

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Patrick's Comprehensive School
Shannon, County Clare
Roll number: 81007U**

Date of inspection: 21 April 2015



**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 April 2015 in Saint Patrick's Comprehensive School, Shannon. 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

Saint Patrick's Comprehensive School is a one of two providers of post-primary education in the town of Shannon. The school is inclusive in its admission practices and caters for students across the full ability spectrum from a broad range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. The trend in increasing enrolment since 2008 is anticipated to continue into the future. The school's current enrolment is 721 students which includes thirty-two students enrolled on Post-Leaving Certificate courses. There has been a large turnover of staff in recent years due to retirements and the school's middle management team has been significantly reduced.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is very supportive of the school but it needs to take a more proactive role in overseeing planning for school improvement.
- Some aspects of the roles of senior and middle management need to be reviewed in order to drive the school's developmental priorities.
- The staff are committed and they voluntarily lead initiatives including a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- The parents' association makes a valued contribution to student activities, however greater partnership with parents is required.
- Care for students is a priority in the school.
- The school provides a very broad curriculum.
- Facilities in the school are very good and the building is well maintained.
- It is essential that significant aspects of the support for students with additional educational needs be reviewed.
- In the majority of lessons teaching and learning were good with very good practice noted in some lessons; there was scope for improvement in a minority of lessons.
- Some recommendations from previous inspection reports have been implemented whilst other key recommendations still need to be addressed.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board of management should ensure that a robust system of whole-school action planning underpinned by target-setting, ongoing review and consultation with all stakeholders is put in place.

- The roles of senior management and middle management should be strategically linked to the school's improvement agenda.
- To optimise the management and care of students the code of behaviour should be reviewed, a student-support team should be established and a formal school attendance strategy should be developed.
- Greater involvement of parents in school life needs to be developed and the board should establish and maintain procedures to facilitate the involvement of students in the operation of the school.
- The school's allocation for special educational needs should be used in full for its intended purpose and to the maximum benefit of students with identified additional learning needs.
- Strategies for differentiation and assessment for learning practices need to be more widely and more consistently implemented to support learning across the range of abilities.
- Collaborative subject department planning should ensure that schemes of work are appropriately detailed to guide teaching and learning and include action planning for improved attainment.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is appropriately constituted, meets regularly and members have received training for their role. The board is very supportive of management, staff and students and strong links are in place with the local community. Good quality minutes of board meetings are recorded. Members of the board also attend school events.

An agreed written report is communicated to the teaching staff following each meeting of the board. To further strengthen partnership with parents an agreed written report should also be made available to the parents' association.

The board supports the financial management of the school and has played a central role in the ongoing refurbishment of the school plant including planning for the new extension.

The board discusses and ratifies school policies as they are presented to it. In a previous Whole School Evaluation (WSE) report (2007) one of the main recommendations was that 'the board should be more proactive with regard to policy review and developing the school plan and to continue to involve the whole-school community in the process.' Based on a review of policies and the school plan provided during the inspection, it is not evident that this recommendation has been addressed by the board. In some cases policies do not reflect school practice and as they are not signed and dated it is difficult to establish when they were last reviewed. This 2007 WSE recommendation should still constitute a priority for the board.

The board have identified appropriate developmental priorities for the school. To achieve these, two actions are needed. First, the board needs to be briefed on current developments on school self-evaluation requirements and to be provided with a greater level of information on baseline school data including attendance rates, trends in certificate examination results and the progress made in the implementation of recommendations from previous inspection reports. Second, the board needs to oversee systematic action planning, where it tracks progress on the priorities it has identified for the school, including appropriate consultation and involvement of parent and student representatives.

The parents' association actively engages in the organisation and funding of several school activities, however further partnership with parents needs to be developed. The parents interviewed feel that the school is well run and reported high levels of satisfaction with the quality of teacher-student relationships and the broad curriculum on offer to students.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal work well together and have a strong commitment to the school. As the senior management team they undertake a range of duties to support the day-to-day running and administration of the school. It is acknowledged that the significant reduction in the school's middle management team over the past six years has impacted on the co-ordination of particular programmes, has increased the duties of the principal, and has meant that day-to-day management of students has had to be prioritised over school planning to some extent. Given the changing needs of the school and a projected increase in enrolment, it is now timely that the roles of the senior and middle management team be reviewed and strategically assigned so that they can adopt more effective leadership roles to drive the school's improvement agenda.

There was evidence that members of staff are self-motivated and display this by voluntarily leading initiatives such as the Droichead project and a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. The sharing of internal expertise as a model of staff training should be further encouraged. Staff continuing professional development (CPD) related to the school's developmental priorities should be planned and an audit of whole-staff training needs should be undertaken to inform a CPD plan into the future.

The year heads and class tutors have a key role in the operation of the school's code of behaviour. Students interviewed articulated the need for greater consistency and clarity in the application of sanctions. Areas for development include the agreement of a clear ladder of referral linked to sanctions and the incorporation of a scheme of positive rewards for students. The school's policy and procedures for suspension and expulsion should also be detailed in the code of behaviour. In this context the code of behaviour should be reviewed in line with *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for Schools*, National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB). Students and parents should be centrally involved in this recommended review.

Improved school attendance is an identified priority of the board. The introduction of ePortal is commended and parents highly praised the texting system to notify them of absenteeism. Year heads reported that they make contact with parents to follow up on absenteeism. However, evidence was gathered that absenteeism among a cohort of students is an ongoing concern and impacting on their learning. To further promote school attendance, a number of actions should be taken and formalised in a school attendance strategy that is developed in consultation with stakeholders. Absence lists should be monitored by year heads on a weekly basis, accumulated absences should be reported at an earlier stage to parents and regular short-term awards for improved attenders should be put in place. Drafting these measures to formulate an attendance strategy, in consultation with stakeholders, is required.

The students interviewed emphasised that the school environment is tolerant and inclusive. They also stated that they feel the school deals very effectively with issues of bullying. During the evaluation, it was notable that students were very well behaved during breaks.

The provision of a breakfast club for all students and an after-school homework club for first-year students is reflective of the school's strong ethos of care. Class tutors work with students in junior cycle communicating concerns to year heads for action. The guidance counsellor and chaplain meet weekly on a voluntary basis to share information. Also members of a pastoral care team meet twice a year. However the largely informal operation

of that care work now needs to be built upon with a student support team operating as envisaged in the *Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools* guidelines (2014). Given the context of growing enrolment, the need to co-ordinate and track student support interventions in a formal manner is necessary. A formal care team meeting should be organised on a weekly basis bringing together a senior management representative, the guidance counsellor, SPHE co-ordinator, chaplain, and year heads. An agreed template should be used to record the outcomes of these meetings, focusing on agreed actions, who is responsible for implementing them, and tracking the outcomes of those interventions at subsequent meetings. It is suggested that a peer mentoring network be established to further support first-year students in their new educational environment.

In the questionnaires administered during the evaluation, the majority of students reported that they do not have a say in how things are done in the school. The students stated during the focus group meeting that they would like a student council to be formed in the school, as existed in previous years. In line with the Education Act (1998) the board should establish and maintain procedures to facilitate the involvement of students in the operation of the school whether through a student council or other mechanism promoted by the board.

The school offers a wide range of subjects and the full range of senior cycle programmes to meet the needs of a diverse student cohort. The availability of a short taster programme supports first-year students in making informed subject choices regarding options. In line with good practice an open choice of subjects is provided at both junior and senior cycle with the school indicating that a large percentage of students are enabled to access their subject preferences each year.

Class period allocation is appropriate in practically all subject areas. The spread of lessons in a small number of subjects would benefit from greater distribution across the week. Social, Personal and Health Education is timetabled for all junior cycle students, however Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is not delivered in a consistent manner to all senior cycle students. This compliance issue should be addressed and an updated RSE policy should be developed in line with Circular Letter 0037/2010.

There is good provision of guidance for students. However, a balance of some timetabled guidance for senior cycle students, delivered on a modular basis, should be blended with the appointment system to maximise student access to the service. The guidance plan should be brought to completion to reflect a whole-school approach to guidance.

The school receives a substantial allocation for students with additional educational needs including resources for low-incidence special educational needs (SEN) allocated by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), English as an Additional Language needs (EAL), and students with high-incidence special educational needs and/or learning support needs. This pool of resources is currently deployed in a number of ways including smaller classes for literacy and numeracy support for students with low incidence learning needs, some group support for students with exemptions from Irish, some smaller subject class groups and some broader subject choices. While some of these uses are in line with the intended purpose of the allocation, a significant proportion of the uses are not.

The following recommendations are made for the full use and effective organisation and provision of supports. A smaller SEN team should be established consisting of teachers with suitable experience and qualifications who will meet regularly to co-ordinate planning and interventions with students and to review their progress. This team through flexible modes of provision tailored to the specific needs of students should deliver the majority of the allocated support hours. The school should create a student register to track the use of allocated hours and how each student receives support as per Circular 70/2014. Good work

has been done in establishing baselines for profiling the reading ages of incoming first years. While this data is used to inform support for some students the provision needs to be expanded so that the identified literacy and numeracy needs of the wider student cohort are met.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

1.3 Management of facilities

The school building and grounds are well maintained and the school is commended for achieving its first Green Flag. Corridors are bright and spacious and the displays of students' work and achievements create a strong sense of community. The school has a good range of sports facilities, specialist rooms are well equipped and many classrooms have good quality print-rich environments. Each classroom has an interactive whiteboard and the school has four computer rooms.

The school's health and safety statement should be reviewed and updated in line with the *Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools* (2010). Risk assessment audits should be carried out by staff in their respective teaching and working areas. The concerns raised in relation to the construction studies room should be addressed as a matter of priority

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

A review of subject and programme plans highlighted significant variation in the level of development reached. While in some cases plans were primarily content driven, very good quality plans to guide teaching and learning were also observed. In these, topics were linked to appropriate learning outcomes, methodologies, resources and assessment strategies. These models of best practice should be used to inform subject plans across departments. The structuring of schemes of work in this manner will facilitate improved collaboration and provide a means to develop agreed strategies in relation to literacy, numeracy and assessment for learning practices.

The analysis of certificate examination results by subject departments should include a commentary on teachers' reflections and should outline targets and action plans for improvement in line with the school's self-evaluation planning process. As part of this process subject departments should review higher level uptake rates in their subjects at both junior and senior cycle and trends in achievement over a number of years to inform action planning. These analyses should be submitted to the board.

In the majority of lessons observed, the quality of teaching and learning was good, with very good practice noted in some lessons. There was scope to improve the teaching and learning strategies employed in a minority of lessons.

The intended learning outcomes were clear and shared with students in practically all lessons. In a small minority of cases these were reviewed at the end of the lesson to assess and consolidate the learning achieved. This good practice should be adopted in all lessons.

In the majority of lessons observed a good range of effective methodologies was employed to engage students in their learning including linking new concepts or skills with students' prior learning and experiences, the use of digital learning resources, group work, pair work, and practical work. A variety of good quality resources were prepared in advance to develop instruction and support student learning.

There was evidence of differentiation by use of pair and group work, resources, individualised support and where an incremental approach was adopted to support students' understanding of key concepts in a small number of lessons. In the context of mixed-ability classes the use of differentiated worksheets or assignments where the task can be tailored according to students' ability is recommended.

Best practice in questioning was observed where questions were well distributed across the class and used to develop higher-order thinking skills. Directed questioning should be used more regularly so that students of all abilities are challenged and included.

Literacy was focused on in many lessons by clear explanation of key terms and concepts and attention was paid to numeracy where relevant. While subject department plans identified subject-specific ways in which literacy could be supported, no explicit links to the school's self-evaluation actions and targets for literacy improvement were evident in these plans.

A positive atmosphere underpinned by respectful interactions was observed in almost all lessons. In a few cases students were not optimally engaged with activities assigned within class time. To address this issue, classroom management protocols should be clearly communicated to students and greater differentiation in the methodologies should be employed to support student engagement.

Homework is regularly assigned in the majority of cases and this good practice should be extended to all lessons to support learning outside of the classroom. Very good practice was observed where students' work is regularly checked by teachers and provided with written feedback to guide improvement. Notwithstanding that good oral feedback was provided in some lessons, there is significant scope to develop comment-based assessment on students' written work in line with assessment for learning principles. A whole-school assessment policy should be developed to support the wider implementation of best practice in relation to assigning homework, correcting work and sharing assessment criteria with students to support peer and self-assessment.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Eight published subject inspection reports were reviewed as part of the evaluation. Good progress has been made by management in the recommendations of these reports with regard to whole-school provision. School management has implemented recommendations of the WSE report (2007) with regard to instruction time, provision for SPHE and class period allocation to subjects. However, key recommendations in relation to whole-school planning, policy development and additional educational needs have not been addressed.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Good progress was noted in some aspects of teaching and learning arising from previous evaluation reports. Learning outcomes were shared with students and there was good variety in the teaching methodologies used. Recommendations regarding subject planning

have been acted upon in some cases. The increased use of assessment for learning practices and the greater implementation of differentiation strategies continue to be areas for development across subject areas.

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

Steps that have been taken in recent years for school improvement include the introduction of extra subjects at senior cycle, mixed ability class groups in core subjects for first year and progressing a significant school extension project. Teachers engaging in peer observation through the Droichead programme is also very positive. With regard to school self-evaluation the school is in the initial stages of this process. The school has developed an SSE report and a school improvement plan (SIP) for literacy is a work in progress. To build on the work achieved to date the areas prioritised for improvement in the SSE report should be advanced by the implementation of agreed strategies to support the literacy demands in each subject area. Steps should also be taken to further advance a whole-school numeracy strategy.

The school has the capacity to engage in school self-evaluation. However, it is essential that action planning for improvement in line with SSE planning is developed and implemented through formal whole-school planning structures. Strong school leadership and engagement with the support services to develop the skill set within the school community are also necessary to effect 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 St Patrick's Comprehensive School welcomes the inspection report and in particular the findings in regard to priority given to student care, the commitment of staff and the broad curriculum on offer.

As per the findings the Board will continue to be supportive of the school in adopting a proactive approach to planning for school improvement and in providing supports for building on the good teaching and learning and good practice in lessons noted in the report.

The Board will continue to ensure the provision of good facilities in the school as noted in the report. In that context the Board welcomes the provision of a large modern extension to the school which will further enhance those facilities.

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

The Board of Management has put in place a plan of action to implement the recommendations of the report.

A student care team has been established and it has begun the process of reviewing and enhancing supports for students with additional educational needs.

A review of the code of behaviour has commenced involving all the stakeholders in the school and it is expected that the review will be completed shortly.

A Student Council is being established and this process will be completed very soon.

The Board is reviewing each recommendation and setting targets by which the recommendations will be implemented in full over the next twelve to eighteen months.