

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

School name	St Benildus College
School address	Upper Kilmacud Rd Stillorgan Blackrock
Roll number	60261R

Date of Evaluation: 16-02-2017



WHAT IS A WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING?

Whole-School Evaluations – Management, Leadership and Learning report on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspectors evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. Quality of school leadership and management
2. Quality of teaching and learning
3. Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations
4. The school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	16-02-2017
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with board of management• Meetings with principal and deputy principal• Meetings with key staff• Review of relevant documents• Student focus-group interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with parents• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers

SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Benildus College is a Catholic voluntary secondary boys' school under the patronage of Le Chéile Trust. The school has a current enrolment of 809 students drawn mainly from local primary schools. The school provides junior cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- Leadership and management in the school is very good at board, senior management and middle management level.
- A culture of learning is fostered and high expectations are set throughout the school.
- The wellbeing of the whole school community is prioritised, although too many teachers were involved in delivering learning support.
- Overall, teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good, with some exemplary practice.
- Assessment for learning strategies were employed in lessons; however, there was scope for teachers to improve formative comment marking.
- While teachers are implementing the new junior cycle specifications in English, Business and Science, Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs) have not been conducted in English. In addition, no subject learning and assessment review (SLAR) meetings have taken place; the reason for this is reported to be industrial action.
- It was reported that the school self-evaluation (SSE) process had not progressed in the current academic year as industrial action led to difficulties scheduling meetings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A smaller and more specialised team to address special educational needs (SEN) should be established, and a representative should attend the weekly student support meetings.
- To extend the good practice observed, all teachers should implement teaching approaches that respond to students' different learning needs, and that develop their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Management and teachers should develop a whole-school assessment policy affirming the good practice taking place and providing guidelines for teacher comment marking to inform student improvement.
- Management and teachers should ensure that they actively engage with the SSE process.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1. School ownership and management

The quality of governance in the school is very good. The board of management is properly constituted and is aware of its statutory obligations and governance role in establishing policy and supporting senior management. The board has recently embarked on a new term of office, and continuity has been ensured through the reappointment of some of the board members. Board members have a breadth of experience and are highly committed to their roles; most of them have received training. Detailed minutes provide evidence of in-depth discussion of various issues at meetings.

The board has adopted all mandatory policies and reviews these policies as needs arise or in response to legislative requirements. A record is kept of the dates on which policies have been reviewed. It is recommended that this record include the planned dates for policy review and should identify those responsible for implementing agreed procedures.

The board, together with the patron and senior management, has been proactive in establishing and maintaining a strong guiding vision for the school which embeds the Lasallian ethos. This vision sets out clear expectations for the whole school community and is communicated very effectively in a way that enables its translation into action.

The board has very good links with their trustee body, Le Chéile Schools' Trust, to whom they submit an annual summary report. An agreed report is prepared after each board meeting for staff and the parents' association. While feedback from parents indicated that they are happy that the board keeps them informed of its role, there is scope to improve communication with the staff. It is suggested that the board invite members of staff to present directly to it on aspects of their work.

The parents' association is very supportive of the school. The principal attends committee meetings where he presents a report. The association is given the opportunity to input to some school policies, and this is good practice. Overall, parental questionnaire responses to the management of the school were very positive. Almost all of those parents who responded to the survey were happy with the school.

1.2. Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The overall quality of leadership and management is very good; however there are some areas for development outlined below. The principal and deputy principal have a very effective partnership approach to the leadership and management of the school. They place an emphasis on having a strong presence in the school and this has contributed to the learning environment of the students. Discipline in the school is highly effective.

Overall, teachers are deployed in accordance with their qualifications and training. However, there is a need to facilitate essential training to those teachers involved in teaching Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and senior cycle Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).

Currently, there are informal procedures for the support of Postgraduate Masters in Education (PME) student teachers in the school. The board and senior management should consider introducing a mentoring system to support PME student teachers and newly appointed teachers, as well as developing a policy outlining support procedures in accordance with the Teaching Council's *Guidelines on School Placement*.

The board and senior management foster a culture in which learning flourishes. Teachers are actively encouraged and supported to engage in continuing professional development (CPD). The principal and deputy principal take a strategic approach to ensure that teachers engage in CPD that will meet identified future needs of the school, as occurred, for example, with Guidance and SEN.

School leaders are mindful of the wellbeing of their staff. They have an 'open-door' policy and feedback from teachers was that they are very supportive of staff needs and initiatives. The new staff common room is designed with wellbeing in mind and helps contribute to the positive atmosphere.

The principal recognises the importance of leadership and has distributed leadership responsibilities to middle management. Roles and duties of post holders are clearly defined. However, there is currently an inequity in levels of responsibility and time commitment in some of these roles. Those who do not hold posts can take on leadership roles through subject co-ordination and involvement with extra-curricular activities. It is welcomed that management plans to carry out a needs-analysis of leadership roles required in the school. It is suggested that this should include looking at ways to increase the role of all teachers in decision-making processes through further distribution of leadership throughout the school.

In-school communication is very effective. The principal and deputy principal oversee the day-to-day running of the school and have developed effective systems for communicating information. Communication with parents is via the school website, regular written reports, parent-teacher meetings and the recently developed school app. Management should explore ways of using these systems to seek parental views on school matters.

The curriculum offers a broad range of subjects in junior and senior cycle, in addition to LCVP and a comprehensive optional Transition Year programme. Management facilitates the introduction of new subjects where possible, for example the recent introduction of Agricultural Science.

LCVP is offered to fifth-year and sixth-year students. The programme is not running in the current fifth year due to insufficient numbers. The programme co-ordinator and senior management should explore ways of increasing uptake.

The optional TY programme affords students opportunities to sample a wide range of experiences which help them develop the skills and attitudes necessary for lifelong learning. The programme is modular, enabling students to sample senior cycle subjects, in addition to non-academic modules. A range of workshops and trips are included, as is the option to participate in the Gaisce award.

A short subject sampling programme is offered in first year and this supports students in making meaningful subject choices.

Teachers are to be commended for volunteering their time to the wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities which are on offer.

Student leadership is fostered through the democratically elected student council, and other initiatives such as TY mentoring of first-year students. However, there is scope to increase opportunities for students to take on leadership roles. The student council plays an active role in decision-making and has been consulted on relevant policies, such as the use of mobile phones. Management has responded to initiatives from the student council, for example by introducing rugby into the school. Currently, first-year students are not represented on the council and this should be addressed to ensure that the council is representative of the student body. Management and staff should consider ways of providing further opportunities to foster student leadership.

The quality of student support and care is very good. A collaborative student support meeting takes place once a week. Currently, no representative from the SEN department attends this meeting. This should be addressed by management. Student and parent feedback about student wellbeing and support in the school was very positive. Currently, the year heads are the main drivers of student support and care; the school should consider introducing a system of class tutors to provide more contact points for students.

Provision for students with special educational needs is good overall. Three teachers are qualified in the area of learning support and the SEN department is well co-ordinated. In addition to catering for learning support, the department fosters students' emotional development needs through initiatives such as the lunch-time club. Currently, in addition to lessons taught by SEN specialists, a large number of teachers without specialist knowledge has been deployed to teach SEN lessons. The establishment of a smaller and more specialised core team is recommended, in line with good practice.

The school needs to review the status of students who are exempt from Irish to ensure that they meet established criteria. It is welcomed that the SEN department has committed to conducting a review of Irish exemptions.

There are very good links with local feeder schools. Management and staff have invested considerable efforts in improving the transition from primary to secondary school and they have been very successful. Visits are made to all feeder primary schools and the school open day takes place during the school day so that perspective parents and students can see classes in progress. This contributes to the ease of transition for first-year students.

There are two qualified guidance counsellors in the school. Appropriate guidance structures are in place for junior and senior cycle students and regular contact with the guidance counsellor is facilitated. As part of the highly effective 'transition to secondary school' initiative, the guidance team meets every first-year student during his first half term. Individual meetings are also scheduled with every sixth-year student. The guidance team provides sessions on study skills and anti-bullying to junior cycle students. Timetabled guidance provision is modular in TY and senior cycle.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

1.3. Management of facilities

The management of school facilities is good overall. Increased enrolment in recent years has led to challenges to space; it is welcomed therefore, that school infrastructure has been identified as a development priority for the board. Sports facilities are very good in the school and highly effective links have been established with the local community which are of mutual benefit to community groups and the school. There is scope to develop the school library or to provide mini-libraries in classrooms in order to encourage student reading. The board supports teacher investment in ICT for use in classrooms; however, feedback from students and teachers indicates that access to ICT could be improved.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1. The quality of learning and teaching

Teaching and learning was evaluated through observation of thirty-three lessons across all subject areas and year groups excluding TY, as the TY students were on work experience at the time of the evaluation. Overall, teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good, with some exemplary practice.

Lessons, in the main, were well planned and prepared. Clear learning intentions were articulated to students in almost all lessons and in a few cases were revisited at the end to assess learning and progress. This is very good practice.

Most lessons were characterised by comprehensive clear explanations and directions. In some cases, demonstration was used to good effect and the whiteboard was also comprehensively used.

Active learning was a central feature of most lessons. In these lessons, teachers planned for group work, pair work, brainstorming, class discussions and plenary sessions. When given these opportunities, students participated well and actively engaged in lively discussions, and higher-order learning was observed. In one case observed, the use of role play and props brought a task to life for students, leading to significant learning. In a few lessons, good cross-curricular links were introduced to broaden student learning and there were good links between lesson content and real life learning, which is good practice.

Teachers used a variety of resources to structure lessons and to put lesson material into context for students. Resources included handouts, worksheets and effective use of information and communications technology (ICT): power-point presentations, video and audio clips and visualizers.

In all language lessons, there was very good use of the target language by teachers and between teachers and students. However, with the exception of one language lesson, there was scope to improve opportunities for students to engage meaningfully through the target language among themselves. All language lessons should incorporate tasks and activities which necessitate students speaking the target language, at a level suitable to their ability and age.

Assessment for learning strategies were observed in most lessons. In these lessons, there was very good use of questioning strategies to engage students and assess current and prior learning. This very successful strategy was further extended in a small number of cases by modifying the lesson according to the needs of the students. In a small number of lessons, teachers shared success criteria with students so that they could assess their learning through self-assessment and peer assessment. This is excellent practice.

In a small number of lessons there was scope for development. In these lessons, the teacher voice predominated, leading students to become disengaged and passive; there was an over reliance on the textbook and there was an absence of additional resources; there was little evidence of differentiation and the use of consistent global questioning resulted in the same students answering all the time. In order to bring about improvement in these areas, teachers should share the effective practice outlined above.

Literacy and numeracy were chosen by the school as their areas for improvement through the school self-evaluation process. There was explicit attention to literacy and numeracy in a few lessons and this is good practice. In many lessons however, strategies for the development of literacy and numeracy

were absent. As these strategies were agreed in earlier school improvement plans and should now be embedded, teachers should ensure that they are implemented in all lessons.

In a small number of lessons, the copybooks examined revealed good formative comments by teachers to guide students in improving their work. This practice varied, as many copybooks revealed a lack of consistent correction and no formative comments. It is recommended that a whole school assessment policy be developed. This should include reference to written formative comment by teachers to ensure that students are fully aware of their strengths and areas for improvement.

Teachers are implementing the new junior cycle specifications in English, Business and Science and using them in their planning for teaching and learning. Teachers have not conducted CBAs in English in accordance with the advice in the English specification and as required by Circular 0024/2016. In addition, no SLAR meetings have taken place. The reason for this was reported to be industrial action. In order to ensure that students benefit from the full range of learning experiences as outlined in the English specification, it is recommended that teachers implement all aspects of the English specification including CBAs. Furthermore, teachers should engage in SLAR meetings after the CBAs have been completed in order to build a common understanding of the quality of student learning and to quality assure the assessment of students' work as outlined in the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015.

There was clear evidence of professional collaboration and engagement in effective teaching and learning practices. However, formal aspects of subject planning require some development. Many subject plans are textbook driven and they do not always reflect actual good practice taking place in the classroom. Subject plans should be active documents, designed to be used by teachers to reflect on and improve teaching and learning in the classroom.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1. Management

Subject inspections were carried out in the school in Spanish, technical graphics and design and communication graphics, business subjects, history and Irish. There has been very good progress in the implementation of recommendations for management. For example, whole-school training has been provided for teachers in active learning and assessment for learning principles; deployment of teachers at senior cycle is rotated and a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities have been facilitated. An assessment policy has yet to be developed.

3.2. Learning and teaching

Teaching and learning recommendations were made in the areas of active learning; sequencing and structuring of lessons; formative assessment; differentiation; increasing the range of resources used; and increasing target language use in lessons. Good progress has been made in most of these areas. For example, most lessons observed were well structured and contained elements of active learning. Teachers used in-class formative assessment strategies effectively and teacher target language use was very good. However there is still scope to improve student use of the target language, differentiation, and the use of written formative comments to guide student learning. Overall, there has been good progress in the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations.

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

The school has engaged actively with the SSE process to promote priorities related to literacy and numeracy. Extensive feedback was collected from the education partners. The school carried out a

review of its SSE process, which is good practice, and plans to refine its practices as a result. A summary progress report is communicated to the school community. However, it was reported that the SSE process had not progressed in the current academic year as industrial action led to difficulties scheduling meetings. Management and teachers should ensure that they actively engage with the SSE process. When planning for the next cycle of SSE, the school is advised to define specific targets, and establish a group to monitor the implementation and progress of the process.

Overall, the school has very good capacity to improve as there are very good leadership and management structures in place.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;