

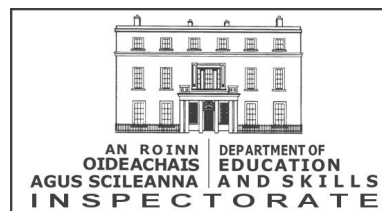
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Scoil Chaitríona
Mobhi Road, Glasnevin, Dublin 9
Roll number: 60700R

Date of inspection: 8 May 2014



Whole-School Evaluation

Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in May 2014 in Scoil Chaitríona. 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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Introduction

Scoil Chaitríona is a Catholic all-Irish co-educational secondary school. It was the first all-Irish secondary school for girls in the country at the time of its foundation in 1928. A connection with the Order of the Dominican Sisters, who founded the school, remains under the 'Le Chéile Catholic Schools Trust'.

In 2013/14 the school has 423 registered students. Available programmes are the Junior Certificate, the Transition Year which is a mandatory programme and the established Leaving Certificate. Nurturing commitment to the Irish language and to Gaelic culture as well as promoting the overall development of the students are mentioned as the main objectives of the school.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- There is a need for strategic leadership by the board and by senior management in order to set out an agreed future vision for the school.
- Provision of effective leadership for teaching and learning in the school in addition to the qualities recognized in the report are an area for development.
- Pastoral care matters are well established; a strong spirit and a good healthy atmosphere prevail between students and teachers.
- There is a wide subject programme available on the school curriculum and the programme and management of the Transition Year is widely appreciated.
- The teaching and learning in most of the lessons observed was of good or high quality and significant strengths were obvious in some of those; it was felt that a small number of them had room for development, one out of each four lessons visited.

Recommendations for Further Development

- It is recommended to the board to set out a schedule for revision and evaluation of policies and of the main aspects of the school during its term of office.
- For the sake of defining an agreed vision for the school it is recommended to the board to publish a report on the operation and functioning of the school in any schoolyear of its term of office.

- Leadership regarding teaching and learning should be more central in the senior management's responsibilities, especially in relation to the leadership responsibilities of the principal. As well as that it is important to affirm the work of the staff and to establish a professional dialogue to formulate improvements.
- It is recommended that a common approach be agreed to subject planning and that a common planning template be used.
- In accordance with the school improvement plan (SIP) for literacy in Irish it is recommended to formulate further strategies as a support for staff to improve accuracy in Irish and to encourage the students' commitment to speaking Irish.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

The current board of management, which is at the beginning of its term, is established as appropriate. An emergent connection with the new schools' trust 'Le Chéile' is noticeable. An indication of that is an end-of-year report the board makes available to the trust about the management and administration of the school.

Although certain mandatory policies have been adopted there was no obvious well-established practice in relation to review and evaluation of the main features of the school. It is good that the new board has this set as an aim for itself. Of the various policies examined, a date of approving or review was apparent only in the case of the code of behaviour.

The code of behaviour is the only policy which had been approved in the last three years and the relationships and sexuality education (RSE) policy which is still in draft form, was the only one examined. The whole-school community was not consulted for the drafting of the code of behaviour. The new board is determined to rectify this deficiency by implementing the guidelines of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) retrospectively. The mandatory RSE policy which is still not approved nor implemented is another aim the new board has set for itself.

There is a very active parents' committee in the school. Apart from considerable fundraising work a wide contact network has been established as a support for Guidance in order to share hands-on experience of careers with the students. This work is going successfully. The committee is determined to manage the quality of communication with the school and all are happy that these efforts are successful. A student council is functioning and has various responsibilities. Even though it is mentioned in the planning partnership that it has a particular role there was limited evidence for this. It would be worthwhile to enhance the position of the council. It is recommended to the board to develop links with the parents' committee and with the student council.

The quality of communication with the whole-school community needs to be improved. Even though a staff email system is being developed in order to improve communication with the senior management for example, it is felt that it is an area for development and therefore it should be focused on.

The parents' committee recognized that agreeing a vision for the school is a central issue in the management and leadership of the school. The approach of the new board of management can be commended for requesting submissions from interested parties to draft a development plan for the school. As a result of the feedback available to date the board presented a vision for the period 2014-2020 during the evaluation.

Although it contained useful material it is felt that the submissions received are insufficient as a basis for a school development plan. Many of them were for renewal of resources in the usual way. Leadership is needed to direct the different strands into a vision for the period 2014-2020, for example the strands which related to the curriculum and to the promotion of excellence in teaching and learning. In this context it would be worthwhile to review the mission statement of the school to see whether it is necessary to bring it more up to date and to add a further point regarding teaching and learning. Aspirations should be refined and turned into definite objectives and a timeframe should be set out for them to be achieved. It would be worthwhile for the new board to identify those objectives which are to be given priority during the board's term as short-term objectives and to record other objectives for the intermediate and long term.

In the interests of defining an agreed vision for the school and to improve communication matters amongst the school community in general, it is recommended to the board to publish a report on the operation and functioning of the school in any year of its term of office, to be disseminated among the whole-school community. The report would refer in particular to the achievement of objectives as set out in the school plan.

A middle-management team is involved mainly with the leadership of students. A review was previously undertaken to adapt the duties of these posts more to the current needs of the school. Although the duties were not changed it is commendable that extra duties are being taken on by those holding posts of responsibility. It is a positive step that all staff members are participating in six planning committees. It would be worthwhile to request of postholders to prepare an end-of-year report about their posts and to use this report as a basis for professional dialogue with senior management.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Some positives were noted in the effectiveness of the leadership for learning such as the desire of senior management to provide the best quality teaching and learning, the analysis of attainment in certificate examinations and the attention paid to the recommendations of subject inspection reports. The board's support for continuing professional development at the level of the subject departments was commendable. Certain teachers have completed further postgraduate qualifications and staff are being trained in the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) resources. Of note also are the teachers' enthusiasm and self-motivation in the students' interest by providing extra certificate examination classes in the teachers' own time. This was generously acknowledged by parents and students.

Despite these achievements it was felt that there is scope for development for the senior management and for the role of the principal in particular, in order to provide effective leadership for teaching and learning. In specifying the responsibilities to be shared in the future between the principal and the deputy principal, there is a need to focus more on leadership for teaching and learning. A focus on this matter is especially important in the case of the responsibilities to be assigned to the principal. The quality of communication with teaching staff is relevant in this context as well.

In the school's own mission statement, which has not been reviewed for a long time, there is only a lateral reference to the promotion of excellence in teaching and learning. It would be worthwhile to review the main aims of the mission statement without compromising the original aim which is that Irish is to be at the heart of school life. Greater attention should be directed to the school becoming a centre of excellence in teaching and learning as one of the main aims for the school.

Senior management assesses the quality of teaching and learning through sources like school reports, examination attainment data, feedback from parents and students and a programme in continuing professional development (CPD) for the entire staff. However, these are secondary sources and it is felt that the CPD programme for the whole staff which has been made available to date is limited with regard to the promotion of teaching and learning strategies. On the other hand, there is some amount of self-initiative in teaching and learning taking place amongst the subject departments, for example team teaching.

School management's opinion of the quality of teaching is made known to the teachers in an informal way. It is important to affirm the work of the staff and to establish a professional dialogue to devise improvements. At present there is no staff handbook available to staff. There is no formal policy set out for the induction and guiding of new teachers. The arrangements for appointing and guiding Professional Diploma in Education student are considered to be loose. The lack of organisation in regard to Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) matters is a clear weakness of leadership for learning. The subject has no coordinator, no subject plan of quality, has no structure to provide CPD for the teachers nor has it good arrangements in place to encourage teachers to teach the subject.

The care given to the students is of a very high quality. The pastoral care system is strongly rooted in the middle-management structure and in the organisation of classes. A student support team was established recently. The weekly meeting of the year heads with senior management has some weaknesses in that two yeargroups are not represented.

A Guidance and Counselling service is provided which goes far beyond what it is provided for it on the timetable. It is clearly evident that parents and students appreciate this very much. Expert knowledge of special needs education is being developed under two appropriately qualified teachers. It would be worthwhile to identify supports to be made available to the high-achieving students as well.

The school's curriculum has a wide subject programme and the content and management of the Transition Year is widely appreciated. There is a need, nonetheless, to review curriculum provision. For example, Technology is made available to Junior Certificate level only. Other practical subjects are missing. It would be worthwhile to investigate the advantages of offering the Vocational Leaving Certificate Programme.

The strong positive spirit and good healthy atmosphere which prevail between the students and the teachers are a great positive point for the school, thanks to the wide range of extra-curricular events which are available as a result of the voluntary work the teachers do.

It was confirmed that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools* without change or amendment, and that the school's practice is in agreement with what is required in the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post Primary Schools*.

1.3 Management of facilities

The school is situated on a pleasant site. There is a very good link between the school and the local sports association and they share each other's resources. Sports have a prominent place in the school.

The school site is kept clean. The building is being renovated on a continuous basis and the parents' committee has helped a lot to renovate the Home Economics resources. It would be worthwhile to increase efforts to create an exciting learning environment in the

classrooms and the corridors. It is recommended to speed up the efforts to use the library more to benefit learning.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The evaluation involved twenty class periods, and a selection of lessons that included a range of subjects in each yeargroup. The teaching and learning was of good or high quality in the majority of lessons observed and there were considerable strengths obvious in some of those lessons; it was felt that there was scope for development in a small number of others, one lesson out of every four visited. The ICT resources were put to beneficial use in the majority of lessons and handouts were prepared in many cases to enhance learning. Handouts distributed in a senior class made for a challenging revision and were of a special quality.

There were long-term and short-term collaborative plans available from all subject departments. A certain number of them were looked at which were chosen at random. Some were connected with the lessons visited and some were not. A lot of variety was noted with regard to quality – some were very good but some others had a lot of room for improvement.

In the best plans specific learning aims were set out for each year group and they contained a description of the teaching methods, resources and of assessment matters. They contained evidence of the teachers reflecting on the outcomes of teaching and learning and that planning for improvement and development was underway. Some of the plans looked at were deficient enough in regard to these same details. It is recommended to agree a common approach to subject planning in the school and to make use of a common planning template.

In the majority of classes the students' attention was, to begin with, directed to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The objectives could be read on a whiteboard. The best approach was seen in those cases where the learning outcomes were typed out beforehand and shown on the screen, because this meant a lot of time was saved. Another positive thing about these was that the learning outcomes were communicated in an accessible way like 'I will be able to do a, b, c by the end of this lesson.'

In certain cases the learning outcomes communicated were too general or they were not distinguished from the topic to be dealt with. In some other lessons the learning outcomes were not set out at all. Careful lesson management so that the learning outcomes can be revisited before the end of the lesson in order to assess the progress made is an aspect that needs to be developed.

Traditional methodologies and more active approaches in learning were practised and at times there was a mixture of the two methods used effectively. Under traditional methods is understood that the teacher is central in the lesson, distributing the knowledge, acting as questioner to ascertain the understanding of the students while the learner has a passive role in the process.

In a senior lesson students gave a presentation in pairs about the qualities of marketing strategies of large well-known companies. The teacher remained on the sideline and effectively directed the presentations through encouraging the listeners to ask questions of the presenters. The students were filling in a very good assessment form about the quality of the presentations in the meantime as feedback for the presenters and as support for the

development of their own critical skills. The teacher was the participant with the smallest input in the lesson but with the biggest influence.

In another case the students' experience with active learning methods was evident from their ability and self-confidence to do effective role play and to assess the quality of their peers' work. It is recommended to take the students' participation in learning and the nurturing of their critical awareness into account as much as possible.

The most productive lessons contained good questioning methods which forced the students to look for gaps in the knowledge and to close them. This cooperative learning or working in pairs or in groups was a great assist to this approach. There were smooth transitions in the best lessons from such an approach to the compilation and consolidation of the most important part of the information. It is recommended to take care when doing group work in order to avoid a duplication of students' work. Each student should be assigned a task within the group work.

Among the areas for development identified in the practice in certain lessons was that too much content was laid out for the lesson, a lack of variety in the learning events, limited opportunities for the students to speak, copying material from the board into copybooks without any function attached to it, and limited differentiation being practised. It would be worthwhile to focus more on the students' prior learning, on reinforcement of what has been learned, on keywords, on assessment-for-learning practices and on recognition and constructive written guidance for the work in copybooks. In a language class in particular there was a need to do far more examination of words. As well as that a dictionary should be available in the lesson.

The inaccuracy in spoken Irish that was noted during the evaluation is an area that needs improvement, especially in view of the diligence put into the whole school policy regarding literacy development. Attention to correct language use by students and teachers is essential, otherwise the literacy policy cannot bear fruit.

The subject departments have made a start with analysing attainment data in the certificate examinations and with comparing them with the national norms. In order to make the most of that analysis it is recommended to add comments to the results and, where there is room for improvement, to set out the aims as part of the overall strategy of the subject department.

Although the students' attainment in the certificate examinations and the high transition rate to level seven and eight courses are satisfactory overall an analysis of Leaving Certificate results showed that it would be worthwhile to focus on a strategy to improve the proportion of students who achieve grades A, B and C in certain subjects, especially at higher level, in comparison with the average national data.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Reports of four subject inspections were issued to the school. The board of management has accepted each one of the reports to date without expressing an opinion on the findings or the recommendations made in the reports. The board is urged to consider providing a school response to reports from now on.

3.2 Learning and Teaching

The subject departments that were the focus of the inspections have paid a lot of attention to implementing the recommendations and an account of that can be read in the relevant subject plans. It is commendable too, that a presentation for the whole staff on the report recommendations is a standard procedure in order to identify common themes. Some of the recommendations remain to be implemented as a standard procedure as was clear in some of the lessons visited.

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

The process of School Self-Evaluation (SSE) is in its beginnings and it is an aspect that needs to be developed. The openness which was obvious amongst the teachers regarding the recommendations for improvement in the feedback meetings with the inspectors was a positive sign of the school's capacity to improve. It is clear that the teachers welcome leadership that targets improvement.

The first attempt at SSE, which is at step four in the six-step process, relates to improving the students' literacy in Irish. In the preliminary work for the School Improvement Plan report the focus was on the learning experience and achievement of the first year students and on teaching practices. All this work is beneficial as open dialogue about practices.

It is good that a programme for continuous professional development of staff in teaching and learning methods has been identified. With regard to the need for improving the students' language awareness and accuracy in Irish, this should be addressed with sensitivity in view of what was mentioned earlier about accuracy of Irish amongst both staff and students.

The results of the survey of the students' commitment to speaking Irish habitually showed a certain apathy regarding this issue. This is absolutely crucial in as far as the main objective of the school is concerned. Positive strategies should be implemented in preference to sanctions, and guidance in sharing this aim with the students rather than enforcing it.

Appendix

School Response to the Report

submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board and school community were particularly pleased at the following points identified by the inspectors:

1. The good or high quality of teaching and learning in the majority of the lessons.
2. Positive aspects noted regarding the effectiveness of leadership for learning:
 - a. the desire of senior management to provide the best quality teaching and learning
 - b. the analysis of attainment in certificate examinations
 - c. the attention paid to the recommendations of subject inspection reports
 - d. the board's support for continuing professional development at the level of the subject departments
 - e. certain teachers have completed further postgraduate qualifications
 - f. staff are being trained in the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) resource
 - g. the teachers' enthusiasm and self-motivation in the students' interest
 - h. extra certificate examination classes being provided in the teachers' own time.
3. The high quality of student care.
4. The pastoral care system that is strongly rooted in the middle-management structure and in the organisation of classes.
5. The student support team.
6. The Guidance and Counselling service provided which goes far beyond what it is provided for it on the timetable.
7. Expertise in special educational needs.
8. A wide range of subjects on the school curriculum.
9. Regard for the content and management of the Transition Year programme.
10. The strong spirit and healthy good atmosphere that is in the school.
11. The wide range of extra-curricular events which are available as a result of the teachers' voluntary work.
12. The very active parents' association in the school.

Lessons

13. Beneficial use made of ICT resources in lessons.
14. Prepared handouts that enhanced learning.

15. Traditional methodologies and more active approaches in learning and the two methods used effectively.
16. Teachers reflecting on the outcomes of teaching and learning.
17. Good questioning strategies in lessons.
18. Presentation to the whole staff on subject inspection report recommendations as standard procedure in order to identify common themes.
19. The openness which was obvious amongst the teachers regarding the recommendations for improvement in the feedback meetings with the inspectors.

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

1. The board of management has set out a schedule for review and evaluation of policies and of the main aspects of the school. A development plan has commenced.
2. Input from parents and students regarding a review of the Code of Behaviour was sought in June 2014.
3. A meeting between the members of the Board, the Student Council and the Parents' Committee will be convened in November 2014.
4. A common approach to subject planning in the school has been agreed since September 2014.
5. The school's Mission Statement will be reviewed before Easter. Input will be sought from all the educational partners.
6. A professional dialogue will be scheduled at the end of the year between holders of posts of responsibility and senior management and the former will be asked to prepare a report on their posts. A template has been agreed for this purpose.
7. A planning committee has been formed to promote the development of teaching and learning.
8. A staff inservice course on assessment for learning was held in August 2014.
9. A system for observation of classes to be operational after the mid-term 2014.
10. Work has commenced on the preparation of a staff handbook as well as a formal policy on the induction of new teachers.
11. A planning committee has been formed to organise and develop Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). Two teachers have attended a two-day inservice course organised by PDST and a new plan will be developed this year.
12. The improvement plan objectives for this year are:
 - a. To improve Irish language accuracy among the students and teachers
 - b. Providing more frequent opportunities for students to speak in lessons

13. Attempts are underway to organise positive events aimed at encouraging the speaking of Irish in the school e.g. a video competition.
14. The analysis of certificate examinations will be advanced. In any school, however, where there are students with an aptitude above national norms, the examination results should also be above the national norms. Our results will be compared to national norms but the results of entrance assessment tests will also be taken into account and written observations will have regard to our students' context.
15. We will address the other recommendations as soon as we can.