

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

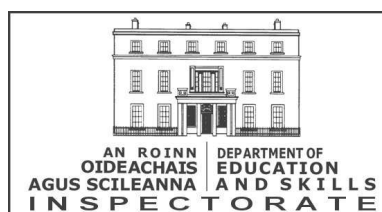
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**North Monastery Secondary School
Cork City
Roll number: 62530F**

Date of inspection: 17 October 2011



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in October 2011 in North Monastery 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, 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

The North Monastery is a voluntary secondary school for boys under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST) and is currently celebrating the bi-centenary of its establishment in 1811. It is a participant in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan for educational inclusion. Currently, the school has an enrolment of 330 boys.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- Very good quality leadership of learning was evident in the work of the board of management and senior management.
- Individual members of staff and staff teams engaged with programmes and initiatives to support students' learning demonstrated very effective leadership for students.
- The quality of teaching and learning was of a high standard in the majority of lessons observed. Students were positively engaged by the content, activities and suitable pace of these lessons. Students were encouraged and affirmed by their teachers in these lessons.
- In a minority of lessons observed there was scope for improvement. Students in this small number of lessons were given little opportunity to participate, interact and were not always engaged by lesson content.
- Structures to support students with additional educational needs are well organised.
- A school development planning process has been re-established.
- Some recommendations from previous evaluations have been implemented while some have yet to be addressed.
- Students, during the evaluation period, were observed to be positive, courteous and well behaved in their daily interactions in the school.
- Parents and students, in their questionnaire responses, articulated a very positive endorsement of the work of the school.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- School management and staff should advance DEIS planning as the focus for school development planning.
- Teachers should develop the quality of teaching and learning through collaborative planning based on an action-planning cycle.
- The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) should be integrated into classroom teaching and learning for a target group of students.
- Senior management and the board should adjust the timetable to facilitate optimal access to the curriculum, for example, through the creation of four nine-period days and one six-period half-day.
- The board should critically evaluate the impact of the current policy of class formation within the school context.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

After a significant time period without a board in the school, the current board of management was established in 2008. It is actively engaged in the leadership of the school and has identified partnership with the teaching staff as an important area for development within the school community. This would strengthen the board's role and credibility.

The board is appropriately constituted, meets regularly and communicates effectively with the school community. The teacher representatives report appropriately to the teaching staff and the parents' association nominate the parent representatives to the board. Board members share a clear vision for school improvement built on good quality academic and caring experiences for students.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary schools* (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006. School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* as a matter of priority.

The school's priorities for development

The current board is engaged and committed to facilitating high quality student learning and care, and in this context, the board has advanced a range of initiatives to improve the experience of students in the classroom. Current priorities include raising the standard of teaching and learning, the ongoing revision of the permanent section of the school plan and the advancement of DEIS, subject and programme planning. These priorities have been identified by the board in conjunction with the principal and staff members.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The principal and deputy principal form an effective leadership team. Supporting teachers, raising the standard of teaching and learning, improving outcomes for students and building students' self-esteem are central elements of the vision for change of senior management that also reflect the priorities outlined by the board. This programme for change is supported by teachers and is clearly endorsed by students and parents as observed at the school's open-night and as evidenced through their very positive responses to questionnaires circulated as part of the whole-school evaluation.

Both members of the senior management team have clearly defined roles in leading learning in the school. While being a visible presence on the school corridors, the principal is guiding school development planning and is also centrally involved in pastoral care and student management, working closely with the deputy principal, the pastoral-care team and the year heads. The principal is currently acting as a year head for two year groups and among a range of other involvements also liaises with the parents' association, the special educational needs organiser, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and other community agencies.

Through recent periods of change, the deputy principal, with the teaching staff, has provided stability in the school and works effectively with the current principal. The deputy principal's duties focus on student behaviour through engagement with the year heads, class tutors, teachers and the pastoral-care team. The deputy principal also engages with parents and is positioned on the ladder of referral within the behavioural and student support structures. The principal and deputy principal both undertake teaching duties.

The principal should delegate some of the duties that he is currently undertaking to allow him to focus on longer-term planning and sustained leadership of learning. To advance the quality of students' experience in the school, the overall co-ordination of supports for students is required. Equally, DEIS action-planning requires co-ordination. The deputy principal expressed a clear willingness and desire, during the evaluation, to accept additional roles and responsibilities that are currently undertaken by the principal. This delegation should be progressed.

Leadership of learning is also evident through the work of staff teams and individuals engaged with pastoral care, the support of students with additional educational needs, and with programmes and initiatives to support students' learning. These programmes are appropriately organised and delivered. A number of initiatives and supports are also provided through the voluntary commitment and enthusiasm of teachers. These very effective contributions are duly acknowledged in this report.

School management and staff should advance DEIS planning as the focus for school development planning. A DEIS committee has been established. DEIS priorities should focus on students' learning and achievement by prioritising a three-year DEIS action-plan that would target whole-school literacy and numeracy and student attainment. The DEIS action-planning process should combine with current subject planning to provide a clear structure for the allocation of tasks and responsibilities, the analysis of data and the advancement of clear time-bound goals to be achieved.

The current school timetable limits access to the curriculum for some students. The daily timetable consists of seven class periods of forty-five minutes and one period of fifty minutes. The school closes for a half-day on Wednesday after the fifth class period. To

achieve optimal access to the curriculum, senior management and the board should adjust the timetable to create four nine-period days and one six period half-day. This change would facilitate the extension of concurrent timetabling for Mathematics, English and Irish to all year groups and the creation of a greater number of contact points with students in some subjects. The change would allow for the equal allocation of time to subjects and class groups which is not the case currently. Physical Education (PE) is not provided for third-year, fifth-year and sixth-year students at present. PE should be provided to all class groups.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is not being provided to students in senior cycle. RSE should be provided and an RSE policy should be drafted. SPHE is timetabled for all first year classes but in combination with computer studies. SPHE should be provided to all junior cycle class groups for one period per week for the full school year.

The parents' association is active in supporting the school. The responses of parents to the questionnaire completed as part of the evaluation demonstrated very positive parental attitudes towards the school and in particular in relation to student support, care and academic progress.

Leadership of students

Student support is wide-ranging and well organised. Support for students with special educational needs is provided through a withdrawal model and through the provision of smaller class groups at junior cycle. Special needs assistants (SNAs) were observed to provide very good quality support for students within a range of classroom settings. The advancement of team teaching and the creation of a core team of teachers should be considered to further develop support for students with special educational needs.

A behaviour support class and an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) class are also significant elements of student support. Students from the ASD class currently experience appropriate inclusion in mainstream lessons and are also provided with smaller class group settings. Considerable and very good quality additional support for these students is provided by the behaviour support teachers and the SNAs.

The ASD class is a very recent development in the school and it is very positive that this initiative is the subject of ongoing support and review by the teachers directly involved, the principal, the special educational needs organiser and NEPS personnel. Further professional learning in the area of special education is also being prioritised by school management. This should be progressed. In addition, a student register outlining students' needs, additional hours allocated, models of delivery and the programme of work undertaken should be developed to provide transparency and to ensure the optimal use of resources. Due to the range and complexity of the supports that are in place, the overall co-ordination of additional supports should also be prioritised.

The school completion programme and the home school community liaison (HSCL) personnel provide a very significant link between school and home. Supports provided by both services were observed to be clearly focused on the needs of the targeted students and their families.

The weekly scheduled meeting of the pastoral-care team is the focus of all the aforementioned supports for students. All those with leadership responsibilities for student support contribute to this meeting. The agenda directly concerns the progress of individual students and how the services and supports available are targeted to best effect. Actions and outcomes are communicated to teachers, year heads and others, as appropriate. This meeting was observed to be formal, effective and to represent very good practice.

Good quality personal, vocational and educational guidance is provided to students. The guidance counsellor, who is also a member of the pastoral-care team, supports students at key transitions in their school life. Guidance is directed and focused by a good quality guidance plan.

On enrolment, students complete entrance assessments and are then offered a choice of Materials Technology Wood (MTW), Metalwork or Business as optional subjects. Streamed class groups are then formed based on the outcome of this process. The board should critically evaluate the impact of this process of class formation within the school context. The evaluation should focus on the impact of placement in streamed classes on students' expectations, self-esteem, behaviour, attainment and on levels uptake of higher level in Junior Certificate, and the consequent uptake of higher level at Leaving Certificate.

The student council has significant visibility in the school. The students in the council display considerable loyalty to the school's tradition and heritage. The council meets on a weekly basis and has been engaged with school management in meaningful policy development and review. The council is currently focused on a campaign to gain green flag environmental status for the school.

Extracurricular activities focus particularly on sports including hurling, Gaelic football, basketball and athletics. Preparations are in place to provide access to Music on an extracurricular basis. The commitment of teachers in supporting a range of valuable activities is duly acknowledged in this report.

Students were observed to be well behaved, courteous and punctual during the evaluation period. Uniforms were neat and students were very well presented. Routines relating to assembly, movement on the corridors, punctuality and the recording of attendance are well established. The students were very positive towards their school in their responses to questionnaires completed as part of the evaluation.

2.3 Management of facilities

Facilities in the school are well maintained. There has been significant investment in developing practical rooms and the information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure. A parents' room has been provided and some classrooms have been developed by teachers as very good quality learning environments through the display of visual materials and the appropriate attention to numeracy and literacy in classroom displays. This good practice was evident in a number of classrooms, laboratories, specialist rooms and in the re-development of the school library.

The replacement of windows is planned under the summer works scheme of the Department of Education and Skills. Health and safety documentation is in place but should be updated. A safety committee should be established and a subject-specific safety audit should be completed by teachers and school management.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning was of a high standard in the majority of lessons observed. In a minority, students were passive and, in some cases, were disengaged and not actively engaged in learning.

Where good practice was observed, teachers worked hard to engage students who, in some cases had limited attention spans and could display challenging behaviour. These lessons had been well planned and were successful. The pace of these lessons was appropriate to the students and the focus was on achieving understanding of the topic rather than an over emphasis on knowledge and content.

Teacher-led discussion and dialogue, demonstration and questioning were the main methods observed in these good quality lessons. Interspersed with these inputs were tasks for students to complete that linked directly to the planned learning. These inputs were seamlessly linked in many lessons and, especially so, in lessons observed in practical subjects. Students were engaged by good quality questioning that provided an appropriate combination of lower-order questions that focused on factual recall of previous learning and higher-order questions that engaged students more deeply and challenged them to further engage with the topic. Teachers interjected regularly and appropriately to focus the discussion and to affirm students' contributions. Stimulus materials including the textbook, photocopied materials, and authentic materials were used to good effect. In some cases, ICT was used to develop learning points. Given the recent significant investment in ICT in individual classrooms, greater integration of this resource is encouraged.

Lessons observed had been well planned. The learning intention was clear and, in the main, the planned learning was achieved. The preparedness of teachers, the pacing of lessons, the methods and stimulus materials used, illustrate a very positive and professional approach by teachers to students' learning in these lessons.

There was scope for development in the teaching, and the consequent level of learning, in a minority of the lessons observed. These lessons lacked a clear learning intention. They were dominated by the voice of the teacher and, in some cases, there was almost no opportunity for the students to engage or respond. The students were either listening or note-taking. Even though note-taking and reading from the text book were widely practised in these lessons, a sustained focus on students' literacy development was lacking. The pace of some lessons, and the lack of variety in the methodologies used, created obvious disengagement by some students that could develop into challenging behaviour. The students in a number lessons indicated that they were following ordinary or foundation level courses due to streaming in junior cycle. This was observed to have created lower expectations and levels of challenge in some subject areas.

In order to improve the quality of teaching and students' learning in these lessons, teachers should adopt a planned approach focusing on clear and intended learning outcomes. A range of methods and activities should be used to engage students actively in achieving the planned learning. In some subjects, decisions regarding examinations should be delayed and students should be challenged to achieve to their best. Teachers are encouraged to share existing good practice that was observed in classrooms to meet the needs of students. Subject departments should analyse levels of attainment, uptake and other data at subject group level to plan achievable and time-bound priorities relating uptake of levels and student achievement.

At junior cycle, the JCSP should be integrated into classroom practice for a target group of students. Indeed, all teachers should engage with the range of JCSP strategies, share the observed existing good practice and develop all base-classrooms and teaching areas as visual learning environments. Currently, the walls in some base-classrooms are bare. Classrooms should contain a range of appropriate visual materials and samples of student work to provide a focus on subject-specific literacy and numeracy and an audience for students' work, as was evident in a number of classrooms.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Some recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports have been implemented and some have yet to be addressed. Recommendations relating to leaking-taps and the storage of chemicals have been addressed. The installation of electrical isolation switches in the laboratories was being addressed at the time of the evaluation. New furniture has been provided in a number of classrooms. The creation of a student register detailing the students' needs, the additional hours allocated and models of delivery, also recommended in this report, has yet to be developed. The development of team teaching has not been progressed.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Recent investment has facilitated the integration of ICT into teaching and learning in some subjects while evidence of the active engagement of students through a range of methodologies and strategies was also in evidence. These developments reflect recommendations made in a number of subject inspection reports.

The board and senior management have committed to formally address further recommendations arising from evaluation reports.

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

After a period of significant change, the school has now engaged in a school improvement process based on a shared vision for development. School development planning and DEIS planning are now in progress. These, and a range of other initiatives, represent a clear reflection on the needs of the school and its students. The board, senior management and staff are advancing significant school improvement at a range of levels. The board and senior management are also aware of the challenges of change and the necessity to implement change incrementally. The school has the capacity to self-evaluate and to progress its vision for improvement.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

1. In an overall context the Management and Staff found the MLL to be a positive experience.
2. The three year DEIS Action Plan is currently being developed from a one year to a three year development cycle.
3. The board is happy to accept the very positive comments regarding supports for students.
4. The recommendation regarding the re-structuring of the school timetable to facilitate the introduction of a nine period day is being considered particularly in the context of the Strategy on Literacy and Numeracy