

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Paul's Secondary School,
Monasterevin, County Kildare**

Roll number: 61702D

Date of inspection: 15 October 2014



**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 2014 in St. Paul's 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 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. Pauls Secondary school was founded in 1969. It is a co-educational Catholic Voluntary Secondary school located in Monasterevin in Co Kildare and is under the Trusteeship of the Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. This very inclusive school caters for students from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds from the town and environs of Monasterevin. The school participates in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) action plan and the School Completion Programme (SCP).

Currently, 300 students are enrolled. Numbers have been relatively constant in recent years having increased from 200 students in 2005-06. The school offers the Junior Certificate, the Junior Cycle School Programme (JCSP), Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate, and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

The school has a strong sports tradition and provides a very good range of co-curricular and cross-curricular activities that includes team sports, Gaisce and the Green Schools programme.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The school is very inclusive.
- There is an experienced and committed board of management with strong community links.
- The principal and deputy principal provide excellent leadership, work very well as a team and have demonstrated an ability to embrace a school improvement agenda.
- Year heads, mentors and class teachers play a significant role in the day-to-day management and care of the students.
- Staff are committed, work diligently, flexibly, and collaboratively to maximise student achievement and to enhance student well-being.
- The school is a welcoming and friendly place which is facilitated by the fact that the school population is relatively small.
- Partnership with parents and the local community has developed greatly in recent years and is central to the school's ethos and many daily practices.
- The school building and site are quite restrictive but planning has begun for a much larger school on a greenfield site.
- Overall, the quality of teaching was good or very good in most of the lessons observed, with some excellent practice evident.

- Some excellent lessons were observed, where active methodologies and high quality student engagement was very much in evidence, but teacher talk predominated in a small number of lessons.
- The student journal is used effectively to communicate with parents and provides a very useful platform for personal review and target setting.
- In lessons observed students' behaviour was very good, and teacher-student rapport was very good in almost all lessons.

Recommendations for Further Development

- A school plan that articulates the vision for the school, that focusses on improvements in teaching and learning and that encompasses the current DEIS action plan and the school's improvement plan should be collaboratively developed and agreed.
- Senior management and staff are encouraged to develop a whole-school teaching and learning action plan.
- The good work of the pilot project on effective feedback as a key aspect of teaching and learning should be more widely disseminated especially in relation to a renewed focus on giving students written advice for improvement on their work.
- Learning support should focus on more in-class support rather than withdrawal and the pace of development of individual education learning plans (IEPs) for students with additional and specific learning needs should be accelerated.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The school and its board of management are well supported by the patron. The experienced and committed board of management is appropriately constituted. Decisions are reached by consensus. Board members are very supportive of the school. The board has made substantial and necessary progress in the areas that they set as priorities such as, governance and financial management. The board, individually and collectively has encouraged and facilitated mutual school and community co-operation and involvement.

Well-constructed school policies act as a useful framework for the operation of the school. Policy formulation is well developed. A front cover template to policies outlines dates for completion, ratification and proposed review dates which is good practice. However, no overall school plan is documented. To fulfill statutory requirements and to act as a benchmark for school improvement, a plan that articulates the vision for the school and that encompasses the current DEIS action plan and the school's self-evaluation improvement plan should be collaboratively developed and agreed.

To date the board's role in planning for school self-evaluation and improvement in attainment, teaching and learning and assessment for learning (AfL) has been limited due to other priorities. To assist in strategic planning for improvement, the board should now oversee the establishment of a teaching and learning action plan that focusses on attainment, teaching, learning and AfL.

Staff recruitment has been a priority in recent years due to retirements. The school's management team play a key role in the selection process. However, the selection board composition should be reviewed to more accurately represent and reflect board of management membership.

The parents' association is actively involved in school activities and expressed satisfaction to the evaluation team with the way the school is run. They and the student council are consulted on key policies such as the admissions policy, code of behaviour and the revised anti-bullying policy. Parent questionnaires completed as part of this evaluation process provide a resounding endorsement of the work of the school. Partnerships are also forged with the local community through the sharing of facilities with local clubs.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The school is very well managed and run. There are clear and effective procedures for policy development, adoption and review. Senior management roles are clearly defined, and they have a partnership approach. The principal is a proactive leader, displaying very good student and staff management skills and actively engages in school improvement. He is ably supported by an experienced, committed and effective deputy principal especially in relation to staff and student issues and the development of the timetable.

Teaching staff are deployed according to their qualifications and expertise. Staff are committed and work diligently and collaboratively in the best interests of students and the school. The flexibility required by teachers in a small school is very evident, and is very much appreciated by management. Teachers are encouraged and supported to innovate and to engage in continuing professional development (CPD). A number of staff has been supported to engage in post-graduate studies. The school's involvement in the Action Learning Network as part of the Forbairt Programme is praiseworthy. The project being piloted on effective assessment feedback is already deepening teacher and student learning.

The school's management provides a broad curriculum in the context of a small school. An open choice of subjects is provided in senior cycle. An innovative and varied TY programme is in place. The project on the River Barrow and the canal which includes local studies and an investigative field study to the source of the River Barrow is commended. All students are encouraged to partake in the LCVP. Due to timetabling issues there is a male-female divide and this should be re-evaluated so as to reflect the ethos of the school.

Student attainment in a number of subjects in the 2014 certificate examinations shows significant improvement. However, attainment varies considerably from subject to subject. In some subjects, the percentage of students taking and achieving well on higher-level papers is lower than might be expected. Results are analysed annually, and compared with national norms. As part of DEIS planning, appropriate, achievable targets for improvement in examination attainment have been set. It is recommended that the analysis of results by subject departments be accompanied by a brief written commentary in which teachers reflect on the results using all available data and draw conclusions. Progression rates to third level are closely monitored. Valuable links have been made with third-level access programmes especially with NUI Maynooth.

Admissions procedures are very inclusive and reflect the characteristic spirit of the school. Attendance is monitored effectively on a daily basis with the help of the e portal system and there are strategies in place to follow up on students' absenteeism and late coming. There are a number of students with poor attendance but these are being consistently monitored and supported by the home-school-community-liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator, year heads, mentors and the guidance service. A clearly structured and fairly implemented code of behaviour is in place. The emphasis on a positive rewards system for both good discipline and good attendance is commended. The number of suspensions is kept under review and they have been reduced especially in 2013/14.

A caring, well organised student support system is in place. The school is a welcoming place for parents, students and visitors. A very good atmosphere in the school was evident during the evaluation and this was confirmed by students and parents in questionnaire responses and interviews.

Students and parents interviewed stressed that management and almost all teachers are very approachable. The senior management team, year heads, teachers and support staff such as special needs assistants (SNAs) help to provide an effective pastoral care system. There is a targeted approach to supporting more vulnerable students and families and the HSCL officer makes a significant contribution in this regard. SNAs give valuable in-school support to students.

The Meitheal system of mentoring provides leadership and training opportunities for senior students. Support is also provided for students transferring in from primary schools. School management and the SEN co-ordinator pay visits to local primary schools prior to student transfer. The initiative of involving local primary and post-primary teachers in shared CPD in areas of common interest is to be commended.

The significant resource of teaching and learning support is mostly deployed to reduce class size and involves withdrawal or small group teaching rather than in-class support. While some team teaching was observed there should be more in-class support rather than over-reliance on withdrawal. The pace of development of IEPs for students with additional and specific learning needs is too slow and should be accelerated. There were a number of recommendations in the DEIS focussed report (2011) in relation to guidance and these are being addressed by the newly appointed guidance teacher. A draft guidance plan is in place and career and counselling aspects of the guidance service are working well.

To enable students across all levels to achieve their full potential in all subjects, school management and staff are encouraged to develop a whole-school teaching and learning action plan which places a greater focus on teaching approaches and student learning. Such a policy should promote active learning and skills development and embed AfL practices. These strategies would enable students take on more responsibility for their learning and would help them to set realistic targets for future achievements.

Year heads and mentors play a substantial role in supporting students. Year heads should become more proactive in the monitoring and tracking of results using data from primary school, school based entrance tests results that teachers input on the ePortal along with the students' own tracking and setting of targets in journal. These could then be compared to attainment in examinations in order to more accurately reflect student progress.

The provision of a well-run breakfast and homework club through support from the SCP are of major benefit to the students. A representative and proactive student council has a constitution and is consulted on the development of key policies. It is recommended that the student council be invited to meet the board of management annually to discuss issues of mutual interest.

The importance of parental support is recognised by management and staff. The Parents' Council is supportive of the school: they give their views on policies and practices and fundraise. For example, the Parents' Council has helped provide a school bus. A comprehensive and informative newsletter is distributed to parents each term, and an annual year book is produced. Every opportunity is taken to involve parents in the school and some day time courses are provided for parents. A small number of evening adult education classes is made available. Opportunities to expand this programme will arise in the context of the proposed new school.

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 building is small but functional, and it is well maintained. Classrooms are neat, and tidy. The school corridors are generally narrow, and so should be kept clear and not obstructed by school bags. The work of the administrative staff, caretaking staff and the Green Schools committee in helping to maintain school facilities is acknowledged.

The school grounds are restricted. There is a well-used gymnasium but there are no playing fields and the school is dependent on the facilities of local sports clubs. The variety of sporting and cultural activities is commended.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

Overall, the quality of teaching was good or very good in most of the lessons observed, with some excellent practice evident. Lessons were fair in a small minority of cases.

The dedicated and professional teachers worked diligently in the lessons observed. Teaching was competent in terms of exposition and explanation of key ideas and concepts. Teaching took place within a disciplined environment in all lessons observed, and teacher-student rapport was very good in almost all lessons.

In lessons where students were actively engaged, good learning was noted. While many students showed a willingness to engage in learning, greater engagement by some students in their own learning was required in a number of lessons. The adoption of a consistent, whole-school approach to implementing the principles and practice of AfL would greatly benefit teaching and learning, as would a shift generally to the utilisation of more active methodologies, and greater use of pair work and group work.

The quality of teacher questioning strategies varied. Some very effective questioning was observed. A better distribution of questions with greater targeting and use of higher-order questions and better use of 'wait time' would have improved teaching and learning in a number of the lessons observed.

The majority of lessons observed were well planned and were well structured. In these lessons, the intended learning outcomes were specific and appropriately challenging, and they were shared at the start and returned to briefly at the end of lessons. There was scope in some lessons for a more rigorous checking of learning, especially towards the end of lessons.

While teacher talk predominated in a small number of lessons, there was a focus on more active teaching methods in other lessons. These lessons included the use of pair and group work, and in a number of instances, the creative and innovative integration of ICT in teaching and learning. These practices need to become more widespread throughout the school.

The pilot project on the development of success criteria and the giving of effective feedback is being trialled in a limited number of class groups and subject areas. The outcomes of this well planned and carefully introduced initiative needs to be disseminated more widely. Moreover, the model of innovation used in this pilot can be adapted to other aspects of teaching and learning development.

Homework was regularly given and monitored and was also recorded in students' journals. However, an area that needs to be addressed is the correction of students' written work. In some of the copybooks reviewed during the evaluation, there was limited correction of the students' work. Overall, there was insufficient written evidence that teachers are giving formative feedback to inform students about how they can improve.

The development of literacy and numeracy skills was focused on in many lessons with good explanation of key terms and concepts evident. The use of key word strategies was widespread. However, a greater emphasis on the development of learners' oral and written skills, as recommended in previous inspection reports, would greatly enhance learning. The benchmarking of student literacy and numeracy levels that is already underway, is allowing for evidenced-based target setting for attainment in general and in literacy and numeracy in particular. The impressive JSCP programme acts as an effective focus for a range of targeted literacy and numeracy initiatives, including reading initiatives. Maths challenges and participation in mathematics week were underway during the evaluation. Active participation in History week, Catholic School week, Science week and Seachtain na Gaeilge is also praiseworthy.

Collaborative subject plans are prepared and are available in electronic format. Subject departments have developed term and year plans based on course content, aims and objectives. A sample of these plans was reviewed during the evaluation. Some of the subject curricular plans focus on intended learning outcomes and teaching methodologies, and a small number of plans outlined the implications of AfL for their subject areas. In general, there needs to be a greater focus within subject departments on developing plans for teaching which promote active teaching and learning strategies and on the embedding of AfL principles in day-to-day teaching and learning.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

St. Pauls Secondary School had a very positive DEIS focused evaluation (2011) and a number of other subject inspections in recent years. Good progress is evident in the effective implementation of the DEIS evaluation recommendations especially in the area of student guidance.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Subject inspection reports have pointed out areas for improvement, some of which have been adopted including a focus on learning outcomes and on more varied methodologies such as group and pair work.

Previous subject inspection reports should be revisited to ensure that recommendations are fully implemented. More active methodologies were recommended in a number of reports. Substantial progress has been made in this regard but more needs to be done to deliver on these recommendations in some subject areas. The giving and monitoring of home work was affirmed in a number of reports but written feedback for improvement, as was recommended in some inspection reports, still needs to be addressed as a priority area.

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

The board of management is very committed to the school and its improvement. It has made significant and essential progress in school governance and financial management. Strategic

planning for over-seeing improvements in teaching and learning should become a more central part of the board's work.

As part of the school's self- evaluation (SSE) processes an action-based school improvement plan, with a focus on teaching and learning, needs to be developed. This will help to deliver on the recommendations of this whole-school evaluation and on previous inspections especially in relation to improvement in teaching and learning and AfL. This will help to ensure that improvements already made or being planned will be shared and influence improvements in other areas.

The principal, deputy principal and the staff have shown a willingness to reflect on current practices and to gradually implement change and improvement by consensus. The school is increasingly using qualitative and quantitative data to set targets for improvement in literacy and numeracy rates, attainment in examinations and attainment within the context of DEIS action planning and school improvement planning.

School management is well placed to continue to critically examine its practices in relation to teaching and learning, student and parental engagement, attainment and progression. It is essential that the board of management, in-school management and teaching staff continue to embrace change and lead SSE, improvement in teaching and learning and strategic planning. The provision of a new school building in the future will present opportunities and challenges as well as acting as a stimulus for change and school improvement.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report.

The Board of Management of St Paul's Secondary School welcomes this report by the Inspectorate. The Board of Management wishes to thank the inspectors for a positive and thorough inspection and for this complimentary and constructive report.

The Board of Management acknowledges and affirms the main findings of the report. The Board wishes to acknowledge the excellent pro-active leadership of the school. The Board wishes to compliment the teaching staff for their marvellous contributions to the well-being and academic achievement of the students. Their contributions to the school's extra-curricular activities enhance the student experience.

The Board of Management commits to overseeing the development of the recommendations in this report and acknowledges its role in the active promotion of teaching and learning.

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 following actions have been undertaken since the initial inspection:

- Senior Management has commenced the development of a whole school teaching and learning plan with a particular focus on the embedding of Afl strategies, target setting and student attainment.
- The pilot project on effective feedback has been extended to five subject areas in first year 2014-2015. It will be evaluated at years end, and it is anticipated it will be used across all subject areas in first year 2015-16.
- Individual Student Plans for all SEN students in Junior Cycle will be completed by the end of the current academic year; all remaining students will be completed in the next academic year.

The following actions will be prioritised for development as soon as practical

- The school plan to begin compiling in 2015-16
- The timetabling of more in-class support instead of withdrawal to commence in 2015-16