

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**St Ailbe's School  
Tipperary Town, County Tipperary  
Roll number: 72480W**

**Date of inspection: 25 September 2013**



**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 September 2013 in St Ailbe's 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***

St Ailbe's is a small co-educational post-primary school under the auspices of Tipperary Education and Training Board (ETB). There are 247 students in the post-primary school, and forty-nine students enrolled in post-leaving certificate (PLC) courses. Established on the current site in 1977, the school has a long history of educational provision in the community.

St Ailbe's participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. It offers a wide range of post-primary programmes including the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Transition Year (TY) Programme, the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme.

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

### ***Key Findings***

- St Ailbe's is a school with an obvious commitment to achieving the best for all its students.
- The board of management is committed and experienced, and working to meet all of its legislative responsibilities.
- The principal and deputy work very effectively as a team, and much progress has been made under their leadership.
- A very positive whole-school climate and 'esprit de corps' has been fostered and created in the school.
- Teachers are professionally committed and open to professional development.
- Parent and student questionnaires returned report significant levels of satisfaction with the school.
- Support for students is a very clear strength of the school.
- The quality of teaching and learning in lessons observed was of a high standard.
- Progress has been made in relation to the implementation of previous inspection reports.

- DEIS planning has been progressed.

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

- The board of management should ensure full compliance with the requirements of Circular M29/95 relating to time in school.
- The board should satisfy itself that all legally required policies have been developed and ratified, and that all legislative requirements are being met.
- The school's DEIS plan should be fully completed.
- Existing curricular programme provision should be consolidated as a developmental priority.
- Whole-staff teacher professional development should include a focus on strategies to support teaching and learning in the inclusive classroom.
- The school self-evaluation process should be used to support and enhance planning and review.

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

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

The board of management is committed to the school, and experienced. It was correctly constituted on its establishment in 2009. Full composition will be restored on the election of a second parent representative.

The board is well supported by the Education and Training Board (ETB), and members have received training. Meetings are organised and structured. It is very positive that meetings are structured so as to support the inclusion of the parent, student and staff voice. The board has played a significant role in supporting developments in the school, and has identified priorities for development.

The board should now ensure that all legally required policies have been developed and ratified, and that all legislative requirements are being met. Priority should be given to ensuring compliance with the requirements of Circular M29/95 relating to time in school.

The restructuring of the secretary's report to systematically report on areas of key importance in the school, such as DEIS planning, the various curricular programmes and the implementation of recommendations made in inspection reports would enhance board awareness and its strategic leadership. A fuller analysis of student attainment in certificate examinations should form part of the reporting on student achievement. It is also advised that, with regard to the recording of cases relating to child protection, a nil report be recorded where there have been no cases since the previous meeting of the board.

Consideration might be given to the merits of requesting periodic reports from those members of staff with responsibility for key areas of curricular provision, or key aspects of the work of the school, and to inviting their occasional attendance at meetings. It is also recommended that members of the student council be invited to meet the board on occasion. The practice of reporting annually to the school community on the work of the school should be instituted and, it is suggested, that an agreed report should be provided to staff and the parent council following board meetings.

The senior management team is in place since February 2012, when the current principal was appointed. His leadership style is practical, proactive and facilitatory. Much progress

has been made since his recent appointment, and this is acknowledged by the school community generally. Changes have occurred in relation to curricula and student choice and in relation to timetabling. Changes such as the appointment of a home school community liaison (HSCL) teacher, the introduction of new attendance strategies and the trialling of a behaviour support room enhance supports available to students. Teaching and learning is being supported by the introduction of mixed-ability teaching, the trialling of team teaching and more frequent reporting to parents.

The principal and deputy principal work very well as a team, combining long experience and in-school knowledge with vision and drive for the future. Communication is very good, and is a tribute to the cooperation extended to the recently appointed principal. A very effective 'esprit de corps' has been established, and this was noted as impacting very positively on school climate.

There is a tradition of parent involvement in the school. The Parent Trust played a very significant role in raising funds for the recently completed school hall and gym. There is a parents' council in place, which is affiliated nationally. Policies are brought to the council for their input, and inspection reports have been sent to the chairperson. Membership of the current committee has not yet been completed. An opportunity exists to seek further nominations, and to plan a number of initiatives. The school website should be used to profile and report on the work of the council.

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

The senior management team is reflective and proactive in its leadership of learning. Teachers are deployed with due consideration to qualifications, student need and staff capacity. The redeployment of a teacher to the school has facilitated the very welcome introduction of music as a subject. Inspectors noted the generosity of staff in volunteering to take on various extra roles, including the co-ordination of some curricular programmes. Their contribution is clearly acknowledged by senior management. A planned review of the school's post structure is appropriate, and will support quality improvement. Such a review should endeavour to achieve stability in relation to the co-ordination of curricular programmes.

There are a number of teams in place in the school including a pastoral care team, a literacy and numeracy team and a DEIS team. These teams work very collaboratively, both with members of staff and with relevant external agencies. When feasible, consideration should be given to the establishment of a special educational needs team.

Teacher professional development is encouraged. Commendably, teachers who attend professional development activities are facilitated to share their learning with all staff. Having instituted a number of structural reforms, senior management has now identified a focus on the quality improvement of teaching and learning as a developmental priority. Such a focus should involve an emphasis on the consolidation, formalisation, and development of practice in the various programmes on offer in the school. Some professional development activities should be aimed at supporting this consolidation.

Although a small school, St Ailbe's offers a very broad curriculum in support of its mission to help all students reach their full potential, "recognising that there is no single standard that applies to all". TY was reviewed, and a review of LCA is planned. It is most important that the full potential of the various programmes to support student achievement be realised. Profiling of the programmes, stability of coordination and greater consideration of relevant teaching and learning strategies will support this.

The school offers as wide a range of subjects as possible. Optional bands have been created to support student choice, and taster programmes are offered in first year. Music has been introduced to the school. Every effort is made to facilitate students taking a subject at an appropriate level. Currently, Physics and Chemistry are offered as a combined subject. As a

number of parents and students expressed a desire to have access to both as separate subjects, it is suggested that the school might explore the potential to do this in co-operation with another local school.

The school has developed and reviewed its policy on admissions and transfers. The policy supports inclusion. In relation to the admission of students with special educational needs, it is suggested that an emphasis be put on how the school enables the participation of such students. Reference could also be made to related collaboration with the special education needs co-ordinator.

Attendance and retention are key priorities for the school under DEIS. Figures show that retention, at both junior and senior cycles, has improved. Figures for very poor attenders remain a concern for the school, but it is clear that specific strategies are in place to deal with this. The work of the HSCL teacher and the teacher involved in the School Completion Programme (SCP) is a key contributory factor to these initiatives.

The school has reviewed its code of behaviour. It is taking a number of specific actions to support the development of positive behaviour. It has introduced a behaviour support room this year and, in conjunction with the National Education Psychological Service (NEPS), will also run a ten-week positive behaviour programme for students. The implementation of the behaviour support room should be closely monitored, and its impact evaluated at the end of the year. A focus on strategies to support teachers and students in the inclusive classroom context should be included in the programme of staff professional development.

Support for students is a clear strength of the school. In addition to curricular support mentioned, support for students is provided through structures and systems such as the year-head structure, systems for monitoring attendance, weekly assemblies and student mentoring. Further support is provided through Social Personal and Health (SPHE) and the school's Relationship and Sexuality (RSE) programme, its guidance programme and the on-going work of the guidance counsellor, the SCP and HSCL teachers. Students can avail of the school canteen and a homework club. The provision of a parent programme relating to Project Maths is a very good development.

Extracurricular and co-curricular activities provide further support for students' academic and personal and social development. The commitment and generosity of staff involved are acknowledged.

Support is also provided to students with special educational needs through the work of teachers and the special education needs assistants (SNAs). It is very useful that a number of members of the current staff have a qualification in this area, and that another member of staff intends to pursue a qualification. When feasible, the creation of a special educational needs team is advised. Some parents expressed a desire for support in understanding and supporting students with special educational needs. This could perhaps be considered in the context of programmes of support for parents generally.

The quality of integrated support contributes to the maintenance of a very positive school climate, which was recognised in both the student and parent questionnaires administered. Whole-school guidance planning offers an opportunity to comprehensively document these.

A student council has been re-activated in the school. One member of the current committee also plays a role at national level. A number of opportunities exist to enhance the role of the student council in the school. Greater use should be made of the school's website to communicate the work of the council. The results of the questionnaire to students, administered as part of the evaluation process, would suggest that opportunities also exist for the student council to canvas and seek the views of students more regularly.

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***

Facilities in the school are very good, as corroborated also by the findings of the student and parent questionnaires administered. Facilities are upgraded as possible; PLC rooms have been added, the school's information and communication technologies (ICT) infrastructure has been developed, a gym provided and a reading corner installed in the library. The school environment is very pleasant and generally well maintained. The role of all staff involved is acknowledged.

All classrooms are ICT-enabled. A good school website has also been developed. The school's ICT infrastructure is being used to support administration and the sharing of materials with students and teachers. The evaluation included some very good examples of the use of ICT to support teaching and learning.

The school is proactive in the promotion of environmental awareness, as reflected in the recent awarding of its first Green Flag. Student access to toilet facilities shared with PLC students is timetabled. The operation of this system should be kept under review to ensure the safeguarding of all students. Attention should be paid to the organisation and appearance of some specialist rooms.

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

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

Eighteen lessons, including six double lessons, were observed as part of the evaluation. Teaching and learning in lessons observed was of a high standard. Lessons had been very well prepared, supported by subject plans and schemes of work. Thorough planning led to clear, structured and well-paced lessons.

Planning had taken cognisance of prior and intended learning. It was evident that planning had included attention to resources for lessons, to the interests of students and to literacy and numeracy as appropriate. There was an evident emphasis on keywords. The benefits of focusing on vocabulary more broadly were discussed in feedback to teachers. Opportunities also exist to enhance the development of students' oral literacy.

Lesson objectives were outlined in most lessons. It was advised that these be identified as learning outcomes for students. Given the high number of students participating in the JCSP programme, it is recommended that the relevant JCSP statements of learning be highlighted as appropriate.

A variety of approaches was used in teaching. These included team teaching, group and pair work and independent learning. Some further exploitation of cooperative learning strategies would enhance group and pair work. There were some very good examples of the use of the target language, differentiation and higher-order questioning to challenge students.

All lessons were very well managed; a reflection of the evident quality of teacher-student rapport. In general, students participated with enthusiasm supported by teacher affirmation and encouragement.

The school does not have a documented assessment policy but practice is evolving. Lesson observation and discussions with teachers provided some evidence of the use of peer, oral and portfolio assessment and of the use of formative feedback. Further incorporation of

assessment for learning strategies would support the development of assessment practices in the school. Good practice has seen the introduction of the analysis of outcomes for students in certificate examinations.

The very good quality of the learning environment was generally very evident. This quality related both to the physical and visual learning environment of classrooms, and to the 'shared' learning environment created and the expectations set for students by teachers. Student progress is monitored and tracked. Student progress is reported to parents and parent-teacher meetings are held bi-annually. An examination of student attainment in certificate examinations demonstrated that the broad spectrum of students is facilitated to achieve in the school.

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

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

Recommendations relating to staffing, curricular provision, subject choice and class organisation have been implemented. Attention has been paid to the demarcation of safe operational areas in the woodwork rooms. This should be checked regularly as part of health and safety audits. Some progress has been made in relation to timetabling issues. Further work is required to complete implementation of recommendations relating to policy and compliance.

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

Progress has been made, and is ongoing, in relation to matters relating to subject department planning, uptake of higher level and the development of assessment practices. The availability of ICT is supporting teaching and learning. Observation of lessons demonstrated whole-staff awareness of key recommendations relating to teaching approaches.

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

St Ailbe's has engaged in some evidence-based planning as part of required DEIS planning. It has also undertaken a number of reviews in support of recent developments. The curriculum was reviewed at both junior and senior cycle, and the school's code of behaviour was also reviewed. The processes of self-evaluation are becoming more inclusive. A review of the LCA programme is planned, and a culture of self-evaluation is also being encouraged at subject department level.

Inspectors noted a clear commitment and openness to improvement in St. Ailbe's. The school is advised to continue to build staff capacity in relation to the process of school self-evaluation. It is also recommended that the process be carefully followed in relation to the planned focus on numeracy as part of DEIS planning and in the review of the LCA programme. An opportunity also exists to systematically include self-evaluation as a part of subject department planning.

# **Appendix**

**School response to the report**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**



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

The Board recognises that the report is very fair, and is reflective of the school ethos and values. It also reflects the significant work being done to ensure our students achieve their full potential.

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

- (i) Policy review in place
- (ii) Work has commenced on completing DEIS
- (iii) SSE underway
- (iv) In-service being structured at Whole School Level to support teaching and learning in an inclusive classroom.