

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**St Francis College  
Rochestown, County Cork  
Roll number: 62460K**

**Date of inspection: 22 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 Saint Francis College. 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***

St Francis College is a voluntary secondary school for boys under the trusteeship of the Capuchin Franciscan Order. The mission statement is underpinned by the characteristic spirit, ethos and traditions of the Capuchin Franciscan Order. The school has many feeder schools and attracts students from a wide catchment area. The school experiences both high attendance and retention rates. There has been much change in recent years: the appointment of the first lay principal; a significant rise in student enrolment from 138 in 2001 to 661 currently and an increase in teaching staff. In addition, there is active planning for extensive development to the school campus to meet the challenges of a growing school.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

### ***Key Findings***

- The board of management offers very good support to the school and is committed to its work.
- The senior management team shows commitment and loyalty to the school and has demonstrated very effective management of change.
- Teachers are committed to ensuring the best educational and personal outcomes for their students.
- Parental satisfaction with the school is at a high level.
- There is a focus on support for all aspects of students' well-being with students having the opportunity to engage in a variety of extracurricular activities.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good with a number of examples of very good practice.

### ***Recommendations for Further Development***

- The board should undertake an audit of existing policies and establish a cycle of policy development, adoption and review.
- The board should prioritise the development of a whole-school guidance plan.

- A strategic planning development team should be established to assist in addressing the school's identified priorities.
- The Transition Year (TY) programme should be reviewed and restructured to fully reflect the spirit and ethos of TY as outlined in the Department of Education and Skills (DES) guidelines.
- The use of co-operative learning strategies should be consolidated and further expanded in order to enable more active participation by students in their learning.
- There should be a whole-school exploration of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies.

## **1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

### ***1.1 School ownership and management***

The recently elected board of management is appropriately constituted, with the principal acting as secretary to the board. There is significant expertise among board members, with the majority of them having served as previous board members. Training for new members is planned. The board is actively engaged in its role and is proud of the school, its history and its achievements. The board is aware of its legal responsibilities and is committed to the mission, vision and development of the school. Regular meetings are held, for which agendas are provided in advance, minutes are recorded with an agreed report issued to the partners following each meeting. It is recommended that teaching and learning should be included on the agenda of all meetings.

The board is involved in school planning through the development and ratification of a wide range of mandatory and other policies. Consultation occurs in the development of policies, there being a good working relationship and good communication between senior management, the board and school staff. To support this work, it is recommended that the board undertake an audit of existing policies and establish a cycle of policy development, adoption and review with any inconsistencies in language and message addressed. In the first instance, the board should prioritise the development of a whole-school guidance plan. As part of this work, it is also recommended that the admissions policy be reviewed to ensure that it is clear that any monies sought are in the form of voluntary subscriptions only.

The school's current priorities are: to maintain the spirit of collaboration and community; to maintain and develop the facilities and to explore the implications of the new Junior Cycle framework. To ensure implementation of these priorities purposeful engagement with the whole school community will be required. It is also recommended that a strategic planning development team should be established to support the realisation of these objectives. Such a team should utilise the skills and experience of the existing middle-management structure.

The principal and deputy principal provide very effective management of the school. They have a long association with the school and display loyalty, commitment and an affirmative attitude to the school community, its students and staff. They have a good professional relationship, each having designated and shared responsibilities. They have set high expectations with a focus on creating a positive environment for teaching and learning. As a team, they have made significant progress. They have: developed and implemented a plan to significantly increase student enrolment; created a clear identity for the school; addressed any infrastructural issues; fostered a culture of collegiality, collaboration and support among the growing staff; created and developed a culture of high expectations and a shared

ownership and understanding of the school's ethos. Almost all parents surveyed agreed that the school is well run.

Parents spoke highly of the school and what it offers the students. The school values the partnership it has with parents and the important role of the active parents' association. The association's regular meetings are well attended, with the principal also present. New officers are appointed yearly. The association has involved itself in fundraising activities, in the reviewing of policies, when requested, and in helping the school in event organisation. It is suggested that the school website and newsletter should be utilised more fully in order to further increase awareness of the significant work of the parents' association and to support effective communication with the parent body as a whole.

A student council has been established in the school. Supported by a liaison teacher, it has been involved in a variety of activities. Almost all the students surveyed stated they are proud to be in this school although most of them also stated that they felt they did not have a say in how things are done in the school. It is recommended that the role of the student council be enhanced so as to promote the student voice through purposeful and pro-active student engagement.

A clear code of student behaviour exists with the school journal being used for communication with home. Almost all the students surveyed stated that they understand the school rules with almost all parents stating that they have been informed of the school's code of behaviour/school rules. There is scope to introduce greater rewarding of responsible behaviour within the current code structure.

### ***1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

There are some opportunities for the teaching staff to contribute and share leadership, as members of the middle management structure, as part of subject departments and as part of the pastoral care structure team for example. Continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for teachers are provided with teachers encouraged to join their professional subject associations. It is acknowledged that many staff have taken on many needed and important middle management roles in a voluntary capacity.

Teachers are deployed according to their qualifications and expertise. Teachers are committed to ensuring the best educational and personal outcomes for their students. In addition to fulfilling their pedagogical roles, members of the teaching staff also avail of leadership opportunities by taking on responsibility for projects and initiatives, which is positive. Many varied extra-curricular and co-curricular activities are supported in the school with many teachers demonstrating leadership through their extensive involvement in these activities, thus adding to the variety of the student experience. The contribution and commitment of staff is recognised and commended.

Subject-development planning is firmly embedded in teachers' practice, and is another example of collaborative work. Co-ordinated subject departments are established with plans and procedures documented. The rotation of the subject co-ordinator role is further evidence of distributed leadership. Regular meetings are held with minutes recorded. The variety of approaches taken to this planning work provides an opportunity to compare and share good practice. An analysis of attainment in certificate examinations is included in the plans with the inclusion of elements of self-evaluation and literacy evident in some plans. The formal inclusion of self-evaluation as part of the work of all subject departments is advised.

A student support structure has been established. Almost all students surveyed stated that they feel safe and cared for in the school, with almost all parents stating they know who to talk to in the school if there is a problem. The school has a chaplain, who is very visible in the school and forms part of the school's pastoral structure. The pastoral care team consists of the guidance counsellor, a year head, a class teacher, the chaplain and the deputy principal. Regular meetings and communication practices have been recently introduced.

The school is committed to the provision of guidance and counselling. The development of a whole-school guidance plan will allow the establishment of a student-support team from the current pastoral care team. The assignment of two roles to one teacher, that of class teacher and year head to the same group, should be avoided in order to ensure a clear student referral system.

Students with special educational needs are supported by a special educational needs (SEN) department. A small core team has been established with designated learning support facilities assigned. Whilst support is mainly provided through the withdrawal of students from some of their mainstream classes, team-teaching is also used and was observed as part of the evaluation. This methodology has much merit both for students with SEN and as a whole school methodology. Co-ordination is shared between two staff members. Educational plans are in place for all resource students, with good communication established between the SEN team and the whole staff.

Students' transition from primary school into their first year in secondary school is underpinned by a student induction process. This involves, in the main, the pastoral support structures in the school with senior students also involved through the school's Meitheal programme.

The school curriculum includes the established Junior Certificate, a compulsory TY programme and the established Leaving Certificate. Students are strongly encouraged to study their subjects at higher level for their certificate examinations. In junior cycle, students are offered a set core curriculum. However, prior to entry in first year students must choose between Music or Art and French or German. Currently, therefore students are making these choices without having sampled the subjects. It is suggested that junior cycle reform now offers a real opportunity to consider curricular expansion at this level.

The TY programme is co-ordinated, with plans and procedures documented. The programme is based on an academic core which is complemented by some additional elements. The academic core was clearly visible on the students' timetables, in an identical format to that of the established Leaving Certificate. Other TY appropriate elements are embedded within subjects for example film-making in English or work experience. In some instances, coursework includes a project work component. However, the programme, as it is currently presented and delivered, does not reflect a "richly formative learning experience" for the students, with there being limited opportunity to engage with other areas of learning.

The subject plans highlight the emphasis on the Leaving Certificate programme, materials and examinations. Students make their subject choice for Leaving Certificate prior to entry to TY, having therefore no opportunity to sample subjects during TY to inform decision making. Such an early commitment to choosing subjects, before the TY programme has even begun, does not reflect the fact that the TY programme is separate to the established Leaving Certificate. It is strongly recommended, that the TY programme be reviewed and restructured to fully reflect the spirit and ethos of TY as stated in the DES guidelines with the school providing more opportunities for subject sampling and allowing students to defer their choice of subjects for their Leaving Certificate until nearer the end of TY.

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 facilities and grounds including the main school building, hall, the large number of temporary classrooms and playing pitches are well maintained. There is an ongoing commitment to development and maintenance of infrastructure. Recent developments have included the newly developed Art room and improvements to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure, which are positive. In addition, planning is advancing for the development of a large extension to the school.

Attractive displays of student work and photographs of past and present students are to be found around the school. Student base classrooms have been embraced by some teachers to provide a rich and stimulating learning environment with a display of relevant student material. Specialist rooms are organised and managed by the teachers involved.

## **2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### **2.1 The quality of learning and teaching**

The overall quality of learning and teaching was found to be good, with a number of examples of very good practice. Questionnaire findings found that most of the students, and almost all the parents, feel that teaching is good in the school, with almost all parents stating they feel their child is doing well in school. Most of the students surveyed felt that they are getting on well with their school work.

Planning and preparation was evident for all lessons. The majority of lessons had a clear structure, with good linkages made to prior learning through questioning and homework review. Some lessons were very well paced with very good organisation of learning for the students. The level and depth of questioning in lessons varied.

Homework was corrected and assigned with the student journal used to record assigned homework. Monitoring of homework was observed in some lessons. Questionnaire findings found most parents are happy with the amount of homework their child gets, with most of the students stating that their homework is corrected regularly.

The learning intentions were shared with the students at the start of most lessons. In lessons where there was very good practice, the clearly expressed learning intentions focused on the learner and the development of skills. The learning intentions were revisited during, and at the end of the lesson, with ongoing monitoring of students' understanding occurring at all stages of the lesson. It is recommended, that there should be a whole-school exploration of AfL strategies.

The use of key words was observed in some lessons, with good use of target and subject specific language also noted in lessons. A variety of resources was used to support teaching and learning, including the whiteboard, a range of visual supports, such as 'show-me-boards', hand-outs and ICT was frequently used to help clarify student understanding or aid in the illustration of a concept. The development of oral literacy in the classroom to support student understanding and learning, should also be considered, to complement the school's current literacy focus.

All lessons observed were managed effectively. Student-teacher interactions were mutually respectful with good affirmation of student effort resulting in a positive learning atmosphere. Questionnaire findings recorded that most of the students feel that teachers encourage them to do the best they can.

Whole class teaching was widely used to present lesson content with teacher-led instruction a dominant approach utilised. Very good practice was where there was a balance between teacher delivery and student participation. Opportunities for collaborative and co-operative learning were observed in some lessons. These worked very effectively when there were clear aims and elements of “learning to learn” present. Students responded favourably and purposefully to these student-centred methodologies. It is recommended, that the use of co-operative learning strategies should be consolidated and further expanded in order to enable more active participation by students in their learning.

### **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

Previously published inspection reports in Science and Chemistry, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Geography, Music and Physical Education (PE) were reviewed by the evaluation team. Evidence of full implementation or very good progress made in the implementation of previous recommendations was provided in almost all cases.

#### ***3.1 Management***

The provision of WiFi in the sports hall has recently been addressed to aid student learning in PE. The establishment of a smaller core team in SPHE has been achieved. There is still no induction policy for student teachers and new teachers, as was recommended in the English report, though the school does have mentor teachers to oversee this process in the school. The repair of the laboratory fume-hood has occurred as has the installation of isolation switches, as recommended in the Science and Chemistry report, with science teachers attending in-service when provided.

#### ***3.2 Learning and teaching***

The recommendations in relation to subject planning and methodologies have been progressed. The PE department has incorporated greater levels of student autonomy into the learning process. This was also observed to good effect during the evaluation. Teaching methodologies in Music have been adapted to include AfL strategies which have also been incorporated into the department plan. The Geography department has reflected on and incorporated more teaching and learning strategies into its practice, including the use of project work and the increased use of ICT. The SPHE department is examining the merging of existing senior and junior cycle Relationship and Sexual Education (RSE) policies and the further development of the SPHE programme is progressing. The English department has developed learning outcomes and is using an integrated approach to the language and literature elements of the syllabuses. The science department is now reviewing related theory prior to completion of the coursework B element of the junior cycle with students and it has also incorporated the investigative approach into its teaching methodologies.

### **4. THE SCHOOL’S SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS AND CAPACITY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

The school is engaged in the self-evaluation process and has produced a School Improvement Plan (SIP) in the area of literacy. Actions were chosen and implemented, with

data gathering a key part of the process. The school is well placed to engage in further school improvement, with subject departments and planning structures acting as a support. The establishment of a strategic development planning team, will strengthen the school's capacity to engage successfully with 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 welcomes the positive and insightful observations contained in this report. The content confirms our already held belief that the quality and style of education in St. Francis College mirrors the values expressed in our Mission Statement.

The commitment to high standards in teaching and learning, strong parental support and the willingness of teachers to engage in a wide range of extracurricular activities as mentioned in the report, accurately reflects the unique community spirit which exists in the college and displays the practical implementation of our ethos.

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

- A number of the recommendations have already been implemented since receiving this evaluation.
- The Board commits to the examination and implementation of all other recommendations which will enhance the management, leadership and learning experience in the life of the college.