

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Piper's Hill College
Naas, County Kildare
Roll number: 70710D**

Date of inspection: 3 December 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 December, 2015 in Piper's Hill 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 accepts the report as the final inspection report available for publication and wished to respond formally to the report. The Board agrees that the response submitted will be included as an appendix to the published report. The board's response is submitted below.

Introduction

Piper's Hill College is a co-educational, multid denominational school which operates under the trusteeship of the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board. After many years at its original location in Naas town, the school moved to a new site and extensive new buildings in Killashee on the outskirts of Naas in 2009. The school population has grown exponentially since then and there is now an enrolment of 979 students. The school is a participant in the Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools (DEIS) scheme and offers all second level programmes.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management and senior management are committed to excellence and quality improvement.
- There is a strong commitment to inclusion and to valuing and developing the potential of the individual student in line with the school's ethos.
- The overall quality of learning and teaching ranged from very good to fair with a significant majority of the lessons observed in the very good category.
- The quality of planning for subjects and programmes was very good.
- The senior management team adopts a strategic approach to school development and a very good capacity for self-evaluation is evident.
- The teaching staff is committed to the students, is dynamic and highly professional.
- There is a strong and real partnership with parents.

Recommendations for Further Development

- It is recommended that the excellent quality of learning and teaching observed be established as consistent practice across the curriculum. Consideration should be given to further developing and extending the already established experience of peer observation to achieve this.
- It is recommended that work continues on building on evident improvements in participation and attainment at higher level in state examinations
- It is recommended that the board of management accesses appropriate training and that agreed reports on the functioning of the school are made available to staff and parents.
- It is recommended that responses to the student questionnaire relating to students' voice be further explored.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is correctly constituted and includes representation with a wide range of skills, experiences and expertise. The board is at an early stage in its term of tenure and has adopted the school plan which is in its final year of implementation. It is evident that the board is committed to leading and supporting staff and students in continuing school improvement and ensuring that the needs of students of all ability levels are catered for in an inclusive learning environment. Board members are taking on their role at an important juncture in the school's development and it is important that Education and Training Board (ETB) training for boards of management is accessed in order to maximise the benefits to the next phase of school self-evaluation and school planning.

All mandatory school policies have been adopted. Strategic planning and the review and evaluation of practices and policies are at the core of the school's operation. Many policies indicate excellent practice in the process of development through to ratification: the inclusion of all stakeholders, as appropriate, in the development process, and dates of ratification and review and success criteria stated. As policies are reviewed, it is recommended that the excellent practice evident is applied consistently and includes reference to those responsible for the implementation and monitoring of policies. The board has reviewed and adopted literacy and numeracy policies and the main focus in the current academic year is on the identification of the third area of teaching and learning to be developed to ensure compliance with Circular letter 40/2012.

Responses to parent and staff questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation indicated that communication with the board could be improved. It is recommended that the board resumes the good practice of making an agreed report on its meetings available to parents and staff. In addition, the school improvement plans developed for literacy and numeracy should also be made available to the school community.

The development of partnership with parents and the role afforded them in the operation of the school is exemplary. The work of the home-school-community liaison (HSCL) teacher in nurturing this partnership is recognised by all as a key enabler. The school benefits from a dynamic and highly motivated parents' association. The association has made significant contributions to the school's development and demonstrated a very good level of knowledge of the school's policies and development priorities. The association's development of the school's library, as part of the school's literacy plan, and links with the local library was particularly impressive. The association clearly sees its role as having the potential to make a significant contribution to students' education and also to the re-engagement of parents with their own education. The parents' association has a voice in policy development and is confident of being listened to by school management. The provision of training in the use of tablet devices for parents and students, in order to maximise the potential of their use in learning, in response to a request from the association is a very good example. While parents are represented on the board, it is recommended that the board includes a meeting with the parents' association, and the student council, on its schedule.

The senior management team (SMT) provides excellent leadership and management for the school community. The team has been highly effective in strategically leading and managing the significant growth of Pipers' Hill College while maintaining the core values of a student-centred school providing an inclusive educational experience for all. The SMT anticipates challenges and gives due consideration to the manner in which these can be best

addressed. The team has a visible presence in the school and is highly effective in delegating responsibility and developing leadership-for-learning skills among staff. The team has established a schedule of regular daily meetings. A very good level of open communication was evident among the team members and between the team and all stakeholders. The SMT has established, and is supported in its work by, highly effective in-school collaborative teams. The work of these teams is characterised by a very good level of communication and co-operation providing for a cohesive approach to the implementation of the school's ethos and policies.

The extent of the distribution of leadership roles among teaching staff indicated that the SMT operates in an inclusive manner towards staff. Leadership roles assigned to middle management are regularly reviewed and relevant.

Many leadership opportunities are provided for students. The student council is representative of all year groups. The council has a high profile and is proactive. Students from across the school, at the focus group meeting, were very articulate and their contributions remarkable. However, responses to the student questionnaires suggest scope for the development of the students' voice in the school. It is recommended that management explores this aspect of the school's functioning. The student council collaborates effectively with the parents' association on various projects. The students' capacity to describe their learning experience in lessons was impressive. The school provides an excellent range of co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for students.

1.2 Effectiveness of Leadership for learning

The SMT has a strategic approach to school improvement and is committed to excellence and quality improvement through teacher professional learning and empowerment. As demonstrated by staff commitment to exploring new and effective strategies and approaches to improving students' learning experiences and outcomes, there is strong commitment and support for teacher participation in various models of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities. Staff participation in peer learning is particularly commendable and should be extended as an effective means of developing consistency across the curriculum in the excellent teaching and learning practice identified. The SMT is aware of and recognises the considerable range of in-house expertise available to colleagues.

The organisation and operation of the special education needs (SEN) team is characterised by very good practice. The team has a very good qualifications profile and the level of collaboration and planning across the various strands of provision is exemplary. A very good programme, which caters for a broad range of interests, is available for exceptionally able students. The school-provided programme is, in line with best practice, regularly evaluated and reviewed in order to ensure that it meets the needs of the students. Team teaching at various levels is engaged in and reflects the schools' commitment to inclusion and excellence. Teachers' practice is underpinned by a professional approach to catering for students' needs. The manner in which teachers were openly complementary about each other's practice is noteworthy.

Teachers are deployed in accordance with their qualifications. The school curriculum is broad and well balanced. In addition to the established Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate, students, as appropriate, have access to the Junior Certificate Schools Programme, Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The timetable reflects the schools' commitment to providing students with access to their choice of subjects and programmes. In keeping with the school's commitment to inclusive practices and high expectations, the school implements a policy of mixed-ability classes and JCSP participants are fully integrated with their peers. The time allocated to subjects and programmes is appropriate. The school is

compliant with the “Time in School” circular, M29/95, with regard to the length of the school week and school year.

The transitions for students into Pipers’ Hill College and into senior cycle are very well managed. Information nights and comprehensive information booklets are provided for students and parents on programme and subject options. The student transfer programme from primary school is thorough, very well managed and includes multiple visits to feeder schools. The HSCL teacher has an important role in the success of this programme along with the school’s management and guidance team. It is noteworthy that the school offers a scholarship programme. To enhance the transfer programme from primary school, consideration should be given to developing professional links between teachers of senior classes in feeder primary schools and teachers of first year in junior cycle, based on subject specialisms, with a view to sharing best practice in learning and teaching experiences and expectations.

The application of the school’s admissions policy and enrolment practices reflects its commitment to equality and inclusion. The documentation does however include wording which could be construed as obstructing student access and it is recommended that this be reviewed. The admissions policies to TY and to the autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) unit are very clear. Further emphasising and supporting staff and students in its commitment to inclusion, the school has established a Social Inclusion unit.

The school has been very successful in maximising student retention to the end of their chosen Leaving Certificate programme. Management acknowledges that there is scope for improvement in the area of attendance and has been proactive in introducing and adapting various initiatives and using available technologies to improve attendance. Work in this regard is very well supported by the HSCL teacher. The code of behaviour and code of positive behaviour have a clear referral structure and emphasise positive behaviour. In the next review of the codes, consideration should be given to integrating both into one policy document. The student-care team is multidisciplinary in its composition, has regular meetings and is very effective.

Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is provided as appropriate in junior cycle and a programme of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is provided in both cycles. The RSE policy is under review and the process reflects best practice. The guidance plan is of very good quality. Students’ access to Guidance is good and Guidance is integrated into the timetable in senior cycle. The destinations of students post-Leaving Certificate are tracked and used to inform career information and planning for students.

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 accommodation and grounds are generally well maintained. The school environment is bright and inviting and school corridors and public spaces are used to good effect to display examples of students’ work. Dedicated notice boards with current information are provided in key assembly areas.

Specialist rooms are well equipped and their use maximised to support learning. Classroom lay-out in many instances is designed to support and maximise opportunities for students to engage in co-operative learning. Samples of students’ work and other print materials are displayed on classroom walls in most instances and this practice should be extended. Best

practice in the use of such materials was observed where the materials displayed were referred to by students or teachers during lessons and utilised to support learning.

The use of information and communications technology (ICT) is integral to all aspects of the functioning of the school. All students in junior cycle use tablet devices and this is being extended into senior cycle. Management and teachers recognise that future developments in the use of tablet device technology needs to focus on deriving maximum benefits in learning for all.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Subject departments and programme teams work effectively to prepare high-quality plans for learning and teaching. There are many examples of exemplary planning based on learning outcomes and the integration of literacy and numeracy skills with subject-specific content.

The quality of learning and teaching varied from very good to fair with a significant majority of lessons in the very good category. Very good lessons, which included a number of excellent examples of team teaching, were characterised by exemplary planning for student learning, providing for well-structured lessons that promoted learning development and progression. Clear learning intentions were shared with students and high expectations were made explicit. The learning intentions were used effectively to support students' purposeful engagement in learning and to guide the assessment of progress. Learning was effectively differentiated through rich classroom and homework tasks, effective pair and group work, and high-quality teacher questioning was effective. A safe learning environment was created in which students were comfortable in asking content-related questions. Formative feedback provided on students' oral responses during lessons was very good and exemplary practice was evident in samples of students' written work reviewed across a range of curricular areas. The development of students' literacy and numeracy skills were seamlessly integrated with lesson content as appropriate. Those lessons identified as fair can be improved by adopting the very good practices identified above in order to ensure consistent high-quality learning experience for all students in all lessons. The further development and extension of peer learning already underway would be most effective in achieving consistency in best practice.

Classroom management, in almost all lessons, was very good. Lessons in the vast majority of instances were conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect and a very good rapport between teachers and students was evident. The print-rich learning environment included samples of students' written work. In some classrooms, there is scope to augment displays and ensure they reflect current areas of focus. It is recommended that advantage be taken of the displays of students' work and other print material to support learning during lessons, as was observed in some instances. In addition, and in order to support the work being undertaken to develop students' literacy skills, there is scope for a greater emphasis during lessons on enhancing students' oracy skills.

Very good practice is established in the review and analysis of student outcomes in state examinations. A review of results indicated improvements in participation rates and outcomes at higher level in certain areas in both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. There is however a need to ensure a greater degree of consistency in improvements across the curriculum in both cycles. Building on the practice of reviewing results in in-house examinations, their careful monitoring and the identification of success criteria for the various strategies employed should assist.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Significant progress has been made in implementing recommendations from previous reports. It is evident that school management gives careful consideration to recommendations in inspection reports and adopts effective strategies to support their implementation. As student enrolment has increased, the school management has been very effective in extending the curriculum, and the range of subjects offered in individual programmes, to comprise a very broad range of academic and practical subjects including, for instance, Applied Mathematics, Physics, German and Design and Communication Graphics. It is evident that every effort is made to ensure equity of access to the learning experiences offered in the school to all students while also addressing more individual needs through, for instance, programmes offered in the ASD and Social Inclusion units.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Management and staff are committed to ensuring appropriate structures and action plans are in place to build on improvements already realised in student attainment. The teaching staff is very well placed to establish as consistent practice the excellent learning and teaching practices identified in this and in previous evaluations. This can be well supported by the various strategic teams that are in place, building on the work already taking place in the induction and mentoring programme and on the very good model of in-house CPD, and by extending the peer observation experience.

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

The school self-evaluation process is an integral part of all facets of the school's functioning. High quality processes and practices have been developed to guide the realisation of excellence in all aspects of provision in meeting students' needs. The engagement with all stakeholders is very effective.

At the time of the evaluation, a third aspect of teaching and learning in the school self-evaluation context was being explored. It is suggested that consideration be given to tablet device technology, an area which was identified at a number of meetings as being in need of further exploration in order to ensure its potential in benefiting student learning is maximised.

Senior management and staff demonstrated an excellent capacity to plan strategically for further school improvement and a very positive disposition towards change.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Piper's Hill College would like to express its deep satisfaction with overwhelmingly positive thrust of the MLL Report.

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

The Board would like to inform the Inspectorate that since the inspection, formal training for all KWETB Boards of Management took place on Tuesday, 5 April 2016.