

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint John's College, De La Salle
Le Fanu Road, Ballyfermot
Dublin 10
Roll number: 60510M**

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AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
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INSPECTORATE**

Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April, 2016 in St. John's College, De La Salle. 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; a response was not received from the board.

Introduction

St John's College, De La Salle is an all-boys voluntary secondary school operating under the trusteeship of Le Cheile Trust. It draws its students, in the main, from Ballyfermot and Cherry Orchard. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion, and the school completion programme. In addition, it provides specialised support through its engagement with the National Behaviour Support Service and the provision of a unit catering for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

The school provides the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and a compulsory Transition Year (TY). At the time of the evaluation, the school had an enrolment of 428 and was facing uncertainty regarding future enrolment owing to the phased closure of the primary school from which the bulk of its students come.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is appropriately constituted, is well supported by the trustee and provides very good support to the senior management team.
- There is scope for improvement in how the board communicates on the operation of the school with the wider school community.
- The senior management team provides very good leadership and works effectively to create an atmosphere of care and support throughout the school.
- The NBSS team, the ASD unit and the care team contribute very positively to the school's operation.
- Provision for students with special education needs (SEN) or requiring learning support is very good.
- The quality of teaching and learning was, in the vast majority of lessons, good or better.

Recommendations for Further Development

- In light of the likelihood of reduced enrolment in the school, the board of management, in partnership with the entire school community, should establish a set of action plans designed to sustain and grow the school's enrolment.
- The deputy principal's current teaching load should be reduced to provide the senior management team with additional time for collaborative strategic planning.

- In addressing attendance issues, particularly in senior cycle, the possibility, and implications, of reducing the length of the lunch break and the provision of tutor time, for each class group, each afternoon should be fully explored.
- Approaches to target setting in the school's DEIS plan should be reviewed to ensure that all targets for improvement are measurable and achievable.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is appropriately constituted and enjoys the strong support of the trustee. The members of the board have a deep appreciation of the needs of the students and support the senior management team in providing the students with high-quality education during their time in the school.

Practices relating to policy development and review are very good. The board has adopted all of the mandatory policies and a schedule for their review is in place.

In 2014, the board, in conjunction with senior management and members of the teaching staff, led a review of educational provision in the school. The review examines a range of aspects of the school's operation and makes recommendations for improvement. In light of the threat to the school's enrolment, one area of particular importance in the review is the demographic and social profile of Ballyfermot and Cherry Orchard. The data contained in this section of the review indicates that the number of boys will remain largely stable over the next eight years and so if the school's future is to be secured it must at least continue to attract its existing proportion of this cohort. Good first steps have been made in this regard with good attendance at the school's revamped open day. In order to build on this, the board in liaison with the entire school community should establish action plans designed to sustain and grow the school's enrolment. Planning should explore how existing lines of communication with the local primary schools can be enhanced and how the many strengths of the school can be made manifest to prospective students and their parents.

Arising from the review and ongoing evaluation of the needs of the school, priorities for school development have been identified. These include: the provision of Physical Education for all students in the school, extending the availability of classes in information and communications technology (ICT), extending the curriculum to include additional practical subjects, a review of the TY programme, increasing attainment rates in the certificate examinations and an assessment of subject provision in the LCA.

Responses from both the parent and teacher questionnaires indicate that there is scope for improvement in how the board communicates on the operation of the school to the school community. In order to address this, it is recommended that the practice of teacher representatives on the board reporting to staff on the day following board meetings that fell into abeyance in recent times be reinstated. Furthermore, the parents' association representative should ensure that the agreed report from each board meeting is communicated to the wider parent body.

The senior management team, which comprises the principal and deputy principal, is dedicated and hardworking and collaborates very effectively. The leadership they provide, their visible presence on the school corridors and the manner in which they interact with staff and students contributes significantly to the smooth running of the school. The sense of order that surrounds all of the school's activities is due in no small part to this aspect of the senior management team's work.

The senior management team was very welcoming of the evaluation process, seeing it as an opportunity to affirm existing good practice and identify areas for development. The team is committed to preserving and promoting the school, rebuilding enrolment and constantly reviewing the quality and breadth of its curricular provision. A particular focus of the team's work is in the creation of an atmosphere of care and support that enables high-quality teaching and learning to take place. The effectiveness of this approach is borne out by the responses from parent and student surveys which indicated a high degree of satisfaction in relation to all of these areas.

Reduction in the number of posts of responsibility over time has placed a great strain on resources. This means that the in-school management team is small in size and has resulted in the senior management team and members of the teaching staff adopting a range of roles. The deputy principal also carries a significant teaching load. All of this impacts on the time available for the senior management team to meet and plan. It is recommended, therefore, that this teaching load be reduced and that the time made available as a result be set aside to provide the principal and deputy principal with additional opportunities to engage in collaborative strategic planning.

An active parents' association is in place and during the meeting with the inspection team its members described the positive nature of their involvement with the school. They expressed particular satisfaction with the support provided by the principal and the school's home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator. The association is actively engaged in a range of activities including fund raising and policy development. However, analysis of the parent questionnaires indicated that there is scope to improve the level of communication between the parents' association and the overall parent body. In order to address this, inputs from the association should be included in the communication to parents that routinely issue from the school.

Students' experience of school in St John's is greatly enhanced due to the school's engagement with the NBSS. Students presenting with behavioural issues receive excellent support in the NBSS classroom and the fall in the number of suspensions compared to that in evidence during the last WSE and the total absence of expulsions is testimony to the impact of the NBSS team. The team also leads a number of whole-school initiatives including *Hidden Heroes*, which celebrates the positive contribution of students to the school. This approach is in keeping with the school's caring ethos and contributes greatly to the sense of order and discipline evident on the school's corridors and in the classrooms.

The ASD unit is very well managed and provides a very effective range of supports for the students attached to it. One approach adopted in the unit is the appointment of older students, who themselves have attended the unit, to act as mentors for first-year students new to it. This brings benefits both to those giving and in receipt of the support and is highly commended. The wider use of mentors for all first-year students was initiated in September 2015 but fell into abeyance. It is recommended that this be reinstated for the coming and subsequent years.

A representative student council has been elected and is active in the school. Meetings of the council are held on a regular basis. However the timing of elections to the council should be changed so that the newly-elected members can avail of appropriate training. A review of student questionnaires indicates that there is scope to develop the student voice in the school. This merits further investigation by the student council.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The quality of leadership for learning, both of staff and students is very good. The senior management team is committed to promoting excellence and quality improvement, liaising with a myriad of agencies and facilitating the implementation of a raft of interventions to support both staff and students in this regard.

The senior management team actively supports staff who wish to avail of continuing professional development (CPD) and the uptake among staff is excellent. Of particular note is the amount of in-house CPD that is provided by staff members. A whole-school workshop on assessment for learning (AfL), is the most recent example of this approach. This high level of engagement with CPD demonstrates the professionalism of the staff and is reflected in the positive responses from students about their experience of teaching and learning.

Teaching staff are deployed in line with their qualifications and expertise. Timetabling, which is managed by a timetabling committee, is very good. The projected reduced intake for September 2016 will require an innovative approach to ensure that subject choice in first year is maximised. To facilitate this, those students following the JCSP, currently accommodated in a discrete group, should be integrated with the main cohort across all subjects.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum and has been proactive in adapting the curricular provision to meet the identified needs of students. For example, curriculum review has led to the recent introduction of TY. This has proved to be a very positive with parents and students alike. The school has also made great strides in the integration of ICT in teaching and learning. The inclusion of coding in the TY programme, for example, is just one instance of this innovative approach.

Improving student attendance in senior cycle is one area for development identified by management and staff. In response to this, a research project examining how attendance by fifth-year students might be improved was initiated by a number of their teachers. The initial findings are quite encouraging and the outcomes from the project should help to inform future approaches to improving student attendance. Attendance tends to deteriorate in the afternoons. In addressing this, consideration should be given to shortening the lunch break and electronic attendance tracking in the morning and evening should be introduced at the earliest opportunity. Consideration should also be given to scheduling a short meeting between class tutors and their class groups immediately following lunch each day. This could help to increase attendance and facilitate the dissemination of information relating to the operation of the school.

The absence of a sports hall mitigates against best practice in the delivery of a physical education programme. However, in line with the recommendations from a subject inspection in Physical Education (PE), the school has a full-time PE teacher. The school utilises a local sports centre to deliver the PE programme. While this is hardly ideal, it does mean that in the coming academic year all students in St John's will have access to PE. Management deserves great credit for the manner in which it has tackled this issue.

Subject department planning is, in the main, good with some examples of very good practice. Where there was scope for improvement, the plans contained material that was out of date and placed insufficient focus on teaching methods and planning for student learning. Ideally, all of the plans should follow the good practice evident in some where the schemes of work were written in terms of learning outcomes and contained teacher evaluations on the teaching methods adopted to deliver them.

The guidance provision in the school is very good and an excellent plan for Guidance has been developed. Provision for students in relation to Social Personal and Health Education and Relationships and Sexuality Education is also of a very high standard.

Excellent structures exist to provide for the care of students. A care team drawn from the teaching staff, senior management and outside agencies is in place. The team has a deep understanding of the challenges facing many of the students attending the school and operates in a manner which lessens any negative impacts which may result. Early identification and intervention is central to the approach adopted by the team. Student surveys indicate strongly that most students feel safe and cared for in the school.

Provision for students with special education needs or requiring learning support is very good. This is particularly true in relation to the manner in which the school establishes needs of students prior to their enrolment, develops profiles of each student's needs and prepares guidelines for teachers. Consideration should be given to rebalancing the model by which support is provided resulting in greater utilisation of team teaching and in-class support.

Significant learning opportunities are provided for students through the exemplary range of extra-curricular and co-curricular programme of activities. The commitment of staff who give voluntarily of their time to support and develop student learning in this manner is outstanding.

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*.

1.2 Management of facilities

The school facilities are maintained to a very high standard. The school is bright and clean and the sense of the school as a learning environment is greatly enhanced by the displays of student work on the corridors and classrooms. An up-to-date health and safety statement has been prepared and has been communicated to the members of the school community.

The classrooms and specialist rooms are maintained to a very high standard. The ICT infrastructure has been upgraded in recent times and its further development is a priority for school management.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning varied from very good to satisfactory with the vast majority of lessons featuring teaching and learning that was good or better.

Good or very good preparation for teaching was evident in almost all lessons. Materials and resources required for lessons were carefully prepared in advance and used to good effect during the lessons, to enhance teaching and learning.

The very best lessons featured clear learning intentions that were rigorously interrogated as the lessons unfolded. These lessons also included effective plenaries prior to their conclusion to determine the extent to which the learning intentions had been achieved.

High expectations of student engagement and attainment were explicit in the majority of lessons. In these lessons, the students demonstrated positive attitudes to learning and participated with enthusiasm in all of the lessons' activities. Student participation was facilitated through effective integration of resources, including ICT, and the use of group and pair work. This student-centred approach meant that the lesson content was appropriately differentiated and that the students understanding of the lesson content was greatly enhanced.

The pace in the majority of lessons was very good and transitions between different phases of the lesson were smooth. In the best lessons, teacher questioning encouraged students to hypothesise and explain their reasoning. This led to deeper learning for the students.

In lessons where there was scope for improvement in teaching and learning, the lessons would have benefited from a more explicit use of the learning intention, more effective differentiation of the lesson content and a greater balance between teacher input and student activity. These anomalies should be addressed at the planning stage and subject department planning should focus on how the good practice in these areas, evident in the majority of lessons, can be more widely adopted.

Elements of AfL including think-pair-share and the use of higher-order questioning, were evident in some lessons. However, in seeking to ensure more effective differentiation leading to enhanced student understanding, greater emphasis should be placed on the wider adoption of AfL in lesson delivery. The focus on AfL, initiated through the workshop mentioned earlier in this report, should be further developed leading to a whole-school approach to its implementation as a key approach to teaching and learning in the school.

Classroom management and student behaviour were very good and interactions between the teachers and students and between the students themselves were warm and respectful.

The vast majority of classrooms featured displays of colourful, relevant and up-to-date learning materials. There is a strong emphasis throughout the school on celebrating students' work and achievements in both the academic and non-academic fields.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Management has been very proactive in addressing the recommendations from previous evaluations. In addition to the changes in provision for PE mentioned earlier, management has addressed timetabling issues in History and, on foot of recommendations from a recent subject inspection in Irish, has engaged the Professional Support Service for Teachers to provide appropriate support.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Recommendations relating to teaching and learning in inspection reports have also been addressed in a positive fashion. In Mathematics, for example, recommendations regarding to the use of common teaching methods have been fully implemented while the recommendations in respect of the wider use of Assessment for Learning (AFL) are currently being addressed.

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

School self-evaluation (SSE) is mediated through the DEIS planning process which benefits from open and effective leadership. A comprehensive and well-structured DEIS plan, which will run until 2018, is in place. The targets in the DEIS plan were arrived at following data gathering and analysis by members of the core team and collated by the coordinator into the overall plan. Each theme contains specific actions designed to drive improvement but there is scope for improvement in the quality of the targets and the role of data analysis in target setting and measuring improvement. It is recommended, therefore, that some of the targets in the plan be reviewed to ensure that proposed improvements are achievable and measureable. In addition an analysis of student performance in the house examinations should bolster the existing approach to tracking student performance against relevant targets. This approach has the advantage of providing ongoing data that can be used to update targets and inform any interim reviews of the DEIS plan.

The school's management and review processes for new developments are effective. Examples of this include; a review of curricular provision for LCA which is underway and will be completed in May of this year and a comprehensive review of the TY programme involving parents, students and staff that is due for completion in September 2016. The capacity and desire for improvement was also evident from the positive and open manner in which management and staff engaged with the inspection process.