Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Coláiste Eoin

Bóthar Stigh Lorgan
Baile an Bhóthair, Contae Bhaile Átha Cliath
Roll number: 60041D

Date of inspection: 20 November 2013
Whole-School Evaluation  
Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in November 2013 in Coláiste Eoin. 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. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Introduction

Coláiste Eoin is an all-Irish boys’ school under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The school is located in four blocks, two of which are shared with Coláiste Íosagáin, a girls’ post-primary school located in the second block. There is very good co-operation between the two schools, in particular in relation to the provision of optional subjects in senior cycle. There are 491 boys currently enrolled. In addition to the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes, the school offers a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme. Coláiste Eoin provides a high standard of education and the promotion and development of the Irish language and culture is a central tenet of the school’s ethos.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management fulfils its role in a very effective manner.
- The senior management team provide very good leadership, inculcate the characteristic spirit of the school through example and are committed to establishing high standards.
- Very good communication channels across the school community have helped to ensure shared ownership and a good level of distributed leadership.
- Staff members are dedicated and are committed to providing a holistic education for all students.
- A significant number of developmental priorities have been achieved across many areas of school life.
- Teaching and learning was of a high quality in the majority of lessons observed and of a very high quality in half of the lessons observed.
- There is a high quality of care for students and student support structures are very good.
- School self-evaluation is well established and management and staff show significant capacity for change and improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development

- A time-bound strategic plan, based on a shared vision for school development, should be drawn up to guide the school in realising its improvement objectives.
• The current structure of the parents’ council should be revised to afford the parent body of Coláiste Eoin a more participative role in the development of the school.
• The student council should be representative of all year groups.
• Developmental priorities in key areas of teaching and learning, including subject and programme planning, should be monitored and reviewed in a more systematic manner.
• As part of the schools SSE improvement agenda for Irish literacy, it is recommended that more explicit and measurable strategies be agreed at a whole-staff level so as to facilitate the evaluation of progress in both spoken and written literacy.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management
The board of management fulfils its obligations in a very effective manner. It is deeply committed to and takes an active role in the development of the school. The school’s mission statement and the values of ERST trustees underpin the work of the board. The board has a very good knowledge of the school through regular and comprehensive principal’s reports. The school is managed in a spirit of partnership with good levels of communication between the board members and all stakeholders.

At present, the principal provides an oral report on matters pertaining to the operation of the board to a joint parent committee, comprising parents of Coláiste Eoin and Coláiste Iosagáin. To build further partnership with the parent body, it is recommended that a parent committee for Coláiste Eoin be established and that the agreed written report from the board, currently provided to the teaching staff, could be also furnished to the parent committee of Coláiste Eoin. This parent committee once formed could more optimally use the school’s website and newsletter to allow for greater flow of information to the general parent body. Meetings of officers from each school’s parent committee could also be facilitated on an agreed basis so that the valuable work carried out by the current joint committee continues.

The board takes an active role in developing and reviewing policies, in supporting the financial management of the school and in overseeing developments and improvements in keys areas of school life. Although all the mandatory policies have been developed, some policies have not been reviewed for a number of years. A cycle of review and update should be devised by the board for all policies. As policies are updated they should go before the parents’ committee and students’ council and should be dated and include a timeframe for review.

The board has a broad overview of the quality of teaching and learning in the school through the establishment of an academic sub-committee, participation on interview boards, general reports on certificate examination attainment and updates on subject evaluations provided by the principal. The board should deepen its engagement with the outcomes of these inspection reports and track progress in relation to the implementation of recommendations made in such reports.

The board in consultation with staff and other stakeholders has identified an extensive range of current priorities in the areas of teaching and learning, curriculum provision promoting the school ethos, developing student support structures, infrastructural developments, supporting school self-evaluation and the acquisition of a new building. The board in consultation with staff, students and parents should rank order these developmental priorities to ensure that there is a shared understanding and unified approach.
to achieve these developmental priorities. In this context a strategic plan should be devised that sets targets and identifies actions to achieve the agreed priorities over defined timeframes. A progress report on the strategic plan should be included as a regular item on the agenda of meetings of the various stakeholders.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning
The principal and deputy principal work in close partnership and provide very effective leadership to the school community. They set high standards, have a strong work ethic. Their laissez-faire leadership style and democratic management approach have successfully inspired and motivated staff to participate in a collaborative and manner in the provision of a high quality Irish-medium education in Coláiste Eóin. There are open lines of communication between senior management and staff, parents and students.

A distributed model of leadership is in evidence among staff members. The middle management team provide essential support in the running of the school. Post-holders feel empowered and are given autonomy to fulfil and develop their roles. Frequent meetings are held between these post holders, guidance counsellors, special education needs co-ordinator and senior management. Non-post holders have taken up key roles to ensure the continued co-ordination of activities and to lead new initiatives. The post schedule should be kept under ongoing review as in some instances there is scope for post duties to be more closely aligned to the changing needs and developmental priorities of the school.

A key strength of the school is its committed and professional staff. A strong spirit of volunteerism and good will exists among staff members which supports the delivery of a broad curriculum and a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. This is highly valued by management and parents.

Teachers display a strong commitment to their own professional development and a number have gained additional qualifications across a range of specialisms. Staff CPD is actively supported; whole-staff in-service training has been provided on a range of topics over the past number of years. There has been a good focus on up-skilling teachers in the use of ICT as a teaching and learning tool. There is an effective induction process to support new teachers and a comprehensive staff handbook has been developed.

The practice of sharing in-house expertise as a model of training is commended and its extended use encouraged. To further disseminate and share good practices it is recommended that a mechanism is put in place so that feedback on return from CPD events can be given to colleagues in a structured manner. It is recommended that a CPD plan for the coming years be drawn up, based on the articulated priorities and needs of the school and the staff.

The subject and programme planning documentation reviewed showed significant variations between the departments in the level of engagement with planning. Best practice was observed where there was a focus on learning outcomes linked to methodologies, resources and assessment modes. It is recommended that learning outcomes be expressed in ‘can do’ statements in the written plans. In some instances literacy strategies were tailored to individual subject plans. This work is highly commended. In a number of cases plans were primarily content driven. It is recommended that a system be put in place to ensure that the subject planning process is utilised effectively as a vehicle to guide and improve teaching and learning across subjects and programmes.

Very good work has been done in advancing aspects of the school’s developmental priorities including improved structures for middle management, guidance, special educational needs (SEN), developments in facilities and ICT and engagement with the SSE
process. The strategic time-bound plan, as recommended above, should provide a more systematic approach to the planning process.

Whole-school development planning is currently driven by senior management and supported by the input of task groups on policy development and individuals drawn from staff working on priority development areas. The permanent section of the school plan is a comprehensive document. A record of the school’s progress in relation to the whole-school improvement planning should be maintained.

The school offers a broad curriculum and additional subjects have been added in an effort to balance the curriculum in recent years. Such educational developments are hampered by the current lack of space. As the school progresses with the addition of other subjects to the curriculum, the benefits accruing for learners from the inclusion of the leaving certificate vocational programme (LCVP) should also be considered. Currently, the time allocation for Physical Education (PE) at senior cycle falls short of the recommended provision and this shortfall should be addressed.

Very good practices are in place to support the management of students. The code of behaviour is a well constructed document, the ladder of referral in discipline matters is clear and the students are very favourably disposed to its positive focus. The Irish rule promotes the use of Irish only among the students while at school. Much effort is invested in its implementation, a testimony to the importance of the rule. The inspection team commended the high standard of fluency and accuracy in the spoken Irish of the students.

The school provides very good opportunities for student leadership through the student council as well as class and school captains. At present, the student council includes democratically elected representatives from senior cycle only. It is recommended that junior cycle students be elected to the council also.

There are effective procedures in place for the management of transitions from primary to post primary through the mentoring programme and the links that are established with the guidance counsellors. An information evening is held for transition-year students and it is positive that an open choice of subjects is offered at senior cycle in co-operation with Coláiste Iosagáin.

One of the key strengths of the school is its ethos of care. Good structures are in place to ensure that the care needs of students are supported. The recent establishment of a care team, the improvements in the provision for Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), the on-going commitment to anti-bullying initiatives, including student-led projects, provide further evidence that the school prioritises the welfare of its students. These supports were very positively endorsed by parents and students. There is a strong commitment to spiritual development and appropriate provision is made for Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE).

Co-ordination for the provision of supports for students with special educational (SEN) needs is carried out in a systematic and organized manner tailored to students needs across a range of skills and subjects. Examples of very good practice include: the early testing of first year students in literacy, numeracy and in Irish, education plans have been developed for individual students, there is a variety of models of provision and inservice has been provided to teachers. Whilst there is on-going informal evaluation of student progress it is recommended that there should also be structured retesting to determine the effectiveness of support interventions. The school should explore the feasibility of team teaching. The school has a comprehensive SEN plan. The SEN policy however, needs to be prioritised for review and the whole-school literacy and numeracy policies should be developed as part of this review.
The guidance and counselling service is a central support structure for students and is working very well in the school. The guidance plan needs to be further developed in a collaborative manner to reflect a whole-school approach to guidance.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools.

1.3 Management of facilities
The building and grounds are well maintained. One of the school’s articulated aims is the acquisition of an initial Green Flag. It would be worthwhile including this objective in the school’s action-plan.

The school’s health and safety statement should be reviewed and updated in line with the Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools (2010).

The school is well resourced with ICT facilities. The need to maintain and upgrade the ICT infrastructure is a priority for management as well as the extended use of e-portal and a virtual learning environment. The development of formal e-learning plan is encouraged for this work.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching
A total of twenty two lessons were evaluated during the inspection. In almost all of the lessons observed, the quality of teaching and learning was exemplary or very good. The level of preparedness for lessons was excellent and clear learning outcomes were always in evidence. The majority of teachers revisited the learning outcomes with the students at the end of the lessons. This debriefing session provided students with the opportunity to recapitulate on what they had achieved during the lesson period. The extended use of this approach is recommended as this will not only assist teachers in establishing what has been learnt by the students but also will facilitate students in engaging in self evaluating their own progress. Very good use was made of a range of suitable resources, including ICT.

In promoting excellence in teaching and learning, two main recommendations are made. Firstly, in relation to the range of methodologies employed: it is recommended that a broader range of methodologies be employed so as to develop collaborative learning, active learning, discussion and debate as well as the imagination and creativity of the students. The second recommendation pertains to questioning techniques. In general the techniques employed were generally appropriate and included a good mix of lower-order and higher-order questions. The greater use of directed and differentiated questioning strategies is recommended so that all students are challenged and that lessons provide for the full range of abilities.

A random sample of students’ work was reviewed. Good quality monitoring and correction of student work was observed. There was evidence in one third of the of the work reviewed that assessment for learning (AFL) techniques were been employed. It is recommended that the use of AFL principles be used in subject areas.

Student achievement in the certificate examinations is generally good to very good and there is a high uptake of subjects at higher level. The responsibility for analysing certificate
results should be devolved to each subject department and the outcomes of these analyses should be included when identifying an improvement agenda for teaching and learning. This agenda should be submitted by each department to senior management.

Due to the recent introduction of teacher-based classrooms, senior students’ punctuality in going class was poor. Strategies aimed at addressing this issue need to be introduced.

The learning environment ranged from exemplary to classrooms in which there was scope for significant development.

Exemplary standards of student behaviour were observed during the evaluation. Classroom management was effective in all cases and student-teacher relationships were always very positive. The high standard of Irish used during all lessons, in the management of students and in communication with students, is worthy of particular commendation.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management
School management have acted on the majority of recommendations relating to whole school support in previous inspection reports. While progress has been made in the drafting of whole-school policies in relation to confidentiality, referrals and assessment, the second recommendation continues to be valid; that in conjunction with senior management a small task group be established to develop a whole-school approach to guidance planning.

3.2 Learning and teaching
Good progress has been made in the implementation of recommendations made in the three previous subject inspections that have issued to the school to date. However, there remains scope for development in relation to the use of a broader range of methodologies, increasing student participation through differentiated questioning strategies and the further use of assessment for learning. It is also worth noting that the recommendations made in subject inspection reports often are not only pertinent to that specific subject area but have implications for teaching in other areas also. In this regard, it is worthwhile discussing the outcomes of evaluation reports at whole-staff level.

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

Over the past five years the school has shown a good capacity for review. Engagement in formal self-evaluation during this time includes: analysis of certificate results, policy review and in the case of SPHE a subject department review. Best practice is evident in the recent engagement of all stakeholders in the compilation of the school’s comprehensive school improvement plan, with the improvements in students written and spoken literacy in Irish as its key focus.

It is recommended that baseline data of students’ oral literacy be gathered. Further discussion is required in relation to the general strategies identified to improve students’ written literacy so that more explicit and measurable strategies can be agreed at a whole-staff level for both spoken and written literacy. Once these strategies are decided on, targets for improvement should be set and timeframes agreed for their implementation and subsequent evaluation.

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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 welcomes the positive WSE_MLL report that was carried out in the college in November 2013.

Many of the observations and recommendations, some of these are detailed below, made in the report are a source of pride and satisfaction to the board of management and the staff of the college.

- The board is proud that the inspectors acknowledged ‘Coláiste Eoin provides a high standard of education and the promotion and development of the Irish language and culture is a central tenet of the school’s ethos’

- The board is encouraged that the dedication and commitment of staff is identified in this report as a key strength of the school and also recognised is the good will and volunteerism among staff members; which enriches the life of the school from day to day.

- The report also documents the work carried out to achieve the school’s developmental priorities. The board and staff are proud of the developmental priorities that have been implemented to date; in the structures supporting middle management, Guidance and special educational needs (SEN).

- For a number of years now, the college has placed a high priority on developing structures to provide for students with SEN and the formalisation of the learning support service. Progress made in these areas, which expound the values of Edmund Ignatius Rice, are endorsed in this report; giving affirmation to both board and staff.

- The development of ICT has been a priority developmental area over the past three years. Improvements in this regard are acknowledged in the report.

- The centrality of the student to school life in Coláiste Eoin is endorsed in the report. Many examples affirm these efforts: management of students, opportunities for student leadership, student care and support structures including the area of pastoral care. This positive report will sustain the board and the staff of the college as they embark on further developments.

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 engaging with the recommendations made in this evaluation report and will inform the work of the board for the coming school year. Some of these recommendations will provide a structure for the board’s planning process over the coming years.

The board has already agreed to address the recommendations made in relation to the structure and process of representation of the student council and the structure of the parent council. The monitoring of progress in relation to subject and programme planning has been initiated. Arising out of the work carried out as part of school’s self-evaluation process, a school improvement plan has been collated and will be implemented during the
school year 2014/2015. A more systematic cycle of review for school policies will be
developed, which will focus on the review and development of particular policies; health
and safety and SEN initially. Other recommendations made in this report will be addressed
in turn, specifically the strategic plan for the future development of the school.