

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

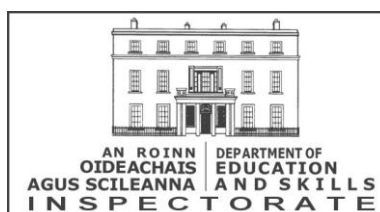
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Peter's Community School
Passage West, Cork
Roll number: 91391H**

Date of inspection: 20 October 2011



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in October 2011 in St. Peter's Community 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, groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

Introduction

St. Peter's Community School is a co-educational, multi-denominational school that welcomes all students. Founded in 1988, current enrolment stands at 291. There is a good vibrant atmosphere in the school. St. Peter's seeks to support the intellectual, personal and social development of students of all abilities, and almost all parents surveyed agreed that this is the case.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board of management functions effectively.
- Priorities for development reflect school context, and also local and national factors.
- Senior management possesses qualities of instructional leadership and demonstrates an inclusive management style.
- Communication, both internal and external, is most effective.
- The teaching staff is committed and motivated.
- School Development Planning has progressed well, and is now firmly rooted in educational achievement and instructional quality.
- Students are very well managed, guided and supported from admission to graduation.
- A broad and balanced curriculum provides for students of all abilities and interests.
- Students' achievements are openly celebrated.
- Recent works have resulted in a school building that is modern and aesthetically pleasing, and one which provides a comfortable learning space.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good, with much excellent practice observed.
- Recommendations provided in previous reports were addressed by school management and staff.
- Review is constant and focused on school improvement and change is embraced.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The identification of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely) goals derived from baseline data is encouraged, as is the introduction of action planning to support the attainment of goals.

- Task groups should lead the implementation of recommendations provided in relation to: enhancing the role of subject teachers in the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills; exploring strategies to further support cooperative learning; and implementing classroom-focused self-evaluation on a whole-school level.
- Teachers are encouraged to consider how the very good to excellent classroom practice observed during this evaluation could be shared and extended further.

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 properly constituted. Regular meetings ensure the active involvement of the board in the management of the school. A percentage of board members has engaged in relevant training. It is strongly suggested that all board members avail of opportunities to participate in appropriate training.

The board of management functions effectively. Members are clear on their collective role and are aware of the associated responsibilities, demonstrating a particular consciousness of the role it ought to play in maintaining school ethos. Equally, members are aware of and responsive to statutory obligations. 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 and that the school is compliant with the requirements of Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006.

The board promotes consultation with all partners, and this facilitates meaningful decision-making. Simultaneously, in-depth discussion at meetings allows for the making of consensual decisions. The board plays an active role in policy development and review. The provision of proposed review dates on policies supports a natural cycle of appraisal. The practice of publishing policies on the school's website helps to ensure that all partners are informed in relation to policies.

The majority of parents surveyed as part of this evaluation appear to be unfamiliar with the work of the board. The preparation of an annual report, as outlined in section twenty of the Education Act (1998), will help to address this finding.

The school's priorities for development

The board is clear on the school's priorities for development, which have been devised consultatively. In the identification of priorities it is obvious that, in addition to the school's specific context, local and national factors are also taken into account. As a result, current priorities are informed by a range of influences including: the school's mission statement; school data relating to student participation levels; recommendations provided in past inspection reports; national foci such as literacy and numeracy and school self-evaluation; the current financial pressures on families; and an overarching desire to continuously enhance teaching and learning. It is recommended that the role played by the board in following through on these priorities be strengthened.

To this end, it is suggested that the board encourage task groups to identify priority-related goals that are very SMART - Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely. As relevant, the board should also further encourage the formation of goals that are based on school-specific baseline data that is acquired via, for example, analysis, focus groups, questionnaires, surveys or testing. In the evaluation of the effectiveness of initiatives introduced to address developmental priorities, the board should consider the use of

baseline data comparisons. With a view to enhancing the role played by the board in monitoring achievements, it is also proposed that short progress reports be requested from task groups at appropriate intervals. Finally, it is suggested that the board might look at how all-partner involvement in the realisation of identified priorities could be further fostered and promoted.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The principal and deputy principal demonstrate a good working relationship, having adopted a partnership approach to the management of the school.

The senior management team maintains a visible presence in the school, and this promotes good communication with all. While high expectations are set for both staff and students, the senior management team also openly acknowledges achievement and effort. Together, the principal and deputy principal demonstrate a clear understanding of curricular issues and how the educational system operates, and the management and organisation of the school provides evidence of good practice relating to both areas. All of these qualities and practices are synonymous with effective instructional leadership.

Communication is very effective, both internally and externally. On-going, informal interactions are a highly valued and significant element of internal communications. A carefully planned series of weekly meetings support the sharing of key information and a cooperative approach to management and leadership. A significant percentage of daily interactions between senior management, staff, students and parents, centre around the management and leadership of student learning, be it in relation to individual students, class groups, or year groups. This is very good practice and demonstrates the school's clear commitment to students' education and wellbeing.

Senior management, and in particular the principal, supports the work of an active and enthusiastic parents' association. This, together with the principal's very direct, weekly involvement with the students' council, demonstrates the promotion of partnership by senior management. The parents' association is encouraged to consider affiliation to the National Parents' Council (NPC). It is suggested also that the parents' association might evaluate the role that they, in conjunction with the students' council, could play in the realisation of the school's current and future developmental priorities.

Delegation is a key operating principle of the senior management team, and coupled with a strong spirit of co-operation and collegiality, this promotes inclusive management, while supporting teachers to exercise leadership. All teachers are afforded the opportunity to manage and lead. The school's assistant principals and special duties teachers, who have been assigned specific management and leadership roles, carry out their assigned duties in an effective, efficient and extremely committed manner.

Management actively encourages the teaching staff to participate in activities that contribute to continuing professional development (CPD), to which teachers respond with high levels of motivation and commitment. Firmly established subject departments support the sharing of both experience and expertise. A well-developed, teacher handbook supports staff in the application of agreed procedures, and the inclusion of some 'food for thought' elements relating to good teaching and teacher professionalism is positive. As relevant, the latter should be developed to correspond with the work of the school planning task groups.

Teachers' active participation in school development planning is facilitated via the establishment of task groups, a practice that has become embedded in the school. As a

result, much has been achieved. The fundamentals of this planning activity, namely the school's mission, policies, and subject-department planning are well advanced. The focus of the school's current task groups demonstrates that school development planning is now firmly rooted in educational achievement and the related area of instructional quality. It is recommended that task groups be further supported in the planning, organisation and documentation of their work with the introduction of action-planning templates. Furthermore, it is suggested that completed templates be collated and summarised for filing in the developmental section of the plan. To this end, and as part of the planned review of the post structure, consideration ought to be given to reinstating the position of school development planning co-coordinator.

Management and staff are supported in their various roles by a very hard-working, dedicated secretarial staff, who provide essential administration. An equally committed caretaking staff, maintain an aesthetically pleasing, comfortable and safe working and learning environment.

Leadership of students

The school has very good admissions, induction and transition policies and procedures. Furthermore, it is very inclusive in its provision for, and support of, students with special and additional needs. The school's guidance allocation is being put to very good and full use. Most noteworthy is the very high quality, incremental, individual guidance and support that is provided to students.

The management and leadership of students is a responsibility that is embraced by all, and this provides a clear example of the active delegation and devolvement of responsibility by senior management. There are, however, a number of identifiable key players. The members of the school's well-constructed and inclusive pastoral care team have ultimate responsibility for student support and care. Year tutors together with class tutors also play a pivotal role, particularly in relation to supporting students in reaching their full potential and monitoring students' participation levels and personal progress. The school's three programme co-coordinators, who are charged with the operation of the Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Adult Education programmes, also demonstrate effective management and leadership qualities both in terms of provision for the individual programmes and in relation to their interactions with students.

Attendance and punctuality are vigilantly tracked and monitored, a finding supported by the student questionnaires completed. The approach includes a commendable emphasis on promoting more positive patterns of participation. Expectations regarding student behaviour are clearly communicated and understood. Students appreciate the "every chance" and "clean slate" principles that underpin the implementation of the code of behaviour. Almost all of the parents surveyed recognize that discipline is good in the school. Student leadership is promoted via structures, such as, the students' council and peer-mentoring programmes. Two other school characteristics which impact very positively on both the management and leadership of students are the very good relations between teachers and students, and the fact that student achievement is openly celebrated in the school.

The school's curriculum is broad and balanced. It is accommodating of all students, providing well for both academic and practical subjects. A number of subjects, such as Applied Mathematics, are offered after school in response to student demand. Subject choice systems accommodate good choice. Overall, the timetable is balanced and fair. It is carefully planned and constructed, and demonstrates good planning principles. The formal curriculum is supported by a comprehensive programme of teacher-led co-curricular activities. Lunchtime and after-school extracurricular activities, particularly in the area of

sport, are also provided. The school's provision for more non-sporting extracurricular activities is suggested as an area for development.

2.3 Management of facilities

The principal, with the support of the board, demonstrates a clear commitment to providing a quality learning and working environment. Recent improvements to the school building and its environs have resulted in the creation of a modern, aesthetically pleasing and comfortable learning space. Work in this area is ongoing, with plans in place to further enhance specialist facilities. All classrooms are fitted with up-to-date information communication technologies (ICT) equipment to support teaching and learning. Clearly, this equipment is being put to very full use, with most students surveyed agreeing that computers are often used in lessons. Almost all parents and most students also believe that the facilities in the school are good.

Equal emphasis is placed on maintaining the school plant. Students fully recognise and value the investment in the school and are contributing to the maintenance of a pleasant environment. In keeping with recent published guidelines the schools health and safety policy is under internal review.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Overall, the quality of learning and teaching is very good, with much excellent practice observed. In a small minority of lessons, areas for development were identified.

Lessons delivered were consistent with what had been detailed in agreed programmes of work. Planning and preparation for lessons observed was consistently comprehensive. In some instances, detailed lesson plans were presented.

A very good range of carefully chosen resources were well utilised. ICT featured in most lessons and, more often than not, it was seamlessly incorporated into lesson delivery. Clear and appropriate references were made to the students' textbooks in order to support understanding and learning. The board was employed in many instances to support note-taking, to foster literacy development, and to promote independent student activity.

A feature of all lessons was the sharing of learning outcomes with students. Student copybooks indicated that this is an established practice. Best practice was where outcomes were further referenced over the course of lessons and used both as a checklist and as a tool to examine student understanding and learning. This approach is further encouraged. Clear links were established with previous lessons and also, as relevant, with previously studied topics.

In the main, lessons were purposeful, well-structured, appropriately paced and content rich. Knowledgeable teachers delivered instruction that was clear and concise, and thorough explanations were provided. The student survey indicated that the majority of students felt that teachers explain things well. Teachers' love for their subject was obvious in most lessons.

A variety of student-centred, teaching methodologies was incorporated into lesson delivery. Best practice was where teacher-led instruction was balanced with purposeful student activity, and where a variety of tasks was set for students. Further commendable practice was observed where students got the opportunity to work in pairs or small groups, as this

promoted cooperative learning. Tasks were clearly explained, activities were time bound and students were assigned roles and responsibilities. Good monitoring of student activity allowed teachers to provide individual support and guidance when, and where, it was required. With a view to varying approaches to pair and group work, teachers are encouraged to explore the range of cooperative learning strategies that could be introduced.

In language lessons, excellent provision was made for teaching through the target language. In a number of lessons, including one mathematics lesson, there was a very obvious exploitation of opportunities to enhance students' literacy skills, an approach that is further encouraged. To this end, an investigation of the role subject teachers can play in enhancing literacy and numeracy skills would be worthwhile.

Questioning featured in all lessons. Best practice was seen where there was a mixture of global and directed questioning and recall and higher-order questioning. Adequate wait time was provided by teachers. At times, and as required, teachers skilfully guided students toward more correct answers. This was achieved in combination with the sensitive handling of incorrect answers. Appropriate references were made to the certificate examination papers, including types of questions and answering techniques.

Overall, classroom relations were extremely positive, underpinned by respect and influenced by high levels of teacher care and concern. The student questionnaire indicated that most students recognise this sense of care. Students quickly focused on lesson content, fully engaged with planned activities and remained interested throughout. In most lessons, teachers sought to make learning relevant, meaningful and fun. This was achieved by positive teacher presence, the careful use of humour, and the provision of appropriately challenging activities that inspired student participation. Students were impeccably well behaved in all lessons. All of this is consistent with the student responses to questionnaires, which indicated that the majority of students enjoy going to classes and find them interesting.

Teacher-based rooms support the creation of subject-specific, print-rich learning environments. Teachers are encouraged in their efforts to keep these displays topical.

Homework was monitored, corrected and assigned in all lessons. Students' copybooks indicated that this is the regular approach, as did the student questionnaire. The consolidation of student learning was not always provided for as lessons concluded. This is identified therefore as an area for development.

Considering the overall very good quality of teaching and learning observed, management and staff should investigate how individual expertise could be further shared, and in a manner that extends beyond that which is already being achieved at subject meetings.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

The school has taken recommendations from previous reports seriously. Matters relating to timetabling, subject choice, the admission's policy, and the cross-referencing of the whole school guidance plan in relevant subject plans have all been addressed. The refurbishment of specialist facilities is ongoing in the school. The active encouragement of students to study at higher levels is being successfully addressed at whole-school and classroom level. Team teaching was introduced but later discontinued. Management and staff are encouraged to revisit this approach in time, with the suggestion that implementation should

be more gradual. In relation to the ongoing sharing of approaches to supporting students with special and additional educational needs, it is suggested that the school's literacy and numeracy and teaching and learning task groups could assist with this. Management is encouraged to continue to seek to factor resource hours into the timetable at the point of construction.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Recommendations relating to curricular and subject department planning have been, and continue to be, addressed. There was evidence to suggest that recommendations provided in relation to classroom practice, approaches to assessment, and access and exposure to ICT are being considered by all subject departments, and not just those directly involved in past subject inspections. This is very positive.

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

5.1

The school's self-evaluation process is very good. Review is a constant feature of the work of individual teachers, subject departments, staff teams, senior management and the board. Parents and students are often included in review processes. In 2009, for example, both parties were surveyed in relation to key aspects of the school. Review is focused on school improvement. Self-evaluation and school improvement is supported by: a whole school climate that is led by the desire to do the very best for all students; an atmosphere that has the hallmarks of commitment, openness, professionalism, reflection and trust; a capacity and willingness to embrace change; and a management style that promotes and fosters collaboration and collegiality. Management and staff are encouraged to further explore self-evaluation at classroom level.

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