

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Mount Anville Secondary School
Mount Anville Road, Dublin 14
Roll number: 60140F**

Date of inspection: 23 October 2015



**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 October 2015 in Mount Anville Secondary School, Dublin. 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

Mount Anville Secondary School is a fee charging girls' school in south Dublin with a long tradition of educational provision dating from 1865. Established by the Society of the Sacred Heart, the school's ethos focusses on intellect, character, community, faith and social awareness leading to action. The school welcomes students from all backgrounds and abilities and has a current enrolment of 639 students. A range of curricular programmes including the Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate is offered by the school.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- A very committed school management and staff ensure that the ethos of the school is embedded in its practices and procedures.
- The board of management and the senior management team effectively execute their leadership and management roles by providing a high quality learning environment.
- Staff promote a very strong work ethic in enabling students to achieve to their potential.
- Significant progress has been made in progressing school development and collaborative subject planning, though a strategic approach in this regard is lacking.
- There are some deficits in current curricular provision and timetabling.
- The school's pastoral care structures reflect the high priority placed on student welfare.
- In almost all lessons, the quality of teaching and learning observed ranged from good to very good with some exemplary practice noted; in a very small number of lessons there was scope for improvement in the choice of teaching methodologies used.
- The reflective school community has a strong professional capacity to pursue and implement improvement where necessary.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The range of pedagogical initiatives and school self-evaluation (SSE) targets should be streamlined and developed into a coherent teaching and learning action plan.
- Senior management should ensure that all programmes are included on the school's main timetable.
- A student academic mentoring and tracking system should be formalised to further enhance the high standard of student care.
- Student learning should be further enriched through the increased use of differentiated learning techniques, assessment for learning strategies, and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) as a student learning tool.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The appropriately constituted board of management has considerable experience and a range of skills that serve the school well. The board is committed to ensuring that the school's ethos permeates its work and is diligent in ensuring that high standards underpin the provision of a holistic school environment. The monthly written principal's report ensures that the board is well informed about school activities. In line with best practice, an agreed report after each board meeting is prepared for the staff and parents' association. As the board concludes its term of office, it has initiated good procedures to support the transfer of responsibilities to the incoming board.

A comprehensive range of policies has been developed in a consultative manner with the stakeholders. Policies are routinely reviewed within a five year period. It is advisable that policies directly relating to student care follow a three-year review cycle.

The principal and deputy principal constitute a very effective and competent senior management team. They divide their duties as appropriate to agreed areas of responsibility and expertise, and adopt a collaborative approach to decision-making. Senior management is highly dedicated to the provision of an enabling learning environment through a consultative approach to school leadership and development. A model of distributed leadership is evident in the school through the post of responsibility system and by the creation of additional key roles which empower individuals and groups of teachers.

A well organised representative student council has effected positive change in the school and gathers regular feedback from student surveys and meetings with class groups. The board should consider inviting the officers of the student council to address it on its activities and achievements.

The committed parents' association acts as a forum for parental discussion, organises educational related talks and actively supports school events. The association has contributed to the review of school policies and maintains a profile on the school website. Almost all the parents who responded to the WSE-MLL survey indicated that they were happy with the school. However, a significant minority of parents indicated that the school does not regularly seek their views on school matters. It is suggested that measures to strengthen consultation with the general parent body be explored.

The school's vision to provide a learning community and centre of excellence that prepares students for further education and life in the twenty-first century is commendable. For example since 2012 the school has undertaken important initiatives such as Bridge 21,

Building Learning Power, and Leading4Learning. The willingness of staff to engage with these initiatives is commended. On review of subject department plans there was little evidence of planning and implementation of these initiatives at subject department level. To advance a more strategic approach to embedding good practice from these worthwhile initiatives, they should be streamlined into a unified school specific learning and teaching action plan which should include short, medium and long-term targets for its implementation. The outcomes of the process should be regularly reviewed at board and staff meetings so that on-going progress can be monitored and evaluated.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal are proactive in their efforts to progress the school as a centre of educational excellence. Their joint efforts to lead and facilitate a consistently high-quality learning environment through collaborative subject planning is praiseworthy. The senior management team mentors new teachers by visiting lessons and providing advice. This is very good practice. It is admirable that some experienced teachers have initiated peer observation practice as a professional development strategy. All teachers are encouraged and supported to develop their professional practice by availing of continuing professional development (CPD). Where CPD relates to teaching strategies, consideration should be given to initially piloting and evaluating the initiatives among a small group of teachers with a view to maximising the benefits for all teachers.

Assistant principals fulfil year head duties and contribute to decision making in consultation with senior management. A small number of year heads also mentor students' academic progress. However, this practice is not consistent across all year groups and this should be addressed.

Non-post holders are encouraged to take on responsibilities which build leadership expertise. The advisory board of studies, which the principal re-established, is a very powerful forum for staff discussion and action planning in the school. The very well attended monthly meetings are open to all teachers. Staff promote a very strong work ethic and are committed to enabling students to achieve to their potential. This is also reflected in responses to questionnaires and from discussions with parents and students.

Enrolment practice embraces inclusiveness and fairness in line with the characteristic spirit of the school. A revised admissions policy is currently in draft form. The board should ensure that the revised policy accurately reflects school practice regarding the timing of requests for information from students with additional educational needs.

A good system of first-year induction is in place. The guidance counsellor engages with all first-year students in their first term. School prefects regularly meet with new students through the school's 'house system'. New students in their first term sample all optional subjects. This practice supports an informed view in making subject choices.

A broad academic curriculum is offered within the school day. Students at senior cycle are offered the option of taking an additional subject outside of school hours. In many instances these subjects have reduced class contact time. LCVP is provided on the main timetable for students with an exemption from Irish. However, for most students, LCVP is provided outside of the main timetable. This non-inclusive approach for a curricular programme is undesirable. Senior management should ensure that programmes are included on the school's main timetable.

Currently, senior cycle students choose from pre-set option bands. However, a very small number of sixth-year students have discontinued their study of one of their optional subjects. This points to some dissatisfaction with subject selection which was also

referenced in responses to parent and student questionnaires issued as part of the MLL process. This is of concern and should be addressed by teachers and senior management.

TY students partake in a range of appropriate activities including the sampling of Leaving Certificate subjects, work experience and social and community placements. The timetabling of work experience at the end of May should be reviewed so that students have the opportunity to reflect on their experiences within the school year in line with TY guidelines. Consideration should also be given to further development of assessment practices such as reflective journals and portfolio preparation across all subject areas within the programme.

The school's clearly structured code of behaviour has a coherent ladder of referral. However, evidence gathered during the evaluation indicated that there was confusion among students on the operation on a newly introduced merit system. It is commendable that year heads have undertaken training in restorative justice practices and have incorporated it into disciplinary practice. In responses to questionnaires as part of the evaluation, a small number of students did not agree they were treated fairly and this perception is endorsed by a minority of parents surveyed. School management, in taking account of these findings, should consider how to share the understanding of the principles of restorative justice and the merit system with parents and students.

An array of opportunities is provided for students to assume active leadership roles. Students regularly contribute to and lead daily whole-school assemblies. Very good structures are in place for student council members to discuss relevant aspects of school organisation with senior management and their peers. Deliberate attempts have been made to extend the range of extra-curricular and sporting activities for students. The focus on strengthening students' appreciation of Art, Music and literature in the school is praiseworthy.

Students' learning and individual education needs are supported by the very good structures provided through the pastoral-care system. This includes class tutors, the chaplaincy, the individual education needs and guidance team. There is a formal referral system in place whereby teachers can relay concerns regarding students to the guidance team. Class tutors, at junior cycle, have weekly timetabled contact with their tutor group and they in turn meet with the respective year head on a fortnightly basis.

A comprehensive guidance programme is provided for all students. It is praiseworthy that in addition to the administering of school-based assessments, the guidance team's assessment of each student's preferred learning style is shared with relevant teachers. Senior management should consider formulating a centralised system for tracking and monitoring each student's academic progress. This could include students' preferred learning style, baseline assessment data and outcomes from subject assessments. As a means of strengthening the academic management role of year heads, this information will assist them in setting targets for students to reach their full learning potential.

Designated hours allocated by the Department to students in need of additional support are used for their intended purpose. Resource hours are delivered in a well-equipped purpose-built resource area. An effective approach to the coordination of resources and learning support was evident, including the preparation of individual learning plans. The school should consider additional methods of delivering learning support, such as team teaching and in-class support in addition to the existing good practice.

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

School facilities are of high quality and are very well maintained. There are very good displays of students' work, projects, achievements and photographs in classrooms, corridors and on notice boards throughout the school. An up-to-date health and safety statement, based on a risk assessment, has been prepared by the school.

Management's focus on the strategic development of the educational environment is clearly evident in the school. There have been deliberate attempts to make best use of the school environment in terms of internal and external learning spaces. The Eliza Croft Learning hub for collaborative learning and a digital technology hub facilitate active learning. The library with its dedicated librarian is a very good resource centre and learning space. Concern for the school environment is promoted through green school activities and student prefects play a role in this regard.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Collaborative subject department planning is well established in the school. To enhance the sharing of ideas and cross-curricular approaches in TY and Civics Social and Personal Education (CSPE) a core team of teachers could be established in each area.

Common programmes of work and common assessments are integral to the work of all subject teams. Some subject departments had aligned the learning outcomes, methodologies, resources, differentiation and assessment techniques that relate to each topic in their curricular plans. This good practice should be completed for all subjects. It was noted that some teachers used programme plans as working documents to reflect on the effectiveness of programme implementation. This information should be used to further enhance their subject department programme plans.

Twenty one lessons across a range of subjects were observed. In almost all lessons the overall quality of teaching and learning observed ranged from good to very good with some exemplary practice noted. There was room for improvement noted in a small number of lessons, particularly in terms of the choice and the range of teaching strategies chosen to facilitate high quality differentiated learning.

At the outset of lessons, shared learning intentions effectively set the learning agenda and assisted in the development of a logical lesson structure. Best practice was evident where learning intentions were differentiated based on student ability. On occasion students' input to learning intentions proved highly effective in their engagement and promoted a sense of shared responsibility for learning. It is recommended that time be taken during all lessons to revisit the learning intentions in order to assess students' understanding and to provide additional formative assessment opportunities.

There was a very good balance between teacher-led and student-led activity in almost all lessons. In most lessons students had opportunities to work collaboratively with peers. In many classrooms the layout allowed for the seamless integration of well-planned group and pair work. While some very good practice was noted in reinforcing learning from student activities, due consideration should be given to facilitating students to process, generalise and apply their learning from group work and pair work activities.

A commendable emphasis was placed on attention to detail in explanations given during each lesson. Deliberate efforts were made to link lesson content with previous learning and some very good use was made of additional resources to support learning. With the exception of a small number of lessons where exemplary practice was noted, ICT was underutilised as a tool to support learning. It is recommended that subject department plans should include a section on how ICT can be used as a tool to support students' learning.

Good attention was paid the development of literacy. In almost all lessons teachers made deliberate efforts to ensure that students understood and used subject-specific keywords and technical terms. There is scope to enhance the range of strategies used to support numeracy across the curriculum.

In all lessons a very good rapport was evident; teachers had high expectations of students and encouraged their independent learning and own responsibility for the completion of work. Students were confident communicators and in many lessons they engaged in high quality discussions of lesson content. Teachers' use of higher-order questioning which challenged students and consolidated learning was good. Given the range of student abilities, there is scope to consider further development of strategies to support differentiation.

In all lessons student copybooks were well organised. Assessment was an integral component of all of the lessons observed. Best practice was observed in copybooks when teachers explained why work was of a good quality and provided specific guidance on how to improve. There is scope to further develop and expand this good practice.

Parents receive regular reports on students' academic progress and all year groups with the exception of TY have an annual parent teacher meeting. In TY, parents, at a subject information meeting, can meet with teachers. To further support parental involvement it is advisable to establish a formal parent-teacher meeting for this year group.

Student achievement at all levels and uptake of higher level in certificate examinations is very good and exceptional in many subjects. Subject departments compare their analysis of certificate examinations outcomes to national norms. Best practice was observed where a subject department provided a brief commentary on their reflection of student outcomes having compared them to baseline assessment data which aided an informed view on teaching strategies used.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

School management has been attentive to and has acted on recommendations arising from previous evaluations in Physical Education, Science and Physics, Classical Studies, French and Mathematics. Recommendations relating to health and safety issues have been implemented. The recommendation in relation to timetabling of Physical Education should be reviewed since class periods are now shorter than at the time of the original evaluation and this erodes engagement time for the subject. School management has enhanced the value of subject inspections by facilitating whole-staff discussions and actions arising from recommendations in individual reports.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Recommendations from previous reports also focused on improvements in the areas of planning, greater use of ICT, questioning strategies and the promotion of independent learning in lessons. The subject departments and teachers involved have made progress in

the implementation of these recommendations. As observed in lessons, there is scope to further develop some of these recommendations at a whole school level.

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

School self-evaluation and reflective practice have been effectively used as the basis for implementing change and improvement in the school. The appointment of a director of school self-evaluation has led to a focused and targeted approach. Teacher, student and parent responses to school-administered questionnaires and feedback from focus groups are used to inform targets for school improvement. In the current year an overly ambitious improvement agenda has set targets for further development in areas such as student support, literacy, numeracy, the student learning experience and use of ICT. It is advisable that these extensive areas be streamlined to ensure effective whole school embedding of practice.

The school has high quality management and leadership capacity. The process of self-evaluation is embedded in current management structures and in all aspects of the school.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Mount Anville Secondary School welcomes the recent WSE-MLL Report which affirms the work of the school across a broad range of areas:

- The embedding of the ethos of the Society of the Sacred Heart
- The provision of a high quality learning environment for students by the Board of Management
- Very effective and competent Senior Management Team
- Strong work ethic among staff – reflected in student and parent questionnaires
- Staff commitment to enabling students to achieve their potential
- Committed Parents' Association which acts as a forum for parental discussion, organises education related talks and actively supports school events
- The Student Council which has effected positive change in the school
- Pastoral Care structures which reflect the high priority placed on student welfare
- A strong extra-curricular programme
- An array of opportunities available for students to assume leadership roles

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

The suggestions and recommendations of the inspectorate have already been incorporated into our on-going School Self Evaluation process and have either been completed or are under review by the Board of Management, Senior Management Team and by the Academic Advisory Board of Studies.