An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Saint Nathy’s College
Ballaghaderreen, County Roscommon
Roll number: 68067P

Date of inspection: 12 May 2011
Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in May 2011 in St. Nathy’s 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, 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

St. Nathy’s College is a co-educational secondary school under the trusteeship of the Bishop of Achonry. The school has a strong Catholic ethos and fosters the holistic development of students. The college was founded in 1810 and for most of its history was an all boys’ school. In 1995 St. Nathy’s College amalgamated with St. Joseph’s Convent Secondary School and Ballaghadereen Vocational school. The recent extensive bicentenary celebrations reflect the school’s long and proud history of serving the educational needs of its community.

The school is the sole second-level education provider in Ballaghadereen and has a large, predominantly rural, catchment area. Students come from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds. The school participated in the Disadvantaged Area Scheme (DAS) but has not been included in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS).

The WSE_MLL was separate to a special inquiry undertaken by the Financial Support Services Unit (FFSU) of the Joint Managerial Board (JMB) at the request of the Department of Education and Skills.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board of management is committed to the school and its ongoing development as a centre of learning.
- The principal and deputy principal are individually dedicated to the school. However, there is a lack of effective teamwork and inadequate communication at senior management level.
- Members of middle-management perform their duties effectively but there is scope for a greater level of distributed leadership among post holders.
- A sense of professionalism is apparent among all those who work in the school and staff are committed and dedicated to their work.
- Staff meetings occur regularly. However there is need for more open discussion and collaborative decision making at these meetings.
- The school’s pastoral care structures reflect the high priority placed on student welfare.
• A very broad curriculum is on offer and programme and subject selection is student centred. However some aspects of curriculum provision need to be addressed.
• The school has excellent facilities and is maintained to a very high standard.
• Good quality teaching and learning was evident in the majority of lessons and exemplary practice was observed in some lessons.
• While some progress has been made in implementing recommendations from previous inspection reports other key recommendations have not yet been addressed.
• An affirming and positive atmosphere characterised by respectful relationships was evident in student-teacher interactions.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

• The board of management should ensure that there is an effective management and leadership team in the school.
• The board should develop systems and structures to improve the quality of communication and transparency across all aspects of the operation of the school.
• The board should lead the preparation of a strategic plan for the long-term development of the school.
• A greater level of collaboration should underpin subject department planning, curricular plans should be extended in some subject areas and agreed teaching plans should be implemented in a consistent manner.
• A review of teacher deployment and the school timetable should be undertaken to ensure compliance with Department regulations.
• Assessment for learning practices should be agreed and implemented regularly in all subject areas.
• Additional teaching hours provided by the Department should be used for their intended purpose.

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 in the third year of its term of office. There is a good level of experience among board members which has served the school well. The school is an integral part of the community and the board has a strong sense of pride in the school and its tradition. The board is committed to the school’s mission statement, the development and refurbishment of school facilities, the maintenance of its broad curriculum and its ongoing development as a centre of learning.

As part of its governance role the board has established a finance committee. Its functions include ensuring that the recommendations made by the FFSU of the Joint Managerial Body following an evaluation of the school’s financial management are implemented. The board carries out its role in an effective manner with regard to policy development and review. The board is supportive of continuing professional development opportunities for staff. All board members consider the quality of teaching and learning to be very good. This view is based on the outcomes of certificate examinations, the high transfer rate to university and the holistic nature of the education provided in the college. As a means of supporting the provision of quality teaching and learning the board should monitor the implementation of recommendations made in subject inspection reports.
The board is informed of the day to day operation of the school through the principal’s report. Communication between the board and other stakeholders has not been fully developed. It is recommended that a formal written agreed report of board meetings should be conveyed to the relevant partners through their representative nominees.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (Published September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines. It is recommended that the child protection guidelines are re-adopted by each new board of management on its formation.

The school’s priorities for development
A number of short-term developmental priorities have been identified by the various partners in the school community for the current school year. Some of these priorities have been achieved and plans are in place for others. There was limited evidence of a shared long-term vision for future school development. The board should make arrangements for the preparation of a strategic plan to steer the school into the future. This plan should be collaboratively developed from an over-arching shared vision for the school, agreed by all partners, and should incorporate staffing, curricular provision, school partnership, communication and teaching and learning. Open communication and consultation should underpin this process. The staff as a collective body should be afforded the opportunity to discuss, decide and plan for the school’s priorities and the manner in which these are to be achieved.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff
There was limited evidence of distributed leadership across the school community. The principal and deputy principal work individually in a dedicated, efficient and well organised manner. However, there is a lack of effective teamwork and inadequate communication at senior management level. It was evident from senior management meetings that difficulties with communication had de facto led to a diminution of the responsibilities attached to the role of the deputy principal over the past two years. It was acknowledged by senior management that this situation compromises the optimal running of the school. It was reported by the principal that the board of management as a corporate body had not been advised of a communication issue. It is recommended that the principal’s report should ensure that the board, as the governing body of the school, is fully informed of all pertinent matters impacting on the quality of school management. As effective leadership of the school depends on senior management working in a unified, professional and collegial manner, it is recommended that this issue be addressed by the board as a matter of urgency. As an initial step the roles of the principal and deputy principal should be clearly defined and the duties attaching to the post of deputy principal should be commensurate with a post of responsibility at that level.

The middle management team perform the duties attached to their roles in a diligent and committed manner. Some of the posts provide limited opportunity to build leadership capacity within the school. Two years ago a review of the posts was undertaken by the principal. This review included a meeting with the whole staff, followed by interviews between the principal and individual post holders. The school now has a reduced in-school
management team and it is crucial that duties attached to posts fulfil the changing needs of the school. It is recommended that the posts are reviewed in a transparent manner at whole-staff level, based on the current needs and future developmental priorities of the school. The posts should be developmental for holders so that they can develop new skills and contribute in a meaningful manner to the management and leadership of the school. This review should be informed by Circular PPT 29/02, should provide for equity within and between posts and should streamline any current overlap.

There was lack of clarity at senior management level in relation to teaching staff employed in the school. Many members of staff reported favourably on the open door policy and support provided by the principal on an individual basis. However the lines of communication between the principal and staff as a collective body are inadequate. While staff meetings are held it was reported by some staff members that there is limited opportunity provided for staff discussion and input into decision making. Drawing from evidence provided by a number of staff members, the inspection team concluded that in the interests of improving morale and ownership across the staff, an appropriate forum should be established at these meetings to ensure effective two-way communication and to facilitate collaborative decision making. This approach should provide a framework within which communication and collective partnership are developed in line with the dignity at work charter. The minutes of staff meetings should be formally recorded and adopted.

There is a range of mechanisms in place to facilitate communication between the school and parents. This contact was positively endorsed in the parent questionnaires and the parents interviewed were very complimentary of the approachability of staff and their willingness to follow up on issues. There is no formal parents’ association in the school. It is recommended that a formal parents’ association be established to facilitate the more systematic and regular inclusion of parents in their children’s education and in whole-school planning.

The school plan is a well developed document. A range of policies required by legislation are in place. Best practice was noted where policies were developed in consultation with parents, teachers and students. It is recommended that this approach be adopted for all policy development and review.

There is now a need to focus on long-term strategic action planning in a consultative and transparent manner at whole-school level. In this context it is recommended that a planning steering group be formed by and from the staff and the co-ordination of this group should be reflected in the post structure. Action plans should be devised to achieve targets over the short and long term.

Subject planning documentation was provided for all subjects and programmes. In some cases curricular plans consisted of a list of topics. It is recommended that a more collaborative and systematic approach to curricular planning is adopted which provides a focus on learning outcomes, methodologies and resources linked to the planned teaching programme. The modes of assessment should also be detailed. Once programmes are agreed at subject department level all teachers should follow the planned programme. This will also provide a framework within which the practice of common assessment can be further developed. An analysis of examination results in comparison to national norms should also be undertaken and documented so that the planning process can address trends in performance.

Leadership of students
Leadership opportunities for students are provided through the student council and the mentoring system, both of which have successfully led initiatives that have impacted
positively on students lives in the school. It is recommended in the interests of democracy that representatives to the student council are elected by the student body in a transparent manner. Officers should also be appointed and their roles defined to support the operation and management of an effective council.

A key strength of the school is its professional and caring teaching staff. The care of students is a priority of all staff and the school has an extensive network of effective pastoral structures to support students. In addition to the chaplaincy and guidance service the relationship fostered between students and their class tutors and year heads are central strengths of student care. The timetabled year head meetings with senior management should be reconvened to facilitate communication and support the structures in place.

The school has an open admissions policy. In the interest of inclusion for all students enrolled in the school, plans should be further progressed to cater for their educational needs on campus.

The code of behaviour was reported to be effective in the management of students. While it is noted that the school has not expelled students in recent years, there are however a high number of student suspensions on an annual basis. Strategies to reduce this sanction should be devised. There is greater scope for promoting positive behaviour in the code and the language and tone of the code should reflect the school’s pastoral care ethos.

The school offers a very broad academic curriculum. However the school should review its overall curriculum provision and its capacity to continue to provide it in relation to teacher qualifications, deployment and recruitment. The TY programme was reintroduced into the school in September 2010. A very good approach to programme planning and co-ordination was in evidence. The programme offers a wide range of educational experience for students.

It is important to ensure that access to the school’s broad curriculum is equitable for all students. Following an analysis of the timetable a number of anomalies were identified. These included inequity in the allocation of time to subjects in senior cycle and the sharing of classes between teachers in a number of subject areas at junior cycle. Timetabling arrangements for the languages need to be reviewed. Fifth-year and sixth-year students do not have access to weekly timetabled Physical Education. In compliance with the requirements of CL M11/03 Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) has still not been timetabled as a designated class period for third years despite having been recommended in a previous inspection in 2007. There were contradictory reports in relation to the provision of an ab-initio language module to meet the requirements of the LCVP. Its actual timetabled provision could not be confirmed by senior management. It is recommended as a matter of urgency that the school timetable is critically reviewed in a consultative fashion with staff and the board of management to address the above irregularities. The constraints imposed by the timetabling of the tutor period should be reviewed.

The school has had much success in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. However the need for a broader variety of extra-curricular activities was highlighted by some staff members to cater for the diversity of students’ interests.

A substantial allocation of additional teaching hours to support students with additional educational needs and for students with English as an additional language (EAL) is provided to the school. A significant proportion of this allocation is not being used for its assigned purpose. It is incumbent on the school to ensure that the allocation is used in its entirety for its intended purpose. Appropriate procedures are in place for the identification
of students with additional educational needs and student profiles are maintained by the co-
ordinator. This work is highly commended and should be extended to the provision of EAL
students. It is recommended that further structures are put in place to facilitate a more
unified and targeted approach to the organisation and delivery of supports to students with
identified needs. The special educational needs co-ordinator should be afforded the
opportunity to address the staff regularly at staff meetings.

The school has a generic special educational needs policy. It is recommended that this
policy should be adapted to describe the specific practices of the school and to ensure
clarity and transparency in relation to the delivery of supports. The learning support policy
should be merged with the special educational needs policy and a whole-school approach to
literacy and numeracy should be provided for within this reviewed policy.

The school has a collaboratively developed guidance plan and the guidance service is
working very well in the school.

2.3 Management of facilities
The building and grounds are maintained to a high standard. The board and senior
management have engaged in extensive planning to provide modern facilities on the school
campus. The school has an extensive ICT infrastructure, well-equipped specialist rooms
and excellent sporting facilities.

The system of recycling and the litter-free environment are testimony of the school’s
commitment to its environmental responsibilities.

A health and safety statement is in place. As part of a recommended annual internal review
each subject department should conduct a risk assessment audit of their respective teaching
areas.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching
There was a very good standard of planning and preparation for the lessons observed. In the
majority of lessons the learning outcomes were shared with students which provided a clear
focus for student learning. These lessons were characterised by a purposeful pace and a
sequenced structure. This practice is recommended for all lessons. A good range of teacher
generated materials both in electronic and hard copy form were integrated to support
student learning and participation.

In the majority of lessons good quality teaching and learning was observed with exemplary
practice in evidence in some lessons. Best practice was observed where teacher-led
instruction was well balanced with student input and the active engagement of students was
facilitated through a good variety of methodologies. All of the lessons evaluated were
mixed ability and there was some very good use of differentiation where individual support
was provided to students. Student participation at all levels of ability was also facilitated
where differentiated questioning strategies were employed. It is recommended that the
extended use of active methodologies and differentiated strategies should be a key focus in
planning for lessons.

ICT was employed in half of the lessons observed. Given the school’s extensive ICT
infrastructure it is recommended that the increased use of ICT should be included in
planning for all subject areas to enhance teaching and learning. The learning environment
of some classrooms was very well enhanced with image and print-rich materials. There is
scope for the development of many other classrooms in this respect.
A random sample of copybooks was observed across a range of subjects in different year groups. In a small number of cases there was excellent developmental feedback provided to students to evaluate and guide learning. This practice should be adopted by all teachers. It is recommended that each subject department should develop agreed practices in relation to the frequency of taking up students’ work, examining it and providing feedback in line with the principles of assessment for learning.

Classroom management was excellent in the vast majority of lessons observed. It is recommended that clear expectations for behaviour are communicated at the outset of the lesson to ensure that all students remain on task during the period of the lesson. There was a very positive and affirming relationship between teachers and students underpinned by mutual respect.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management
Some of the key recommendations made in previous subject inspections have been implemented by senior management. However, recommendations in relation to SPHE have yet to be implemented. These recommendations should be addressed as a matter of priority.

4.2 Learning and Teaching
While some progress has been made with regard to subject planning a more collaborative approach to planning is necessary. The recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports in relation to the use of active learning methodologies, ICT and assessment for learning strategies should be further extended to support teaching and learning.

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

School self-evaluation practices have resulted in a number of improvements including the introduction of mixed-ability class groups, the move towards first year common assessment and the reintroduction of TY. In order to further enhance the school’s capacity for improvement it is imperative that effective communication channels and structures to ensure ongoing self-evaluation be developed. A whole-school approach to implementing the recommendations of this report should be adopted.

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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 St. Nathy’s College welcomes the WSE-MLL Report of the Inspectorate and thanks it for its work.

The Board is pleased with the very positive observations and findings of the Inspectorate which identified:

- a key strength of the school is its professional and caring staff, their dedication and commitment.
- the priority of all staff is the care of students facilitated by an extensive network of effective pastoral structures.
- the very positive and affirming relationship between teachers and students underpinned by mutual respect in a positive atmosphere.
- the range of mechanisms in place to facilitate communication between the school and parents.
- the highly commended work of the Special Education Needs Co-ordinator.
- the good quality and exemplary practice in teaching and learning and excellent classroom management.
- the very broad student-centred curriculum.
- excellent facilities maintained to a very high standard, extensive ICT infrastructure and well equipped specialist rooms.
- the system of recycling and litter-free environment demonstrating the school’s commitment to its environmental responsibilities.
- the success of the school in a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

The Board also welcomes the extremely positive feedback from questionnaires distributed to students and parents which included the following responses:

Of parents

- In almost all cases parents believe the school is well run
- In most cases parents believe discipline is good in the school
- In most cases parents said their children enjoy going to school.
- In most cases parents said their children feel safe and well looked after in the school.
- In most cases parents said teaching is good in the school.
- In almost all cases parents said that, overall, they were happy with the school.

Of students

- In most cases students said they were getting on well with their school work.
- In almost all cases students said teachers encourage them to work to the best of their ability.
- In almost all cases students said that they get regular homework.
- In most cases students with an opinion claimed that bullying is dealt with well by the school.
- In most cases students with an opinion claimed that the school pays attention to alcohol and drug issues.
Area 2  Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

Since the Inspection, the Board of Management has overseen the implementation of the following:

- A new senior management team is now in place. The team works very effectively together having a relationship based on mutual trust, support, loyalty and professionalism as well as on excellent communication.
- The newly-appointed Deputy Principal will be capable of carrying out all work appropriate to, and commensurate with, this very senior management position.
- The school’s Posts of Responsibility have been fully reviewed resulting in an equitable distribution of very comprehensive middle management tasks, duties and leadership roles.
- Recommendations of previous Evaluations and Inspection Reports are being implemented in full.
- A review of the utilisation of the school’s resources is currently under way. This includes a review of subject planning, timetabling and the utilisation of teaching personnel.
- A review of the Code of Behaviour is underway and will address issues including student rewards and sanctions.
- The Board is currently in the process of arranging for the preparation of a long term plan for the future and further development of the school.
- The Board has reviewed communication structures with and within the wider school community.