

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**St Mary's CBS
Enniscorthy, County Wexford
Roll number: 63560T**

Date of inspection: 29 January 2013



**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 January 2013, in St Mary's CBS, Enniscorthy. 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.

Introduction

St Mary's CBS, Enniscorthy, is a voluntary secondary school for boys with a Catholic ethos under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice School's Trust (ERST). St Mary's has been providing second-level education for boys in Enniscorthy since 1857 and has a current enrolment of 672 students. The school caters for students from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds serving both urban and rural communities. 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.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is hardworking, effective and deeply committed to the school and to the maintenance of its ethos, and provides a wealth of expertise, knowledge and support for the principal.
- The principal is reflective, has a clear vision for the school and, together with the deputy principal demonstrates effective and motivational leadership.
- The senior management team, comprising of the principal and deputy principal, work closely on progressing the school's priorities for development and improvement and manage the school effectively and efficiently.
- Management and staff demonstrate very good commitment to pastoral care and this is underpinned by carefully planned disciplinary and support structures.
- School development planning is well developed and teachers have undertaken considerable work in the last year in relation to consistent approaches to subject planning.
- The current structure of the timetable is leading to some shortcomings in time allocation to certain subject areas.
- Teaching and learning was observed to be good overall with some instances of very good practice.
- Students were very well behaved and a positive welcoming atmosphere pervades.
- There was good use of information and communication technology (ICT) in some lessons which could be further extended.
- There was a lack of active methodologies and collaborative learning in some lessons and these are areas which need some development.

Recommendations for Further Development

- Management should consider a variety of measures with a view to addressing some shortfall in time allocations for specific subject areas.

- It is recommended that all teachers regularly use a range of active methodologies to provide opportunities for students to collaborate with each other to consolidate and reinforce learning.
- It is recommended that the practice of providing formative written comments to students to give guidance on how to improve their work be established across the school, as well as increasing the involvement of students in monitoring and assessing their own progress.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is properly constituted, meets regularly and was seen to be a very cohesive, hardworking and motivated unit. Members demonstrated a tangible and commendable commitment to the school's ethos and the continued maintenance of that ethos under the trusteeship of ERST. There has also been considerable continuity with some members serving for some years. Previous boards have overseen substantial building projects and renovations and ensured that school planning is well advanced. The current board of management is proactive and takes a leadership role in relation to school development planning. All school planning activities are either initiated or approved by the board. Board members participate in the work of planning groups or sub-committees. All policies are ratified and reviewed by the board and trustees are kept up to date with all policy developments. There is further work to be done in relation to developing and finalising some policies such as the special education needs policy and an attendance and participation policy and this work should be progressed and expedited as soon as possible.

The board of management was very well informed about all aspects of school life and demonstrated engagement with the school's priorities for the future. The board of management is a source of considerable expertise, knowledge and support for the school principal. The board outlined its future plans for the development of St Mary's CBS. Considerable time and effort have been devoted to the development of the schools' current buildings and sporting facilities over the last decade. In response to increased enrolment in recent years, the board has submitted plans to the Department of Education and Skills for additional buildings and facilities. However, the board stated its main current focus is the new mission statement and the promotion of that ethos throughout the school community. A review of the current code of behaviour, which is underway, will help to underpin the new mission statement.

Another priority for development initiated by school management includes the development of a whole-school plan on either literacy or numeracy in the short term; the chosen theme will depend on the outcomes of further review and analysis conducted through the formal school self-evaluation process. The board intend to lead a review of formal assessment practices and wish to support on-going staff training in assessment for learning (AFL) strategies.

The senior management team, comprising the principal and deputy principal, presented as an efficient and committed team. The school is very well run and organised under their joint effective leadership. The principal and deputy principal meet regularly to discuss current management issues but also work closely on progressing the school's priorities for development and improvement. The senior management team is reflective and has a shared vision for the school.

St Mary's CBS has currently three assistant principals and thirteen special duties teachers' posts of responsibility. These posts cover a wide range of organisational, leadership and administrative roles within the school. A review of posts is intended by senior management

in light of changes in school priorities. Many of the current posts are meeting the needs of the school. The assistant principal posts should be revisited to ensure that they encompass increased leadership role as well administrative duties in order to complement and support the work of senior management.

There is an active parents' council which supports the work of senior management and staff. Parents were very positive about the educational provision in the school and described St Mary's CBS as a welcoming nurturing school that has education as its core function but that provides plenty of opportunities for the holistic development of the student. The results from parental questionnaires indicate a very high level of satisfaction with the school and an indication that students are very well looked after.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The senior management team lead the staff in a motivational way. Staff members are encouraged to engage in continuing professional development (CPD) and are facilitated to attend and to present to staff on their return. Senior management is prioritising a focus on improving teaching and learning in the school. Staff had input from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) in relation to teaching methodologies in mixed-ability settings. Senior management reported that a considerable amount of time and energy is spent on the recruitment and induction of staff. Management strives to ensure that new teachers come into a welcoming culture of work. The staff-work room is a considerable asset and is well utilised by the staff.

Staff members were encouraged, in the last year, to take ownership of the review of the school mission statement. The school was of the view that the statement no longer adequately reflected the ethos of the school. The new mission statement, arrived at after much discussion and debate, is seen as a true reflection of where the school community is in terms of its work and achievements. There have been many working groups in the school in recent years and staff volunteer to take part in these. A group is currently working with the NBSS to review the code of behaviour to reflect more positive approaches to promoting good behaviour.

Overall, the teaching staff is deployed in line with their qualifications. Students are offered a wide range of subjects and programmes. An increased focus on subject planning and preparation has created a new dynamic in subject departments and school management and staff reported that this has led to improvements in teaching and learning in the classroom. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) has been provided in very recent years although this is very resource intensive for the school due to the small numbers that apply. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is also available. Transition Year (TY) is popular and both students and parents commented favourably on their experiences with the programme. Students spoke highly of the guidance provision and of advice in relation to career choices and subject options.

The pastoral care system and care for students are strengths in this school. The role of year head is a clearly defined role with responsibility for discipline, attendance, pastoral care issues and monitoring attainment. Students who are having difficulties in any of these areas can be referred on to the disciplinary committee, the pastoral care committee or the deputy principal who makes many decisions on what kinds of referrals are appropriate. The effective and reflective pastoral care team meets once a week. The principal and deputy principal attend these meetings. They also have a weekly meeting with the year heads. The role of the class tutor, an essential element of the school's pastoral care provision, should be more clearly defined and outlined in school documentation.

Student retention and progression is good overall. Attendance among a very small cohort of students is a concern. School personnel work very hard in trying to ensure attendance among this group. The home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator and the pastoral care team have initiated drafting an attendance policy for the school. The board is commended for its support for pastoral care in the school by providing a HSCL service and the services of a counsellor who comes to the school on a weekly basis to provide counselling for referred students. There is a comprehensive and praiseworthy whole-school guidance policy in place. A notable feature of the school's guidance provision is the attention paid to identifying students who are likely to benefit from bursaries and tracking and supporting these students through senior cycle onto third-level education.

A draft special educational needs policy clearly outlines the good practices in place to support students with additional needs. A committed team led by the special educational needs co-ordinator works effectively with management and staff so that the school's allocation of resource and learning support hours is used appropriately to ensure student-centred provision. Using student profiles and assessment information, resource teachers create individual plans with goals and objectives to guide instruction. A range of formal and informal assessment practices including work portfolios, checklists and student self-assessment are in place to monitor progress.

Subject teachers collaborate in long-term subject planning and have identified appropriate methodologies, resources and learning outcomes for each subject topic. However, most plans should further elaborate on how subject teachers can address specific learning needs arising from special or additional educational needs.

There is an active students' council in place. Students interviewed were very positive about their experiences in the school. They spoke warmly of a supportive and helpful teaching staff and a welcoming friendly atmosphere. They were appreciative of the school facilities and the wide subject sampling available. The opinions articulated by these students were also reflected in the student questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation.

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 building has undergone considerable renovation and extension in recent years. The current school buildings are very well maintained and the school environment is bright and welcoming. The provision of an all-weather pitch has been a welcome addition to the sporting facilities. The integration of ICT into teaching and learning has been a priority in recent years, and, as well as providing the necessary equipment and access to broadband, teachers received training on the use of the technology. The provision of more suitable blinds in classrooms to maximise the effective use of ICT resources should be considered.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning in most of the twenty-three observed lessons ranged from good to excellent. There is, however, scope for development in some areas.

Most lessons began with references to previous learning and by outlining the intended learning outcomes. Best practice featured the presentation of these outcomes using a white board or data projector, and direct reference to them during and at the end of the lesson to provide a review or summary of the learning. Lessons were generally well structured and

many featured a good variety of teaching methodologies. A degree of differentiation was provided through watchful monitoring of individual students and targeted questioning.

The most effective lessons provided opportunities for students to actively participate in learning through well structured activities, whole-class discussions, and question and answer sessions. A few lessons gave prominence to direct instruction as a methodology. These lessons were characterised by lectures and the giving of directions, and provided little opportunity for students to interact with their peers. Although some teachers ably facilitated student learning through pair or small group work, it is recommended that all teachers regularly use a range of active methodologies to provide opportunities for students to collaborate with each other to consolidate and reinforce learning. Carefully structured lessons that ensure that students do in fact work co-operatively with each other are recommended. Good co-operative learning can result in higher achievement, greater productivity, and increased social competence and self-esteem.

St Mary's is to be commended for the high level of mutual respect that exists between teachers and students. Overall, students were polite and well behaved and purposefully engaged in their learning. Teachers were patient and fair in their treatment of students. They had high expectations of their students and so simultaneously challenged and supported them in their learning. During the evaluation, student efforts and contributions were always welcomed and praised.

Team teaching is in limited use in the school. In one observed lesson, teachers planned and worked collaboratively to provide targeted instruction and individualised support to all of the students. The school should proactively consider the many benefits of co-operative teaching especially as an alternative model of support for students with additional needs.

Teachers consistently used the target language in most of the observed language lessons. In many cases, but not all, teachers encouraged students to engage with the target language through rephrasing the language and creative use of visual images and gestures. This practice should be extended to all language classes as a priority. The way in which modern languages are offered in Transition Year should be revisited with a view to ensuring that students have access to the language that they intend pursuing in senior cycle.

A range of assessment practices including targeted questioning, teacher observation, projects, portfolios and class-based tests is used effectively in most classrooms to evaluate student understanding and progress. All teachers regularly set, collect and correct class work and homework, but only some employ formative assessment. It is therefore recommended that the practice of providing formative written comments to students to give guidance on how to improve their work be established across the school. Increasing the involvement of students in monitoring and assessing their own progress should also be considered.

Literacy has been correctly identified by the school as an area in need of development and should now be prioritised. Subject teams have had preliminary discussions in relation to the promotion of literacy in subject areas and some initiatives have been started. For example, the development of subject-based vocabulary through a range of activities to promote the understanding and proper usage of key subject words was evident in many lessons.

Overall, well maintained classrooms provide positive learning environments. They are equipped with good ICT facilities and many teachers can be commended for productively incorporating ICT into their teaching. However, the use of the valuable resource could be further extended in teaching and learning.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Subject inspections were carried out in the following areas in recent years: Physical Education, English, Irish, Business Studies and Technical Graphics (TG) and Design and Communication Graphics (DCG). Management has addressed many of the recommendations in the reports while some areas still need consideration. Learning outcomes and formal assessments have been developed for each year group in Physical Education. However, students in LCVP still do not have access to PE. Irish has been allocated an extra period in TY and common assessments and assessment of orals skills have also been introduced.

All those teaching TG and DCG are now qualified in the subject and the subject is provided within school hours. Examination of subject plans and school documentation during the evaluation showed that considerable time and effort has been devoted to subject planning and the development of schemes of work in all subject areas. An increase in the number of lesson period available during the week would help to address any remaining issues around timetabling for specific subjects and the board is actively considering options for timetable adjustments to meet curricular requirements for next year.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Many of the recommendations in the subject inspection reports in relation to teaching and learning focused on the use of more effective assessment methods, active learning methodologies and improved collaborative planning. Assessment methods have been broadened somewhat and are being further explored in the relevant subject areas and collaborative planning has become a central tenet of all subject departments. Many teachers have started to engage with AfL strategies, an area which should be further developed. While active methodologies were observed to be a feature of some lessons during the evaluation, this is also an area of teaching and learning that needs further attention.

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

St Mary's CBS is a reflective school. All of the educational partners in the school have been involved in identifying priorities and areas for improvement in recent years. School development planning is well advanced with a very good school plan in place but there is a small number of policies to be progressed. Teachers show increasing commitment and involvement in effective subject and whole-school planning. The senior management team lead and promote a reflective and self-evaluative approach.

The school is starting to engage in the initial stages of the formal school self-evaluation process through the collection and analysis of data in a range of areas including: assessment results on enrolment, second-year literacy scores and state examination results. Student attainment is monitored and retention and progression figures are examined periodically. In addition, student surveys have been administered to fifth years in order to assess their views on teaching and learning and on school provision generally. A staff survey on student behaviour has also been carried out in association with the NBSS. The use of such quantitative and qualitative data will support action planning in the planned initiation of the formal school self-evaluation process.

With the continued support of a committed and reflective board of management, the focused and effective senior management team and the engaged teaching staff, the school has an excellent capacity for school improvement.

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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 welcome the whole school evaluation report and is pleased that the Inspection team recognises the quality of education provision to the students in St Mary's CBS. The board is pleased that the report commends the efficient management and governance of the school, the quality of leadership provided and the high standard of teaching and learning observed over the period of the evaluation.

The key role that the principal and deputy principal play in the efficient management of the school is affirmed and the quality of leadership provided by the principal and deputy principal is highlighted by the comment that they 'demonstrate effective and motivational leadership'.

The board is very happy that the commitment and professionalism of the teaching staff is affirmed. The board is pleased that the quality of teaching observed by the inspection team ranged from good to excellent and that they experienced some very good examples of teaching in their classroom visits. The report also notes the commitment to personal and school based continuing professional development and the good work done on subject planning has also been commended.

Our school is very committed to the ethos of Edmund Rice and this is particularly demonstrated in the school's commitment to the pastoral care of the students. The board is pleased that the inspectors commended good practice of having weekly pastoral care meetings; recognised the commitment of resources to ensure that the excellent provision of guidance and home school liaison is maintained.

The school is very proud of its provision for students with special educational needs and the board is pleased that the progressive work and good practice of the special educational needs coordinator and team is recognised.

The board is also pleased that the report noted the positive atmosphere in the school, the good behaviour of the students and in particular noted 'the high level of mutual respect that exists between teachers and students'.

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 committee has been formed to consider possible solutions to the shortfall in time allocation for specific subject areas. The solutions will be put in place for September 2014.

The school will prioritise active methodologies in its plans for whole school professional development.

The school will continue to promote the practice of providing formative written assessment comments to students in order to increase their involvement in monitoring and assessing their own progress.

The assistant principal posts will be reviewed to ensure that they encompass an increased leadership role.

The role of the class tutor will be reviewed with a view to providing greater clarity on the role and functions of the class tutor.

Students in transition year in the new academic year will have access to the language that they intend pursuing in senior cycle. The target language will be used in all language classes to ensure that students have the opportunity to actively and creatively engage with the language.

The school is committed to the aims of the National Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy and will continue to promote literacy. This will be a priority in the work the school engages upon in the school self-evaluation process.