

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Bandon Grammar School
Bandon, County Cork
Roll number: 62060R**

Date of inspection: 17 April 2013



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April 2013 in Bandon Grammar School. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment 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

Bandon Grammar School was established in 1641 and moved to its current site in 1958. It is a Church of Ireland school under the patronage of the Incorporated Society. The school is a fee-paying, co-educational secondary boarding school. There is a diverse school community. Currently, about twenty percent of the 591 students enrolled are either five or seven-day boarders. A number of these are non-nationals. Recent years has seen a steady rise in enrolment, with over 600 students from a wide catchment area expected in the 2013-2014 academic year.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The school has recently appointed its first board of management.
- The board of management is chaired by an experienced chairperson.
- The established school ethos is shared very positively by the trustees, parents, students' and staff, both teaching and ancillary.
- Very good quality leadership of learning was evident in the work of senior management.
- The school is well led and managed and there is a strong commitment to excellence and quality improvement in the school.
- Student support, care and the holistic development of the students are core values in the school.
- The teaching staff demonstrates professionalism and is committed to the work of the school.
- The information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure has been comprehensively developed.
- Overall, a very high quality of teaching and learning was observed.
- Very good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations from previous inspection reports.

- Senior management promotes a culture of self-evaluation and review within the school community.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board, as it establishes itself, should undertake an audit of existing policies, to ensure the development of any legally required policies not yet in place, and establish a cycle of policy development, adoption and review.
- The board should promote the formal inclusion of the student and parent voice when and where, appropriate.
- School management and staff should review the current method of subject choice to ensure that the needs of students are being best met.
- The whole school guidance plan should be developed to co-ordinate supports for students in the school.
- Senior management should use the recommendations made in the teaching and learning section to build on the very good practice observed in lessons.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

Bandon Grammar School was managed by a Board of Directors. In March 2013, a decision was taken to establish a board of management in compliance with the requirements of the Education Act 1998. Former directors will maintain an overarching interest in the school as well as continuing to manage the boarding element and fee finance. There is significant expertise among board members with good leadership evident. Members of the board, including the principal, were previously members of the board of directors, which ensures continuity and linkage between these two boards.

Training of the board of management has begun and should continue. Board members are aware of their legal responsibilities. They are fully committed to the mission and vision of the school and are proud of its traditions and achievements. Members are also aware that this is a time of transition and development for the school.

Documentation provided to inspectors highlighted established good practices at board of director level. It is recommended, that the new board audit existing policies and establish a cycle of policy development, adoption and review, with any legally required policies not yet in place prioritised. The board should reconsider the wording of the admissions policy to reflect inclusive practice in the school. In addition, the board of management is reminded of the importance of recruiting and deploying staff according to their qualifications and expertise.

The board of directors had assumed responsibility for the development of the school's planning process. It identified the following priorities: the establishment of a board of management in the school; the continued development of learning and teaching; literacy and numeracy; the further development of school self-evaluation; on-going continuing professional development (CPD) of staff; the appointment of a chaplain to strengthen ethos and pastoral care and the further development of ICT in the school. Some have been achieved while others are being significantly progressed.

The establishment of the board of management also presents an opportunity to establish new practices. The review and analysis of student attainment should continue to inform and support school self-evaluation and curricular planning. The inclusion of teaching and learning on the meeting agenda should be considered. The new board should also look at the area of communication. It should consider inviting occasional presentations / reports from key groups or persons in the school, for example the student council and programme and year group co-ordinators. The new board of management should also provide an agreed report to the trustees, staff and parents association following meetings.

Partnership with parents is very important. The school has an active parents' association which has evolved from a parents' committee. The parents' association has appointed officers with their chairperson appointed by the out-going board of directors. The association has its own constitution and is affiliated to the National Parents Council Post-Primary (NPC-PP). The association is involved in school activities, including fundraising, and has had some involvement in policy development and review. Regular meetings are attended by the principal and two staff members. It is suggested that, the school website and newsletter could be utilised more fully to highlight the significant work of the parents' association and to support effective communication with the parent body as a whole. In addition, consideration should be given to the open election of the chair of the parents' association. Half of the parents surveyed felt that the school regularly seeks the views of parents on school matters. It would be important to ensure that the views of parents are always sought by the school when and where appropriate.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The senior management team provides very effective leadership and management. They are experienced instructional leaders having both served the school as classroom teachers and now as leaders. Both are committed, enthusiastic and positive about the school and its students. They have complementary roles and approaches and have created good internal communication structures with regard to day-to-day issues. They are open to new ideas, demonstrate reflective practice and have a professional relationship of high quality. The majority of parents surveyed felt the school is well run.

There is a strong commitment to excellence and quality improvement in the school. The observation of teaching practice by the senior management team, which has been agreed by all teaching staff, is to be highly commended. This illustrates a commitment to self-evaluation and improvement. It can also support a focus on areas highlighted following previous evaluations and aid in other work the school will pursue as part of its school self-evaluation process. There is also a strong culture of facilitating and encouraging staff members to engage in continuing professional development (CPD).

Teachers have been provided with opportunities to take on leadership roles, as programme and subject-department co-ordinators, form tutors, year heads and in various initiatives. Leadership roles are also fostered through the creation and empowerment of key teams, such as the care team, the special educational needs (SEN) team and the team of assistant principals. The timetabling of weekly meetings of the assistant principals with senior management provides a regular forum for the discussion of issues and ideas. Some staff members in the school have assigned duties through the posts of responsibility structure. The school should review the post structure to ensure the assigned duties continue to provide ongoing supports to the school in the future.

The learning environment of the schools has been enhanced through the development of the ICT facilities. Teacher-based rooms are also well resourced, with many rooms print rich and stimulating. The locating of subject areas together has contributed to, and allowed for, easier communication, support and collaboration within subject departments.

Leadership of students

The school offers, and is committed to, the maintenance of a broad curriculum. A wide range of subjects is available at both junior and senior cycle. Optional subjects are presented to the students in pre-selected subject blocks. The school also offers the Transition Year (TY) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

The compulsory TY programme is well organised and co-ordinated. The balanced nature of this curriculum affords students the opportunity to try subjects. Parents spoke very highly of the merits of this programme and what they feel it offers their child in the school. The optional LCVP is co-ordinated by one teacher. There is currently a low take-up of this programme in the school, possibly due to the fact it is placed against two modern languages in the option blocks for subject choice.

On occasion, additional subjects are provided for students after school to fulfil student demand with a facility for students to change subjects if required. The school should review the current method of subject choice to ensure that the needs of students are being best met. It should review how current practice impacts on uptake of LCVP at senior cycle.

Student-focused supports and care within the school are of a high quality. The majority of parents surveyed felt their child feels safe and looked after in the school. The supports include the special educational needs (SEN) team, the guidance counsellor and the chaplain. A weekly care meeting is held in which issues are discussed and relevant action plans devised. This is good practice. The SEN team is well co-ordinated and organised, with dedicated facilities available. Resources are clearly allocated with plans produced and monitored regularly to reflect student progress. Communication with parents is established, which is good practice. The team intends to implement some team-teaching in the future, which is to be encouraged. High-achieving students are also acknowledged and suitable external links established.

The school is committed to the importance of guidance and counselling. Guidance is timetabling for students at senior cycle and is delivered through SPHE at junior cycle with inputs in relation to subject choice at relevant information meetings. The role of the guidance counsellor is developing. A whole school guidance plan should be developed to co-ordinate supports for students in the school.

The chaplain provides a further daily support for the students. In addition, she leads a weekly assembly for each year group to help support and maintain the school ethos. The boarders are further supported by the matron(s) and boarding house masters and mistresses.

Year-heads and form teachers have a pastoral role with the year head also monitoring student behaviour, attendance and academic progress. The code of student behaviour is positive in tone, placing great emphasis on the building of trust and responsibility. The majority of students surveyed are proud to be in this school. They feel safe and cared for and they also reported that there is a good atmosphere in the school and that they get on well with other students in the school. Attendance and retention rates are good in the school. Internal tracking mechanisms have been established; these will be supported by the e-portal system.

Student leadership roles are developed through involvement in the student council and the student-mentoring programme. The student council is appropriately organised and has a liaison teacher assigned. Regular meetings are held. The council is involved in a range of projects within the school, with the acquisition of a new monitor for the Deane Building being the most recent. One third of the students surveyed felt they had a say in how to make the school a better place. The student-mentoring process helps first-year students in the transition from primary to secondary school. Senior students involved receive training to ensure they are effective in this role. The majority of parents feel that the school made their child feel welcome when he/she started in the school and that their child enjoys going to school, which is positive.

The school offers a very wide range of both extracurricular and co-curricular activities. These are viewed as very important to the school in the holistic development of the students. They have resulted in a very positive student-teacher rapport. The provision of these activities would not be possible without the huge contribution and commitment of the staff involved. This is recognised and highly commended.

The schools planning process is well developed. Co-ordinated subject departments have been established and plans and procedures documented. There was a sense of teamwork evident. A variety of approaches were taken to this planning work. The inclusion of self-evaluation and literacy in some plans is positive. There is now an opportunity for subject departments to compare and share 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

The school campus has expanded over time and now comprises several classroom blocks, student dormitories, extensive outdoor spaces and several pitches. There is a clear commitment to the continued development and maintenance of the infrastructure, with refurbishment of the school dormitories planned in the future. The majority of both students and parents surveyed think the facilities are good. The new Deane Building has facilitated the establishment of teacher-based rooms. A range of well equipped specialist rooms is also available. All rooms are now ICT enabled, with ICT being embraced as a very important communication tool by the whole school community. The school also has a good website, the potential of which should continue to be exploited.

The school has very good canteen facilities, which are used by the whole-school community. They have become a central hub in the school. Links with the community are created through the use of the school's outdoor areas and gym by local groups and clubs.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Overall, learning and teaching observed in the lessons was of a very high quality. In their questionnaire responses, the majority of parents felt that teaching was good in the school and that their child is doing well. Similarly, a significant majority of student responses stated that they were getting on well with their school work. Student attainment in certificate examinations is of a high standard.

Lessons were syllabus appropriate, engaging and both well planned and paced. There were good levels of student participation and engagement with opportunities for collaborative learning provided in some lessons. Student questionnaire results found a large majority of students' enjoyed going to their classes and that they found their classes interesting. Lessons had established routines and were structured. The majority of students surveyed, felt that the teachers explain things clearly to them.

The purpose of lessons was outlined at the outset. However, lesson purpose was not always expressed as student learning outcomes. It is recommended that student learning outcomes be identified and shared at lesson outset and reviewed at close of lesson.

The variety of teaching methods observed resulted in a more interesting experience for the learner. Good and appropriate use of visual stimulus resources enhanced many lessons. Teachers, through discussion and effective questioning, established good linkages with students' prior learning. Target and subject-specific language was used by both the teacher and the learner. Many lessons had a literacy focus and included reference to subject-specific key terms. It is recommended, that teachers explore further the use of differentiation to support students in mixed ability settings.

Formative assessment to evaluate student progress occurred in the majority of lessons. Both higher and lower-order questions were observed with some good examples of the use of probing techniques and "wait time" observed. Whole-school formal assessment also occurs with the majority of parents surveyed stating that the school report gives them a good picture of how their child is doing at school.

Classroom management was very effective. Student-teacher interaction was mutually respectful, with good affirmation of student effort. A significant number of students surveyed felt that teachers listen to them and take notice of what they say. This results in a positive learning atmosphere and a teacher-student relationship of high quality.

Homework was assigned in all lessons, with varying practice in both the use and signing of the journal. This could be reviewed by the school. The majority of parents surveyed, felt that the teachers regularly check their child's written work and were happy with the amount of homework their child receives. Observation of student work showed some good examples of teacher monitoring and feedback though the quality of presentation of work by the students varied. It is recommended, that good examples with regard to the area of monitoring of student work be further developed throughout the school.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Previously published subject inspection reports in Music, Material Technology (Wood) (MTW), French, Science and Biology, Guidance and Maths were reviewed by the evaluation team. The role of co-ordinator is now rotated among the mathematics team. The safety and room issues in relation to MTW have been rectified with the establishment of a new teaching space. Music is now an optional subject in the school. Dedicated facilities have been created with the subject further developed outside of the classroom. Both MTW and Music have been allocated the recommended teaching time.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Recommendations in relation to subject planning, methodologies and assessment have been progressed. The short and long-term planning in Guidance has been documented. The mathematics plan has been reviewed. Observation of teaching and learning showed that lesson purpose is being shared with the students as was recommended in both the Science and Biology and French reports. This practice should be developed as stated previously in this report.

It is very positive that, in almost all cases, there is evidence of full implementation or very good progress made in the implementation of previous recommendations.

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

The school already displays very good capacity for school self-evaluation and improvement. School leaders and a committed staff are open to new ideas. Self-evaluation processes are already well established at a whole-school level. The findings from the student and parent questionnaires completed during the evaluation could be used to assist in the school self-evaluation process.

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 Bandon Grammar School welcomes the WSE/MLL report. The Board is particularly pleased to welcome the many positive comments which the inspectors made on the quality of teaching and learning, the quality of leadership and the mutual respect which exists between teachers and students.

We wish to thank the two inspectors for the very professional manner in which they carried out the inspection process and their appreciation of good practice and advice for continued improvement.

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

Recommendations have been taken on board and are being acted upon.