Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning
REPORT

St Paul’s College
Raheny, Dublin 5
Roll number: 60290B

Date of inspection: 22 September 2011
Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in September 2011 in St Paul’s College, Raheny. 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 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
St Paul’s College is a voluntary secondary school that has provided education for boys for over sixty years and operates under the trusteeship of the Vincentian Order. The school serves a mixed catchment area and provides a broad and balanced curriculum.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board is deeply committed to and involved in the school and has prepared a considered development plan, the Draft Strategy for the Board of Management 2010-12. The plan is in need of further development in some areas.
- Teaching staff were not involved in the development of the board’s plan.
- Senior management work very well together and with the board but there is a need for greater clarity and formality around the respective roles of the principal and the deputy principal.
- Enabling structures in management, whole-school planning and pastoral care that would support the effective running of the school do not exist.
- The post of responsibility structure is ill-adapted to current needs.
- The code of behaviour is inconsistently implemented. The hour-long lunchtime presents challenges in the area of student care, especially for younger students.
- Planning and co-ordination in key curricular and support programmes are in immediate need of development.
- While there is evidence of some good subject department planning, there is scope for development in a number of areas.
- In the majority of lessons observed during the evaluation, the quality of teaching and learning was good and in a small number of cases, exemplary.
- A commendable range of learning activities and methods was observed in many lessons.
- The school’s sports facilities are very good.
- Fire drills were not carried out in 2010/11 and this presents a risk to health and safety. No health and safety statement was made available to the evaluation team.
- The school has not fully implemented the child protection guidelines.
- Some, but not all, of the recommendations in previous inspection reports have been implemented.
- Recent actions by the board to address the school’s development needs have the potential to bring about improvement.
1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should examine its mechanisms for consulting and communicating with staff, parents and students, as appropriate, with a view to ensuring a partnership approach to strategic planning for school improvement: the current *Draft Strategy for the Board of Management 2010-12* should be revised in this context.
- Senior management should develop action plans which derive from the board’s development plan, suitably revised, and which are clearly focussed on strategies to support teaching and learning in the school.
- The post structure should be revised and robust enabling structures to support management, whole-school planning and pastoral care of students should be established.
- Strong consideration should be given to reducing the length of the lunch period.
- A learning-support policy and structures to support its implementation, including upskilling of staff, should be developed.
- Subject planning should be reviewed in a number of identified areas. There should be planning for improvement in literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.
- The Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the subject areas Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) should be thoroughly reviewed.
- A Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy should be developed.
- Staff development policy and practice should focus on targeted areas that would support learning.
- The allocation of hours for learning support and guidance should be fully used for the purpose for which they are intended.
- Fire drills should be carried out immediately and the board should ensure that the health and safety statement is in order.
- As a matter of priority, the board should now ensure that the child protection guidelines are fully implemented.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

**Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations**

The trustees are supportive of the school, notably through the Vincentian Bursary. The board of management’s deep commitment to the school is evidenced through its engagement with school matters and, in particular, its preparation of a *Draft Strategy for the Board of Management 2010-12*: further comment on this development plan is provided below. There is good communication between the board and the school’s senior management team.

A number of key policies have been written up. The board should now conduct an audit to see what policies are outstanding and ensure ongoing review and development. The language in some existing policies, for example, the code of behaviour, is not likely to engage parent and student support and should be reviewed. A Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy should be developed and implemented in accordance with Circular Letter 037/2010.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department’s Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (published September 2004). Child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and
parents but not yet to new staff and parents; a copy of the procedures has not yet been provided to all staff (including all new staff); management has not yet ensured that all staff members are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines. The DLP has received training but the deputy DLP has not yet accessed training. As a matter of priority, the board should now ensure that the child protection guidelines are fully implemented.

The school’s priorities for development
The Draft Strategy for the Board of Management 2010-12 provides a very useful roadmap. It requires further development in the key areas of Teaching and Learning and Raising Morale. There is no evidence that teaching staff were consulted in the development of the plan or that it was effectively communicated to them. Moreover, it is the view of the evaluation team that without improvement in the school’s current management, operational and communication structures, the development plan is not achievable.

It is recommended that the board’s current development plan be revised following engagement with staff, parents and students, as appropriate. It is further recommended that the board ensure that senior management develop action plans which derive from the board’s revised plan. The board should also put in place oversight mechanisms to ensure that progress is achieved.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff
The principal and deputy work very well together. The principal sees his role as creating a learning environment but there is no clarity as to how this high level goal is being translated into actions designed to impact on the quality of teaching and learning in the school. Currently, the focus is on administrative tasks, with little attention paid to the instructional leadership role. Staff morale is low. The deputy sees his role as administrative, while maintaining personal contact with staff and students. Senior management do not have written schedules of duties and no formal meetings take place. There needs to be greater clarity and formality regarding their respective roles.

The senior management team should lead the development of action plans which are based on a vision for and knowledge of school improvement and which derive from the board’s revised development plan. Emphasis should be placed on measures to support improvement in the learner experience and to address staff morale. Staff, parents and students should be involved, as appropriate, in determining priorities and developing action plans.

Effective management and planning structures have not been developed. The current post structure is not meeting pressing needs and has not been reviewed. Duties are not clearly defined, fairly balanced and commensurate with posts. It is recommended that the post-structure be thoroughly revised and robust enabling structures to support management, whole-school planning and pastoral care of students be established. Senior management should require post-holders to be accountable for the effective management of their posts and should arrange for each to formally report back on a regular basis. Formal communication mechanisms need improvement: up to the time of the evaluation, meetings with year heads and post holders did not take place.

Although there is strong commitment to planning on the part of the planning co-ordinator, there is no mechanism in the school to support systematic whole-school planning. An Advisory Board of Studies, established by a previous principal twenty-five years ago, has done some very good work. This group has the potential to be reconstituted as a planning
group, balanced in terms of gender and experience, which would adopt a collaborative approach to school self-evaluation and development planning and report on a regular basis to senior management.

There was little evidence that senior management has addressed the capacity of the school to best meet the learning and personal needs of its diverse student population. Senior management should lead policy development and planning to ensure that provision is appropriate to the needs of students. Continuing professional development should be targeted on strategies to improve teaching and learning and to promote the positive implementation of the code of behaviour. Areas which should be addressed are differentiation, active and collaborative learning, mixed-ability teaching, literacy and numeracy, and assessment for learning.

Deployment of teachers is generally in line with qualifications and experience. Some of those deployed in the area of physical education (PE) are not qualified and this may have health and safety implications and must be addressed. Planning and co-ordination of SPHE and CSPE are underdeveloped and provision for these subjects should be reviewed.

**Leadership of students**

Although all stakeholders are very committed to the care of students, the management and leadership of the student care system needs considerable development. The pastoral care structure is not working effectively. It is recommended that a tutor system, led by one year head for each year, and a care team, to manage specific cases, be established. A formal transfer programme for first year students should be integrated into the pastoral care structure. Commendably, sixth-year members of the student council have a mentoring role to first year students but there is need for training.

The code of behaviour has been revised and planning for this purpose was well organised. However, the code is not consistently implemented and the ladder of referral is not always fully observed: records indicate that the board of management has spent a considerable amount of time on individual cases. There is lack of clarity regarding sanctions such as the detention system. There appears to be a greater emphasis on sanctions than on promoting positive behaviour and a leaning towards suspension as a solution to indiscipline. The number of suspensions is relatively high but when students return from suspension, there is no system in place that would enable them to modify their behaviour. There is no strategic early identification and intervention process to prevent problems arising. It is recommended that the code of behaviour be consistently implemented, sanctions made explicit, the promotion of positive behaviour documented and implemented, and the code regularly reviewed to determine its effectiveness. Review should be supported by data-based evidence.

The hour-long lunchtime presents challenges in the area of student care, especially for younger students. Strong consideration should be given to reducing the length of the lunch period. The timetabling of additional voluntary subjects and of learning-support classes during lunch time should be discontinued to ensure that all students get an appropriate break from lessons.

An anti-bullying policy has been developed and anti-bullying events were organised in the past. However these have not continued on a whole-school basis. This programme should be reinstated and every effort should be made to involve the student council in its delivery.

Attendance on the whole was quite good. The tracking of student attendance through the recently introduced e-portal system is positive. The issue of very poor punctuality was noted in a minority of lessons: this necessitates a thorough review and the development of appropriate action points.
Provision for admissions is defined but a dual system, related to catchment areas, is in operation. This is currently under review. There is ambiguity in the school’s statements on admission to TY. Clear criteria should be published to inform parents and students at pre-entry stage.

A critical incident policy and a policy on inclusion were not provided to the evaluation team. Both require attention. A start has been made on the development of a homework policy which is commendable. As part of this exercise, positive motivational strategies and the role of teachers and parents in implementation could be documented. The potential of the student journal to improve communication between school and home should be further explored.

A very good games and sports programme is available. Facilities are particularly good. Strong consideration should be given to extending the range of regular, structured extracurricular and co-curricular activities to cater for diverse student interests and needs.

The student council is actively involved in the school and there is good liaison with the parents’ association (PA). The council engaged in a healthy eating campaign last year. The initiative was not met with a proactive response from school management. The food being provided in the school canteen is not consistent with healthy eating. A healthy eating policy should be developed and implemented.

The school’s allocation of over sixty-one hours a week for learning support is not currently fully accounted for: this issue was raised in the 2006 English report and has not been adequately addressed. Clear evidence that the learning support allocation is used for its intended purpose should be documented. The same report recommended that a learning-support policy be developed but this recommendation has not been implemented. There is some commendable practice in the area. It is positive that there are plans to retest some students but routine testing should take place in all cases to track improvement. Student use of information and communication technology (ICT) should be fully integrated into lessons. There is an urgent need to develop a core resource team and to upskill staff. It is strongly recommended that all aspects of learning-support planning and provision be developed, that a robust structure be put in place, and that a policy be developed without further delay.

The school has a guidance allocation of twenty-nine hours per week but this is not fully accounted for. It is recommended that the school make full use of the allocation for the purpose of guidance. The school guidance counsellor gives individual counselling to students: this service is amplified with part-time personnel. The study-skills programme in the junior cycle is commended. The guidance plan should be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

A good range of subjects and programmes is available. Students are required to choose subject options from a preset menu in first year. Open nights and information sessions are provided. Given the popularity and success of Materials Technology (Wood) in the junior cycle, provision of the subject at LC level should be considered since there are no major infrastructural barriers to such an innovation.

Although interesting modules appear to be offered in TY, no current comprehensive plan was submitted to the evaluation team. The LCVP’s potential to meet the needs of students is not being realised and there is evidence of poor practice in a number of areas. It is strongly recommended that all aspects of provision, planning and co-ordination of TY and LCVP be reviewed.

Students are encouraged to achieve in many subject areas but some are experiencing low levels of success, especially in the junior cycle. Some good practice in subject department
planning is in evidence and this should be shared. It is recommended that all subject plans show evidence of the collection and analysis of data to inform planning and set targets for improvement. There should be a focus on the delivery of outcomes framed by the syllabuses, and assessment policy and practice, underpinned by assessment for learning strategies, should be documented clearly in all cases. There should be evidence of planning for improvement in literacy and numeracy in all subjects. Subject planning should include the integration of student use of ICT into teaching and learning.

Almost all students receive a full twenty-eight hours of tuition. The need for a study period for a minority of students should be reviewed. The school should review the organisation of the school day: four lessons are timetabled in the afternoon when learning is not optimal for students.

A majority of parents and students surveyed are positive about the school. Communication with parents is good in some areas but there is scope for development. The majority of parents surveyed felt that formal school reports give them a good picture about their son’s progress but less than one third of those surveyed felt the school regularly sought their views. This needs review. The PA is very supportive of the school and has the potential to play a constructive role. A staff liaison person should be appointed without delay as the role is temporarily being filled by the principal.

2.3 Management of facilities

Facilities are generally very good and significant Department of Education and Skills funding has facilitated the development of infrastructure for science, ICT and sport. The school has developed an ICT Acceptable Use Policy. The operation of the school library, currently in disuse, should now be addressed.

The role of the fire safety officer is being carried out by the principal. Fire drills were not carried out during 2010/11. One is planned for early this term and this must be undertaken immediately. The school reports that it has a health and safety statement and there are plans to review it but a copy was not provided to the evaluation team. The board should ensure that the health and safety statement is in order.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty-four lessons were observed during the evaluation. In the majority, the quality of teaching and learning was good and in a small number of cases, exemplary. In a minority, there is scope for improvement.

Class routines were well observed in most lessons. In many, teachers shared the learning intention with students. The pace and structure of many lessons was appropriate. In a minority, there was no evidence of planning for learning and skills development. These should be reviewed.

The use of a good range of stimulating resources in some lessons is commended. Some good teacher use of ICT, for example, a visualiser, to promote learning was observed. In a small minority of lessons, there was overdependence on electronic resources that facilitated passivity rather than active learning. The use of classroom wall space for displaying
students’ work and providing a stimulating learning environment is in need of development in some subject areas.

There was a commendable range of learning activities and methods used in many lessons. In the best, active learning methods such as role play and group work were deployed and these engaged students. Questioning strategies were good in many lessons. The targeting of individuals is particularly commended since it provided important feedback to teachers and ensured alertness. In some cases, there was very heavy reliance on global questioning techniques and this allowed some to disengage. In some very good lessons, students felt secure in asking questions and in engaging in dialogue and discussion; this indicated both confidence and interest in learning. Particularly commended was the use of higher-order questioning observed in a minority of lessons.

Traditional didactic approaches with too much teacher input were noted in some lessons. Such methods do not cater for the diversity of student ability and thorough review of methodologies is needed to meet the learning needs of all students.

In a small minority of lessons, very good practice was noted in the area of differentiation with reference to task and methods. In most, more scaffolding is needed for students in the lower end of the ability spectrum and more challenge in the upper range. Differentiation is strongly recommended.

Monitoring of student learning was good to very good in the majority of lessons observed. Samples of student journals examined suggest that homework is routinely assigned in some but not all subjects. While some copybooks and notebooks were checked regularly, in a minority, there was little evidence of monitoring and of useful assessment feedback. In general, the level of formal, written homework assigned is inconsistent and in some lessons, there was none at all. Three TY student portfolios examined showed no evidence of written work. It is recommended that all teachers assign regular writing tasks to develop literacy skills and provide feedback that supports learning. The quality of assessment and record keeping is uneven and needs review in all subjects.

Classroom management was effective in most lessons observed. In almost all, teaching and learning took place in a positive and supportive environment, student behaviour was good, and there was a good rapport between students and their teachers. In a small minority, low-level indiscipline was not conducive to learning; all aspects of planning should be reviewed in such cases and the code of behaviour rigorously implemented.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

The school’s response to the seven most recently published subject inspection reports was taken into consideration during this evaluation. The recommendations of previous reports have been implemented in some areas but not in those referred to above.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Recommendations in the area of teaching and learning, specifically active learning, differentiation and assessment for learning, were addressed in some but not all lessons. The use of the target language previously recommended in reports was observed in relevant classes but there is scope for more independent student use. Senior management should
ensure that the next round of subject planning activity focuses on addressing recommendations highlighted in this and earlier published reports.

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

The school does not currently have effective enabling structures that would engage staff, under the leadership of senior management, in delivering improvement. Effective communications modes, necessary to secure maximum co-operation between the board and staff and senior management and staff, are in need of development. The appropriate involvement of parents as partners in the education of their children, and measures to include the student voice, also need to be addressed.

The board recently appointed a facilitator and a working group to address areas identified for development. The commitment of all parties to working with the facilitator and working group is evident, and the board appropriately intends to integrate the findings of the facilitation process, and the outcome of this evaluation, into future development plans.

The willingness of the board to bring about improvement, the commitment of staff and management to students, the outcomes of the current facilitation process, overall good practice in teaching and learning, and the positive responses of parents and students surveyed and encountered, provide a constructive basis to move forward.

Published March 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 welcomes the affirmations and the recommendations in the WSE/MLL report. These are particularly helpful coming after the College had already initiated a thorough root and branch review of its own organisation and structures. The WSE/MLL findings are an affirmation of the direction in which we were already moving. The College has moved from a hierarchical model of vision and leadership to a form of shared leadership. This change is underpinned by the creation of four significant new structures:

1. The Year Head Council, a senior management group and a key component of the shared leadership model.
2. A formalised pastoral care structure.
3. Class tutors for all classes in the junior cycle.

The Board, management and staff are fully committed to creating a climate which gives students positive learning experiences in an ordered environment which fosters self-discipline and respect for authority, and is conducive to high standards of achievement.

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 has fully discussed, agreed with and is currently implementing the recommendations emanating from the WSE/MLL report. These have been subsumed into the Board’s planning strategy and an implementation team has been appointed to oversee this process. There is regular contact between the board and staff in relation to the strategy and its implementation.
- The board is also working collaboratively with the parents association and the students’ council in designing and implementing a healthy eating policy for the students.
- The Board/Implementation Team has met with all the partners associated with the College before and since the publication of the report.
- Following ongoing revision and updating of the board’s strategy plan, action plans have been developed by Senior management to improve the teaching and learning experience in the College.
- A comprehensive pastoral care system has been established and the review of the Post of Responsibility structure is at an advanced stage.
- The length of lunchtime is being reviewed by management, Board, staff and parents.
- A Learning-support policy has been developed and implemented. Staff up-skilling will take place in the next academic year.
• Incoming first year students have been assessed for Literacy and Numeracy ability with a view to implementing a plan to improve these skills. In-service training will be provided for staff in the area of subject planning with a view to improving student learning and skills development.

• TY and LCVP programmes together with the SPHE and CSPE subject areas will be thoroughly reviewed following the completion of the Post of Responsibility review.

• The RSE policy will be developed following completion of the above-mentioned post review.

• Staff development policy and practice is being reviewed. A training day dealing with classroom-management has already taken place and other days are being planned.

• All Learning-support hours have been allocated for Learning-support purposes.

• The first planned Fire-Drill has taken place and the review of the Health and Safety statement scheduled for this year has begun.

• Child Protection guidelines have been fully implemented.