

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

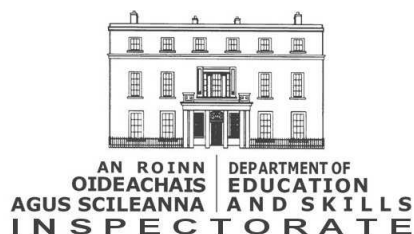
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Flannan's College
Ennis, County Clare
Roll number: 61920N**

Date of inspection: 7 March 2013



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in March, 2013 in Saint Flannan's College. 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Introduction

St Flannan's is a voluntary secondary school under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Killaloe. Its origins which have been traced to the mid-nineteenth century show that it became the diocesan college in the third quarter of that century. More recent developments include the ending of boarding and the introduction of co-education. With an enrolment of 1242, one-third of whom are female, the school now provides a broad curriculum for boys and girls, principally from Ennis and surrounding areas of Clare. The Transition Year programme (TY) is provided on an optional basis.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management provides structures that ensure effective provision for education in the school.
- Senior management works as a united and cohesive team providing clear leadership for improvement.
- Staff members demonstrate a strong sense of ownership and commitment to the school.
- Leadership is distributed effectively with staff members entrusted with responsibility for a range of essential school tasks.
- The parents' association is active and committed though there is scope to formalise its involvement in school planning.
- Development priorities are clearly identified by the board and the school while the opportunity exists to detail how they are to be achieved in a more rigorous developmental section in the school plan.
- Arrangements around subject choice, curriculum and programme choice are good although consideration should be given to increasing the number of places in Transition Year (TY) to meet student interest in the programme.
- While enrolment practice is based on principles of fairness and openness; the written policy needs to express more fully the application of this practice for students with additional educational needs.
- The special educational needs department is very well organised and it functions effectively.
- The code of behaviour is positive in tone and generally well structured.

- Practice in relation to student care is very good.
- Learning was good or very good in almost all lessons observed.
- In all but a small number of lessons, the quality of teaching was good or very good.
- There was good implementation of the principles of assessment for learning (AfL) in general.

Recommendations for Further Development

- A written whole-school guidance plan should be developed.
- Strategic planning to address school priorities should include specific action plans which are linked to the developmental section of the school plan.
- The duties attached to posts of responsibility should be fundamentally reviewed and this should be done in a collaborative way.
- Elections to the student council should be organised and its role in the formal life of the school should be further enhanced.
- The written enrolment policy should reflect more precisely practice with regard to the enrolment of students with additional educational needs.
- Written formative feedback by teachers on students' work should be further developed in a significant number of cases.
- All teachers should ensure that they use a wide enough range of teaching approaches, differentiating their teaching to provide a level of challenge to suit individual students' needs.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is properly constituted and comprises four patron's nominees, one of whom is the chairperson, two parent and two staff nominees. The board, which began its three-year term in November 2011, works in a coherent manner and is collaborative in its deliberation and decision-making. The board benefits from regular contact, particularly through its chairperson, with the trustees, a five-member body appointed by the patron. An annual report is furnished to the trustees by the board. These structures provide the necessary organisation and communication to ensure effective provision of education in the school.

The members of the board are aware of their responsibilities and fulfil their roles effectively in the best interests of the school community. The board has adopted a range of policies including most of those required by the Department of Education and Skills. However, there is a requirement to provide a whole-school guidance plan to meet the requirements of Section 9(c) of the Education Act 1998 as covered by Circular Letter M37/03. The existing school document, *Guidance and Counselling Overview*, will be of use as a starting point in the further development of the school guidance plan.

Subsequent to each meeting of the board, an agreed report is delivered to staff and to the parents' association. The process of reporting, particularly to the parents' association, should be made more formal with a written report, agreed by the chairperson and those present, prepared routinely at the conclusion, rather than after, each meeting.

The parents' association is active and good communications are maintained with senior management. Formality should be increased in some aspects of the parents' association, such as clear delineation between meetings of the representative executive and general meetings to which all parents are invited. In light of the board's priorities, this is an opportune time to increase the parents' association's involvement in structured review of

school policy. Liaison between the policy committee co-ordinator and the executive of the parents' association should be used to further develop the role of the parents' association in policy development and review.

The board gives high priority to ensuring its own operation is effective and that the school has a clear vision, mission and strategic direction. The board undertakes to ensure that all legal and regulatory requirements are met and that governance is of the highest possible standard. Its immediate development priorities include the review of in-school management structures and functions and the structured review of school policies. Both of these are urgently needed to meet the challenges being met by the school. Plans for the achievement of the development priorities should be detailed in a more rigorous developmental section of the school plan.

The board, through its policy sub-committee, is undertaking a systematic review of all existing policies in a sustainable and timely manner. The review will conclude at the end of the 2014 school year with a review of the role and performance of the board itself. This is in line with good planning practice. All policies will be formally ratified and dated as part of this process and dates for future review will be inserted in each policy. Particular attention should be paid to full involvement of the parents' association and, as appropriate, the student council in the process of policy review.

The school's internal policy committee is representative of staff and management and functions efficiently with the school planning and development co-ordinator as its chairperson. The particular co-ordination functions of the policy committee should be prioritised over hands-on writing of policy or other involvement in school administration. The planning and policy development work, being undertaken by staff, parents, students and the board, will need careful co-ordination if targets are to be met while assuring full involvement of each body.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and two deputy principals work very well together as a united and cohesive senior management team. Duties are rationally, evenly and transparently distributed to provide very good leadership for middle management and the whole school. The deputy principals take particular responsibility for the co-ordination of the year-head structure, one for the junior-cycle or the other for the senior-cycle classes. This division provides opportunities for more efficient meetings of year heads on a regular basis. There are two year heads appointed to each year group, each taking responsibility for half the cohort. Leadership is thus distributed through the year heads and provides a commendable emphasis on the achievement of the school's vision, particularly with regard to the quality of learning.

School management drives improvement in learning and teaching. The senior management team is committed to achieving the highest standards in its own work and thus provides clear leadership for improvement among the staff as a whole. There is a strong sense of ownership among staff, many of whom have had a long association with the school. This sense of ownership is strengthened by management's interaction which is respectful and appreciative of professional and personal commitment.

The distribution of additional tasks and responsibilities, often undertaken on a voluntary basis, shows the staff's commendable commitment to the vision of the school. It is noted that in some instances teachers have continued to perform duties that previously were attached to posts of responsibility. The current post of responsibility duties have been, in

many cases, in place since the review and rationalisation of the post structure took place in 2008. There have been many changes in staff and in post allocations since then. Also, the needs of the school have changed. The duties attached to posts of responsibility should be reviewed fundamentally as a matter of urgency, beginning with a review of the vital requirements of the school, particularly those that impact most directly on students' needs. It is important that the whole staff be fully engaged in this review process and that decisions be made collaboratively to the greatest extent possible.

The curriculum is broad and balanced. The generous provision of co-curricular and extracurricular activities, predominantly overseen voluntarily by staff, is a significant positive addition to the students' experience and broad education. The procedures around subject choice are fair and transparent and are admirably flexible, when appropriate, where students wish to change their chosen options. There is a clear commitment to students' needs in the provision of subjects and programmes. The optional TY is well developed and is limited to two class groups, about one-fifth of the year cohort. While constraints such as staffing and school size are acknowledged, student demand for the programme indicates that consideration should be given to increasing the number of places available.

The timetable meets the requirements for instructional time as outlined in Circular Letter M29/95. The time allocated for the teaching of each subject is in line with the requirements of the respective syllabuses.

Enrolment practice is based on principles of fairness and openness and, in line with the vision and characteristic spirit of the school, embraces equality, diversity and inclusiveness. It is recommended, however, that the written policy reflect this practice more precisely with regard to the enrolment of students with additional educational needs. There is a need to state, for example, that any extra supports needed for a student will be sought on behalf of the student following enrolment.

Each first-year class has a class tutor. The class-tutor structure is valuable as a means of supporting students, strengthening and distributing the student-support role of the year head. It is planned by senior management to develop this structure in successive years as the current first-year cohort progresses through the school. This is a positive development to enhance support for students and to further facilitate the effectiveness of year heads.

The student council is supported by management and has a liaison teacher assigned who is fully engaged and experienced in the role. However, the present members of the student council have been co-opted rather than elected by their peers. All necessary measures should be taken to restore students' interest and to organise elections, preferably as part of Civic, Social, and Political Education (CSPE), as has been the case in the past. The role of the student council in the life of the school should then be further enhanced. Closer contact with the structures of leadership and development, including the board and the policy committee, should be used to facilitate more formal student council involvement in policy development and review.

There are well-developed procedures for recording and notifying student absences and to encourage attendance and retention. The school follows up appropriately on the small number of students whose attendance rates are poor. The code of behaviour is positive in tone and generally well structured. The section of the code dealing with student suspension and expulsion should be reviewed to provide more clarity and certainty around the procedures involved.

Practice in relation to guidance, counselling and student support generally is very good. However, there is an urgent need to provide clarity regarding the interaction and overlap

between the various elements of the student support structure in the school. This should be addressed through the development of the whole-school guidance plan.

The special educational needs department is very well organised and effective with a dedicated team that meets weekly. The team works collaboratively and proactively to develop very good supports for students. While there are no timetabled meetings for overall student support, it is commended that year heads in each half of the school meet regularly with the respective deputy principal to whom they report. The possibility of provision for more formal student support team meetings should be investigated.

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 facilities and school environs are managed to a very high standard. The health and safety statement has been completed with professional assistance within the past year and is up to date. The school should make use of the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) guidelines and documentation, including the risk-assessment templates, to make provision for annual safety audits.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

In all but a small number of lessons, the quality of teaching was good or very good. Notwithstanding this, there was significant scope for development in a few lessons. Preparation for teaching was good to very good in almost all lessons. Where best planning and preparation practice was observed, lessons were well structured and suitably paced and responded accurately to the range of student ability. In general, however, the final stage of lesson development, which typically includes a recapitulation of the lesson to ensure reinforcement and consolidation of the learning undertaken, needed to be further developed. In more than half the lessons observed a range of methodologies was used that suited the content of the lesson. In a significant minority of lessons a greater diversity of approaches should have been used.

Some good use of information and communication technology (ICT) was observed, generally when it was employed for teacher presentations. In some instances it was used more intensively to dynamically support and reinforce learning. In general, subject departments should develop further strategies for more effective integration of ICT in the classroom.

The good level of differentiation observed in a small number of lessons provided appropriate challenge for students. This is an area that needs further development across the school and it can be supported by providing increased opportunities for pair work or small-group work to encourage collaborative work among students. Some excellent examples of active learning were observed where activities were carefully prepared and implemented.

In some cases a better balance needed to be struck between teacher-led approaches and student activity in lessons. However, in some instances where lessons were teacher-led,

effective usage of differentiated questioning was observed which included good examples of effective higher-order questioning.

One instance of team teaching was observed. This worked very well. Such an approach can have benefits for students in many subject areas and in the area of learning support for students' additional educational needs. Team teaching should be further explored and implemented more widely taking all factors into account, including staffing constraints.

A very good standard, in particular, of language teaching and learning was observed. The use of target languages in all language lessons was very good. Classroom management was of a very high standard throughout, including smooth and effective selection of students for group activities and classroom organisation for active learning

Learning was well monitored. Students were affirmed and encouraged through good implementation of the principles of assessment for learning (AfL), primarily in verbal communication between teachers and students. There was, however, substantial scope for improvement with regard to written formative feedback on students' work in a significant number of cases. This is an area that merits further investigation and development at whole-school level.

Learning intentions were shared with students in the majority of lessons and this supported the students' monitoring of their own learning. Good work is being undertaken by staff on the development of continuous assessment practices across the curriculum. Particular account should be taken of the range of learning to be assessed in individual subjects, using a sufficiently wide range of assessment modes.

The school's physical learning environment is well-maintained, neat, tidy and comfortable throughout with good access to equipment and materials. Where students' work and subject-related materials were displayed in classrooms learning was further facilitated. However, in some cases the opportunity to develop a print-rich environment had not been taken. There is scope for further development in this area.

Teachers generally communicated high expectations of students' learning, but in a small number of lessons the level of challenge presented should have been greater. Students in general remained engaged and motivated. In the majority of lessons students were seen to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Where given opportunities to reflect and contribute, students showed a high degree of understanding and knowledge. Very good learning was seen where students' autonomy was given scope for development.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

There is evidence of action taken to address many of the recommendations made in previous subject inspections. In particular in the case of the most recent subject inspections, it is clear that detailed follow-up procedures are being followed with appropriate consultation between senior management and the relevant subject department to monitor implementation. However, the inspection team noted a small number of still relevant recommendations made in earlier reports, for example the further development of formative assessment, where evidence of implementation was limited.

Recommendations of inspections should be recorded centrally in all cases to aid monitoring of their implementation. The teachers who carry responsibility for implementing the recommendations should be noted in the documentation.

3.2 Learning and teaching

In the case of subject inspections completed recently, teachers in the subject departments concerned have taken responsibility and are actively implementing the recommendations made. There is no consistent evidence, however, that recommendations made in individual subjects which have a whole-school dimension have been shared with other subject departments. Where recommendations apply also to subjects other than those inspected, they should be considered by all subject departments with a view to their implementation. This procedure should be applied to all previous inspection reports.

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

The school is at present embarking on the school self-evaluation (SSE) process. The board and senior management are focused on success in SSE and there is every reason to expect the process to be successfully integrated into the functioning of the school. A start has been made on the collection of base-line data from first-year students, using strategies that are consistent with SSE.

The school shows significant ability to bring about further improvement. Senior management and staff are energetic and motivated and are ambitious for the further success of the school. There is a strong sense of unity and mutual respect and a notable degree of willingness to become involved among the whole staff.