Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Saint Angela’s College
Saint Patrick’s Hill, Cork
Roll number: 62640M

Date of inspection: 11 May 2011
Whole-School Evaluation  
Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in May 2011 in Saint Angela’s College, Cork. 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 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 Angela’s College is a Catholic, girls’ voluntary secondary school situated in Cork’s city centre for over 120 years. The college is under the trusteeship of the Ursuline order and endeavours to uphold the values of respect, uniqueness, curiosity and kindness which form the cornerstones of the Ursuline ethos. With over thirty feeder schools, the school has a consistent school enrolment of approximately 520 students. It has been recognised that the college’s current facilities are not fit-for-purpose. A development plan which began over twenty years ago was given new impetus when planning permission for the new school building was recently granted, with a three-dimensional model of the new school now available.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The building plan has occupied a significant amount of the board’s time over the past decade, taking precedence over other educational developmental priorities.
- Despite the constraints of the current plant, students enjoy attending the school and both students and parents commented favourably on the atmosphere.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good overall.
- Good attention is given to the care and support of students.
- Support for the professional development of staff is good.
- Some communication structures are in place but clearer channels of communication between all members of the school community are needed.
- Recent school development planning (SDP) activity has focussed solely on subject departments. This has had implications for all other areas of SDP which have not progressed.
- Recent changes to staffing, for a variety of reasons, have had a significant impact on both the day-to-day running of the school and on school planning.
- Students are not receiving a minimum of twenty-eight hours of instruction time per week as stipulated in Circular Letter M29/95 – Time in School.
1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- All areas of compliance identified in this report should receive attention by school management as soon as possible.
- A strategic whole-school approach to planning should be adopted in preparation for the new school context.
- It is recommended that the board looks at ways in which communication and engagement with all school partners can be enhanced.
- School management should ensure that members of the student council are democratically elected from the entire student cohort, thus ensuring that the council becomes an effective voice for students.
- It would be worthwhile to form a curriculum advisory committee, the work of which could feed into an overarching teaching and learning and curriculum policy.
- School management should continue to implement the recommendations of previous subject inspection reports.
- It is recommended that a review of the roles and responsibilities of middle management be conducted with a view to reflecting the changing needs of the school and to raise experience levels.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

The current board is properly constituted and is aware of its statutory obligations. Regular meetings are held and agreed reports are issued to staff and parents. Board members have accessed board of management training. Some board members have not yet accessed training in child protection guidelines. The board recognises the need for more communication between it and the parent body and ways in which communication can be enhanced is currently under discussion. Findings from parental questionnaires also indicate that while over half of the parents surveyed know about the work of the board, a significant number feel that the school does not regularly seek their views on school activities. The school has an active parents’ association which meets regularly and looks at areas that benefit and support students and parents. In this context, it is recommended that the board looks at ways in which communication and engagement with all school partners can be enhanced. This should also include the further development of student participation.

The board has been engaged in policy development and all statutory policies have been ratified. Some polices have been reviewed but clarity regarding the process is needed. While some polices are presented to staff, parents and sometimes students as part of the development and review process, a more defined timeframe for completion, review and evaluation of policies on an annual basis should be developed. Dates of ratification and a specified review date should be clearly recorded on all policies. Taking cognisance of time factors and with tangible targets in mind, it is recommended that the school continues to develop and update all its policies and engage all school partners in the process. These steps should help to initiate a strategic whole-school approach to planning.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child
Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (Published September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

The school’s priorities for development

The building plan has occupied a significant amount of the board’s time over the past decade, almost to the detriment of other educational developmental priorities. The board has recognised this and teaching and learning and student welfare are now always included on the agenda of board meetings, in order to keep abreast of all activities, both educational and infrastructural, in the school. Thus, in addition to the next stage of the building project, a focus on teaching and learning, information and communication technology (ICT) and enhancing channels of communication have also been prioritised. These are clear priorities for development. However, there is a lack of clarity as to how these will be achieved.

It is recommended that the board instigates strategic plans to manage and guide both the transition period when the school will need to move off-site, and the preparation for the new school context. It would also be important to devise strategies to achieve the other priorities listed and use performance indicators to appraise progress. Involvement at a meaningful level of all those in the school community should be sought, encouraged and facilitated, and to this end there should continue to be consultation between management, staff, parents and students.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The current principal and deputy principal both took up their respective appointments in the academic year 2009-10. Senior management works as a team with complementary roles and approaches. Both are committed to the education and welfare of all students in the school and promote and encourage participation in appropriate continuing professional development (CPD) for staff, as much as possible. However, few leadership opportunities are afforded to teachers. There are no year heads and the class teacher roles are voluntary, albeit in consultation with senior management. Senior management recognises that there is a lack of a clear middle management structure and steps have been taken to review the current posts of responsibility. Many staff changes have had significant impact on both day-to-day running of the school and planning in general. Everything has been overshadowed by the building plan and other factors such as the moratorium on posts have also hindered development. While the support for staff CPD is acknowledged, it is suggested that an audit of the professional needs of staff should be carried out on a regular basis. This would lead to a programme of staff development and, in turn, should help to create mechanisms to facilitate the sharing of individual CPD in order to build the collective capacity of the staff.

In light of probable future staffing changes, it is recommended that both management and staff avail of any opportunities to review the roles and responsibilities of middle management, to reflect the changing needs of the school and broaden the range of experience of existing staff members. This review should link into any structures put in place to reinvigorate whole-school planning, policy development and review and include a co-ordinator of school development planning, a post which was discontinued over five years ago.
School management has recognised that all communication systems need to be enhanced in the school. It is recommended that this be addressed in a proactive way, whereby meetings with key staff members of middle management and other key personnel should be facilitated. It would be appropriate also to instigate some type of year head structure which is not necessarily linked to post duties. More formal time for subject and programme planning and review with a structure for feedback between the principal and subject department co-ordinators would also be useful. Furthermore, the development of a more comprehensive staff handbook and induction folder, further supported by formal mentoring of teachers new to the school or subject departments, would achieve much to streamline the variety of communication channels in the school.

**Leadership of students**

Senior management is working to establish a positive learning environment that benefits both teachers and students. Appropriate procedures are in place to monitor school attendance and punctuality. There are some small amendments to the admissions policy which are required to avoid any undue discriminatory implications. Furthermore, the code of behaviour, although regularly reviewed, still has some inconsistencies. There is certainly scope to increase rewarding positive behaviour as well as including students in any ongoing review. It would be opportune if a whole-school review of the code of behaviour was undertaken with more of an emphasis on expectations of positive behaviour rather than sanctions. Both of these matters should receive attention by school management as soon as possible.

There is a broad curriculum but there is no formal curriculum policy articulated in school documentation. Some subjects are offered after school to fulfil student demand, but other than the transition year (TY) programme, no other programmes are available. It would be of benefit to the school if the outcomes of subject department planning informed overall curriculum planning and organisation. It is recommended that, as the development of teaching and learning is progressed, a curriculum policy be developed. This policy could include areas such as programmes on offer, subject choice arrangements, homework policy, supervised study, class size, subject planning and co-ordination and planning for ICT. This organisation, along with a planned curriculum audit, would facilitate both school management and staff in focusing on key issues in relation to teaching and learning.

Students are not receiving a minimum of twenty-eight hours of instruction time per week as stipulated in *Circular Letter M29/95 – Time in School*. Furthermore, despite a well-balanced timetable, the timetabling of physical education is inadequate especially at senior cycle. In accordance with the requirements of *Circular Letter M11/03*, SPHE had not been timetabled as a designated class period for third years. These compliance issues should be addressed without delay. Reorganisation of the timetable should take place to ensure a minimum of twenty-eight hours instruction time, the provision of physical education for all students and the timetabling of SPHE for all third-year students.

There is range of pastoral care and supports for students with effective structures at transition times for first year and TY students. A significant majority of students and parents are very satisfied with the way issues, such as bullying, are dealt with by the school. The work of the special educational needs (SEN) coordinator and support team is highly organised, but there is no formal care team, nor are there any procedures in place to meet as a team. In order to maintain this good standard of care, formal meetings of care and support teams should be facilitated.

The student council is in effect a senior prefects’ forum and opportunities to liaise with the rest of the student body are limited. It is recommended that the student council be enlarged and school management should ensure that its members are democratically elected from the
entire student cohort, thus ensuring that the council becomes an effective voice for students. This would help to promote leadership qualities among students. The new student council could also have a role in how student participation and interests in extracurricular and other school activities could be enhanced.

2.3 Management of facilities

The commitment to the development plan and the maintenance of the existing plant are among the challenges facing the school community at present. The current facilities consist largely of pre-fabricated and old school buildings. Attention to the maintenance of the existing facilities is praiseworthy and these have been kept up to date in as much as is possible. The fragmented nature of the current site means there are limited opportunities for subject specific print rich environments. School management is committed to providing as effective a learning environment as possible in the current context, given the challenge of balancing financial constraints with value for money. There is a need for a collective input to plan, manage and improve the school facilities in the interim period.

Much work has been done to ensure that ICT is kept up to date as much as possible and recent investment has equipped most classrooms with a good range of equipment. The school’s website has been updated, and it is hoped that this will be progressed to optimise its potential as a powerful communication tool. Although a policy on acceptable use of the internet exists, an ICT plan has yet to be devised. The school has undertaken some initial planning, and among the key issues identified in relation to ICT are integrating the use of ICT into whole-class teaching, increasing the number of staff involved centrally in this area, identifying the future role of ICT in the school, and planning to achieve that role on a short, medium, and long-term basis. It is recommended that in drafting an ICT policy these issues should be borne in mind.

The health and safety statement is now in need of review. Some risk assessments were carried out in some subject areas but as these are undated it is unclear as to when these were done. It is recommended that organised risk assessments be carried out in all areas of the school and that these outcomes are used to inform the review of the safety statement. Appropriate actions should be taken to ensure the maintenance of a secure, safe and healthy working environment.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Over the two days of the evaluation, inspectors visited a total of twenty-one lessons across subjects provided in the school. The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons observed was good. Skilful preparation and planning for lessons ensured that the structure, pace and levels of student engagement were commensurate with ability. There was very good classroom management and the students’ behaviour was exemplary. Good teacher-student rapport was evident, underpinned by mutual respect.

A range of teaching methodologies was employed and best practice, where teacher-led instruction was well balanced with student input and active learning methodologies central to lesson delivery, was observed in many instances. Many teachers attended skilfully to individual learning needs during activities and some very good examples of students successfully completing tasks were observed. Effective team teaching was also observed. It is recommended that this practice be extended to other lessons and teachers through building on the successes to date and sharing the experience with the whole staff. Furthermore, it is recommended that a focus on assessment for learning be initiated. This
could look at factors like teacher questioning and formative feedback and include the promotion of literacy and numeracy. Such a focus should help to ensure that there is self evaluation in the classroom on an ongoing basis.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

The subject inspections reviewed include Home Economics, Gaeilge, Physical Education and Latin. There is little evidence to indicate that management has addressed the recommendations from subject inspection reports, with no responses to any of the subject inspection reports from the board. As a means of supporting the provision of quality teaching and learning, the board should review all subject inspection reports and seek to monitor the implementation of recommendations therein.

Subject specific responses which have been addressed include the auditing of the home economics kitchen and the use of real-life materials to stimulate spoken language and ideas in the teaching of Irish. Subject specific responses which have not been addressed include the timetabled PE for all senior cycle students for the full year and the provision of double periods for junior cycle. It was also recommended to include PE as part of the formal reporting on student progress but to date this has not been undertaken.

School management should continue to implement the recommendations of previous subject inspection reports.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

In relation to ICT, the school has made considerable investment in ICT and its integration into the classroom is evolving. It is recommended that now specific task groups should look at the recommendations in relation to the use of ICT in the classroom and prioritise actions that impact on all subject areas. There is also scope to further integrate the recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports in relation to the use of active learning methodologies and assessment for learning. School management and staff need to examine all subject inspections reports to ascertain the valuable learning experiences which can contribute to improvement in teaching and learning across all subject areas.

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

5.1

Self-evaluation is at the early stages in this school. An analysis of the results in the certificate examinations now takes place at the beginning of the school year. The outcome has been that some attempts at progressing self-evaluation have begun, with some strategies developed for the assessment and monitoring of student achievement. While a beginning have been made, the level of engagement by the different members of the school community varies. At present there is little evidence to show how targets for improvement are set and monitored within the school.

The development of more formal whole-school self-evaluation is recommended. It is vital that the whole-school community shares an understanding of this process which involves the board, parents, teachers and students. All staff should have a shared
understanding of and commitment to the process of self-evaluation as an ongoing means of promoting further improvement in teaching and learning. In order to progress this in a manner conducive to effective self-evaluation and improvement, a steering committee should be established to coordinate focus groups from all members of the school community.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management
Area 1  Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of St. Angela’s College would like to commend the Inspectorate on a very thorough evaluation of the school, its teaching, practices and structures. In particular the Board is pleased that the Inspectorate recognised the characteristic Ursuline spirit in our school which values respect, uniqueness, courtesy and kindness for all members of the school community.

The Board of Management is particularly pleased that the findings clearly identified:

- Despite the constraints of the current building, students enjoy attending the school and both students and parents commented favourably on the atmosphere.
- Senior management are committed to the education and welfare of all students in the school and promote and encourage participation in appropriate continuing professional development.
- The work of the special educational needs coordinator and support team is highly organised.
- There was very good classroom management and the students’ behaviour was exemplary—good teacher student rapport was evident, underpinned by mutual respect.
- There is a commitment to examining and improving teaching and learning practice, and to further integration of ICT into teaching and learning.

The Board of Management has engaged in policy development and all statutory policies have been ratified.

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

The Board of Management would like to acknowledge key areas for development in the report and outline steps taken to address the recommendations made in the whole school evaluation report:

- On-going review of both our admission policy and our code of behaviour.
- Adjustments have been made to the timetable to ensure that we are in compliance with CL 29/95—ensuring that each student is provided with 28 hours of tuition each week.
- S.P.H.E has now been timetabled as a designated class period for third year students in accordance with circular letter M11/03.
- P.E is on the report cards with effect from autumn 2011.
- The Board of Management with school management have liaised with both the parents and student councils to ensure that the channels of communication are enhanced and further developed.
- School management has recognised that all communication systems need to be enhanced through,
  - formal time for subject planning
  - school policy planning
  - further integration of ICT in both teaching and learning

Discussion is on-going in regard to: composition of the student council, curriculum advisory committee and the curriculum policy.