

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Meánscoil Phádraig Naofa,
Castleisland, County Kerry
Roll number: 61250R**

Date of inspection: 11 November 2013



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in November 2013 in Méanscoil Phádraig Naofa. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with in-school management and groups of teachers 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

Meánscoil Phádraig Naofa (St Patrick's) is a voluntary secondary school founded in 1939, catering for students from both urban and rural communities in the town of Castleisland and surrounding localities. The school operates under a unitary management system with the current owner/manager, who is also the school principal, having taken over in June 2012. Enrolment has increased steadily over the last five years to the present enrolment of 148 students. The school collaborates with the local girls' secondary school, St Joseph's, to provide a Transition Year (TY) programme and a shared timetable in some subject areas.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- St Patrick's is a very good school with increasing enrolment led by a highly committed owner/manager/principal.
- The school does not currently have a board of management or a parents' association.
- The school has a highly committed staff exhibiting a clear dedication to their work and to the welfare of all students in the school.
- A very positive, professional atmosphere is evident in all interactions between teachers and students throughout the school.
- Students are interested, well engaged and active participants in their learning.
- The collaboration with the local girls' secondary school to provide a TY programme and a shared timetable in certain subject areas has been of significant benefit to the school.
- The overall standard of teaching and learning is very good.
- Excellent school self-evaluation strategies have been in place in the school for a number of years and the school is well placed to manage its growth and development into the future.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The establishment of a board of management, to oversee the management of the school and to discharge the functions of a board as set out in Section 15 of the Education Act 1998 should be regarded as a priority for the school.

- In order to allow for formal consultation with parents on the operation and development of the school, a parents' association should be established as soon as is practicable.
- The recruitment of a guidance counsellor would be very beneficial and should be considered as a staffing priority.
- Some minor changes are required to the school's admissions policy.
- Management should continue to promote the use of a wide range of teaching methodologies, including the use of assessment for learning strategies (AfL), pair and group work and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) by students.
- Some modifications to the format of written reports to parents are recommended.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The current principal of St Patrick's Secondary School took over the roles of owner, manager and principal in June 2012. As such, he is also fulfilling the role and functions of a board of management in addition to overseeing the day-to-day running of the school and fulfilling the role of educational leader. While the outstanding personal and professional commitment of the owner is clearly evident, it is nonetheless recommended that a board of management, with appropriate representation, should be established. Despite the fact that the owner carries out his many duties in a fair and transparent manner, the establishment of a board of management should be viewed as providing a means through which the various stakeholders could have a formal role in the development and running of the school. It should also improve the standing of school policies and procedures that are ratified by the board, and provide a means whereby any disputes that might emerge could be settled at a local level. Lastly, a board of management established to carry out its duties in line with Section 15 of the Education Act 1998, would have the capacity to reduce the significant burden of responsibility and workload which is currently vested in one individual.

Subsequent to, or perhaps in tandem with, the establishment of a board of management, a parents' association, affiliated to the national governing body, should also be formed. While the principal operates an 'open door' policy whereby individual parents can express their views at any time, and parent questionnaires indicate very high levels of satisfaction with the school, the establishment of a parents' association would provide a vehicle through which the views of the wider parent community can be expressed. In the same way as board of management approval of school policies prior to ratification strengthens their standing within the school, gathering the views of parents on such policies and plans will have a similar effect and may provide a very useful insight into the perspective of parents. This would also help to fulfil the school's ethos statement which states that the school is a *lay secondary school of Catholic ethos, inclusive in its intake, allowing for and encouraging the active involvement of all the educational partners in all aspects of school life*.

The school's senior management team exhibits excellent leadership and management skills. Both the principal and deputy collaborate closely with each other to ensure the smooth running of the school on a day-to-day basis. Although a division of duties between principal and deputy is not formally documented, both have a keen awareness of each other's complementary role and function, and the small size of the school means that both are in frequent contact with each other and with all staff members.

In September 2012, the school began a collaboration with the local girls' secondary school as a result of which students from both schools are following a joint TY programme and a

shared timetable in other subjects such as Home Economics, Art, Materials Technology Wood, Technical Graphics and Chemistry. This collaboration is very valuable as it extends the learning opportunities for students of both schools and provides valuable opportunities for professional collaboration among teachers. It also reflects foresight and openness on behalf of the management of both schools, together with a strong sense of community spirit.

Priorities for development have been outlined through excellent school self-evaluation strategies which have been in place for a number of years. These priorities have been formulated in consultation with staff and have led to the implementation of clear, focussed initiatives which are having a beneficial effect on student learning. Policy development is managed by the principal, and the staff is provided with an opportunity to comment and amend policies prior to their adoption. It is recommended that all school policies be published on the school website in order to increase their accessibility to the school community. It is also recommended that, where appropriate, the students' council, and parents' association if one is formed, have an opportunity to provide comment on relevant policies prior to their adoption.

Some minor changes are recommended to the school's admissions policy whereby it should be stated that parents have a right to appeal a decision to expel or suspend a student to the Minister for Education under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998. All references to the board of management in the policy should also be removed until one is formed. It is also important that any documentation sent from the school requesting funding from parents makes it clear that the provision of such funds is voluntary.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The staff of the school demonstrates high levels of professionalism and a real sense of shared vision and commitment to excellence. There is a clear sense that all members of staff want the school to be the best that it can be and are working towards that end. The staff is appropriately consulted with regard to policy review and whenever key decisions affecting the school have to be made. Excellent levels of support for teachers are in place and the induction pack which is available for new teachers is particularly praiseworthy.

Responses to student questionnaires as well as interactions with students during the evaluation indicate that students are happy and well cared for in the school. The school's code of behaviour is applied in a fair and consistent manner and students feel that they get a fair hearing and will be listened to if they have a problem. The students' union is relatively new, having been formed in 2012, and would benefit from having a dedicated section on the school's website through which they could highlight their activities.

There is a good structure for the provision of learning support in the school. However it is recommended that the number of teachers involved in delivering learning support and resource hours be reduced to a smaller team who can avail of any professional development opportunities in this area. The recruitment of a guidance counsellor, even on a part-time basis, would also be very beneficial to the school and should be considered a staffing priority. The designation of a staff member as a literacy link teacher would also be beneficial and would allow that person to avail of continuing professional development opportunities that are currently available. This would also complement the work which the school has recently commenced in literacy development, as part of the school's self-evaluation work.

Confirmation was provided that 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*.

Strategies have been implemented, as a result of careful, whole-school review, to improve the school's performance in areas such as retention of students, student progression, enrolment, transition from junior cycle to senior cycle and the uptake of subjects at higher level, absenteeism and the performance of students in certificate examinations. These initiatives are very worthwhile. In addition to these, the role of the principal as instructional leader should continue to be developed, and an open night to assist students in making subject choices at the end of third year should be considered.

While acknowledging that the small size of the school places considerable limitations on timetabling, especially when the school is making such efforts to offer as broad a curriculum as possible, the school should remain cognisant of the need to maximise instruction time for students at all times. The timetable should also accurately reflect what is actually taking place in all lessons so that classes which are composed, for example, of students taking particular subjects at ordinary level are not incorrectly labelled learning and language support lessons.

There is a very healthy provision of extra-curricular and co-curricular activity in the school, with activities such as the school's participation in the Active School Awards and the joint musical with the local St Joseph's school being particularly noteworthy. The school has a very strong commitment to sporting involvements, with a recent all-Ireland title in basketball representing a remarkable achievement for a school of this size. It is also commendable that photographs celebrating the school's extra-curricular involvements are displayed throughout the school corridors.

1.3 Management of facilities

The school provides a comfortable, well-resourced learning environment for students and teachers. Although the main school building is quite old, it has been very well maintained and has benefitted from some key renovations and additions in recent years. Although plans for future renovations and further development of the school's facilities are in place, management is keenly aware that further increases in enrolment will necessitate an extension to existing facilities.

Within the confines of available resources, the installation of wifi routers should be considered in order to increase the functionality of laptop computers which many members of staff have purchased, and in order to facilitate the school's plans for greater integration of the use of ICT into teaching and learning. Base classrooms would also be an advantage to teachers in terms of allowing subject-specific resource material to be displayed on walls. Although general maintenance is excellent, there is a need to ensure that the science preparation area meets the high standards evident throughout the rest of the school.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The overall quality of learning and teaching observed during the evaluation was very good. All lessons benefited from very good preparation and use of resource materials, and good planning to link with previous and future learning was in evidence. Some good integration of ICT into teaching and learning was seen in many lessons, with some very effective use noted. Management has made significant efforts to encourage the increased use of ICT among teachers, and individual subject departments should now consider how best to

achieve this in each subject area. The willingness of teachers to share good practice with each other, which was evident during the evaluation, will be of considerable benefit in this regard.

A very good variety of active teaching and learning methodologies was seen in the majority of lessons observed. Where more traditional, teacher-directed approaches were used, these were nonetheless effective in almost all lessons. An excellent use of questioning was a noteworthy feature of lessons, with a good range of directed, general, higher-order and lower-order questions being used. Where group and pair work was observed, this was very effective in engaging students and is recommended for greater use. An excellent teacher-student rapport and very positive atmosphere were a feature of almost all lessons. Students were very well engaged, attentive and responsive in all lessons and were active participants in their learning in the majority of lessons. Some scope exists for greater differentiation in both the tasks assigned to students during lessons and also in the assignment of homework in order to cater for all ability levels in mixed-ability class settings.

Lesson objectives were made clear to students, either verbally or by writing them on the board, at the start of many lessons. While this was beneficial to learning, teachers occasionally merely outlined lesson content. It is recommended that teachers highlight the learning outcomes, in addition to lesson content, at the start of each lesson. This will help to complement the good practice noted of reinforcing learning throughout lessons by regularly referring to the desired learning outcomes. Homework was corrected at the start, or during the course of, lessons and this was used effectively as a link to previous learning and to set the context for the current lesson. Commendably, many teachers made efforts at the end of lessons to make sure homework was clear to students, and it is noted that this has been promoted by management following consultations with parents and students.

Keywords which were written on the board in many lessons were a useful support to student literacy development. There were many photographs, posters and other materials displayed on walls throughout the school to stimulate learning and promote pride in the school. There would be additional benefits to teachers having base classrooms, in this regard, but it is acknowledged that the small size of the school does not always facilitate this.

Aspects of AfL, such as an increase in the use of formative commentary in the correction of student copies and the opportunity for teacher comment in reports to parents, should be considered. It is also recommended that marks allocated to component elements of assessments should be identified in reports. This would support, for example, the recommended extension of the use of the investigative approach in Science as well as marks for oral proficiency in languages and practical assessments in other subjects.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Following on the recommendations of previous inspections, the timetable provision for History has been increased and management has made a conscious effort to try to increase the number of students taking higher level in all subjects, particularly at Leaving Certificate level. A very good analysis of uptake levels has been undertaken and consequent strategies put in place to try to achieve this.

It is recommended that an information night for third-year students not doing TY and students who are about to complete TY, should take place in order to assist students in

making subject choices for senior cycle. The correct practice for the storage of chemicals in the science laboratory is now being observed. Some clarity is still needed in subject plans, however, as to how Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is being provided at senior cycle.

3.2 Learning and teaching

In response to the recommendations of some subject reports, a good variety of teaching and learning methodologies was noted in many lessons. Some, more traditional, methods were still in evidence but these were still effective in the lessons in which they were observed. There is clear evidence of the impact of management's efforts to increase the use of ICT in lessons, and where this was used it was an effective aid to learning. Excellent use of the target language was noted in all language lessons, with all routine classroom instructions taking place through the medium of the target language. This is commended. Good visual support for learning was noted in many classrooms, although the fact that teachers do not have base classrooms meant that this was often not specific to the subject being taught. There was some evidence of formative commentary in the correction of homework to assist students' learning and this is recommended for greater use. Excellent use of peer assessment and AfL strategies were noted in some lessons and, again, greater use of such strategies is suggested.

There is clear evidence that subject inspection reports are systematically being examined and recommendations brought to the attention of all staff for consideration. It was noted that subject folders, in subjects where an evaluation has taken place, have a "response to recommendations" section. This is very good practice and reflects a shared commitment to school improvement on the part of management and staff.

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

A thorough, robust school self-evaluation process has been in place in St Patrick's for a number of years. This has led directly to initiatives such as the collaboration with the local girls' secondary school, the emphasis on encouraging students to do higher level as much as possible and changes to house examination schedules. Other areas which have been examined include retention, progression, enrolment, uptake of subjects and levels as students make the transition from junior cycle to senior cycle, performance in certificate examinations, absenteeism and many others. Clear strategies for improvement have been designed and implemented as a result. It is commendable that the views of parents, as well as the views of current and past students, were sought via questionnaires as part of this process. This reflects a culture of openness and commitment to improvement which is very evident in the school. Work is currently ongoing to improve literacy levels as part of the Department of Education and Skills school self-evaluation (SSE) initiative.

Going forward, the school is fully capable of managing the school improvement processes on its own. The benefits which are likely to accrue from the establishment of a board of management and a parents' association, will be important in helping to guide this work.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

Following on the recommendations made in the WSE-MLL report the following recommendations have been addressed by the Management/Principal of the school.

The recommended minor changes have been made to the school's Admissions/Enrolment policy.

The school has begun the process of publishing the school policies on the school's website with the main policies now published.

Modifications have been made to the format of the written school reports to parents' with opportunities for teacher comments and the marks allocated to component elements of assessment also being identified in the school reports.

Clarification has been made on the provision of funding from parents' being voluntary.

A staff member has been designated as a literacy link teacher.

An information night for Parents of third year students and students not doing TY and parents of students about to complete TY has taken place which will assist in the making of Subject choices for senior cycle.

The remaining recommendations will be addressed over time.