Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in September 2011 in Presentation 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, 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

Presentation Secondary School was established by the Presentation Order in 1814 to provide Catholic education for girls in Clonmel and its environs. The school is on its present site since 1829. The school population has been growing steadily in recent years and there is a current enrolment of 508 students. Presentation Clonmel has a very inclusive enrolment policy and welcomes students from a wide range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds. While the school is currently able to accommodate all of those students who wish to enrol this situation is likely to change in the coming years as the school’s enrolment grows. 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.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The outgoing board of management presented as a committed unit that was interested in and well informed about every aspect of the school and its future development.
- The mission statement of the school was seen to be lived out in every aspect of school life observed during the evaluation.
- The school is effectively organised and managed by a supportive and committed senior management team.
- There is an excellent student support system in place with many interventions for the student body as a whole but more particularly for those students who may be at risk of not completing second-level education.
- Middle management structures have undergone a period of considerable change in the recent past and the forthcoming review of posts should address effective distributed leadership.
- Staff members are commended for their professionalism and willingness to engage with many aspects of school development and organisation.
- Overall the standard of teaching and learning was very good with a range of teaching methodologies observed but there was scope for development in some instances.
- Presentation Clonmel is a reflective school committed to striving for excellence and to the provision of a holistic education while encouraging students to achieve to their highest potential.
1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The scheduled review of posts should focus on devolved leadership roles for middle management as a support to senior management and should allocate areas of responsibility commensurate with the level of posts involved.
- Subject plans should be developed to include proposed learning outcomes, as well as resources, methodologies and assessment practices to support these outcomes.
- All staff should focus on active methodologies and the further integration of effective resources, including information and communications technology (ICT), into teaching and learning.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations
At the time of the evaluation there was an outgoing board of management and a new board was ready to take office with retention of some members in order to ensure continuity. The outgoing board presented as a hardworking and focused unit deeply committed to the school and to the Presentation Order’s ethos of providing education for all with particular emphasis on education for the marginalised in society. The board was well-informed on all aspects of school work and each board member presented on some aspect of school provision and development during a meeting with the inspectors. The principal provides a very informative and comprehensive report for each board meeting on all aspects of school organisation and provision. Presentation Clonmel is affiliated to the CEIST trust since 2007 and has forged strong links with the over-arching trustee body.

The board of management is properly constituted and is fully aware of its statutory obligations. The board meets at least six times a year and there is provision for additional meetings if required. Sub-committees are formed to look at aspects of school provision and school development planning as needed. The board is very involved in the drafting and ratification of school policies and is commended for its work in this area. There is a comprehensive school plan in place and there was considerable evidence of ongoing school development planning under the direction of the board. Following an unprecedented number of retirements among the school’s middle management the board requested that the staff undertake a review of the schedule of posts in order to prioritise the most immediate needs of the school. This review was due to take place shortly after the evaluation.

Board members expressed a strong sense of pride in the school and spoke warmly of the concerted efforts of management and staff to ensure excellence in education for the students. The school was described by the board as a “community where collaboration and an atmosphere of inclusiveness and innovation are encouraged”. This assertion was seen to be borne out during the evaluation. School management strives to nurture and support each individual student and in order to support this aim the board provides financial support for an additional student counsellor to address the particular needs of some students.

The school’s priorities for development
The board identified a significant number of areas for attention and development in the short term which included systematic evaluation of state examinations results, the raising of academic standards, review of staffing allocations in coming years, added focus on teaching methodologies, development of the school’s literacy plan and curriculum development. One area identified for development and improvement in the longer term was the need for substantial work on the senior college building. Another area requiring both immediate and
ongoing attention is the necessity to build management capacity and to allocate responsibilities and roles among staff. Senior management intend to focus also on the areas of special education needs and learning support, ongoing review of ICT provision and Health and Safety.

Management and staff are committed to achieving improvements in all of the developmental targets mentioned in the school’s short term and long term priorities. Work has started on almost all of the aforementioned priorities and is well underway in many. Literacy strategies and whole-school approaches to developing literacy have been brought to teachers’ attention and there has been considerable input at staff meetings in this area. ICT is being introduced into teaching and learning. Management and staff have begun to examine and analyse state examination results with a view to raising academic standards further. The development of the senior school will need long term planning but this was already under consideration by the outgoing board and will need to be further examined by the current board.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff
Senior management lead and motivate staff in an effective and supportive way. Staff members are encouraged to take responsibility for different areas of school organisation. Year heads are voluntary roles as are many other roles and responsibilities key to the smooth and effective running of the school. The many recent retirements among assistant principals (AP) has left the school with three AP posts. The current roles and responsibilities of the APs are temporary and were agreed between management and staff in the short term until such time as the review of posts sought by the board of management takes place. Management and staff are commended for their willingness to be flexible in the current circumstances and for finding short-term solutions. The proposed review of posts should endeavour to focus on the middle management responsibilities of the AP posts. Furthermore, the review should take into account devolved leadership roles for middle management as a support to senior management and should allocate areas of responsibility commensurate with the level of posts involved.

Staff members are encouraged and facilitated to get involved in different areas of school life and organisation and are very willing to do so. Teachers are facilitated to attend continuing professional development (CPD) courses and are encouraged to undertake further study.

Subject planning documentation is generally of a very good standard, although some subject plans were more detailed than others. All schemes of work should include detailed information on topics, methodologies, use of resources including ICT to support teaching and learning, learning objectives and methods of assessment in an integrated way to facilitate the addition of new information and the recording of work done.

Communication systems in the school are excellent and are central to the way in which the principal keeps all major education partners and stakeholders fully informed of what is happening. Staff members are kept informed of all current activities by announcements in the staff room and by means of a weekly newsletter for staff entitled the Friday Flyer. Parents are contacted by a range of means including letters, meetings, texts and the school website.

Leadership of students
Clear leadership and direction is given by senior management in the area of student motivation, student care and student leadership. All school staff and management strive to ensure that the mission statement is implemented as it pertains to the development of each
individual student and the realisation of every student’s academic and social potential. The deputy principal plays a leading role in the student support system which is designed to ensure that every student is safe and cared for. The school has developed many links with the wider community and with many external services. The provision of a designated student counsellor by the board of management is a considerable asset to the school.

The student support system is underpinned by an effective code of behaviour developed over a number of years through the trialling of many different systems and methods of encouraging and ensuring good behaviour. The system is centralised and labour intensive but is seen to be very fair by all concerned parties including the students. A focused interview with students and student questionnaires revealed that an atmosphere of fairness permeates the school. Teachers are seen as helpful and fair. Students felt they had a voice and that the school was inclusive of all girls. This is positive and is testament to management and teachers’ concerted efforts to provide for and include all students in line with the mission statement.

The breakfast club and the system of lunchtime vouchers for those who need them are valuable supports for students. The development of lunchtime activities for junior students in recent years is a praiseworthy initiative designed to encourage all students to get involved in a range of activities including sport. Students interviewed during the evaluation spoke enthusiastically of the range of sporting and cultural activities available to them including the by now famous St Declan’s walk undertaken over a three day period by all TY students.

The school has a vibrant student council who are representative of the student body. The council were instrumental in obtaining permission and raising funds for television screens in the general purpose area which cover all events and information which pertain to the students themselves and its work in this regard is commended. More effective maintenance of council documentation and minutes would help to record the work and achievement of the council while serving to further develop student skills in this area.

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.

2.3 Management of facilities

The school is located in two buildings on the same campus. The senior college dates back to the early 1930s and although the building is well maintained with large bright classrooms there is an issue around heating. This will be addressed as soon as school resources allow. The junior school is located in a more modern building which is well maintained. The school buildings provide an attractive working and learning environment with many examples of impressive student art work which is a notable feature of Presentation Clonmel. School management has recently invested substantially in ICT and further work was being completed in the senior school block at the time of the evaluation.

Due to the location of the school gym it has been susceptible to flooding and considerable efforts have been made in recent years to raise the floor level and to install anti-flood mechanisms. This work is commended.
3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty-five lessons were observed during the evaluation, encompassing all programs, years and levels. Teaching and learning was primarily of a very high standard, with scope for further improvement in some instances. Lessons in which very good teaching and learning took place were generally characterised by clear learning objectives, good pacing and appropriately chosen methodologies, complemented by questioning strategies that provided very good opportunities for teacher and student interactions.

Most teachers developed links between students’ prior knowledge and current learning. Subject-specific terminology and the use of the target language, as appropriate, were generally very much in evidence in lessons. In line with the school's literacy strategy, most teachers took time to encourage students to record keywords and checked students’ definition and spellings of words. This is very good practice.

During most lessons a range of teaching strategies was observed. These included traditional whole-class teaching and group and pair work. In some lessons, problem-solving and an investigative approach were used and this is good practice. In most instances, the chosen methodology was appropriate and allowed for good learning to take place. However, there were instances where a greater variety of methodologies would have been more effective. Greater use, for example, of active methodologies would have enhanced the learning experience for students and allowed them to become more involved and responsible learners. This is an area of teaching and learning that requires further discussion and development. It is recommended that teachers vary teaching strategies to cater for the range of student abilities and learning styles within classes.

Preparation for all lessons was generally of a high standard. In most lessons some resources in addition to the textbook were used. ICT use featured in a significant minority of lessons observed and in almost all instances its use supported and complemented student learning. However, some lessons would have benefited greatly from increased and more effective use of ICT. It is recommended that all teachers plan for the appropriate integration of ICT and a range of other resources into their teaching as a priority.

Classroom management was most effective and students were very co-operative. Students were regularly affirmed for their contributions and in many instances were eager to participate in learning and in classroom activities. The atmosphere in all lessons observed was very positive and teachers frequently circulated around classrooms providing individual attention.

Assessment practices to monitor student learning are well established. In answering the student questionnaire, the vast majority of students agreed homework was regularly given and checked. Observation of students work during the evaluation indicated that in addition to oral feedback, many students receive useful written annotated feedback in their copybooks as an important part of the learning process. Analysis of the school’s performance in state examinations indicates that the school is performing well.
4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

The recommendations from previous subject inspection reports as they pertain to management issues have been addressed satisfactorily. Substantial work has been carried out on the floor of the physical education hall. Timetabling issues in relation to Physical Education and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) have been addressed. The uptake of Business in senior cycle has been increased substantially and the numbers of students taking Music are increasing. The history resources have been updated. Spanish is now being taken as an *ab initio* subject in LCA and in the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Subject departments have addressed the recommendations made in former subject inspections. The integration of ICT into teaching and learning has been initiated and but it will need further work to embed its use in classroom practice. Staff and management are aware of the need to further progress this area and staff training in ICT is underway. Investigative approaches are being used in teaching and learning in many subjects and this should be further developed as a useful strategy in teaching and learning. There is an increased collaborative approach to planning in subject departments and to the cataloguing and sharing of resources. There is an increased focus on whole-school literacy and numeracy strategies and staff is regularly briefed on this area at appropriate meetings during the year.

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

Presentation Secondary School, Clonmel is a reflective school. Management and subject departments have engaged very well with the programme and subject inspection process and this is commended. All school partners including members of the board of management, senior management and teaching staff presented as striving for improvements and excellence. Staff members were seen to be open to discussion and dialogue and willing to engage with new practices and teaching strategies.

The school has administered questionnaires to its students in the past in an effort to gauge how they see the school and to inform future planning. Senior management are very supportive of staff members and are appreciative of teachers’ willingness to engage with all aspects of school organisation and with a wide range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities. Senior management is well placed to lead the school community in the coming years and to drive and lead changes and adaptations to the school as needed.

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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, staff, parents’ council and students of Presentation Secondary School Clonmel welcomes the very positive WSE-MLL Report and supportive manner in which the evaluation was carried out. The Board wishes to place on record its appreciation of the professionalism, courtesy and thoroughness of the inspectors and the collaborative manner in which the inspection was carried out.

The Board of Management would also like to acknowledge the dedication and professionalism of the teaching staff, secretarial, caretaking and cleaning staff and the cooperation and support of students and parents, all of whose commitment to excellence results in the high standards outlined in the report.

The school community are affirmed by the very thorough but very positive evaluation of all aspects of school life. In particular, the school is pleased that the Inspectors recognised

- That the mission statement was seen to be lived out in every aspect of school life observed during the evaluation
- There is an excellent support system in place for the student body
- The very good standard of teaching and learning in the classroom using a wide range of strategies and resources
- a committed and highly effective senior management team and a Board of management that is itself committed to the future development of the school
- the school is a reflective community committed to striving for excellence and to the provision of a holistic education while encouraging students to achieve to their highest potential

The school community is also delighted with the recognition of its progress in such areas as the implementation of the recommendations from previous evaluations, leadership of students, the vibrant student council and management of facilities. The WSE MLL experience was both positive and empowering and the evaluation process was a very supportive and beneficial experience for the whole school community.

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 and staff of Presentation Secondary School Clonmel are fully committed to the continuing development of the school. The Board accept the recommendations of the WSE MLL Report as a means of building on strengths and will endeavour to implement them as part of the on-going process of school development planning and as resources become available. The Board has set about implementing them in a structured and timely manner.
• A scheduled review of posts will commence in September 2012, taking into account the reduction from eight Assistant Principals to four Assistant Principals and from eleven special duties posts to seven.
• From 2012, the school will use the new template for subject planning as endorsed by PDST.
• Since the Evaluation, the staff has engaged in whole staff In-service training on active methodologies. Also, two separate IT courses have been organised for staff members to develop their IT skills. The school will continue to offer opportunities for staff to develop their teaching methodologies and the use of resources into teaching and learning.