

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

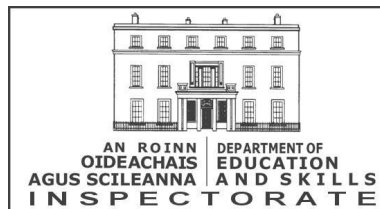
**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Christian Brothers' Secondary School,  
Synge Street, Dublin 8  
Roll number: 60470D**

**Date of inspection: 07 December 2011**



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

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in December 2011 in Christian Brothers' Secondary School (CBS). 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.

## ***Introduction***

CBS Synge Street, under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST), has a long tradition of educational provision for boys since 1864. This is an inclusive school with a current enrolment of 276 students. The school previously experienced a steady decline in enrolment, but numbers have now stabilised. The student cohort is mainly composed of boys from disadvantaged backgrounds, with a relatively large percentage of newcomer students for whom English is an additional language. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative and benefits from a number of supports, including a part-time home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator and significant input from the School Completion Programme (SCP). In addition, the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) supports a whole-time behaviour-for-learning programme teacher. The school provides the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the established Leaving Certificate. 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.

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

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

- The board of management is strongly committed to the school and to fulfilling its statutory obligations.
- Leadership roles are distributed amongst post-holders and key personnel. Student leadership and the promotion of pride and a positive and secure atmosphere are areas that need development.
- A number of programmes and services are provided to monitor and support students' engagement, welfare, behaviour and learning.
- The school offers a broad curriculum and a range of extracurricular programmes. Elements of curriculum organisation and delivery require review.
- Teaching and learning was good or very good in most lessons, with scope for improvement in a small number of instances.
- Improvements were reported in student retention and progression to further education.
- Some progress has been made in implementing recommendations from previous inspection reports; however key areas remain to be addressed.

- While the school has the professional capacity to implement the recommendations in this report, a strategic approach by management to ongoing development is required.

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

- A coherent and systematic approach to school self-evaluation and improvement should be developed.
- Areas for review and attention include; whole-school planning; curricular provision and organisation; subject department structures and planning; attendance monitoring; supporting and tracking student attainment and future professional development to support teaching and learning.
- Management should ensure the re-establishment of the student council and work to promote the student voice and greater involvement in school life.
- The completion and ratification of outstanding policies should be prioritised and progressed.
- Additional teaching hours, including resource hours, provided by the Department of Education and Skills, 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 strongly committed to the school and the execution of its legal responsibilities. It meets regularly and provides agreed reports on its work to all partners. Members understand the school context and possess a broad range of skills and experience that contribute to their capacity to manage the school. A principal's report at each board meeting ensures that members are informed of relevant activities. There is also regular communication between the chairperson of the board and senior management.

The board has been supportive of school development planning. Many required school policies have been developed. A small number of policies are in draft form and require ratification, such as the whole-school guidance plan. The board should ensure that policies for special educational needs and relationship and sexuality education (RSE), as well as a new health and safety policy, are developed. A systematic review process should be implemented to ensure that all policies reflect current practice.

The current board has focused mainly on considerable infrastructural projects, including the transfer of the school's accommodation from two buildings into one. This complex process was recently completed, which now provides the opportunity to refocus on strategic planning for school development and educational leadership.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools* (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006. School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* as a matter of priority.

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

The priorities identified by the school aim to increase the numbers progressing to further education, to further embed the culture of school development planning and to encourage and support continuing professional development of staff. Some progress has been made in these areas, with a positive trend reported in the numbers progressing to third-level and post-leaving certificate courses.

It is now an opportune time for the board to further develop its role in relation to educational leadership. Time should be set aside to discuss elements of school practice such as DEIS baseline data, targets, actions and progress, and supporting and further enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. In addition, post holders, programme co-ordinators and subject departments should prepare an annual report for the board, outlining their targets, achievements and areas for further development. A curriculum review group should also be established to report to the board on curriculum provision, including the range of programmes and subjects offered to meet students' needs.

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

### **Leadership of staff**

The senior management team members have a positive and close working relationship and share management responsibilities. It was reported that the team's achievements include the stabilisation of enrolment figures and an increase in the numbers of students progressing to further education. The work of the Creedon Trust, established by a past student, in supporting students pursuing further education opportunities, is exemplary.

The core elements of a school plan are contained in a teachers' handbook, while developmental priorities are identified through the DEIS planning framework. These documents should be collated to create a formal school plan, with the developmental section expanded. At present strategic planning is not coherent or systematic and this should be prioritised by senior management.

Management devolves leadership to staff through the post of responsibility structure and through the deployment of teachers to key support roles. The number of posts has recently been reduced due to retirements. A brief review of the post structures resulted in the redistribution of duties amongst the remaining post-holders, who displayed a high degree of flexibility and commitment in undertaking additional duties.

In a number of instances, greater support by senior management of staff deployed to key roles is needed. For example, management should establish a core team for learning support and also ensure that the co-ordinators for JCSP and LCA have regular teaching and contact time with their respective groups.

The HSCL co-ordinator, the behaviour-for-learning programme teacher, the SCP co-ordinator and the guidance counsellor form a restructured care team whose work is thorough, well-documented and clearly focused on addressing the substantial needs of students. It is recommended that a member of senior management also attend these meetings, to further support the work of the personnel involved in each of their respective areas.

Overall teachers are highly committed to the school and are hardworking and professional. Several staff members have attained post-graduate qualifications in areas relevant to school management and leadership. The profile of the staff has changed in recent years due to retirements and the appointment of new teachers. This changed profile of staff provides both challenges and opportunities for school management.

Continuing professional development (CPD) is appropriately supported. The further expansion of the school's professional capacity in the areas of learning support and information and communication technology (ICT) should be considered in future CPD plans. Areas that impact directly on teaching and learning, such as differentiation, assessment for learning and active learning should also be considered.

Staff meetings are held regularly in accordance with agreed procedures and these provide a forum to discuss many aspects of school organisation and development, and to facilitate elements of school development planning.

### **Leadership of students**

Students of all abilities and nationalities are welcomed. As a result, the school has a rich cultural and social diversity. A transition programme for incoming first-years is effectively managed. Parents and teachers commended the benefits of this initiative. Standardised assessments are conducted and re-testing on entry, in addition to testing and re-testing of literacy and numeracy levels during junior cycle, is good practice. This valuable information should be used to inform planning and whole-school interventions.

Most parents are happy that the school is well run. While there were some isolated low level disruptions during lessons observed, these were dealt with well by teachers. However, the majority of students surveyed expressed concern about the behaviour of students in the school. In addition, a sizeable minority of students reported that they do not feel cared for or safe in the school, which is a concern. The recent appointment of the behaviour-for-learning programme teacher has resulted in a methodical approach to analysing student behaviour and developing intervention programmes with a cohort of students who display challenging behaviours. The programmes being established appear to be working well but will take time and whole-school support to become fully embedded.

There is a high level of suspension of students for a variety of reasons. While this sanction may be deemed necessary in many instances, the nature of the suspension should be re-examined in favour of alternative models.

Some improvements have been noted in the attendance monitoring system since the DEIS evaluation in 2010. The work of the SCP personnel is acknowledged in this regard. However, the current approach is cumbersome, resource intensive and restrictive in its scope, with no monitoring in the afternoon. Senior management should expedite a system to monitor and track attendance patterns across each school day more effectively.

A number of key personnel provide additional support to the school under the DEIS programme. The HSCL and SCP personnel provide an excellent service through their many initiatives that support parents and students. Students interviewed during the evaluation spoke very highly of initiatives such as the breakfast and home-work clubs, study programmes and links with local third-level institutions.

It is commendable that the school strives to provide as broad a curriculum as possible. However, a considerable number of timetable issues were identified. It is essential that an electronic version of the timetable is available in the school at all times. Curricular restrictions notwithstanding, management should ensure that subjects are as evenly distributed across the week as possible. Subjects should be delivered to each class group by the same teacher, except in the case of team-teaching, and there should be an equitable allocation of periods for each subject in each year group.

Hours allocated to the school for resource teaching were not fully documented and accounted for in the timetables. This must be addressed immediately.

Personal counselling is available for all students if required, and a comprehensive guidance programme is provided for senior students. However, the allocated resource is not fully optimised, as there is little guidance input at junior cycle. Many parents and students surveyed were either unsure or did not feel that they received sufficient advice about option subject choices. Management should ensure that educational and career guidance is adequately provided for at critical stages of transition.

Senior management conducts an analysis of student outcomes in certificate examinations, which is shared with subject departments. Parent-teacher meetings are appropriately provided. The hosting of two parent-teacher meetings for third-year and sixth-year parents is a positive initiative to motivate and guide these students. To build on this good practice, a whole-school system of target setting and attainment tracking could be implemented, ideally supported through the student journal.

Surveys of students' opinions have been conducted in the past, most recently about the revised code of behaviour. However, most students surveyed during this evaluation were either unaware or did not feel that they had a say in how to make the school a better place. The re-establishment of the student council should be prioritised. Greater efforts to include the students' voice and promote student leadership will contribute to a greater sense of ownership and enhance collective efforts and responsibility in school life.

A majority of students indicated that they participate in the school's extracurricular activities, which is very important. In addition, the school has enjoyed unparalleled success in the Young Scientist and Technology competition. Pride in the activities and achievements of past and present students is evident in the photographs, newspaper articles, art work and trophies displayed in the school. The work of the dedicated teachers in providing opportunities for students to explore and develop their talents and interests is highly commended.

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

Until recently the school operated from two adjacent buildings. Following significant restructuring the school now operates from a single building. The school building has also been insulated and an efficient heating system installed. The building is relatively well maintained, although some issues have arisen due to recent flood damage, especially to the physical education hall. The restoration of the canteen is welcomed.

There is a need to develop a new health and safety policy to reflect the restructured building and organisational procedures. In addition, each specialist subject department should undertake a risk assessment audit of their respective teaching areas.

Neither students nor teachers have their own base classrooms, which results in much movement in between lessons. This should be reviewed, to better suit the school and to optimise classrooms as a teaching and learning resource.

The school has the ICT infrastructure to support administration, planning and teaching and learning. Optimisation of these resources should be prioritised. A new website has been created and once this is activated it should prove very useful in promoting the work of the school and subject departments and communication with the wider school community.

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

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

Over the course of the evaluation, twenty lessons were observed. The quality of teaching and learning was generally good, with very good practice noted in a number of lessons. There was also scope for improvement in isolated instances.

Teachers strive to establish a rapport with their students, and to create a supportive learning atmosphere. Most teachers held high expectations of students' engagement, achievement and behaviour.

Many lessons were characterised by very good planning, which resulted in well-structured and well-paced lessons. Best practice was noted where learning outcomes were established at the outset, thereby providing students with a clear focus for their learning. In some lessons, time was taken at the end to recall and consolidate the learning outcomes. This should be extended to all lessons.

Students' engagement was best when there was an appropriate balance between teacher input and student activity. This was achieved through the use of well-framed questions to stimulate students' interest and create links with prior learning. Good lessons also saw the setting of focused individual, pair or small-group tasks and the appropriate selection and use of resources, including ICT, visual aids, flashcards, historical footage, case studies and subject specific equipment to support students' learning. Less effective lessons were dominated by teacher talk where students became passive. In such instances, greater use of active methodologies that engage students purposefully, and use of supporting resources, is recommended.

Most class groups comprised students with a range of abilities. Some teachers successfully included all of these students, particularly in the effective framing of questions and the individual attention afforded to some students. This good practice should be extended to include greater use of differentiated tasks.

Homework was assigned in most lessons observed. Many teachers took time to provide oral feedback on the quality of students' homework. Parents expressed satisfaction with the volume of homework provided and with the quality of reports sent home. Similarly, a majority of students stated that teachers encourage them to work to the best of their ability, tell them how to improve and check their work regularly. With a few exceptions, however, there was limited evidence of written formative feedback on students' work. This is an area for further development.

Some classrooms were stimulating learning environments, highly decorated with displays of students' work, exemplar material and commercially sourced posters. Further work should be undertaken in this area, where possible.

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

### ***4.1 Management***

Previous subject inspections in Science and Biology, Physics, French, English and a DEIS evaluation were reviewed. Management has facilitated progress in implementing some of the report recommendations. The breakfast club and homework clubs are now reinstated, there has been a re-structuring of the care team which is now working effectively and some improvements were noted in monitoring attendance. Progress is still required in other areas including a review of the school health and safety statement, communicating and

integrating key targets in the DEIS plan across all subject departments, and the formalising of subject department planning structures.

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

Recommendations from previous reports focused on improvements in the areas of planning, greater use of active learning strategies and implementing a common approach to assessment.

The quality of subject department planning was generally good; however, there is a need to further develop and formalise this process. It was reported that colleagues generally work well together, but a minority do not engage in the collaborative process. This should be addressed in the interest of establishing consistency of practice amongst subject teachers, and to ensure that there is appropriate sharing of responsibilities for planning and preparation within each department. Subject departments should also ensure that relevant DEIS planning targets are integrated into their plans.

Active learning was evident in a considerable number of the lessons observed. ICT was also used to good effect in some lessons. The continued development of task-based and active learning methods is encouraged. There remains scope for further improvement in developing common assessments and the provision of formative comment on students' written work.

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

The board and staff have the professional capacity to review, plan and implement targeted interventions and strategies for improvement. Evidence of good reflective practice observed included the collation and analysis of data related to behaviour, the review of posts of responsibility and analysis of state examination results.

While there are some good elements and structures in the school to support students' participation and attainment, there is considerable scope for further improvement. Management needs to establish coherence between these many elements and provide vision and greater leadership. The findings of this report and those of the student and parent surveys should provide guidance on prioritising and acting on the areas of concern identified.

*Published May 2012.*



## **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 Synge Street CBS would like to thank the visiting inspectors for their professionalism and attention to detail.

**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 recommendations of the Report are currently being reviewed. Indeed, some of them have already been implemented."