An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Jarlath's College
Tuam, County Galway
Roll number: 68074M**

Date of inspection: 21 January 2015

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

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in January 2015 in Saint Jarlath's College, Tuam. 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

Saint Jarlath's College is a boys-only Catholic diocesan voluntary secondary school established in 1800. The school operates under patronage of the Archbishop of Tuam and in 2009 amalgamated with the nearby St Patrick's College. The first lay principal appointed in 2013. Students are drawn from the full spectrum of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Saint Jarlath's College has a current enrolment of 550 students and is one of four providers of post-primary education in Tuam.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings
- The board of management is committed to the school and carries out its statutory responsibilities in an effective manner.
- Good progress has been made in the implementation of a number of developmental priorities across many areas of school life.
- The senior management team displays consultative and proactive leadership qualities and has a clear vision for school improvement.
- The posts of responsibility do not adequately meet the needs of the school or its developmental priorities.
- Strategies are in place to support students' literacy skills, however a whole-school numeracy support initiative has not yet been developed.
- The parents' association is very supportive of the school, however there is scope for improvement in the quality of communication with the wider parent body.
- Key strengths of the school are its broad curriculum and the extensive range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- A range of good structures are in place to support the care and wellbeing of students.
- The quality of teaching was good to very good in the majority of lessons observed.
- There has been very good implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations.
- The school demonstrates a very good capacity for change and improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development
- The school's developmental priorities should be rank ordered in collaboration with stakeholders and progressed systematically through target setting, action planning and regular review of outcomes.
- Systems should be put in place so that the leadership dimension of the principal and deputy principal's role can be further developed.
- At whole-staff level the post of responsibility schedule should be reviewed; the duties for each post should be agreed and responsibilities in key areas devolved to build participative leadership capacity and support the attainment of the school's priorities.
- The school should review the effectiveness of its literacy strategies and should advance the introduction of a whole-school numeracy plan.
- Action planning for improved attainment should be a central focus of all subject department planning.
- The delivery of special educational needs (SEN) supports should be reviewed.
- The roles of all personnel should be formalised in a student support policy and linked to the management of students' care needs.
- Students should be afforded a greater voice in pertinent areas of school life.
- Differentiation strategies should be further extended by teachers to maximise learning outcomes for students 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 and fulfils its statutory obligations in an effective manner. There is a good level of experience among board members all of whom have received training for their roles. The board meets regularly, has a very good knowledge of the school and a financial sub-committee is in place.

The school is managed in a spirit of partnership with good levels of communication between the board members, the patron, senior management, the teaching staff, parents and the wider school community. A comprehensive agreed written report is communicated to staff and to the parents' association (PA) following each board meeting. At present, the principal reports orally on the operation and performance of the school to the school patron on an annual basis. It is intended to formalise this reporting structure through a written report. To further strengthen partnership, this annual written report should also be made available to the school community.

The PA actively supports many school activities. There is evidence that the more optimal use of conduits of communication such as the school's website and newsletter would allow for a greater flow of information with the general parent body. Such improvements in communication might also build ownership among parents which would lead to them becoming involved in the association in the years ahead.

The board has a broad overview of the quality of teaching and learning in the school through general reports, provided by the principal, on certificate examination attainment and updates on subject inspection reports. The board should be provided with more robust analysis of certificate examinations and should deepen its engagement with the outcomes of these reports and track progress in relation to the recommendations made in such reports.

The board takes an active role in developing and reviewing policies, supporting the financial management of the school, developing the curriculum, improving facilities and

supporting the school self-evaluation (SSE) process and the continuing professional development (CPD) of staff. A range of policies, including all mandatory policies, and other documents relating to the operation of the school are available though there was evidence that all relevant stakeholders were not involved in their development. The board should ensure that appropriate procedures for policy development and review are in place and these should include consultation with parents and students.

Whole-school planning is currently driven by senior management. The developmental section of the school plan identifies a number of short-term priorities categorised into four areas; curriculum development, retention, inclusion and student attainment. Good progress has been made in some of these areas supported by specific action planning. In addition, a wide range of other educational and infrastructural priorities for development have been identified by the board and senior management. To support the implementation of the priorities, target setting and strategic action planning should be linked to each priority area over the short, medium and long-term. This planning process should be supported by the formation of task groups from staff to work on the school's priorities for improvement.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal work in close partnership and manage the school very effectively. They carry out an extensive range of shared and individual duties to support the day-to-day running and administration duties. In order to oversee the implementation of the school's developmental priorities, it will be necessary for senior management team to place an increased emphasis on their leadership roles. This will necessitate a devolution of duties to the middle management team in order to build capacity and skills to meet the current needs and developmental priorities of the school.

Members of the middle management team show dedication in their work and there is some evidence of distributed leadership in the tasks assigned to their posts of responsibility. A post review was conducted at the time of the amalgamation in 2009, however there was minimal changes to the schedule. At present, the duties attaching to a number of posts do not reflect the current needs or the developmental priorities of the school. The senior management team meets weekly with the assistant principals, most of whom are year heads. Overall, the middle management team should be utilised in a more optimal manner to collaboratively support senior management and progress the strategic priorities identified for the school. This review should be informed by Circular Letter PPT 29/02 and a schedule of responsibilities should be documented for each agreed post. Non-post holders have taken up key roles to ensure the continued co-ordination of activities and to lead new initiatives.

A key strength of the school is its committed staff. A spirit of good will and volunteerism supports the delivery of both the curriculum and a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. This is valued by management and parents. Senior management place a high priority on staff CPD and programme of whole-staff in-service training is being provided on a range of topics based on an audit of staff needs. There has been a good focus on up-skilling teachers in the use of ICT as a teaching and learning tool. Mechanisms to further disseminate and share good practices among all staff from externally-delivered CPD should be developed.

Subject department planning is well established and actively supported by management. Departments meet formally four times per year and minutes are being maintained in some subject areas. The quality of subject and programme planning documentation reviewed showed significant variations between the departments in the level of engagement with the process. It is recommended that a system be put in place to ensure that the subject planning process is utilised effectively as a vehicle to guide and improve teaching, learning and attainment across subjects and programmes.

The school offers a broad curriculum and, as the school progresses with curriculum development, the benefits for learners of the inclusion of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme (LCA) should also be considered. Currently, the time allocation to subjects is generally appropriate. The time allocation to English across the three years of junior cycle should be implemented in line with Circular Letters 0058/2011 and 0025/2012.

Good standards of behaviour and affirming and respectful student-teacher relationships were evident during the evaluation. The code of behaviour is a well constructed document and the ladder of referral in discipline matters is very clear and good systems are in place to support the management of students. However, the code should be reviewed so that the sanctions and interventions pertaining to each stage in the ladder of referral applied in a consistent manner by all staff. There is a high number of student suspensions on an annual basis. Strategies to reduce this sanction should be devised, implemented and reviewed.

The school provides good opportunities for student leadership through the student council, prefects and monitors as well as the head boy. The student council includes democratically elected representatives from all year groups and are in the process of developing a constitution. As part of its development the council should seek to raise its profile, develop a range of mechanisms to communicate with the general student body and generally seek to improve the quality of the student voice in the life of the school.

The school has a range of structures in place to support the care needs of students. The findings of parent and student questionnaires indicate a very high level of satisfaction with the level of care and feeling safe. The care team meet on a weekly basis and comprises of the deputy principal, the guidance counsellor, the School Completion Programme officer and the home-school-community liaison officer. Given the central role of the year head in the care system it is recommended that year heads are represented on the care team so that all key personnel can network in a more cohesive manner. An agreed schedule of responsibilities for the year head and other personnel involved in the care of students should be drawn up and formalised in a student support policy in line with best practice outlined in the publication *Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools.* These roles should be linked strategically to the code of behaviour, the suspension and expulsion policy and other policies and practices supporting the holistic care of students.

Very good supports are provided for students at times of transition. Students are provided with an open choice of subjects at both junior and senior cycle and students are well supported by the guidance counsellor in this process. Work in relation to the academic monitors and academic journals introduced this year for leaving certificate students is highly commended, as is the inclusion of academic achievement in the school's annual award ceremony.

Currently, the senior management team has assumed responsibility for the co-ordination of SEN. Students' needs are appropriately identified prior to entry and information is shared with relevant teachers. The majority of the hours allocated to SEN are used for their intended purpose and fifteen teachers are involved in the delivery of these supports. The main models of provision include some one-to-one and small group withdrawal from Irish and French. A small number of students needs are accommodated through the Special Class and the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). The upcoming review of the SEN policy and provision should set out clearly the practices and procedures of the department including the roles for the personnel involved, the frequency of formal meetings, structures to facilitate a greater level of communication with mainstream teachers and the protocols for the retesting the effectiveness of interventions. Consideration should be given to the deployment of a smaller SEN core team.

The overall quality of guidance the quality of guidance support is very good. Good links have been established with the social, personal and health education (SPHE) department to support the delivery of guidance at junior cycle.

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.*

1.2 Management of facilities

The school buildings and grounds are well maintained and a plan is in place for ongoing refurbishment. A health and safety statement in place and this should be reviewed and updated in line with the *Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools (2010).* An annual review of the statement should be supported by risk assessment audits carried out by staff in their respective working areas.

There is good provision of ICT throughout school and it is commendable that the school has an ICT plan which identifies a range of priority areas.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Good quality teaching and learning was observed in most lessons with practice of a very high standard in more than a quarter of lessons observed. There was significant scope to improve the teaching and learning in a few lessons.

The level of short-term planning for lessons was good with good quality teacher-generated resources integrated to support learning. Additional resources were used well to support instruction, to illustrate the practical application of concepts and processes and to cater for the different learning styles.

Lessons with a very high standard of teaching and learning were characterised by well-framed learning outcomes, a purposeful pace, incremental development of key lesson content and a variety of methodologies as well as good consolidation of the learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes were identified in a significant majority of lessons and these provided a good focus for the delivery of lesson content and student learning. In a small number of lessons the absence of definite learning outcomes resulted in lack of focus for teacher exposition and in consequence there was little evidence of students progressing in their learning. It is recommended that more careful attention is given to short-term planning to ensure that an adequate level of learning occurs during the lesson period.

ICT was used in the majority of lessons and was most effective where it was used to demonstrate concepts, to present visual stimuli, to create atmosphere and to test a hypothesis. The more varied use of ICT as an aid for teaching and learning should be further supported in the school's CPD programme.

In the majority of lessons a good balance was achieved between teacher input and student participation through the employment of a variety of methodologies. Instruction was punctuated with tasks and in very small number of cases with pair work or group work which enabled students to apply their learning. In some cases good individual scaffolding

was provided by the teacher where necessary. Student participation was also facilitated through questioning. Best practice in questioning was observed where there was a balanced blend of higher and lower-order questions, where questions were open as well as directed across the ability continuum. In some instances there was scope for a greater variety in questioning techniques and sufficient time should be given to students to formulate answers. Notwithstanding this variety in the methodologies employed, there is significant scope for the greater use of strategies for differentiation to support student learning across the range of abilities. In this regard the extended use of collaborative learning and other methodologies to support differentiation in terms of learning outcomes, learning activities and teacher intervention is recommended across the curriculum.

In the lessons observed the dominant literacy strategy used was the identification and explanation of subject terminology. Additional strategies including mind maps and graphs to support students in structuring and developing the quality of written answers to questions were very effectively used in a small number of lessons. The consistent cross-curricular implementation of agreed literacy strategies should be extended beyond the use of key words. In just under half of the lessons visited fair to good attention was paid to students' numeracy skills. All subject areas should identify elements of the curriculum where students' numeracy development can be meaningfully supported within the framework of a whole-school numeracy agenda. This work in numeracy should now be progressed by the school.

It was evident from a random sample of journals and students' work reviewed that homework is regularly assigned in lessons. In almost half of the lessons copybooks were monitored however there were wide variations in the quality of formative feedback provided. Very good practice was observed in a small number of cases where students were given specific guidelines on how to improve their work and where positive aspects of the work were affirmed. The agreed procedures in relation to assessment of learning, for learning and as learning noted in subject plans should be implemented in a consistent manner all departments. Exemplars of students work across a variety of skills should be used to support the implementation of all assessment techniques and to develop the practice of peer and self-assessment. This will also support the school's articulated priority to raise students' expectation and attainment.

In almost half of the classrooms visited good or very good learning environments had been developed. Given that classrooms are teacher-based it is recommended that all opportunities to create print and visual rich learning spaces be explored in co-operation with students.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

All recommendations made with a whole-school dimension have been very well progressed with the exception of a timetabling recommendation in the provision for Irish in junior cycle. Planning recommendations have been or are in the process of being implemented in practically all cases.

3.2 Learning and teaching

The recommendations made in relation to teaching and learning are being actively implemented, however, there is scope for the greater use of methodologies to support the differentiated needs of students.

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

The senior management team have been actively developing the school's SSE process in relation to literacy. However, a whole-school numeracy support initiative has not yet been developed.

The school demonstrates a high level of capacity to implement the recommendations of this report and is very well placed to progress an improvement agenda for 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 Jarlath's College feels that the positive finding in this report are a source of reassurance which endorses the College's excellent practices.

In particular the report has recognised the following:
- ✓ The highly experienced Board of Management and the commitment offered by the board to the College.
- ✓ The quality of teaching and learning, which was observed to be good to very good, with practice of a very high standard in more than a quarter of the lessons observed.
- ✓ The committed school staff and the spirit of good will and volunteerism, which supports the delivery of both co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- ✓ The senior management team displays consultative and proactive leadership qualities and has a clear vision for school improvement.
- ✓ The supportive and active Parents' Association.
- ✓ The good range of structures in place to support care and wellbeing of students and the very high level of satisfaction among parents and students with "the level of care and feeling safe".
- ✓ The good standards of behaviour and respectful teacher-student relationships.
- ✓ The good opportunities offered to by the school for student leadership.
- ✓ The very good quality guidance and guidance support, and supports provided for students at times of transition.
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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 acknowledges the recommendations made by the inspectors and confirms that a number of recommendations align with development priorities previously identified by the Board of Management.

Based on verbal feedback from the inspectors, work has taken place in a number of areas.
- ✓ A full review of the posts of responsibility has been initiated and will be continued in the upcoming academic year.
- ✓ A review of the literacy strategies has been carried out and significant work on the numeracy plan has taken place since the inspection.

All other recommendations throughout the report will be addressed in a timely fashion during the upcoming school year.