

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Christian Brothers Secondary School
Mitchelstown, County Cork
Roll number: 62420V**

Date of inspection: 4 February 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 January 2013 in Christian Brothers Secondary School, Mitchelstown, Co. Cork. 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

The Christian Brothers School was established in Mitchelstown in 1857. A new building was erected in 1969 in the grounds of the original school and a major extension was added in 2007. Part of the original building continues to be used as classrooms.

As a voluntary secondary school in the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST), a comprehensive philosophy underpins its functioning and underlies the provision of programmes, such as the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Transition Year (TY), which is optional. The school serves the educational needs of a largely rural community, and enjoys high attendance and retention rates.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- Organisational change is being well managed, and in a positive direction, following recent appointments at the levels of the board of management and of senior management.
- An affirmative working environment has facilitated a more structured approach, both to school development planning and to the strengthening of the middle management functions of staff.
- The school ethos is in keeping with the ERST charter and places support for students and the development of good relationships among its key values.
- Some examples of very good teaching were observed, and would be a valuable resource in the school's current consideration of teaching practices in the context of school self-evaluation.
- Significant progress has been made by the current management team in response to the recommendations of previous evaluations by the Inspectorate.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The consolidation of school development planning should be enhanced by continuing policy development and engagement with school self-evaluation.
- The roles and responsibilities necessary for the efficient running of the school should be clarified with a view to a more effective middle management structure.

- The public areas, such as the entrance, the corridors and the exterior of some buildings should be decorated in a manner that celebrates creatively and symbolically, the ethos, traditions and achievements of the school.
- The timetable should be adjusted to provide for a nine-period day.
- A focus on teachers' professional practice should take account of the creative changes demanded by the reform of the junior cycle, the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into practice and the teaching skills of staff members.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

- There has been much change at management level in the past year. Both the principal and deputy principal were appointed in March 2012, following the retirement of their predecessors, and a new board of management was appointed later that year. In addition, some recent appointments have been made to the staff. It was acknowledged by all that challenges were faced during the period of adjustment. It was also acknowledged that those challenges have been, and continue to be, managed constructively and positively.
- The board of management is properly constituted, comprising members appointed by ERST, parents and teachers. Although the current board has only been in office since October 2012, members display an appropriate sense of responsibility for, and commitment to the operation of the school in the context of the ERST charter, especially as it relates to the ethos of the school and to its proper governance and budgetary management. The participation of members in training related to membership of the board exemplifies this commitment.
- The professional competencies of board members in areas such as financial services and education are also indicative of a board with a clear capacity for management. Continuity has been ensured by the appointment of some members with prior experience of the board, or of boards in general. It has been the practice of the board to meet formally on up to eight occasions annually and to communicate informally as necessary.
- The board has identified a number of priorities that are relevant to this transitional phase in the school. They include the support of the principal and deputy principal in the management of change, the support of staff in the development of professional practice through continuing professional development (CPD) and self-evaluation, and the maintenance of the current level of enrolment. An annual report to the relevant members of the school community should enhance this good practice.
- The principal and deputy principal form an effective and reflective leadership team. Both are experienced educators and they have formed a positive working relationship, based on their complementary skills and interests. Their approach to decision-making is proactive, open and adaptable. Their relationship with the board of management continues to develop in an atmosphere that is professional and positive.
- Policy development has been a priority for the senior management team. A new discipline policy has been drafted by a staff sub-committee and has been ratified by the board of management with a proposed review by 2014. This is good practice. The reorganisation of the school's administrative systems has been undertaken in collaboration with administrative staff. Senior management has emphasised the use of digital technology to support the monitoring of student attendance and the development of the school's purchasing system.

- The current focus of the school's middle management is, appropriately, on the needs of students. Each class is assigned a class tutor whose functions include the care and support of students in their remit. Programmes, such as the LCA, TY and LCVP are effectively and collaboratively co-ordinated, and a list of the responsibilities assumed by staff members is in circulation.
- In light of the various changes among staff, and in view of the impending changes to the national educational curriculum, it is recommended that a co-ordinated approach be taken to the identification and prioritisation of the school's needs. In particular, the list of in-school duties should be expanded to include the duties taken on by all staff, whether post holders or not. The list should be reviewed annually with respect to changing school needs and as an affirmation of staff collaboration and expertise. The process which was encouraged by the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) is suggested as an appropriate method by which all staff may be involved. The positive feelings about the school expressed by parents and students in responses to questionnaires administered in the course of this evaluation are indicative of the potential for inclusion of the voice of students and of parents in the more general process of school improvement.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

- Significant advances have been made in whole-school planning and in its application. A comprehensive list of short, medium and long-term objectives has been set out by senior management. The actions taken to fulfil these objectives have included a focus on teaching practices and on student support. This is good practice. The approach taken by senior management values highly a structured planning process. There is clear recognition of the value of CPD and of the inclusion of the voice of students and of parents in the process.
- A subject-department structure is in place. This facilitates collaborative activity among teachers and a structured approach to subject planning and co-ordination. The subject-department plans are generally well-formed and presented. Features of the plans observed, and that are recommended for more widespread adoption, include some reflection on the achievement of stated subject objectives and learning outcomes. Typically, a spreadsheet outlining the subject objectives and programme is included in the plans observed. The addition of a column in which to note some reflective comments would be a simple, but effective method by which reflection might be achieved.
- In some subject-department plans, the school mission was stated at the outset, which established a values-based approach to subject development. Similarly, the statement of desired subject objectives and learning outcomes, the teaching strategies to be used and the supports available to students were noted in some documents. In order to avoid duplication, it is recommended that documents relating to generic issues, such as teaching methods, referrals, supports for students, and literacy and numeracy be devised by staff and included in the school plan. Reference to these documents might then be made in subject-department plans and in the context of more subject-specific information.
- Subject-department plans show reflection on the results of the certificate examinations. The comparison of results with those of the national aggregation is good practice that may stimulate further reflection on teaching practices. It should be noted that, when comparing results, those of schools of a similar type should be used as the comparison group in order to provide a more specific comparator.
- In general, classrooms are teacher-based. This arrangement has facilitated the display of relevant information and student work in many rooms. It is clear that the national

strategy to improve literacy and numeracy has impacted on classroom practice and, in some rooms, subject-specific displays included lists of key words, and visual and text documents. Such practices should be extended to all departments.

- It was clear, during interactions with students, that relationships among students and between staff and students were positive. Students were observed to be well behaved, courteous and helpful. A room, normally occupied by a class of LCA students was being redecorated by the students and furnished by management at the time of the evaluation, exemplifying the benefit of collaborative engagement. This is confirmed by the participation of senior-cycle students trained in youth leadership in a mentoring programme for newly-enrolled students and by the recent achievement of Green Flag status by the school.
- On a broader level, substantial collaboration exists between the school and the neighbouring Presentation girls' school. The timetables of both schools are constructed to enable students to access, at senior level, subjects not available in their base school. This facilitates access to a broader range of subjects than would be normally available and to a co-educational environment where resources are shared. Mutual participation in events, such as school musical productions is also facilitated. This is good practice.
- The school operates on a timetable of eight lesson periods per day. This means that it is difficult to maximise the use of twenty-two hours of teacher tuition-time. Although the two schools collaborate in the provision of an extended range of subjects, it is the stated preference of the management of both schools that, in order to facilitate a greater range of subjects, a nine-period timetable should operate. Management considers that the flexibility afforded by such an arrangement would enable a more creative response to the curricular changes proposed under the reform of the junior cycle. Although some staff members have expressed reservations about the proposal, the adoption of a nine-period timetable is recommended. It is noted that the reports of previous subject inspections include similar recommendations.
- An early initiative of the senior management team was the formation of a care team comprising senior management and representatives of the guidance and learning support departments, and other interested staff. In consequence, the need for a structured approach to student support and guidance was recognised. Significant progress has been made in this regard. Existing strengths in areas such as learning support and provision for students with special educational needs, as exemplified in the skilled management of the autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) programme, are being complemented by the development of a whole-school approach to student guidance and care. CPD for staff is being underwritten by the board of management and will enable the development of whole-school guidance planning in keeping with that outlined in National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) documents.
- The parents' association, although not currently affiliated to a national association, is well structured and dynamic. Parents have been active in recent policy development and in fundraising for the school. It is clear that parents, with their local knowledge, discernment and positive attitude to the school, are a valuable resource.
- The student council has been placed on a more formal footing. With the assistance of a member of staff, members elected by their classes attend regular, structured, meetings, consider policies as appropriate and, subsequently, meet the principal or deputy principal. Among its other activities, the council has engaged collaboratively in the recent revision of the school code of behaviour.
- 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 buildings and grounds are well maintained. A range of accommodation, including a modern, three-storey extension is in use. Some classrooms of the original school provide additional accommodation. These are the subject of a planned refurbishment programme designed to maximise energy efficiency. A handball alley is housed in a separate building that, although suited to purpose, is of little aesthetic merit due to the erosion of an insulating cladding. In promoting the school, consideration should be given to the decoration of features such as the school entrances, the public areas and the exterior of some buildings. Opportunities exist in these areas to celebrate creatively the ethos, traditions and achievements of the school.
- Among the priorities of management is the development of digital technology as an essential resource in teaching and administration. Considerable progress has been made in this regard. In addition to the widespread availability and use of classroom technology, such as data projectors, visualisers and interactive whiteboards, the administrative system has been upgraded to enable more widespread access to data regarding student attendance and retention. Plans are also in place to digitise the reporting of students' achievements to parents.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

- A number of examples of very good teaching practice were observed in the course of the evaluation. Most lessons were well planned and structured. The materials and resources appropriate to the topics covered were to hand and, in most lessons, a variety of methods that enabled student engagement was employed. It is recommended that teachers share good practice in this regard. The current focus on teaching and learning under the umbrella of school self-evaluation provides opportunities for such development.
- The teaching methods outlined in some subject-department plans should form a basis for the development of a whole-school focus on teaching methods. This should inform a move from some of the more traditional teaching methods observed, in anticipation of the more student-focused methods to be employed in the successful implementation of the revised junior cycle.
- It was clear that the relationships among students and between teachers and students were affirmative and supportive. The rapport that had been established in all lessons provided an environment in which on-going assessment was natural and based on teachers' understanding of students abilities and learning styles. Good use was made of formative assessment in the course of the lessons, although little evidence of this, or of any written comment by teachers, was observed in samples of students' written work. This should be discussed at whole-school level.
- Good practice observed in some lessons included the inclusion of a clear statement of the desired learning outcomes, the use of subject-specific terminology and the noting of key words. Effective use was made of whiteboards and blackboards, as appropriate, to display notes, diagrams and other lesson content. Clear directions and explanations were features of most lessons. In all cases, students demonstrated their understanding

of prior learning and its integration into their current learning. Where there was scope for improvement, feedback to teachers indicated a need for the more active participation of students in the learning process through the use of variety, both in lesson content and in the teaching methods employed. It was recommended in some cases that the homework assigned relate more closely to lesson content. It is suggested that such a review might be undertaken in the development of school policies on assessment and homework.

- The use of digital technology has been incorporated into the teaching practice of the majority of teachers. The use of data projectors was widespread; visualisers were used in some lessons and teacher-generated digital materials were observed in the majority of lessons. The combined use of prepared slides, the interactive whiteboard and broadband access was, in one lesson, of the highest order. The potential of digital technology in the context of the delivery of lesson content and the development of teachers' skills in its application should form part of teachers CPD.
- Student inputs were encouraged and were facilitated by the clear interest of teachers in their subjects. Students were engaged throughout the lessons and demonstrated an interest in the subject matter in conformity with teacher expectations.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

- The implementation of the recommendations from previous evaluations has been mixed. While those referring to subject-specific issues have been addressed in all cases, recommendations regarding the development of school systems and whole-school planning have had a longer gestation. It is clear, however, that much has been achieved in a relatively short time since the appointment of the current senior management team, as evidenced particularly in responses to the management focus on short, medium and long-term plans. These have included a commitment to the documentation of processes, the establishment of a structured approach to planning and to student support, and a focus on teaching and learning.

3.2 Learning and teaching

- Subject-specific responses to previous evaluations have been positive. Although the timetabling arrangements recommended in a recent report are to be implemented when practicable, recommendations regarding the analysis of the results of the certificate examinations and the documentation of subject programmes have been implemented.
- The formalisation of the subject department system provides a structure by which issues raised in evaluations may be addressed collaboratively. The current focus on school self-evaluation provides additional opportunities for cross-curricular collaboration and for the development of approaches to issues of common interest, such as teaching methods, assessment and technology in education. The recommendations of previous evaluations should be reviewed in light of these developments.

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

- In developing the planning, policy, administrative and technological infrastructure it is clear that the senior management team has, as its objective, the advancement of a school-wide focus on teaching and learning in the context of school self-evaluation.

Evidence of progress in that regard was found at subject department level in the departmental plans, at classroom level in the teaching practices observed and in references to literacy and numeracy, and at whole-school level in the records of staff meetings and in staff engagement with CPD.

- Given the recent significant advances in those areas, it is evident that the school has a clear capacity for change management and for improvement. Given staff engagement with the current national drive towards improvement through self-evaluation, and, especially, through the potential offered by collaborative sharing of the good teaching practices observed, the resources are available within the school to plan effectively for improvement.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

On Section 2.1 The quality of learning and teaching (page 6) – at the end of the third bullet point, it is stated that “Good use was made of formative assessment in the course of the lessons, although little evidence of this, or of any written comment by teachers, was observed in the samples of students’ written work.’

On discussion of this matter at a recent staff meeting, those teachers inspected reported that on average only 2 copies per class were inspected, (a number of which were notes copies), and that A4 folders with students homework and worksheets were not viewed. They also stated that this matter was not raised at the verbal feedback immediately after the lessons inspected – if it were, then the matter would have been addressed.

The handball alley listed on page 6, ‘of little aesthetic merit’ is used by the school, but is not the property of the school. Unfortunately, as this is the case, we cannot decorate the outside of this building.

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

The recommendations made in the report were both reasonable and helpful.

CBS Secondary School will, as recommended, implement a nine period day in the next academic year.

The Parents’ Association will affiliate to the National Parents Council, next year.

At a future date the middle management structure will be reviewed.

Work will be carried out next term to improve the aesthetic appearance of the school entrance etc.

CPD will be provided for staff on school self-evaluation and on the methodological changes required by the New Junior Certificate