

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Saint Joseph's CBS Secondary School  
Drogheda, County Louth  
Roll number: 63840C**

**Date of inspection: 15 January 2014**



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS  
AGUS SCILEANNA** | **DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION  
AND SKILLS**  
**INSPECTORATE**

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

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in January 2014 in St Joseph's 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, 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***

St Joseph's is a voluntary Catholic secondary school for boys. Managed directly by the Irish Christian Brothers for 150 years, it now operates within the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The school operates at full capacity with current-year enrolment at 641. A significant building extension, launched at the time of the evaluation, will see capacity grow to a potential 900 students by 2018. Enrolment is open, qualified only by the acceptance of the school's ethos and code of behaviour. The student body shows a diverse profile of different nationalities, cultures, faiths and abilities. The school offers the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes.

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

### ***Key Findings***

- The board of management is a well-organised competent body, fully apprised of its functions and obligations, focused on delivering improvement and development to enhance the attractiveness of the school for the community.
- The principal and deputy principal have the confidence of staff and students and have set a worthwhile agenda of school priorities that are focused on raised expectations and attainment and an intolerance of poor effort and behaviour.
- Senior management has facilitated and supported the emergence of staff members to display initiative and to take on leadership positions that complement the established post-of-responsibility structure.
- The school provides a curriculum that is developing and student support structures are good.
- The quality of teaching and learning ranged, in the main, from good to very good and was in some instances excellent. The need for significant change was noted only in a very small minority of the lessons observed.
- Management has led and supported collaboration within subject departments with a view to developing subject department planning, a worthwhile objective that remains a work in progress.
- There was a willingness apparent among all staff interviewed to follow the school self-evaluation process and to plan for improvement. The capacity of the senior management team to lead improvement was well demonstrated.

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

- In order to achieve a broader ownership of the school self-evaluation and school development planning processes, there is scope for greater collaboration with all members of the school community in developing SMART targets for improvement and in reporting on progress in the future.
- In reviewing future curriculum provision, favourable consideration should be given to increasing the number of places on the Transition Year programme and to the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).
- The good approaches to subject department planning evident in a minority of plans should be implemented across the full range of subjects.
- In reviewing the range of responsibilities that are devolved to middle management, there is a case for including whole-school self-evaluation and planning.

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

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

The board is appropriately constituted and all members have availed of training on the functions of a voluntary secondary school board of management. Regular meetings are held, attendance is good and there is a willingness to be available for special meetings, additional to the norm. Proceedings of meetings are well minuted. Mandatory policies have been adopted and there is a process for review. An agreed report is an established practice. A future review of the admissions policy, which will likely be guided by pending legislation, will need to ensure criteria cover all places, down to the last available place.

The board has established good links across the school community with recognition accorded to the student council. The first annual report on the operation of the school has commendably been published on the school website. The board contains a wealth of experienced people who show an affiliation to the school and are strongly supportive of the leadership of the senior management team of principal and deputy principal.

The board has endorsed a worthwhile agenda for school development, as identified by the school's senior management team. Separate from the extension project, these include first-year literacy enhancement, self-evaluation by subject departments, preparation for the new Junior Cycle, supporting the LCA programme, review of the post structure and meeting the needs of high achievers. The board is urged to keep these priorities under review in the interest of ensuring that it remains responsive to existing and emerging school needs. The board, as an influential body, might also consider setting a marker for school self-evaluation by undertaking an audit of its own effectiveness and identifying areas to assure the strategic development of the school.

The dominance of student discipline issues was apparent in a number of special board meetings prior to the evaluation. The minutes showed that these issues were delicately handled and a commitment to balancing supports with sanctions for offenders was clear. An analysis of questionnaire responses showed a marked variation between the views of parents and students on the question of student behaviour and suggests that further opportunities for the board to promote and affirm positive discipline may pay a dividend.

The relatively recently formed senior management team has a shared view on implementing a worthwhile agenda of priorities. They are set on raising expectations and attainment, developing teacher capacity and leadership talents and broadening the curriculum. Encouraging student responsibility and including the student voice are also high on this list. They are an active presence in the school and work hard to ensure that a positive learning

environment obtains in the classroom so as to allow optimal learning take place. Most notable in this regard is a focus on raised expectations and attainment and an intolerance of poor effort and behaviour.

### *1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning*

Senior management provides effective leadership for learning and both members model a high work ethic along with communicating expectations of similar efforts. There is a coherence about measures implemented to date to support current teaching and learning priorities. The code of behaviour has been fully revised and a significant investment has been made, with external supports, in developing an anti-bullying charter that is widely promoted and accepted throughout the school.

The current agenda of school priorities, identified in the opening section, owes much to the senior management team. They have combined leadership with direct action in pursuit of school improvement and have met with a positive response. The school timetable, amended to a nine-lesson day from the previous eight, now permits an improved time allocation for subjects. With senior-management support and encouragement, there has been an emergence of staff initiative to leadership positions. Examples of this are to be found in the tenure of year head, special educational needs (SEN) and LCA portfolios. The development of professional practice was evident in emerging team teaching, mentoring of newly-appointed teachers and the development of some subject websites and blogs. Morale was seen to be high among the teaching staff and there was repeated evidence of trust and confidence between management and staff.

Mixed-ability class formations have been introduced from first year and there is strong support for individual and whole-school continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and for classroom practice, most recently in introducing differentiation strategies. There has been a focus on leading greater professional collaboration among subject departments and concrete supports for subject department planning.

The curriculum has been expanded and the LCA programme, now in its second year, with a core teaching team established, has seen a good uptake and caters for a cohort of students previously disadvantaged by the sole option of the established Leaving Certificate programme. Applied Mathematics has been provided for high achieving students. While this may accommodate the talents of some, it is recommended that a more holistic approach to supporting high-achieving, and high-potential students, be developed across the curriculum as a whole-school endeavour.

Analyses of attainment in the certificate examinations have been led by the senior management team with the focus on developing strategies that will deliver further improved attainment. Chief Examiners' reports published by the State Examinations Commission are another source that could inform this improvement agenda.

The SEN department has been greatly developed in recent times and a clear focus has been brought to the work of the department. A resource team has been established within the last two years and student plans are well monitored with strategies to address student needs shared with the general body of staff. Hard evidence of improved outcomes for SEN students was provided in the 2013 Leaving Certificate attainment data.

Under-capacity in the existing building has limited provision of the popular TY programme to a one-class group annually that is routinely heavily oversubscribed. The same accommodation limitations have prevented the provision of Construction Studies and Technology in senior cycle and the library has been converted to a classroom. These deficits have been beyond the capacity of management to remedy to date and should be

eased by the extended building facilities. In reviewing future curriculum provision, favourable consideration should be given to increasing the number of places on the TY programme and to the introduction of the LCVP.

Student support structures are operating well within the school with senior management attending all weekly year head and care team meetings, and the guidance counsellors and chaplain meeting separately with senior management. Senior-cycle student mentors are trained to assist with first year students' adjustment to secondary school. The student council is an emergent voice and has prepared a critical analysis of students' ratings of recent house examinations for submission to senior management. Prompted by senior management, the board of management has moved to protect key services provided to students in the areas of Guidance, counselling and chaplaincy through its own resources.

The parents' association (PA) has supported the after-school, Saturday, and school-holiday study facility for students. This was seen to be popular and to operate well during the evaluation. A breakfast club is also supported by the PA. Alongside this, the school maintains a considerable commitment to co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

In all of these developments, senior management can be seen to have a high awareness of, and involvement with, all elements of school endeavours related to the leadership of learning.

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 1990 school building is welcoming and is well maintained and the site includes expansive playing fields. There is considerable teacher commitment to co-curricular and extracurricular activities. Resources are managed well and a budget application procedure is open to subject departments annually. Teachers are well supported in the use and maintenance of information and communication technology (ICT) resources by a staff member with a particular interest and expertise. Environmental awareness is very well managed and there is an active Green Flag committee.

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

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

In the lessons observed much effective practice was noted. The quality of teaching and learning ranged, in the main, from good to very good and was in some instances excellent. Teachers reacted positively to inspector feedback and to recommendations for improvement. The need for significant changes in classroom approaches was noted only in a very small minority of the lessons observed.

Among the best teaching practices noted were excellent examples of encouraging reflection among students on their learning, in identifying weaknesses, and in showing how these could be overcome. In particular lessons students were helped to overcome any inhibitions at acknowledging mistakes made in homework and were met with a 'can do' positive reassurance, by demonstration and practice, that these weaknesses could be remedied. Students responded very positively to these assessment-for-learning approaches. These lessons provided excellent examples of teaching approaches that were focused in the first

instance on the needs of learners and were marked by good efforts and contributions from students which were in turn affirmed by teachers.

Subject plans were provided for most areas of the curriculum. Senior management has led and supported subject department planning with a good quality resource produced to guide this work, including a common template. It was apparent that this area remains a work in progress with a minority of the plans examined providing a useful guide to delivery of the subject and with good references to learning outcomes, methodologies, assessment, profile of subject uptake and attainment, literacy and numeracy development and a collaboratively created plan for improvement. The good approaches evident in the minority of subject department plans should be implemented across the full range of subjects.

Short-term planning was appropriate to the lessons observed in most cases. In the best examples clear learning outcomes were identified to the class at the start for achievement within the available time. These learning outcomes remained a focus that kept students on task and learning was well reinforced at the conclusion of the lesson by reviewing their achievement. This approach is commended and urged for wider use.

In a very good instance the teacher properly decided to reframe the learning outcomes after a time in acknowledgement of the difficulty students were experiencing with particular tasks that needed further practice, and therefore further time. It was good that the changed plan, and the rationale for it, were shared with the students. This was a further example of student-focused teaching, unafraid to change course, so as to ensure that students experience success with more measured learning outcomes.

A range of teaching methodologies was noted that included teacher exposition, questioning of students to establish prior knowledge, ongoing understanding, and opportunities to develop higher-order thinking. Differentiation strategies were successfully used in a small number of lessons. Certain students were set more challenging work while the teacher engaged with other students. This was well managed, both in a vibrant team-teaching lesson that was seen to operate very effectively, and in more normal one-teacher settings. Where teaching provided students with opportunities for active learning such as brainstorming, think-pair-share routines and well-managed group work and feedback the learning atmosphere was richer and more evident than in the setting which focused on imparting content. The former approaches were also marked by ongoing encouragement and checking for understanding that had a clear impact on student willingness to participate and on the desire to learn. These approaches are urged for wider application.

ICT resources were seen to be used in approximately half the lessons observed and were in some cases excellently integrated into the lesson and the use of authentic texts made content more meaningful. The use of video clips to develop student awareness and knowledge was managed in two very divergent ways with pauses, questions, and commentary seen to have a quality impact on learning in one instance. In the other instance the approach lacked these measured interventions and students were left too long to process information without supports to develop their discrimination of information.

Students worked purposefully in all lessons and high expectations were communicated in most. The intended learning outcomes were reached in most cases, while not always checked for achievement. The quality of the learning environment created in teacher-based classrooms ranged from very good print-rich environments to displays that looked tired. Literacy development, through the use of a key-words focus, was evident in some lessons.

It was a positive that senior students showed well organised records of attainment – a necessary step in developing responsibility for learning. An analysis of a number of Leaving Certificate subjects over a four-year period showed positive evidence of raised

higher-level uptake rates most recently. The bar for excellence has been recently set by the successive award to students of the school of prestigious third-level scholarships as a result of conspicuous success in the Leaving Certificate. These are encouraging developments.

Some teaching approaches observed should be reconsidered as they limit the engagement of students in the learning process and lessen the evidence that students are processing knowledge in a way that will support recall of knowledge – a key element in learning. Among these approaches are delivering lessons that are overly teacher-led, focusing too much on developing students' receptive skills and thereby on passive learning, avoiding collaborative and active learning experiences fearful of discipline issues arising, overlooking the development of students as questioners and confining them to the role of answering questions, the absence of differentiation in lesson content, resources and in the assessment of learning.

In all lessons visited, inspectors observed respectful interactions between teachers and students even in certain circumstances where student management issues were acknowledged in comments to inspectors.

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

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

Management-directed recommendations have almost all been implemented and involved significant change relating to the school timetable, the introduction of LCA and mixed-ability class formations in first year. The development of a Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) policy remains an important recommendation to be completed.

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

Senior management has addressed recommendations on developing subject department planning with a booklet developed to guide this work. This work needs to be progressed beyond the good efforts seen in a minority of planning work. Teaching and learning recommendations urging the development of an extended repertoire of classroom practices have been examined and implemented very successfully in some circumstances. Recommendations in further published inspectorate reports, within discrete subject areas, have also been examined for descriptors of good practice. There is a need to extend the implementation of these recommendations

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

Some school self-evaluation (SSE) processes have been commenced. A survey has been conducted among first-year parents and students. While key words have been developed for first-year students in all subjects, the planned testing arrangements did not proceed. Consequently the data-gathering and baseline target-setting steps of the SSE process have not been adhered to. While a literacy-link teacher has emerged, the accompanying CPD has not been accessed due to circumstances beyond the control of the school

School development planning and SSE currently remain within the brief of the senior management team alone. This is not the optimal arrangement. Priorities for school improvement and development are best adopted collaboratively rather than introduced by management alone. A willingness to follow the SSE process and to plan and implement for

improvement was apparent among all staff interviewed. The capacity of the senior management team to lead improvement was well demonstrated. In reviewing the range of responsibilities that are devolved to middle management, there is a case for including whole-school self-evaluation and planning.

## **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 of St. Joseph's Secondary School warmly welcomes the recent overwhelmingly positive WSE-MLL Report and is pleased with its contents. This independent Report acknowledges the high standards of teaching and learning in our school and the high quality of our student support systems. The Board is also very pleased that the Inspectorate acknowledges the dedication and commitment of staff, parents, students and management to the achievement of its educational goals.

### **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 Board of Management will promote in relation to school self-evaluation and school development planning process a greater collaboration with all members of the school community in developing SMART targets (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time bound) for improvement and on reporting progress in the future. The Board has recently reviewed the posts of responsibilities and has appointed an assistant principal post holder to school development and planning.

The Board acknowledges the need for making available additional places in the Transition Year programme to meet the student demand. It has not been possible to meet this demand due to limited accommodation until recently. With the impending completion of additional accommodation at the school premises, the Board has now sanctioned two classes in the optional Transition Year Programme to meet the demand for places.

The Board will ensure in the coming school year that the good approaches to subject department planning evident in a minority of plans will be implemented across the full range of subjects.

St. Joseph's has previously offered the LCVP Programme on two separate occasions and due to poor take up on both occasions the Programme was discontinued. The Board will keep the offer of this Programme under review.