

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Dominican College Wicklow
Wicklow Town
Roll number: 61860V**

Date of inspection: 26 May 2016



**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 2016 in Dominican College Wicklow. 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

Dominican College Wicklow is a Catholic voluntary secondary girls' school under the trusteeship of the Le Chéile trust. The school has a long established tradition since 1870, serving a mix of urban and rural students from a wide catchment area. The school has a current enrolment of 442 girls and offers the following programmes: Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good.
- Students exhibited high levels of motivation in their learning and engagement in the many leadership opportunities afforded to them; they are very well supported in the school.
- There are many positive aspects to the curriculum although some deficits are evident in the timetabling of certain subjects.
- While many plans and policies have been developed and subject planning is effective, there is currently no overall school plan in place.
- The board of management is committed to the school and has a diverse range of skills; however, certain key school areas require greater oversight.
- Some difficulties in professional relationships and communication processes were evident throughout the school both in how necessary changes have been managed and in how change has been received.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board of management and senior management, in collaboration with the whole school community, should develop a cohesive school plan.

- Trustees, the board of management and senior management need to work together effectively to strengthen professional relationships and communication processes in the school.
- Senior management should develop strategies to improve organisational systems within the school, to include planning processes and timetabling.
- Planning and implementation of TY and Guidance require further development by management and staff.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board is properly constituted, meets regularly and is supported by the trustee body. Board members are committed to the school and have a diverse range of experience which helps them in their role. All board members have received training and the board supports teacher continuing professional development. The board supports student well-being through various activities. There is a finance sub-committee in place.

The board has adopted mandatory policies. However, policy review is not systematic. Inconsistencies were noted in the dates on which some policies were ratified, and in versions of policies available in the school and on the school website. All policies should be dated and the board should oversee the review process and ratify policies in a timely fashion. There should be a yearly review of the child protection and anti-bullying policies, according to the guidelines *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools* (2011) and *Anti-bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools* (2013).

While many plans and policies have been developed, there is currently no overall school plan in place. The board, in collaboration with senior management and staff, should oversee the creation of a cohesive school plan, containing all current school policies. The developmental section of the school plan should include the short and long term developmental priorities agreed by the school community, together with strategies to achieve those priorities. The plan should also include action plans containing specific achievable targets and timeframes. In order to monitor this and other key aspects of the school, the board of management should improve its own review and evaluation processes.

The principal gives an oral report on school matters to the board at every meeting, following which issues of concern and areas for development are discussed. Feedback from teacher questionnaires and interviews revealed there is scope to improve the board's communication with staff. Therefore, the board should take steps to ensure that its decisions are shared with the school community by means of an agreed report. In order to have a greater understanding of school affairs, the board should consider ways of increasing staff input into board meetings.

The parents' association is actively involved in the school. Parents play a role in policy review and supporting ongoing school activities. The committee meets regularly with the principal and deputy principal, who provides it with oral feedback regarding school and board activities. Questionnaires administered to parents as part of the evaluation revealed that the majority of parents were satisfied that the board keeps them informed regarding its work.

The above recommendations regarding communication merit serious attention as difficulties in professional relationships exist at various levels in the school. These are detailed in the following section. The board should prioritise the development of strategies to build

professional relationships at senior management level and to enhance relationships at all levels throughout the school.

In summary, the board should strengthen its role in relation to leading the school and increase its role in providing direction and oversight.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Evidence gathered during the course of the evaluation suggests that the principal and deputy principal do not currently operate as a cohesive team. Responses to questionnaires administered to staff revealed a high level of dissatisfaction with how the school is run. It is welcomed that the principal and deputy principal have committed to continuing professional development designed to support pedagogic and strategic leadership functions in the school.

Feedback from interviews with staff suggests that, at times, deficits in communication systems hinder the effective running of the school. For example, a lack of clarity over the scheduling of meetings caused some staff to be unaware that the meetings were taking place. Further use could be made of the school's electronic platforms to enhance the sharing of information with staff. The board and senior management should investigate further ways of improving communication within the school.

A number of new initiatives has been introduced by the principal. In some instances, these have been successfully implemented and have led to improvement. For example, feedback from staff reveals that an initiative to enhance collaborative subject department planning has led to improvements in teaching and learning. A whole-school approach to recording student progress has also been initiated. However, there are organisational and system level issues which need to be resolved to enable the school to progress. The absence of a school plan has impacted negatively on the introduction of some initiatives by senior management. The full rationale for new initiatives needs to be made clearly evident to staff as, to date, there has been low staff engagement with some initiatives. Senior management should ensure that a strategic action plan is in place as part of the school plan, with clear rationale and procedures for introducing, monitoring and reviewing the progress of initiatives. These should be appropriately timed and consideration should be given to finding means of increasing staff engagement in these initiatives.

The principal and deputy principal acknowledge that their roles and responsibilities require further definition, since they have assumed many duties which would normally be devolved to middle management. It is praiseworthy that senior management, in collaboration with the board of management and staff, has initiated a review of posts. In some cases, there was an inequity in the scope and extent of the roles assigned to middle management posts, some posts requiring less time and responsibility than others. The restructuring of posts should enable senior management to give greater focus to strategic development and organisational management. The co-operation of staff in implementing necessary change will be required. This process should be progressed and drawn to a timely conclusion in order to facilitate future school development.

The curriculum offers a range of subjects in junior and senior cycle. A short subject sampling programme is offered in first year and this supports students in making subject choices. A wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular programmes is on offer and staff are to be commended for volunteering their time.

Evident weaknesses in timetabling in the TY and LCVP programmes and in certain subjects have had a negative effect on the delivery of the curriculum. This was evidenced during the course of the evaluation and was also raised as an issue during interviews with teachers, parents and students. For example, in a Computer module, students are provided with study

for two periods each week, due to lack of timetabled access to specialist facilities. Timetabling study periods is poor practice and should be avoided through better planning. In other subjects, lessons are timetabled twice on the same day, giving students less frequent exposure to the subject. The timetabling of double periods over break-time should also be avoided. As discussed below, Guidance is not currently provided for on the timetable.

Deployment and compliance issues have also been identified during the course of the evaluation. Currently some job-sharing teachers are deployed for under eleven hours per week. Deployment of staff should be reviewed to comply with Department of Education and Skills Circular 0075/2015 which states that job-sharing teachers should be timetabled for a minimum of eleven hours per week. The school does not currently provide instructional hours in compliance with the Department Circulars M29/95, and M1/00. All students must be provided with 167 instruction days per year. To become compliant, TY activities should extend to the end of the school's academic year.

Senior management has committed to addressing timetabling issues for the coming academic year and it is welcomed that they have identified areas for improvement. Senior management should develop strategies to strengthen planning processes and timetabling within the school.

The compulsory TY programme affords students the opportunity to experience different kinds of learning and to achieve new skills. While diverse TY modules are provided, there is a lack of continuity in the delivery and completion of many of these modules due to other TY activities. This should be avoided. The TY programme should be organised in such a way that students can sample the majority of senior cycle subjects in innovative ways and should provide for substantial diversity in the curriculum. The timetabling of work experience on one day per week limits TY students' experience of diverse workplaces and therefore the students' broader TY experience. The overall TY plan requires significant development in line with Department guidelines. It is praiseworthy that school management has started to significantly review TY provision. This should be progressed by the whole staff in the next academic year to include the monitoring of work experience.

LCVP is provided for those students who qualify to partake in the programme. Attainment of LCVP students is good. The collaborative LCVP plan outlines the organisational details of the programme, teacher continuing professional development, availability of resources together with useful teacher reflections which inform planning.

The guidance plan outlines the whole-school guidance and counselling programme for each year group, and student leadership and pastoral care initiatives. The guidance programme provides educational and personal guidance. While there was evidence that the hours allocated are used for guidance counselling, the current absence of timetabled Guidance in TY and at senior cycle is of concern and should be addressed by senior management. It is welcomed that senior management plans to provide more hours for Guidance in the coming academic year.

Overall, the quality of subject planning was good. Most subject plans reviewed followed a school planning template. There was varied practice regarding the level of detail included in subject planning. The best subject plans were underpinned by detailed schemes of work which outlined specific learning outcomes for each year group, planning for active methodologies and hyperlinking to resources. They also included attendance records of teacher continuing professional development, student assessment strategies and teacher evaluations which informed planning. This good practice should be extended. Regular department meetings are held for all subjects and minutes are maintained. It is suggested that all departments include the discussion of relevant teaching and learning matters at these meetings, together with reflection on student progress.

Students are very well supported in the school. Student wellbeing is a priority and many events to support wellbeing take place throughout the year. All class groups are timetabled

for Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) at junior cycle and there is appropriate provision for Relationships and Sexuality Education throughout the school. There are three qualified resource teachers and the special educational needs (SEN) team meets weekly. To further enhance SEN provision, it is recommended that a SEN coordinator be appointed. A collaborative pastoral care team is in place and meets fortnightly. Feedback from both parents and students was very positive with regard to how students are cared for in the school. The pastoral care structure for students is organised through a system of class tutors and year heads. There is scope to develop the role of the class tutor.

Student leadership is facilitated and actively promoted in the school and there are many opportunities for student leadership. A representative students' council has been democratically elected and is engaged in decision-making processes. Students have many opportunities to become involved in leadership in the school. However, responses to questionnaires administered during the course of the evaluation revealed that the majority of students indicated that their voice was not being heard. The school should investigate this discrepancy, perhaps through the student council.

Commendably, the school is actively building a network of educational links with its feeder schools. This has had a positive impact on school numbers.

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 facilities, classrooms and specialist rooms are well maintained and the school has a very good canteen facility. The school has initiated the process of applying for an extension, to include a new science laboratory and a technology room, in order to expand the curriculum and provide improved access to specialist facilities. There is a very good range of stimulating displays and subject-specific reference materials in most classrooms and along the corridors.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

During the evaluation, inspectors visited twenty lessons across a range of subjects, programmes and year groups. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning observed ranged from good to very good. In the teacher-based classrooms, room layout and the classroom environment were conducive to collaborative learning. Inspectors found students to be highly respectful, and they engaged very well in the learning process. There was excellent student behaviour throughout the inspection.

In the majority of lessons, teaching and learning was good. In all lessons observed, teachers shared the learning intention of the lesson with students at the outset; students' prior learning, interests and experiences were taken into account in lesson organisation and content, and opportunities for pair or group work were included. An appropriate range of teaching approaches was used in all lessons and students were challenged by the teaching and learning activities which enabled them to engage actively in their learning. Classroom interactions were respectful and inclusive in all lessons. Students were affirmed and encouraged for their efforts and contributions in most lessons. In a very small number of lessons, there was scope for students to become more actively engaged in their learning.

In the very good lessons, student learning was reinforced throughout the lesson and examples of collaborative learning were observed. Where very good language lessons were observed,

teachers planned activities which necessitated consistent target language use by both students and the teacher. These very good practices should be extended as appropriate to all lessons.

Teachers used information and communications technology in some lessons. Many students have tablets, particularly in junior classes and there is scope to utilise this technology more fully in lessons.

Classes are mixed ability in the school. While very good use was made of differentiated questioning techniques in a significant minority of lessons, limited evidence of other differentiation strategies was observed during the evaluation. To further improve teaching and learning, all teachers should develop their use of differentiation strategies to fully support or extend students, as appropriate.

Teachers used some assessment for learning techniques in most lessons, for example, using directed questioning to check for levels of understanding during lessons. A review of copybooks revealed that, while most teachers regularly correct student written work, only a small number of teachers included formative written comments on how students could improve on their work. All teachers should adopt these good practices. The school should consider developing a whole-school formative approach to correcting students' written work.

Given the good practice observed, it is recommended that all opportunities for teachers to share expertise be availed of.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Subject inspections have been carried out in the following areas over the past five years: Mathematics, Science and Physics, SPHE and business subjects. Management has made good progress with implementing most of the recommendations and this is commended. A clear successful strategy was adopted to implement a whole-school approach to subject planning, with almost all department plans reviewed using the aforementioned school planning template. A whole-school approach to recording student progress has been initiated. Senior management and subject departments analyse student attainment in certificate examinations. There was evidence in some subject plans that these analyses informed planning and this good practice should be extended to all departments.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Some good progress has been made on almost all of the teaching and learning recommendations from previous inspections, as evidenced in the lessons observed. During the evaluation, there was good use of active learning and good use of questioning by teachers. Learning intentions were shared with students and there was evidence of the use of assessment for learning strategies in lessons. There is still scope for development with regard to formative comment marking in student copybooks.

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

The school has engaged in the SSE process. A school improvement plan has been developed and is shared with the school community on the school website. The plan identifies a number of targets, some of which address improvements in literacy and numeracy. Steps have been taken to evaluate progress on these through use of base-line data, in-class assessments and surveys of the school community. The post of SSE coordinator was vacated earlier this year.

It is suggested that a team be put in place to oversee the SSE process in order to ensure that it is directed towards addressing priorities for improvement.

All staff who engaged with the inspectors expressed their commitment to the school. All levels of school management and the teaching staff will have to accept and engage with significant change in order to bring about the improvement required.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Dominican College, Wicklow, on behalf of all the stakeholders, wishes to acknowledge receipt of WSE-MLL report. The report affirms many of the excellent practices in existence in the school and the teaching staff and management were encouraged by many of the findings but in particular:

- Students are very well supported in the school. Student wellbeing is a priority.
- Students' high level of motivation and engagement with leadership opportunities
- Very good teaching and learning.
- Commitment of the Board of Management and staff.
- Effectiveness of Subject Planning. Excellent student behaviour and engagement in the learning process.
- Teachers are commended for volunteering their time in a wide range of extra- curricular and co- curricular activities.
- Management and staff have been commended on implementing previous recommendations.
- The school facilities are well maintained, in a listed building.

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

Since the initial feedback phase of the WSE-MLL process the school has already made some steps to address a number of the recommendations:

- Review of the school communications systems at all levels has progressed through the engagement of an external facilitator.
- To improve organizational systems, the Board of Management already has a plan in place for the systematic review of policies.
- The Posts of Responsibility Review is in process.
- The process of consultation with all stakeholders to develop a School Plan to incorporate existing policies has commenced. Teacher volunteers have joined the SSE Team to support the Board of Management in the collation and completion of the School Plan.
- The Senior Management Team and staff have conducted a review of TY. As a result, the following have been implemented- (1) Guidance has now been provided within the timetable (2) the extension of the TY Programme (3) TY students have the opportunity to sample all Leaving Certificate subjects.
- Study periods on the timetable have now been replaced by a structured curricular programme" Preparation for Work.
- The increase in student enrolment has improved allocation and therefore enhanced the school timetabling process.
- The Board of Management is committed to review and evaluate the progress of the above measures.

The Staff and Board of Management are fully committed to strengthening the communication systems and planning process in order to maintain and continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning in our school.