

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**Christian Brothers Secondary School**  
**Midleton, County Cork**  
**Roll number: 62360G**

**Date of inspection: 9 February 2012**



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

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in February 2012 in the Christian Brothers Secondary School, Midleton. 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, 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***

Christian Brothers Secondary School (C.B.S.), Midleton is a Catholic voluntary secondary school for boys under the trusteeship of ERST – the Edmund Rice Schools Trust. Education has been provided by the Christian Brothers in Midleton since 1867 and the secondary school moved to its current location in 1971. The school serves a wide catchment area with more than twenty feeder primary schools within the East Cork area, and demand for places is strong. The school's enrolment has increased rapidly in recent years to its current level of 592 students. This number is expected to continue to increase in the years ahead in line with the growth of the town population and its hinterland.

At the time of the evaluation, an acting principal and acting deputy principal had recently been appointed.

## **1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

### ***1.1 Key Findings***

- There is an effective board of management and acting senior management team, and a committed, hard-working staff.
- The school has an open and inclusive admissions policy.
- The Parents' Council and the Past Pupils' Union play an active part in the life of school.
- Good support systems for students are in place including a well-structured programme for students with additional educational needs.
- A strength of the school is the broad and balanced range of subjects that it offers.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good with some examples of very good practice.
- The holistic development of students is emphasised together with a commitment to promoting participation in sport.

## ***1.2 Recommendations for Further Development***

- Management should address the daily difficulties that students experience due to over-crowding and should prioritise improving the quality of the school environment for students.
- The school's planning process should be revitalised, and strategies to improve the school's administrative and planning systems should be put in place.
- The schedule of posts of responsibility should be reviewed in order to better support management in meeting the changing needs of the school.
- Recommendations from previous inspection reports should be implemented, in particular in relation to timetabling in first year.
- The sharing of good practice by teachers should be further developed in order to introduce more innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

## **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 board of management is appropriately constituted and is aware of its responsibilities. Members of the board are committed to their work for the school and some have a long association with the C.B.S. As part of the ERST network of schools, the board receives support in promoting and fostering the school's characteristic spirit. Members of the board have availed of appropriate training and ERST also provides training for newly appointed principals and teachers.

The board operates in a spirit of consultation and partnership, and is proactive with regard to the future of the school. It takes an active role in policy development, in particular the Admissions policy and the Code of Ethics and Discipline. It is supportive of teacher professional development and facilitates attendance by teachers at seminars. The level of communication between the board and the school community is good with regular reports given to the staff and to the parents' council after meetings.

The board is aware of the importance of preserving the school's traditions while facilitating the changes needed to provide for the present and future needs of the school. It is to be commended for the way in which it has actively pursued a building programme in recent years. This has resulted in additional classroom space and a new weights room. The board has a policy of ongoing investment in the development of the school and its facilities, particularly in the area of information and communication technology (ICT). The board is now encouraged to continue to oversee the effective use of these resources.

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*.

The partnership between the school and the wider school community is seen in the close links with the parents' council and with the past pupils union (PPU). The school is fortunate in that both groups make a meaningful contribution to the life of the school. The parents' council organises seminars and information evenings for parents and is involved in fundraising. Its views are sought in the drafting of relevant policies.

The PPU has provided valuable support to the school for nearly fifty years through funding school development and renovation projects including ICT resources and gym equipment as well as the sponsorship of the annual awards, and support for student participation in the Developing World Immersion Programme in India.

### **The school's priorities for development**

The school's current priorities are both infrastructural and educational. The key priority is the improvement of the school's physical infrastructure. The rapid increase in student numbers in a short space of time has led to a deterioration in the quality of the teaching and learning environment. Given the number of students currently enrolled, the school operates in cramped conditions and struggles to provide sufficient basic facilities to cater appropriately for the needs of nearly six hundred boys during the school day.

The Department of Education and Skills has recently given approval for the building of new temporary accommodation which will help to alleviate the situation in the short-term. In addition, a large extension to the school, to accommodate further increases in student numbers, has also been agreed with the Department in a draft schedule of accommodation.

However, there is an urgent need for management to address concerns that were repeatedly raised by parents and students during the evaluation. The concerns relate to management of the space available, and include over-crowding on the corridors; access to lockers; the lack of space for students to eat their lunch; and the limited sanitary facilities. While some measures have been introduced such as a one-way system in the corridors, further action is required. It is recommended that management implement measures in the short-term to address these issues, such as a staggered break time and lunch time. Given the limited communal space available, ensuring that classrooms are open at lunchtime would give students somewhere to eat. Attention should also be paid to ensuring that appropriate designated space is available to support students with additional learning needs.

## ***2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

### **Leadership of staff**

Since their appointment, the acting principal and acting deputy principal have developed an effective and collaborative working relationship, and have focused on ensuring stability and continuity in the management of the school. They demonstrate energy, drive and a willingness to lead by example, as well as a commitment to the welfare and support of staff and students. They have an understanding of how to lead learning, and of the importance of facilitating the conditions under which teaching and learning can flourish. In addition to leading learning, they are also involved in pastoral care and in administrative tasks such as the running of the pre-examinations.

The middle management team of assistant principals and special duties teachers provides good support to senior management. They contribute to the work of the school through the carrying out of a range of pastoral and curricular duties. However, as a result of retirements and increased enrolment, there have been changes in staff, and the needs of the school have also evolved. Although a review of the posts of responsibility was initiated in the previous school year, the process was not completed. In the context of current staffing circumstances, the schedule of posts should be reviewed, and this process should be prioritised.

The teachers have taken a leadership role in various aspects of school life and have contributed greatly to the school through their involvement in pastoral duties, extracurricular activities, leading initiatives and in the co-ordination of programmes. Teachers are also involved in the mentoring of student teachers, thus promoting professional dialogue and the sharing of good practice. The commitment and contribution of staff is acknowledged and commended.

The year-head and class-tutor system is a key component of the middle-management structure while the pastoral aspect of the role forms an important part of the student-support structure within the school. The provision of a weekly timetabled meeting has allowed the year heads to offer support and advice to the principal.

During the evaluation, it was evident that elements of the school's administrative and planning structures and systems had not been operating effectively, in particular in relation to planning, communication, arrangements for meetings and meeting records. Many of these matters have subsequently been addressed and rectified by the acting management team. With regard to school development planning, extensive work was done on the preparation of the school plan some years ago. However, further work on its evaluation and review has not taken place as previously envisaged. The planning process should be re-established and revitalised. There is a need for systemic evaluation and review together with the development of a strategic plan in order to facilitate the day-to-day management of the school. This work should become a priority.

### **Leadership of students**

The quality of leadership of students is very good. Results from parent and student questionnaires, together with discussions with parents and students, indicate high levels of satisfaction with many aspects of school life. During the evaluation, the students displayed a sense of pride in their school and commented on the good relationships between students and teachers.

The school has an open and inclusive admissions policy which is kept under regular review. The transition of students from primary school to the C.B.S. is well managed. Almost all of the parents surveyed stated that the school made their child welcome and that their children feel safe and well looked after in the school.

Good systems are in place to support students when they enter the school, and at key periods during their education. A comprehensive guidance programme is provided, and a well-structured learning support programme is in place for students with additional educational needs.

The Guidance department and the learning support team form an integral part of the pastoral care team. The recent introduction of a regular meeting time has provided a valuable forum for discussing student support and has highlighted the importance of the pastoral care team.

Management is commended for the broad and balanced curriculum on offer. It is noteworthy that Music and Art are provided, and that new subjects, such as Technology, have been introduced to meet demand. Further additions such as Engineering are being considered. Good collaboration with neighbouring schools has resulted in the provision of Applied Maths as an after-school subject. The programmes offered include Transition Year (TY) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) while the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme has been offered in the past.

However, it should be noted by management that the wide range of subjects on offer has limited the number of lesson periods allocated to core subjects such as English in first year. This is not good practice. As the school's current eight-period day limits its ability to make changes, the increased time-tabling flexibility that a nine-period day would provide should be examined.

The school's commitment to promoting the spiritual and holistic development of students is very evident. Students are encouraged to develop a sense of concern for others through mentoring, fund-raising for charities and participation in the India Immersion project. Opportunities for leadership and involvement in the life of the school are available to students through the student council, the Meitheal group or through participation in Gaisce, music and sport. The school's reputation in hurling and football has been achieved through their many successes in Cork and Munster colleges competitions but other sports such as cross-country running also feature prominently. Many of the parents and students surveyed indicated participation by students in activities outside of school time.

### ***2.3 Management of facilities***

The school buildings are well maintained, and the work of the school's caretaking and administrative staff is acknowledged. The students benefit from the extensive playing pitches that form part of the grounds. A comprehensive Health and Safety statement is in place and it is planned to carry out a risk assessment in conjunction with subject departments. This assessment should be progressed.

While there has been significant investment in the development of ICT facilities, some difficulties have emerged due to the unreliable nature of the internet connectivity and the ongoing technical problems experienced. The resolution of these issues will extend the school's capacity to integrate ICT into teaching and learning.

Good progress has been made in promoting student involvement in care for the environment through a Green Schools' committee and investment in recycling.

## **3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### ***3.1 The quality of learning and teaching***

The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good with some examples of very good practice.

Lessons were well structured and planned, and the resources used, including some differentiated handouts, were appropriate to the lesson and to the level of the students. Well-established classroom routines such as roll call and the correction of homework were evident. In some instances, the intended learning outcomes were communicated to students at the start of lessons. This good practice should be extended, and time should be made available during lessons to re-visit the learning outcomes.

There was a good balance between teacher instruction and student activities in many lessons. Students were given opportunities to work independently or in pairs, and it was positive that in some instances, they had an opportunity to present their work or projects to other students, through the use of PowerPoint or through an oral presentation. This was an effective approach as it encouraged peer learning and developed students' oral skills. In a small number of lessons, there is a need to provide more opportunities for student engagement and interaction in the selection of lesson activities.

Good practice was seen in the emphasis on the use of subject-specific terminology or vocabulary in some lessons. This practice was reinforced through use of visual aids, flash cards or ICT. In order to further support students' literacy and numeracy skills, the continued development of this approach is encouraged.

In a number of lessons observed, there was a focus on examination questions and techniques. While this emphasis is appropriate with examination year classes, a more student-centred approach to learning in line with syllabus and programme requirements is advised for non-examination year groups, in particular in first year and in TY.

Students' progress was assessed by teachers through monitoring of lesson activities and through ongoing questioning. Very good practice was noted where higher-order questions challenged students or where students were asked to formulate their own questions. It was positive that students' efforts were encouraged and affirmed even when their answers were hesitant or incomplete.

Classroom management was very good and a positive learning environment was created. A relaxed and often good-humoured rapport was evident between teachers and students. The teachers had high expectations and students responded positively to these expectations. It was positive also that students gained satisfaction from the successful completion of tasks during the lessons.

An examination of a selection of students' copybooks and journals showed that homework is assigned and corrected. However, there was limited use of formative comment in students' copybooks, and it is suggested that the use of Assessment for Learning (AfL) techniques should be strengthened in order to support students' learning.

The uptake of higher level in subjects in the certificate examinations is very good, and overall student achievement is high. While an analysis of student achievement is carried out at subject department level, the practice of preparing an annual analysis of student achievement including results from the certificate examinations for the board of management should be re-introduced.

In their responses to the questionnaires, parents stated that they feel that their child is doing well. Students in their responses were positive about the advice they received from teachers on how they could improve the quality of their work, and feel that the teachers encourage them to achieve to their potential.

While a traditional approach to teaching is still working well within the school, proposed curricular and assessment changes at national level, together with the expected increase in enrolment will necessitate changes to teaching and learning practices. It is clear that the positive teacher-student relationship in the C.B.S. would support a more innovative approach to teaching and learning. It is recommended that teachers share good practice in order to develop new approaches to teaching and learning so as to best meet the needs of students as learners in the future.

## **4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

### ***4.1 Management***

Published subject inspection reports in Science and Biology, English, Music and Guidance were reviewed by the evaluation team. While some recommendations have been implemented, notably in Guidance and in ICT, constraints on the space available have impacted on the implementation of other recommendations such as in Music. However, some recommendations still remain at discussion stage a number of years after the inspections. In particular, key recommendations regarding the inadequate timetabling allocation for first-year English and Science have not been implemented and should be addressed.

### ***4.2 Learning and Teaching***

It was positive to see a documented response from the Guidance department on the implementation of recommendations from the inspection. There was also evidence of progress in the area of subject department planning with elements of reflective practice and self-evaluation included in some subject plans. Recommendations relating to TY were referred to in some subject plans, and, as a result, new modules and approaches have been introduced in English and Science, and in the TY programme generally.

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

### ***5.1***

The board of management and the acting senior management team share the goal of improving the quality of education provided in the school. The acting senior management team has a keen awareness of the changes needed in order to meet the evolving needs of the school. An evaluation of current systems and the implementation of a programme of strategic planning at organisational, curricular and resource level is required, especially given the projected increase in enrolment to 1,000 students. The experience, commitment and goodwill of the board of management, the acting senior management team and staff should ensure that the school will have the capacity to bring about further improvement.

## **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 Midleton CBS wishes to thank the inspection team in the manner in which the inspection was conducted. We would like to thank them for their courtesy and professionalism during their entire inspection. It was an affirming experience that the overall quality of teaching and learning was good. This is one of the core objectives of the school.

The Board is pleased that the quality of service being provided is readily acknowledged and that the supportive roles of the Parents Council, the Past Pupils Union, and the Board of Management is recognised.

The issue of overcrowding is due to the fact that the school was originally built for 250 pupils and now caters for over 600 pupils. The lack of space and accommodation is responsible for the undesirable congestion which takes place. Overcrowding can only be fully resolved when the new proposed building is in place, which is now being actively processed by the National Development Finance Agency in conjunction with the Department of Education & Skills.

The Board of Management notes the suggestion of staggered lunch breaks but is not convinced that the suggestion would benefit the teaching and learning process as up to 300 pupils would be free from class, milling around in corridors, and the subsequent noise level would be distracting for students and teachers in the classrooms.

There are technical problems from time to time with our ICT infrastructure. The school has three networks four servers and 135 computers. These will cause problems from time to time and unfortunately the Department of Education does not pay for ICT technicians or support. We have a good support agreement in place but due to cost constraints it can never be adequate.

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

1. 2012/2013 School timetable has an extra class for 1<sup>st</sup> year English and 1<sup>st</sup> year Science as recommended on the report.
2. The number of periods on the school timetable has been increased from eight to nine on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. Wednesday has a six period day.
3. The Board of Management has provided two covered lunch areas for the pupils out of school funds.
4. Overcrowding in corridors has been partly reduced by the addition of five new pre-fabs which removes some students from the main school block.
5. Extra toilet facilities have been put in place thanks to a grant from the Department of Education & Skills.
6. Improving the schools administrative and planning systems and making the allocation and effectiveness of Post of Responsibility more appropriate to the changing needs and development of the school is currently being addressed.