how places in the school are determined by the board. A good range of practices are in place to support students with exceptional ability and with learning difficulties. To promote inclusion, all first-year classes are of mixed ability with banding only occurring in Irish and Mathematics from second year. Students with autism are enrolled in two designated units but are successfully integrated as much as possible into mainstream lessons and school life in general.

Well-established and effective procedures led by a team which includes the guidance counsellor, the resource teacher and the first-year head ensure the smooth transition of students from their primary school. The welfare of first-year students is overseen effectively by a pastoral care team of volunteer class tutors and supported by the liaison student system. In relation to the remaining students, the pastoral care system is not as advanced and all teachers take responsibility for monitoring student welfare. The school is urged to improve this arrangement by extending the class tutor system throughout the junior cycle in the first instance.

A plan for the delivery of guidance as a subject is in place and there is good overall guidance provision. The systems in the school that ensure the wellbeing of all students are noted in various sections of the school plan. Management is advised to draw these sections together as a stand-alone whole-school guidance plan to provide a clear overview. Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is a core subject for all junior cycle classes and a

relationships and sexuality education (RSE) programme is in place for senior cycle students.

The school's discipline system is predicated by a code of behaviour and a classroom behaviour pledge which all students and parents sign. In parallel with the code, school management and teachers are endeavouring to establish a whole-school approach to promoting positive behaviour. Teachers operate demerit and merit systems to sanction and reward behaviour. During this evaluation, only good student behaviour was witnessed in classrooms and around the school. However, in the focus group interview and the questionnaire responses, students expressed concerns about the poor behaviour of some of their peers. To address these concerns, it is recommended that school management and staff review and extend the current practices and procedures for promoting positive behaviour and to include these in the code of behaviour. The increased use of commendations and the further development of a rewards system may also assist.

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum through the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, and a choice between the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The TY plan requires further development in line with Department guidelines and there should be a clear focus on skills development. This progress is needed to achieve the admirable goals stated in the school plan and to raise the profile of TY. Management is advised to seek professional development opportunities for the new TY co-ordinator and key staff to assist in the further development of the TY programme.

Subject departments analyse the results of the state examinations. However, planned actions in response to the analysis are not identified in subject planning. A comparison with national data suggests that subject departments should closely examine the data regarding levels and attainment, and identify strategies to increase both uptake at higher levels and attainment in certificate examinations.

A democratically elected and representative student council engages in numerous school activities often working with the parents' association. However, in the questionnaires administered during the evaluation, the vast majority of students reported that they do not have a say in making the school a better place. The student council is encouraged to develop their role as the voice of the student body. In support, the new board might consider seeking the views of the council early in the development of policies that directly affect the student body and inviting council representatives to present an annual report at a board meeting.

The school provides a range of extracurricular activities and students have achieved success in a variety of local and national competitions and events. Despite this, a number of students pointed out that most of these activities are sports related. They expressed an interest in access to additional non-sports activities. This is something the student council might investigate.

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**

The school and its grounds are well maintained. The board of management and a task group of teachers have worked collaboratively to develop the school accommodation to a good standard. Recent progress includes an extension of four classrooms, a dedicated library, a

refurbished canteen and the installation of data projectors and internet access to every classroom. A statement from the board outlines the school's compliance with health and safety legislation and the inherent responsibilities to the welfare of the school community.

The development of ICT facilities and a shared network has impacted positively on learning and enabled innovations in the sharing of information between staff, and between the school and parents. Communication with parents has been augmented through access to a shared school calendar. All students except third years are now timetabled for ICT classes.

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

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

In a significant majority of the twenty-one lessons observed, the quality of teaching was good or exemplary. Teacher expertise and enthusiasm for their subject was noteworthy in many instances. A positive rapport and good classroom atmosphere prevailed in all lessons. Teachers were caring and supportive of their students who in turn were courteous and respectful of their teachers.

There was convincing evidence of good quality learning in a majority of the lessons observed. However, there were identifiable weaknesses in the teaching practices observed in a small minority of lessons. In these instances, students did not experience a meaningful level of challenge and so did not achieve to their capacity and appropriate level of ability.

The majority of lessons were well planned and structured. Individual teacher preparation in advance of lessons was very good overall. There was very good continuity with prior learning. Intended learning objectives were clear and, in many lessons, were shared with students at the outset. This good practice should be extended to all lessons. A minority of lessons lacked structure to further engage all students in learning.

Students displayed very good aptitude in applying their learning, whether in the use of language, the completion of experiments and tasks, or the solving of practical problems. Best practice was observed when differentiated tasks were implemented to enable increased levels of student participation and engagement.

The most effective lessons used methods that engaged students as active participants in their own learning and where students were encouraged to think, to reflect and to provide considered responses to questions posed. In many lessons, teachers' facilitated students' self-directed learning through pair work and practical activities. Such approaches should be extended so that in every lesson there is a good balance between teacher instruction and student activities. A few lessons placed too much focus on the textbook and on note taking, reducing the opportunity for active participation in the lesson. In such lessons, teachers should plan to improve levels of student engagement and participation in lesson activities. The re-organisation of classroom furniture to facilitate meaningful group work should be considered at times.

Students' literacy and numeracy skills were developed through good use of the board to record key words and through problem solving. Where relevant, a clear focus on the use of subject-specific terminology or vocabulary was evident, often reinforced by visualisation on the board or screen. In addition, key-word charts were on display in many of the thematic teacher-based classrooms. Further displays of students' work and the further maintenance of key-word copies are recommended to reinforce learning and students' ownership of the learning process.

ICT was best utilised when it was integrated into the flow of the lesson so that it served a specific learning aim and represented a productive use of lesson time. ICT was particularly well used during language lessons as an effective aid to the development of oral skills. There was scope for the further appropriate and focused use of ICT in some lessons.

A range of good assessment modes were employed including questioning, facilitated discussion, oral feedback and in-class testing. Many teachers used a range of student-directed questions to test understanding and recall. This practice should be extended. Questioning should be developed as a strategy to gather feedback from students and as a means of involving all students in the learning. Some teachers checked the quality of student understanding at intervals in lessons through the use of customised worksheets. Students should be encouraged to extend their answers both in oral and written form so that teachers can monitor their level of understanding.

Some teachers wrote directive, meaningful and positive feedback for students in their copybooks. Positive affirmation of student effort should form part of all lessons, through verbal affirmation and through formative written feedback in students' copybooks. This is an essential element of *Assessment for Learning* and teachers should strive to implement it in every subject area to help improve academic outcomes across the curriculum.

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

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

The board of management's presentation, meetings with senior management, groups of teachers, and students together with a review of subject department plans very clearly outlined the actions taken in response to recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports. The school timetable has been adjusted to accommodate recommended changes in the delivery of Physical Education and Irish. Subject department capacity building has been supported, and revised subject plans have been developed. Senior management is actively advancing whole-school practices to promote literacy and numeracy although there is still further development required.

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

Overall, teachers have attended well to the implementation of many of the recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports. Subject departments have taken a range of actions in response to these recommendations. A range of methods including those that promote active student learning, investigative and discovery learning were evident in many lessons. However, this outcome has yet to be achieved in a minority of lessons. The focused use of ICT has improved in the majority of lessons. The improved use of target language and oral skills in language lessons is praiseworthy. Other improvements necessary include further display of students' work in classrooms, and increased and focused use of written formative feedback to students.

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

Arklow CBS has actively engaged in many aspects of school self-evaluation through practices such as the annual analysis of state examination results, planning meetings, and the development of subject planning as well as evaluating TY with student, parent and teacher questionnaires. Teachers have been empowered to play a vital role in school improvement through their participation in three task groups. Their commendable work in

the areas of student learning, school relations and numeracy has been prioritised by the staff and encouraged by the board.

It is evident that the school led by its senior management team and supported by the board has the capacity to fully engage with the school self-evaluation process for the good of the whole-school community. The newly-elected board should lead the process by devising an action plan to achieve the priorities identified by the previous board and to address the recommendations in this report.

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# Appendix

## School response to the report

### Submitted by the Board of Management

#### **Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management of Arklow CBS wishes to thank the visiting Inspectors and to acknowledge the depths and professionalism of their work throughout the process of the Inspection. As a newly constituted Board, the WSE-MLL report will form the basis for our priorities for the next three years.

The Board welcomes the report which affirms the dedication, hard work and commitment of all members of the school community.

The inspection provided a thorough and comprehensive overview of the school and the Board is delighted with the positive finding and the affirmation provided to us as a team.

#### **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 plan to have a timetabled meeting for Form Masters to facilitate the development of a middle management team.

A whole school review of posts will be undertaken before June 2013.

We intend to continue the development of Learning Outcomes in our subject plans.

Assessment for Learning and Active teaching methodologies will become a large part of our whole school professional development planning.

As part of the regular review of school policies, the Board of Management will ensure to prioritise the review of both our Admission and Code of Behaviour.

Our TY planning template will be reviewed in order to strengthen the focus on skills development.

As part of our pastoral care system class tutors will be extended to each year over the next five years.

Our Parents' Association are in the process of affiliating with the National Parents' Council for Post Primary Schools.