

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Presentation Secondary School
Ballyphehane, County Cork
Roll number: 62693K**

Date of inspection: 17 October 2013



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in October 2013 in Presentation Secondary School, Ballyphehane. 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Introduction

A former participant in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan; Presentation Secondary School is a single-sex, girls' school, serving the Southside of Cork city. Current enrolment stands at 295, with indications that it is increasing. Students complete a three-year cycle after the Junior Certificate. This consists of a compulsory Transition Year (TY), followed by the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) or the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). Presentation Ballyphehane welcomes all; exudes a warm, friendly atmosphere; and seeks to support the holistic development of its students. The results of questionnaires issued to students and parents as part of the evaluation, demonstrate strong support for these contextual findings.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management operates effectively.
- Strong lines of communication exist between school and home, and structures to support consultation with both students and parents are in place.
- The senior management team demonstrates a strong partnership.
- The principal and deputy principal's approach to management and leadership is student-centred, supportive of teaching and learning and focused on improvement.
- While communication between management and staff is effective, greater opportunities to discuss new initiatives would be welcomed by the staff.
- A culture of collaboration, a spirit of generosity, and a genuine interest in helping students reach their potential, underpins the whole-school approach to managing and leading students.
- A broad and balanced curriculum is provided.
- Provision of quality support and care for students is a core aspect of school functioning.
- The impact of positive staff-student relationships on students' experience of schooling is significant.
- A welcoming and attractive internal environment houses quality, wide-ranging, well-equipped and well-maintained facilities.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good, with some excellent practice.

- Distributed leadership and ongoing review and evaluation, in conjunction with a self-motivating staff, supports a whole-school propensity to embrace change for development and improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development

- Board involvement in the further identification of developmental priorities, and in the monitoring of related action plans, is recommended.
- All developmental priorities should be clearly identified in the developmental section of the school plan.
- Full compliance with the integrity of tuition time for LCA students must be ensured in future timetables.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

A properly constituted board of management operates effectively, and is steadfast in its approach. Meetings are regular; business is informed by agendas; minutes are maintained; and agreed reports are provided to nominating bodies. Training has helped to ensure members are clear on their collective role, which they view largely as one of support to the principal. Additionally, the board seeks to ensure the school is run in accordance with the school ethos, as informed by the Presentation Sisters mission. Members demonstrate a positive, working relationship, with in-depth discussion supporting consensual decision making. The preparation of an annual report, as outlined in Section 20 of the Education Act (1998), is advised. This should reference progress in relation to the achievement of developmental priorities.

The board, which acknowledged the considered and considerable work of the teaching staff in drafting school policies, discusses and contributes to each policy in advance of ratification. All legally required policies have been developed. An audit of all policies, to identify those in need of ratification, review or updating, should be completed. The addition of policy ratification and proposed review dates would be valuable. The publication of policies on the school's website is also suggested.

In recent times, much time and energy has been channelled into building concerns. As this all-consuming work is in the process of being concluded, and whilst recognising that the desire to maintain or increase student enrolment was cited as a key, current, development priority, it is timely now for the board to consider other developmental priorities, short-term, medium-term and long-term. Clear action plans are required to support the achievement of all identified priorities. Such plans should provide for the identification of SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely) targets, timeframes for their achievement, and the necessary resources. The board needs to play a key role in monitoring such action plans.

To foster a greater role for the board in identifying and supporting development priorities rooted in teaching and learning, a number of suggestions are offered. To begin, a restructuring of the principal's report to provide for more systematic reporting on areas directly relevant to teaching and learning is suggested. A possible inclusion, for example, is the current whole-school literacy policy, reframed within the School Self Evaluation (SSE) process. Building on the template provided by CEIST, it is suggested that alongside standard agenda items, other areas such as teaching and learning, student welfare and SSE be included. Simultaneously, it might also assist the board if periodic reports from personnel involved in key areas of responsibility were requested. All of this would enhance board awareness and

knowledge, while strengthening its capacity to offer strategic leadership. It is also suggested that, on occasion, the board consults with members of the students' council.

Partnership with parents is valued. Most of the parents surveyed believe that there is good contact between school and home. The loss of the school's DEIS status, and the associated Home School Community Liaison position, presents a challenge for the school in relation to working with parents of students most in need of support and assistance. Almost all parents surveyed believe the school to be well run. A loyal and active parents' association exists. The board should encourage affiliation with the National Parents' Council Post-primary. Opportunities for the parents' association to work in partnership with the student council might also be further explored.

The school has a representative and democratically elected student council, whose good work is supported by a liaison teacher. The council members demonstrate enthusiasm and pro-activity. Further training would support the development of the council's role in the school, and enhance its capacity for action. Student questionnaires suggested that an opportunity might exist for the council to capture and involve the student voice to a greater extent. In addition to existing communication mechanisms, the council might also valuably contribute to the school newsletter.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The current senior management team, which is composed of an external, recently appointed principal and an established deputy principal, in a relatively short time, forged a partnership approach to management. They have a clear understanding of both their individual and joint roles, and they communicate very well. Both maintain a visible, daily presence. Their approach to management and leadership is student-centred, supportive of teaching and learning, and focused on improvement.

The principal and deputy principal endeavour to deploy staff in the best interest of the students, doing so in accordance with qualifications, expertise, potential and interests. They are strongly committed to providing a balanced programme of continuing professional development (CPD) for staff. An effective mentoring programme is also facilitated by senior management, which is intended to support the induction of both student teachers and new teachers.

Informal communications are ongoing in the school, supported by an atmosphere of collegiality and support. A number of structures, which support more formal lines of communication, also exist. These include, for example, the facilitation of regular meetings with key personnel and groups. Subject department plans, which are noted as very comprehensive and at an advanced stage of development, also indicate a strong tradition of dialogue. It was clear, however, that despite such positive findings, the teaching staff would welcome greater opportunities to discuss and consider new initiatives.

A culture of collaboration, a spirit of generosity, and a genuine interest in helping students be the best that they can be, underpin the whole-school approach to managing and leading students. Beyond the four walls of the classroom, these commendable attributes also enable the functioning of key school systems such as the class tutor and year head systems, the student support team and the special educational needs team.

The teaching staff embraces all opportunities afforded to them to lead, as evident in, for example, the good quality coordination of each senior-cycle curricular programme. Leadership is distributed, responsibility is shared and staff capacity is built through each of the previously referenced systems and teams, as well as through the middle management

team. The teaching staff was found to be highly self-motivating. Recognising this, there is a keen consciousness within the senior management team to extend leadership and management opportunities to all members of staff, regardless of their status or position in the school. All of this supports a whole-school propensity to embrace change for development. A hard-working secretarial staff provides ongoing assistance and support.

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum including Junior Certificate, TY, established Leaving Certificate, LCVP, and LCA. Taster programmes, which are offered in first year and TY, support informed decision-making in relation to optional areas of study. It is positive that at senior cycle the subject-options blocks are created in light of majority student preference, and that demand can influence the number of class groups formed at junior cycle in each of the choice subjects. Seeking to offer a curriculum that is accommodating of senior-cycle students' interest in the Sciences, inter-school cooperation has been established with a neighbouring post-primary school. Its role in supporting an even greater level of subject choice for students is being explored. In the current context, the school's capacity and desire to continue to offer two languages is both admirable and advantageous.

With the exception of the LCA timetables, tuition time is in line with the requirements of Circular 29/95. The board must ensure full compliance with the integrity of tuition time for LCA students in future timetables. For all other programmes, a sound timetable has been constructed. The possibility of timetabling PE in senior cycle should be considered.

Provision of quality support and care for students is a core aspect of school functioning, with both student and parent questionnaires indicating clearly that students feel cared for and safe. The school's admissions and transition policies and procedures were found to be inclusive. Great care is taken in the induction of first-year students. The school has well published policies on attendance and punctuality and has introduced strategies, such as a texting service for parents, to support them. Monitoring of attendance is strong, as reflected in the student questionnaires, and statistical evidence indicates that rates of attendance are relatively good.

A recently reviewed code of behaviour also supports effective student participation. Parental questionnaires indicated communication of the code to parents and significant rates of satisfaction with discipline in the school, including how the school deals with bullying. Expectations regarding behaviour are clearly communicated to and understood by students. Over and above the student council, student leadership is promoted via structures such as a peer-mentoring programme.

Good support is also provided to students through whole-school guidance and through the programme of personal, educational and vocational guidance provided by the school's guidance counsellor. The area of special educational needs and the associated work is well coordinated and organised, and communication intended to support teachers in providing for the relevant students in the mainstream setting is strong.

Support of students' holistic development is provided through the school's programme of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. It is very positive that the school has enjoyed success in a number of these areas in recent times, most notably basketball and choir. Students' achievements are acknowledged and celebrated. Faith development of both students' and staff is well supported. Most of the students surveyed are proud of their school. The quality of staff-student relationships cannot be underestimated in terms of its impact on students' positive experiences.

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

A lit lantern, symbolising the mission of the Presentation Sisters and their foundress, Venerable Nano Nagle, greets all who pass through the school door. The interior environment is welcoming, clean and comfortable. Visually stimulating and information-rich corridors support a sense of tradition, alongside a celebration of students' achievements. Print-rich classrooms, together with a very good range of well-resourced specialist rooms, support teaching and learning.

While the original school building dates to the 1960s, a significant extension was provided in 1987. School management continues to develop and improve the infrastructure, most recently adding a performing arts theatre. A student lunchroom is also under development. Classrooms are well equipped in terms of information and communication technology (ICT), and in recent times the school has invested heavily in an upgrade to the computer room. Almost all parents believe that the facilities in the school are good.

The facilities are well maintained, supported by a regularly reviewed health and safety statement. The school successfully participates in the Green-Schools Education Programme, as evidenced by the impressive acquisition of three green flags.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning is very good, with some excellent practice observed. This resonates strongly with parents' opinions, as captured in the questionnaire. Simultaneously, some relevant findings from the student questionnaire include: almost all surveyed students agree that teachers encourage them to work to the best of their ability; and most agreed that teachers tell them how to improve.

Planning and preparation for lessons was consistently comprehensive, and as a result, lessons demonstrated very good structure and pace. A range of resources were sourced and prepared in advance, a number of which were developed using ICT.

Lessons were purposeful and content rich. Clear learning outcomes were used to set the scene in all lessons. In determining and devising learning outcomes, and in addition to identifying knowledge to be gained, teachers should further consider the skills and attitudes that may be developed or promoted. A structured re-visitation of learning outcomes at appropriate points, in order to highlight progress and consolidate student learning, was also suggested for consideration.

Teachers exhibited very good knowledge of their subject area and delivered instruction that was clear and interesting. Thorough explanations were provided, often underpinned by high levels of teacher enthusiasm. This resonates strongly with the findings of the questionnaire, where the majority of students agreed that teachers explain things well. Teacher instruction was well balanced with a variety of different student activities. Resources were well utilised to support students' participation, understanding and learning. The use of ICT featured in most lessons, with seamless incorporation of this valuable resource into lesson delivery. In

language lessons, teachers taught through the target language. Teachers exploited any available opportunities to enhance students' levels of literacy and numeracy. Teachers are encouraged to continue to make provision for the specific development of students' oral literacy levels. Teacher-based rooms are supporting the creation of subject-specific, print-rich learning environments. A variety of teaching methodologies was incorporated, and these were predominantly student-centred in nature.

Many examples of best practice were observed. Existing students' knowledge was used to scaffold new learning. A task-based approach to teaching concepts was to the fore, with very good quality teacher monitoring of students' participation. This also offered opportunities to provide additional help or to set greater challenges for students, depending on recognised students' needs. Students got the opportunity to work in pairs and small groups which, with reference to the findings of the student questionnaire, is an established approach in the school. With a few to enhancing teachers' provision for co-operative learning in the classroom, an exploration of the range of strategies which support this classroom approach was suggested. Teachers worked hard to make lessons meaningful and fun.

Much attention was paid to checking levels of students' understanding and learning and, in the main, teachers demonstrated very good use of questioning strategies. A mix of global and directed, together with lower-order and higher-order questions, was provided in many lessons. A confident use of 'wait-time' was observed in a number of lessons. Teachers often demonstrated high levels of sensitivity when students found questions difficult to answer. Teachers supported these students through the provision of gentle encouragement and subtle prompting, which further promoted students' learning, as well as their levels of self-esteem and the related sense of achievement. Some scope for development was observed around the art of questioning in a small percentage of lessons.

Challenging activities inspired high levels of student participation. Students quickly focused on and fully engaged with lesson content, remaining interested throughout. Students were happy to, and comfortable with, contributing in lessons, and their contributions were encouraged and appropriately affirmed. Students, especially senior cycle students engaged, very naturally, in selective note taking. The introduction of note-making strategies to complement this tendency was proposed.

The Certificate examinations were appropriately referenced over the course of lesson delivery. Homework, as is evident both in students' journals and from students' questionnaire responses, is regularly assigned. Students' completion of homework is also carefully monitored in class, and there was much evidence of very good quality out-of-class correction by teachers.

Classroom management was excellent, with students responding favourably to teacher direction and correction. Teachers maintained a positive presence with their students. It was clear that classroom relations are underpinned by respect and influenced by clearly communicated expectations and high levels of teacher care and concern. Humour was appropriately used throughout lessons. As a result, classroom atmosphere was extremely positive.

The overall, very good quality of teaching observed could be further enhanced through the inclusion of classroom strategies that inform teacher self-evaluation.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

The relevant previous evaluations include: Guidance; Music; English; French; and LCA. The school has responded to almost all of the key recommendations contained in the corresponding reports. The majority have been fully implemented, and work is underway in relation to others.

3.2 Learning and teaching

It was clear from the practice observed in lessons during the evaluation, that all subject departments are considering recommendations offered in previous inspection reports, and not just those directly involved. This is very positive. Recommendations relating to subject and curricular planning have also been, and continue to be, addressed.

In the interest of improvement it is clear that management and staff give significant consideration to the advice provided to them in evaluation reports.

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

Historically, teachers' active participation in School Development Planning (SDP) activities has been facilitated and therefore the fundamentals of SDP, namely policy development and subject department planning, are well advanced. The task group approach to planning is an embedded approach. Developmental priorities are sought, not imposed. Review and evaluation are strong features of the work of individual teachers, subject departments, staff teams, senior management and the board, and this informs planning for improvement. While quantitative evidence is well utilised to inform areas for development, there is scope for developing the use of qualitative evidence. All this work is informed by a desire to improve and develop, whilst being mindful of meeting students ever-evolving needs.

It is recommended that all developmental priorities be clearly identified in the developmental section of the school plan. As alluded to previously, time-bound action plans that could, at this point, be modelled on the six-step SSE process and the related School Improvement Plan (SIP) should accompany these.

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