

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Salesian Secondary College
Pallaskenry, County Limerick
Roll number: 641800**

Date of inspection: 9 May 2013



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in May 2013 in Salesian Secondary 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 in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report. The board chose to accept the report without response.

Introduction

Salesian Secondary College is a co-educational Catholic school that operates under the trusteeship of the Salesian order. While the school has a rural setting, the student population comprises those who live locally as well as those who travel from Limerick City. Owing to the school's participation in Limerick's Common Application System, there has been a significant increase in the number of students travelling from the city; resulting in a 30% increase in enrolment in the past three years. Currently, enrolment stands at 525 students. Members of the Salesian community, as well as staff and students from their Agricultural College, are also present on the campus.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- Board members display a commitment to holistic educational provision, inclusivity, partnership and school improvement.
- The principal and the deputy principal have a very good working relationship and bring energy and enthusiasm to their roles.
- Staff members have displayed competence and leadership in their adaptation to significant changes in their work environment.
- A commendable emphasis is placed on developing youth leadership.
- Inclusivity is actively promoted and students are well cared for.
- Students have been highly successful in a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- The quality of learning and teaching ranged from good to very good in the majority of lessons observed, with some examples of highly-commendable practice.
- A positive and courteous atmosphere was evident in classrooms.
- The whole-school focus on numeracy is progressing well.
- Active consideration has been given by management and staff to recommendations in previous subject inspection reports.
- Effective school self-evaluation requires the creation of more defined lines of communication and a strategic alignment of middle-management structures with developmental priorities.

Recommendations for Further Development

- Identification of developmental priorities, in collaboration with the whole-school community, is recommended.
- In order to ensure a collective focus on key developmental priorities, it is recommended that senior management agree and clearly define their individual areas of responsibility and that, where appropriate, some of these duties be delegated to other staff members.
- A reconfiguration of the post-of-responsibility structure is required to ensure effective strategic planning as well as a whole-school commitment to the realisation of strategic goals.
- Disused chemicals that are currently in safe storage must be appropriately disposed of as a matter of urgency.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The school's board of management operates under the auspices of the Salesian Order and is appropriately constituted. Board members display a good understanding of school life and are commended for their willingness to engage in professional dialogue and to maintain their awareness of educational strategies and reforms. All mandatory policies have been adopted and it is good that members of the board have an input into their formation prior to their ratification.

Board members are committed to maintaining the provision of a holistic inclusive education, guided by the Salesian ethos, in the face of increasing enrolment. The systematic approach taken to policy development, adoption and review is evidence of a management style that is organised and democratic. While the identification of challenges that need to be overcome is positive, there is a need to further explore developmental priorities, particularly in the area of teaching and learning. Once identified, core areas of focus, and strategies to achieve these, should be agreed at a whole-school level.

Board members place considerable emphasis on the notion of partnership and on providing opportunities for members of the school community to communicate with each other. Minutes of board meetings are comprehensive and an agreed statement is provided to staff following each meeting. A copy of the agreed statement should also be provided to the Parents' Association. Long-established and productive links with both the student council and the Parents' Association have been placed on a more formal footing recently: this is a very positive development which provides a more solid basis for including the views of the whole-school community when progressing school improvement.

Both the principal and the deputy principal bring energy and enthusiasm to their work. They have a very good working relationship and display a deep loyalty to the school and its community. As a precursor to strategic planning at a whole-school level, it is recommended that their respective roles and responsibilities be more clearly defined. Another area requiring attention is the lines of communication between members of the school community as it would appear that the senior management team have become the initial point of contact for parents, students and colleagues when information or support, no matter how trivial, is required. A more refined structure that delegates greater responsibility to other staff members, where appropriate, is strongly recommended. Moreover, it is suggested to the board and the trustees that steps be taken to minimise the burden of facilities management on the school principal so that the senior management team has sufficient time to address curricular and pedagogical reform in a more meaningful way.

Many of the middle-management team are new to their role and are commended for the manner in which they have speedily and competently adapted to their new duties. The current model of posts of responsibility has assistant principals acting as year heads. Once developmental priorities have been identified, it is anticipated that middle-management responsibilities will need to be reconfigured to ensure people with the relevant strengths are deployed strategically and innovatively. This may require an alternative approach to pastoral care with an expansion of the duties of the class tutor so that some assistant principals can lead other areas such as curriculum planning.

At the core of the Salesian 'Preventive System' is the fostering of youth leadership. Considerable emphasis is placed on encouraging students to participate meaningfully in and to take personal responsibility for their own learning. The student council, the *Ceangail* mentoring programme, the Youth-Leadership courses and the 'Camp Bosco' summer camp are all examples of very worthwhile initiatives that promote student engagement in various aspects of school life.

Every effort is made to encourage parents to work in partnership with their child's educators. Members of the Parents' Association are commended for the interest they display in school improvement and for the support they provide during events such as the school musical, the fashion show and the golf classic.

The combination of retirements and increasing enrolment in recent years has led to considerable change in the school's cohort of teachers. It would appear that the teaching staff has adapted well to these changes. Their involvement in a wide range of school activities indicates that they are eager to realise their leadership potential and are willing to work collaboratively. Senior management believes that there is now an even greater capacity to progress school improvement. Teachers have already demonstrated leadership through their engagement with subject-development planning and initiatives such as team-teaching. Opportunities afforded to them to develop their professional skills through further study or participation in locally-led or national seminars are very worthwhile. It is clear that the teaching staff is now poised to engage meaningfully with curricular reform and pedagogical improvement. Thus, it is incumbent on senior management to now provide effective leadership for learning and teaching. The formation of teams in line with shared developmental priorities would create greater opportunities for distributed leadership amongst the teaching staff. More explicit references to teaching and learning in the staff charter would also indicate a whole-school commitment to improving the learning experience for students.

For the most part, teachers are deployed according to their qualifications and expertise. In some instances, when gaps have occurred owing to retirements, the board of management has funded the upskilling of other staff members to ensure optimum provision. It was indicated that a number of those teachers involved in the delivery of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme during this academic year had not received the appropriate training. It is recommended that, at all times, all those teaching SPHE are suitably trained.

There is an open admissions policy. While responses to questionnaires, distributed to parents as part of the evaluation, indicated that they do not feel any compulsion to make a financial contribution to the school, there is a need to ensure that enrolment documentation indicates clearly that any contribution they are asked to make is voluntary.

It is good that the code of behaviour alludes to the responsibilities of all members of the school community in fostering an atmosphere of respect. While the designation of monitoring of attendance as a middle-management post would suggest that maximising

student attendance is a core management duty, it is recommended that greater use could be made of the information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure to track attendance and punctuality.

Improving support for students with special educational needs is on-going through the upskilling of two staff members following the recent retirement of the previous co-ordinator. Provision for Guidance is adequate and good use is made of available resources. As a means of ensuring a cohesive model of student support that monitors student progression, it is recommended that a student-support team be established to oversee student management. Such a team could review areas such as channels of communication, promotion of responsible behaviour among all students as well as a refinement of the class tutor-year head escalation model to ensure remediation is addressed at the lowest level possible.

While the 15-minute weekly tutor session is an effective means of information sharing, it is not directly supportive of teaching and learning and, therefore, cannot be considered part of the required 28 hours of instruction time for students. Furthermore, the likelihood of class tutors developing a good rapport with their class group is slim in instances where this session is the only point of access that tutors have to their classes. An alternative model of contact between class tutors and their students should therefore be devised in the formation of timetables in the future.

There is a wide range of subjects provided and a commendable effort is made to accommodate student choice. Timetabling of SPHE, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Physical Education (PE) is appropriate. Currently, incoming students make their subject choice prior to entering first-year. While neither parents nor students criticised this model, the merits of a taster-system for first-year students should be considered.

There is a variety of curricular programmes available, with both Transition Year (TY) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) being held in high regard by the whole-school community. The popularity of the TY programme is largely due to the success of its activity component which is carefully designed to provide students with opportunities to develop a wide range of skills outside of the classroom setting. Review of the TY plan and visits to TY lessons indicate that classroom-based learning includes an appropriate blend of curricular subjects and additional modules that support students' holistic development. Further consolidation of the TY plan is recommended to ensure that such activities are grounded in a curricular programme that seeks to develop identified key skills. In the context of the planned reform of the junior cycle, an overall review of the school's curricular provision at this level will also be necessary. Such reviews could fall within the remit of the a Curriculum Team whose overarching purpose would be to enhance the teaching and learning experience for teachers and students alike.

Students' responses to questionnaires indicate that they feel safe and cared for in the school and that they are strongly encouraged to work to the best of their ability. The very good work done by the *Ceangail* mentoring team, a group of fifth-year students who oversee the integration of first-year students into school life, was frequently alluded to by parents, staff and students. Members of the student council indicated that they have an input into school policies and conveyed to inspectors their satisfaction with their recent meeting with the board of management.

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*.

Students are afforded the opportunity to participate in a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and many individuals and groups have been highly successful in a variety of competitions. Such achievements are overtly celebrated and acknowledged on the school website and in the weekly *Tutor News*. Given that overall student achievement in state examinations is highly commendable, there is scope to place a greater emphasis on academic excellence in much of the schools internal and external documents.

1.3 Management of facilities

The school building and its extensive campus are very well maintained and the school community is commended for work done to earn its green-school status for reducing waste and energy usage. Classrooms are in good order with access to an advanced ICT infrastructure. Specialist rooms are well maintained and used for their designated purpose. However, some disused chemicals from the science laboratories must be disposed of safely, as a matter of urgency. There is a large canteen, which also caters for students from the associated Agricultural College. Students have access to a very impressive range of sporting facilities including a sports hall, playing pitches, a handball alley and a swimming pool. In keeping with the Salesian ethos, students participate in a number of liturgical services and Masses during the school year.

With the school building currently at capacity, plans are in place to construct an extension. At the time of the evaluation, plans to improve wheelchair-accessibility were well advanced.

As part of the suggested review of the communication structure, the possibility of installing an intercom system, or an equivalent facility, should be explored. There is also a need to consolidate the health and safety statement and to ensure that audits focus specifically on the needs of a school community.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of learning and teaching was evaluated during eighteen lessons and, in the majority of lessons, ranged from good to very good with some examples of highly commendable practice. Scope for development was identified in a small number of lessons. The large number of students who indicated in questionnaires that they are getting on well in their school work reflects an overall classroom experience that is positive and productive. Equally, inspectors often noted during lessons that students displayed a good understanding of subject-specific information and concepts.

Preparation for all lessons was good in so far as due consideration had been given to the sequencing of lesson activities. Additional resources to support teaching and learning had been prepared, with a deliberate effort to use the ICT facilities available. While learning objectives were frequently displayed on the board, in some cases more explicit reference could have been made to them. Very good practice was observed when objectives were expressed in terms of desired learning outcomes and were alluded to during lessons as a means of enabling students to consider their own progress.

Whole-class teaching was frequently used to deliver lesson content and new material was presented to students clearly, often through the creation of links with their own experiences. Best practice was observed when there was an appropriate balance between teacher input and activities that gave students an opportunity to engage with new areas of learning. In such cases, their participation in various tasks at certain intervals throughout the lessons enabled students to consolidate newly-acquired knowledge and skills. This student-centred

approach also enabled teachers to direct as much attention as possible to the differentiated needs within the class group. In other lessons, where teacher input predominated, students were more passive and their understanding of lesson content was less evident. In these cases, suggestions were made regarding activities that would promote student participation during lesson activities.

While the main focus of all lessons was subject-specific, a commendable effort was made in some cases to develop students' literacy and numeracy skills. Of particular note was the reference made by some teachers to the problem-solving tips displayed in classrooms as part of the school's numeracy strategy. All teachers are urged to make a considered effort to maintain a focus on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills.

Classroom interactions were courteous and student contributions were often welcomed. When provided with the opportunity to interact with their peers, the vast majority of students worked constructively, clarifying their understanding and explaining their reasoning to their peers as well utilising their negotiation skills to ensure a worthwhile learning outcome. In some lessons, students would have benefited from greater independence during co-operative learning tasks, as well as a more generous time allocation, to enable them to explore and discuss new ideas and information. The layout of some rooms did not facilitate student engagement in interactive tasks. In these cases, every effort should be made to ensure that students who are working together are appropriately positioned.

Questioning was used in almost all lessons to check understanding. Where more creative and varied modes of assessment were used, students were keen to engage with the challenge presented by less predictable approaches. Student responses were best in instances when all students felt compelled to answer the questions put to them. The creation of opportunities for students to pose questions to fellow students was also very valuable.

Homework is regularly assigned as a means of consolidating learning. Samples of students' written work indicate that their work is monitored as a matter of course, although constructive feedback is provided in only a small number of lessons. In instances where notes copies suggested an emphasis on note-making, as opposed to note-taking, during lessons, students were clearly required to take responsibility for their own learning and were adept at organising their notes to ensure they formed a useful revision tool. As stated in previous subject inspection reports, it is recommended that Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies be used more widely, as a means of fostering students' ability to learn independently. Making such an initiative the focus of the school's self-evaluation process would be beneficial.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Recommendations concerning safe storage of chemicals and incorporating the student voice into relevant policies have been implemented. Nonetheless, the issue of safe disposal of chemicals remains and should be addressed with urgency. It was indicated that a recommendation with regard to a whole-school approach to literacy will be addressed as part of the school's self-evaluation process during the coming school year.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Classroom observations provided evidence that opportunities for co-operative learning are created in many lessons and that, in some instances, assessment for learning strategies are being used effectively. Other recommendations regarding the development of students' note-making skills, the provision of formative feedback on students' work and a greater focus on teaching and learning in subject development planning remain to be advanced.

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

Formal school self-evaluation is in its early stages but worthwhile steps have been taken to use it as a tool to drive the school's numeracy strategy. It is strongly recommended that the self-evaluation process be used to identify key developmental priorities, as alluded to in the earlier sections of this report. Realisation of such strategies will depend, however, on the creation of more clearly defined lines of communication, a middle-management structure that supports a whole-school focus on key developmental priorities and a willingness by all to embrace a distributed leadership model.