

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Loreto College
Foxrock, Dublin 18
Roll number: 60240J**

Date of inspection: 25 September 2013



**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 September 2013 in Loreto College Foxrock. 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Introduction

Loreto College Foxrock is a Catholic, voluntary, fee-charging school founded by the Loreto Order in 1941. The school has a current enrolment of 647 girls. It offers the Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes, and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme. The school's mission is to be "a caring enabling, learning community where staff and students work together with mutual respect".

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is action focused and competent.
- The principal has a clear vision for a high quality provision of education and, together with the deputy principal, is providing very good quality strategic leadership and management of the school as well as leadership of teaching and learning.
- A well organised system is in place to support students' welfare and well-being underpinned by a caring, and respectful whole school culture.
- Subject department planning was very good in most subject areas, with some excellent practice noted.
- The curriculum is supported by an extensive range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in almost all of the lessons observed, with exemplary practice noted in a number of lessons.

Recommendations for Further Development

- Consultation with the whole school community including staff, students and parents, should be progressed to ensure that the priorities of the whole school community are reflected in the development of the Strategic Plan for the next five years.
- A review of the posts of responsibility to take account of the current needs and priorities of the school should be progressed as planned.

- The review of the curriculum which has already been initiated should be progressed to lead to an enriched broader curriculum.
- The effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) as a teaching and learning tool should be further developed and integrated across all subjects.
- A wider range of assessment techniques should be identified and implemented in the teaching of all subjects.
- Ways of consulting and communicating with all parents should be further explored and progressed, so that the views of parents contribute effectively to the ongoing development of the school.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is appropriately constituted, action focused and competent. Members of the board bring a range of professional expertise to their role, are dynamic and reflective, and seek to work effectively in partnership with the whole school community. Very good support is provided to the board and the school by its Loreto trustees.

The board has successfully project managed the building of the new extension to the school and has overseen significant investment in ICT. All key policies are in place and ongoing review of policies is a feature of the board's way of working.

The provision of a high quality education and the promotion of best practice in teaching and learning are guiding principles for the work of the board. More recently, the board has managed the successful recruitment of the new principal in a process which included consultation with the whole school community.

The board has successfully implemented its five year Strategic Plan, 2008-13, and a new draft Strategic Plan is currently being developed by the board. The plan, as currently drafted, encompasses the work of the whole school and is a comprehensive compilation of the range of activities and priorities engaged in by the school. Consultation with staff, students and parents should now be progressed to ensure that the priorities of the whole school community are reflected in the development and drafting of the Strategic Plan. It is recommended that at the end of this process, five key areas be identified, and action targets and an action plan to support their implementation be developed.

The principal brings a strategic focus to the provision of a high quality education. The principal and the deputy principal work collaboratively together as a unified senior management team with well-defined roles which complement each other. As a newly formed team, they have managed a time of transition very effectively, and have introduced a significant focus on teaching and learning including eLearning and e-Portal. They have provided very effective leadership and continuity in running the school whilst leading out on an agenda of improvement including revising the school timetable, progressing school self-evaluation (SSE) through an agreed whole school focus on literacy, and planning for curriculum review. In planning for further school development, the ongoing implementation of SSE should be progressed.

The parents' school association is very energetic and committed and is actively involved in both running events and supporting school activities. The association contributes to the ongoing review of school policies and maintains its profile on the school website. Parents have been consulted as part of the school self-evaluation process (SSE) which is good practice. As part of this whole school evaluation, parents of second and fifth-year students were surveyed and a response rate of seventy percent was achieved. Almost all the parents

who responded to the WSE-MLL survey indicated that, overall, they were happy with the school. However, a significant minority of parents disagreed that the school regularly seeks the views of parents on school matters. To address this, the nature of communication and consultation with the general parent body needs to be further explored, understood and strengthened.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The senior management team provides very effective leadership. The team works closely to ensure the efficient day-to-day operation of the school and provides opportunities for devolved leadership among staff. They have successfully created and continue to facilitate a supportive and caring environment for the whole school community.

The roles of year head and class tutor are student centred incorporating responsibility for the pastoral welfare and discipline of students and for tracking and monitoring of students' progress, attendance and punctuality. There is a very good system of communication between the year heads and their relevant class tutors which is well organised and managed and ensures timely and effective communication with senior management regarding any issues that may arise. A well developed and clearly structured school plan is in place. A review of the staff handbook is advised.

Management has identified the need for and has planned a review of the school's post of responsibility structure. This should be progressed as planned to meet the needs of the changing requirements and priorities of the school.

Teachers are effectively and appropriately deployed. The teaching staff are committed, motivated, caring and supportive of students and bring a strong pastoral care focus to their relationships with students. They are generous with their time in availing of opportunities to lead projects and initiatives which enhance student learning, including the sixth-year academic mentoring programme. They have engaged with changes that have been led by senior management by being involved in, for example, in-school committees on literacy, and curriculum review.

Very good opportunities are provided for the continuing professional development of the teachers, both on an individual and whole school basis. There is very good practice in the induction of new teachers and a good trainee teacher mentoring system is in place.

Subject department planning was very good in most subject areas with some excellent practice noted including, for example, identification of developmental priorities and targets for each year.

A good balanced academic curriculum is provided with a taster programme provided in first year, a good choice of optional subjects and a very popular Transition Year (TY) programme. The TY programme provides a very good broad educational experience characterised by choice, variety and development opportunities. It includes a wide variety of opportunities for the personal and social development of students including opportunities to be actively involved in a supportive way in the local community and activities which challenge them to become responsible for themselves.

Curriculum review has been initiated in the context of Junior Cycle reform and teachers have responded positively by signing up to be involved in this work. The planned review of the curriculum, including taking the views of the students and parents into account, should be progressed to lead to an enriched broader curriculum. The timetable is well constructed, having been recently reviewed. It takes account of the needs of the students and provides 28

hours instruction time for the students in compliance with Circular M29/95 Time in School. The curriculum is supported by a range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities including a wide range of sports, delivered to a high standard.

High expectations of students, respectful relationships and the implementation of the school's code of behaviour contribute to the maintenance of a purposeful and focused learning environment. The clearly structured code of behaviour is working well.

A well organised system is in place to support students' welfare and wellbeing with a range of supports, including both career guidance and counselling support, being provided to students as needed. Central to this system is the student care team which meets once a week. Given that a restorative justice approach has been adopted by the school to address and resolve bullying incidents as part of the range of supports provided for students, this process should be clearly documented and recognised within the school's anti-bullying policy. It is timely to review and update the anti-bullying policy in light of Circular 045/2013 and the publication of revised anti-bullying procedures for schools.

While the school has a range of policies and procedures in place including a pastoral care policy and a guidance department plan which address student welfare and support, it is advised that in line with recent interdepartmental guidelines *Well-being in Post-Primary Schools* (2013) these should be brought together in an integrated manner as the whole-school guidance plan.

A holistic approach which recognises students' personal and social development and participation as well as academic achievements is implemented by the school. There is a strong emphasis on the faith and spiritual development of the students which is informed by the school's Loreto ethos. A comprehensive provision for students with special educational needs is in place which is effectively implemented through, inter alia, a learning support timetable.

A wide range of good leadership opportunities are being provided for students through the student council, various student-led committees, school activities and initiatives. A vibrant and dynamic student council is democratically elected and is actively engaged in a range of activities including policy development.

There is very good student achievement in State examinations. School management and subject departments undertake an analysis of examination results annually which is very good practice. An analysis of incoming first-year standardised test results has been undertaken as part of SSE and has informed the school's strategy on literacy. The monitoring of students' academic progress and achievement should now be tracked from first-year onwards through the e-Portal system.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

1.3 Management of facilities

The board of management has successfully led the upgrading of facilities. This has included the provision of a new 'state of the art' extension, a new library, research and resource room and the introduction of ICT to all classrooms. All the school accommodation including specialist rooms have been improved and are maintained to a very high standard as are the school grounds. Very good notice board displays incorporating student-centred

information and reflections enhance the corridors. The school is working towards its third Green Flag.

A detailed health and safety statement is in place which is appropriately audited. All of the students and parents surveyed during the evaluation indicated satisfaction with the school facilities.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty-six lessons, including two double lessons, were observed covering all years and all programmes in the school, and a wide range of subjects.

The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in almost all of the lessons observed, with exemplary practice noted in a number of lessons. Responses to the questionnaires issued to parents and students as part of the evaluation also indicated a high level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning.

Lessons were well planned and prepared. Good practice was observed when teachers explicitly highlighted the intended learning outcomes in addition to the lesson content at the start of the lesson and consolidated the learning of the lesson through targeted questioning and recap.

Lessons were most effective when there was a good balance between teacher input and student activity. In these lessons, a variety of appropriate teaching methodologies was employed including good student co-operative learning strategies which were successful in engaging and involving students in their learning. Active learning was a feature of some lessons through the completion of practical work and role play. In the majority of lessons, students were encouraged to think for themselves and apply critical thinking skills through open-ended exploratory questioning, investigative approaches and links to current affairs. This good practice of increasingly challenging and developing students' higher-order and key skills should be extended to all lessons.

Throughout, a wide range of resources such as teacher-generated hand-outs, show-me boards, graphic organisers, mind maps and ICT video resources and visuals was observed in use by teachers to enhance student learning. While very good use was made of ICT in some lessons, effective integration of ICT as a teaching and learning tool should now be expanded, where appropriate, so as to further support student interest and engagement and the development of students' digital literacy skills. The role that ICT has in facilitating students taking responsibility for their learning through student presentations of their own research and knowledge should also be more fully exploited. The introduction of information sharing platforms such as "Moodle" is welcome.

In modern language lessons, the teachers' and students' use of the target language in interactions and tasks was consistently high. Teachers employed a good range of visuals and gestures to convey the meaning of the language and the use of phonics enhanced student pronunciation of the target language.

In all lessons, a positive learning atmosphere and a very good rapport between teachers and students were evident. In some lessons, exemplary practice was evident through the

engagement of students in student-centred activities. Students were affirmed and encouraged for their efforts and contributions throughout all lessons.

A visually stimulating and print-rich learning environment had been created in many classrooms, which are teacher based. Some classroom layouts enabled good collaborative learning whilst others did not readily facilitate co-operative work. Student work and achievements were displayed both in the classrooms and were also presented very attractively on eye-catching notice boards in the corridors.

In almost all lessons there was a focus on the development of students' literacy skills, explanation of keywords and exploration of unfamiliar terminology and concepts. All first-year students maintain a vocabulary notebook wherein they record the meaning of unfamiliar words and this is noteworthy as was the "drop everything and read" time during some periods of tutor time.

Homework was regularly assigned and corrected. It was observed in some lessons that very good written feedback is provided on students' work and this formative assessment aids students in becoming more responsible for their own learning. Assessment for learning (AfL) practices are being progressed within the school and it is now timely to implement a wider range of assessment techniques across all subjects such as focusing on written formative feedback on substantial assignments, self and peer assessment and the further inclusion of additional AfL techniques. The involvement of students in monitoring and assessing their own progress and identifying how they could improve should also be progressed.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Subject inspections have taken place in seven subjects: Biology, Classical Studies, German, Physics, SPHE, English, and Business Studies since 2006. The board of management together with the senior management team have engaged effectively with most of the recommendations concerning whole-school provision and support. Notably, recommendations concerning upgrading of the science facilities and the facilitation of the optimum use of ICT have been addressed through the provision of new modern laboratories and provision of data projectors and internet access in all classrooms.

Following the recommendation in the SPHE report, the school's anti-bullying policy was revised in 2011. A written policy on visitors and visiting speakers, in particular those visiting speakers who address aspects of SPHE, remains to be developed and it is recommended that this policy should be drafted as a whole-school policy taking account of Circular 0023/2010. Very good progress in the development of most subject plans has been achieved.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Subject departments have actively and effectively engaged with and implemented many of the recommendations relating to teaching and learning with some subject departments adopting the recommendations as developmental targets for the year. These included the sharing of learning outcomes with students at the beginning of each lesson and the range of resources used in lessons being modernised. While there is formal reporting of students'

progress in SPHE to parents, the assessment strategy underpinning this should be clearly documented in the subject plan.

The recommendations of previous subject inspection report have been shared with the staff by school management on a whole-school basis. This is effective practice whereby recommended developments and improvements in one subject area can influence improvements in practice across all subject areas. In this regard, there is scope for the ongoing development and integration of the use of ICT into the teaching and learning of all subjects.

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

4.1 The School's Self-Evaluation Process

A reflective culture of school development and improvement has been established and embedded in the school. In the development of its previous Strategic Plan, the board of management engaged in a consultation process with parents, students and staff. Likewise, it has adopted a consultative collaborative approach in developing and reviewing policies and has managed significant change in recent years.

School review and self-evaluation (SSE) processes have been successfully initiated with the agreed focus on the theme of literacy. The views and experiences of staff, parents, and students were gathered in an effective manner to inform this self-evaluation process which has led to the completion of a school improvement plan.

4.2 The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school, through the experience, skills and resourcefulness of its board of management, senior management team and the whole school community, has shown very good capacity for ongoing improvement and the ability to respond effectively to the needs of the students. In this regard, the results of the students and parents questionnaires conducted as part of this evaluation could be used as a resource in identifying further areas for improvement.