

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

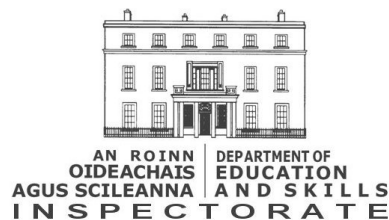
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Cistercian College
Roscrea, County Tipperary
Roll number: 65410K**

Date of inspection: 10 May 2013



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in May 2013 in Cistercian College Roscrea. 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 governors, 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 governors 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

Cistercian College, Roscrea, is a voluntary, Catholic, seven-day boarding school for boys under the trusteeship of the Abbot and Community of Mount Saint Joseph Abbey. Established in 1905, it is guided by the words of Saint Benedict 'The strong have something to strive for and the weak are not discouraged.' There are currently 178 students enrolled from all over Ireland and abroad. The school is actively seeking ways to increase enrolment in order to secure its viability in the current, difficult economic times.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of governors is supportive of the school and is to appoint a board of management in October 2013 in accordance with Section 14 of the Education Act (1998).
- The College President (principal) and Dean of Studies (deputy principal) are hard working, dedicated, committed managers of the school and are effective leaders of learning.
- The middle management team support the operation of the school well; however, there is scope to develop their leadership roles.
- Teachers have engaged very well with subject planning and very high quality subject and programme plans have been developed.
- The school's curriculum is augmented by the provision of additional examination subjects after school and during evening study and is broadened and balanced by a wide range of extracurricular activities.
- While student care is a priority and good care systems are in place, there is scope for a more equitable implementation of the code of behaviour.
- There is very good provision for students with special educational needs and students for whom English is an additional language.
- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the majority of lessons observed, with some examples of excellent practice and some areas for improvement noted.
- The school has good capacity for improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The newly appointed board of management should ensure that the school's decision-making processes benefit fully from the contributions of the representatives of all the nominating bodies.
 - A review of the code of behaviour, in line with the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) guidelines and involving all students, should be carried out to ensure that respect, fairness and equality are at the heart of student management.
 - The school should actively encourage a culture of empowerment of staff and students in order to ensure that it benefits fully from their contributions.
 - The work of the care teams should be reviewed.
 - The school should explore a more whole-school approach to the provision for Guidance.
 - The subject plans should be developed further to include a section for action planning.
 - Teachers should observe each other's lessons to share best practice.
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1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The school is well managed by a board of governors comprising trustee nominees who are ambitious for and supportive of the school. The monastic and Catholic traditions are at the core of the board's work. The board is working on a programme of whole-school evaluation and improvement with the objective of increasing student enrolment. This work is ongoing and has seen the development of a very good school improvement plan that outlines the measures necessary to bring the school forward.

A management advisory council that includes parent, past pupil, teacher, school management and trustee members was recently set up to complement the work of the board of governors. A board of management is to be appointed from October 2013 in accordance with Section 14 of the Education Act (1998). This is an essential development and presents the school with an ideal opportunity to establish best practice in strengthening the link between the work of the board in its role in directing and managing the school and the teaching staff in relation to teaching and learning.

The current roles of the board of governors and the management advisory council need to be revised in light of the appointment of a board of management. It is imperative that the newly appointed board operates within a culture of openness and transparency and that it ensures that the school's decision-making processes benefit fully from the contributions of the representatives of all the nominating bodies.

Communication between the board of governors and the wider school community is somewhat limited although it has improved with the recent issuing of an agreed report to staff. An agreed report should also be issued to parents through the parents' association and to the wider parent body through the school's website. The newly appointed board should put procedures in place to ensure that a strong parent voice informs their work.

The board and senior management have good links with other seven-day boarding schools and this is very beneficial in sharing ideas about common issues. The school would also

benefit from developing links with schools in other post-primary sectors and also technology centres. It is recommended that the school forges links with the wider community.

The College President (principal) and Dean of Studies (deputy principal) are hard working, dedicated, committed managers of the school. The College President's duties include taking overall responsibility for the running of the school, producing the timetable, and leading strategic planning for the school. The Dean of Studies is mainly responsible for managing and monitoring teaching and learning. The senior management team has been very successful in managing recent change. The senior management team are significantly involved with student care and wellbeing and are members of the care teams. They share a common vision, which is to provide a rounded educational experience for students and to ensure that all students achieve their potential. They communicate and work very well together.

The middle management team comprises two assistant principals and two special duties teachers. They support the operation of the school well. There is scope to develop their leadership role through increasing their level of engagement in strategic whole-school planning. The post structure meets most of the school's needs and, although the schedule of posts has been adjusted as the needs have changed, it has not been subject to a systematic review. It is, therefore, recommended that the whole staff engage in a prioritised audit of the school's needs and that the senior management team appoint post holders to the posts in a way that best meets the school's needs. Consideration should be taken of all possible options in determining the schedule of posts. It is good that post holders prepare a short annual report for management detailing the achievements and challenges encountered during the year and opportunities for development as a basis for discussion in an end-of-year meeting with management. These reports should be made available to the new board. A yearly meeting of all post-holders should be considered as a forum for reviewing the operation of the posts, sharing expertise and engaging in strategic school planning.

The school has developed a range of relevant policies, which are subject to periodic evaluation and review. It is recommended that the admissions policy be reviewed to ensure that it fully reflects the school's admissions practices, outlines clearly the criteria on the basis of which decisions regarding admissions are made and is compliant with all relevant legislation.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The College President and the Dean of Studies are effective leaders of learning. The timetable is well organised and very student centred; there are good pastoral care structures in place; almost all classrooms are fitted for information and communication technology (ICT) and teachers' continuing professional development is facilitated. The senior management team is open to ideas to develop the school. The senior management team knows the students very well and has a keen interest in their academic progress and their overall development.

While it is good that teachers are involved in certain aspects of planning, there is scope for more teacher involvement at a whole-school strategic planning level. Similarly students' input should be sought where appropriate. It is recommended that the school actively encourages a culture of empowerment of staff and students in order to ensure that it benefits fully from their contributions.

The support for teachers new to the school includes an induction programme, the provision of subject plans and involvement in subject planning meetings. However, there is scope for new teachers to be further supported.

Teachers have engaged very well with subject planning. Very high quality subject and programme plans have been developed. In most plans the programmes of work link learning outcomes to selected resources, the methodologies to be used and modes of assessment. This good practice should be extended to all plans over time. It is good that an analysis of the school's performance in the certificate examinations is included in each subject plan. A section outlining how this analysis influences classroom practice and brings about improvements in teaching and learning should be developed. Each subject plan should also include a section on strategic planning identifying challenges facing the subject department and the action plans to address them.

There is very good provision of language, arts, business and science subjects on the curriculum. Due to low student numbers it is impossible to provide a very wide range of curriculum options within normal school hours and the curriculum is augmented by the availability of additional examination subjects after school and during evening study. This arrangement caters well for most students' subject needs. The curriculum is broadened and balanced by the provision of a wide range of extracurricular activities that cater for students' interests.

The school's code of behaviour is comprehensive, is broadly in keeping with the NEWB guidelines, and is clearly communicated to the students and their parents. However, there is scope for implementing the code of behaviour more equitably. Although recent measures taken to address inequity between senior and junior students have resulted in considerable improvement, there remains a need to ensure all students enjoy equal status in all areas of school life. The code of behaviour is due for review and this should be done in line with the NEWB guidelines. This is particularly important as some student behaviours that would, in the past, have been viewed as traditional rights or privileges would be categorised as bullying in the guidelines. The review presents the school with an ideal opportunity to involve all students and to ensure that respect, fairness and equality are at the heart of student management.

The student council comprises senior students and while some members are charged with representing the interests of the junior students, elected representatives from first, second and third year should be included on the student council. An annual meeting with the board and the student council should also be considered as a way of raising the student council's profile.

The school's self-evaluation documentation indicated that student care was an area of concern. The remedial action taken on foot of this concern included the creation of six care teams, one for each year group. This represents a substantial commitment and is an indication of the importance placed on care of students. In addition, all teachers through their interactions with students play a significant role in contributing to student care. The care teams have been in operation for a year and their effectiveness should be reviewed. The students' responses to the questionnaire administered in this evaluation should be further investigated as part of this review.

Provision for students with special educational needs and for whom English is an additional language is very good. The main modes of delivery are individual or small group tuition and the creation of small classes. Moreover, there is a strong culture of teachers routinely assisting students and providing additional tuition during evening study, often in the teachers' own time. Students, in their meeting with the inspectors, expressed sincere

appreciation for their teachers' efforts in this regard and also for the high quality teaching and support they receive.

Guidance is provided in the senior cycle through direct class contact. Students complete an interest inventory in Transition Year (TY) to guide their subject choices and receive assistance with applications for third level colleges in sixth year. Junior cycle students receive advice prior to making subject choices. Individual appointments with the guidance counsellor for careers advice are also provided for students. The chaplain provides counselling and members of the various care teams are available to support students experiencing personal difficulties. While it is very good that the school has been able to continue its guidance provision with reduced allocated teacher hours, this provision may not be sustainable. It is, therefore, recommended that the school explore a more whole-school approach to the provision for Guidance.

Confirmation was provided that the board of governors 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 is situated alongside the Abbey of Mount St. Joseph in a setting of ample green space and magnificent woodland that includes a guest house and farm run by the monks. In keeping with excellent practice much use is made of these special resources to enhance students' learning and holistic educational experience in areas such as Religious Education, Science, TY and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

The school has good facilities for teaching and learning and extracurricular activities; specialist rooms are well equipped; the majority of classrooms have very good ICT, and sporting, music and art facilities are very good. In recent years, there was significant development of the school's infrastructure. Improvements are continuing, but at a slower pace.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty-one lessons were observed and the quality of teaching and learning was very good in the majority of the lessons, and good in the other lessons. Some examples of excellent practice and some areas for improvement were noted.

There was evidence of very good lesson planning with teachers preparing a wide range of relevant and interesting resources to support learning. Teacher explanations and instructions were clear. New material was related to prior learning and to real life. Lessons were well structured overall and movement through each phase was well managed.

Learning was differentiated in some lessons through the provision of assistance for students experiencing difficulty, the use of methodologies that allowed students to work at their own pace and the use of differentiated questions. In the majority of lessons, however, the learning activities suited students' abilities in the middle of the range present. It is recommended that teachers prepare activities and resources that provide additional challenge for more-able students.

The variety of methodologies observed included teacher exposition, group work, pair work, discovery learning, practical work, brainstorming and problem solving. The quality of learning was highest in lessons where more than one of these strategies was used. The group work observed was of a very high standard, particularly where the seating arrangements in the classroom supported this approach. In order to share this and other very good practices, it is recommended that teachers observe each other's lessons. In addition, CPD in *Instructional Leadership*, which promotes the use of very structured group work, is suggested for consideration.

Skilful questioning and discussion strategies were noted in some lessons where teachers used open questions to encourage students to reach a deeper understanding of the concepts taught. Best practice occurred where students collaborated either in groups or as a class to discuss the lesson's ideas. It was evident that through engaging in these types of discussions, the students had been enabled to develop their thinking skills and also the necessary subject-specific language. It is recommended that teachers make further use of strategies that optimise the learning potential of questioning and discussion.

Good attention was paid to the key words of some lessons in terms of introducing new language and using their meanings to introduce new content. In some cases the key words and their meanings were written on the board. It is good that the school is targeting literacy as part of its school self-evaluation and improvement process.

Teachers monitored learning well through oral questioning and observation. Some of the written work reviewed showed the inclusion of comments advising students on how to improve the quality of their work. This is very good assessment practice and it is noteworthy that students, in discussions with the inspectors, highlighted the value to them of such high quality feedback. In other written work reviewed there was significant scope for the inclusion of such comments. It is recommended that all teachers provide comprehensive feedback to students in the correction of their written work and ensure that corrected work is handed back within a reasonable timeframe.

The relationships between teachers and students were observed to be warm and caring. In all lessons students participated and engaged very well and students' contributions indicated that very good learning was taking place. An analysis of student attainment in certificate examinations indicates that the school is performing well.

A wide range of valuable opportunities is provided for students to participate very successfully in co-curricular and extracurricular academic activities. This is very worthwhile as it provides students with additional challenge, allows them to develop a range of skills and offers them a different perspective on learning.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

The whole-school recommendations made in previous evaluations related to time in school and timetabling and have all been implemented.

3.2 Learning and teaching

The integration of ICT in lessons was previously recommended and good practice was observed in the use of ICT in this evaluation. However, there is still scope to develop the use of ICT as a teaching and learning tool.

Previous subject inspections recommended that the learning objectives of each lesson be shared with the students at the outset and their achievement should be checked. This recommendation was partially implemented. Almost all lessons began with a sharing of the learning objectives. Good practice was observed in some lessons where the students' achievement of the learning objectives was assessed. In some lessons the objectives were merely revisited at the close of the lesson in the form of a recap or a lack of time prevented a return to the objectives.

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

The school has good capacity for improvement. Student numbers have fallen sharply in recent years. The school has responded by examining itself and its practices to identify how it can plan for the school's survival and the continued high standard of provision for students. The result of this process is a very good school improvement plan, which outlines very clearly the actions and responsibilities required to bring the school forward. The school is also considering a variety of alternative enrolment options in relation to ensuring its viability. In order for this self-evaluation and planning work to have a significant impact in all areas of school life, the school's guiding principles which are best described by the words of St Benedict 'The strong have something to strive for and the weak are not discouraged.' need to be lived out in all aspects of the school's work including the work of the board, the senior management team, teachers and students.

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 Governors of Cistercian College Roscrea welcomes the WSE-MLL report and is delighted that the inspectors recognised and affirmed the many positive and unique aspects of the educational experience provided at Cistercian College.

In particular the Board are happy to note the following points:

- The Board of Governors is ambitious for and supportive of the school
- The Senior Management Team has been very successful in managing recent change
- Very high quality subject and programme plans have been developed
- The school's curriculum is broadened and balanced by a wide range of extra curricular activities
- In keeping with excellent practice much use is made of the resources of the location (ample green space and magnificent woodland) to enhance students' learning and holistic educational experience in areas such as RE, Science, TY & LCVP
- In recent years there was significant development in the school's infrastructure
- Whole school recommendations made in previous evaluations have all been implemented.

The WSE-MLL was a positive and encouraging experience for the whole College community and is viewed as an integral part of our ongoing commitment to strive for best practice in every area. The Board and staff would like to thank the inspectors for their professionalism and the time that they took to understand the particular traditions and monastic ethos of Cistercian College.

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 Governors has given serious consideration of the recommendations of the report. In particular:

- The Trustees and Board of Governors are preparing for the introduction of the Board of Management from October 2013. Staff and Parents Association have been briefed in preparation for this important development and appraised of their respective roles and responsibilities on this new Board.
- The Student Council has been reconstituted and will have a significant input to the review of the Code of Behaviour which has already begun.

- An audit of the Posts of responsibility has begun and the work of the Care Teams is being reviewed.
- The Provision of Guidance is being examined with a view to providing a more 'whole-school' approach.
- The Admissions Policy will be reviewed in the coming month.

The Board of Governors acknowledges the validity of the recommendations made in the report and thanks the inspectors for the interest they took in Cistercian Roscrea.