

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

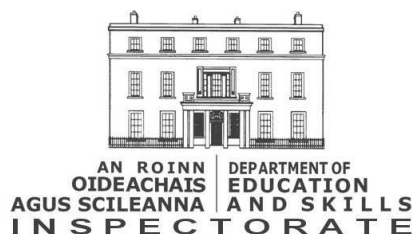
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Cuan's College
Castleblakeney, County Galway
Roll number: 62930V**

Date of inspection: 9 May 2013



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in May 2013 in Saint Cuan's 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Introduction

Saint Cuan's College is a co-educational school providing post-primary education to students from the surrounding locality. The school operates under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Elphin and enjoys strong support from the patron and the local community. The number of students in the school has increased in recent years and the current enrolment of 285 students includes thirty-nine post-leaving certificate (PLC) students. The focus of the evaluation was on second-level provision.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- Relationships between students and teachers, as evidenced by interactions at school level, are good.
- The school provides a broad curriculum for students with good continuity in optional subject provision between junior and senior cycle.
- The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities the provision of which is largely dependent on the commitment and goodwill of teachers.
- Aspects of the timetabling arrangements in the school require revision to ensure compliance with Department of Education and Skills guidelines.
- The quality of teaching and learning was found to be generally good including a number of lessons with very good practice. In a small number of lessons there were evident weaknesses in teaching that impacted students' learning.
- The school community has prioritised the development of the school's physical infrastructure and a print-rich environment supports students' learning in classrooms.
- While a range of whole-school policies is in place there is a need to develop policies in some key areas such as guidance and special educational needs (SEN).
- Student support is a whole-school priority. However, there is a need to develop formal student support structures which should set out additional detail on the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the system and on its structures.

- Junior cycle class groups are organised on a mixed-ability basis for most subjects with setting replacing it in English, Irish, Mathematics, French and Business Studies at varying points in junior cycle.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should broaden its focus on matters relating to the quality of learning within the school through informing itself of developments including planning, students' attainment and progress.
- The school's management must ensure that students' entitlement to the minimum number of days' instruction per year as outlined in circular M29/95 is met.
- The functions and responsibilities of the individual members of the senior management team should be reviewed.
- The school's management should prioritise the development of whole-school policies and systems for guidance and special educational needs (SEN).
- A review of setting as the approach to class organisation in English and French for junior cycle students should be undertaken. The review should identify the best time to introduce setting and produce clear criteria for allocating students to particular groups.
- Greater emphasis is required by all teachers on the use of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies within their subjects.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is appropriately constituted and meets each school term. The patron of the school has regular contact with the board through his nominees and visits the school each year to meet with the staff, students and board. The appointment of a new board later in 2013 will provide an opportunity for board members to avail of training to ensure that they are fully prepared for their role in the school's management structure. The board members have strong links with the local community and it is evident from the minutes of board meetings that there is openness in the communication between board members. To strengthen communication with the wider school community the board is advised to replace the existing oral reporting to staff and parents with an agreed written report which is finalised at the end of each board meeting.

A review of the work of the board indicates its strong operational focus. The board has been centrally involved in leading the recent upgrades in the school's infrastructure and the outcomes of this are a credit to the board. There is scope for the board to enhance its practices for review and evaluation of key aspects of the school, including teaching and learning. For example, the board could formally review students' attainment in the certificate examinations. To improve its insight into learning at school level the board could seek inputs from staff teams involved in development planning and other school-based initiatives. Also, following subject inspections, the relevant subject department could be expected to engage with the board around its action plan for addressing the recommendations in the report.

The parents' association is active in supporting the school. Its members have worked hard to support the development of the school in particular in relation to fundraising. A link with the school's management is provided by the attendance of either the principal or deputy

principal at each of its meetings. The association is currently seeking to expand its role. In this regard it could, for example, work with in-school management to organise and provide information sessions for parents on curriculum-related themes, for example, Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE). The development of the school's website provides a valuable opportunity to regularly update all parents on the activities of the parents' association which should be availed of as soon as possible.

The board has established a number of whole-school priorities and significant work has been undertaken in recent years in updating the school's physical environment including the working spaces for staff and students. In progressing the school's priorities, additional attention should be paid to identifying those priorities that focus on the development of teaching and learning and that centre on developing capacity throughout the school for school self-evaluation. The board has also prioritised a review of the school's admissions policy and work in ongoing in relation to this. A useful approach in supporting policy development and review is to compile a register of policies. This register should include suggested review dates for each policy.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal, who was recently appointed, is a long standing member of the school's staff. The principal and the deputy principal form the senior management team. They meet both formally and informally regularly. The minutes of the weekly formal meetings are well documented and outline a programme of work that is focused on student care and day-to-day management issues. Presently, they are working on reviewing the role of post holders in order to meet the needs of the school. It is timely that this review would also include a reassessment of the role of principal and deputy principal that would focus on their respective and shared roles and responsibilities in the management of the school's resources including personnel.

All staff members demonstrate a high level of commitment to the school and its students. In addition, the middle management team is generally very hard working and its members are currently working with senior management to review their roles. This is positive in light of the changing needs of the school and its students. Of particular merit are the annual reports of the assistant principals to all staff on the completion of their duties. These reports should also be made available to the board of management.

An analysis of the school's timetable reveals a number of concerns. While the school is in compliance with the minimum weekly instruction time requirement of twenty-eight hours, the staggered start of formal classes at the beginning of the school year should be discontinued as it reduces the overall number of instruction days per year available to students required by in Circular M29/95, *Time in School*. In addition, the concurrent timetabling of study classes with option blocks for senior cycle students along with the supervision of these study periods by teachers as part of their teaching hours is an under-use of teaching time. These practices should be discontinued.

At present, some of the additional time available to the school under the Croke Park Agreement is used for the supervision of extracurricular activities. Senior management is currently reviewing this. As an outcome of this review, it is necessary to ensure that all of the time concerned is used in accordance with the requirements of Circular 0025/2011.

Currently, the school does not have a guidance plan. The school is required to use its available resources to provide appropriate guidance for students, incorporating all three dimensions of personal, educational and career. Every school should have a guidance plan as an integral part of its school plan. In developing the guidance plan, existing provision such as the school's programme for SPHE and the year-head system is highly relevant.

Management should consider the establishment of a whole-school student support team which would operate under the direction of the principal and could include, among others, the counsellor and a learning support teacher. Once established the team could be responsible for drafting the whole-school guidance plan and reviewing other relevant policies, in particular SEN.

The school's management is actively pursuing strategies and developing its information and communication technology (ICT) systems to monitor student attendance and to improve the quality of data available at school level. This work is ongoing and provides good potential to develop a range of whole-school data management systems, including assessment data that would support decision-making and school self-evaluation.

The transition programme for first-year students is good and strong links are established with local primary schools. The work of the school's prefects and their role in the *Settling-in Programme* is beneficial and allows for leadership among students to be developed. The student council are well informed of its role. Of particular merit is the sense of shared ownership, with management, of the projects that it has successfully engaged with including the recent updates of the canteen and toilet facilities.

The school provides a broad curricular programme given its size and the resources available. A taster programme for optional subjects in first year has recently been introduced. Students' responses during the evaluation, together with the changed pattern in optional subject uptake, provide evidence that this new approach has been beneficial in assisting students to make informed decisions about subject choice.

There is a culture of volunteerism among staff to support students' attainment evidenced by, for example, the teachers' provision of additional tuition in their own time. In a deliberate effort to meet the needs and interests of students the school has made strenuous efforts to broaden the curriculum, including the introduction of Music. There is good continuity in optional subject provision between junior and senior cycle and the senior-cycle programme includes an optional Transition Year (TY) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). However, it is evident that there is considerable duplication between the existing careers programme and the Preparation for Work link module of the LCVP, which all fifth-year students complete. In addition, there is some overlap in the careers programme in TY and fifth year. Rationalisation of the provision of careers education is recommended. This should be prioritised when devising the guidance plan

In junior cycle, classes are generally organised on a mixed-ability basis. However, in five subjects—Irish, English, Maths, French and Business Studies—setting applies. In Business Studies the use of setting has been reviewed and it has been decided to discontinue it. Overall, there is a need to assess the impact of setting on students' expectations and attainment for English and French, where there is evidence that the number of students opting for higher level could be increased. In reviewing the current approach, particular attention should be paid to when setting is introduced and to the criteria used to allocate students to particular groups.

Currently, student support is mainly provided through senior management and the year-head system. Junior cycle year heads organise, in their own time, to have a weekly meeting with their year groups. This is very good practice. In relation to SEN, it is evident that the overall approach needs to be restructured. While acknowledging the school's student-centred ethos, it is evident that current timetabling practices do not always ensure the optimal use of the additional resources provided and this should be addressed.

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*.

1.2 Management of facilities

The school buildings are well managed and clean with students and staff actively involved in maintaining a tidy and litter free physical environment. The board's decision to prioritise the development of facilities has resulted in a real enhancement of the learning environment. The support of the patron and the provision of the adjacent resource centre for use by the school were both very important in bringing about these improvements.

The school's resources for ICT have recently been upgraded. Management is reviewing how to optimise the use of the available resources, both to develop students' ICT capabilities and to support teaching and learning across other subjects. It is important that agreed actions emerge from this review. The health and safety statement was recently updated. An active whole-school approach is taken to the school's involvement in the Green-Schools programme.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Planning documentation was made available for all subjects. The quality of the subject department plans reviewed varied. The best examples of schemes of work included detailed learning outcomes matched to appropriate methodologies, resources and assessment modes. All schemes of work have been updated to include a review section. A small number of subject departments have been completing this section as a working document, reflecting on students' progress and attainment as well as the teaching approaches being used. This very good practice should be adopted by all subject departments.

The quality of teaching and learning was generally good. A number of lessons with very good practice were observed. In a small number of lessons there were weaknesses in teaching that impacted negatively on students' learning. These weaknesses were generally as a result of the lesson not being appropriately pitched at the students' interests or abilities. Although these lessons contained features of good practice, where relevant teachers need to improve lesson planning, and develop their use of active learning methodologies. Differentiation strategies should also be progressed to serve the needs of all students in these lessons.

In the most effective lessons, teachers used methods that engaged students as active participants and encouraged collaborative learning. Differentiation strategies were incorporated in the questioning approaches used and in the work assigned. Such approaches should be extended so that in every lesson there are sufficient opportunities for students to engage actively with the content of the lesson and that the content be delivered in a way that takes cognisance of the range of abilities in the class.

Both teachers' and students' presentation of their work was good, with teachers placing considerable emphasis on the layout and general structure of students' work. This included the use of headings, dating and numbering of questions in students' copybooks. The inspectors' review of students' copybooks and folders indicates that a good volume of class work and homework has been completed during the year. It was evident that students' level of homework completion is very high in general. There was evidence of some directive,

meaningful and positive feedback for students in their copybooks. This very important element of assessment for learning (AfL) should be implemented in every subject area. It was noted that errors in students' work, including spelling mistakes, were not addressed in some of the copybooks examined.

In almost all of the lessons observed, teachers' individual planning was of a very high standard. The lesson intention was clear and, in many cases, was reviewed before the end of the lesson. In two lessons observed, very effective use was made of teacher-led multimedia presentations. In each case, the input complemented the lesson objective and was accompanied by related group work, worksheets and discussion. Such interactions formed part of a rich and diverse learning experience for students. In two other lessons, student presentations, including the use of presentation software, were included within the lesson. In each case, this activity was included as part of the students' assessment portfolio. The benefits of these approaches are that students' research and oral skills are enhanced and assessment modes are broadened.

The interactions observed between teachers and students were very positive. Despite movement between the two main parts of the school campus, there were little or no issues with regard to punctuality and students presented for lessons with the necessary equipment and books. Classrooms were generally teacher-based and were well presented with subject specific and cross-curricular content and themes. A considerable amount of work has been undertaken recently in relation to the presentation of key terminology, both in text form and graphically in classrooms. This forms part of the school's developing approach to whole-school literacy. Classroom layout facilitated the incorporation of pair and group work into classroom activities. The potential of such collaborative opportunities, particularly as a means of differentiating the lesson content, was not fully exploited in all lessons. This is an area for development for teachers.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

The school's management has made good progress in implementing the recommendations with a management dimension from previous inspection reports. Among the areas of progress are the increased time allocation to senior-cycle Geography and the introduction of the taster programme for first-year students. The main area where work is still required is in planning for SEN and in strengthening the links between subject departments and SEN.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Significant progress has been made in the active use of ICT within lessons as a teaching and learning tool. While a range of questioning strategies was used with students in the majority of lessons, there is scope to improve the balance between the use of global and targeted questions. In addition, practice varied with regard to the incorporation of all four language skills within language lessons.

A number of inspection reports made reference to correction strategies and the need for affirmation and recommendations for improvement to be included with students' work. In a minority of lessons there was evidence that this approach was being implemented. There is need to develop a whole-school approach for the use of evaluative, comment-based feedback to students on their work.

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

A student reflection questionnaire has been designed for distribution at the end of the current school year. This questionnaire, and the resulting data, should provide useful feedback to subject departments and should assist them in progressing teaching and learning priorities relevant to school self-evaluation. At school level the capacity within subject departments for self-evaluation varies though it is strong in some departments as indicated by their progression of inspection recommendations and their approach to subject planning. As the school develops its self-evaluative processes and advances its developmental priorities, it should co-ordinate the available data sources and reinforce them with new sources to meet the needs of the school and the students.

Building on this work the board, in cooperation with school management and teachers, should take a more proactive role in identifying and progressing priorities specific to improving the quality of teaching and learning.