

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Wilson's Hospital School
Multyfarnham, County Westmeath
Roll number: 63300Q**

Date of inspection: 5 December 2012



**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 December 2012 in Wilson's Hospital 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

Wilson's Hospital School is a co-educational boarding school in rural County Westmeath under the trusteeship of five Church of Ireland archbishops and bishops. The school has recently celebrated 250 years in existence and maintains very good links with its past pupils. It amalgamated with Preston school, Co. Meath in 1969. At the time of the evaluation there were 436 students enrolled, including students from the local area, from 22 out of the 26 counties in the state and from abroad. In line with the founding principles of the school approximately two-thirds of the places in the school are reserved for boarders. The school entered the free tuition scheme in 2011.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The school management board is proactive and innovative and has engaged very well with its developmental priorities.
- The principal has given many years of dedicated service to the school as warden/headmaster and has overseen a number of developments that have assured the future of the school.
- The principal and deputy principal work very well as a team and have very good support from parents and teachers.
- The school ethos and traditions are of fundamental importance and are lived out in the daily life of the school.
- Very good collaboration is evident among teachers.
- Student behaviour is very good.
- A broad, balanced range of subjects and programmes is available to students.
- The school facilitates an extensive programme of extracurricular and co-curricular activities that is availed of by the vast majority of students.
- A very good Transition Year (TY) programme enjoys widespread support from students and parents.
- Student care and student support are of a very high quality.
- In general, teaching and learning is of a very good standard with many excellent lessons observed but there is room for improvement in some instances.
- The school is very well resourced.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The school should review the organisation and delivery of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).
- A review of posts should take place and post holders should prepare a short annual report for management.
- Lessons should be well structured and should start with the introduction of proposed learning outcomes and should conclude with a review of learning.
- More emphasis should be placed on the consolidation of subject-specific terminology and key words in many lessons.
- Senior management, including the school management board, should oversee the planning for and implementation of recommendations made in evaluation reports on a more consistent basis.

QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The Board of Governors is appointed by the trustees and is a limited company. It has overall responsibility for Wilson's Hospital School. It has devolved responsibility for the boarding aspect of the school to the School Residency Board and responsibility for the school itself to the School Management Board which acts as the board of management for the purposes of fulfilling the requirements of the Education Act, 1998.

The School Management Board (board) is appropriately constituted. Meetings take place regularly and members of the board, many of whom have given long periods of service to the school, are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities under the Education Act, 1998. The board has been proactive and innovative in regard to the furthering of the developmental priorities of the school which have included keeping the school affordable and attractive for members of the Church of Ireland community. In the last twenty years many improvements have taken place in the quality and range of the school's facilities. There is good evidence of a very pragmatic and business-like approach to planning for development and due regard has been paid to the preservation of the school ethos and the heritage nature of the school's property. The move to the free tuition scheme has been carefully and skilfully managed.

The board has overseen the development and adoption of a comprehensive range of policies that help in the smooth running of the school. Good reporting mechanisms to the Parents' Association and staff on the business of board meetings were evident. Consideration should be given to the use of school magazine or website to communicate with the wider body of parents. There are very good links between the staff and board, for example, committees from the staff work on advancing school policies for the board. However, with regard to most policies adopted, there was little evidence of consultation with parents and students. This should be addressed when policies are being formulated or reviewed. Policies should be dated and include dates for review.

From an examination of minutes of board meeting and the interview conducted by members of the evaluation team with the board it was evident that comprehensive action planning based on school priorities is under way. Now that a number of school priorities have been achieved or are underway such as changes to the infrastructure of the school and the successful move into the free tuition scheme, action planning should be broadened to include the implementation of recommendations contained in evaluation reports and should outline specific targets and timeframes for achievement in regard to agreed priorities.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The principal has given many years of dedicated service to the school and has overseen many developments that have assured the future of the school. The principal and deputy principal have clearly defined roles and work very well as a team. Both show a deep commitment to the school and a very strong work-ethic. Members of the school community, including staff and parents, spoke very favourably about the support they received from both members of the senior management team.

Frequent staff meetings are held and staff members have the opportunity to contribute the agenda. There are also frequent meetings with groups of staff, such as the regular meetings that take place between the year heads and the deputy principal. Appropriate consultation and delegation of authority takes place. Middle management plays an important role in the running of the school.

The post structure has developed and been added to over time and it was evident that the duties associated with some posts are more onerous than others. Staff members interviewed indicated that they would welcome an audit of the needs of the school and a review of post duties. Posts should be matched to the needs of the school and the talents of post holders. It is recommended that post holders prepare a short annual report for management that details achievements, challenges and opportunities for development. This report should form the basis of an end-of-year meeting with management.

Good collaboration was evident across the school and teachers give generously of their time across a range of areas. One indicator of this is the committee system that has been developed to advance school policies and priorities. Staff members are afforded opportunities to lead projects and initiatives, for example, the National Council for Technology in Education (NCTE) e-learning initiative. It is highly commended that each subject department in the school has engaged with this initiative and has prepared an action plan for development.

A good programme of continuing professional development (CPD) takes place in the school. Staff members are committed to professional development as evidenced by the number of staff members involved with further study. Opportunities for further development in relation to programmes and subjects should be availed of. For example, the school should engage with the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) when reviewing programmes such as the LCVP.

Management facilitates frequent meetings of subject departments and good subject department structures were evident across the school. A range of subject department folders were examined. The quality of these ranged from fair to excellent. Where best practice was evident, the subject plan contained schemes of work which were laid out on a termly basis, to facilitate common assessment, and where topics were allied to learning outcomes, resources and suggested methodologies. These also included the minutes of meetings, an analysis of state examination results and evidence of action planning for improvement. It is recommended that management ensure that all subject departments progress subject planning to this high standard.

Leadership of students

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum including the Leaving Certificate Vocational programme (LCVP) and the Transition Year (TY) programme and a broad range of subjects. Instructional hours in the school are compliant with Circular M29/95. The school timetable allocation for subjects and programmes are broadly in line with syllabus and programme guidelines.

The school ethos is lived out in the daily life of the school as exemplified by the daily morning assembly, the Sunday evening prayer service attended by all boarders and a number of services throughout the year. The admission policy also reflects the characteristic ethos of the school. The policy, in general, lays out clear criteria for admission in line with the founding principles of the school. It is recommended, however, that the specific circumstances in which enrolment could be refused be clarified in this policy. It is notable that all parents surveyed indicated that the school made their child welcome when they entered the school.

Attendance is monitored in an organised manner. The principal contacts students' homes in the case of prolonged absence. It is planned to introduce a texting system in the case of student absence. Confirmation was provided that the school has submitted its statutory returns on student absence to the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB). It is recommended that the school continues to submit returns to the NEWB in a timely manner in line with its requirements under section 21 of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000.

Student access to subjects and levels is very good. Students and parents interviewed were fulsome in their praise of the comprehensive TY programme. Students undertake a range of activities in TY and have the opportunity to sample a broad range of subjects, for example Chinese. The *development education* module in the TY programme came in for particular mention from students and parents interviewed. In junior cycle students choose their optional subjects before entering the school. Student and parent surveys and interviews conducted suggest that additional support for students making choices at this stage would be welcome.

It is very positive that the school has maintained the LCVP on the curriculum, thus catering for the broad range of student needs. While many good aspects of the programme are evident, there is a need to review the way that the LCVP is organised and delivered. A broader whole-school programme approach should be adopted. All subject departments should consider how they can contribute to the programme. Timetabling issues should be addressed including a consideration of how students of all abilities could be accommodated on the programme.

There are very good quality care systems in the school. The guidance counsellor, the school chaplain, year heads and members of the learning-support department work well together to support students with additional educational needs or those who are in need of additional support. A number of policies have been prepared to guide student care services in the school including a comprehensive guidance plan that is linked very well to Social Personal and Health Education structures. Very good communication between the school and residential staff in relation to boarding students was noted. A large majority of students surveyed indicated that there was a good atmosphere in the school. The survey results have been made available to the school and the school should use them to reflect on areas that could be addressed into the future.

Student support systems are very well organised. One indicator of very good practice is the detailed register that is kept of the additional support hours granted by the Department of Education and Skills to individual students and how they are allocated. Student support is

delivered in a thoughtful and inclusive manner including, commendably, the significant use of team-teaching.

Interviews conducted, parent and student surveys and observation by members of the evaluation team indicate that student behaviour in the school is very good. The role of the year heads in maintaining positive discipline and monitoring academic performance is very important. A code of behaviour, which is reviewed each year, further supports positive student behaviour. However, it is negatively framed in parts. In line with the requirements of Section 23 of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, it is recommended that the NEWB audit checklist is used to check for compliance with legal requirements and good practice when the code next comes up for review.

Student leadership is encouraged. Members of the student council are democratically elected and meet regularly. The prefect system offers further opportunities for student leadership to senior cycle students.

A wide range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities in the area of sporting, moral, cultural and spiritual activities are made available to students including the *Gaisce* challenge and the *Comenius* project. The vast majority of students surveyed indicated that they take part in additional school activities outside of class time. This is commendable.

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 is very well resourced and substantial upgrading of facilities has taken place over a number of years. There was a building programme underway at the time of the evaluation. On completion all classrooms will be situated in the more modern Preston building. School management has prioritised for development the use of ICT and its integration into teaching and learning. This emphasis on ICT is further exemplified by a school website that is wide-ranging and informative.

The student council have engaged with the Green Flag Programme as a first step to obtaining the Green Flag. A comprehensive school health and safety statement has been prepared.

1. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty lessons, including two double lessons, were observed over the course of the evaluation. The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good. This evidence is supported by student survey results. In many lessons observed exemplary practice was evident. There were a small number of lessons in which there was considerable room for improvement.

In general, planning for lessons was very good and exemplary in some instances. A good range of resources were used in lessons including very good use of ICT. Teachers, in about half the lessons observed, introduced the topic at the start. In some cases this was in the form of proposed learning outcomes which were returned to in a review at the end. This very good practice helps to structure lessons and assess student learning and should be extended to all lessons.

In general, lessons were very student centred. Students were involved in lessons through the use of questioning and group or individual activity. In some cases challenging and thought-provoking questions encouraged the development of higher level thinking. In one instance the teacher ensured that all students received a question by adopting the hands-down approach and ticking off students' names as the class progressed. In some lessons not all students were included in the questioning processes. Teachers should ensure that all students are included in the lesson through the use of differentiated questioning and other forms of student activity such as group work or individual work.

Most lessons were well structured. In a small number of lessons, a combination of a lack of structure and poor questioning technique resulted in less than optimal learning opportunities for some students. Student behaviour, however, was generally very good and very good teacher-student rapport was evident. In a small minority of lessons some students were disengaged. Teachers should challenge those students who opt out and ensure that an appropriate environment is maintained where all students are encouraged to engage in the learning process.

Oral affirmation of students by teachers was generally very good. However, a review of a selection of student journals indicated that the journal is underused to affirm students and to communicate with homes. The school should explore extending the use of the journal to support teaching and learning and student engagement.

Differentiation was evident in many lessons, generally though the use of teacher movement and support. In a few lessons, the subject-specific vocabulary of the lesson was introduced at the start of the lesson and referred to throughout the lesson. This strategy is a very good support for students with additional educational needs, including those for whom English is an additional language, and should be extended in line with the literacy strategy of the school. The use of differentiated work or worksheets, where the work assigned gets gradually more difficult, should be explored to support students at all levels.

Good assessment modes were evident including peer assessment and self assessment. Teachers give homework frequently and the monitoring of homework was evident. In some instances teachers give students helpful written feedback on their work, particularly in senior cycle. This good practice was welcomed by students interviewed. Some junior cycle students interviewed would welcome more written developmental feedback on their work. The inspection team agree with this perspective. Teachers should give students developmental written feedback, as appropriate, when correcting students' work. Many departments in the school set common house examinations. This good practice should be adopted across the school. Performance in state examinations compares favourably with national norms in most instances.

Very good use of the target language was evident in language classes. Students' use of the target language was particularly noteworthy. Practical lessons were generally well organised. Teachers have high expectations of students. A good range of co-curricular activities supported teaching and learning in subjects. For example, on one of the days of the evaluation a class group was brought to a theatre performance.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Good attention has been paid to the whole-school aspects of evaluation reports received by the school to date, but less attention has been focussed on achieving in-class recommendations and improvements. The ICT infrastructure has advanced and management has given good support to teachers to engage with ICT. Timetabling recommendations have been attended to. Subject department planning is developing, although some subject plans are more advanced than others. Senior management, including the senior management board, should oversee the implementation of recommendations made in evaluation reports. Subject departments should report to management on their progress in implementing recommendations.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Five general areas were selected from previous inspection reports received by the school to monitor whether developments and improvements recommended in one subject area are shared with and influence improvements in practice in other subject areas.

Teachers have attended well to some of the recommendations made. It was clear that there have been substantial improvements in the use of ICT. In relation to the use of questioning to advance the lesson, good or very good use of questioning was evident in almost all classrooms visited. The use of keyword strategies was observed in some lessons but has yet to be embedded into classroom practice in most instances. The sharing of and reviewing of proposed learning outcomes, which was observed in a few lessons only, needs to be developed. Written developmental feedback on student's work was evident in many classrooms visited. However, this is an area for development in some.

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

Management bodies have been proactive and innovative in regard to infrastructural improvement and prioritised areas have been well researched and developed. There was evidence of sound reflective practice in many departments across the school for example, English, Guidance and learning support. Analysis of state examination results takes place and is shared with members of the board.

The school has a good capacity for self evaluation and improvement. It is important that a more focussed approach to bringing about improvements in teaching and learning and following up on recommendations made in evaluation reports be implemented. The practice of self evaluation and consequent action planning should include all stakeholders in planning for school improvement.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

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

Wilson's Hospital School is pleased with the content of the Whole School Evaluation report. In particular, the positive comments in the inspection report on the school's ethos and traditions being of fundamental importance and reflected in the daily life of the school, are welcomed.

The observations of the Inspectors in regard to the academic performance of the school were noted:

- the favourable comparison of Wilson's Hospital School in state examinations in relation to national norms
- the fact that a broad and balanced range of subjects and programmes are available to students
- the very good Transition Year (TY) programme and that, in general, teaching and learning is of a very good standard.

The Board of Management was encouraged by the Inspectors' reporting that the school has an extensive range of extra-curricular activities. Wilson's Hospital School's priority in attending to the welfare of its students was highlighted by the inspectors in their comments that student care and student support are of a very high quality. The board welcomes the favourable commentary on the support students with additional educational needs and children in need of additional support are given. As the report states, "student support is delivered in a thoughtful and inclusive manner". The school is conscious that its care of students is of primary importance, resulting, as the Inspectors found, in very good student behaviour and the students indicating that "there was a good atmosphere in the school".

The Board notes the inspectors' recognition of the school's efforts as a boarding school to keep the school affordable and attractive for members of the Church of Ireland in accordance with its founding documents. The school has boarder representation from 22 out of the 26 counties filling the two-thirds of spaces reserved for boarders.

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 recommendations and suggestions contained in the report will further enhance the development plan of the school. The board is committed to furthering the recommendations.

In particular, the school will be reviewing posts of responsibility, particularly in the context of post holder retirements arising. The school is conscious of the reduction of resources by the Department of Education and Skills to posts of responsibility. The board is committed

to using the resources available to best meet the needs of the school in a balanced way in consultation with staff members.

Senior management, including the school management board, will pro-actively plan for, and oversee the implementation of recommendations made in evaluation reports, noting the inspection report's finding of the overall quality and learning being very good.

The prioritisation which the school management has given to the use of Information Technology will be furthered by the installations in the new twenty-room classroom extension, which will open in September 2013.