

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

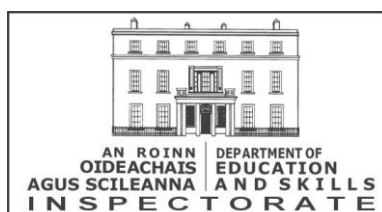
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Mary's Secondary School
Glasnevin, Dublin 11
Roll number: 60770P**

Date of inspection: 18 January 2012



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in January 2012 in St Mary's Secondary School, Glasnevin. 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 Mary's Secondary School, serves a socially diverse catchment area and has provided quality education for girls during its long history. In 2009, the Le Chéile Trust became its trustee organisation. The school has a current enrolment of 725 which represents a gradual increase over the last number of years. The vast majority of parents surveyed were happy overall with the school.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board is proactive, is very committed to supporting the school and to safeguarding its ethos, has overseen the review of policies including the code of behaviour and its communications are generally effective.
- The senior management team is very effective, leadership is distributed and staff feels empowered.
- The quality of continuing professional development (CPD) planning and provision is very good, school development planning (SDP) is embedded in the school and co-ordination is efficient and effective.
- The pastoral care system is reflective of the school's ethos, the curriculum is subject to ongoing review and efforts are made to meet the needs of a diverse student intake by offering a broad range of subjects and programmes and by addressing the additional learning needs of its students.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall.
- Self-evaluation is well understood, is regarded as a priority and the school has very good capacity to promote school improvement.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should adopt a systematic process of rolling review and updating of school policies, including a few aspects of the code of behaviour.
- Some aspects of middle management need review, including the introduction of formal annual reports from post-holders to senior management.
- The feasibility of introducing a technology subject should be examined, uptake of higher level in some areas should be increased and certain aspects of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) need review.
- The school needs to devise specific strategies to improve the attendance of targeted students.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Throughout its history, the school has prided itself on its ethos which is underpinned by the philosophy of Margaret Aylward who founded the Holy Faith Sisters. Support for the school ethos informs all aspects of the board of management's leadership style.

The board has adopted a positive partnership approach and is involved in the school and local community in a number of ways. The quality of partnership with in-school management is very good and the senior management team is held in high regard.

The board carries out all its functions in accordance with statutory requirements. Members have received training for their role. The Board is very committed to the school and is proud of both staff and students. It endorses and supports CPD and receives regular, comprehensive reports on teaching and learning from the principal in her role as secretary to the board.

The board maintains good communication with the Parents' Association (PA) which is fully supportive of the school. However there is some scope for developing communications with the generality of parents, as survey findings indicate. The board should consider offering opportunities to the student council and to staff members to formally present reports on their work from time to time.

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

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*.

The school's priorities for development

Priorities for school development are informed by a well-established in-school planning process. The board evaluates and approves all policies brought to its attention after a process of consultation.

The board's priority is to continue its practical support in order to maintain the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Currently, its focus is on investigating the feasibility of teacher-based classrooms, continuing its commitment to CPD, overseeing the implementation of the school's literacy and numeracy strategy, and progressing school self-evaluation.

It is recommended that the board adopt a systematic process of rolling policy review to ensure that all policies are brought up to date and ratified in sequence.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The school has a very effective senior management team that enjoys the full confidence and support of the board, parents and school staff. The team has developed a vision for the school: to maximise the potential of students and teachers, and to sustain and enhance school traditions. The two members of the senior management team, the principal and deputy principal, work very well together

The principal discharges the role of instructional leader very effectively. A strong emphasis is placed on staff selection and development. In addition to her role as instructional leader, she carries out the standard administrative and management duties associated with the work of the school principal.

The deputy is deeply involved in the day to day practical management of the school and is very committed to the promotion of a positive learning environment. Both liaise with staff, offer support and deal with issues. The deputy carries out additional duties previously attached to posts. Currently, for example, she is the school's fire safety officer. This needs to be reviewed and such duties transferred to middle management.

Areas of operation are clearly defined in line with roles, skills and interests and these are mutually agreed. Both work assiduously to ensure that no overlap occurs in common areas of operation. There is a very good level of communication between the two and regular formal and informal meetings are scheduled. Space for review and reflection is preserved at the end of the school year. A strong level of trust and respect exists between the members of the team.

Leadership is distributed and staff feels empowered. This is highly commended. Staff members including non-post holders, are encouraged to lead and manage projects designed to improve the quality of student learning. The post of responsibility schedule was reviewed in 2011. The post structure appears to be serving many of the prioritised needs of the school but there is some scope for further review in a number of areas. It is suggested that post-holders present formal annual reports to the principal. They should be encouraged to set achievable targets, to document implementation strategies, to review progress and to evaluate impact on learners. Communication between senior management and those with leadership roles is good and formal meetings are held.

School development planning is very well embedded in the school over a number of years. Coordination is efficient and effective. Good structures are in place and communication processes are good. The school's curriculum review committee meets a few times a year under the aegis of SDP.

The principal has been proactive in promoting CPD and a significant number of events have taken place in the last number of years aimed at improving teaching and learning. Evidence of effectiveness was observed in many lessons. The school has a highly professional staff. The quality of communication and collaboration is good in all aspects of staff leadership.

Leadership of students

The school has an open admissions policy that is clear and fair. Communication with the feeder primary schools is very good. The transfer from primary to post primary is well managed and a number of strategies are in place. The school has identified a need to develop a transfer programme to fifth year for those who do not opt for Transition Year (TY). This is commendable.

The school has an inclusion policy. Pre-entry assessment is used for diagnostic purposes. It is positive that the school is changing one of its assessment instruments.

A minority of students require learning support. A learning support policy has been developed and supports are appropriately organised. The special education team informs and advises staff and this is commended.

A small minority of students are in need of language support, a co-ordinator has been appointed, and a plan and policy have been developed. Students whose first language is not

English are encouraged and facilitated to take their native (non-curricular) language in the Leaving Certificate examination and this is very positive. Many actively participate in extracurricular and co-curricular activities.

There is a need for ongoing testing and tracking of all students in receipt of learning and language support to determine the effectiveness of the programmes of intervention and to track progress.

A literacy task force is now established and initial work done. This is a very good development for the school and indicates a proactive approach to the issue.

Behaviour is generally good and students have a positive attitude to the school. The code of behaviour was recently comprehensively reviewed and there are many very good elements noted in the document. The ladder of referral is explicit. An anomalous aspect is the scope of the role of the class teacher. This should be reviewed. A core principle of the code is its emphasis on positive behaviour. While this is frequently implemented in practice, and students are regularly affirmed orally, there should be more specific articulation in the code itself. The awards initiative is a good strategy to reinforce positive behaviour, effort and achievement. There is a lack of consistency in the documenting of merits in the student journal and this should be addressed. Consultation with staff and students should assist in overcoming obstacles.

The school has an attendance policy and strategy which is commendable. The introduction of the e-portal system and texting parents is positive. Attendance is good for the majority but a pattern of very poor attendance has been established in the case of a small minority and this was observed in some senior cycle classes. It is recommended that the school devise specific strategies for targeted students. Consideration should be given to assigning some home-school community liaison duties to a member of staff.

Year heads have a specific role in student management. They meet tutors regularly, both informally and formally, and hold regular assemblies to motivate students and to raise and address issues. The role of the tutor is documented and designated tutor time is allocated. The tutor performs an important front-line role in early intervention. Ways of progressing anti-bullying measures should be regularly reviewed and students should themselves play a central role.

A care team is in place and is credited with effecting improvement in behaviour, retention and progression and this is commended. The school's guidance personnel and chaplain are important links in the pastoral care structure of the school. Commendably, prefects have an advisory role to junior students and help with the homework club. The chaplaincy is a particularly effective support in the school.

The school has a Relationships and Sexuality Education programme and policy and Social and Personal Health Education programme both of which are provided on the timetable, the former through Religious Education classes in the senior cycle. The survey of students and parents highlights a need for more emphasis on raising awareness about drugs and alcohol abuse and providing more information in the area of relationships and sexuality.

The student council has a significant role in the school and includes all year groups. It has had training and its work is published in the school newsletter. Communications with the board and PA are good. It is recommended that the student council make presentations to the board of management and that it widen its representative base aiming in particular at the small minority of students who have disengaged from full participation in school life.

There is evidence of improved progression rates to higher education, and in particular, to further education for students in the lower end of the ability spectrum and this is commended. The school has enjoyed success in a wide variety of competitions, most recently in the BT Young Scientist & Technology Exhibition. A good range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities is on offer and this represents enormous commitment on the part of staff. However, there is also evidence from the survey that a significant number of students do not participate and this is an area for development.

St Mary's provides a broad curriculum and a good range of subjects. Science is optional in the junior cycle and consideration should be given to making it compulsory. No technology subjects are available; in the context of curriculum review, the feasibility of providing one should be examined. All review at junior level needs to occur within the framework of the junior cycle review and the changes flagged therein.

Uptake of the optional TY programme is good. Structures are in place. The programme impacts positively on learning by introducing students to new skills and enterprise education is commended in this regard.

It is very positive that the school provides the LCVP. Notable improvements have been made to planning structures, for example, a committed co-ordinator has been appointed and a team of teachers established. It is recommended that planning time be allocated and that both timetabling and attainment in the link modules be reviewed.

The Gold Module is provided for students who find learning challenging and is a very good initiative. Students participate in Gaisce, the President's Award programme and also complete a Further Education and Training Awards Council accredited course, Digital Creator, through which students learn to use a range of digital media.

Students experience a year-long sampling programme of options in first year and are therefore facilitated to make informed choices. However, the commitment of a year needs to be reviewed. In TY, students have an opportunity to experience curricular subjects new to them and to sample Leaving Certificate science subjects. Senior cycle students are informed of all subject choices through the Guidance programme and parents are invited to open nights. A majority of students and parents surveyed are happy with the level of information on subject choices.

Class sizes vary, depending on the subject, and some are small. Larger classes need to be kept under review. The provision of study periods for some students in the senior cycle to accommodate curricular needs should be reviewed as a means of ensuring the minimum class contact hours.

Communications with parents are maintained in a variety of ways and are regarded as very good by representatives. A recent innovation has been the attendance of students at parent-teacher meetings and this is positive. Student learning is supported through after-school study and the homework club is particularly commended.

2.3 Management of facilities

School buildings and facilities have undergone considerable improvement and upgrading over the last number of years and work is ongoing. Improved ICT infrastructure and the development of the Mary Carroll Library are commended. The latter hosts both a book club and a creative writing club and these initiatives are highly commended. The role of the library should be extended in the context of the school's literacy strategy. Sports facilities have also been enhanced.

Health and safety policy is updated and regular fire drills are held. The school cultivates environmental awareness. It has recently earned the accolade of a green flag for recycling and this whole-school endeavour is highly commended.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning observed in thirty-three lessons over thirty-four class periods was very good in the majority of lessons, and in many instances, exemplary. Planning for learning was very good and a good range of resources that catered for the diversity of learners was used in lessons. Teacher use of ICT was good.

Methodologies used were well considered. Learning intentions were explicit. Collaborative learning was commended in many lessons and frequency of use is borne out by survey findings. Classroom atmosphere was very positive; the degree of affirmation given to students and the maintenance of a nurturing learning environment were commendable. Questioning strategy was good in most lessons. In language lessons, teacher use of the target language was good. However, there is scope for developing student use of the target language for meaningful communication purposes in some lessons.

Some emphasis on literacy development was observed and this is a positive sign of a growing awareness that all teachers are teachers of language and literacy. A focus on promoting numeracy awareness was not observed in most subject areas but this is likely to change when the school's strategy is rolled out.

Evidence from classroom observation and from the survey indicates that students are engaged in learning and supported by their teachers. Attainment is very good in many subject areas but there is scope for raising expectations in a minority of cases. Teacher enthusiasm and reflection were of a very high order in some lessons.

A good range of assessment modes was observed and particularly commended were assessment for learning strategies. It is suggested that the school consider enrolling students in the optional oral examination for Junior Certificate students in the curricular languages and there is some evidence to suggest that this is already being considered.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

The school has adopted a positive attitude to evaluation and has set about the systematic implementation of recommendations from previous subject inspection reports over time. Parents' representatives receive reports and they are confident in management's commitment to implementation.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Progress has been made. In the majority of lessons, learning outcomes were clear, the quality of planning for learning was good and questioning strategy was good. The promotion of higher-order thinking was noted in many lessons but there is scope for development in some. There is still scope for increasing the numbers taking higher level in some subjects. Assessment has been documented in the music plan and this is positive.

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

There is good capacity for school improvement. The board is reflective in its style and informally examines its work. It is therefore well placed to consider ways in which it could formalise self-review, including the occasional surveying of stakeholders to help it to evaluate its current operations.

The board and senior management recognise the importance of self-evaluation, have set it as a priority planning area and the formal process is in an early stage of development. Through review, the school has already addressed key areas and a particularly positive initiative has been the introduction of mixed-ability grouping. CPD has brought about improvements in teaching and learning

There is already a good level of consultation with stakeholders and the school has begun the process of data gathering and analysis to enable it to develop specific targets that are achievable within a reasonable timeframe and can be measured and evaluated. Good review practices are already in place in some areas. School planning is well-embedded and this has impacted on learning by changing school culture and giving impetus to subject planning.

The school's positive engagement with external evaluation is an indicator of its capacity to bring about 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 of St. Mary's Holy Faith, Glasnevin acknowledges the WSE/MLL Report received on Wednesday 9th May 2012.

We would like to record our appreciation to the two inspectors who came to St. Mary's to carry out the inspection for their challenging and very detailed observations and findings.

We are delighted the Report gives such positive recognition and affirmation to the work being done by the school community.

We are happy that the Report highlights:

- The high quality of teaching and learning.
- The positive and all embracing influence of the Ethos of the school.
- The well developed planning structures.
- The centrality of the well developed school planning procedures.
- The high commitment to CPD.
- The implementation of recommendations of previous inspection Reports.
- The excellent example of leadership demonstrated by the Senior Management Team of Principal and Deputy to their leadership of the whole school community.
- The impact of the sharing and delegation of responsibility by Senior Management.
- The empowerment of staff.
- The effective pastoral care system and the particular role of the care team.
- The important role of the special education team in advising staff.
- The strategies followed for transfer from Primary schools.
- The evidence of the positive partnership communication and engagement with all stakeholders.
- The inclusive Admission Policy.
- The significant role of the Student Council.
- The broad curriculum provided.
- The role of the Board in support of the school community.
- The schools' attendance policy.
- The continuing development of the plant and educational resources.
- The continuing rise in the number of students going to third level.
- Recognition for staff of the vast array of additional educational, sporting and cultural activities provided in the school.

We particularly appreciate that both inspectors took cognizance of and fully appreciated the Characteristic Spirit of the school which permeates the Report and their understanding of the very particular nature of St Mary's Holy Faith, Glasnevin.

The Board does have some difficulty with:

1. How extra duties or the re assigning of new duties can be managed when 9 of middle management posts have been lost to the school.
2. How smaller classes, while always desirable, can be organised with quota cuts and the urgent need to provide Guidance and Counselling hours within reduced staffing and resources.

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 at its meeting on Monday 14th May gave considerable time to the Report and is of course planning to deal in a systematic way, as far as is possible in the current educational reality, with the issues as identified.