

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**Loreto Secondary School**  
**Balbriggan, County Dublin**  
**Roll number: 60010P**

**Date of inspection: 5 December 2012**



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

# **Whole-School Evaluation**

## **Management, Leadership and Learning**

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in December, 2012 in Loreto Secondary School. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

### ***Introduction***

Loreto Secondary School is a girls' school under the trusteeship of the Loreto Education Trust with a current enrolment of 1221 students. The school operates an inclusive and transparent admissions policy and enrolment is sought after within a wide geographic area that includes north Dublin and south Meath. The programmes offered in the school are the Junior Certificate, established Leaving Certificate and compulsory Transition Year (TY). A substantial building programme that has been ongoing for two years is now coming to its conclusion.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

### ***Key Findings***

- The board plays an active role in the life of the school, supporting senior management and promoting good practice in major areas of school life. Priorities for school development, agreed through a commendably consultative process, are actively discussed at board meetings.
- The principal's leadership style is collaborative and he and the two deputy principals co-operate closely and are deeply committed to the school. In line with good practice, leadership roles are also distributed among teaching staff.
- Teams established in the school play key roles in planning and innovation and members show high levels of dedication and commitment.
- Most lessons observed were of good or very high quality and included strategies that were highly effective in promoting the active engagement of learners.
- Classroom management was excellent in all lessons and the learning environment was always supportive. Classroom interactions were very positive and respectful.
- There is a strong culture of self-evaluation and school improvement in the school.

### ***Recommendations for Further Development***

- It is recommended that TY be used as an opportunity for students to sample a range of senior cycle subjects, following which, they could make a more informed choice for the Leaving Certificate.
- The school day should be rearranged to accommodate a longer morning break.
- The school needs to reconsider current arrangements for the organisation and management of support for students with special educational needs.
- Strategies to support differentiated teaching should be investigated and implemented.

## **1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

### ***1.1 School ownership and management***

The board of management, appropriately constituted, is supported in its work by the Loreto Education Trust that has provided initial training and ongoing support during the board's term of office. The board plays an active role in the life of the school, supporting senior management and promoting good practice in major areas of school life. Members are aware of and regularly discuss the board's legislative and financial obligations. The board is driven by values including leadership, integrity and service, and decisions are reached by consensus and made in the best interests of students.

The board links with the parents' association (PA) through a parent-nominee member and has plans to link with the chair of the student council (SC) in the coming year. The board also agrees a brief report on board meetings for communication to teaching staff and the PA. This good practice helps to highlight the centrality of the role played by the board in the life of the school and to keep these important stakeholders informed.

The agenda for board meetings includes reports on school development planning and on the TY programme, ensuring the board is up to date on important school activities. Priorities for school development, agreed through a commendably consultative process, are categorised into six main areas and are actively discussed at board meetings. From among the agreed priorities, the board has selected key areas for its involvement, with a particular focus, this year, on what will receive its attention for the final year of its term. This is very good practice.

The board is also aware of evaluations that have taken place in the school and receives reports in advance of meetings to facilitate full discussion. The board is happy with the quality of teaching and learning in the school and also that recommendations made in previous inspection reports are being implemented.

There is good communication between the school and parents, as confirmed by responses to parent questionnaires completed as part of the evaluation. In addition, parents are encouraged to get involved in school activities. The parents' association is supportive of the school and the teachers, and the principal reciprocates this support through attending all meetings. Consideration should be given by the PA to affiliate to the National Parents' Council (post-primary) as a means of broadening its role as education partner.

### ***1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

The principal's leadership style is collaborative and he and the two deputy principals co-operate closely and are deeply committed as a senior management team. Each member of the team has specified duties as well as shared responsibility. As a team, they have led many innovations in the areas of staff and student care, teaching and learning. The principal and each of the deputies stressed the importance of communication and the establishment of relationships in their approach to management. Their leadership roles are extended through their membership of in-school committees including the pastoral care team and the school development planning team. In line with good practice, leadership roles are also distributed among members of the teaching staff.

The school development planning team has played a key role in establishing the current developmental priorities and in drawing up the school development plan 2010-2014. Teaching staff, students, members of the PA and school management have all contributed to the process, and a periodic newsletter ensures that all parties are kept informed of progress.

Following the good practices of review and amendment, an up-to-date schedule of posts that addresses the needs of the school to the greatest extent possible, has been established. Post duties are accompanied by documented descriptions and post holders meet with the principal to discuss their areas of responsibility. There is also significant, valuable and innovative work being undertaken by teachers outside the post-of-responsibility structure. This work, supported by the principal, is indicative of a high level of dedication and commitment by staff members.

There are once weekly and, in one case, twice weekly meetings scheduled for specific curricular, student-care and planning teams within the school. However, the year heads, or assistant year heads as appropriate, that are at the core of the student management structures, have scheduled meetings only twice per term. It is recommended that school management examine all possibilities and find a way to rebalance the schedule of weekly and termly meetings.

Further evidence of teachers' commitment to students and openness to innovation is the teaching-and-learning initiatives group that has developed from participation in the research project TL21, established by NUI Maynooth. Its current target is to facilitate whole-school implementation of innovative strategies to improve students' learning. A group of teachers meets regularly outside class time to share and explore ideas, which are then communicated to all teachers at staff meetings. It is very good practice that video clips of innovative teaching and learning in action in the classroom have been recorded. It is intended that these clips will be sent electronically to teachers during the course of the year to further encourage their wider use.

Whole-school literacy and numeracy development is being headed up by the school development planning committee. Focusing this year on literacy, strategies for implementation at whole-school level have been agreed. The first-year students were tested in September to ascertain their levels of literacy and numeracy and will be retested in April to measure progress. This good monitoring practice will be key in ensuring the effectiveness of any strategies and is an important element of the school's self-evaluation processes.

Members of the teaching staff are, in most instances, deployed in accordance with their qualifications and expertise. It is good practice that they are consulted on their teaching duties at the end of the school year prior to the framing of the timetable. Teachers are encouraged to engage in continuing professional development (CPD) and further study, and the support they receive from school management is playing its role in establishing the school as a learning organisation.

Subject planning is facilitating collaborative work practices for the teachers, who have invested significant time and energy in developing subject plans. Of those reviewed during the evaluation, some put students at the centre of the planning process through including programmes of work that were mostly expressed in terms of learning outcomes for students. All subject teams should now follow this practice. In line with the school's literacy and numeracy policy, all plans showed an awareness of literacy and numeracy development and how it might be progressed. In addition, good practice was seen in planning for the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) into teaching and learning activities.

Some subject plans included a summary analysis of students' performance in the 2012 Leaving Certificate examinations. This will be more valuable as a tool for planning and reflection when data from a number of years are presented and analysed and accompanied by action plans to address identified issues, as appropriate. Very good elements of subject planning included the exploration of extensive cross-curricular links, detailed plans for

students receiving learning support and an action plan for the development of the subject in the current year.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum with students studying a range of core subjects as well as four optional subjects. Consideration is currently being given to the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). As this would further improve the school's capacity to meet the needs of all students, school management is encouraged to pursue this option at an early opportunity. Following completion of the junior cycle, all students participate in Transition Year that includes core and optional subjects, along with a wide variety of modules. Currently students choose their Leaving Certificate optional subjects at the end of third year and they are the optional subjects they study during TY. It is recommended that TY be used as an opportunity for students to sample a fuller range of senior cycle subjects, allowing them make a more informed choice for the Leaving Certificate at the end of that year.

The school, in line with Department of Education and Skills' requirements, timetables classes for all students for at least twenty-eight hours. However, scheduled study periods for sixth-year classes are reducing the tuition time available to those students. This should be addressed. The mid-morning break lasts only five minutes, an insufficient time for students or teachers to refresh and organise themselves for the remainder of the morning classes. The school day should be rearranged to accommodate a longer morning break.

The long-standing TY programme offered in the school provides opportunities for memorable educational experiences for students. The TY co-ordinator, who participates in dedicated CPD, is assisted in managing the programme by the fourth-year head and a core team of four teachers. It is planned that the internal annual programme review will now be extended to include parents of TY students and this will be good practice.

The extensive student-support structures include form teachers, year heads, guidance counsellors, chaplain and senior management. Form teachers meet with their form classes each week to support and monitor their well-being and progress. It is good practice that first-year form teachers guide students through a specially tailored programme. The school's pastoral-care team includes a representative year head, guidance counsellors, chaplain, special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinator and one of the deputy principals. The team meets on a weekly basis to discuss and progress student-support issues and to plan the annual Mental Well-being week.

Guidance is available to individual students by appointment or referral and third-year and sixth-year students are offered individual appointments with one of the two qualified guidance counsellors to discuss subject choices and career options. Guidance classes are scheduled for third-year and sixth-year class groups on a modular basis and for fifth-year class groups once per week. There is a well-planned guidance programme that links in with the social, personal and health education (SPHE) programme in third year.

Support for students with SEN is offered on a withdrawal basis. Students requiring learning support usually receive two additional periods per week of both English and Mathematics. Despite some efforts already made in this area, the school is lacking in personnel qualified in learning support and resource and this needs to be addressed. 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 staff involved to a smaller team of teachers who are willing to devote time to learning support and resource teaching and possibly to engage in further training.

A democratically elected student council, student prefects, subject captains, head girl and deputy head girls are all forums for developing student leadership in the school. Students interviewed during the evaluation were fully aware of these roles and many expressed a keen interest in becoming part of the leadership network. All student leaders are readily recognised by the badges they wear and the SC has a dedicated notice board and a section on the school website.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

### **1.3 Management of facilities**

The school's building programme is almost complete and a new extension is providing high-quality additional accommodation. Specialist rooms, general classrooms and office and open areas are well maintained and, in some instances, are being used for uplifting and thoughtful displays. Facilities for sport are also being improved with the completion of a synthetic-surface playing pitch.

The school prioritised the redevelopment of the library and it has now been upgraded. Its popularity with students is evident in the school and its management and development is greatly aided by the presence of a school-funded librarian.

## **2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### **2.1 The quality of learning and teaching**

The quality of learning and teaching ranged from fair to excellent, with most lessons being of good or very high quality. There was thorough preparation for all lessons, including the advance preparation of materials to support students' learning. All lessons were purposeful and had clear learning intentions, almost all of which were clearly communicated to students. Best examples of this were where students were told in what ways they would progress by the end of the lesson. It is recommended that all teachers present the learning intentions in this way – that is, in the form of learning outcomes for students.

Most lessons included strategies that were highly effective in promoting the active engagement of learners. These included high-quality group work, co-operative learning, peer teaching, student presentations and approaches that made learning fun. ICT was integrated into the majority of lessons and, in the majority of these, enhanced learning for students. Teachers should continue to build their own expertise in this area and to explore new ways of using ICT in their classrooms. All lessons were characterised by very good student engagement as students worked purposefully on assigned tasks.

The school's focus on literacy was evident in most lessons and, at its best, included the meaningful integration of key words into lesson activities, an increased focus on understanding terms and an expectation that students would communicate using the correct subject-specific terminology. Classrooms were also enlivened with subject posters, symbols and students' projects, enriching the learning environment for students.

Teachers provided support for individual students in a majority of lessons. However, the use of scaffolding strategies for less-able students and additional challenges for more-able students was evident in only a few lessons. It is suggested that strategies to support differentiated teaching might be investigated and disseminated through the teaching-and-learning initiatives group.

Classroom management was excellent in all lessons and a supportive learning environment was always in evidence. Teacher-student interactions were very positive and respectful and students were also respectful of each other. Students were appropriately challenged by the learning activities in almost all lessons. Their contributions in class were encouraged and handled respectfully and sensitively by teachers. Good routines were established in practical lessons in line with health and safety protocols.

Students' progress during lessons was checked predominantly through the use of questioning. There was some very good use of higher-order questions, challenging students' understanding and extending their learning. Good practice in the assessment of students' written work was seen where it was closely monitored and accompanied by helpful feedback from teachers.

Learning intentions were usually attained during lessons and were checked by some teachers using innovative and effective strategies. It is recommended that, prior to the ending of a lesson, all teachers review the attainment of the stated learning outcomes as a further means of checking progress. Performance by students in the Certificate examinations compares favourably with performance on a national level.

### **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

#### ***3.1 Management***

Most main recommendations made to school management in previous evaluations have been implemented. However, the establishment of a core team of fully-trained SPHE teachers remains to be realised.

Implementation in subject planning is also good. In future, it would be worthwhile to record discussions of methodologies and teaching strategies that take place at subject planning meetings.

#### ***3.2 Learning and teaching***

The main recommendations for learning and teaching are now being implemented.

A number of statements made in previous evaluation reports apply equally to all subjects. The school's process for addressing the outcomes of evaluations includes sharing generic findings of good practice and recommendations for improvement with all staff for school-wide adoption. This is very good practice.

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

There is a strong culture of self-evaluation and school improvement in Loreto secondary school, Balbriggan. With the implementation of the DES-recommended process of school self-evaluation and a focus on the achievement of targets, the school's capacity for improvement is very good.