

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**O'Connell Secondary School
North Richmond Street, Dublin 1
Roll number: 60440R**

Date of inspection: 7 February 2013



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
AGUS SCILEANNA** | **DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
AND SKILLS**
INSPECTORATE

Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in February 2013 in O'Connell 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. 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

O'Connell Secondary School, located in Dublin's north inner city, is a member of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST) and has a long tradition of providing education for boys. Its immediate catchment area has seen enormous demographic change over recent years. O'Connell School has a diverse population of 358 students. A significant minority do not have English as their mother tongue. The school participates in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion and benefits from additional allocations in consequence. The school provides a co-educational, one-year repeat Leaving Certificate programme.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The school is supported by the board of management and trustees.
- The care team is an effective structure and some positive elements are noted in care and supports for students.
- The code of behaviour has been recently and effectively reviewed but issues remain regarding consistent implementation.
- Improvements are ongoing in the development of accommodation and infrastructure.
- The quality of learning and teaching ranged from good to very good in just over half of the lessons observed; in a small minority of cases, exemplary practice was observed; however, in a number of lessons, there is scope for development in teaching and learning.
- Management of students in areas such as curriculum provision, planning to support improvement in teaching and learning, DEIS planning, literacy and numeracy and student supervision requires immediate attention.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board of management should ensure that the DEIS planning process is robust; there should be systematic policy development and review processes; communications with all stakeholders should be improved, and appropriate consultation should take place.
- Senior management should establish working groups to execute the board's priorities; evaluation of progress should be recorded and reviewed by the board; instructional leadership should address the school's capacity to deal with the needs

of a changing and diverse student cohort; an ongoing programme of continuing professional development (CPD) should be provided for staff in a range of areas.

- All aspects of curriculum provision should be reviewed to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all students; timetabling, teaching and other resources should be equitably distributed.
- All procedures in relation to supervision of students should be rigorously followed; the code of behaviour should be consistently implemented by all staff; the role of form teachers and year heads should be reviewed.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is appropriately constituted and enjoys the full support of the trustees. It is very loyal to the school.

Some aspects of the board's role and responsibilities are understood by its members but there is considerable scope for development in order to fully discharge the obligations of the board under the Education Act 1998. It is recommended that all board members receive training at the earliest opportunity.

The board's developmental priorities are broadly in line with the prescribed DEIS planning areas of attendance, retention, progression, literacy and numeracy, examination attainment and partnership with parents and the community. A further priority is infrastructural improvement. The board's vision for the future of O'Connell Secondary School is a dynamic, community-based school of first choice for its catchment area. In this context, the board should consider the demands made by the repeat year on school resources.

Significant weaknesses were identified in the DEIS planning process. The board has not ratified the current plan and systematic procedures for the evaluation of any previous DEIS plan were not in evidence during the evaluation. It is strongly recommended that the board ensures that all aspects of DEIS planning are fully implemented; targets should be set based on the collection and analysis of baseline data; strategies should be devised grounded in that analysis; implementation and evaluation by senior management and staff should be monitored by the board.

The board has adopted mandatory policies. However, whole-school systems for policy development and review need to be established. The board should ensure that a broad range of mechanisms is developed to communicate and consult effectively with all stakeholders. A website is to be developed and this is positive. It is recommended that this be prioritised as an effective means of communicating with all stakeholders.

Currently, the school has no parents' association. A first-year parent group has been established. The board should encourage this initiative.

A student council is established. Some positive developments are reported. The council should be facilitated in becoming involved in a broader range of school activities. It should receive training for its role.

The school should take full cognisance of the views of the students and parents in the community it serves; key messages gleaned from the survey of parents and students should be carefully considered to enhance the experience of learners.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal take responsibility for day-to-day management. Communication is good and both are committed to the school. Respective roles should be clearly defined, separate responsibilities agreed and formal meeting time set aside for strategic planning.

Communication between school and home is good on the whole. The school journal has recently been redesigned and this is positive. The potential of the journal as an effective medium of communication should be fully exploited.

Leadership roles are distributed and post holders feel empowered. Roles and responsibilities are appropriate in most cases. Some roles do not match the school's developmental priorities. Review should take place to more closely align the school's current needs to the post structure. The exercising of duties attached to a number of roles needs to improve to be fully effective. The board should take steps to ensure that the post schedule is effective in supporting the achievement of school priorities and, in this context, post holders could be asked to prepare progress reports on their work on an annual basis.

Senior management should establish working groups and lead the development of action plans to deliver the board's developmental priorities. Currently there is no literacy or numeracy link person as per circular 0025/2012 so that training has not been accessed. Literacy strategies are being implemented. Whole-school, cross-curricular literacy and numeracy teams should be established to strengthen DEIS planning practice.

Inadequate strategic planning for staff deployment over many years is impacting negatively on curriculum provision. There is an oversupply of teachers in some curricular areas while there are severe shortages in others. The school has currently more than four teachers over quota. While most teachers are deployed in line with their qualifications, a number are not. It is strongly recommended that strategic planning for future deployment and recruitment prioritise the needs of all learners.

Significant weaknesses have been identified in timetabling and in the allocation of the teaching resources made available to the school. It is strongly recommended that all matters in relation to timetabling be reviewed to ensure clarity and equity. Teaching resources should be used for their intended purpose to improve learner outcomes for all students and to derive maximum benefit from allocated resources.

School management should address the school's capacity to deal with the needs of a changing and diverse student cohort. Whole-staff CPD has been accessed in areas related to student behaviour through the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) and Health Service Executive. An ongoing programme of in-school CPD should be provided in areas such as mixed-ability teaching with a focus on differentiation, collaborative learning, assessment for learning (AfL) and English as an additional language (EAL) methodologies. Other teaching and learning areas that have the potential to improve the student learning experience should be identified for attention subsequently.

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*. It is recommended that parents and students be fully apprised of the school's Child Protection policy and procedures.

The school provides instruction in line with circular M29/95. Time for subjects is in line with syllabus guidelines. The organisation of the school day should be reviewed to

optimise learning for all students. The value of half-hour class periods is questionable and should be reviewed.

The design of the curriculum does not support inclusive practice and there is evidence of inequity in provision. Critical factors are staff deployment and shortages and the school prioritises the needs of students in the repeat year.

The school provides all Department of Education and Skills (DES) post-primary programmes, including Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). However, not all students have access, as appropriate, to these. The operation of programmes is not optimal. The LCVP has many advantages but is compulsory for mainstream students; this restricts subject choice and determines curriculum design for all. There was no uptake of the LCA programme in the current fifth year. There is scope to enhance the breadth and balance of the LCA programme offered at sixth-year level. All junior cycle students are placed in the JCSP. Use of learning statements was not in evidence and this requires review. A programme co-ordinator administers all available programmes. It is recommended that discrete co-ordinators for the LCVP, JCSP and the LCA programme be assigned to manage and develop the programmes with a focus on innovation, professional development of staff and review.

A wide variety of subjects is available but is not provided for all students. There are concerns about the suitability of the curriculum for mainstream students, especially those in the junior cycle. The rationale for making some subjects compulsory is not student centred. There is limited provision of practical subjects.

It is commendable that the school is attempting to enrich the curriculum by introducing a second European language to first year. There is a lack of subject continuity in some subjects between junior cycle and senior cycle and this needs to be reviewed. Commendably, the curriculum was broadened for some junior cycle students to include music appreciation. All students have access to Physical Education.

There are a number of significant weaknesses in curricular provision for some students whose mother tongue is not English. Two discrete groups, an induction class and a progression class, have been established. Students in both groups have a restricted curriculum. It is recommended that a broad and balanced curriculum be provided for the induction group. A stepped approach to full integration should be followed. Additional supports should be put in place where relevant. It is strongly recommended that the practice of forming a progression group be discontinued from next year as it is not in line with the good practice referenced in the DES Report, *Looking at English as an Additional Language* (2012). Aspects of English language teaching have a number of weaknesses. It is recommended that all aspects of English language teaching be reviewed.

Commendably, some EAL students take their mother tongue as an examination subject in the Leaving Certificate. More needs to be done to ensure EAL students are reaching their full potential. The *Post-primary Assessment Kit* should be used to provide initial and ongoing assessment of students' English language proficiency, as recommended in the EAL report.

It is strongly recommended that all aspects of curriculum provision be reviewed and the needs of all learners be placed at the heart of this process.

The admissions policy is open and transparent. It is positive that almost all parents surveyed agreed that enrolment procedures were clear, however, there needs to be more clarity regarding the nature of voluntary contributions.

While the majority of students attend regularly, there is evidence of very poor attendance in some cases. Good tracking systems have been introduced. Commendably, the school acknowledges good attendance through an award system. A more targeted, data-based strategy is needed for those with identified patterns of poor behaviour. The attendance group has the potential to be effective. It is recommended that the post-holder assume a strategic leadership role to improve outcomes.

The school has a pastoral care system. The care team is an effective structure. There is a good first-year induction programme. The role of students as mentors is commended. Further areas of responsibility should be entrusted to students to develop leadership. Some good supports for EAL students are noted.

The roles of form teachers and year heads should be reviewed. Some individual year heads adopt good practices but there is no systemic approach. Formal timetabled weekly year head meetings should be held with senior management. Effective practices in the areas of student management and motivation should be agreed and consistently implemented. The repeat year head has five administrative periods per week. This provision could be more equitably distributed in recognition of the work of all year heads. Form teachers should meet individual class groups to develop meaningful relationships. A formal pastoral care programme of learning should be devised and implemented by all form teachers. Year heads should meet form teachers occasionally to ensure consistency in care and management practices.

The code of student behaviour has been recently and effectively reviewed. The senior management team encouraged the formation of the group that worked both independently and in conjunction with the NBSS. This initiative illustrates some capacity to engage in school improvement processes. However, the implementation of the code is inconsistent and there are unacceptable practices. A minority of students surveyed considered behaviour to be good. The code of behaviour should be implemented by all staff and agreed sanctions enforced. The effectiveness of detention as a deterrent should be evaluated. The school should explore Restorative Justice Practice as there is a perception among a number of students surveyed that they are not treated fairly. A Behaviour for Learning classroom operates in the school under the aegis of the NBSS.

Evidence from school documentation and observation during the evaluation indicates significant weaknesses in the quality of student supervision. The responses of a significant minority of students surveyed in relation to their safety and care indicate that school policies and practices in these areas require urgent attention. School supervision procedures should be fully implemented by all teachers.

Guidance classes are provided to senior cycle students. There is a limited counselling service and good links with outside agencies. A Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme is provided in the junior cycle. There is scope to enhance the breadth and balance of the senior cycle Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme. It is recommended that an effective RSE programme be fully implemented.

Learning support is good in a number of areas. Plans for individual students have been developed and progress is being tracked. Team teaching is not operating optimally in the school and should be reviewed.

1.3 Management of facilities

The school has improved resources, in particular, information and communication technology (ICT). The library is under development. An all-weather pitch has enhanced

sports provision. The faith centre demonstrates the school's respect for other beliefs. The student canteen implements a healthy eating policy.

Ongoing refurbishment needs to deal with identified issues. Consideration should be given to the provision of lockers for all students; currently, only the repeat year students have this facility. It is positive that mainstream students have access to after-school study provided for repeat students.

Immediate action needs to be taken in a number of health and safety areas; a fire drill should be carried out; the health and safety statement should be reviewed annually and clearly (and regularly) communicated to all staff, visitors and students. The woodwork room is in significant need of refurbishment. It is recommended that the *Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools* be used to inform the monitoring and management of all health and safety matters in the school.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Examination attainment strategies as set out in the school's DEIS plan have significant weaknesses and these need to be addressed. No subject plan referenced the DEIS plan and there was no evidence of data collection and analysis. It is recommended that all subject teams explicitly target attainment for improvement linked to the reviewed DEIS plan and that teaching and learning strategies be documented and regularly reviewed in the subject plans. The board and the senior management team should monitor progress.

Junior cycle outcomes indicate some positive trends in a few subject areas. For example, in Maths, fewer students are taking foundation level over a four-year period. Some favourable trends are also noted in higher-level uptake of Science, Geography and Business.

Good practice was identified in a small number of subject plans in which an outcomes-based approach and clear programmes of learning were documented. A few subject plans were of poor quality. Good quality plans could be used as a model for all planning.

The quality of learning and teaching ranged from good to very good in just over half of the classes visited; in a small minority of cases, exemplary practice was observed; however, in a number of lessons, there is scope for development in teaching and learning.

Preparation for lessons was good in most cases and very good in a few. Some lessons were well structured to maximise learning. Structure and pace need to be reviewed in a small number of cases.

Teachers announced the learning intention at the start of many lessons and this is positive. The very good practice of sharing learning outcomes was observed in a small number. It is recommended that learning outcomes be written on the board at the start of lessons. Review should take place at the end of lessons to ensure these have been achieved.

Many lessons were teacher-led; a balance between teacher and student input should be maintained. Collaborative learning was observed in a very small number of lessons where good practice developed higher-order thinking and oral communication skills. It is recommended that collaborative learning strategies be implemented in all lessons.

Some good examples of higher-order questioning and the encouragement of investigative approaches were observed in a minority of lessons. In general, questioning strategies should be reviewed to achieve a balance between global and targeted questioning.

It is strongly recommended that differentiation be fully integrated into all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment to scaffold weaker students and challenge the more able.

ICT resources were used in many lessons. Effective use was noted in a small number. The full scope of ICT should be explored as teachers' confidence and skills develop.

There was evidence of good approaches to improve literacy and numeracy in some lessons but considerable scope for development in many.

Classroom interactions were positive in most cases and students were encouraged and affirmed. In a small number of cases, teachers did not move around the room sufficiently to monitor learning.

Commendably, the individual learning plans of students were used by a small number of teachers and this good practice should be extended.

Assessment practices had more weaknesses than strengths and significant weaknesses in some instances. AfL principles should inform classroom practice. Written teacher feedback should direct learning. An acceptance of lower standards of work or no work was evident in some lessons. While homework is set regularly in some subject areas, it is not set at all, or rarely, in others. Subject departments and teachers should address this issue. Oral and aural assessment, where relevant, should be integrated into in-house examinations. All aspects of teaching, learning and assessment should focus on raising student expectations.

The quality of record keeping varied. It is recommended that consistent practice be agreed and implemented so that an accurate picture of student progress in learning is recorded.

Use of the classroom to create a stimulating learning environment was good in a small number of cases and fair overall. No evidence was noted in a few. It is recommended that all teachers fully exploit the classroom space as an additional learning resource.

It is reported that students have access to co-curricular and extracurricular activities to enhance learning. This is commendable.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Some progress has been made in the implementation of recommendations from previous reports in the area of management.

3.2 Learning and teaching

The implementation of recommendations in the areas of learning and teaching is inconsistent. The integration of ICT into teaching and learning has improved. Some improvement in questioning strategies was noted. Insufficient progress has been made in relation to raising student expectations in a strategic way, use of data analysis, promotion of collaborative learning, deployment of strategies to improve literacy and assessment practice.

While the school encourages sharing of learning from evaluations, there is no evidence that this leads to action across all subject departments. More robust whole-school systems are needed. The board of management should ask for formal responses to evaluation reports and outcomes from incidental inspections.

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

The work of the code of behaviour review group provides an example of engagement in school self-evaluation and review. Positive trends in some subject areas also augur well. However, there are significant areas for development. The school plan consists of a large number of policies that did not emerge from an organic planning system. More than half of the students and parents surveyed did not know or agree that their views were sought by the school. The school in general lacks enabling and review structures. The views of staff are gathered largely through the ineffective mechanism of infrequent staff meetings where no coherent agenda to improve the student learning experience emerges. The school's management, including board, senior management, post holders and staff need to share responsibility and collectively address weaknesses highlighted in this report to bring about school improvement. It is essential that a vision for change be shared and implemented by all stakeholders.

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 and Staff of O'Connell Secondary School acknowledge receipt of the WSE-MLL Report. It is always good to see the positive side of our school community highlighted, and to listen to constructive criticism of our unique school community.

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

As a school community we are most satisfied with the on-going actions taken by individual teachers, subject departments and school management to add to our positive school environment, to address issues identified in the report and to continue the process of fulfilling its positive recommendations. To date the school has, among others, addressed the following issues:

- DEIS Planning is now a kernel feature of the school
- Changes have been made to curriculum provision in both senior and junior cycle
- Planning to support improvements in teaching and learning is on-going
- Literacy and numeracy targets have been discussed and formalised
- Literacy and numeracy link personnel have been appointed
- The Board of Management have been up-skilled and obtained training in a number of significant areas
- Systematic policy development and review systems are being implemented
- Staff CPD has already taken place in mixed ability teaching with a focus on differentiation and a session on AfL is planned
- Timetabling software has been upgraded and staff appropriately trained in its use
- The roles of form-teachers and year-heads have been clarified and agreed
- A staff hand-book has been developed and distributed
- Resource deployment issues have been carefully looked at in all areas of the school
- The school website is up and running and all classes periods are at least 35 minutes in duration, with some at 40 minutes
- Materials Technology Wood is now being offered at Junior Cycle level
- Student attendance issues are now being monitored more regularly
- SPHE, including RSE, is now a part of the senior cycle programme in the school
- Lockers are now available for all students
- The Woodwork Room is due to be refurbished during this school year, 2013-14
- A fire drill exercise is planned each term
- Subject plans are constantly being reviewed

The entire school community is pleased to confirm that all recommendations are currently being implemented.