

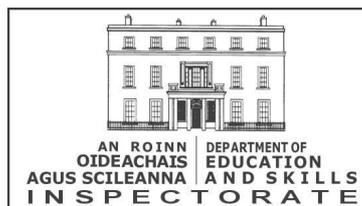
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Saint Joseph of Cluny Secondary School
Killiney, County Dublin
Roll number: 60260P

Date of inspection: 16 May 2012



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in May 2012 in St Joseph of Cluny 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. The board of management 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

The school was founded in 1956 by the Congregation of St. Joseph of Cluny. It is a fee-charging, Catholic, second-level school for girls. The congregation maintains a significant interest in school life and ethos. The school operates under the administration of a board of management and has been in the trusteeship of the Le Chéile Schools Trust since 2011. The school shares a common campus with a convent of the Religious Sisters of the Order and a junior school. The vast majority of the 438 students currently enrolled come from the immediate area of Killiney. Students complete a six-year programme comprising the Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year (TY) and the Leaving Certificate established. A very high proportion of students go onto third level.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board provides experienced and confident leadership demonstrating considerable dedication to the school.
- The senior management team provides very high quality management and leadership, setting high standards which permeate the working and learning environment.
- The school is continuously building capacity as a teaching and learning community and is proficient in meeting the needs and challenges of its own context.
- Continuous evaluation and review are central to planning practices.
- Teachers demonstrate considerable motivation and commitment to their roles.
- A wide range of very good systems support school life and an impressive range of opportunities is provided for students to undertake leadership responsibilities.
- Teachers and management have very high expectations of their students and continuously challenge them to perform to the best of their ability and engage in a range of activities that provide opportunities for personal and social development.
- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good with some exceptional practice observed, including very good assessment for learning (AfL).
- The school demonstrates significant strengths in school self-evaluation with very good reflective and developmental approaches in evidence, including data gathering and surveying.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The board of management should develop a comprehensive enrolment strategy for the school into the future and also address some aspects of the school's current enrolment policy which merit rewording to reflect actual inclusive practices.

- To strengthen the role of class tutor, it is recommended that the school progress the position of year head as leader of a team of class tutors which would bring greater consistency to working practices.
- The school should monitor the areas for development identified in the responses to student questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation and ensure measurable progress is made in each annually.

QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

The board of management operates very effectively with a firm corporate identity. The board meets regularly, is very aware of its responsibilities and is proactive in its duties. Board members have considerable expertise and bring their strengths to their leadership role in the school. The board demonstrates considerable dedication to the school, particularly the guardianship of the school ethos and traditions. In so doing, the board approves and supports the leadership provided by senior management. The board provides annual reports to the Le Chéile Schools Trust. A finance sub-committee oversees income and expenditure.

The board is very aware of the quality of education provided and is dedicated to staff continuing professional development (CPD) and the recruitment of high quality teachers. The board demonstrates strong support for the broader curriculum while also monitoring academic outcomes. In this evaluation and the recent Physical Education inspection, matters in relation to teacher qualification arose which the board should address in accordance with circular 0031/2011.

The board is reflective. It invites and responds to input from its educational partners which assist in guiding its work. The principal acts as an important reference point between the board and the staff, parents' association and student council all of whom have a good voice in the school.

The board is cognisant of its role in driving school development planning including policy formation and review. For example, it initiated the establishment of an advisory board of studies for curriculum planning and receives progress reports from working groups. Most school policies have been reviewed recently and these reflect best practice. A three-year cycle of policy review, where possible, is recommended.

Some aspects of the enrolment policy merit rewording to reflect actual inclusive practices. In particular, the purpose of the enrolment interview should be clarified and clearly stated in this policy. The fact that the junior school is undergoing a phased closure, and will cease provision in two years time, will impact significantly on first-year intake. In light of this and of current changes in the economic climate, it is important that the board now oversees the development of a comprehensive enrolment strategy for the school. A shared vision for school enrolment held by all key stakeholders is essential to the school's continued success.

A meeting with representatives from the parents' association and the outcomes of parent questionnaires indicate very high levels of satisfaction with the way school is run. The parents' association has a supportive role including a meaningful input into policy development. Together with the association, school management should continue to develop effective communication with parents. There is some potential for the school to garner support from past students, to develop the website further and to build its profile through public relations.

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*.

The school's priorities for development

The school is strategic in its approach to planning and bringing about effective school improvement. Responsibility for school improvement is shared by the board, senior management, assistant principals and staff. Very good progress was made with the 2008-11 priorities including developments in the guidance plan, subject planning and timely reviews of support systems and anti-bullying procedures.

Current priorities for development include a review of the quality of in-house meetings, staff welfare and literacy and numeracy strategies. These are appropriate priorities. School planning reflects a willingness to embrace change and keep abreast of current educational initiatives. It is clear that the school is building capacity as a teaching and learning community and proficient in meeting the needs and challenges of its own context. Teaching and learning are fundamental to development planning. This is particularly well borne out in the advanced planning and implementation by each subject department in the school to develop innovative approaches to literacy and numeracy in subjects, as evidenced in the subject plans and during visits to lessons. In addition, the school is currently engaging in associate work with the NCCA in relation to the reform of the junior cycle.

Continuous evaluation and review are central to planning practices, particularly in relation to how educational provisions are contributing to student learning and wellbeing. Changes are made to draft plans following staff, parental and student consultation. The consultation process frequently involves the use of surveys. The recent review of the homework policy provides one good example of the consultative and collaborative planning approaches.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The senior management team, comprising of the principal and deputy principal, provides high quality leadership setting high expectations for all. The team is committed to providing a quality learning environment for staff and students. Consultation and accountability are built into their management style. The principal holds regular scheduled meetings with the leaders of each of the school's working groups and student bodies. Examination of minutes from a range of meetings reveals a commitment to care for the individual, as well as teaching and learning. Regular assemblies and staff meetings provide valuable opportunities for communication, while also ensuring consistency in approaches and responses to the many school systems. Thorough communication systems enhance the working environment and ensure follow-through action.

Senior management avails of appropriate in-service as do all staff. On staff planning days, external CPD is facilitated as well as internal peer-led CPD in areas of expertise by staff, for which the school demonstrates considerable capacity. Ongoing attention to CPD has led to very successful developments in classroom practice, most notably in the areas of ICT, AfL and literacy and numeracy. Developments are initiated at whole-school level and follow-through planning for implementation takes place in each subject department. Very good systems are in place to support the induction of new teachers.

Capacity building of staff at all levels is very good. Teachers are given opportunities to take on leadership roles including leading initiatives and working groups. As a result of this distributed model of leadership, members of staff take ownership and responsibility for

review and evaluation and demonstrate considerable motivation and commitment to their roles.

The middle-management structure operates effectively. Posts of responsibility are well distributed to meet the school's needs. Assistant principals form a distinct middle-management team with clear identity and developmental responsibilities. Their function is becoming increasingly strategic as, in addition to other duties, this group is responsible for school self-evaluation including the preparation of a framework for school improvement and reporting to the board of management. Ongoing adaptations are made to posts. A post-review committee meets annually and teachers have a say in prioritising the school's needs.

Senior management makes every effort to maximise the resources at the school's disposal. Almost all full-time teachers are deployed to the maximum twenty-two hours class contact. Weekly timetables include time for class tutor and year head duties. Resource hours for learning support are well distributed among a small core group of teachers building the school's experience and capacity in this area.

Leadership of students

A positive atmosphere pervades the school and this adds to the learning experience. School structures support high quality outcomes in care, guidance, learning support and attainment. There is very good awareness of the code of behaviour and attendance rates are high.

In leading students, the focus is on developing the strengths of each individual. Teachers and management have very high expectations and continuously challenge students to perform to the best of their ability and engage in a range of activities that provide opportunities for personal and social development. The level of participation and engagement in additional activities by students is impressive including sports, music and debating. The newsletter showcases the richness and range of such activities. The school ethos strongly emphasises Christian values including respect and tolerance for all. There are established links with Cluny schools and missions globally.

A significant range of opportunities is provided for students to develop leadership skills. The peer-monitoring programme, house system and positions such as prefects and head girls are some of many examples. The student council has a strong voice. It serves as a useful forum for contributions to school improvement, meets regularly with management and makes formal presentations to staff. There are many examples of team work among teachers and students in the school community including the green school committee.

Continuous evaluation and review are central to the work of those involved in leading students. Teachers and management who liaise with the various groups invite feedback through surveys and focused meetings. They are proactive in responding and in adapting systems for the evolving needs of students.

Year heads are pillars in student support. As well as taking a key role in pastoral care, presenting biannual reports to the board on student welfare, year heads monitor school data in relation to discipline, timekeeping, merit awards and academic progress. This system works very well. The work of class tutors is guided by a monthly plan that integrates care-related topics with school supports and workshops.

School management and staff have recognised the need to strengthen the role of class tutor. In particular, it is suggested that the school should progress the position of year head as leader of a team of class tutors. More frequent meetings between year heads and class tutors with structured agendas would bring greater consistency to working practices, and is therefore recommended. Year heads could devolve certain agreed tasks and consideration could be given to class tutor training.

Student responses to questionnaires show very good outcomes, including students having pride in their school and getting on well with others. However, some questionnaire outcomes revealed varying perceptions about student welfare issues, fairness and having a say. The findings support the recognised need to further develop the pastoral dimension of the class tutor system.

The principal and board strive to constantly provide a curriculum that is interesting, challenging and supports students in their future needs for third-level and career options. Management balances the maintenance of existing subjects with curriculum developments. Recent additions to senior cycle include social, personal and health education (SPHE) and Applied Mathematics. Clear information about subjects is presented on the website and in school documentation. The principal strives to ensure the best system for allocating subject choice.

There is a very high uptake of higher level in almost all subjects and student achievement in the certificate examinations is very good at both levels. The sending of school reports prior to Christmas holidays enhances the AfL process. The planned development of a system for student tracking has the potential to assist students and teachers in further optimising attainment, particularly if it is used to inform lesson planning. Systems for student self-assessment, in use by some teachers, could be collated and discussed as part of this process. All subject departments should extend their scrutiny of examinations outcomes to an analysis of the trends in attainment at both levels, including uptake of higher level from year to year and compare these with other subjects.

2.3 Management of facilities

School buildings are well maintained. Ongoing developments and summer works have led to significant modernisation. The school now has contemporary ICT facilities facilitating shared teaching resources. ICT has successfully been integrated into teaching practice to support student learning. The school has recently undergone a health and safety inspection. A high level of environmental awareness permeates and the school has impressive green credentials having achieved a fifth green flag.

The board is shortly to invest significantly in the outdoor pitches and plans are well advanced for the building of an Astro turf. Opportunely, associated building works will involve beneficial enhancement of the main entrance and signage. The board recognises the need for further development in a few areas and is continuously planning to maintain the school as an attractive option for parents in the locality.

QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty-eight lessons were evaluated and planning documentation relating to all subject areas was reviewed. The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good with some exceptional practice observed.

Lessons were well prepared and a range of resources was used to enhance learning and add variety to the teaching methods. ICT was also used very well in almost all lessons to support learning. Students worked in stimulating and print-rich learning environments. Current work by subject departments in developing and applying innovative approaches to literacy and numeracy is further enhancing teaching and learning across the curriculum. There was ample and impressive evidence of this good work in the lessons visited. In the majority of lessons, the learning outcome was articulated at the beginning and revisited at the end of the lesson. This practice led to very well structured lessons. Very good links

were made with prior learning and with other subjects, which put learning in context for students.

A feature of most lessons was the opportunities for students to be actively involved in their learning. This was achieved through very good questioning strategies, class discussion, pair or group work and some student presentations. In the very best lessons, the teachers facilitated learning by engaging the students in a series of tasks where they had to take responsibility for deepening their understanding of the topic under discussion. While teaching for learning was generally always effective, in a significant minority of instances there was an over dominance of teacher talk, and recommendations were made to integrate lesson activities that would enhance opportunities for student participation.

Teacher questioning was good and it was best when teachers ensured that all students in the lesson were covered by naming students to answer specific questions. Some very good higher-order questions were asked, especially when students' personal responses were sought. In a few instances, teachers asked only recall-type questions and in these lessons there was scope for broadening the questioning strategies.

The respect that students showed for each other and for their teachers was very noticeable. It was evident that students engaged well with their learning, and teacher circulation of the classroom ensured this engagement.

A major strength of the school is the very good assessment for learning strategies that were in use. It is clear that the CPD in this area has been embraced by teachers. Formative assessment was a particular strength with the students receiving very good feedback from teachers on their work. Students' copies and folders examined were of a very high quality and some of the work presented was excellent in terms of content and presentation. Very good records of students' work are kept by teachers and it is evident that students are frequently assessed. Homework was assigned in almost all lessons, with students being given adequate time to record this homework. Some very effective strategies for consolidating student learning were noted including revisiting the learning outcomes at the end of the lesson, constant questioning and reinforcement of ideas during the lesson, teacher-designed assessment templates and student self-evaluation. It is recommended that the staff build on this excellent practice by sharing such strategies for learning and by engaging in peer observation.

IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Almost all recommendations made to management in previous inspections have led to changes in practice. Recommendations from the recent Physical Education inspection are shortly to be addressed.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Recommendations in relation to subject planning continue to be addressed. Subject coordinators reported greater discussion in relation to teaching and learning practices as an outcome of subject inspections. Teachers set up 'drop boxes' to share resources electronically. To further support existing good practice, teaching and learning should be explicitly placed as a specific item on the agenda of every subject meeting. The integration of intended learning outcomes into all subject plans is advancing in most subjects with some excellent practice evident.

Improved practices in teaching and learning in the subjects inspected include increased use of ICT, use of learning outcomes to structure lessons, developments in the monitoring of students' copies, developed questioning strategies and evidence of high levels of student autonomy. Very good use of the target language by teachers was in evidence in lessons visited. The development of students' oral language skills is ongoing and is being enhanced by the use of oral assessments.

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

5.1

School self-evaluation is very well developed. School management has been advancing the culture of self-evaluation as a means of ensuring ongoing improvement. School surveys are being increasingly used and the outcomes of these provide evidence of strengths and weaknesses. Embedding the routine use of surveys and follow-on surveys to track and measure progress in certain themes, such as the issues raised by the student questionnaires used in this evaluation, will further develop the very good self-evaluation process.

The school has demonstrated its capacity for improvement through its reflective and evaluative practices and the very good leadership and management observed.

Published December 2012.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of St. Joseph of Cluny S.S. acknowledges the WSE-MLL report received on 05/10/2012. The Board wishes to thank the visiting Inspectors and to acknowledge the depth and professionalism of their work throughout the process of the Inspection. The Board would like to thank the Inspectors for the advice they offered during their visit.

The Board is very pleased that the WSE-MLL report recognises the many good practices, systems and opportunities that are in the school to support students. The Board also acknowledges the recognition given to the school in this report of the high quality and high levels of teaching and learning documented throughout the inspection process as well as the effective management structures presently in operation in the school.

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 is fully committed to addressing the recommendations contained in this report including:

- Examining ways to strengthen the role of class Tutor as a significant member of the pastoral care team in consultation with tutors and Year Heads.
- Monitoring the areas for development identified in student questionnaires. This is currently being explored by the school's middle management team as part of its work on school self-evaluation.
- The newly constituted Board is committed to examining the wording of the current school enrolment policy to ensure that it reflects actual inclusive practices and that it is in keeping with current DES guidelines.