

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Good Counsel College
New Ross, County Wexford
Roll number: 63610I**

Date of inspection: 22 October 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 October 2015 in Good Counsel College. 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

Good Counsel College is a voluntary secondary school for boys. The school is one of two schools in Ireland under the trusteeship of the Irish province of the Augustinian Order and newly formed Augustinian School Trust. Enrolment has increased steadily over the past decade and currently the school has 819 students attending from across the county and beyond. Good Counsel College has over 60 feeder primary schools. The school has two autism units.

The school offers the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) and the established Leaving Certificate. Funding for additional school buildings which will house the technologies subjects and provide a purpose built Autism Unit has recently been approved.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management demonstrates very effective leadership, is supportive of senior management and has identified important priorities for on-going school development.
- The principal and deputy principal work as an effective team, are committed to school improvement and consider teaching, learning and student care as their primary focus.
- The middle management structure within the school requires review and development.
- Good opportunities for devolved leadership are provided for staff outside the post of responsibility structure and many staff members support and develop the school through their involvement in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities.
- Students in the school are well cared for through, for example, the work of the care team.
- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from fair to very good.

Recommendations for Further Development

- A review of all posts of responsibility and associated duties is recommended to ensure that the current needs of the school are being met.
- The duties of year heads should be developed to ensure a greater role in the management and academic monitoring of all students.

- A curriculum advisory board should be established to review the current curriculum and timetabling arrangements.
- The teaching staff should focus on the quality of student learning and attainment by introducing assessment for learning (AfL) strategies into their lessons, focusing more on differentiation and providing opportunities for the students to participate actively in their learning.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management of Good Counsel College demonstrates very effective leadership in its management of the school and places a strong focus on student welfare, in line with the core values of the Augustinian ethos.

The board is appropriately constituted and meets regularly. Although some members of the board have served on previous boards of management, so far this board has not availed of training. This is an area for development that the board itself has recognised and should be pursued.

Minutes of board meetings indicate that the board is involved in all aspects of school life. It is proactive in supporting continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and teaching and learning initiatives. The board takes a keen interest in student attainment, examines the overall performance of subject departments and seeks to support areas of weakness in teaching and learning.

The board has a very good oversight of policy review and has developed a three-year schedule which identifies policies for review and development. Mandatory policies have been adopted; the most recent of which has been the code of behaviour and Student Charter. However, some policies are in need of further review and updating particularly the policy for relationships and sexuality education (RSE).

Priorities of the board are clear and include: promoting good teaching and learning; encouraging devolved leadership opportunities among school staff; progressing school building projects, and promoting high standards for student academic success and pastoral care. These are worthwhile priorities, and structures are being established to support and bring them to fruition. Consideration should be given to developing an action plan with specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound (SMART) targets for each of the priorities, to assess and monitor their progress.

Although a relatively new team, senior management, comprising the principal and deputy principal, work together very effectively. They have discrete but also collective roles and responsibilities to ensure the effective management and leadership of the school. They meet on a regular basis to discuss day-to-day school business and to progress the long-term school priorities.

Currently, middle management in the school comprises eight assistant principals (AP) and eight special duties posts of responsibility. The position of AP is mostly retained for year head duties but some APs and all of the special duties teachers undertake a range of mainly administrative duties. The descriptors for each of the posts of responsibility have remained in place without review for a considerable period of time and some of the duties are no longer priority needs of the school. A significant minority of teacher questionnaire responses expressed dissatisfaction with the overall effectiveness of in-school management systems. To ensure the development of an effective middle management structure, senior management initiated a review of the post structure in 2013 and again in 2015. However, for a variety of reasons this process has now stopped. It is recommended that the board of management oversee a root and branch review of the posts of responsibility structure within

the school so that the current and future management needs of the school are met. Furthermore the principal should conduct review meetings with each post holder.

An active and supportive parents' council is involved in school activities. Regular meetings of the council take place during which the principal presents a report updating the parents' council on school events and initiatives. Consideration should be given to developing ways in which the parents' council can disseminate pertinent information to the wider parent community.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal are proactive leaders and managers who have a long involvement with the school and are very committed to school improvement. They have a visible presence on the ground and are involved in every aspect of the school. They share a clear vision for progress, and consider improving teaching and learning and student care as their primary focus. Each takes an active role in the progression of these objectives. For example, both members of senior management participate in national initiatives, such as Instructional Leadership (IL) and the Action Learning Network (ALN) and have introduced these initiatives into the school.

Senior management operates an open-door policy and ensures that the views of the school community are valued and used in the decision-making process. An annual principal's report is published on the school's excellent website and provides a very good overview of the operations and achievements in all aspects of school life. Communication with staff, parents and the wider school community is very good. Regular staff meetings are scheduled and noticeboards and electronic systems are used to facilitate good communication.

Teachers demonstrate their commitment to supporting the overall effective management of the school by volunteering as class tutors, programme coordinators and by their willingness to participate in and lead various school initiatives. Teachers are encouraged to present at staff meetings on their areas of expertise. In addition to participating in ALN and IL, the school is involved in piloting the Droichead programme. Such examples of very good practice support the school in achieving its overall priorities for improvement.

CPD opportunities for staff are encouraged and facilitated. Many teachers are active in their subject association or work with the State Examinations Commission or the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. The experiences and learning from such involvements are invaluable and should further support improvements in teaching and learning.

Many structures are in place to support the overall management and leadership of students. Five AP posts are allocated to year head duties. A weekly meeting of senior management and year heads has been established, but no records of these meetings are retained. These meetings are used to discuss issues pertaining to student attendance, welfare and some academic monitoring. However, there was evidence of inconsistencies among year heads in the application of their duties. In addition, senior management is involved at an early stage in discipline issues, interventions that might be better dealt with by year heads. The recommended review of the post structures should ensure that the roles and responsibilities of the year head are established and clarified for all teachers, students and parents and that year heads take a greater role in academic monitoring of all students and in dealing with disciplinary issues.

Students' attendance is monitored every morning by the principal and deputy who visit each lesson and gather attendance data. Use of the school's ePortal system was not

observed in any of the lessons visited during the evaluation. The recent introduction of a new system to follow up on lateness is proving beneficial.

A highly commended student charter has been developed in collaboration with all partners. In addition, the board has recently ratified a new code of behaviour. However, during the evaluation, concerns were expressed by students and through teacher and student questionnaires about inconsistencies in the application of the code of behaviour, particularly in relation to the demerit system. Although the policy has recently been ratified and will need time to be embedded into practice, it is recommended that a review of the code of behaviour and its application take place in light of concerns raised.

The range of subjects offered on the school's curriculum is very good. Time allocated to most subjects is also very good, although the allocation of an additional lesson period to English and Irish at Junior Cycle should be considered. Some adjustments to the curriculum have taken place in recent years. For example, French is being phased out and Spanish and German are the two main languages offered in the school. It is particularly praiseworthy that there has been some increase in participation in modern languages in recent years, in both junior and senior cycle. However, a more detailed review of the overall curriculum and the timetabling of subjects has yet to take place. This is particularly advisable given the constraints on the timetable caused for example, by the timetabling of Games. The establishment of a curriculum advisory committee as suggested in the 2006 WSE report, should now be established to advise on how the curriculum can be further developed and to offer suggestions in relation to key timetabling decisions.

The overall coordination and planning of TY are excellent. A very successful review of the TY programme has been undertaken and the findings used to amend aspects of the programme. The Leaving Certificate Applied programme is not being offered this year due to insufficient demand among the student population for the programme. It is praiseworthy that the school is re-considering the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

An excellent programme of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities exists to cater for the interests of all students. These include sporting activities, events to coincide with subject specific national weeks, participation in international competitions and various educational trips. The promotion of these activities by staff is acknowledged and commended.

The admissions policy for the school is reviewed annually and aims to be open and inclusive. However, the conditions attached to accepting a student into a year group other than first year should be removed to reflect the school's inclusive practices.

Guidance is well organised within the school with a range of meetings and events arranged to support students and parents in the selection of subjects and career opportunities.

The special educational needs (SEN) department is effectively co-ordinated by two teachers, one of whom is completing studies in the area. Students with SEN are provided with very good support in a secure environment. A large team of teachers is providing SEN support, sometimes during one or two class periods per week. It is recommended that management in consultation with the SEN department work towards the creation of a smaller core team of teachers each of whom would have greater contact with the delivery of SEN support.

A highly committed care team meets weekly to identify and put structures in place to support all students in the school. They are supported in their work by the services of in-school staff such as the guidance counsellor and a fulltime chaplain provided by the

Augustinian order. A range of counselling services is made available including the Rainbows programme.

The deputy principal undertakes a detailed analysis of student attainment in state examinations. More recently, subject departments are also undertaking this analysis. There is an expectation that all students strive to participate at the highest level in all subjects and this results in a high uptake of higher-level subjects. However, in a number of subject areas student attainment requires further analysis by teachers. To augment the current practice of students tracking their progress in their student journals, it is recommended that an academic monitoring system be established to assist each student making appropriate progress commensurate with their ability. The recommended review of the post structure may support the development of this system.

Excellent opportunities for student leadership are in place. For example, the student prefect system and a peer mentoring programme known as *Unitas* have been developed for the students. Commendably, the student council is working towards increasing their involvement in school life and it has developed a clear list of priorities to achieve.

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

Overall maintenance and upgrading of the school's facilities are very good. The school comprises many individual school buildings on one campus, including a church, meditation room, pastoral care and learning support buildings in addition to a wide range of sporting facilities. The school's 'working garden' was seen to be very important and is a source of pastoral support for students.

Management has invested significantly in the school's information and communication technology (ICT) facilities to support teaching and learning. The rejuvenation of the green-school committee is a positive development and water conservation has been chosen as the next project for the committee.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Thirty-four lessons were observed during the evaluation and the quality of teaching and learning ranged from fair to very good.

Teachers demonstrated very good knowledge of their subject areas and their instruction and explanations during the majority of lessons were very good. In almost all the lessons observed students were purposeful in their work and very well behaved. There were good student-teacher relationships evident in many cases with a respectful and often genial atmosphere prevailing.

Most lessons opened with teachers checking homework or continuing from the previous day's lesson. Where the learning intention of the lesson was explicitly stated it provided a clear roadmap for the students. This good practice should be adopted by all teachers.

Very good practice was observed in some lessons where a variety of teaching and learning methods was used and, where following a period of whole-class teaching, the teacher

facilitated students to work independently or in groups enabling them to take responsibility for their own learning. In addition, very effective AfL strategies were used in some lessons. These included the teacher constantly checking students' learning and giving them opportunities to work independently or cooperatively.

Pair and group work were in evidence in some lessons. In the best lessons it was purposeful and well-structured with students collaborating and sharing their learning. However, in many lessons such cooperative techniques were often introduced only towards the end of the lesson and often lacked structure. Where best practice was observed, there was good consolidation of learning. This practice should be extended to all lessons.

In many lessons, the teachers' voices dominated and there was little opportunity provided for student discussion. In these lessons students were passive for most or all of the time except when given limited opportunities to answer questions. It is recommended that teachers continually review their teaching methodologies and ensure that there are more opportunities for cooperative student work and participation.

Questioning of students was evident in all lessons. In the best lessons observed, students were asked both lower and higher-order questions, were encouraged to extend their answers and sufficient wait time was given. Extended questioning which challenged students to speculate and think further about the topic was not evident in some lessons.

Where differentiation was seen, it was mainly through questioning or attention to individual students. It is therefore recommended that differentiation be focused on as an area for development.

The black/whiteboard, handouts, ICT and overhead projector were used. However, there was an over-reliance on the textbook in some lessons. Some classrooms were print-rich environments but there was little evidence of student work on display.

A review of students' journals indicated that students are assigned frequent homework in most subject areas. Although copies were monitored, there was little evidence of formative written feedback in most of them. Students reported during the evaluation that teachers talked to them about how to improve their learning. However, it is recommended that all teachers provide students with written formative feedback.

Subject plans varied in terms of structure and content. Many provided an outline of the course over each cycle and some focused on chapters from the textbook or topics to be covered. It is recommended that subject departments review their curriculum plans and focus on intended learning outcomes and appropriate methodologies for each aspect of the taught curriculum.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

A whole school evaluation took place in the school in 2006. While most recommendations in relation to this report have been implemented, some recommendations are still outstanding. School management is to be commended for the progress it is making in implementing the recommendations from the 2013 SEN inspection report.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Many subject specific recommendations from previous evaluations have been implemented including the appointment of subject coordinators and the embedding of ICT. However,

there is still considerable scope for development in terms of implementing recommendations in relation to embedding participative student-centred learning strategies and greater use of differentiation strategies to support students of all abilities.

There was evidence that the target language was the predominant means of instruction and student communication in most language lessons observed as recommended in previous language reports. Arising from the SEN evaluation work has commenced on developing a whole-school assessment policy.

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

A very structured and well organised system is in place to support the school in the school self-evaluation (SSE) process. A teacher with responsibility for school development planning oversees the organisation and implementation of school initiatives relating to SSE.

The school is beginning its second theme and has worked through the SSE process to progress the initial themes of Literacy and Numeracy. In line with best practice the school used information from parent, student and staff questionnaires, analysed the data and produced a school improvement plan which is shared with the school community via the school website.

The school plans for AfL to be the next focus of the SSE process and preparatory work has begun in this area. The focus on AfL strategies as well as the school's participation in national initiatives should serve to progress some priorities for development.

The able leadership of the senior management team and the commitment to school improvement of many teachers and board of management members indicate that the school has considerable capacity to progress its priorities and improve.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

In the first instance, given the uncompromising priority afforded to promoting quality teaching and learning in Good Counsel College, the following points made by the Inspectorate are particularly noteworthy:

- That “Teachers demonstrated very good knowledge of their subject areas and their instruction and explanations during the majority of lessons were very good”;
- That “very effective Afl strategies were used in some lessons. These included the teacher constantly checking students’ learning and giving them opportunities to work independently or cooperatively”;
- That “In the best lessons observed, students were asked both lower and higher-order questions, were encouraged to extend their answers and sufficient wait time was given”;
- That specific strengths noted included “Very good practice was observed in some lessons where a variety of teaching and learning methods was used and, where following a period of whole-class teaching, the teacher facilitated students to work independently or in groups enabling them to take responsibility for their own learning.”;
- That “Students with SEN are provided with very good support in a secure environment.” within the school.

We consider the above five points to be of utmost and integral importance as they reflect the ethos of Good Counsel College. Good Counsel College promotes student learning of a high standard and which continuously strives to ensure that each individual pupil has the opportunity to fulfil their unique potential.

In the second instance, we are pleased that the Inspectorate noted, affirmed and has re-enforced the following hugely positive aspects of our school:

- That “Teachers demonstrate their commitment to supporting the overall effective management of the school by volunteering as class tutors, programme coordinators and by their willingness to participate in and lead various school initiatives” and that there are also “excellent opportunities for student leadership”;
- That “the principal and deputy principal, work together very effectively” and that “they share a clear vision for progress, and consider improving teaching and learning and student care as their primary focus.”
- Following a very successful review of the TY programme aspects of the programme have been changed in order to enhance it where “The overall coordination and planning of TY are excellent”.
- That “communication with staff, parents and the wider school community is very good”;
- That “An excellent programme of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities exists to cater for the interests of all students” where “The promotion of these activities by staff is acknowledged and commended”;
- That there is an “excellent ICT infrastructure in the school”; and

- That the Board of Management “demonstrates very effective leadership in its management of the school and places a strong focus on student welfare, in line with the core values of the Augustinian ethos.”

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

The Inspectorate notes that the “board of management demonstrates very effective leadership, is supportive of senior management and has identified important priorities for on-going school development”. Furthermore, the Report notes that senior management “has a very good oversight of policy review and has developed a three-year schedule which identifies policies for review and development”. This will support the school community in working towards the recommendations outlined in the report.

In continuing to provide the highest quality education for our pupils, the school notes the Inspector’s “Recommendations for Further Development” and they are being given due and in-depth consideration by all relevant stakeholders.

Furthermore, the statement that “The able leadership of the senior management team and the commitment to school improvement of many teachers and board of management members indicate that the school has considerable capacity to progress its priorities” affords us great satisfaction as we strive to ensure that Good Counsel College continues to provide an education of excellence for all of its pupils, building on the “Key Findings” of this Report.