

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Clare's Comprehensive School
Manorhamilton, County Leitrim
Roll number: 81013P**

Date of inspection: 12th 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 St Clare's Comprehensive School, Manorhamilton. 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 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 Clare's is a co-educational comprehensive school with a current enrolment of 480 students. It is an inclusive school, taking all sixth class pupils from primary schools within its catchment area.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- Teachers and senior management demonstrate their commitment to students and to the school through their strong work ethic. There is a high quality of care for students, as confirmed by almost all student questionnaire respondents.
- There is very good organisation and discipline evident throughout the school.
- Teaching and learning were good to very good in almost all lessons. Mutual respect was evident in classroom interactions.
- The school building, grounds and facilities are being continuously upgraded and are maintained to a high standard.
- The capacity for school improvement, led by senior management, is very good. Structures and procedures are being enhanced on an ongoing basis and there has been good implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- Planning processes should be characterised by systematic collaboration and consultation with all key stakeholders.
- The responsibility for school improvement needs to be more evenly shared by middle management, teaching staff and the board of management.
- The roles of tutors, year heads, mentors and the student council should be reviewed and developed.
- The development of students' personal responsibility for learning should be prioritised and strategies put in place to ensure its achievement.

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 composition of the board and the frequency of meetings are in line with regulations for comprehensive schools. A new board is to be appointed in the next academic year and it is important that training is organised early into its term on its role and responsibilities as a body corporate. The board discusses and ratifies school policies, as they are presented. It is recommended that the date of ratification and an agreed date for review be documented with each policy.

Currently only teaching staff receive structured feedback from board meetings. The Education Act, 1998 requires the board to establish procedures for informing parents of matters relating to the operation and performance of the school and the incoming board should put such procedures in place at an early stage. It is also recommended that a formal mechanism for providing feedback to the patron be established.

There are no formal links between the board and the parents' association (PA) or the board and the students' council. To promote partnership, the board should consider meeting annually with both bodies. Training should be undertaken by the officers of the incoming PA to gain a greater understanding of the scope of its role as partner in the operation of the school.

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

Priorities articulated by the board include an extension to the school building and the retention of current teaching staff.

School development planning is currently being driven by the senior management team. It is recommended that a core planning team is set up, led by a member of middle management and reporting to senior management. This team should establish a system that includes teachers, parents, students and the board in the identification and agreement of priorities for development.

School improvement strategies and their achievement have been and continue to be overly dependent on the input of the principal. Responsibility now needs to be shared by other members of staff and by the board.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The principal and deputy principal work effectively as a team, sharing a vision for the school as a safe and happy environment in which students achieve to their potential. The distribution of management duties between them is still evolving and should, in time, lead to additional responsibilities being assumed by the deputy. They actively engage in continuing professional development (CPD) and reflect on their roles in the school. They are hard working and lead other staff by this example.

The principal takes the main responsibility for staff management and deals directly with issues of effectiveness and performance. Holders of posts of responsibility document reflections on their work and discuss the outcomes annually with the principal. The other teachers are now being guided to develop a template for self-evaluation of their work.

The schedule of posts does not currently meet the needs of the school. To address this, staff input has been sought on prioritising areas of responsibility for post holders. The next stage planned is for agreement to be reached on appropriate levels of duties for different posts. This is a good example of whole-staff consultation and involvement. Once the plan has been drafted, it should be presented to the board for ratification.

Subject plans were reviewed during the course of the evaluation and it was clear that significant time and energy had been invested in their preparation. Plans were generally of good quality. Noted elements of good practice included the presentation of programmes of work in terms of learning outcomes, the use of common assessments, and, in a small number of subjects, the collaborative discussion of teaching strategies.

To improve the value of subject plans in informing teaching and learning, the following recommendations are made. All programmes of work should include time frames for the completion of topics and an agreed order to be followed. Differentiation should be explicitly planned for and assessment criteria should be developed for project and portfolio work as a guide to students.

The commitment of teachers to subject planning is further evident from their willingness to undertake the very important role of subject co-ordinator. The rotation of the role between all members of the subject teams provides a valuable opportunity to develop leadership skills among staff members. Currently in pilot phase, the development of e-folders for subject departments will enhance the potential for the sharing of work, lightening individual workloads and further progressing collaborative working.

Teachers' CPD is supported at board level and by senior management who recognise its potential to impact positively on teaching and learning. In recent years whole-school CPD has, correctly, included a focus on classroom practice. Students' learning is also promoted through the creation of an environment of high expectations.

Students' progress in learning is monitored by year heads who review term reports. Good practice has also been established through senior management meeting with each Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate student following the issuing of their 'mock' examination results.

The school is particularly well-equipped with ICT and an assistant principal post is dedicated to its organisation and development. There has been a good focus on up-skilling teachers in the use of ICT as a teaching and learning tool and it has been particularly beneficial to have the sharing of in-house expertise. It is planned to fit all classrooms with interactive white boards in the near future. A detailed strategy and accompanying action

plan should be collaboratively devised to ensure that best possible use is made of this investment.

Currently the principal compiles data on certificate examination results at teacher and subject level and meets with each teacher to discuss them. With the ongoing development of subject meetings and subject planning it may now be appropriate for these data to be analysed by subject teams, who should compare them with in-house and national examination data. Strengths should be linked to successful teaching and learning strategies, where possible, and areas for development addressed with time-bound action plans. The outcomes of the analysis should then be shared with the principal.

Leadership of students

The principal and deputy principal have a high profile on the corridors and play a key role in ensuring order. The PA felt the school was organised and well run and inspectors noted an ordered atmosphere. The code of behaviour, reviewed in 2009, includes rights and responsibilities of parents, teachers and students in creating a school environment that supports teaching and learning. Rules for students, signed up to at the beginning of each year, are expressed, for the most part, in terms that promote positive behaviour. Responses to student and parent questionnaires indicate commendably high levels of awareness and understanding of the school's code of behaviour.

A number of students ineligible for the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) engage in individual study as an alternative to attending links module classes in fifth year. At the time of the evaluation there was no teacher scheduled to supervise these students. This arrangement needs to be reviewed and an alternative put in place.

It is good practice that the resource co-ordinator and resource teacher both have a qualification in resource teaching and that the team has dedicated meeting time each week. Appropriate links are made with feeder primary schools prior to new students' transfer to St. Clare's and a standardised verbal reasoning test is administered to all new entrants. Learning support is organised predominantly through the formation of small classes that run parallel to English, Irish and Mathematics. A large number of teachers are timetabled to provide learning support. This makes collaboration, communication, planning and the sharing of resources difficult and limits the development of individual expertise through experience and professional development. Efforts should be made, therefore, to restrict the number of teachers involved to a smaller team who are willing to devote time to learning support and resource teaching and possibly to engage in further training.

Individual education plans are prepared by the resource team, who consult with the year heads and subject teachers, as far as possible. It is recommended that future plans be prepared in line with the publication *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines* and include targets for academic attainment.

The school has a small number of students who speak English as an additional language (EAL) and English language support is provided to them until they can be integrated into mainstream English class. It is recommended that, in future, EAL students attend mainstream classes until they have been assessed as requiring English language support and that their assessment be done using one of the specifically designed assessment tools available.

As part of the school living out its inclusive ethos, a designated unit for students with moderate general learning disabilities (MGLD) was established in 2002. It currently serves four students, providing them with a broad and balanced curriculum in their own classroom setting. The teaching hours allocated to the centre are assigned to the two resource team teachers and to a number of mainstream subject teachers, giving students appropriate access

to subject specialists in a number of areas. Integration into non-academic school activities is, commendably, taking place, but there may be scope to expand this to include some class activities. A means of formally acknowledging these students' achievements should be devised and the possibility of following a formal programme in a small number of subjects should be considered.

The Guidance programme links in with each year group, in line with good practice. Guidance plays a key role in assisting students in making subject, programme and career choices; handbooks have been prepared and student and parent information meetings arranged to help with this process. A career event organised this year by the guidance counsellor and TY students provides a very good example of how collaboration and consultation can maximise effectiveness and relevance. The guidance counsellor is, appropriately, a member of the recently established care team.

The tutor system in place in the school is inclusive of all teachers, but leads to a situation in which an individual class can have up to three tutors. The school should review the purpose and role of the tutor. There is also scope to strengthen the role of the year head as leader of a team of tutors, emphasising the pastoral dimension of this key role.

The admissions policy reflects the school's inclusive ethos. It should be reviewed in the coming year to include a distinct section on admission to the designated unit for students with MGLD. The board should note that, in the case of students with SEN, enrolment should not be deferred. There is a very good transition programme for incoming first-year students. Mentors are assigned to each class to offer support and help with initial difficulties. There is a high level of interest from senior students in becoming a mentor; however, the primary purpose of the role may need to be re-emphasised.

Teaching staff are deployed, in almost all instances, in line with their qualifications and expertise. Most students follow the LCVP and the school believes this, along with the Junior Certificate and TY programmes, meets the needs of all students. The range of subjects offered is broad and balanced and has been enhanced by the recent addition of Music. A review of the ab initio language provision within LCVP should be undertaken to bring it in line with requirements.

There is very good uptake of higher level in most subjects with achievement generally good. However, high achievement rates at ordinary level, particularly in the Junior Certificate, indicate that, in some subjects, uptake at higher level could be even better.

Sampling of optional subjects has been introduced for incoming first-year students. This very good practice allows them make an informed choice and has had a positive impact. TY, too, offers an introduction to the full range of Leaving Certificate subjects, serving as a sampling year for students on the programme. Feedback on TY is sought from students on completion of modules and at the end of the year. Ongoing review would be further facilitated with the gathering and analysis of written data from parents and teachers involved.

Attendance and punctuality are overseen by a post holder and the deputy principal and very good attendance strategies are in place. It is believed that these strategies are having a positive impact on attendance figures and the school is encouraged to back up this view with data that is readily available in the school.

2.3 Management of facilities

The size and capacity of the school building is an issue with increased enrolment levels and the school is anxious to acquire sanction for an extension. However, best use is made of the

current building and facilities, which have been upgraded to high standards. The school building and grounds are well maintained, providing a quality learning environment for students and a welcoming atmosphere for visitors.

The school is conscious of its environmental responsibilities: a two-bin system for recycling is in operation and a water conservation programme has recently been established.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in almost all lessons observed. Learning outcomes were shared with students in all lessons and in a small number, were used to deepen students' understanding. All teachers should continue to develop their understanding and use of learning outcomes through discussion and collaboration.

At times, there was scope to deepen the level of students' learning through greater use of activities and through questioning techniques that challenged students and promoted higher-order thinking. Care should be taken by teachers to avoid over-direction and, instead, to foster in students a culture of personal responsibility for learning.

The quality of presentation of students' written work varied considerably between lessons. It is recommended that teachers adopt a policy of checking the maintenance of copy books and communicate high expectations with regard to the presentation of work.

There was extensive use of ICT as a teaching strategy and a small number of lessons in which it was also used as a learning tool. The digital projector or whiteboard was used effectively for reinforcing learning and linking lesson content to students' knowledge and experience.

Classroom management was very good and mutual respect was observed between teachers and students. In many classrooms, the learning environment was enhanced through displays and teachers are complimented on their successful efforts in this regard.

The good practice of explicitly developing students' literacy and numeracy skills was observed in just over half of lessons. Subject teams should now begin work on developing literacy and numeracy strategies across the curriculum.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Almost all recommendations made to school management in previous evaluations have been implemented.

Implementation in subject planning has been more variable with the most successful initiative being the writing of programmes of work in terms of learning outcomes. Implementation has not yet been fully realised in planning for a specified component of the junior cycle syllabus and in the inclusion of active lesson ideas in programmes of work. A description of the interface between the learning support/resource team and the rest of the teaching staff also remains to be added to the learning support policy. In future, following

any evaluation in the school, the relevant team should put in place a time-bound action plan to address recommendations made.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Many recommendations for teaching and learning made to subject teams have been implemented. Particularly good practice has been seen where teachers of all subjects have incorporated recommendations that were made in individual reports. The use of higher-order questioning, however, still needs to be increased.

In the area of assessment, common tests have been introduced but the use of clear formative feedback on students' written work is not yet fully implemented.

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

In the past ten years, a culture of school improvement, led by senior management, has been well established. Its impact has been a more dynamic and effective school environment in which students and teachers are encouraged to reach their potential. Subject planning, whole-staff CPD and the focus on ICT are positively influencing teaching and learning.

Self-evaluation and reflective practice is taking place in areas including the first-year induction programme, student and staff care and middle management. A culture of collaborative working, however, is under-developed in the school. The planning systems recommended earlier in this report will help to drive forward collaborative self-evaluation and school improvement.

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 welcomes the positive findings of the inspectorate and its acknowledgement of the excellent standard of practice in St Clare's Comprehensive.
- The board acknowledges the overwhelmingly positive response of both parents and students through the distributed questionnaires.
- The Board acknowledges the tremendous work carried out by the teaching and the non teaching staff of St. Clare's.

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 recommendations as per planning and school improvement have been initiated. However, the Moratorium on Posts of Responsibility has added considerably to the work of the Principal, Deputy Principal and Middle Management.
- St Clare's is in the process of reviewing the role of the Year Head/Class Teacher.
- Subject Departments have noted and are working on the recommendations.