An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Christian Brothers’ Secondary School
Tramore, County Waterford
Roll number: 64923L

Date of inspection: 7 April 2011
Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April 2011 in Christian Brothers’ Secondary School Tramore. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school’s board of management, in-school management, groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

Introduction
The Christian Brothers’ Secondary School (CBS) Tramore was founded in 1867 to provide a Christian education for boys from the Tramore area. The school is currently under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools’ Trust (ERST). It is the only male voluntary secondary school serving this area. The longstanding tradition of co-operation with the girls’ secondary school in Tramore complements the CBS ethos which places great emphasis on community, both in the school and in the local area. This ethos will be brought to full fruition with the proposed amalgamation of the two schools in 2013.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board of management is properly constituted and, through its work, supports senior management in the effective administration of the school.

- Leadership of staff is reflected in the growing importance of the middle management role in the school.

- The school offers a broad and comprehensive curriculum aimed at meeting the needs of all students.

- Management and leadership of students are supported by the systems in place to track students’ progress both academically and pastorally.

- The school is well maintained and resourced with very good access to and use of ICT to support teaching and learning.

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in most of the lessons evaluated.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- School management should progress the preparatory phase of the proposed amalgamation by inviting both schools to work together on policy development and subject planning.
• As part of its leadership role, school management in should carry out a root-and-branch review of policies and practices to ensure that the school’s strengths are assimilated into the ethos of the new school.

• The school’s anti-bullying policy should be developed as a matter of urgency and should complement the revised code of behaviour. The admissions policy should also be further reviewed.

• The deployment of teachers in line with their subject specialisms and the more effective timetabling of subjects should be the main priority for the next academic year.

• The outstanding recommendations from subject reports should be implemented as a matter of priority.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations
The board of management is properly constituted and is in the final year of its tenure. It meets at regular intervals throughout the year and the principal’s report keeps its members informed of all that is happening in the school. An agreed statement is drawn up at the end of meetings and is communicated to staff and the parents’ association, in line with good practice. The board is conscientious in carrying out its administrative remit, ensuring financial stability and supporting senior management by ratifying policies and decisions taken by the principal. However, the information accrued from the evaluation and from the minutes of the five most recent board meetings indicates a need for evidence of more active discussion arising from the principal’s reports or the key decisions to be agreed. To this end the salient points from such discussions should be included in the minutes of board meetings.

Most of the school policies required by legislation or circular are in place. The admissions policy was recently revised. Further revision of the policy is recommended in order to ensure equality of access to all male students from the local community in line with the school’s mission statement. A timeline for the development and review of policies should also be drawn up for the purpose of informing present and future boards of the ongoing status of policy development in the school.

The school has an anti-bullying statement, but does not have a policy setting out the procedures to deal with bullying incidents. This should be addressed as a matter of urgency as students have been suspended for bullying offences. The findings of the student and parent questionnaires, completed as part of the evaluation, also reflect the need for an anti-bullying policy.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (Published September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.
The parents’ association makes a significant contribution to school development through its fundraising activities and its support for senior management. Members have also had input into policy development.

The school’s priorities for development
Senior management has identified a range of areas in need of development. These include greater focus on positive behaviour and the formulation of an assessment policy to include assessment for learning (AfL). There is also a keen awareness of the need to plan for the proposed amalgamation in order to ensure a smooth transition into the new school. To this end, the amalgamation committee should organise a series of meetings between the different stakeholders in both schools for the purpose of reflection and planning. Furthermore, the review of policies in need of development should be carried out with the neighbouring school, as should subject planning. This will help embed certain practices in the new school from the outset in addition to advancing the successful integration of all staff.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff
Senior management work as a united team and maintain a visible presence in the school. They are ably supported by the assistant principals (AP) and special duties teachers (SDT) who carry out a range of significant duties. Post-holders reported that they contribute to the smooth running of the school and that their middle management roles are becoming more established. Scheduled meetings initiated by senior management have contributed to a more consultative process with the members of middle management and have resulted in the introduction of a number of commendable initiatives in the school.

Teacher professional development is supported through the delivery of in-school presentations either by external facilitators or members of staff. Significant work has been carried out in information and communication technology (ICT) resulting in the commendable integration of ICT across the curriculum. Presentations have also been made on differentiation and positive behaviour management. It is recommended that all future in-service initiatives be delivered jointly to the staff in both amalgamating schools to ensure subsequent consistency in practice.

Senior management has benefited from the professional development delivered by the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) initiative. Opportunities for teachers to attend in-service programmes such as Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) are recommended to support the mandatory development and implementation of an RSE policy.

Many of the teachers are currently deployed in subject areas other than their subject specialisms, despite the availability of teachers qualified to degree level in those subjects. This is particularly prevalent in the area of general subjects. This has implications for consistency in the delivery of the subject and also for teachers’ workload, as some have had to upskill in order to undertake the new subjects assigned to them. The deployment of teachers in accordance with their subject specialisms should become the first priority when drawing up the school timetable.

A number of teachers are also deployed across a very wide range of subjects. This limits opportunities for them to further their experience and expertise in their subject-specialist areas. Some have also been assigned to both SPHE and Civic Social and Political Education (CSPE), where one is timetabled directly after the other. Because it is important for students to have a clear understanding of the differences between these two subjects, it
is recommended that they are not timetabled sequentially. Practical subjects are timetabled for some double periods in line with good practice. However, timetabling double periods across break time should be avoided. Successful language learning benefits from frequent contact with the target language. Senior management should thus explore ways whereby languages in junior cycle, which are currently blocked against practical subjects, could be timetabled in single periods across the week.

Current provision of study periods as an alternative to a curricular subject compromises the required weekly instruction time of twenty-eight hours, as prescribed in circular M29/95 *Time in School* and, as such, should be addressed. Furthermore, in the interests of promoting the holistic development of all students, the current provision for, and timetabling of Physical Education (PE), a curricular subject at senior cycle, should be reviewed with the expressed aim of encouraging full participation.

**Leadership of students**

School management offers a broad and comprehensive curriculum aimed at meeting the needs of all students. The introduction of a joint Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme with students from the neighbouring girls’ school has been a very positive initiative ensuring its continued viability in a resource-effective manner. The short taster programme offered to first-year students is also very good practice as it supports informed subject choices. School management is also commended for affording students the opportunity to study both a modern European language and a practical subject.

Effective systems in place to support student welfare include a ladder of referral and the tracking of students’ progress both academically and pastorally. The class tutor is assigned on the sound basis of frequent contact with the students. Year heads have both a pastoral and a disciplinary role. They deal with issues referred to them and they work with the students, tracking academic progress, promoting student self-discipline and leadership. Unresolved disciplinary issues move from the year head to the dean of discipline. The position of dean is rotated among year heads in junior cycle. An alternative system, whereby the dean is independent of the year head system and is a further stage in the ladder of referral, should be considered as it ensures that all measures have been fully exhausted before the involvement of senior management and the issuing of suspensions. The code of behaviour has recently been revised in line with the requirements set out by the NEWB. This is welcomed as it places greater focus on the expectations of students in relation to respect and concern for others. To further build on this good work, school management should monitor suspensions closely in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the systems in place to support positive behaviour. The procedures for appealing suspensions should be revised to ensure due process for all students.

Issues aimed at moving the school forward in all aspects of students’ care and development are discussed at weekly meetings between year heads, the guidance service and senior management. For example, the decision to change the timing of school examinations for Leaving Certificate students from Christmas to October has enabled the teaching staff to identify and engage with students who are underperforming. This is good practice. The introduction of the texting system to inform parents of students’ absences is evidence of another positive initiative resulting in very good student attendance.

The continuous presence of the student council is welcomed as a means of affording students a leadership role and a greater voice in the school. Greater student representation should respond to the findings of the student questionnaire, where the statement ‘I have a say in how to make the school a better place’ yielded a significantly negative response.

Good practices were noted in identifying and assessing students with additional needs, preparing them for entry into secondary school and supporting teachers in drawing up
individual education plans (IEP) for them. Concurrent timetabling for Irish, English and Mathematics facilitates the creation of an extra class group in these subjects to support students with additional needs. In one instance, however, the additional class group for Mathematics is taught by a number of different teachers. This should be addressed in any future timetabling. In the interests of facilitating optimum delivery of learning support and resource teaching, it is recommended that a core team be formed, fully utilising the expertise of teachers who have a relevant qualification. This will facilitate collaborative planning and organisation and the development of professional expertise through experience and in-service.

The guidance service works to support students in their educational, vocational and personal development. However, the findings of the student and parent questionnaires indicated that many students were unsure of whom they could talk to if they had a problem. To this end it is recommended that students and parents be regularly reminded of the very good supports provided by both the class tutor system and the guidance service.

2.3 Management of facilities

School management shows strong commitment to maintaining a facilitative learning environment for both students and staff in a situation where the move to a new building is impending and where many of the classrooms are currently housed in prefabs of varying vintage. Classrooms are teacher-based and most are well equipped with interactive whiteboards or digital projectors. A high level of ICT provision and internal support has been developed over the years. Science facilities have recently been improved and a designated LCA classroom has been put in place. The staff room has also been upgraded to facilitate the provision of a work area.

It was noted during the evaluation that students moved promptly and purposefully within the different areas of the school. This was very good to observe.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Most lessons observed during the evaluation were well planned. Many teachers had prepared resources such as handouts, questionnaires and ICT resources. In relevant lessons, safe storage and recovery of students’ prior work was also well managed. Best practice was noted where teachers identified and wrote up the learning outcomes on the board. This practice should be extended across the school as a key element of assessment for learning (AfL) and lesson planning and would complement these thorough levels of preparation.

A wide range of teaching methods was employed in the lessons observed. ICT was effectively used to support content delivery, to stimulate discussion and to provide a template for students’ follow-on work. The white board was well used to identify key words and structures. Question and answer sessions were observed in all lessons and included good use of higher-order questions. However, in some instances teachers should direct more questions on quieter students. Use of target languages and of subject-specific terminology was good in most lessons observed, though sometimes an additional emphasis on visual reinforcement would have supported weaker students. Good levels of self-directed learning were evident in lessons where students worked on projects ranging from simple dictionary tasks to the creation of designs, posters, objects or portfolios. Such activities afforded students the opportunity to develop relevant skills, with teachers acting
as facilitators. The good use of pair and group work noted in some lessons should be extended throughout to promote more active and experiential learning.

A positive learning environment prevailed throughout. Teachers were very encouraging of students’ efforts and student behaviour was good. Many classrooms, being teacher-based, had high levels of visual display and, sometimes, good print-rich environments which can support subject literacy.

Student participation was actively encouraged and there was good evidence of learning in most lessons observed. Many displayed confidence working independently on projects and tasks. They used subject-specific language and concepts, and gave personal responses to lesson content or to the work of peers. In some lessons, greater emphasis should be given to student note-making or to the revisiting of lesson aims for recapitulation purposes.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Six subject inspections have taken place since 2006. Recommendations common to the subjects evaluated include the need to deploy teachers in accordance with their subject specialisms, timetabling, the facilitation of subject planning and the building up of resources. The board of management, in its response to the findings of the reports, indicated its intention to implement the recommendations as a means of building on existing strengths and to address areas for development.

Timetabling issues in Science have since been addressed. However, recommendations concerning the deployment of subject-specialist teachers have not yet been addressed satisfactorily and issues such as student uptake and the capacity for collaborative subject planning still remain.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Subject co-ordinators have been appointed, subject planning folders issued and meetings facilitated in the wake of the subjects evaluated in recent years. However, meetings need to occur more frequently and the subject-planning schedule should be organised to facilitate attendance by all involved in the delivery of the subject. Furthermore, the planning templates, currently being used to inform teaching and learning, should be updated to include the desired learning outcomes, resources, proposed methodologies and assessment protocols to be used for each year group.

Teachers in some subject departments reported greater collaboration in the rotation of higher-level and ordinary-level classes, the pooling of resources, agreement on core texts and increased use of ICT to support teaching and learning. Language teachers reported placing greater emphasis on using the target language in lessons. Many of these improvements were noted in the lessons observed during the evaluation.

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

Senior management reported that CBS Tramore has, in recent years, experienced very good success in the number of students transferring to third-level. Concern to maintain this
success has resulted in initiatives such as encouraging target-setting among current students and attributing greater importance to the October examinations for Junior and Leaving Certificate students. Successful past-pupils are invited back to speak about life as a third-level student. A new induction programme for incoming first-year students is also being developed. Such initiatives indicate positively the school’s capacity to look at itself with a view to bringing about ongoing improvement. However, an effective self-evaluation process also requires a school to look at areas for further development and improvement. It is thus recommended that, in preparation for the amalgamation, all stakeholders should undertake a root-and-branch review of current policies and practices to ensure that the strengths of CBS Tramore will be assimilated into the ethos of the new school. Areas for development and the outstanding recommendations from subject reports should also be addressed as part of this process, supported by the Department inspection reports and the findings of the student and parent questionnaires.

*Published November 2011*
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 CBS Tramore would like to thank the Inspectors who carried out the Inspection for their courtesy and their genuine interest in the school. The BOM is pleased that the inspectors recognised that it is conscientious in carrying out its administrative remit, ensuring financial stability and supporting senior management. The BOM is also in compliance with the Child Protection Guidelines. Active discussions do take place at board level. The BOM minutes are a record of decisions taken.

The board is extremely pleased to receive such a positive report. The board is delighted that the report acknowledges that:

• The school offers a broad and comprehensive curriculum aimed at meeting the needs of all students.
• Senior management work as a united team and maintain a visible presence in the school.
• The leadership of staff is reflected in the growing importance of the middle management role in the school.
• Management and leadership of students are supported by the systems in place to track students’ progress both academically and pastorally
• The school is well maintained and resourced with very good access to and use of ICT to support teaching and learning. We are delighted to see that an initiative to integrate ICT across the curriculum has been commended.
• The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good
• The parents’ association makes a significant contribution to school development through its fundraising activities, input into policy development and its support for senior management.
• The introduction of a joint LCA programme with the students from the neighbouring girls’ school has been a very positive initiative ensuring its continued viability in a resource-effective manner.
• The short taster programme offered to first year students is very good practice as it supports informed subject choices.
• School management is commended for affording students the opportunity to study both a modern language and a practical subject.

The BOM welcomes comments on:

• The excellent revision of the code of behaviour which places greater focus on the expectations of students in relation to respect and concern for others
• The excellent communications between students and staff and between school and parents
• The good practices in identifying and assessing students with additional needs, preparing them for secondary school and supporting teachers in drawing up IEPs.
• The high level of ICT provision
• The improved science facilities
• The provision of a designated LCA classroom and
• The provision of a work area in the staff room.
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 would like to outline steps taken to address the recommendations made in the WSE-MLL report:

- School management had started the preparatory phase of the proposed amalgamation. A decision was taken to postpone further work on policies and practices until firm evidence of building is given due to multiple false starts since July 1994. A facilitator has now been appointed to assist the two schools with the planning and preparation for the proposed amalgamation. A Steering Committee composed of personnel from both schools has been formed to lead the planning process for the new amalgamated school.
- The Croke Park Agreement will create opportunities for departments to engage with the planning process. Some of these hours may be used to progress subject planning and policy development with our neighbouring school as we move towards amalgamation.
- An anti-bullying policy has been developed following consultation with all the stakeholders and is due to be presented to the Board of Management for ratification shortly.
- SPHE and CSPE are not timetabled sequentially for any class this year.
- Several teachers have availed of opportunities to attend in-service courses in SPHE and RSE.
- We are very supportive of teacher professional development through the use of external facilitators and members of staff. We will endeavour to co-ordinate in-service initiatives with our neighbouring school in preparation for amalgamation.
- The deployment of teachers in subject areas is on-going process of curricular review given:
  - Retirements of many
  - Difficulties presented by awarding CID contracts different to retirees and
  - Rise in pupil/teacher ratio
- The timetabling of languages is designed to maximise access and address class limits in practical subjects. Full participation in PE at senior cycle will be part of the senior cycle curriculum when more PE facilities and staff will be available following amalgamation. In the meantime CBS Tramore will strive to achieve maximum participation given the limit of resources i.e. one PE Hall (built exclusively from school funds) and all school areas now occupied by pre-fabs.
- The post of Dean of Discipline in the junior school ceased following a recent retirement. The current embargo on posts of responsibility prevents the proposal to appoint such a position independent of the year head system.

Finally the Board of Management would like to thank the Inspectorate of the DES for affording us the opportunity to further improve our school and to thank the members of the Inspectorate for the quality and professionalism of their work.