

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Presentation Secondary School
Waterford City
Roll number: 64970U

Date of inspection: 8 May 2014



**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 May 2014 in Presentation Secondary School Waterford. 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

Coláiste na Maighdine or Presentation Secondary School, as it is more commonly known, is a voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools' Trust (CEIST). Founded by the Presentation Order, the school forms part of a rich tradition, dating back to 1798, of educational provision for girls from Waterford City and its hinterland. A wide range of educational programmes is offered in the school. They include the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JSCP), Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). The school currently participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- Presentation Secondary School is an inclusive school with a strong ethos of care and concern for the students' social and academic needs.
- The board of management is proactive and effective in carrying out its duties.
- The principal and deputy principal demonstrate high quality leadership and management.
- Devolved leadership practices have enabled all members of the teaching staff to take on responsibilities which contribute to the effective management of students and to the school improvement agenda.
- Very good systems are in place to support positive behaviour and open communication between all members of the school community.
- High quality guidance and Home, School Community Liaison (HSCL) services are in place to support students.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good with very good to exemplary practices in a number of lessons.
- The school demonstrates good capacity to advance the school self-evaluation process.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The middle management role of assistant principal (AP) should be redefined to reflect the level of responsibility and workload commensurate with the position.
- A more systematic approach to recording the supports provided for students in receipt of learning support or resource teaching should be introduced to optimise the tracking and evaluation of their progress.

- Senior management and staff are encouraged to develop a whole-school teaching and learning policy and to consider the introduction of academic tracking and mentoring to further support students across all levels to achieve their full potential.
- Teaching methodologies and assessment protocols that empower students to engage more actively in lessons, think more critically and take on greater responsibility for their learning should be adopted.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is properly constituted and its strong commitment to the Presentation tradition and to the local community has resulted in it being pro-active and effective. It meets regularly and, as indicated in the minutes of meetings, due attention is given to all aspects of school governance.

A significant priority for the board and the senior management team in recent years has been the new school building. Now, that it is completed, the board and senior management have identified other priorities for attention; they include advancing the DEIS initiative and relevant policy development. Subject and programme planning have also been prioritised in order to best meet the challenges of future curricular reform. Progress in these areas should support and drive the school's overarching priority of raising its profile in the local and wider community with a view to increasing student enrolment. As the board endeavours to increase the number of students attending the school, it is recommended that the admissions policy be revised so that clear criteria for enrolment are in place. This should facilitate prioritising should places become restricted or demand exceed the number of places available. To further underpin this overarching priority regarding student enrolment, it is also recommended that teaching and learning feature more explicitly in the school's articulated priorities.

The priorities as articulated have grown organically from a consultative process involving the whole school community; in discussions between the senior management team and members of the board and the teaching staff and at meetings with APs and members of the Guidance service. Proposals from curriculum development teams such as DEIS and LCA and feedback from parents and students have also informed these priorities. The practice of consulting with all members of the school community is very good in engendering greater ownership of the school development agenda.

The small but committed parents' association supports school management through its fundraising activities and its involvement in school events. Members are also consulted as appropriate in relation to school policy development.

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*.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal are a cohesive and dynamic team, grounded in the educational principles of the Presentation Order and strongly committed to the school and its community. Their clear vision for the future of the school and their effective and consistent work practices contribute significantly to high quality leadership and management of the school.

APs contribute to the effective management of the school in carrying out their assigned duties and in embracing the advisory roles devolved to them as part of distributed leadership practices. APs reported that they meet regularly with the senior management team and last year participated in an end-of-year review to assess how the term had progressed in the new building. They cited the recent introduction of additional academic awards for all year groups as an outcome of a consultation process with the senior management team. These awards are now presented at the school's annual awards' ceremony. All APs are currently year heads.

Non post-holders have also been empowered to take on responsibilities that support the effective day-to-day running of the school. Some teachers have undertaken year-head duties on a voluntary basis, while many others work as class tutors. Teachers have also voluntarily taken on the co-ordination of TY and LCA and of students with additional learning needs. Others are leading initiatives such as DEIS and School Self-Evaluation (SSE). The practice of affording all members of staff opportunities to take on such responsibilities reflects good leadership and management.

Year-head duties are currently carried out by post-holders and non-post-holders alike. To ensure that the duties assigned to APs reflect the level of responsibility and workload commensurate with their status, it is recommended that their middle management role be redefined so as to enable them become more proactive in implementing the long-term vision for the school.

Most of the professional development provided to date has focused on improving student supports and creating a climate where quality teaching and learning can take place. Now that the new school is fully operational, provision for whole-staff in-service on aspects of teaching and learning would be timely and would complement the professional development already undertaken.

There is a strong focus on positive discipline in the school. A ladder of referral is in place managed by the year heads. Points are given as sanctions for breaches of the code, culminating in Saturday detention for persistent misdemeanours. A range of positive behaviour initiatives have been introduced to support students exhibiting challenging behaviours. Very good efforts are made to minimise the need for serious sanctions including suspension. The school works closely with the National Education Psychological Services (NEPS) in the implementation of its positive behaviour approach.

Very good communication systems are in place. The senior management team maintains an open door policy regarding discussions of day-to-day issues. The manner in which the agenda and minutes of staff meetings are drawn up, recorded and disseminated to teachers is further evidence of senior management's efforts to consult with staff and to keep staff up-to-date. The E-Portal system informs teachers of student-related matters such as attendance and general progress and allows for greater collaboration among teachers and with parents in supporting students' overall welfare. Good communication with parents is maintained through the school's texting system and its website.

The student support systems reflect a strong ethos of care and concern for students' pastoral needs. The guidance service ensures the effective delivery of guidance to all students through timetabled lessons, individual personal and careers counselling and social personal and health education (SPHE) lessons. The school care team meets regularly to discuss the needs of students experiencing difficulties. High quality follow-through work is carried out by the HSCL service and is supported by the school completion programme and relevant external agencies. The school's DEIS initiative is also effective in informing the school's priorities in terms of setting targets in order to progress student learning, educational progression and

success. To further support the school's DEIS strategy, the board of management should formalise the Attendance and Participation Strategy. This would confirm full compliance with the Education Welfare Act and should ensure that all students receive the required 167 days instruction each year.

Support for students with additional needs is provided primarily through a withdrawal system and through the JCSP and LCA programmes. Individual education plans are drawn up for students in receipt of designated resource hours and for most students receiving learning support. While there is clear evidence of teachers' concern and support for students with specific needs, there is a need for a more systematic approach to recording the supports provided and to tracking and evaluating their progress. To this end a planning and recording template should be devised to detail the specific learning objectives and outcomes for each student in receipt of additional support. Team teaching with a qualified learning support teacher should also be considered as a means of maximising resources. The inclusion of learning support and resource teaching as a specific department within the subject planning schedule should also be considered to facilitate planning and sharing of expertise.

It was noted during the course of the evaluation that some of the time allocation for learning support and special education needs (SEN) was eroded due to the practice of affording year heads and programme co-ordinators a number of periods each week for co-ordination time. This practice should be reviewed, to ensure that any future allocation for SEN and learning support is fully utilised for its intended purpose.

A broad range of subjects is offered in response to students' needs and demands. First-year students make some subject choices prior to entry into the school. They are also offered a taster programme for other subjects in order to inform their future subject and career options.

TY is compulsory for all students and a comprehensive programme is offered, balancing academic subjects with structured activities and work experience. As part of a recent DEIS review of attendance, it was noted that absenteeism among students is higher among TY students. This should be examined to see if the compulsory nature of TY is best meeting the needs of the student body.

The LCVP has fallen into abeyance in recent years due to lack of demand among students. This is regrettable given the many benefits of the programme in terms of access to third-level studies and students' overall vocational development. It is recommended that every effort be made to communicate the benefits of this enhanced Leaving Certificate programme and to encourage the many students with the appropriate subject combinations to consider LCVP.

Presentation Secondary School is an inclusive school, which aims to meet the varied needs of the student cohort. This cohort comprises students with good or very good academic potential and corresponding high expectations, along with students requiring additional support or resource teaching to meet their specific learning needs. A review of outcomes in the Certificate examinations indicated good uptake of higher level and good levels of achievement in a number of subject areas. In other subject areas however, a deeper analysis of outcomes is required to address lower levels of achievement.

To enable students across all levels achieve their full potential in all subjects, school management and staff are encouraged to develop a whole-school teaching and learning policy which places a greater focus on teaching approaches and learning outcomes. Such a policy should promote active learning and skills development and embed assessment for learning (AfL) practices. These strategies would enable students to take on more responsibility for their learning and would help them to set realistic targets for future achievements. The introduction of a tracking and mentoring system to support students' academic progress in

tandem with their social and personal development should also be considered. This could be piloted on an incremental basis with a chosen year group or groups.

Students are afforded very good leadership opportunities through the work of the democratically elected student council. The professional manner in which meetings are conducted and minutes recorded reflects the importance attributed to student representation. Students are highly commended for the manner in which they undertake their responsibilities and their engagement with senior management and the board of management. The highly valued student prefect system and Athena student mentoring programme also serve to provide leadership opportunities for students.

1.3 Management of facilities

The school which comprises a new building in addition to a refurbished annexe is very well maintained and provides a very attractive learning space for all. This is enhanced by the print-rich environment built up in the teacher-based classrooms. Ease of movement between lessons is facilitated by the design of the building. Good practice was noted in some classrooms where seating arrangements facilitated co-operative learning. A well-resourced library and parents' room are also in place. Up-to-date ICT resources are available throughout the school and were used in many of the lessons observed.

The health and safety statement is currently being updated to respond to the changes arising from the move into the new school building.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty-three lessons were observed during the evaluation, comprising all year groups, levels and most programmes and covering core, optional, practical and non-examination subjects. The overall quality of teaching and learning was good. Very good to exemplary practices were noted in a number of lessons. These included the communication of clear learning outcomes to students, the use of student-focused methodologies, the effective exploitation of resources and in-class assessment that supported meaningful learning. In a minority of lessons there was scope for development in relation to active student engagement and learning.

Subject plans are now available electronically and this is good practice. There was variation in the quality of the sample of subject plans inspected. Best practice was noted where schemes of work indicated the learning outcomes, methodologies, resources and assessment protocols, thereby providing clear direction for all teachers of the subject. Plans to incorporate literacy and numeracy strategies into subject planning are welcomed.

Lessons were well prepared and structured. Most teachers communicated the proposed lesson content or learning outcomes at the outset. In some instances the learning outcomes were revisited to assess student learning. This good practice should be extended to all lessons.

Methodologies used included question and answer sessions, ICT, demonstrations, role-play and individual or group work tasks. They were used to better effect in some lessons than others.

Effective questioning for the purpose of initiating or assessing learning was observed in most lessons. However, there were some instances where an overemphasis on global lower-order questions resulted in little opportunity for critical thinking and very limited participation by

some students. The use of open-ended questions and investigative approaches, as noted in some lessons, is recommended to support the development of higher-order thinking skills.

ICT was incorporated into almost all lessons. Best practice was observed where ICT resources were used creatively to engage learners and to support attainment of the lesson's key objectives. The procurement or development of interesting, creative and innovative ICT resources should be further progressed through the sharing of best practice among teachers, particularly within subject department groups.

The emphasis on subject-specific terminology supported literacy development in many lessons. While initiatives to support numeracy have been piloted and analysed as part of the SSE process, opportunities for numeracy development presenting in the lessons observed were not always availed of. This should be addressed as part of the DEIS and SSE action plans. Teachers' use of the target language for instruction was good in language lessons observed. There is however, scope for further development in relation to students' use of the target language and the integrated development of the different language skills.

Co-operative methodologies such as role play, pair or group work were used in the majority of lessons. In many instances, the planned activity encouraged students to think, discuss and learn independently. In lessons where the progress and outcomes of pair or group work were less successful, greater attention to the purposefulness of the activity is recommended. Teacher instruction dominated in a small number of lessons resulting in students remaining passive. This should be addressed.

The learning atmosphere in all lessons was caring and positive and students displayed exemplary behaviour. However, while they were receptive to learning and complied with the tasks given, many of them were not active participants in the lesson.

Active learning was most evident in lessons where students were encouraged to develop thinking skills. To ensure that these good practices extend to all lessons, teachers should increase the use of higher-order questions, encourage students themselves to ask questions and guide them in note making rather than note-taking. The setting of more challenging class and homework tasks would also facilitate both active and independent learning.

The review of a sample of student journals and copybooks from most lessons indicated variation in the quantity and recording of homework. Some student journals provided evidence that homework was not regularly assigned across many subject areas. There was evidence of good quality corrections in some copybooks, where teachers provided guidance on how students could improve their work. In other cases, it was unclear as to whether homework was being corrected or merely checked in terms of its completion. It is recommended that all subject departments review their practices regarding the assigning, recording, monitoring and correction of homework. AfL strategies should be also developed to enable students monitor and assess their learning through the use of explicit learning outcomes.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Nine subject inspections have taken place since 2006. Recommendations arising from the inspections related to the possibility of introducing a taster programme in first year, subject planning and some aspects of teaching and learning and assessment.

3.1 Management

Most of the recommendations relating to school management have been implemented and further progressed. A taster programme has been instigated for first-year students for some optional subjects, while some flexibility is facilitated for changing subjects. Recommendations in relation to time-tabling, curriculum provision and resource allocation have been implemented where possible. The relationships and sexuality (RSE) policy has since been ratified.

3.2 Learning and teaching

More time has been made available for subject department planning and improvements were noted in many of the subject plans inspected. Improvements were also noted in aspects of teaching and learning such as the communication of learning outcomes, the use of an experiential approach where appropriate and greater emphasis on target language usage in language lessons. There is however, still scope for the further development of higher-order thinking, active learning and strategies to promote assessment of and for learning.

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

The new school building and the caring and positive learning environment facilitated by management, staff, parents and external partners augurs well for the future of the school. The work completed by the DEIS team in recent years in building up baseline data to inform planning and target setting in relation to key areas for improvement has provided the school with valuable information to support its SSE process. Systems have also been established to empower teachers and other members of the school community to look at their practices and to effect change.

The leadership skills and style of the senior management team and the overall desire and willingness of the staff to progress initiatives for the benefit of students indicates very good capacity for ongoing school improvement.

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 of Coláiste Na Maighdine is very pleased to congratulate the school community on receipt of this very positive report. It is gratifying to have our present work commended by the inspectorate and to know that we can embrace future education challenges with confidence.

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

In line with on-going school development planning, the 2014-15 programme of review includes:

Learning Support and Management planning meetings that have clarified and defined the tracking and progression of SEN students

Comprehensive staff CPD programme (including AFL and Mind Mapping)

Post of Responsibility review (commenced September 2014)

A redefinition of the role(s) of Assistant Principals will allow senior management to have a greater participation in the ongoing development of the school's teaching and learning policy.

The Board is pleased to note the inspectorate's commendation of the exemplary behaviour of our students, the manner in which they undertake their responsibilities and their engagement with senior management.

