

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Oatlands College
Mount Merrion, County Dublin
Roll number: 60050E**

Date of inspection: 15 January 2015



**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 2015 in Oatlands College. 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 of the school 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

Oatlands College is a voluntary secondary school for boys, under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The school's care for its students and its emphasis on providing a holistic education is guided by the educational philosophy of ERST. Founded in 1951, the school provides for the educational needs of the large surrounding urban area. Enrolment in the school has increased considerably over the past decade. The school is currently over-subscribed and is operating above its accommodation capacity, with an enrolment of 541 students.

Oatlands College provides the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board is actively engaged in its role and provides very effective management and leadership to the school.
- The senior management team provides highly effective leadership, which is founded on openness, collaboration, communication and mutual respect.
- A vibrant and engaged parents' council provides a range of practical supports to the work of the school.
- The school offers a broad curriculum and exemplary co-curricular and extra-curricular programmes.
- Key staff teams, including the year heads, guidance service, learning support and those teachers leading school self-evaluation, among others, are central to the successful inclusion of students and leadership of learning.
- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in all lessons, with some examples of excellent practice noted.
- The school has a strong capacity to progress priorities identified for future improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development

- Provision for Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) at senior cycle should be reviewed in accordance with Circular Letter 0027/08 and supported by an updated and expanded RSE policy.
- Consideration should be given to the establishment of a curriculum advisory board to support management and the school improvement process.
- Management should explore ways of further enhancing students' meaningful contribution to relevant aspects of school life.
- Teachers should revisit the principles of assessment-for-learning (AFL), with a particular emphasis on formative feedback and underpinned by a whole-school assessment policy.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

Management structures ensure the efficient operation of the school at all levels. The board of management is appropriately constituted, meets regularly and communicates effectively with all education partners on its work. The board demonstrates very effective leadership and fulfils its corporate governance responsibilities with integrity. Board members possess a diverse range of relevant skills, are committed to their roles and responsibilities and play an active role in supporting the school.

The board is kept informed on all school matters through a detailed principal's report at each meeting. Decisions are made through consensus and are shared in the best interests of the school community. Partnership with the local community is a strong feature of the school. The board evaluates its own work at the end of each term of office, which ensures continuity when transitioning to a new board. This practice is highly commendable.

The board has established procedures to ensure the development of the school plan and seeks to promote a culture of collaboration, reflection and self-evaluation. Whilst welcomed, the challenges of an excess of applications for enrolment in the school impose considerable demands on the workload of the board and the senior management team. As a result, the school's admissions policy is reviewed annually to ensure clarity and equity in the enrolment of new students. All other mandatory policies have been adopted and a number of additional policies have been identified for development. It is recommended that the board also arranges to update the existing RSE policy and to develop a whole-school assessment policy.

In addition to infrastructural and fiscal planning, the school's current priorities for development provide an appropriate emphasis on teaching, learning and assessment, school self-evaluation and curricular review. Action plans, containing specific targets and timeframes for their achievement, have been established for many of these priorities, which is good practice. To bring further coherence to the achievement of the school's priorities, consideration should be given to the establishment of a curriculum advisory board to support management.

The school enjoys a high level of parental support. A vibrant and proactive parents' council supports the organisation and funding of many school activities. Its members are fully informed on school issues and appropriately consulted in policy formation. As a support for the parent body, the parents' council also organises talks on relevant and topical issues as well as social events in the college.

The school encourages and facilitates students to actively engage and contribute to their local community, through participation in various clubs and events and through engagement with local businesses and enterprises.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff is highly effective. The recently appointed principal and deputy principal bring a range of complementary skills to their work, characterised by frequent communication, shared decision-making and clarity of direction. They operate an open-door policy and are available to respond to the needs of students, staff and parents, an approach that is acknowledged and valued by all. They share a vision for school improvement, which is built upon the principles of communication, collaboration and mutual respect.

As leaders of learning, the senior management team are committed to high standards and quality improvement. A number of examples give expression to the exemplary practice currently being developed and implemented by them including visiting classrooms and an annual survey to seek staffs' opinions and feedback on the management and operation of the school. The recent introduction of subject department and individual teacher meetings with senior management provides an exemplary approach to constructive review and planning for students' progress and achievement. Senior management and the board are highly supportive and appreciative of the work ethic and the professional and caring nature of all staff working in the school.

Teachers with posts of responsibilities have assumed clearly defined duties. A considerable number of the middle management roles are invested in the duties of year head and various administrative responsibilities. The fulfilment of the roles makes a significant contribution to the effectiveness of the many school systems. Many teachers, who are not post holders, also undertake a range of roles voluntarily that contribute to the overall effectiveness of the school's educational provision.

Every effort is made to ensure that teaching staff are deployed according to their qualifications and expertise. Engagement in continuing professional development (CPD) is actively supported by management. Of particular note is the collective awareness and willingness amongst staff to further develop a collaborative learning culture within the school. The proposal, by some teachers, to engage in peer professional collaboration through observation of lessons should also further promote professional dialogue and development and is to be encouraged.

Revised programme and subject department structures facilitate a collaborative approach to planning. The quality of subject plans reviewed during the evaluation varied with some plans providing a detailed guide to subject organisation and delivery, whilst others were mostly content based and lacked sufficient detail. Best practice was found where subject plans identified learning outcomes for each year group and module, and aligned these with methodologies, resources and modes of assessment. All subject departments are encouraged to adopt this good practice and to fine tune plans, where relevant.

The timetable is constructed within the resources available in order to accommodate students' subject choices. Tuition time is in line with Circular M29/95. A broad curriculum is provided to meet the needs and interests of students. The school timetable allocates time for most subjects in line with syllabus guidelines. The provision of a taster programme for first years ensures they are well informed in choosing their subjects for the Junior Certificate. The provision for RSE, particularly at senior cycle, should be reviewed to

ensure that the school is fully compliant with Circular Letter 0027/08. Management should also explore the possibility of providing Home Economics as a subject at Junior Certificate.

A good quality TY programme provides a diversity of learning experiences in keeping with the aims and philosophy of the programme. Whilst optional, almost all students choose to complete the programme. The extensive work experience element of the programme should be kept under review, as it reduces students' access to tuition time in other aspects of the curriculum. LCVP was recently reintroduced on the curriculum and enjoys a healthy uptake.

Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is appropriately provided for all junior cycle classes. A dedicated SPHE module is also provided in TY to continue to support students' personal development. Management has recently established a more formalised SPHE subject department, which should help to develop the subject further.

Good communication with parents is facilitated through a range of mediums including reports and parent-teacher meetings. Overall, students' uptake of higher level and their attainment in state examinations is very good. To build on the school's existing practices in relation to the analysis of student attainment, consideration should be given to using students' measured cognitive ability as an initial benchmark when tracking and monitoring their academic progression.

As well as the recognition of academic achievement, students' involvement and contribution to school teams, events and initiatives are recognised and rewarded, both at organised assemblies and at the annual award ceremony.

Students' welfare is monitored and supported through the pastoral care system. Weekly meetings between management, the guidance counsellor and year heads work well to ensure that issues affecting students' attendance, participation and progress are communicated and acted upon. Class tutors are assigned to base classes at junior cycle and TY, however, the school does not have a dedicated tutor time set aside during the week. The further development of the tutor system should be considered by management and staff, to ensure that it makes a meaningful contribution to students' engagement in school.

Responses from student questionnaires indicate that the majority say that they feel safe and cared for, get on well with their peers and can talk to an adult if they are having problems. However, a notable minority disagreed that students were treated fairly. Management and staff should explore the reasons for this response. Consideration should be given to the introduction of a restorative approach when dealing with students as a possibility to address such perceptions. A more student friendly version of the code of behaviour should also be considered for inclusion in their journal.

The learning support department is well organised. A range of models of support is provided, appropriate to the individual needs of students, and the progress of students in receipt of support is effectively monitored.

The guidance and counselling service is highly valued by all in the school, with exemplary supports provided for students, at all levels, to meet their personal, educational and academic needs.

The school's programme of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities is exemplary and provides students with many opportunities for participation in a wide range of activities including physical activity and sport, school shows, tours and cultural exchanges. The work undertaken voluntarily by dedicated teachers to facilitate these activities is highly commended.

Opportunities are provided for students to assume leadership roles that contribute positively to school life, including a fifth-year mentoring programme for first-year students. The school has a well organised democratically elected student council. It reports to the principal after each meeting to discuss issues and proposed actions, which is good practice. During the evaluation, students indicated that they would welcome additional opportunities to make a more meaningful contribution to school life. Management should explore and progress such opportunities with students.

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

School management has continued to develop and improve the buildings to meet the educational requirements of students. The recent addition of a new sports hall, along with changing rooms, a small gym, a canteen and a classroom has added greatly to the quality of the school's facilities as has the refurbishment of the staff room. A number of practical rooms are also in need of refurbishment. Management is currently exploring a possible extension of the school's accommodation to better meet the curricular needs and interests of its students. This proactive approach is commended.

Considerable effort is taken by the maintenance, cleaning and catering staff to ensure all of the school's facilities are maintained to a high standard. The contribution of the administrative staff to the highly effective organisation and functioning of the school is also acknowledged.

The system of classroom allocation works well in the school. Some teachers have made admirable efforts to ensure their classrooms provide a stimulating visual learning environment for students, including supporting the school's numeracy and literacy strategies. Other classrooms would benefit from a similar approach.

There is good access to information and communication technology (ICT) throughout the school, which is well used to support teaching and learning, administration and communication. The school website gives detailed information about the school and school life. Plans for the advancement of ICT use, including the development of a virtual learning environment, will further support this interactive educational medium.

A health and safety statement has been developed underpinned by a risk assessment audit. Environmental responsibility in the maintenance and use of facilities and resources is actively promoted, which is evident in the school's pursuit of the International Green Flag.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of learning and teaching was very good in the majority of lessons observed, with some exemplary practices noted. Scope for development was also identified in a number of instances, particularly in relation to facilitating more active student engagement.

Positive, supportive and respectful interactions between students and their teachers contributed to a focused and purposeful learning atmosphere. Classroom management was effective in all lessons and students were regularly acknowledged and affirmed for their efforts.

Most teachers' planning and preparation ensured their lessons were well designed, with all materials and resources available to support students' engagement. Teachers revisited prior learning to contextualise the topic of the lessons, which was very effective in supporting concept attainment. Good practice was observed in a number of lessons when teachers explicitly established the learning intentions at the outset, clearly identifying what students should know and be able to do by the end of the lesson. The recapping of these learning intentions, through appropriate questioning strategies, enabled the effective assessment and consolidation of learning. These practices should be extended to all lessons.

ICT was used effectively in many lessons to stimulate students' interest and understanding of concepts. A small number of lessons would have benefitted from some use or more extended use of ICT.

Many lessons were successful in achieving a good balance between teacher input and student activity. Learning was most effective where students were engaged, either through independent or collaborative tasks. Some very good examples of such tasks included students' researching design briefs, engaging in appropriately focused pair or small group work, demonstrating experiments or working through mathematical problems and completing a range of class assignments. In such instances, students were afforded sufficient opportunities to apply and extend their knowledge and skills. These effective learning activities also afforded teachers time to provide more focused and differentiated support for individuals.

Student engagement and learning was less effective in lessons where there was prolonged teacher explanation or an over-emphasis on initiation-response-evaluation type questioning. In these lessons, there was scope to reduce student passivity through more varied and inclusive approaches to questioning and the greater use of applied tasks. This is an area that should be discussed, developed and shared by teachers.

There was substantial use of the target language in most language lessons, which is very effective practice. This was supported through the use of phonetics in one instance, and in another through the effective use of video. Subject-specific terminology supported students' literacy development, through extending their vocabulary and comprehension. While explicit attention to numeracy was evident in some lessons, this should be further strengthened through the greater implementation of agreed strategies.

Students' contributions to lessons were valued and in several instances, teachers actively encouraged the expression of students' views and opinions, through the provision of good quality formative feedback. Best practice was observed where students were willing and confident to ask questions for clarification or to enhance class discussions. Activities where students are generating the questions should be promoted.

Homework was set and a variety of practices in relation to the monitoring and correcting of written homework was seen in a sample of assignments reviewed. In some instances, very helpful detailed corrections and written developmental feedback was provided. There is scope for further development in the provision of written formative feedback on significant assignments in a consistent manner across all subject areas. Consideration should also be given to broadening the nature of homework set to include, for example, students undertaking research in advance of the introduction of a new topic. Summative assessment is used widely and incorporates an appropriate focus on the practice of examination craft.

A wider range of assessment techniques should be implemented across all subjects including placing a focus on the development of students' self and peer assessment skills. The development of a whole school assessment policy which addresses the greater integration of assessment for learning strategies into teaching and learning is recommended.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

All recommendations from previous inspections have been collated and responded to comprehensively by management. In addition to ensuring a fully functioning ICT infrastructure, good efforts have been made to address issues related to timetabling, programme and subject department planning, and in supporting CPD. The constructive use of whole-school planning hours supports the further development of a collegial and collaborative culture in the school.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Teachers have attended well to the implementation of many of the recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports. Good levels of follow through were also observed in areas identified for improvement, including the development of subject plans. Implementation of recommendations were observed in many instances during the evaluation in the explicit establishment and revisiting of intended learning outcomes, the creative use of ICT and the greater use of the target language in language lessons. Areas for continued improvement include the extension of assessment for learning practices to all lessons, including the role of formative feedback and the greater use of active and collaborative learning.

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

A culture of review and self-evaluation is progressing very well in the school. The SSE process has supported the establishment of an evidence-based approach to school improvement. Developmental priorities have been identified in the school improvement plan and specific targets and related interventions have been agreed to help achieve these outcomes. The establishment of teams of teachers, from across the curriculum, to lead, research and to develop initiatives in numeracy and literacy is very good practice.

A number of additional approaches has been used to gather information about the effectiveness of various school systems. Continued engagement in the cyclical self-evaluation process, as outlined in *School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools* should support the school in improving outcomes for its learners.

There is a strong professional capacity for self-evaluation and school improvement.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

Since the completion of the inspection:

- A 2 day RSE Inservice has been arranged in May as well as AFL Inservice in the next academic year.
- Implemented the recommendations re Student Council.
- The Curriculum Advisory Board will be established in the next academic year.
- The BOM will undertake review of policies as recommended.