

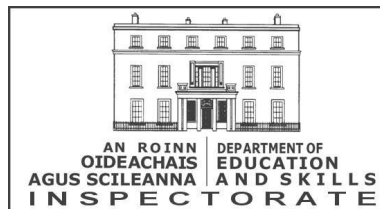
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Muckross Park College
Donnybrook, Dublin 4
Roll number: 60710U

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 Muckcross Park 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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

Introduction

Muckcross Park College was established in 1900 as St. Mary's College, under the patronage of the Dominican Sisters. It is now under the trusteeship of Le Chéile. It continues to uphold the Dominican ethos and promotes, through its organisation, structures and programmes, the principles of respect, responsibility, initiative, personal growth and leadership. This is a high functioning, very well managed voluntary secondary school for 668 girls, where demand for places vastly exceeds capacity.

The school provides the Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme and the established Leaving Certificate.

A new school building was provided by the Department in 2006. The school has recently undergone significant change in leadership with the establishment of a new board of management and the appointment of a new principal and deputy principal at the start of the academic year.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- Muckcross Park College is a high functioning school with highly effective leadership of staff and students.
- The school has a strong professional capacity to pursue and implement the identified priorities.
- Distributed leadership, amongst staff and students, is successfully promoted in the school.
- High expectations are set for students in all aspects of their attendance, participation and attainment.
- A very good overall standard of teaching and learning was observed in many lessons during the evaluation, with scope for development in a limited number of instances.
- The school offers a broad curriculum and a diverse range of extracurricular activities.
- There are some issues to be addressed in the allocation of teaching resources and in the provision of twenty-eight hours of tuition time to all students.
- Significant progress has been made in progressing school development planning.

- Facilities are excellent and well maintained.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- Management should ensure that that all students receive the minimum twenty-eight hours tuition time in compliance with circular M29/95 and that all allocated teaching resources are appropriately utilised for their intended purposes.
- The admissions policy should be reviewed and policies in the areas of special education and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) should be developed as a matter of priority.
- A comprehensive RSE programme must be planned and delivered to all senior cycle students.
- A whole-school approach to differentiation and formative assessment should be discussed and implemented.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

The Board of Management presented as an informed, progressive and committed body with a diverse range of skills and knowledge that greatly enhance its leadership capacity. The organisation of sub-committees also greatly enhances the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the board.

Board members possess a deep understanding of the school's ethos and loyalty to upholding its traditions through established systems and procedures. These structures support high quality outcomes in teaching and learning and high standards of attendance, participation, care and behaviour.

In its short period in operation the current board has developed a detailed school plan, in addition to a checklist identifying school development planning aspects that are currently not in place or require review and updating. This work is currently underway through consultation with all stakeholders. Of particular concern for the board is the school's admissions policy and procedures, which are currently under review. The urgent completion of this process is recommended, towards a policy that is clear and transparent in how the 120 available places in first year are to be allocated through the application of appropriately ranked criteria for admissions. Furthermore, the board is advised to reconsider the appropriateness of requiring information regarding special educational needs of prospective applicants as part of the 'expression of interest' phase, rather than at a point when a place in the school has been offered and accepted.

The board should ensure that a special educational needs policy is drafted and also ensure that arrangements are made to provide a comprehensive RSE policy and programme for senior cycle students.

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.

The school's priorities for development

Current priorities, aimed at developing the high quality of educational provision fall into four main categories: supporting best practice in teaching and learning; policy development and school development planning; enhancing a partnership approach to school management with all stakeholders and developing the self-evaluation process. Action plans for the current year identify the key questions and tasks to be undertaken to achieve specific elements of the identified priorities. The establishment of timeframes for achieving tasks is good practice.

The board facilitates the active involvement of parents in the work of the school. A strong, committed and well-informed parents' association is actively encouraged and makes a very meaningful contribution. The board should further enhance its procedures in reporting to the school community on the operation and performance of the school.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

Leadership of staff is highly effective. The principal and the deputy principal bring complementary skills to their work, characterised by clarity of direction, frequent communication and shared decision-making. They maintain a visible presence and work collaboratively with staff and students to effect a clear vision for development and promote a strong commitment to high standards.

A comprehensive review of the school's strengths and challenges, by senior management and staff, formed the basis for significant achievements in advancing the school's organisational, administrative and pastoral care systems and processes, in keeping with good practice.

Management successfully devolves leadership among assistant principals and special duties teachers, along with form tutors, guidance and learning support personnel. Regular meetings are facilitated for the various teams to discuss and support student welfare, engagement and progress. Frequent staff meetings provide a forum to discuss all aspects of school organisation and development.

Teachers are appropriately deployed to their subject specialisms and to the range of programmes and levels. Continuing professional development (CPD) is fully supported by management. The maintenance of a schedule of staff attendance at inservice and professional development courses is very valuable. Further development of the professional capacity in RSE, learning support and differentiation should be considered in future CPD plans. Senior management also visits classrooms to support and advise new teachers. This is exemplary instructional leadership. Additional initiatives, such as peer-mentoring, should also be considered to further share and promote professional practice.

Management supports subject department planning and ensures that department plans are documented and available for review. The quality of this planning was generally good, with exemplary work in some subject departments. While the TY programme is well documented, some module descriptors need to be further developed to ensure they meet the overall aims of the programme. Management has identified elements of curriculum provision for review, which is commendable.

Leadership of students

Results from student questionnaires and discussions with students indicated very high levels of satisfaction. Students are very proud of their school, feel cared for, encouraged and well supported to achieve to their potential.

Transition from primary schools is well managed. Places in the school are allocated three years prior to the year of entry, providing ample time to prepare to meet the needs of new students. Mixed-ability classes are formed for most subjects, with setting occurring for some core subjects from second year.

A very broad curriculum is provided and every effort is made to accommodate the diversity of students' subject choices. Appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that parents are well informed about the option subjects. Consideration should be given to a brief taster programme for first-year students to familiarise them with each optional subject.

Study periods are currently provided in senior cycle, which results in these students receiving less than the required minimum of twenty-eight hours instruction per week in accordance with Circular Letter M29/95 and teaching resources being used for supervision instead of instruction. Management should address these issues as a matter of priority. Insofar as possible, a more even distribution of allocated periods for core subjects and languages across the week should be achieved. The planned introduction of Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) and Physical Education to the senior cycle curriculum will ensure a more appropriate use of time to provide developmental education programmes.

A comprehensive guidance programme is provided for all students, with exemplary attention afforded at junior cycle. Standardised educational assessment tests are administered by the guidance service prior to entry into the school. There are few students with diagnosed special educational needs in the school. While allocated resource hours are used appropriately, the use of the general allocation of learning support hours was not accounted for in the school timetable; this is an issue for management in allocating all teaching resources appropriately for their intended purposes. A core team of interested and committed teachers is deployed in learning support. Additional attention is needed to ensure that the school fulfils its requirements in the provision of support for students with additional educational needs, including those who are gifted and talented.

Student behaviour is exemplary. Attendance, punctuality and retention are closely monitored and records indicate a very high level of compliance. Daily registration and regular whole-school assemblies are effectively used to affirm students' efforts, reinforce procedures and monitor and encourage students' progress.

Monitoring of student attainment is enabled by the information shared on the network and the use of common assessments in many subjects. Good quality reports are sent home, focused on constructive advice and positive remarks. After-school study also promotes good habits. Student outcomes in certificate examinations are consistently high. To build on the existing monitoring system, consideration should be given to implementing a system of target setting and attainment tracking through student journals.

Prefects are given responsibility for promoting care and a sense of belonging among junior groups. A range of additional opportunities are also provided for students to assume leadership roles and responsibilities, for example through the student council and as sports captains. Appropriate structures and opportunities are in place for students to report to management and to their peers on many aspects of school organisation and management.

Most students surveyed indicated that they participate in the school's diverse extracurricular programmes. This high level of participation is indicative of the very

important role that these activities play in school life for the majority of students. Pride in the activities and achievements of students are evident in the photographs and work displayed on the electronic notice boards, corridors, and publications.

2.3 Management of facilities

The new school building has resulted in a modern, high quality educational facility, which is excellently managed and well maintained. The school's library and librarian constitute a valuable and excellently used resource, with an exemplary range of educational programmes and services provided for all year groups. The provision of top-class external facilities, supplemented by the parents' association, enhances the provision for physical education and extracurricular programmes.

Most teachers are classroom based and this has resulted in bright, print-rich, and visually stimulating learning environments. An excellent range of information and communication technology (ICT) facilities and resources is available to support planning, administration and teaching and learning. The school has an excellent website which gives detailed information and is regularly updated.

Good attention is paid to health and safety practices and a detailed health and safety statement has been developed. Efforts to gain the International Green Flag will provide a positive endorsement of the school's focus on environmental responsibility.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

In most of the twenty-six lessons observed the quality of teaching and learning was very good with exemplary practice noted in a number of instances.

Effective planning and preparation for lessons was evident in almost all instances. This included the preparation of ICT, teaching aids and a variety of materials designed to enhance students' learning experiences.

In the majority of cases, teachers shared the purpose and intention of lessons with students. Best practice was observed when these learning outcomes were revisited throughout lessons enabling teachers to accurately gauge students' understanding and modify teaching strategies accordingly.

The balance between teacher input and student activity was appropriate in most instances. However in some lessons there was scope for greater student activity, through the incorporation of tasks designed to develop students' knowledge, skills and understanding specific to the topic or area of study.

Differentiated teaching strategies were adopted in a few lessons. Good practice was observed where teachers tailored learning activities to suit students of varying abilities. This differentiated approach was achieved in a number of ways including the use of carefully planned worksheets, varying the difficulty of questions posed to students and facilitating focused collaborative learning activities. These practices should be further developed throughout the school.

Effective questioning strategies were incorporated into lessons in order to encourage student interaction and engagement. In some instances higher-order questioning was used

to initiate discussion and debate. Good practice was observed when questions were directed to named students and where sufficient time was allocated to allow students to form their answers individually or in pairs.

Very good attention was given to promoting the use of subject-specific terminology. In language lessons, the language of instruction adopted by teachers was primarily the applicable target language. To complement and further develop this good practice, the use of targeted learning strategies such as role play and pair work should be encouraged.

ICT was incorporated into almost all lessons. In some instances these resources contributed significantly to students' learning. Best practice was observed where ICT resources were used for a short and focused segment of the lesson in order to recapitulate on previous learning, to provide stimulus material or to highlight the lesson's key learning outcomes. The ongoing development of interesting and innovative ICT resources to improve students' learning should now be progressed through the sharing of best practice among teachers, particularly within subject department groups.

Both teachers and students exhibited high expectations for learning. Areas for possible improvements to students' work were outlined through the regular administration of oral formative feedback during lessons. The vast majority of students responded positively when surveyed on this matter, particularly in relation to teachers' explanation of relevant subject matter and teachers' support and encouragement to achieve to their full potential. Teacher-student relationships were founded upon mutual respect and resulted in the creation of a positive and supportive learning atmosphere.

Student learning was at a high level in almost all instances, particularly when an environment was created that encouraged students to take an active role in their learning. Modes of student engagement included the discussion and debate of highly developed theories and opinions, focused active learning tasks and some integration of co-operative learning strategies that were mutually beneficial to both participants.

Homework was assigned in many lessons. These tasks were generally designed to further develop and embed prior learning. In a few instances homework was assigned at the beginning of lessons; this enhanced students' engagement in class work and also developed their understanding and application of newly acquired knowledge or skills.

Good practice was observed where formative assessment techniques were utilised to inform and improve students' learning. Examples included students applying appropriate marking schemes to their work, the development of instant feedback systems to help teachers ascertain student learning and the use of oral developmental feedback. In addition to these practices subject departments should endeavour to implement a wider range of assessment techniques placing significant focus on written formative feedback, self and peer-assessment and the further inclusion of additional assessment for learning (AfL) techniques.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Previous subject inspections in History, Science and Biology, German and Irish were reviewed. Considerable progress has been made in all of these areas and management has enabled many of the recommendations from previous reports to be acted upon. There is still

scope to improve the distribution of language classes to optimise contact with the target language.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Recommendations from previous reports focused on improvements in the areas of planning, greater use of interactive and self-directed learning strategies and the implementation of a broader range and common approaches to assessment.

Subject convenors and regular subject department meetings are now common in all subject departments and considerable progress has been made in developing comprehensive subject plans, with common programmes of work. Plans reviewed were of a good standard.

Good examples of interactive, student-focused approaches to teaching and learning were evident during the course of the evaluation and when employed, resulted in good levels of student engagement and learning. ICT was effectively used in many lessons. Good examples were provided of strategies to promote self-directed learning amongst students, particularly at senior cycle. Common assessments have been introduced in almost all subject departments. Consideration should be given to implementing an oral component as part of the assessment process for all year groups in the language areas. A whole-school approach in the areas of differentiation and formative assessment strategies, including the provision of constructive feedback on assignments should be discussed and implemented.

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

Many examples of reflective practice were evident over the course of the evaluation, including the recent SCOT analysis conducted by senior management, the administration of questionnaires to seek the views of parents and students on a range of topics and issues, the detailed analysis of student attainment in house and state examinations and thorough monitoring of student attendance, engagement and progress.

A high degree of openness to change and development and a reflective approach to practice was evident amongst the staff, management and board. Reflective processes are embedded and have led to progress on the priorities for improvement and effective action on implementing changes to many areas of school operation. A systematic and objective approach to the school self-evaluation process should be further developed to continue to support the high quality of education provision in the school.

Published October 2011

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 welcomes this very positive and affirming School Report

As highlighted in the Report's introduction, the school did indeed undergo a significant change in the leadership during the academic year 2010-2011.

This new leadership, having conducted the referred to 'SCOT Analysis' at the beginning of its tenure, had identified all of the issues which needed to be addressed before the MLL inspection and had in fact begun to work on most of them during the academic year. Management were then in the fortunate position of being able to discuss the work in progress and seek advice where necessary from the expert panel of inspectors who conducted the MLL in May 2011

The Board of Management would like to thank the inspectors for their insightful observations, helpful advice and clear affirmation of the work being undertaken in Muckross Park College and it continues to commit itself to building on the exemplary instructional leadership' referred to in the report. The Board also welcomes the praise given to the committed body of staff (teaching and non-teaching) in the school and further endorses same.

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

With regard to 'Recommendations for Further Development' of the report:

- The new Management had recorded at both Board of Management and Staff Meetings at the beginning of the year that the scheduled 'Supervised Study Periods' did not represent best practice and that senior PE and SPHE would be introduced in September 2011. These subjects are now in place in 'Timetable 2011-2012' and there are no 'Supervised Study Periods'. All students now receive the required hours of tuition per week. Learning Support hours have also been allocated appropriately in 'Timetable 2011-2012' with due regard to higher achieving students.
- Having recognised the need for review, the Board of Management spent a considerable part of the year revising the existing Admissions Policy and the Expression of Interest Form. After seeking legal counsel and the approval of the Le Chéile Trustees, a new Admissions Policy (2011) was ratified on July 5th 2011 and the Expression of Interest Form has been changed. This new Admissions Policy is posted on the school's website and a hard copy is currently being sent to all applicants on file in the school.
- An RSE Policy is also completed and awaits ratification and work on a Special Needs Policy is underway.

- The recommended whole school approach to differentiation and formative assessment has been adopted as a theme for subject development planning
- The Board of Management is pleased at the acknowledgement of its analysis of the status of school development planning. The Board is committed to working through the 'checklist' it produced and considerable work has already been undertaken on policy development and self evaluation.

With regard to student self-evaluation, the new school journal (2011-2012) now contains an Evaluation Table which students can 'fill in' during the year and watch their grades rise or fall. This charting of progress (or lack of) will result in students engaging in a meaningful way in their own learning process