

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Joseph's Secondary School
Spanish Point, County Clare
Roll number: 62010C**

Date of inspection: 6 March 2014



**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 March, 2014 in St Joseph's 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 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

St Joseph's Secondary School is a co-educational school under the trusteeship of Catholic Education an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). The school was founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1929 and the school's ethos is underpinned by the key principles of inclusion and the provision of a holistic education. The school serves an extensive rural and a small urban catchment area and caters for students from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management operates effectively and is well informed on school matters.
- The members of the senior management team work well together and demonstrate a strong commitment to the school.
- The last review of the posts of responsibility was completed in 2007 and there have been significant changes in staffing in the period since then.
- Progress is ongoing in relation to school development planning and policy statements have been developed across key areas of school life.
- Planning in relation to the integration of literacy and numeracy strategies into teaching and learning is at an early stage and now needs to be progressed.
- A significant strength of the school is its broad curriculum, complemented by an open choice of subjects.
- A strong commitment to the welfare and care of students is evident in the school.
- Subject department planning is well established in the school with scope for the development of greater consistency in planning across subjects and programmes.
- The quality of learning and teaching was good in the majority of lessons observed and very good in one third of lessons. There was considerable scope to improve the learning and teaching strategies employed in a small minority of lessons.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board of management should oversee the development of a strategic plan with targets and actions identified to address agreed priorities over defined timeframes.
- The posts of responsibility schedule should be reviewed and aligned to the school's needs and priorities.

- A prioritised cycle of review and update of school policies should be devised in consultation with stakeholders and it should give urgency to the need to review the code of behaviour.
- Practice and provision for special educational needs (SEN) should be further developed with the remit of improving and maximising learning outcomes for students.
- The school's literacy strategy should be further developed to incorporate more substantive strategies.
- It is recommended that a more collaborative and consistent approach to curricular planning be adopted which provides a clearer focus on learning outcomes, methodologies, resources and assessment modes.
- In order to further progress the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) as a learning tool, a comprehensive e-learning plan should be developed.
- Increased use should be made of active learning methodologies and strategies for differentiation to support student learning across the range of abilities.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is appropriately constituted, operates effectively and is very supportive of the school. The board meets regularly and is well informed on school matters. Many members of the board have a long association with the school and have served on previous boards. Some board members have yet to receive training for their role and should avail of training at the next available opportunity.

The board has established good communication links with key stakeholders. Agreed reports of all board meetings are issued to staff and to the parents' association. Formal structures for communication with the student council should now be established. From a record keeping perspective, the board should ensure that the minutes of board meetings reflect the discussions held in a more comprehensive manner.

The board plays a supportive role in the area of school finances, policy development and review, curriculum review and student support. The board also facilitates continuing professional development (CPD) for staff.

Discussions are held at board level in relation to certificate examination results. As a means of gaining further insight into these results, the board should consider requesting annual reports from subject departments about progress and challenges within their subject area. Post-holders should also be required to submit an annual report to the board.

The board, in association with stakeholders, has identified a number of developmental priorities. These include the upgrade and development of ICT facilities, sports facilities and other accommodation refurbishments, the development of an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) unit and the advancement of teaching and learning to support national initiatives including the new Junior Cycle and the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. To progress these priorities the board should now oversee the development of a strategic plan with targets and actions identified to address agreed priorities over defined timeframes.

The parents' association plays an active role in supporting the school through a variety of fund-raising and other activities.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal work closely together in leading the school and collaborate well in undertaking an extensive range of duties. They have a strong commitment to the school and students' needs are prioritised in all aspects of school life. While there are good lines of communication with staff, procedures for facilitating a greater level of consultation and involvement in decision-making should be developed with middle management.

There is some good evidence of distributed leadership among the middle-management team as well as among non-post holders and assigned tasks are carried out effectively. The last review of the post schedule was undertaken in 2007. Since then, there have been significant changes in staffing in the school. It is, therefore, timely to conduct a further review of the post schedule in order to ensure that the posts are more closely aligned to the school's needs and priorities. Documentation outlining the duties and responsibilities attaching to posts should be compiled in conjunction with this review.

Staff members are dedicated to the school. A good spirit of volunteerism is evident among some staff members in facilitating extra-curricular and co-curricular activities as well as providing additional tuition across a range of subjects.

A good quality staff handbook has been developed and there is an effective induction process to support teachers who are new to the school. The staff handbook should incorporate a section detailing the school's expectations in relation to the use in classrooms of mobile phones and other electronic devices.

School planning has been led by the senior management team and supported by the input of task groups formed from staff members. There has been a central emphasis on the development of a range of policy statements across key areas of school life. Many of these statements now need to be developed into comprehensive policy documents that more fully reflect current practices and procedures in the school. A prioritised cycle of review and update of policies should be devised and this process should be conducted in appropriate consultation with stakeholders to ensure shared ownership of school policy-making.

The school should now focus on long-term strategic action planning in a consultative manner at whole-school level to advance the school's improvement agenda. In this context, it is recommended that a planning steering group be formed from and by staff and that the co-ordination of this group be reflected in the post of responsibility structure. Action plans should be devised to achieve developmental priorities over the short and the long term.

Planning for the integration of literacy and numeracy strategies into teaching and learning are key elements of the school's developmental agenda. The role of literacy link person should become operational forthwith and the link person should engage with CPD provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).

At present, the school's literacy strategy focuses solely on spelling. In this context, it is recommended that more substantive strategies be agreed to support the development of a wider range of literacy skills. These should be implemented in classroom practice across all subject areas. To reflect this broader focus, a comprehensive school improvement plan needs to be drawn up which identifies the school's targets for improvement and the agreed strategies for the achievement of these targets.

The school offers a broad range of subjects in the context of its size and teachers are commended for their flexibility with regard to curriculum provision. An extensive taster programme for transition year (TY) students in conjunction with fifth-year classes is in place. However, it is recommended that this provision be appropriately differentiated to reflect the aims and objectives of the TY programme. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme is a valued component of the school's curriculum and is effective in the retention of students.

It is commendable that an open choice of subjects is provided at both junior and senior cycle. Class period allocation is in line with syllabus requirements for practically all subject areas and exceeds requirements in some subjects. Provision for Physical Education (PE) falls short of the recommended number of lesson periods. Class period provision for PE should be prioritised and addressed as resources become available. In addition, the inclusion of study periods on the timetable for some year groups should be reviewed.

Effective strategies are in place for monitoring student attendance. There are some concerns with regard to attendance for a small percentage of students. Early-response mechanisms should be formalised in a whole-school attendance strategy to address such concerns.

Discipline is good in the school and the code of behaviour is reported to be operating effectively in the management of students. However, it is recommended, given the high number of suspensions for particular offences, that the school should explore alternative sanctions to suspension. The code of behaviour was last reviewed in 2007 and should now be revised in consultation with students to incorporate a more positive focus and rewards for improved behaviour.

Students with additional educational needs are catered for through a combination of models of provision. These include individual withdrawal from lessons, the provision of smaller classes and some team teaching. On entry into first year, the identification of students requiring additional support is informed through a variety of mechanisms including standardised testing and school-based entrance tests in English and Mathematics. The school's approach to re-testing needs to be more robust in order to determine the effectiveness of the interventions that are put in place. While it is acknowledged that some progress has been made in drawing up individual learning plans for students, teachers providing additional support to students should further develop these plans to include the content, strategies and the assessment modes employed to address the identified learning targets.

The role of SEN coordinator should be clearly defined and a dedicated period of time should be assigned to the co-ordination of SEN. A dedicated team for the planning and delivery of learning supports should be established with representation from the core subjects of English and Mathematics. In addition, structures should be put in place to strengthen communication links with mainstream teachers. The school has a generic SEN policy. It is recommended that this policy provide a central emphasis on inclusive learning and be adapted to describe the specific practices in place to support students across the full ability spectrum. A whole-school approach to literacy and numeracy should be incorporated into this revised policy.

The work of the school's special educational needs assistants is highly valued by the school as a key support for students with additional educational needs. In line with best practice, the duties of the special educational needs assistants are outlined and tailored plans have been developed for individual students.

Students are provided with leadership opportunities through the mentoring programme and through the student council. In line with good practice the student council is democratically

elected and is representative of the entire student body. Given the leadership competency evident among council members, measures should be put in place to raise the profile and increase the operational effectiveness of the student council as a mechanism for positive change in the school.

The care of students is a priority of all staff and a number of effective care structures to support students are in place. The year head and the guidance service are key pillars of student care and are strongly supported by the chaplaincy service which operates on a voluntary basis. A care team has been nominated and it is convened as care needs emerge. The findings of parent and student questionnaires indicate high satisfaction with the level of care for students in the school.

Provision for Guidance is good in the school. The guidance plan in place should be further developed through the collaborative efforts of key school personnel to reflect a whole-school approach to Guidance.

Subject planning meetings are facilitated at different stages of the year and curricular plans are in place for all subjects and programmes. The quality of planning documentation reviewed varied from content-driven plans to comprehensive schemes of work which serve as a very effective guide to teaching and learning. It is recommended that planning documentation be further developed through a more collaborative and consistent approach to curricular planning. This process should allow for professional dialogue in the areas of active learning methodologies, differentiation strategies, assessment for learning practices and the dynamic integration of ICT as a learning resource.

The school has engaged well with CPD events supporting national initiatives such as the new Junior Cycle, the literacy and numeracy initiative and *Project Maths*. Further engagement with CPD is encouraged and this training should focus on the key areas of teaching and learning mentioned above.

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 school is very well maintained and has a litter-free environment. There is an effective recycling system in place and the school should now give active consideration to pursuing An Taisce's Green Flag Award.

There has been ongoing refurbishment of the school building and classrooms are equipped with ICT facilities, have broadband access and there is a good range of specialist rooms. Much of the school's computer hardware is out of date and in need of replacement. Before purchasing hardware on a large scale, it is recommended that a strategic plan for ICT integration be drawn up with an emphasis on curriculum integration, professional development and the promotion of an e-learning culture in the school.

Sports facilities include an indoor sports hall, outdoor hard courts and a playing field.

An up-to-date health and safety statement, based on risk assessments, is in place. Future risk-assessment audits should be carried out by each subject department in their respective teaching areas and these assessments should form an integral part of an annual review of the health and safety statement.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of learning and teaching was good in most lessons and very good in one third of lessons. There was considerable scope to improve the teaching and learning strategies employed in a small minority of lessons.

Best practice was noted in lessons characterised by a purposeful pace, clear learning objectives and where there was a good balance between teacher input and students' active participation in learning. In these lessons there was effective two-way interaction and students were actively engaged and challenged across the ability range. In other lessons teacher input dominated and students were largely passive. It is recommended that teacher instruction be interspersed with individual and collaborative exercises in all lessons to actively engage students in their learning.

Teachers were generally well prepared for lessons and a range of good quality resources had been prepared in advance to support student learning. In the majority of lessons ICT was integrated and used almost solely for the presentation of course information. The potential of ICT as a dynamic and interactive teaching and learning resource should be further explored.

In many lessons the intended learning objectives were shared with students. In some cases a more detailed explanation of these would have provided greater clarity for students' learning. Good practice was observed where consolidation of learning was facilitated through review and evaluation of the learning outcomes achieved. These good practices should be extended to all lessons.

Best practice in questioning was observed where targeted questions were well distributed across the class, where there was a good level of higher-order questioning and where students were given adequate time to formulate their answer. This approach engaged students effectively and allowed for a good assessment of their understanding and learning.

There was evidence of some very effective differentiation by questioning, use of visual resources, the integration of collaborative learning tasks and where students' comprehension of concepts was developed and scaffolded in a structured manner. Given the mixed-ability composition of classes it is recommended that planning for lessons provide for differentiated learning outcomes and methodologies to ensure students' engagement with their learning across the continuum of ability.

In some lessons good attention was paid to literacy where there was an explicit focus on the explanation and reinforcement of subject vocabulary. The cross-curricular implementation of literacy strategies and a consistent approach to the use of these strategies is recommended to support students' literacy development. The potential to develop students' numeracy skills should also be explored in all subject areas.

Homework is regularly assigned in lessons. However there were marked variations in the level of monitoring and the provision of formative feedback on students' written work. Good practice was observed where teachers' written comments identified strengths as well as appropriately guided students towards improvement. This good practice should be formalised and developed by each subject department. In a small number of lessons peer-assessment was used very effectively and it was evident that the students were competent evaluators of each others' work. Strategies to promote self-assessment and peer-assessment

among students should be developed and implemented by teachers so that students are given greater involvement and responsibility in improving the quality of their work.

Classroom management was effective in all lessons. There were very good student-teacher relationships underpinned by mutual respect and a positive and affirming learning atmosphere.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Almost all recommendations in relation to management have been progressed. Further work is needed in the development of subject and programme planning practices to incorporate more detailed schemes of work in some subjects and programmes.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Recommendations in relation to learning and teaching have been implemented to varying degrees. Areas in which further development is still required include: differentiation of the lesson content to meet the range of abilities in the class, the inclusion of an appropriate range of activities in the lesson and the use of ICT as a means of further engaging students in their learning.

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

School management is committed to the school. Recent investment in software designed to track students' attainment indicates a willingness and an enhanced capacity to engage in self-evaluation and review. Developmental priorities have been identified in the school plan. These should now be progressed through the implementation of time-bound and focussed action plans. Collaborative planning structures need to be more widely developed to implement a more progressive approach to drive change and the school improvement agenda.

The staff has a wealth of knowledge and experience at their disposal and on this basis the school has the capacity to advance improvement and to address the recommendations in the report.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

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 B.O.M accepts the report and has begun the process of implementing the findings and recommendations.