Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Scoil Muire agus Pádraig
Swinford, County Mayo
Roll number: 64690O

Date of inspection: 22 September 2011
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A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in September 2011 in Scoil Muire agus Pádraig, Swinford. 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
In 1906 the sisters of Mercy founded St Mary’s Secondary School for girls on the present site. In 1985 the amalgamation with Saint Patrick’s College gave rise to the current co-educational context. In 1992 Scoil Muire agus Pádraig was established incorporating the vocational school and it is now the sole provider of second level education in the town of Swinford and surrounding rural catchment area. The school’s current enrolment of 399 students is drawn from a mix of socio-economic groups. Enrolment has decreased by five per cent over the past four years and current demographic patterns indicate a continuing trend. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department’s action plan for educational inclusion. It benefits from the services of a full-time home school community liaison (HSCL) coordinator and participates in the School Completion Programme (SCP).

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The senior management team is committed to the development and improvement of the school as a safe and caring learning environment.
- The range of subjects and programmes offered by the school is broad and balanced in the context of the size of the school.
- There is unified approach to the assessment of students with special educational needs (SEN) and the organisation and delivery of supports to them.
- The welfare and care of students, supported by a formal weekly meeting, is a high priority in the school and is central to the work of all teachers.
- The quality of teaching and learning was very good or exemplary in the majority of the lessons observed.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The board of management in consultation with senior management and the teaching staff should articulate a clear long-term vision for the school guided by the DEIS framework and should develop action plans to achieve its collective aims.
• A review of the posts of responsibilities should be carried out at whole-staff level, to meet the developmental priorities of the school as well as the current needs of the school.
• An analysis of staff continuing professional development (CPD) needs should be carried out and a CPD programme, linked to the school’s developmental priorities, should be drawn up based on the outcomes of this.
• Teaching and learning practices should become a central focus of all subject department meetings. Methodologies identified should be developed and implemented so as to progress the improvement of teaching and learning.
• The school’s self-evaluation processes and structures should be formalised and should include the views of parents, students and members of the school community.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

The board of management is appropriately constituted and fulfils its statutory obligations. It is committed to the school’s Christian values of partnership, mutual respect and loyalty as espoused in its mission statement. Board members demonstrate a complementary range of skills, experience and expertise and are appropriately trained. A good level of communication has been established with the trustee body Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST) which supports the school in many ways.

The board is very supportive of senior management. The current board initiated the setting up of a finance sub-committee with appropriate procedures to inform full board meetings. The recent introduction of an annual principal’s report to the board on the operation and performance of the school is a further example of the board’s and senior management’s commitment to building open lines of communication. Policy development and review has been a frequent item on the board’s agenda since 2002. While a collaborative approach to policy development and review has been established between the board and the teaching staff, it is recommended as a matter of priority that the views of both parents and students be included in this process.

The parents’ council is supportive of the school and it commends the open door policy of management towards parents and the approachability of teaching staff. The school’s HSCL coordinator plays a key role in developing and enhancing home-school links.

The board should progress the review of its health and safety statement as a matter of urgency. The current school safety statement was written in the context of 1989 health legislation. Recommendations made in relation to health and safety in three previous subject inspection reports should be addressed in this review. Furthermore, each subject department should carry out an annual risk assessment of its teaching area for submission to the school’s safety officer.

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 school’s priorities for development

Among the priorities for development are short, medium and long term strategies for the school and ongoing evaluation of the school plan and policy review. Other priorities include improving the quality of teaching and learning, supporting curriculum developments, ICT improvements and greater parent participation. Some progress has been made in the achievement of a number of these priorities and a school development planning team, consisting of the principal and an assistant principal is in place.

In line with its participation in DEIS the school needs to set out specific and measurable targets as part of a DEIS plan. There was no data available in the school to establish if the strategies and interventions arising from DEIS are having a positive, negative or negligible effect across the seven DEIS themes. It is recommended that the board in consultation with senior management and the teaching staff articulate a clear long-term vision for the school guided by the DEIS framework. Action plans to achieve short, medium and long term strategic goals should be devised. Formal structures should include established task groups being assigned to each strategic area with an elected chair who in turn would be a member of a planning steering group co-ordinated by the deputy principal. Elected chairs should provide continuity over time and ensure objectives are achieved in a sustained manner. Task groups on this occasion should also be representative of all stakeholders and progress reports on school planning should be a regular item on the agenda of board meetings.

To further develop student learning the board should support staff CPD programmes based on a professional needs analysis, including training for staff in the use of the recently installed information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure. While the parents’ council and parents generally feel valued as part of the school community parents were largely unaware of the work of the board. The synergies that could be derived from joint meetings of the board and the parents’ council regarding common priorities for school development should be explored.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The senior management team was in a transition phase until the appointment of a principal in May 2011 and a deputy principal in August of 2011. Both members of the new senior management team have given a long service to the school and are committed to the development and improvement of the school as a safe and caring learning environment. They both carry out a large range of duties that support the efficient and effective organisation of the school, which involves a mix of day-to-day duties and forward planning. The distinct roles of the principal and deputy principal are evolving according to their individual strengths. The senior management team is consultative and empowering and values open channels of communication. Both members demonstrate good leadership in their willingness to delegate according to expertise and interests. Senior management would benefit from availing of opportunities for CPD and training to support them in their new roles.

Members of middle management carry out their respective responsibilities in a diligent and committed manner and reported being afforded autonomy in their roles. This has fostered a sense of ownership among post-holders. Although a recent review of the schedule of posts was carried out on an individual basis, a review of the posts should be carried out at whole-
staff level, to meet the developmental priorities of the school as well as the current needs of the school in the context of whole-school action planning within the DEIS framework. This review should remove subject co-ordination from the list of post duties and should be mindful of the possibilities of building leadership capacity among non-post holders. The roles of the principal and deputy principal should also be documented as part of this review.

Teachers are encouraged and facilitated to participate in external CPD. Structures to facilitate sharing of information gained at such in-service should be developed at a subject department level and where relevant at a whole-staff level. Whole-staff inputs have been organised in the past, in particular in the areas of subject planning and learning support. It is recommended that a professional needs analysis of the staff be carried out and a programme for CPD over the coming years be drawn up based on the outcome of this analysis. The school should link CPD planning to its developmental priorities. An annual consultation between senior management and subject departments would allow for discussion on the progression of planning priorities as well as challenges encountered.

The school has developed 43 policies since school development planning (SDP) began in the school in 2002. All policies should be dated and signed on adoption. A rolling approach to policy review is in place and in the current year curriculum, sport, and health and safety are under review. The code of behaviour was reviewed last year and although formal class group assemblies to reinforce good behaviour were introduced, there is still scope to develop the rewarding of positive behaviour element of the code when the next scheduled review takes place.

Subject departments meet formally at the beginning and at the end of the school year and subject plans were made available in the majority of subjects on the curriculum. This planning work has impacted positively on student learning through the delivery of planned common programmes in almost all subjects and through common assessments and marking schemes in some subjects.

A staff handbook is being developed at a whole-school level and one subject department has commendably developed common practices and procedures for that particular subject. It is recommended that these working documents be used to progress the development of the handbook.

While a number of post holders have, as part of their remit, responsibilities for absenteeism, no analysis was being carried out on the attendance data gathered. It is imperative that the school begins gathering this baseline data without delay. The SCP which has a target group of 66 students, half of whom are very poor attenders, will provide a starting point to begin work on attendance and other DEIS themes.

**Leadership of students**

The school has a democratically elected student council and the student body has a clear voice through its elected representatives as well as a centrally located suggestion box. The students interviewed demonstrated leadership qualities and have effected positive changes. In the future it is recommended that the student council be involved in policy development at an early stage.

There are appropriate procedures in place for the management of transitions from primary to post-primary school. Students and parents expressed satisfaction with the quality of supports and information at key transition times. First-year students are also well supported by the mentoring system. Partnership between staff and students is a key element of the school’s philosophy.
The school has an open and inclusive admissions policy. It is recommended that the criteria for entry to TY be agreed at whole-staff level and documented. Parents and students should be informed of these criteria at the start of the junior cycle.

The range of curriculum subjects and programmes offered by the school is very broad and balanced in the context of the size of the school. The school is also commended on the provision of post leaving certificate (PLC) courses. The establishment of an autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) unit is further evidence of the school’s commitment to meeting the needs of the local student population.

Students’ learning and holistic development is supported by an extensive range of extracurricular activities. These are made possible through the commitment of teachers in giving of their own time.

All students are placed in mixed-ability classes in first year. From second year on students are set for the core subjects. A number of issues in relation to timetabling were raised during the inspection period including the need a minimum of two lesson periods of Physical Education (PE) each week for all year groups.

The work of special educational needs co-ordination is shared and there is a unified approach to the testing of students and the organisation and delivery of supports. SEN co-ordinators and teachers mainly involved in delivery of supports have SEN qualifications. A formal weekly team meeting of the SEN coordinators is facilitated and the coordinators are afforded the autonomy they need to work effectively. Very good procedures, systems and practices to deliver SEN supports have been developed, which include one-to-one and small group supports. A comprehensive and high quality plan is in place with review on-going. It is recommended that the SEN team share teaching and learning strategies with all staff to support inclusion of SEN students and a whole-school approach to literacy and numeracy. It would also be beneficial to document the good practices carried out in relation to the diagnostic testing of students and to develop models of re-testing as part of a testing policy, a policy development recommended in the guidance subject inspection report in 2007.

The welfare and care of students is a high priority in the school and central to the work of all teachers. The pastoral care team comprises key personnel and provide an effective link with senior management, HSCL and SCP coordinators, and the guidance service. A formal weekly forum allows for the meeting of all members of the care team and provides a cohesive network system that impacts positively on student welfare. Year heads and senior management also meet weekly on a formal basis and there is an effective class tutor system. A good quality guidance service underpins the pastoral care supports. It is recommended that a whole-school approach be developed to support the delivery of guidance.

2.3 Management of facilities

The school building is in very good condition and is clean and well maintained. The school has recently installed ICT facilities that include broadband, data projector and laptops available in all general classrooms and in almost all specialist rooms. Plans are in place to establish a Green-school’s committee to increase environmental awareness.
3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning was very good or exemplary in the majority of lessons observed. Teachers set high expectations for student learning in these lessons. Preparation and planning for lessons was uniformly very good and was characterised by the effective sharing of learning outcomes. Teachers planned for opportunities to differentiate student learning outcomes in over half of all lessons observed. Good links were forged with prior learning and these promoted continuity and enhanced student motivation to learn in the majority of lessons.

A range of teaching methodologies was employed. These included very good examples of questioning techniques, addressing keywords during lessons and, in some lessons, attention to the development of key transferable skills was evident. In these lessons a good balance was achieved between teacher input and student activity and the appropriate use of task-based learning was characterised by good attention to individual learning needs. Teachers showed an awareness of students’ literacy needs across a good range of subjects and effective numeracy-building strategies were evident, mainly in mathematics lessons. In half the lessons evaluated ICT was used effectively to increase student learning. Excellent use of the classroom board to enhance teaching and learning was observed in a number of lessons.

Discussions in relation to expertise and good practice in teaching and learning should become a particular focus of all subject-department meetings. Methods identified should be collated across subject to progress the improvement of teaching and learning.

Classroom management and students’ behaviour was of a high standard in all classes and this very good teacher-student rapport was underpinned by mutual respect.

The music and art rooms were exemplars of stimulating learning environments. All classrooms should seek to maintain a relevant image and print-rich learning environment.

Good practices were observed in relation to student assessment. Very good practice was observed in the assigning and correcting of homework in line with the whole-school policy on homework. In over half of the lessons observed assessment for learning (AfL) techniques were employed or evident in copybooks and one excellent example of student self-assessment was observed. A whole school policy on assessment should be documented. The good practice of analysing students’ participation rates and attainment in certificate examinations at a whole-school level could be further enhanced by contextualising this annual analysis in the context of national norms at subject department level.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

It was noted that many recommendations made in previous subject inspections have been implemented, including the establishment of a formal care team, the rotation of subject co-ordinators in some departments, and liaison between subject departments and the SEN
team. Although some improvements have been effected in relation to timetabling issues raised in the subject inspection reports, issues still remain to be addressed.

In order to further extend the application of recommendations to all subject areas and programmes the board should discuss inspection reports as they become available and should request a progress response from the departments which could then be shared with all staff.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

The key areas for development identified in previous reports were the communication of intended learning outcomes, the enhanced use of ICT, the use of differentiated teaching and learning strategies, focus on literacy and numeracy, the use of AFL and the further development of subject planning. These recommendations have been implemented to a good extent across the range of subjects evaluated, including those subject areas previously inspected.

Subject plans are at different stages of development with instances of detailed planning in line with recommendations made in previous inspection reports. All planning should be guided by this good practice. So as to build on reflective practice at classroom level a space for teacher reflection at the end of topics as recommended in the Metalwork and Engineering report in 2006 should be included.

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

5.1

There is a practice of school self-evaluation and improvement on an informal basis arising out of the day-to-day operation of school systems and procedures. The school’s senior management team has shown considerable leadership in bringing about changes that have taken place recently, improvements that have been initiated, as well as those planned for school year 2012/2013. School self-evaluation processes and structures should be formalised and include the views of parents, students and members of the school community.

On the basis of the leadership and loyalty across the staff evident during the evaluation period the school has considerable capacity for change and improvement. The school community is very well placed to implement all the recommendations of this report over time.

Published June 2012
Appendix

School Response to the Report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management accepts the report as a true and accurate report. 
The Board of Management accepts this report as a fair reflection of the work of the school. 
The Board of Management is disappointed that an entire school year has elapsed before 
publication of the report.

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

1.1 
The Board was pleased with the findings.

1.2
- The Board of Management along with Senior Management and teaching staff is constantly reviewing and updating a long term plan for the school guided by the Deis framework. A Deis planning committee has been established comprising of the Principal, Deputy Principal, Career Guidance teacher, Home School Community Liaison, Head of Learning Support and School completion Programme Co-ordinator. Regular meetings are held which are minuted. Two members of the Deis committee have completed in-service. Reports from Deis planning are brought to the Board of Management and staff.
- The schedule of Post of Responsibility have been revised and redrafted in September 2011. Included in our School Plan is an intention to review the Posts of Responsibility every year. A whole staff input mindful of the needs of the school will be accommodated during our School Planning meeting scheduled for August 27th 2012.
- During the course of the school year the need for CPD has been discussed by management and staff. The content of CPD has been decided based on the needs of the school with emphasis on delivering of quality teaching and learning, numeracy and literacy, health and safety and mental wellbeing. Three two hour in-services have been planned for 2012/13 which form part of the Croke park agreement and will not affect the mandatory class contact days in the school. A co-ordinator “link teacher” has been appointed for 2012/13.
- With reference to the point above, teaching and learning practices have become a central focus of all subject departments. The installation of IT in all classrooms, regular subject department meetings, report to all staff by learning support co-ordinator have addressed the recommendations. Subject department meetings will be directed to include methodologies which will improve teaching and learning. A review of the Code of Conduct in 2012/2013 will address the creation of a positive learning environment whereby the pupil will benefit from an undisturbing class situation.
- The school is activity planning to improve its self-evaluation. Parents have had a greater input into school planning and have become an active partner in 2011/2012. A new executive has been elected, there have been more relevant meetings. There is the desire for parents to become more actively engaged in school matters. A speaker for NPCPP will visit in the Autumn and address the parents on their role and responsibilities. Parents Council, Student Council and Board of Management have met and have addressed issues collectively. A similar meeting is planned for Autumn 2012 and this will form part of school plan by becoming an annual event. Annual election of Student Council ensures new vision and enthusiasm is brought to the council. Students Council is recognised as a valuable partner in school planning. All the recommendation which have been highlighted by the WSE/MLL
had been targeted as part of school planning/Deis planning 2011/2012. The Report gave new impetus to progressing Self evaluation.