

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

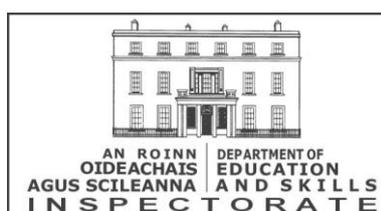
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Hamilton High School
Bandon, County Cork
Roll number: 620500**

Date of inspection: April 23-26 2012



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April 2012 in Hamilton High School, Bandon. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's unitary manager, in-school management, 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. During the evaluation, a wide range of lessons was inspected. The Unitary Manager 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

Hamilton High School is a privately owned, Catholic, lay voluntary secondary school which has provided education for boys in Bandon and its hinterland for seventy-two years. The unitary manager plays a role equivalent to a board of management in other schools. The manager is also the school owner and financial management is supported by a not-for-profit limited company. The school has a strong academic tradition, and a fine sporting tradition. The school site has major building challenges but on the positive side, enrolment has risen by over 50% in the past decade.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The school is in a strong position with significantly increased enrolment in recent years
- The level of student and parent satisfaction with Hamilton High School, across almost every category of importance, is very high
- The dedication and ongoing commitment of all in management positions is self evident
- The school is committed to academic excellence but also to holistic student development to a high degree
- The quality of teaching and learning observed during the evaluation period was consistently very good and in many instances excellent
- Recent innovations in information and communication technology (ICT), support and guidance provision and whole-school approaches to new challenges are commended.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- It is timely that the future management structure of the school be considered and discussed
- The promotion of greater involvement of parents, past students and the community generally in the life of the school is urged
- Management of more day-to-day issues ought to be devolved to the in-school senior management team
- It is of paramount importance that the school buildings be improved in several ways
- Some review of the current curriculum and timetable is required for the coming years

- Greater clarity is needed to ensure optimal use of the additional hours allocated to support learning among students identified with special educational needs
- Recommendations still outstanding from past subject inspections should be implemented.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

The school's model of management is provided for within the Education Act 1998. The manager fulfils many of the duties of a board of management, and is responsible for identifying development priorities, ensuring formulation of a school plan, ratification of school policies and overall building management. The manager also plays a significant role in decisions around curriculum development and staff appointment, including the augmentation in recent years of non-teaching staff. He has a keen awareness that the school is now in a strong position in terms of enrolment and measurable outcomes, despite challenges posed by the school building. The manager also realises that planning for the future needs to commence and should include possible reconfiguration of the overall management structure.

School management has taken steps to increase consultation across the school community. A very positive parents' support group has been formed, and it is recommended that this be re-configured as a parents' association, with affiliation to the National Parents Council, as soon as possible. The school has a popular profile in Bandon and it would enhance community involvement if a past-students' union or network could be formed. The website is currently under reconstruction and this ought to be used to add to public awareness about life in Hamilton High School. The site would also be an ideal way of publishing an annual report to parents on the workings of the school, which is required of a board or a manager, under the Education Act 1998.

The school's manager has ensured that the admissions policy and enrolment procedures are transparent and have been published. Confirmation was provided that the manager 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*.

In-school management of students and staff is devolved to the principal and deputy principal. There is a clear division of duties evident in the roles of both members of this team, but also an awareness of the need to overlap and support each other daily. The manager has attributed much of the school's continued success and rising enrolment to the sustained work and enthusiasm of the principal and deputy principal, and to the diligence and professionalism of the school's staff.

To build on this growth and these strengths, and to streamline management of some important challenges, it is recommended that decisions about day-to-day spending and building maintenance should be devolved directly to the in-school senior management team. The encouragement of a greater staff voice in policy development is also recommended. Communications between management and staff can be a challenge in the school, not least because the shape of the complex makes an intercom system difficult to install. It is inevitable that some staff announcements will need to be made at times when people gather in the staffroom, and the ongoing use of a consultative approach to staff meeting agendas and of any-other-business items is to be encouraged.

The school's priorities for development

The manager has identified the upgrading of school buildings and grounds, including sports facilities, as major development priorities. Specifically, the school has expressed a need for a new biology laboratory, a physical education hall, a canteen and three new classrooms. An application for most of these has been submitted to the Department of Education and Skills and there is no doubt that the current condition of much of the school building strongly supports the need for such facilities. The school has secured two pre-fabricated classrooms but there is much work to do on the condition of the general school buildings, whether the current, specific application bears fruit or not. Window improvements which have been sanctioned and funded by the Department under a previous Summer Works Scheme ought to be effected as soon as possible. Seeking emergency funding for some aspects of the building in general, and more specifically of the science facilities, is also recommended.

Another development priority of management is to uphold academic standards through school self-evaluation. This is well in hand and results in State Examinations Commission examinations are impressive. Work has begun on school self-evaluation, which is commended, and should involve all stakeholders in time. The school has also been extremely positive in its roll out of new information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning. Despite some teething difficulties, the new ICT equipment has been embraced by staff and has been very well supported by management and staff expertise, and by involvement in an Active Learning Network.

The school cites maintenance of its subject range as a further priority, and is to be commended, in particular, for the wide range available in Leaving Certificate. However, there are some areas for added consideration in this respect, which go beyond the maintenance of current provision. The long-standing lack of a qualified teacher of Physical Education has not been addressed and ought to be as soon as possible. The low levels of uptake in the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) are a further challenge. In addition, some timetabling anomalies ought to be rectified, including the non availability of Physical Education for fifth and sixth year students. Furthermore, the lack of double periods for any of the senior cycle science subjects is at odds with the general requirements for practicals and experiments in these disciplines. The replacement of double periods in non-practical subjects in order to facilitate this may need to be considered.

Junior cycle has a strong academic focus, including two compulsory modern languages. This curriculum will need some reconsideration in the coming years, as pressures towards broadening the range available are likely to come from the proposed implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle from 2014. These may include possible option-block formation, increased junior cycle guidance time and the need for some technical or design courses for junior students. It is recommended that a significant portion of staff planning time, and of some future staff meetings, be allocated to such aspects of curriculum development and to enhance a partnership approach to school development planning.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

A high level of staff change has occurred in the past six or seven years, due to a combination of retirements and additional teaching posts created because of an increase in student enrolment from 222 in 2002 to the current 340. This means that Hamilton High School has a particularly young staff cohort and in-school management team. In-school management has been very supportive of staff in a number of key ways. Continuing professional development opportunities, including in-school professional development in a range of educational areas, have been organised. Staff membership of subject associations

has also been part-funded by management, and time has been made available for subject department planning as well.

It is encouraging to see the prominence given to staff involvement in the roll out of a number of school initiatives. These include whole-school guidance planning, an instructional leadership project revolving around ICT, planning for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and a whole-school literacy and numeracy project. The latter will form a key part of the overall school improvement plan for 2012-13. In terms of the structuring of formal planning time, the school calendar intimates that the main formal focus of staff involvement in policy formation is at the start of the year. It is recommended that a more staggered approach be considered, allowing for scheduled meetings throughout the year to better facilitate consultation and development.

Very good work has been done in subject department planning and a range of department folders, and programme folders, are well stored and accessible for staff use. In time, the development of staff and departmental folders on the school network, the use of ICT in attendance monitoring and in communication within the school community are planned, and this is applauded. Staff have received training and mentoring support in the area of ICT, and have also been given continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities in aspects of special education, which is applauded. In this context, it is good to note that a special needs coordinator has been appointed and that further professional development opportunities are being explored. The current timetabling of learning support and resource hours is confusing and needs greater clarity in its documentation than currently obtains. Inserting additional teaching hours into the timetable at construction stage rather than later, exploring team teaching in some contexts and creating an overarching database or student register which charts where teaching resources are allocated to students in support contexts, are recommended.

Leadership of students

Hamilton High School has an open admissions policy and parental satisfaction with enrolment procedures is very high. There are consistent procedures in place for monitoring attendance and punctuality, with a combination of classroom teachers and the deputy principal involved on a day-to-day basis. Personal contact with parents in all instances of student absence is made by the deputy principal each day. An effective year-heads system supports general student management, including behaviour, attendance and academic progress, and there are good communication lines with home, via journal entries, reports, an appointments procedure and parent-teacher meetings.

In-school management has given good encouragement to the student voice. The student council meets twice a month and raises matters of general relevance to students when its representatives meet the principal. In addition, class representatives play a role in solving any challenges, which are specific to particular class groups or rooms. Students have been appropriately consulted with, on an individual basis, when the revision of the code of behaviour was undertaken, and the student input into the RSE programme and whole-school guidance planning has also been important. There is a low level of suspensions and students were very positive in questionnaire responses about how they were treated in school. Previously, timetabled meetings of year heads have been good supports to student management. If resources permit the scheduling of this formal weekly meeting and of a similar meeting time for teachers involved in pastoral care, this would also be beneficial.

2.3 Management of facilities

Space is tight but is well managed and there is good awareness around safety matters. Classes are based in their own rooms, avoiding undue student movement between lessons. However, the main buildings do need immediate attention. In the past, the school has been

somewhat reluctant to seek either Departmental or community assistance for renovation work and there is a need for greater proactivity in this regard.

Without prejudice to the current application to the Department for an extension, a five-year facility improvement plan is recommended, involving school management, in-school management, staff, parents, community and the Department. It is possible for everyone to engage with this plan at different levels. There is a need to focus on day-to-day issues, including litter control, window cleaning and general tidiness and on maintenance issues, which require the empowerment of in-school management as previously discussed. The possible re-configuration of a pre-fabricated classroom to accommodate some basic equipment for Physics is worthy of consideration while simultaneously progressing building improvement or extension projects as may be feasible.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty-four lessons were inspected during the evaluation, across a very wide range of subjects and year groups. The overall quality of teaching and learning observed during this snapshot was uniformly very good, with several instances of outstanding practice evident.

Planning and preparation by teachers was very good, including advance preparation of a wide range of teaching resources, such as handouts, worksheets and ICT-based video clips and powerpoint presentations. Planning also included occasions where students' active involvement was to be facilitated, such as for drama or group activity. Although there were some challenges, it was also noted that many rooms had appropriate print-rich posters and examples of students' work on display. All lessons followed a logical structure, with many using the presentation of learning intentions initially, which were revisited later in lessons and reinforced near the end.

Teaching included significant amounts of whole-class teaching with pair work and group work used less frequently. ICT was frequently used to stimulate activities, provide introductory or visual material and summaries, teachers' overall comfort with the equipment was noted, as was the degree to which students helped when practical difficulties occurred. A number of lessons saw very good use of student presentations, drama and visual interpretations, and good identification of key terms and subject-specific explanations by teachers. Where relevant, very good use of the target language for classroom communication and questioning was evident, and students were comfortable in this context.

A very positive atmosphere pervaded all lessons observed. There was evident teacher energy and enthusiasm and students' behaviour was very good but also very natural in all classes. In all lessons observed, there was a very good rapport between teachers and students and, when relevant, between students and other students as they engaged in class activities or in general discussion. Students got lots of affirmation and encouragement, especially if answers were tentative or incomplete. Textbooks were used for consolidation and support and were not over-used, and good opportunities were provided for students to speak. Classrooms were safe environments where humour and banter were important features of the atmosphere.

There was ample evidence of satisfactory learning by students. Most gave reflective and mature answers and there was noticeable student enthusiasm. Students were afforded good opportunities to apply their learning in class and homework. In almost all instances,

teachers were able to consolidate student learning at the end of lessons with a review or some focused questioning. The only recommendations in terms of promoting student learning are for teachers to place more emphasis on clear visual reinforcement of key outcomes, and on student note-making, where they look, listen and discern important points for themselves rather than only take down notes provided by the teacher.

In-class assessment included regular and differentiated oral questioning, and some good use of peer questioning which is worth developing. There was consistent teacher monitoring of students' homework, which was assigned in all lessons and well linked to the lesson topic in the main. Best practice observed included a focus on learning outcomes and a review of these as lessons progressed and concluded. This is an area which could be built upon at a further CPD event on assessment for learning in time.

The evidence from the lessons observed during the inspection, and drawn from students and parents' responses, supports the overall view that a very good standard of teaching and learning obtains at the school.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

As previously intimated, the school has not employed a physical education teacher since this was recommended in a previous inspection. This should be pursued as a priority, as should the review of senior cycle timetabling to ensure that students in fifth and sixth year have physical education classes. The school is commended for its application for a physical education hall but must be more proactive in its general provision in this area.

Another previous inspection report urged the creation of space to enhance the print-rich environment in several classrooms. This has been done to a good degree, though hampered by the condition of the walls in some rooms. Another more recent report sought significant upgrades of science facilities. This has been done to some extent and staff members are commended for their work in this respect. It is reiterated that the upgrade of science facilities needs to be prioritised by the manager and a commitment to do so has been forthcoming, while a similar commitment has been made in relation to the need for double periods in senior sciences.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

As recommended in previous inspections, minutes of subject planning meetings are being well maintained and clear departmental structures are in place. A previous recommendation relating to the use of learning outcomes in lessons is being implemented in many lessons and the recommendation for CPD made above should reinforce this further. A subject-specific recommendation relating to a choice of text for junior cycle has been given reasonable consideration by the relevant department and implemented where deemed to suit the particular class group.

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

5.1

Formal self-evaluation is in its early stages but good steps have been taken and the focus on literacy and numeracy is applauded. Some very good whole-school ideas have surfaced in this respect, and the integration of such approaches across all subjects and all aspects of the curriculum is recommended, as practicable. Recommendations within this report regarding a strategic approach to tackling building challenges, the enhancement of in-school management's role, increased involvement of staff, parents, students and other stakeholders in self-review should also support future planning and improvement.

The school has many strengths, including its student cohort, and its young and energetic staff has great capacity to engage with self-evaluation and school improvement.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Unitary Manager

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The school wishes to thank the Inspectorate for their professional & informative feedback, during the recent WSE-MLL. The school community found the experience both a worthwhile and a positive experience. Go raibh maith agaibh!

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 Parents Support Group is considering affiliation to the NPCpp.
- An application under Emergency Works will be submitted by the Manager, to greatly improve the building infrastructure of the school.
- The school will continue to review the curricular needs of the students and the timetable for the coming years, in light of planned curricular changes.
- The school is continuing to plan for students with extra needs, in line with D.E.S. Circular No. 0010/2012.
- The school will welcome any liaison with the P.E. Inspectorate regarding guidelines on practical Health and Safety suggestions in the implementation of J.C.P.E. without the facility of a P.E. hall. The school also awaits a positive response from the DES Buildings Unit to our existing application for this facility.
- The school is actively planning curricular options for the better provision of Physical Education throughout the school.
- The school has already timetabled double periods for science subjects, as discussed during the WSE-MLL.
- Under the Emergency Works Scheme, an application will be prepared by the Manager without undue delay for improved Biology Laboratory facilities.