

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

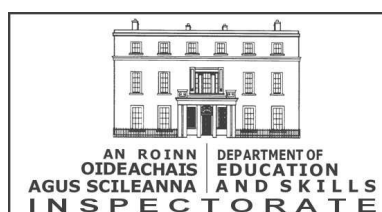
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**John Scottus Secondary School
72-76 Morehampton Road,
Donnybrook, Dublin 4
Roll number: 68071G**

Date of inspection: 10 March 2011



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in March 2011 in John Scottus Secondary School. 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, and 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

John Scottus School was founded as a multi-denominational school with the establishment of a primary school in 1986 and a secondary school in 1989. Its founding body, John Scottus Educational Trust, set up the school to provide an education inspired by the School of Philosophy and Economic Science, an independent educational charity. The school's central philosophical principle is that knowledge resides in the person and that the function of education is to nurture and facilitate each child's unique expression. In line with its ethos, the school provides instruction in the subjects Philosophy, Sanskrit and Classics.

The secondary school has a current enrolment of 118 students, a reduction of 11% over the previous 5 years, with a predicted increase for the next school year. Approximately two-thirds of students typically progress from John Scottus Primary School with the remaining students coming from the wider Dublin area. The school endeavours to provide a caring and safe environment for its students and to foster a strong sense of community. Since the Trust views the education of the child from 4 to 18 years as a seamless continuum, the primary and secondary schools are governed and managed as a single entity. Both schools are seeking permanent recognition from the Department of Education and Skills. 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.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board of management and principal share a clear vision of the development priorities for the school. This vision keeps a strong emphasis on the unique school ethos and on teaching and learning.
- Leadership of teaching and learning is evidenced in many ways, including promotion of assessment for learning strategies, trialling of new initiatives and the roll-out of ICT in classrooms.
- A vibrant learning community has been established in the school. Notwithstanding that the teaching staff includes some part-time personnel either without recognised qualifications or without Teaching Council registration, the overall quality of learning and teaching observed was good or very good.
- In supporting learning, the school emphasises teacher-student relationships, delegation, encouraging students to take individual responsibility for their own learning and, particularly, pastoral care of its students.

- School management has shown a capacity for reflection and school self-review, and a willingness to learn from previous inspection reports when relevant.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The school should maintain a practical focus on obtaining permanent recognition and, while maintaining its unique ethos, on the potential to build its capacity as a centre for learning.
- The board of management should draft an agreed report after each meeting for dissemination to the board of governors, parents and teachers. An annual board of management report should be furnished to the wider school community.
- Working groups led by experienced members of the management team should examine particular developmental, curricular or educational priorities and bring the views of all staff members more fully to decision-making processes.
- Ongoing school development planning and review should include teacher professional development, curriculum development, timetabling, and learning support and resource provision.
- In their capacity as employer, school management should be mindful of teacher qualification and registration requirements and should encourage and support members of the teaching staff in registering with the Teaching Council and in pursuing additional measures as necessary to ensure that their qualifications are recognised.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

A board of governors appointed by the John Scottus Educational Trust has responsibility for upholding the school ethos and overseeing the school buildings and financial affairs. The trustees nominate four members to the school's board of management, which also has teacher and parent nominees from both primary and secondary schools. The principals of both schools are non-voting members of the board of governors and are trustee nominees to the board of management. The board of governors provides the strategic leadership for the board of management. The overlap in membership of the two boards facilitates communication between the two bodies.

The board of management provides ongoing support for the principal and has responsibility for overseeing the day-to-day organisation and operation of the school, development of policies, and employment of teachers. Policy review, development and enactment have been prioritised by the board since its establishment. The board has met legislative requirements regarding policy formation. The policies developed by the board reflect its commitment to openness, inclusiveness and respect for the individual. The board should consider inviting the officers of the student council to address it annually on the activities and achievements of the council.

The principal provides a report on the working of the school to both boards. The principal is a trustee nominee to the board of management and does not act as its secretary. Review of this arrangement should form part of the board's ongoing self-evaluation process. It is recommended that the principal consider acting as secretary to the board of management as is common practice, while becoming a member of the board of governors. It is also recommended that after each of its meetings, the board of management draft a short agreed report, outlining the key discussions and decisions of the board for dissemination to the board of governors, parents and teachers. In addition, an overall board of management

report should be furnished to the wider school community on an annual basis, as required by the Education Act 1998. This would provide the school community with greater insights into the school's management and decision-making processes.

Traditional parent and staff links with the School of Philosophy and Economic Science have helped to support the unique ethos since the school's inception, a key feature of which has been the progression of students from the primary to the secondary school.

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

Re-identification of the key ethos factors to inform the development of the school has been highlighted as a priority by school management. All key staff attend weekly meetings where the focus is on school ethos development and its dissemination throughout all aspects of the school. Curricular development is focusing on innovative learning initiatives that place the student at the core of learning.

Examples of the school management's educational priorities include the development of the school 'academy' in fifth and sixth year with increased emphasis on the teacher as mentor and advisor while students take increased responsibility for their own learning. The board is strongly of the view that the school ethos is well positioned to deliver key skills and to embrace the proposed reform of the junior cycle curriculum.

The school has identified necessary actions so that it can continue to fulfil its founding ethos. The school should maintain a practical focus on obtaining permanent recognition and, while maintaining its unique ethos, on the potential to build its capacity as a centre for learning.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

School management promotes leadership opportunities among staff through the selection of staff members for promotional appointments. Senior management creates opportunities to foster and to promote excellence in many ways with staff delegated to take a leading role in school development. Meaningful roles are distributed to post holders with teachers having responsibility for TY, school development planning, examinations and special educational needs.

In making appointments to the teaching staff, school management has been mindful of preserving the school ethos. In their capacity as employer, school management should be mindful of teacher qualification and registration requirements and should encourage and support members of the teaching staff in registering with the Teaching Council and in pursuing additional measures as necessary to ensure that their qualifications are recognised.

The involvement of senior management in every aspect of school life was very much in evidence at the time of the evaluation. The principal and deputy principal, as the senior management team, bring a complementary range of skills and qualities to their varying

roles. They share a consistent vision of school leadership and are in constant communication with each other and with the many groups and individuals with delegated responsibility. Both have leadership qualities which have contributed to the strong sense of community and commitment among the staff and students in the school. Leading and supporting teachers in the promotion of high-quality teaching is a priority for the principal. The main focus of the deputy principal is discipline, school organisation, school maintenance and health and safety. It is recommended that a greater leadership role be delegated to the deputy principal to include the co-ordination of the key curriculum initiatives underway in the school.

The principal has selected seven members of staff to form a management team which brings forward key matters for consideration and decision. This initiative is praiseworthy in that it enables school self-evaluation in key areas such as policy development, TY, assessment and teacher professional development. To democratise the consultative process more fully, working groups led by experienced members of this team could examine particular developmental, curricular or educational priorities and bring the views of all staff members more fully to the decision-making processes.

The school supports its ethos in many ways, including the staff induction process and the ongoing work of the meditation development group. The provision of a staff handbook is a very praiseworthy development. Staff development conferences are a key focus of teacher continuing professional development (CPD) which is encouraged and supported in order to maintain high standards and has been enthusiastically embraced across many subject and programme areas.

Curricular review forms a central strand of planning for the future. Themes for discussion should include continued promotion of assessment for learning (AFL) and further integration of computers as classroom learning tools. The TY programme is currently under review with a view to maximising the continuity of certain aspects of the school-based curriculum. School management should ensure that each student receives twenty-eight hours of classroom instruction time in accordance with Circular M29/95. In addition, the school should plan for the inclusion of Physical Education on the curriculum in accordance with Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools.

Leadership of students

The role of subject co-ordinator contributes to student learning through planning, co-ordinated development of work schemes, looking at methodologies, sharing resources and taking responsibility for leadership within departments. All students surveyed said that teachers encourage them to work to the best of their abilities. This is a very positive acknowledgement of the effort of teachers. The facilitation of meeting times for groups of teachers, the focus on study skills and regular assessment and reporting are some examples of the ways in which the work ethic enshrined in the school ethos is promoted.

Almost all students stated in questionnaire responses that they felt safe and cared for in the school. The class teacher system is effective in the management and care of students and is an example of distributed leadership. The class teacher is the main link between home and school. Almost all parents surveyed responded that there is good contact between home and school and they know who to talk to in the school if there is a problem.

The school's unique founding principles influence all aspects of school life. School assemblies allow for the integration of prayer and reflection and are daily occasions which serve to forge the school community together in implementing its objectives in practice. They provide excellent opportunities to acknowledge achievements, whether academic, sporting or personal. The school motto 'delight in the present' is lived out in many ways including a pause between lessons and a short fragment of classical music signalling the

end of each class period. The integration of the school community through various projects and activities further promotes the ethos.

The guidance and the learning support departments play a key role in the care and support of students. Students are provided with a range of opportunities which complement the academic curriculum. Learning support and resource provision is good with students receiving individual support, and support through team teaching and the provision of small focused class groups. However, given the number of teachers involved in delivering support, careful co-ordination and record keeping should be prioritised.

Members of the students' council and prefects are also a critical group of leaders whose contribution to promoting self-discipline and individual responsibility among students was clear. Prefects take responsibility for setting up some assemblies and for supporting the class teachers in the fulfilment of their duties.

2.3 Management of facilities

Annual improvements in the school's infrastructure have impacted positively on the working environment for teachers and the learning environment for students. Recent focus has been on the expansion of resources, specifically information and communication technology (ICT) in classrooms and specialist rooms. Art work and displays of photographs contribute to the attractive nature of the surroundings. A professional catering team provides a wholesome meal to staff and students each day. This provides an opportunity for the development of responsibility, leadership and teamwork through the 'house' team systems that perform assigned lunch duties on a rota basis.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The overall quality of learning and teaching in the twenty-five lessons observed was good or very good. Responses to the questionnaire issued to parents and students also indicated a high level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning.

The majority of lessons were conducted in appropriate settings. While seating arrangements were mainly conducive to student participation and teacher mobility, facilitation of group work was hindered by some arrangements. This matter should be addressed.

Lessons were well planned, with teachers having prepared a range of resources and materials to support students' engagement and learning of the chosen topic. Good practice was observed when teachers also explicitly highlighted the intended learning outcomes in addition to the lesson content. It is recommended that all teachers adopt this approach, in keeping with the principles of assessment for learning.

The wide range of methodologies employed in most lessons helped to support student learning. The board was well utilised throughout the majority of lessons to highlight key words and concepts. This practice should be extended. While good use was made of ICT in some lessons, effective integration of ICT into teaching and learning should be expanded, where appropriate, to include additional elements that support student interest and engagement. Students were often engaged in active learning through the completion of practical tasks, pair work, group work or through the good practice of presenting their work to the class group. This practice should be extended to also include the focused use of role play, debates, peer questioning and dialogues. Teachers should ensure that when students are revising material, active and appropriate methodologies are employed so that students remain fully engaged throughout the lesson.

In all lessons, a positive atmosphere prevailed and a good rapport between teachers and students, and among students, was evident. Lessons were most effective when there was an appropriate balance between teacher input and student activity. In a minority of lessons, there was an over emphasis on teacher-directed activity. The pace of lessons was good overall. In some lessons the pace should be reviewed to maximise learning for the majority of students. While classroom management was effective in the majority of lessons, some group work strategies should be addressed and the overall balance of time between teaching and testing should be monitored in order to maximise the quality of student learning.

In most lessons, effective questioning strategies were used to facilitate the development of higher-order thinking skills. Good practice was observed when teachers directed questions to named students and gave sufficient time and prompts to students to assist them with their progress. Differentiation for ability levels was noted in some lessons with teachers providing individual instruction and asking questions appropriate to the level of ability of the student. This is an area for further development. In a significant majority of lessons students were engaged and responsive. However, in a few lessons observed, enhanced input and participation from students would have considerably improved lesson outcomes and the quality of student learning.

Very good practice was observed in lessons when teachers provided individual students with clear direction on how to improve the quality of their work. The emphasis on formative assessment strategies was impressive overall as evidenced through the annotation of students' copybooks. The standard of students' written work was high overall. However, further monitoring and annotation of students' work is required in some instances. Homework was given in a significant number of the lessons observed. In the interests of better classroom management, it is recommended that some tasks done in class would be better assigned as homework. The teachers of SPHE should devise an agreed assessment strategy which will facilitate the formal recording of students' progress and ascertain whether learning outcomes are being achieved. To this end the use of a personal reflection log is recommended.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

The board of management's presentation and the meeting with relevant subject department co-ordinators very clearly outlined the actions taken in response to recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports. These include the adjustment of the school timetable for various subjects, the revision of subject department plans and provision for the increased use of ICT. SPHE is timetabled for all junior cycle classes and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is taught to all senior cycle class groups. The improved quality of the planning in subjects was evident. The planning documentation for all the subjects evaluated has been reviewed, augmented and enhanced. Further development of subject plans including the setting of long term goals for each subject should inform future planning.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

The quality of teaching and learning in the subjects previously evaluated was high. Teachers have attended well to the implementation of many of the recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports. Subject departments have taken a range of actions in response to these recommendations. Lesson objectives were clearly stated at the outset of many lessons, methodologies were enhanced with key words and concepts placed on the

board. Specific improvements include the use of the target language in French, the development of student communication skills in Irish and student participation in history lessons. The image-rich and print-rich classroom environment has been enhanced, where feasible.

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

Whole-school self-evaluation has been student-centred. The integration of the school ethos permeates the work of the school boards, senior management, teachers and students. The school has the capacity to bring about improvement where necessary. This capacity is evident in its ongoing focus on formative assessment, its involvement in new curricular and pastoral initiatives such as the Bridge2College programme, problem-based learning and the student-integrated 'wilderness' project. Initiatives are in place to support sustained efforts to maximise students' potential. To further develop self-evaluative practices, the boards should consider evaluating their own work at suitable intervals.

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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 John Scottus Secondary School is grateful to the Inspectorate for a most encouraging, informative and professional inspection experience. The school is encouraged by the report's reference to our 'vibrant learning environment', our 'strong emphasis on the unique school ethos' and to the fact that 'the overall quality of learning and teaching observed was good or very good'. Care was taken by the Inspectorate to meet and address all partners of the school community in a meaningful, thorough and considerate way.

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 Board is addressing the recommendations of the report, specifically:

- It now drafts a report for dissemination to governors, parents and teachers after its meetings.
- It did furnish an annual report to the School community at the end of the 2010/11 year.
- It is maintaining a practical focus on obtaining permanent recognition.

The Board is also seeing that, at school management level, the other recommendations are receiving all necessary attention.