Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Scoil Chríost Rí
Borris Road, Portlaoise, Co. Laois
Roll number: 63451O

Date of inspection: 16 November 2011
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A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in November, 2011 in Scoil Chríost Rí. 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 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
Scoil Chríost Rí, a girls’ Catholic secondary school, was established in 1967 by the Presentation Sisters. A long tradition of providing for the education of local children goes back to the establishment of the first Presentation convent in Portlaoise in 1824. The school is now under the trusteeship of CEIST. The school provides the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate, and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The school moved from its original location to a new campus on the outskirts of Portlaoise in August 2010. The new school building has been built under the Public Private Partnership model and the campus is shared with the Christian Brothers’ boys’ secondary school. The school’s enrolment has increased steadily over recent years to its current level of 610 students.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board of management provides very good leadership and the school is well managed.
- Senior management demonstrates a very good capacity to lead and manage teaching and learning in the school.
- Very good processes are in place to support school development and the school has a good capacity to effect school improvement: however, school development planning is mainly led by the senior management team.
- The school provides well for the needs of students through its curriculum and pastoral-care structures, and provides them with many opportunities to develop academically, socially and personally.
- Staff are very involved in and committed to the success of the school.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good in all of the lessons observed and was very good in about one third of the lessons observed.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- It is recommended that an overarching school development planning committee be established in order to share the experience of leading in this area and build expertise across the staff.
- In the context that the quality of teaching and learning was very good in many but not all of the lessons observed, it is recommended that the school facilitates subject departments in sharing good practice both internally among teachers of the same subject and also between subject departments.
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 provides strong leadership for the school community. It has a very good awareness of its responsibilities and operates effectively through regular meetings, good record keeping, and close links with the school’s senior management. Good practice is also evident in the importance it places on accessing training for its own members.

The board has a very clear view of the importance of maintaining and promoting the tradition and ethos of the school. For example, all school policies are checked to ensure that they are in line with the school’s mission statement. The board works closely with the trustees, and aims to preserve the unique identity of Scoil Chríost Rí into the future.

The board is fortunate to have a wide range of experience and skills in its membership. It was evident that all members contribute actively to the work of the board. Sub-committees of the board often undertake to research particular issues so as to facilitate decision making by the full board. Decisions on issues are reached only after extensive consideration. These strengths have led to the board having a very good capacity to lead the school.

Through its representative structure the board facilitates a very good level of communication with parents and staff and promotes the active involvement of parents and staff in the operation of the school. The Parents’ Council is very proactive and has a strong supportive role as a partner in the operation of the school. This was seen, for example, in the role it has played in the development of the school’s code of behaviour and other policies. Staff are represented on the board. However, other staff groups or students have not met directly with the board. It is suggested that staff and students occasionally be invited to meet with the board: for instance, representatives of a subject department could meet with the board to discuss the outcomes of an inspection, or the students’ council could present an annual report to the board.

The successful development of the shared campus and the completion of the building project have required considerable input from the board over a number of years. The leadership of the board in this regard is evident in the ongoing involvement of the board in the implementation of the management structure for the shared campus and its liaison with the on-site management company.

The board is very involved and gives great consideration to all aspects of policy development. The board is very clear on the need for all partners to be consulted in the development of policies and consults with parents, students and trustees as necessary.

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 school’s priorities for development
Good practice is evident in the preparation of an annual school development report for the school’s trustees. The priorities identified in the report reflect a balanced approach to the needs of the school in terms of the day-to-day running of the school and the future development of the school. For example, planned developmental work is categorised into
three areas: staff and student welfare, support for teaching and learning, and management and organisation. Within each of these areas, clear objectives are set out and the intended actions to achieve the objectives are planned. The school is very aware of the changing circumstances in which it now operates. In particular, it is aware that increasing enrolment will bring changes in the profile of students attending the school, staffing and the curriculum in the years ahead. Consideration is already being given to the dealing with the challenges these changes will bring.

The annual report is based on views and inputs gathered from the entire school community. However, the task of compiling the annual report and leading school development planning falls mainly to senior management. While it is acknowledged that staff contribute greatly to the process of school development planning through the work of various task groups, it is recommended that an overarching school development planning committee be established in order to share the experience of leading in this area and build expertise across the staff. Such a committee could coordinate and guide the work involved in achieving the objectives set out in the annual report, and monitor progress at the end of each school year.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff
The quality of leadership of staff is very good. The senior management team provides good leadership and members work well together as a team. The school is very well organised and effectively managed. The senior management team has created good and open relationships with all stakeholders in the school. The approachability of the senior management was noted by staff, students and parents.

Good use is being made of the post structure within the school to support senior management in the day-to-day running of the school. Good practice is evident in the regular reviews of both the overall schedule of posts and the duties assigned to individual posts. There is a good capacity for leadership among the staff and there are opportunities for staff to lead in various aspects of the life of the school. Teachers with posts of responsibility act as year heads and lead in areas such as information technology, organising examinations and liaising with newcomer students.

Apart from the duties assigned to posts of responsibility, staff have contributed greatly to the development of the school through participation in various task groups and by leading initiatives such as the induction programme for first year students. There are good structures in place to facilitate the involvement of staff, such as regular meetings of the whole staff and of subject departments. It was evident that the staff are committed to the development and future of the school.

Because of retirements and increased enrolment, there has been considerable change in the staffing of the school in recent years. New staff are well supported by an induction programme, informal mentoring by colleagues and by classroom visits by senior management. This has provided good opportunities for professional exchange between new and established teachers. Good practice was also evident in the appropriate deployment of staff and the facilitation of their attendance at in-service courses and events.

Leadership of students
The quality of leadership of students is very good. The school has an open and inclusive admissions policy. In light of the increasing and changing enrolment, this policy is kept under review by the board. Good practice was also evident in the procedures and guidelines for admission to the TY programme. Well-organised pastoral care and discipline systems are in place.
Good systems are in place to support students when they first enter the school, transfer from junior to senior cycle and when they prepare to move on to further study or work. The majority of parents and students surveyed were satisfied with the level of advice they received about subject choices. However, some parents and students indicated dissatisfaction in this regard. It is recommended that, in conjunction with the completion of review of the guidance plan currently underway, the school explore the reasons behind this dissatisfaction.

The curriculum provides for the needs of the student body. New subjects have been added to the curriculum in recent times and further additions such as a second modern language are being considered. The school has investigated the feasibility of providing the Leaving Certificate Applied programme and is open to providing the programme if the number of suitable applicants is sufficient. The TY and LCVP programmes are very well organised. The provision for learning support is also very well organised. Good practice was evident in the creation of small groups, team-teaching and the maintenance of a register of provision for individual students.

The majority of students surveyed felt proud to be attending this school and felt safe and cared for in the school. A good level of opportunities for leadership and involvement in the life of the school are provided through systems such as the students’ council, the prefects system, and the Meitheal group. Students are consulted by the board on policies as appropriate. As suggested previously, it would be beneficial for students to have an opportunity to directly address the board on occasion.

The school has developed good systems for monitoring the attendance and punctuality of students. The school is aware of some cases of above average absenteeism and is making good efforts to deal with the particular situations.

The school provides a good range of sporting and other activities for students’ personal and academic development. Over half the parents and students surveyed indicated participation by students in activities outside of class time. For example, during the evaluation, events associated with Science Week were very popular with students.

2.3 Management of facilities
Considerable effort has been made by the board and senior management in the successful transfer of the school to its new location and building. The new school building provides a modern and attractive environment for teaching and learning. A state-of-the-art sports hall is shared with the Christian Brothers’ secondary school. The school liaises closely with the onsite management company to resolve any maintenance or ongoing issues regarding the upkeep of the building.

The environmental awareness of the school is reflected in the awarding of a green flag to the school and its commitment to reducing its carbon footprint.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching
The quality of teaching and learning was good in all of the lessons observed and was very good in about one third of the lessons observed.

All of the lessons observed were very well managed and conducted in a respectful atmosphere. Students were very cooperative and worked well with their teachers. The displays of student work in classrooms and throughout the school provide affirmation and encouragement to students to do well. In most lessons there was an appropriate balance
between teacher and student input. The use of resources such as worksheets or handouts showed a good level of advance preparation. Practical activities in relevant subject areas were well organised and provided students with useful opportunities to develop their skills and understanding of the lesson content. In some lessons, differentiated strategies supported student learning across all abilities.

Where the quality of teaching and learning was very good, strategies based on an Assessment for Learning approach were used to good effect. In these lessons, the planned learning outcomes were shared with students at the start of the lesson and were also reviewed at the end of the lesson to evaluate whether or not they had been achieved. During the lessons, students’ progress was well monitored through the use of directed questions. There was a good balance between higher-order and lower-order questions and students were given time to think about questions before responding. Peer assessment and self assessment also featured in the very good lessons. These assessment strategies, and the quality of the feedback given by teachers, ensured that students knew what was required to do well in answering questions, and completing classwork and homework.

An openness to trying innovative or new teaching techniques also featured in the very good lessons. For example, in some lessons, students had to take the role of teacher and explain or teach some aspect of the lesson to their classmates. Pair and group work, and novel techniques such as ‘traffic lights’ and ‘jigsaw’, were also used to good effect to engage students in learning. Very good use was made of information and communication technology (ICT) facilities to make the lessons interesting and to give the teacher more time to focus on the students. Team teaching worked very well in providing extra support to students.

In the context that the quality of teaching and learning was very good in many but not all of the lessons observed, it is recommended that the school facilitates subject departments in sharing good practice both internally among teachers of the same subject and also between subject departments. The recent establishment of a post of responsibility with duties in the area of continuing professional development shows the school’s commitment to ongoing staff development and will facilitate professional dialogue. Other support could be provided by identifying items for the agenda of subject department meetings. For example, all subject departments could be asked to consider the outcomes for students in school and state examinations. A statistical analysis of state examination results was available in all subject plans. In a few cases, this analysis was supplemented by a deeper analysis which identified what is working well, what is not working well and recommended actions for improvement. This level of consideration could be carried out by all subject departments.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management
It was evident that serious consideration has been given to the findings and recommendations from previous reports. They have been considered by senior management, subject departments, the parents’ council and by the board of management. Action plans have been developed and the majority of recommendations have been implemented. For example, improvements to the timetabling of Irish have been made. In some cases, following consideration of the recommendation, the school has decided on an alternative course of action to suit the school’s context. For example, the school has decided to retain two single periods for the LCVP link modules. In other cases, the move to the new school building has meant that some recommendations are no longer relevant.
4.2 Learning and Teaching

Many of the recommendations from previous reports focused in some way on improving the quality of subject department planning for teaching and learning. The implementation of these recommendations has been supported by the development of a common template for subject department plans and very good progress was evident in the planning documents reviewed during the inspection. The majority of the planning documents were of a very good standard. For example, subject plans provide good advice to teachers on the area of special educational needs and link subject-specific planning with the provision made by the school for students with special educational needs. The development of electronic folders for teachers to access and share teaching resources and methodologies will further enhance the quality of subject planning. However, as mentioned previously, there is scope for sharing of good practice across subject departments. For example, some subject departments have identified areas for development within their own subject area after consideration of inspection reports on other subjects. It would be good practice for all subject departments to carry out such a review. Also, subject departments could look at other subject department plans so as to learn from the good practice in each others’ work.

It was clear that good progress has been made with regard to specific recommendations regarding teaching and learning. For example, very good use was made of ICT in Home Economics and, in Irish lessons, the desired learning outcomes were shared with students at the start of lessons.

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

The school has a long-established practice of self evaluation and commitment to improvement. This is particularly evident in the provision and implementation of an annual school development report. There is a very good level of engagement by all stakeholders in the development and monitoring of the objectives and action plans set out in the report. For example, parents were very actively involved in the review of the school’s code of behaviour which has been completed over recent years. Staff contribute enormously to the implementation of the plan through their work in task groups dealing with specific objectives.

The self-evaluation framework evident in the annual report has impacted positively on the work of the school. This is seen, for example, in the development of subject planning, the ongoing review of policies, and the rearrangement of posts of responsibility. These developments show that the school has a very good capacity for self evaluation and for improvement.

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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 Scoil Chriost Rí Presentation Secondary School, Portlaoise would like to thank the inspectorate for the very professional, courteous and thorough manner in which the WSE-MLL evaluation was carried out.

The Board welcomes this very positive report which gives us confidence, boosts morale among all the partners and allows us to continue our growth and development into the future. This report has recognised our achievements and success to date in managing the challenges and opportunities that we have faced. The process benefited us in reviewing school planning and progress at this time of change with our relocation to a new school building and increasing enrolment.

The Board of Management would like to acknowledge the dedication, professionalism and support of all of the staff and the cooperation of students and parents who have all contributed to this affirmative report and continue to support us in our endeavour to ensure that Scoil Chriost Rí is an effective learning community.

The school community is delighted with the acknowledgement by the inspectors of its progress in many areas of educational provision such as the strong leadership provided by the Board of Management, the very good quality of leadership of staff and students, the implementation of the recommendations from previous evaluations and the successful transfer of the school to its new location and building.

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

Taking account of the recommendations of the inspectorate

An overarching school development planning committee has been established to lead the strategic planning process. It is envisaged that this team will build capacity to engage all school partners in continuing the effective school self-evaluation processes already in place.

To enhance the quality of teaching and learning among all teachers and the following action steps have commenced:
• At recent staff meetings professional dialogue has been initiated among all teachers in sharing effective classroom practices. Cross subject groups of teachers have been established and have agreed to implement aspects of Assessment for Learning strategies within their classroom, reflect on their effectiveness and share their findings with their colleagues. This work is on-going.

• To ensure student focus and that lessons remain interesting, I.C.T. methodology workshops for teachers were designed and delivered in conjunction with N.C.T.E.

In our review of the guidance plan, parents and students will be surveyed in relation to the support, information and advice being provided when making subject choices at senior cycle level.

In our discussions with all the partners of the school community i.e. board members, staff, students and parents, the WSE-MLL evaluation was found to be a most positive and affirmative experience for all. All members of the school community were most appreciative of the practical, innovative, insightful, challenging and encouraging comments from the inspectors.