

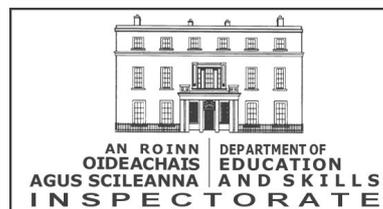
An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta

Department of Education and Skills

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

**St Macartan's College
Monaghan, Co Monaghan
Roll number: 64810V**

Date of inspection: 20 September 2011



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in September 2011 in St Macartan's 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, 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

St Macartan's College opened in 1848 and has a current enrolment of 690 boys. The school offers the Junior Certificate (JC), a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate (LC) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board of management is proud of the school's achievements and shows a strong commitment to the development of the school.
- Senior management forms a well-organised and focused leadership team and enjoys the full support of the staff.
- School development planning and policy development have progressed well in recent years.
- Communication between the educational partners is good.
- The school offers a broad curriculum with a good range of academic and technical subjects.
- The teaching staff is well qualified and support for teacher continuing professional development was evident.
- Addressing the care needs of students is one of the school's core values.
- The quality of teaching and learning across the lessons observed was good and in many cases, very good.
- The school has responded well to recommendations made in previous evaluations.
- St Macartan's College shows a strong capacity and ability to implement school improvement.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- Strategies and procedures need to be put in place to address individual cases of poor attendance by students.
- Subject department plans need development with a stronger emphasis on student learning outcomes and differentiation.
- A more whole-school approach to the teaching of students with special educational needs (SEN) should be adopted.
- A smaller core team of teachers should be established to provide learning support.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

The board of management is properly constituted and is well informed about its functions and statutory obligations. There is good awareness of roles and responsibilities among board members and these roles are carried out efficiently. The board is consultative, adaptable in its outlook and has a strong profile in the school community. It was evident during the evaluation that the board members are supportive and proud of the work of St Macartan's College.

Members of the board demonstrate a strong commitment to the school and are proactive in acting in the school's best interest. This commitment is reflected in the list of development priorities which have been identified by the board. These span a range of activities and issues relating to school efficacy and include, among others, promoting academic excellence in the school, safety in the workplace, improving communication in the school, school finance, policy review, the development of the school's facilities and the promotion of Gaelic games in the school. Very good progress has been made on the development of these priorities. Of particular note is the advancement of whole-school planning and policy development with a raft of policies ratified by the board over the past two years. Proper procedures have been followed in the development of these policies. To ensure clarity and consistency, it is recommended that all ratified policies be dated and signed with a date for review indicated.

There is constant and effective communication with the principal, who acts as secretary to the board. The chairperson of the board and the principal hold regular informal meetings. Following board meetings, minutes are drafted and an agreed report is communicated to the teaching staff and the parents' association. This is good practice.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (Published September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

The Parents' Association plays an important role in the life of the school through fundraising and the support of a range of activities. The principal attends all association meetings and the members see this as a strong support of their work. The ongoing diligence of the association is highly valued by school management and the teachers.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and the deputy principal form a cohesive team and demonstrate very effective leadership of learning, of people and of the school as a whole. The senior management team manages the college collaboratively and has an active presence in the college. The principal views his role as leading and managing all the school partners and resources to create the best possible educational experience for the entire school population. The deputy principal deals more directly with student issues on a day-to-day basis. High standards are set by senior management for students and staff, communication is open and transparent. Management operate an open-door policy and is flexible and realistic in its approach.

Responses to the questionnaires indicate that all of the parents surveyed agree that the school is well run.

Among the teaching staff of the school there are currently nine assistant principals and fourteen special duties post-holders. They see themselves as middle management in the school and describe discussions with senior management as democratic and open. Duties have been assigned based on the needs of the school and the skills, capacity and interests of the post-holders. In the main, meaningful roles are distributed to post holders and there was evidence that posts are reviewed to ensure that the needs of the school continue to be met.

The school operates a clear admissions policy with prioritised criteria for admission. The policy suggests that deferral or refusal of enrolment of students with special educational needs may be done on the basis of the allocation of resources by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) or, in certain cases, even where the DES has provided additional resources. It is suggested that a minor alteration to wording, relating to enrolment being conditional upon resources being made available, would represent a more open and fair admissions policy, in keeping with the ethos of the school.

The code of behaviour is based on respect, courtesy and well-being. It is positive in tone and is prominently placed in students' homework journals. Almost all of the students surveyed through questionnaires agreed that they understood the school rules. It was noted that the behaviour of students during the evaluation was exemplary.

A year head and tutor system is in operation in the school to assist in the care of students. The class tutor is best described as fulfilling a pastoral role, with some disciplinary functions, while year heads have some pastoral duties and most of the serious disciplinary tasks. It was reported that discipline has improved in the school in recent years. Almost all parents surveyed by questionnaire agree that discipline is good and most students surveyed feel both safe and cared for in the school.

The existence of a Student Support Committee provides further evidence that the school prioritises the welfare of its students. This group meets weekly and comprises the senior management team, the chaplain, one of the guidance counsellors and the year heads. The work of this group is central to the care and support of students and is highly commended. A Meitheal group assists in the care of first year students whilst the sixth year prefects provide very good role models, have a high profile in the college and are seen as trustworthy and fair in the way they deliver support.

A computerised system is in place for recording and tracking students' attendance. This is monitored by year heads and an assistant principal with relevant data sent to the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB). The data returned to the NEWB for the 2009/10 academic year indicates a high level of absenteeism and in particular a high number of students missing twenty days or more during that year. It is recommended that the school urgently puts strategies and procedures in place to address these attendance issues.

Individual subject plans are at various stages of development and are based around the templates provided by the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI). It is recommended that the schemes of work within these folders be further developed to incorporate increased levels of detail on student learning outcomes, teaching methodologies, differentiation, resources and assessment methods for each topic listed. The advancement of the subject planning process will increase the levels of collaboration within subject departments and will provide a forum for the discussion of strategies to further promote student engagement and achievement. It is suggested that senior management should actively monitor the development of these subject plans.

The continuing professional development (CPD) of staff is actively supported and encouraged 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 with the help and support of the school. Whole-staff, in-service training has also been provided on a variety of relevant topics. These are all positive measures. It is suggested that an appropriate focus now for senior management is the upskilling of staff in the use of learning outcomes and planning for differentiation in teaching and learning.

A broad curriculum is offered both at JC and LC levels, with a range of academic and technical subjects. The curriculum is continually under review by school management and requests from parents and students have been acted upon. This has led to the introduction of Agricultural Science as a module in TY with a view to offering it as a subject choice for the LC. The possibility of re-introducing Applied Mathematics at senior cycle is also being actively explored.

Students at senior cycle are offered the full range of LC programmes. School management is commended for continuing to offer the LCA to students in spite of a low uptake. This shows a strong commitment to the students who may find that the established Leaving Certificate programme does not suit their needs.

Students are provided with a range of supports at times of transition. Incoming first-year students are offered an open choice of optional subjects and are advised on their choices by subject teachers and the guidance department. Students moving to senior cycle sit the Differential Aptitude Tests (DATs) after which the guidance department conducts individual interviews with students and their parents to discuss subject and programme choice. This is good practice. Students are offered an open choice of subjects at this level and are given extensive advice concerning the subject choices necessary to enable participation in LCVP. All students take the fourth year TY programme and have the opportunity to complete modules in a variety of activities. Students interviewed during the evaluation expressed their satisfaction with the TY programme.

Effective procedures are in place to identify students who require learning support. One teacher delivers a large proportion of the learning support and coordinates the delivery of the overall programme. She is assisted by twelve additional teachers, many of whom have a small allocation of learning support hours. In the interest of best practice, it is recommended that a smaller core team of resource teachers be established. This would facilitate training, would establish continuity with students and would build on levels of teacher experience. Individual education plans are drawn up for students who receive support and these are reviewed biannually to monitor progress and set new targets. This work is commended. To build on this good practice it is recommended that identified students be formally re-tested on an annual basis. This would assist in the tracking of student progress and help target future interventions.

Students have a real voice in the school through the student council. The council communicates with the general student body through the council notice board, through year group representatives and a comment box. The structure of the student council is determined by the existing student council constitution which does not allow members to be drawn from first or second year. It is recommended that this constitution be changed to ensure that representatives from every year group are elected onto the council.

2.3 Management of facilities

Both the original school building and the more recent extensions are maintained to a very high standard. A calm, welcoming atmosphere pervades the school. Photographs and displays around the school mark student achievements and significant events in the school's history. A selection of student artwork creates a friendly ambience in the common areas of the school.

The school is well resourced in terms of information and communication technology (ICT). The Department of Education and Skills has recently provided significant funding to the school for the purchase of ICT equipment and this money has been judiciously spent. All classrooms have good access to ICT equipment to aid teaching and learning. Of the students surveyed almost all believe that facilities are good in the school.

The school buildings are not fully wheelchair accessible and this is of concern to management. Efforts to find workable solutions to the various practical problems posed by the design of the buildings are ongoing.

Classrooms are predominantly teacher based and most teachers have taken full advantage of this to display subject specific materials and students' project work. The effort made to create a rich, stimulating, learning environment for the students is commended.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty-four lessons were observed during the evaluation. In the majority of these lessons the quality of teaching and learning was good and in many lessons was very good. Responses to questionnaires indicate that almost all parents agree that teaching is good in the school. Best practice was observed where lessons had clear aims which were shared with students at the start of lessons. Communicating the learning objectives of the lesson to the students provides a clear structure, creates a lesson focus and helps students take responsibility for their own learning. The identified aims can also be used at the conclusion of the lesson to evaluate the progress made during the lesson.

During classroom visits, it was noted that teachers encouraged students to use subject specific terminology. This is good practice. As a further support for the development of literacy, it is recommended that new terminology encountered during a lesson be written and displayed on the whiteboard or some other suitable medium and that these words be recorded by students in their copybooks. Such a strategy could form the basis of a whole-school approach to literacy. Similarly, the school should seek to develop strategies to facilitate a whole-school approach to the teaching of numeracy.

There was good evidence of careful short-term planning, including the preparation of resources for the lessons observed. A range of teaching styles and strategies helped to stimulate and maintain student interest and there were some successful uses of active learning methodologies. These included the use of brainstorming, pair work, group work, discussion and practical activities. It was also good to note the very effective use of ICT in many of the lessons. By providing variety, the teacher facilitated the varied learning styles of students. Of the students surveyed, most found their lessons interesting.

In a small number of lessons there was evidence of the effective differentiation of lesson content. This is an important consideration in all lessons to ensure that the lesson material

and the lesson activities are accessible to all students. There is scope, through subject planning and the more extensive use of learning outcomes, to extend this practice.

During classroom visits, students' homework and class exercise books were examined. These were of a good standard and were checked regularly by teachers. Results from the questionnaires indicate that almost all parents and students surveyed agree that teachers regularly check written work. In some cases teachers provided written formative feedback to students. It is recommended that there be an increase in the quantity and quality of constructive and affirmative written feedback provided to students on their work in keeping with assessment for learning principles (AfL). The cross section of homework journals examined indicated that they were a well-used resource in the management of students generally and in the recording and monitoring of homework. Almost all parents surveyed through questionnaires sign their son's journal on a weekly basis.

Classroom management was effective. Teaching and learning took place in a supportive environment, characterised by mutual respect and positive working relationships. Teachers encouraged students' efforts and when good work was completed, it was affirmed appropriately.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

All the recommendations, made in previous evaluations, relating to subject provision and school support have been systematically addressed by the school management. The thoroughness with which they have engaged with this process is highly commended.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

A common theme running through many of the previous subject inspection reports relates to the need for improved subject department planning. The evaluation team examined the subject planning folders presented during the evaluation and conclude that while there has been some improvement in relation to the development of subject department plans, there is still considerable room for improvement. It is recommended that a whole-school approach to subject planning be adopted to really bring this process forward. Subject department collaboration and planning with a focus on the identification of student learning outcomes should be promoted as an area for early attention. Efforts should also be made to increase the sharing of resources, methodologies and good practice within subject departments.

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

There is clear evidence that there is full engagement by the school's stakeholders in school self-evaluation and school improvement and that they work together to best meet the evolving needs of the student cohort. Sound processes have been implemented to date. This, coupled with the strong leadership from the principal and the board of management, has seen an ambitious programme of improvements agreed and these improvements are being acted upon in a systematic and diligent manner. The school has also engaged positively with recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports. All of these factors indicate that St. Macartan's is a school which, through cooperation and collaboration, is willing to change and adapt in order to benefit its students.

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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

St Macartan's College very much appreciate the professional manner in which the inspection process was undertaken in our school. We also very much appreciate the very positive and favourable report as presented by the inspection team at the end of the inspection process.

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

Subject Department Plans were presented to the inspectors in light of in-service and direction given by the SDPI and the SLSS. The Board has asked all subject departments to review their plans to include further reference to learning outcomes and differentiation as recommended by the inspectors.

In light of the comments made by the inspectors, a full review of how the school monitors attendance took place immediately after the inspection. The Board has reassessed how absences are recorded. In future, students who arrive late for school i.e. after 11.00 a.m. will be marked late but present. The Student Support Committee will, in consultation with the Assistant principal in charge of monitoring and reporting on absenteeism, continue to review absenteeism on a monthly basis. In future a report on student absenteeism will be presented to all Board of Management meetings.

The inspection team has noted that considerable work is being done with regards to the integration and teaching of students with SEN in the College. This work will be progressed further in light of the comments made by the inspectors during the inspection process.

A smaller core team of teachers involved in SEN would be ideal. However, in light of the impact of the National Recovery Plan 2011-2014 on Learning Support and to quote DES school allocations, "it is expected that the educational needs of the SEN pupils enrolled in your school can be met from within the school's existing staffing allocation".