

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Davitt College  
Castlebar, County Mayo  
Roll number: 76060U**

**Date of inspection: 6 December 2011**



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

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in December 2011 in Davitt College. 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 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***

Davitt College is a non-denominational, co-educational school which operates under County Mayo Vocational Education Committee (VEC). It comprises a second-level school, which currently enrolls 673 students and Castlebar College of Further Education (CCFE) with an enrolment of 283 students, located on two separate campuses in the town. The school also operates an adult night school.

The main focus of this WSE-MLL is on the second-level school which has seen a significant increase in enrolment over recent years. Davitt College offers all available second level curricular programmes and a wide range of subjects.

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

### ***1.1 Key Findings***

- There is very good management and leadership from senior management and strong evidence of distributed leadership.
- All stakeholders share one vision for the school and a culture of self-review is apparent.
- The staff are dedicated and hard working.
- The quality of teaching and learning was, overall, very good.
- Very good organisational and student management systems are in place.
- The school is a true learning community.
- It is evident that the school has the capability to face the challenges of changing enrolment patterns.

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

- Aspects of special educational needs (SEN) provision should be reviewed.
- In planning for the future, staff should outline how they plan to achieve their identified targets.
- Teachers should ensure that there is an adequate level of differentiation in all lessons.
- Additional ways of including the student voice should be incorporated into lessons.

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

### ***2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management***

Mayo VEC supports Davitt College very well in a number of ways. Meetings of principals in the scheme are held regularly, training is provided to boards of management and to teachers and the VEC's five-year plan is the overarching framework within which the college operates. The shared vision of the VEC, the board, staff and management of Davitt College to constantly strive to improve teaching and learning can be seen from the VEC's and the school's involvement in projects such as Instructional Leadership. It is commendable that the board and the parents' council are cognisant of steps taken by the college to implement recommendations in subject inspection reports.

The parents' council is highly supportive of the school and is well informed about school events. Parents met during the course of the evaluation were appreciative of the standards of teaching and learning and care for their children as well as of the quality of management and leadership in the school. Parents have some involvement in policy making but in reviewing or developing future policies they, as well as the students' council, should be more involved at an earlier stage in policy development. In addition, it is suggested that the parents' council become involved in organising briefing nights on areas of relevance to the general parent body.

### **Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations**

The board of management of Davitt College is properly constituted, is fully aware of its statutory role and carries it out accordingly. Board members have availed of training in this regard and in areas such as child protection responsibilities. Board meetings are well attended and the board acts as a sounding board for developments within the school. It also works on school policies which are subsequently ratified by the VEC. The board focuses much of its attention on the second-level school. As the board is also responsible for CCFE, a report on CCFE affairs should appear on the agenda of each board meeting in the future. It is also suggested that the board of management meet the students' council on at least an annual basis.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools* (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Primary Circular 0061/2006 (or Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006). School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* as a matter of priority.

### **The school's priorities for development**

The school community has identified the following as its main priorities for development: to continue to strive for excellence in teaching and learning, to focus on improving academic achievement and to enhance the school's reputation in the area. Much progress has already been made in achieving this vision. At the time of the evaluation, the school was planning the official opening of phase one of its building project. Phase two involves providing additional classrooms and phase three involves moving the CCFE campus onto the school grounds. A deputy principal has recently been appointed to CCFE and work has commenced on integrating the two staffs.

A strong culture of planning has been embedded in recent years. Staff members participate in a range of planning committees and very good systems are in place to facilitate communication and sharing of goals. It is commendable that school policies have review dates which are adhered to. For example, the school's code of behaviour is under review to make it more positive.

To enhance its vision of excellence in teaching and learning, school management facilitates continuing professional development (CPD) for its staff and some are pursuing further study in education. Many also work as examiners in the certificate examinations. A particular feature of CPD in the school is its delivery by members of staff to each other. A culture of collaborative subject planning, sharing of resources and teaching methodologies exists. Subject departments have commenced the practice of analysing certificate examination results against national averages to identify trends and improvements in terms of achievements. This work is commended. All subject departments should provide this analysis at junior as well as senior cycle on an annual basis and use the results to identify what is needed to be done to continue to raise standards.

The introduction of information and communication technology (ICT) systems for the purpose of enhancing teaching and learning has been guided by a well grounded and forward thinking vision. Known as the Learning Management System it allows students to access subject resources online. The widespread use of ICT has revolutionised teaching and learning in the school and has led to very good communications including electronic assignment of homework. Recently, ePortal has been introduced and this should further enhance communication and tracking of students.

The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools (DEIS) action plan and has identified a range of key targets in relation to specific areas. There was evidence of achievement in many of these targets.

Subject coordinators and staff members with particular areas of responsibility report on their work annually and identify progress to date in identified targets and plans for the future. This progressive approach is highly commended. So too is the recent work done in developing whole school literacy and numeracy policies and in raising awareness of these areas across all subject departments. To continue to enhance the excellent work already achieved in target setting, staff should specifically identify in their reports how they will achieve such targets.

The SEN policy is not specific in terms of supports available for SEN students in the school. In addition, it is not comprehensive in terms of outlining how the curriculum is delivered. There is a need to document the provision for students with SEN.

Some aspects of the school's enrolment policy should be reworded with a view to amending some statements in relation to students with SEN and students transferring from other schools.

## ***2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

### **Leadership of staff**

The principal and deputy principal provide leadership of a high quality to staff. They do this by example and by having put in place very good systems to communicate with staff and ensure the smooth running of the school. They operate very much as a team and their shared vision permeates the school. They have specific as well as shared duties which serve the school well.

It is commendable that members of senior management meet daily to plan and review. There is also a weekly management meeting with assistant principals. This facilitates constant review and good communication. This management meeting is used to consolidate plans for the school and its outcomes are reported to all staff.

Leadership is also distributed across the school and many staff members have taken on responsibilities including acting as year heads and coordinators of programmes to ensure the smooth running of the school. The duties of post holders are continually monitored and reviewed to ensure that they are in accordance with the development needs of the school. Post holders are very much part of the management of the school.

All roles within the school are clearly defined and good reporting mechanisms are in place from those with specific roles. Year heads meet once a term to ensure consistency of approach and each year head meets their tutor group weekly to discuss emerging issues and plan a response to these issues.

Evidence of school improvement in relation to identified areas includes better timekeeping, the introduction of subject choice information week, the revival of the school musical and good use of the school journal. Davitt College's annual report gives a comprehensive overview of the school and illustrates the many examples of good practice which are part of everyday life in the school. The staff handbook ensures consistency of approach and attention to detail and promotes high expectations of teacher professionalism, for example by suggesting an appropriate dress code for teachers.

There is a palpable energy among staff in the school and evidence of very good relationships. This was widely commented on by students, parents and staff during the evaluation and was clearly evident from the positive dynamic in the school. Staff show tremendous dedication to their school, willingness to take on roles and responsibilities and huge appreciation of the leadership they are receiving from senior management. In turn, senior management is constantly building capacity by identifying staff to lead on new projects or to take over the running of ongoing projects. During the evaluation, several potential leaders were identifiable among the staff.

### **Leadership of students**

There is very good leadership of students by senior management and staff. The annual open night is a showcase of all that is good in the school and has been successful in attracting many students into the school. There are very good care structures for student, including the well organised tutor and year head system, the first year induction programme, a mentoring programme for first years, as well as a partnership programme where parents can discuss issues of concern with teachers. The care team, which is also the DEIS planning team, meets weekly and their work is central to the school. Tutors and year heads may refer students to the care team where a plan for that student is put in place. The School Completion Programme is also central to the school and is effective in organising support for targeted students including the operation of breakfast and homework clubs and a summer programme. This in conjunction with the work of the home school community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator ensures a rapid response to the specific needs of students and there is evidence of improved retention of at risk students as a result of these interventions. The students also benefit from the work of a counsellor from a community organisation as well as the work of the guidance service in the school. It is commendable that there are very good links between the care team and the social, personal and health education (SPHE) team to organise events such as anti-bullying week and mental health awareness week.

Students with SEN are assisted through the creation of smaller class groups for English and Mathematics and through support lessons if they have an exemption from Irish or if they do not study a modern European language. Third-year students currently spend much of their time in their support classes receiving homework support. A more targeted provision for these and all students to meet their individual identified needs would be more appropriate. The plan of support should be agreed with the student and his/her parents and be made available to all staff and it should be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure progress.

The school timetable is constructed in a collaborative manner and, on the whole, serves the students well. Staff are consulted prior to the construction of the timetable and efforts are made to utilise the specific talents and interests of the staff for the betterment of the curriculum.

Members of the students' council are elected by each class group and it meets regularly. Its officers are the main student representatives in the school and have a high profile at organised events. Students reported during the course of the evaluation the recent improvements they had noticed in the school for examples in terms of tighter discipline. They were also appreciative of the innovations in relation to ICT such as the use of visualisers. Award events are organised for the whole school community to celebrate successes. The curricular programmes meet the needs of all students. The first-year taster programme is well organised and helps students in choosing subjects for further study in junior cycle. There is also good communication with students and home in relation to subject choices and other relevant information.

A very wide range of extra and co-curricular activities is in place including a variety of sports and non-sporting events, school tours, charity events, and involvement in a range of events and competitions by different subject departments. These are further evidence of the commitment and hard work of the staff and students.

### ***2.3 Management of facilities***

Davitt College's two campuses are well maintained. The second-level school is well resourced in terms of appropriate rooms and equipment. ICT facilities are very good in the school. All teachers are provided with laptops which are widely used in classrooms. Classrooms are teacher based and are stimulating learning environments. Health and safety requirements are adhered to and the school has been recently awarded the Green flag which is evidence of environmental awareness among staff and students.

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

The quality of subject department planning is very good and subject folders also included relevant documentation and resources. All subject departments annually review their work and report on this to senior management and some have built self-reflection into their planning. This is very good practice.

There was very good or good quality teaching and learning observed in most of the thirty five lessons observed. It is commendable that learning outcomes were displayed in almost all of the lessons observed. There was evidence in almost all lessons of ongoing assessment of student learning. Homework was assigned in most lessons and there was evidence of students' work being well corrected and much formative feedback being given. Classroom management was very good in almost all lessons.

Features of very good lessons included high but realisable expectations in terms of appropriate learning objectives and very good teacher preparedness in terms of resources.

In these lessons ICT was used well to consolidate learning. In addition, in these lessons, all students were fully engaged and actively involved in their learning through discussion, directed questioning or well managed peer-learning activities, which promoted learner autonomy and allowed the students to express their opinions. Links were made with previous or future learning and with students' lives to put learning in context and higher-order questioning ensured that students were challenged. Teachers in these lessons displayed a passion and creativity for their work and this led to enthusiastic and interested learners. A particular feature of these lessons was that differentiation was used to ensure that all students were on task and working at an appropriate level. Teachers made allowances for assisting individual students and both pace and structure of lessons were appropriate. In these lessons, learning outcomes were clearly realised. The atmosphere was positive, purposeful and co-operative. In addition, attention was paid to the development of literacy and/or numeracy.

Where teaching and learning was good, classroom practice was effective although some possibilities for improvement existed. These lessons had many positive features including student engagement, student progress, and ongoing checking and monitoring of work. However, there was sometimes a lack of variety of activities in the lesson which led to less fulsome student engagement and often absence of the student voice due to too much teacher talk. In addition, the pace of some of these lessons was either too fast or too slow, teachers sometimes asked global questions as opposed to directed questions or there was little evidence of differentiation.

There was significant scope for development in a small number of lessons. Although these lessons contained features of good practice, there was little checking of student learning as little opportunity was given for the student voice to be expressed, ICT tended to be used as a lecture tool or the pace of the lessons was not appropriate. This often resulted in no differentiation, little student participation and a lack of consolidation of learning. Teachers of these lessons need to be more aware of the need for a balance between student and teacher input, and should develop questioning styles which are inclusive all students. Differentiation strategies should also be developed to serve the needs of all students in such lessons.

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

##### ***4.1 Management***

Management has focused on implementing recommendations from previous subject inspection reports. Timetabling has been reviewed in light of some recommendations, Christmas examinations have now been introduced for all students, coordinators of subject departments are rotated and management has located subject department teachers closer together where possible. The school is working to implement the twenty-eight hour weekly tuition or timetable provision.

##### ***4.2 Learning and Teaching***

There was much evidence that teachers have implemented the recommendations made in individual subject inspection reports. For example, in all lessons observed the learning outcomes were shared with all students. Formative assessment was used well in most lessons and differentiation was evident in many, although not all, lessons. In addition, teachers have commenced work on analysis of results in state examinations.

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

Davitt College demonstrates a very good capacity to continue to develop and improve. It has many self-evaluation processes already in place. Review processes are firmly embedded across the school. First-year students were surveyed in relation to their satisfaction with the school, and other surveys of staff and parents in relation to TY and in preparation for the school homework policy have been conducted. The school is a true learning community as evidenced by the willingness of staff to take on new roles, to engage in new teaching and learning activities and to accept feedback in relation to teaching and learning. As this is a progressive school, teachers should consider engaging in peer observation of teaching and learning so that the very good practice in so many lessons can be disseminated.

# **Appendix**

**School Response to the Report**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

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

The Davitt College Board of Management, Senior Management and Staff accept this report as a true reflection of the work being carried out within the school. We also wish to thank the visiting inspectors for their professionalism, advice and recommendations.

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

Page 2: Recommendations for further development

1.3 A full review of SEN provision has been made since January 2012.

The SEN Policy has been reviewed and expanded and is comprehensive in terms of outlining how the curriculum is delivered. The policy also documents provisions for SEN students.

From September 2012 staff will specifically identify how they will achieve targets they set. In-house training has been organised in “Differentiation Strategies in Teaching” for all staff and will be carried out in the 2012/2013 school year.

Through in-house peer mentoring by staff, strategies such as concept attainment (where students are encouraged to operate at the level of analysis) and Think/Pair/Share (participation in group work) are new strategies that will be learned which will further encourage the student voice into lessons.

Page 3 It is noted that the Parents’ Council should be more involved at an earlier stage in policy development. It is envisaged that in the future a representative from the Parents’ Council will be a member of a task group at the commencement of policy development. The Parents’ Council have agreed to organise briefing nights on areas of relevance to the general parent body commencing in September 2012.

For the June 2012 B.O.M. Meeting a report on Castlebar College of Further Education is on the agenda and this practice will continue in future.

It has been decided that the Davitt Student Council will meet the B.O.M. at their March/April meeting each school year.

Page 4 Analysis of Junior Certificate results against national averages has now begun in a number of subject departments and all subject departments will carry out this practice from September 2012.

From September 2012 staff will specifically identify how they will achieve targets they set. The Enrolment Policy is currently under review and the new Policy will be available to present to our B.O.M. in June 2012.

Page 7 In-house training has been organised in “Differentiation Strategies in Teaching” for all staff and will be carried out in the 2012/2013 school year.

Page 8 Peer observation of teaching and learning has begun in Davitt College and will continue to develop.