

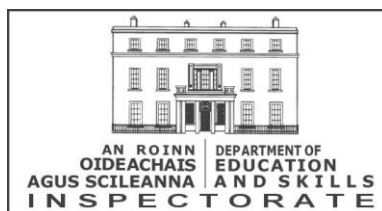
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Rosses Community School
Dungloe, Co Donegal
Roll number: 91407T**

Date of inspection: 24 September 2012



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in September 2012 in Rosses 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, 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; a response was not received from the board.

Introduction

Rosses Community School was founded in 1973 with the amalgamation of the High School in Dungloe and the Vocational School in Loughanure. It participates in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. The school currently caters for 492 students, 265 males and 227 females. It offers the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- Board members show a strong loyalty to and pride in the school.
- Senior management share a vision for the school and work as an effective team.
- Teachers have engaged in continuing professional development (CPD) and this is supported by senior management.
- A high level of care and concern for student welfare was evident.
- In almost all the lessons visited, the quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good.
- The school has proactively implemented the recommendations from previous inspection reports.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- A Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy should be devised and swiftly brought forward for ratification.
- The board should more proactively monitor the progress of student achievement across the range of subjects within the school.
- Management should ensure that the school provides a minimum of twenty-eight hours of instruction per week and that all class groups attend for the full school year.
- The DEIS planning process should be more central in driving school improvement.

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 board of management is appropriately constituted and is at the end of its three year tenure. The principal provides each meeting with a comprehensive report on school activities and school issues. The administrative aspect of the board's role has been carried out effectively and the school has benefited from the board's expertise and commitment. All members work as a cohesive unit and demonstrate a strong sense of pride in the school.

Policy development is ongoing with many policies now at the review stage. To ensure clarity, it is recommended that all ratified policies be clearly marked to include the date of ratification and the proposed date of review. A number of important policies are in draft form and should be swiftly brought forward for ratification. Furthermore, in line with circular letter 27/08, an RSE policy should be devised which clearly outlines how RSE is to be taught in the school.

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 has an active Parents' Association (PA) which plays an important role in the life of the school. This includes fundraising, consultation on policy development, as well as ongoing efforts to improve student facilities. The PA expressed confidence in the leadership of the school. It is suggested that the PA consider using mechanisms such as the school's website to maintain ongoing communication with the general parent body.

As is good practice, an agreed report is communicated to the teaching staff and the PA after each board meeting.

The school's priorities for development

To further develop its educational vision and leadership dimension, the board is currently undergoing an intensive strategic planning process which is being facilitated with the help of independent experts. A three-year strategic plan is being developed through appropriate consultation with all the school partners. A range of areas relating to school efficacy has been identified within the strategic plan. The board is commended for this ongoing work. To further enhance its role in supporting the development of teaching and learning in the school, it is recommended that the board proactively monitor student achievement across the range of subjects and programmes within the school, to include the careful analysis of results achieved in state examinations.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The principal and deputy principal present as a cohesive team and demonstrate very effective leadership of the school. They communicate very well with each other, illustrate a strong team spirit and share a clear vision for the school. Senior management maintains a high level of visibility around the school. Both members operate an "open door" policy and are available to respond to issues which arise. This approach is commended, however, it is

suggested that a regular, specified meeting time be formalised to better facilitate the consideration of the school's progression on medium to long-term issues.

There are currently four assistant principals and nine special duties post-holders among the teaching staff. The valuable contribution they make to the day-to-day life of the school is acknowledged. The school has recently lost posts of responsibility and the schedule of posts has not been reviewed in a number of years. With this in mind, it is recommended that the duties attached to posts are reviewed at whole-staff level, based on the current needs and future development priorities of the school. Post-holders see themselves as middle management, have good levels of autonomy and take lead roles in many aspects of school life. As is good practice, regular meetings of assistant principal post-holders are facilitated where ideas can be shared regarding planning for the future.

The CPD of staff is actively supported by both senior management and the board of management. Many members of the teaching staff have furthered their professional development through a variety of post-graduate and in-service courses. This work is highly commended. Future professional development should prioritise key areas such as assessment for learning (AfL), differentiation and the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the classroom.

Current timetabling arrangements are not precisely in line with the requirements of circular letter M29/95. They provide a maximum of twenty-seven hours and forty-five minutes class contact time per week instead of the stipulated minimum of twenty-eight hours. It is acknowledged that senior management has moved towards addressing this matter. It is now imperative however, that management sees to it that the school provides a minimum of twenty-eight hours of class contact time per week, thus ensuring compliance with the terms of the circular letter.

A collaborative and systematic approach to curricular planning has been adopted which has seen rapid development and improvement of subject planning documentation. This has been initiated in response to recent subject inspections and driven by senior management. This work has focused on the integration of student learning outcomes, teaching methodologies, resources available for the teaching of each topic and the proposed methods of assessment of learning. Subject departments are commended for their progress to date and are urged to fine tune their use of learning outcomes and continue to populate their schemes of work with increased detail under the other headings. This will keep teaching and learning practices at the centre of subject planning and will generate improved collaboration and discussion within subject departments.

The school has developed a three-year DEIS plan which has targets and strategies in place for all eight of the required areas. To further develop this good work, the targets set must be more specific, measurable and time-bound. It is recommended that the DEIS planning process be more centrally placed as a tool to drive school development and improvement.

Leadership of students

The school has an inclusive and fair admissions policy. There has been a gradual increase in students attending the school over recent years. An effective code of behaviour underpins the student support system and encourages the use of praise and commendation to raise students' self-esteem and confidence. Both the admissions policy and the code of behaviour are reviewed regularly. Almost all of the students surveyed through questionnaires agreed that they understood the school rules.

Discipline issues are addressed through the use of restorative justice practices. This system is reported to be working well. Positive behaviour is highly valued by the school and is

encouraged through a wide range of merit awards, achievement awards and commendations.

The care of students is a priority for all staff. Each class is assigned a class tutor who fulfils a pastoral role. The year head also has a pastoral role and deals with most of the serious disciplinary tasks. Almost all tutors have contact with their full class group through timetabled teaching time but they have no dedicated tutor time. Of the students surveyed, fewer than half considered that they had an adult in the school to whom they could speak if they were having problems. It is timely to review the effectiveness of the current arrangement in light of these results.

A pastoral care team facilitates communication among those involved in the care of students. This group meets regularly and liaises with teachers and year heads regarding the welfare of individual students. It helps to co-ordinate activities and interventions. The work of this group is central to the care and support of students and is highly commended. To further integrate the delivery of support, it is suggested that a representative from the special educational needs (SEN) department attend each meeting.

Prefects are selected from the sixth-year students by the Prefects Committee following nominations from teachers. Prefects assist in the management of students and help to organise activities. They represent the school in a positive manner and act as a further layer of student support. This delegation of leadership to students is very good.

A good range of supports is offered to incoming first-year students as they make the transition from primary to post-primary school. Sixth-class students attend a two-day induction period which allows them to experience all the option subjects on offer. Subject choices are made prior to entry to the school with students selecting from an open choice of available subjects. Parents are invited to attend an information evening and receive a well-presented prospectus.

The school has an active mentoring policy as a further support to first-year students. Mentors are selected from senior student groups and are provided with training. Each mentor is assigned a small number of first-year students. A range of activities and mentoring sessions is arranged weekly to help the new cohort of students integrate into the school.

The optional TY programme enjoys a very strong uptake from students. It has seen significant changes to its format this year with students now completing modules in each of the senior-cycle subjects offered by the school. While the opportunity for students to sample such a wide range of subjects is commended, it results in a short contact time for each of these subjects. It is recommended that the current interpretation of the programme be kept under review as the fragmented nature of its delivery may lead to student disengagement. It is also recommended that in keeping with circular letter 34/11, the length of the academic year for TY students must match those for other year groups in the school. Students moving to senior cycle sit the Differential Aptitude Tests (DATs) during TY which is used to guide subject choice. Following best practice, students moving to fifth year are offered an open choice of available subjects with option bands generated to best accommodate these choices.

While the support structures in place at times of subject choice appear robust, the information gathered from the questionnaires show that fewer than half of the students surveyed and just over half of the parents surveyed believe they received helpful advice and information from the school when choosing subjects. This would indicate that some work is needed on improving communications with parents and students.

Senior management is very encouraging of the work of the learning-support department. Effective procedures are in place to identify students with learning needs through testing and communication with feeder primary schools. Commendably, the learning-support department maintains a register of special needs students which aids in the ongoing monitoring of student progress after admission. Regular testing using standardised tests, and the development of individual education plans for targeted students, combine to ensure that interventions made are appropriate. As is good practice, a small core team of teachers form the main learning-support team. This facilitates professional development, maximises teacher experience and provides continuity with students from year to year. The primary means of support is through small group withdrawal. The school is encouraged to explore cooperative teaching as an efficient use of allocated support hours and as a means of disseminating good practice amongst the wider staff body.

The school has made progress in the development of a whole-school approach to literacy. A number of initiatives from the JCSP including the use of key-word lists, the 'Make a Book' project and the 'Drop Everything and Read' strategy are used as whole-school supports for the development of students' literacy. To further this good work, it is recommended that the development of strategies to support literacy be at the core of future subject department planning across all subjects. A whole-school approach to numeracy has received less attention and needs further work.

The school provides an array of extracurricular and co-curricular activities to enhance students' personal and social development. The availability of these activities relies heavily on the generosity and voluntary participation of teachers and parents, and is acknowledged and valued by parents, students and management.

The student council has two representatives from each year group and meets every two weeks. Communication between the council and school management is facilitated. Currently, it is a prerequisite that students wishing to be nominated for election to the council need signatures from four members of the teaching staff. It is suggested that this practice be discontinued as it has the potential of giving undue influence to teachers in the election of a student body. It is suggested that the council use a dedicated notice board, the school website and a suggestion box to communicate with the full student body.

2.3 Management of facilities

A warm welcoming atmosphere is evident on entry to Rosses Community School. The school is currently operating at full capacity. To accommodate the student population, a number of prefabricated classrooms are positioned to the rear. The school has a modern, well-equipped sports hall.

The school's website is highly visual and well structured but is in need of updating. It is recommended that the website be developed further and updated regularly to ensure that it remains relevant as a means of communication. Furthermore, as already suggested, the website could be used by the board of management, the parents' association and the student council as a means of delivering key information and messages.

Where possible, classrooms are allocated to facilitate teacher-based rooms. In most cases teachers have taken full advantage of this arrangement to create stimulating, subject-specific, learning environments. Information and communication technology (ICT) equipment is widely available for teaching and learning with all rooms visited containing a digital projector and a desktop computer.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty-one lessons were observed during the evaluation. In the majority of these, the standard of teaching and learning was good and in some cases, very good. One lesson observed had evident weaknesses that impacted on student learning.

The aims of the lesson were generally displayed using the whiteboard or ICT. In some cases, sufficient time was set aside to revisit these learning outcomes at the end of the lesson, thus aiding summary and review. This very good practice should be adopted for all lessons.

Teachers' classroom management techniques were very effective in almost all lessons visited. Lessons were carefully prepared and well structured in most cases. Teachers maintained positive classroom relations throughout. They were caring, patient and supportive of students.

Questioning was used effectively to ascertain students' learning and to reinforce newly acquired knowledge. In some instances, a greater emphasis on the use of targeted questions rather than global questions was recommended. Good practice was observed where teachers tailored learning activities to suit students of varying abilities. However, the area of differentiation for the learner needs to be further developed and should be linked with whole-staff CPD and subject planning.

Good practices were evident to develop students' literacy skills such as focusing on key words, use of print-rich environments and students' use of notebooks to record subject-specific terminology. Many teachers also explained new words encountered during the lesson and wrote these on the whiteboard. This whole-school approach to the development of literacy is commended.

ICT was used well in many lessons visited to display notes, diagrams and photographs. However, some lessons would have benefited greatly from increased and more effective use of ICT. Greater efforts should be made to integrate highly visual and interactive resources into lessons to complement some of the effective traditional practices observed.

Care should be taken not to over-instruct students. Strategies to promote greater student autonomy and active learning ought to be employed in some lessons, giving students more responsibility for their own learning. The use of a broader range of student-centred teaching methodologies such as student presentations, brainstorming, pair work, student-student mentoring and group work would help to stimulate and maintain student interest.

Examination of students' copybooks and journals indicated that homework is being assigned regularly. In addition to oral feedback, some teachers provide useful written feedback to students as an important part of the learning process. This good practice should be adopted by all teachers. It is recommended that subject departments develop agreed practices in relation to the frequency of taking up students' work and the provision of written feedback in line with the principles of assessment for learning.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

The school's response to the four most recently published subject inspection reports was taken into consideration during this evaluation. Management has engaged fully with the recommendations made in these reports relating to subject provision and whole-school support.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Several of the recommendations in previous inspection reports relate to subject planning. The evaluation team examined the planning folders for the subjects concerned and concluded that very good progress has been made. Commendably, senior management has ensured that the recommendations have been disseminated to all subject departments and a common template for all schemes of work has been adopted.

From observation of lessons, the inspectorate team concludes that the recommendations relating to teaching and learning have been systematically addressed.

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

A high degree of openness to change was evident among the board, senior management and staff. The school has engaged fully with inspection processes to date, indicating a reflective approach and a strong capacity for school self-improvement. Senior management demonstrates clear leadership of the school and has driven the planning and review process. Sound self-evaluation processes have been implemented to date, including the use of reflection sheets, strategic planning, subject wish lists and written responses to subject inspection recommendations. Staff members were seen to be open to feedback received, and were willing to engage with new practices and teaching strategies.

Rosses Community School is proactive in responding to the evolving needs of its students and is well placed to implement the recommendations of this report.