

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Rockwell College
Cashel, County Tipperary
Roll number: 65300D**

Date of inspection: 23 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 Rockwell 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 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

Rockwell College is a co-educational, fee-charging school, situated outside Cashel, County Tipperary. The school has been established here for over 150 years and has a long tradition as an education provider. It caters for both day boarders and students who are accommodated in the on-site boarding school facility. Approximately twenty-five percent of the student population are accommodated in the boarding facility. At the time of the inspection, the school had an enrolment of 475 students. It offers a broad curriculum which includes the Junior Certificate and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme. At senior cycle, students can choose between the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The school is under school under the trusteeship of Des Places Educational Association.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management provides very effective management and strategic leadership for the school.
- The senior management team provides very effective leadership of the school and of student learning.
- Various management and leadership roles are distributed between staff members and staff teams.
- A strong culture of professional development, communication and collaboration exists in the school.
- Students at Rockwell experience their learning in a caring, inclusive and positive atmosphere.
- Accommodation and facilities are continually maintained to a very high standard.
- The quality of learning and teaching was very good with some examples of excellent practice observed.
- A wide range of teaching approaches was observed as were very good relationships between students and teachers.
- Very good strategies are in place to ensure that recommendations from previous inspection reports are implemented across all subject areas.
- The school self-evaluation (SSE) process continues to inform progress and planning in the school and has become part of school culture.

Recommendations for Further Development

- Summaries of the annual school self-evaluation (SSE) report and school improvement plan (SIP) should now be provided to the school community.
- The role of the special educational needs (SEN) department in the co-ordination of student learning and support should be strengthened.
- In order to sustain the effectiveness of the current student-support structures in the school, further consolidation and formality with respect to roles, communication and information protocols should be developed.
- The school should develop an assessment policy which would build on the homework policy and the 'notes' system already in place.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management provides very effective management and strategic leadership for the school. The current board has been in place since October 2012 and its members have shown significant levels of experience, expertise and commitment to the school and to its core values, which are based on the Spiritan tradition. The Trustees decided that the school would become a fee-charging school, out of the free education scheme, in 2013 and the board has managed this transition very well. The board has adopted all mandatory policies, many of which are published on the school website, and has developed well-established practices for self-review which are based on the Des Places Educational Association report model. The board works through a number of sub-committees which encompass strategic planning, residence, policy review and site maintenance. The policy review committee has developed inclusive procedures for consultation and debate among stakeholders and it was positive to note the involvement of the student representative council in this regard. The board reported that it had chosen the school self-evaluation process as a key driver towards progress and sustainability for the school into the future and that the Rockwell 2020 analysis was a good example of practice in this area. The board could consider setting up a representative sub-committee, at board level, which could mediate and adapt national and school policy in areas of curriculum development and programme change, which would have a strategic impact on teaching and learning in the school into the future.

The board has identified a number of strategic priorities as they strive to provide the highest standard of education and care possible to students within the context of the Spiritan ethos. These priorities include retaining optimal class size in order to benefit teaching and learning, to strengthen enrolment, to retain and develop high quality staff in all areas of the college, and to identify future needs in collaboration with parents, students and staff. The parents' association has been active since 2012 and see its main roles to include: giving support to parents and their particular needs, policy consultation and communicating, on behalf of parents, with school management and other stakeholders. The board should continue to meet with the student representative council and consider meeting with the parents' association on occasions throughout the year.

The board has put a number of communication structures in place which include a school newsletter, a texting service, a social media presence and a very attractive school website, which is already used as a source of school information and celebration of student and staff achievement in a variety of areas. Students have the opportunity to offer suggestions and opinions through the prefect system and through a 'suggestion' box which is available to all students. The parent survey suggested that over half of parents in the sample agreed that the school regularly sought the views of parents on school matters. Almost all parents agreed

that the parents' association kept them informed about its work. The board should initiate a communication's audit in order to identify strategies which could further develop clear and open lines of two-way communication between the school and its stakeholders. The school website could become a central tool in providing a presence and a strengthened visibility for both the parents' association and the student representative council.

The principal and deputy principal work together as a very effective senior management team. Roles and areas of responsibility are clearly identified and shared between both principal and deputy in a spirit of common purpose and trust. Both are deeply committed to the school and to the wider school community. Almost all of the parents surveyed agreed that the school was well run and the same proportion agreed that their child felt safe and well looked after, and that they were happy with the school. Appropriate middle management structures have been developed through a dean and class tutor model and various management and leadership roles are distributed between staff members and staff teams. The year deans are responsible for the general functioning of a year group and use a 'billet' system for encouraging positive student behaviour. Class tutors have a mainly administrative and pastoral role. This distribution of roles and tasks, and related structures are reviewed on a regular basis. A strong culture of professional development, communication and collaboration exists in the school.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Together, the senior management team provide very effective leadership of the school and of student learning. Teachers are encouraged to avail of relevant continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities and members of staff have opportunities to lead projects and other school initiatives. These CPD opportunities should be targeted to match the strategic priorities which underpin the vision for the school as it moves forward. Staff members have a deep commitment to after-school and extra activities which was universally appreciated by students, parents and management. Staff relationships were positive and ancillary staff were seen as being crucial to the smooth running of the school and its administration. Good procedures are in place to support the induction of new teachers which are supported by a useful and informative teacher handbook. This handbook could, in future, also have a digital version and could include sections on child protection and on learning strategies for students with additional educational needs. The development of a teaching and learning group at staff level, would allow for professional discussion and action around key pedagogic and curricular issues and the implementation of policy at classroom level. This initiative could develop from the initial advisory board of studies structure which is already in place at staff level. This group would mirror the potential for the creation of a curriculum sub-committee at board level.

Students at Rockwell experience their learning in a caring, inclusive and positive atmosphere. Almost all students and parents surveyed indicated that there was a good, welcoming atmosphere in the school and that they felt safe and cared for at the school. There are effective strategies in place which support and facilitate transition for primary school pupils to the secondary school. Very good student behaviour and application to their learning was observed throughout the inspection visit. A code of behaviour has been developed in consultation with the school community. Almost all parents and students surveyed agreed that discipline was good at the school. Student attendance and retention is monitored effectively. The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum with a wide range of subject options available to first-year students. Due to the twelve-hour school day which is followed (day boarding) at the school, students have a wide-range of extra-curricular options to choose from which are designed to maximise the potential of the high quality sports facilities and campus which the school provides. Students are generally taught in mixed-ability classes with streaming in some subjects at junior and senior cycles. The school should continue to review the policy of streaming some classes at junior cycle in the context of the

timing of the streaming process in junior cycle and the uptake patterns and student choice for higher level courses at senior cycle. Transition Year (TY) is popular with students and parents while provision for the LCVP is appropriate. As part of an on-going development, TY planning structures should be reviewed and an agreed assessment strategy should be developed. The provisions made for Social and Personal Health Education (SPHE) and for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) are in accordance with Department of Education and Skills requirements.

Effective student support structures and a pastoral care team are in place and work within the structure of a school guidance plan. The special educational needs (SEN) department is inclusive and works closely with the management and teaching staff. The role of the SEN department in the co-ordination of student learning and support should be strengthened. In order to sustain the effectiveness of the current student-support structures in the school, further consolidation and formality with respect to roles, communication and information protocols should be developed. An over-arching student support team with representatives of the year deans, deans of residence, class tutors, the guidance counsellor, the chaplains, the SEN co-ordinator, the SPHE co-ordinator and school management should also meet on a regular basis. The students have their own student representative council which is drawn from students in the senior cycle while a prefect system also functions and has responsibilities to partner with junior cycle students and classes allocated to senior students. The student representative council could review how students in the junior cycle are represented at council level. A 'notes' system operates which gives students and parents regular feedback on academic application, outside the formal report structures during the school year. This 'notes' system also acts as a student support system in that it can suggest, at an early stage, that there might be an academic or personal issue which a student may be facing which can then be identified and supported by the school. In terms of its curricular provision, students should have access to an English lesson every day, from the earliest possible date (circular 25/2012).

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

Accommodation and facilities are continually maintained to a very high standard. Specialist rooms are available in many subject areas and the home economics facility is currently being upgraded. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources are available for teaching and learning and the e-portal system is being used as an administrative tool by the school. There is a high level of health and safety awareness among board members, school management, staff and students. The school has a medical facility on site, which is staffed by an experienced nurse. This resource is shared by the school and the boarding facility. The school, in conjunction with the Rockwell College Union, is fundraising for a new sports changing room and pavilion facility on the school campus. The inspection team noted the excellent collaboration which exists between the school, the boarding facility, the canteen and other ancillary services. Sports facilities are excellent at the school and these support a strong sporting tradition and underpin student and school success in many sporting activities at local, regional and at national level.

There is good provision for ICT in the school. All classrooms are equipped with a computer and a data projector while some have an interactive capability through an interactive whiteboard or an interactive projector. The school has a good basic ICT infrastructure and connectivity, and teachers can exchange teaching materials on a central-shared server. The school should now focus on creating a vision and developing a plan which would set out how

ICT might be used as a tool which supports learning and teaching into the future. Existing good practice in areas of communication and collaboration between teachers and between students could be built upon in the context of an ICT environment which could include mobile, tablet technologies and a school-wide learning platform. Leadership of this process would be essential

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of learning and teaching was very good with some examples of excellent practice observed. Best practice was noted where students had opportunities to work together in structured groups, where student learning was task-based and where a range of questioning strategies were employed. Questioning strategies were often employed by teachers both to assess levels of student knowledge and learning, and to provide a structure to support students for their future learning. Classroom layout and design was an important factor in the potential for integrating collaborative approaches to student learning. Lessons were well planned and learning was scaffolded around many learning opportunities which were created for students. Learning intentions were shared with students in almost all lessons and were most effective when they helped to consolidate student learning at the end of a lesson. Interesting teaching and learning resources had been created by many teachers and were available to other teachers through a digital folder. Almost all parents, and most of the students who were surveyed, agreed that teaching was good at the school, with almost all students indicating that teachers encouraged them to do the best that they can in class. ICT was used appropriately as a teaching tool in the lessons observed. In many cases, teachers skilfully presented digital resources on a white board which were then annotated and adapted by the teacher or by a student. This blending of technologies allowed teachers to present learning resources to their students in a dynamic and effective way. In some classes a visualiser was used to good effect by facilitating the sharing of clear and relevant images with students which supported, in a very rich way, the learning process. Whole-school literacy strategies, such as a 'key word' focus, were evident in the content of many lessons and were embedded in most subject plans. Key evaluative terms such as 'compare', 'contrast', and 'describe' were clearly visible in classrooms and were used to match subject and teacher expectations around assessments of student learning. A wide range of teaching approaches was observed as were very good relationships between students and teachers. Lessons were generally student-centred and interesting with many opportunities for students to actively engage with their learning task. Student opinion and self-prepared background work to a lesson were valued and used as springboards for engagement with the learning process. Students were on-task and engaged with their learning in the lessons observed. Teacher praise was used appropriately in lessons and was a motivating factor for students in their learning. The study system structure, which is built into the school day timetable, provides another important support for the consolidation of student learning. Classroom behaviour was of a high standard in all lessons which contributed to a positive learning atmosphere in lessons.

Homework was regularly assigned and monitored by teachers and certificate examination results are consistently very good. Almost all students who were surveyed agreed that their homework was corrected regularly while almost all parents surveyed were happy with the amount of homework that their child got. Departments should continue to analyse the uptake levels and results in certificate examinations which should, in turn, impact on the subject planning process. The school should develop an assessment policy which would build on the homework policy and the 'notes' system already in place. This policy could include reference to peer assessment, reflective practices, and assessment for learning strategies.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Very good strategies are in place to ensure that recommendations from previous inspection reports are implemented across all subject areas. This good practice is led by the board of management, the senior management team and subject departments and generates important discussion at staff meetings. The health and safety statement has been reviewed and previous recommendations around the need to upgrade the home economics facility are due to commence. The student representative council is now more active in policy development.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Learning intentions and review of learning outcomes are now clearer for students. Active learning methodologies were more prominent and literacy strategies were seen to be integrated into subject planning and classroom practice. ICT is now used to access teaching and learning resources and is a central support as a teaching tool through presentation technologies.

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

The school self-evaluation (SSE) process continues to inform progress and planning in the school and has become part of school culture. An initial school report and school improvement plan (SIP) have been developed and the school has begun to implement a three-year literacy initiative and is now focusing on a whole-school numeracy plan. The SSE process in literacy resulted in an improved library stock in the junior study room, increased reading time in class and a key words strategy which focuses on evaluative terms which are used across all subject areas. Summaries of the annual SSE Report and SIP should now be provided to the school community. The school has demonstrated a very high capacity to continually improve and develop.

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 welcomes the findings of the WSE/MLL carried out in Rockwell College. The Board is appreciative of the Inspectorate's recognition of the many very good and excellent practices currently underway in the areas of management, planning and teaching & learning.

The Report is an important affirmation of the excellent work undertaken across Rockwell College by staff, management, student leadership and the Board of Management. The Board thanks the College students, staff and parents for their positive engagement with the process.

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

At the time of the publication of this Report, the Board has already moved to address recommendations vis-à-vis the strengthening of the role of the SEN coordinator and the circulation of the School Improvement Plan. The formalising of pupils support structures has been initiated through the Student Care Team and policy review continues to form part of the planning process for the management and Board of the College.