

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

Beneavin De La Salle College

Finglas, Dublin 11

Roll number: 605110

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**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 December 2013 in Beneavin De La Salle College, Finglas. 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.

Introduction

Beneavin De La Salle College is a boys' secondary school in the Lasalian tradition. It has a current enrolment of 488 students. The school offers a wide range of programmes consisting of the Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Leaving Certificate (Established) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). Beneavin College participates in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. 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.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- School planning has progressed significantly in recent years, under the guidance of the senior management team, who share a vision for the school and are establishing structures to ensure its achievement.
- Many teachers show a high level of care and inventiveness in their work and avail of opportunities to lead and implement projects and initiatives to benefit the students; school-based CPD has supported teachers' success in teaching and learning initiatives.
- The school lives out its mission statement through its strong ethos of care for both students and staff and the ways in which teachers and school management work together to achieve the best for their students.
- In most lessons visited, learners' active engagement was promoted and, in some lessons, their thinking was challenged and understanding deepened through excellent higher-order questioning.
- The learning environment was always supportive and mutual respect was evident; students showed a high level of courtesy and co-operation with their teachers.
- The school demonstrates a very good capacity for school improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development

- Further progress should be made on presenting planned programmes of work for all subjects in terms of learning outcomes for students.
- The presentation of data on students' achievements in the certificate examinations should be followed with documented analysis, which should then be used as one of the bases for planning for improvement.
- The weekly time allocation to a small number of subjects at junior cycle should be increased, in line with current guidelines.

- The focus of school self-evaluation should be narrowed so as to facilitate more effective school planning.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The school's board of management, at the beginning of its term of office, is properly constituted and has met on one occasion prior to this evaluation. In line with good practice, board members have accessed training and understand their roles and responsibilities. The board maintains strong contact with the Le Chéile trust, which, in turn provides a range of supports.

Records indicate that the school's board meets regularly, playing a commendably active role in the management of the school. At the end of each board meeting, a brief report, to be relayed to the teaching staff, is agreed. Consideration should be given to communicating the same report to parents, perhaps through the parents' council.

It is good that the board is very involved in policy development and ratifies reviewed school policies in a structured way. The board has strong links with the parents' council, through its chairperson, who is a board nominee. It is planned that the board will meet with elected members of the student council. This would be good practice and steps should be taken to achieve this.

The in-school senior management team share most management and leadership responsibilities and work to their individual strengths for the benefit of the school. They communicate on a daily basis and each supports the other in their work. They share a strong and commendable vision for the school and are investing much time and effort in establishing structures to achieve this. Their commitment to the school is clearly evident in the way they carry out their duties.

The schedule of posts of responsibility had a complete review, led by the board of management, in 2012. Amendments to post duties have been made at the start of this school year, appropriately prioritising the school's year head structure. Posts meet the management needs of the school, in as far as is currently possible.

Considerable progress has been made in school planning in recent years, under the guidance of the senior management team. In line with an ethos of distributed leadership, a number of members of staff have taken responsibility for DEIS planning, including elements of school self-evaluation. Planning teams have analysed baseline data, formulated targets and identified persons responsible for ensuring progress. Consultation has taken place with students and parents on a range of school issues. This good practice will bring further benefits when the current broad focus is narrowed.

The parents' council meets on a monthly basis and meetings are normally attended by the principal. The council is involved in a range of school activities and functions. It engages in fundraising so as to supplement resources available to students. Opportunities have also been provided for the council to input to school policy review. The council should exploit the potential of the school website to increase its level of communication with the wider parent body.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal play pivotal roles in motivating staff, providing guidance for subject planning and nurturing an environment of high expectations. In

addition, teachers are afforded and avail of opportunities to lead projects and initiatives, greatly enhancing their professional development. Many members of staff show a high level of care and inventiveness in their work.

Supporting and providing resources for teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) are recognised by school management as key factors in the realisation of the school's priorities, which have moved from a focus on behaviour and management to an emphasis on teaching and learning methodologies. In-house CPD, some of which has been presented by the senior management team, has been influential in the areas of assessment for learning, formative feedback and effective questioning. Teachers are also supported in accessing externally provided CPD.

A structure for planning has been put in place in the school, facilitating collaborative and collegial work practices. Subject teams have invested time and effort in developing subject plans, a number of which were reviewed during the evaluation. The content of plans reviewed included subject organisational structures, records of CPD and programmes of work for different year groups and levels. Some programmes of work were presented in terms of learning outcomes for students, which is good practice. So as to reaffirm students at the centre of the planning process, it is recommended that all plans now follow this example. Minutes of planning meetings indicate a strong focus on organisational aspects of planning. Meetings should now refocus on teaching and learning methodologies, in line with whole-school planning activities.

Most subject plans included data on students' performances in the 2013 certificate examinations. This will be more valuable as a tool for planning and reflection when data is not only presented but also analysed, as was done in a small number of instances. This should lead to the development of subject action plans for improvement. Particularly good practice observed in subject plans viewed included planning for literacy and numeracy development, documenting the addressing of recommendations from previous inspections, and, in the case of one plan, the preparation of a detailed action plan to address concerns identified at junior cycle.

Deliberate efforts are made in the school to try to ensure the curriculum meets the needs of students. At senior cycle, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied are currently provided and consideration is now being given to introducing a Transition Year. At junior cycle, as well as offering the Junior Certificate, a number of classes are following the Junior Certificate School Programme. A range of science, technical and arts subjects are provided on the curriculum and Art is available after school. It is particularly commendable that, from this year, all students have access to a modern European language.

The school fulfils its obligation to provide twenty-eight hours' tuition time for students and the provision of time for subjects is mostly good. However, the time allocated to a small number of subjects at junior cycle is not in line with current guidelines and may be impacting negatively on students' attainment in these areas. Prior to the implementation of the new junior cycle, every effort should be made to attend to this issue.

It is good that the school is in the process of increasing the number of mixed-ability classes at junior cycle, with first year being organised as three mixed-ability groups and one learning support group. This should naturally lead to a reduction in classes being separated into higher and ordinary levels for a wide range of subjects in third year, as currently happens. The school is commended for addressing this.

The school's inclusive ethos is reflected in the admissions policy, which has been reviewed following a previous evaluation. Support mechanisms for students are visible in the year

head and recently enhanced tutor structure that monitors attendance and supports retention. It is notable that student absence rates have significantly reduced over the last three years.

The code of behaviour was reviewed last year in line with National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) guidelines, emphasising positive behaviour and mutual respect. The full code is lengthy and would benefit from shortening. It should also be readily available to parents, perhaps through the school website. Responses to student and parent questionnaires indicate that the school rules are clearly understood. It is good practice that parents and students sign up to the school charter at the start of each year. During the evaluation, the behaviour of students was very good, both in classrooms and elsewhere in the school.

The year heads have scheduled weekly meeting time at which they discuss student behaviour and progress. They also have appropriate links with the school's care team that consists of the guidance counsellor, Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) teacher, special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinator, behaviour support classroom (Slí Eile) co-ordinator, school chaplain, principal and deputy principal. It is good practice that tutors meet with their class groups each day and follow a tailor-made programme, prepared by the tutor co-ordinator. Tutors play an important pastoral role, attending to the care needs of students in their groups.

To ease students' transition to post-primary level, the school has developed an effective programme that begins with the HSCL teacher helping to familiarise sixth-class pupils and their parents with the school. The SEN co-ordinator also liaises with the feeder primary schools regarding the aptitudes and needs of incoming students. This allows the collection of useful data. At the beginning of their time in Beneavin College, incoming first-year students follow the structured Belonging Plus induction programme, under the guidance of their tutors and fifth-year student mentors. In addition, parents are welcomed to social and educational activities that are arranged through the HSCL teacher.

The appropriately structured induction process includes the assessment of incoming students to determine their literacy and numeracy needs. In line with DEIS requirements, students are again tested at the end of the year to assess their progress. Literacy is currently the focus of the school's self-evaluation and many literacy initiatives are in place, including Accelerated Reading and the use of key words in lessons. The library plays a pivotal role in the promotion of literacy among the students and displays examples of students' written project work. The library is comfortable, well stocked and ordered under the guidance of the school's part-time librarian.

Support for students with SEN is effective, flexible and responsive to the needs of the individual student and models of support used include withdrawal, co-operative teaching, and the formation of small class groups. It is commendable that, following a recent SEN inspection, the school has been expanding the practice of co-operative teaching. The SEN team meets on a weekly basis and collaborates effectively with school management, colleagues and external agencies. In line with good practice, planning for the needs of individual students includes documented input from parents and, more recently, students.

The school's commitment to supporting students in developing their role within their community is highly evident. Good links have been established with the adjacent Beneavin Lodge nursing home, local primary schools, youth clubs and local Gardaí. The school also honours the Lasalian tradition through its involvement in the recently introduced Young La Salle project.

The behaviour support classroom, Slí Eile, was established in 2010 under the auspices of the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS). The initiative supports students with

behavioural difficulties, but has more recently extended its remit to include students with other issues affecting their education. The Slí Eile personnel play an integral role in promoting positivity among the students with whom they work, their teachers and their parents.

A whole-school guidance plan that is comprehensive and informative has been developed consultatively. It is clear that Guidance integrates effectively with all of the school programmes and provides a range of educational, career and personal supports for students. It is notable that learning and achievement outcomes are included in the programme of work for each year group and that links with Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), LCA and outside agencies have been documented. The guidance counsellor plays a key role in restorative circles that provide support and facilitate conflict resolution within the school as well as in providing information for students and their parents on a group and one-to-one basis.

Attainment and progression data is maintained and analysed by the guidance counsellor. Clear progress is being made in the numbers of students taking papers at higher level in the Junior Certificate examinations and the school's target for this up to 2015 is realistic. While a similar analysis at Leaving Certificate is not yet as positive, progress made at junior cycle is sure to impact positively in time. The school operates a student awards system that recognises, among a commendably wide range of items, students' academic achievements. This supports the nurturing of high expectations within the school community.

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 school is of recent construction and facilities are up to date and suited to the school's needs. The school infrastructure has been updated and there is very good information and communications technology (ICT) hardware in all classrooms. ICT initiatives taking place in the school include "bring your own device", the Beneavin movie club and teacher pod casts on the school server. In addition, the school has recently been invited to participate in the EU Folio Project to introduce e-portfolios as a means of formative assessment.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

In the course of the evaluation, eighteen lessons were visited in a range of subject areas and programmes. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was good with individual lessons ranging from fair to excellent.

In almost all lessons visited, teachers communicated the learning outcomes to students at the outset, appropriately providing a framework within which lessons were structured. Best practice was observed where teachers referred back to these learning outcomes during the lesson and where they were used in recapitulation prior to its conclusion.

Enthusiastic teaching and high levels of affirmation of student effort were evident in many lessons. In most lessons, there was very good use of strategies to promote the active engagement of learners, including paired work, group tasks, games and board work. There were some examples of excellent practice in the use of higher-order questioning, challenging students' thinking and deepening their understanding. The use of methodologies such as these engages students in their lessons and allows for differentiation

for those at each end of the learning spectrum. Teachers should share best practice in this area, within and beyond subject teams, with a view to continuing to implement these and other effective methodologies.

All lessons visited were characterised by an atmosphere of mutual respect in which a supportive learning environment was created. Students showed a high level of courtesy and co-operation with their teachers. ICT was used in every lesson and its potential was used to make a significant contribution to the quality of teaching and learning in almost all lessons. Excellent practice was seen when digital presentations were used that included a good balance between text and diagram, prompts to promote discussion and ongoing opportunities to check students' learning.

In line with the school's literacy and numeracy focus, most lessons included a range of practices to take advantage of opportunities to develop students' literacy and numeracy skills. In the area of literacy, these included referral to dictionaries, the use of the language of the subject and a strong emphasis on key words. Examples of numeracy development included paying attention to units and measurement.

Students' copy books were generally well presented. Students' written work was carefully monitored by the teacher in many lessons and there were a number of instances where very good directional feedback was provided. Particularly noteworthy was the setting of distinct targets for individual students by a small number of teachers. In one lesson, excellent practice was seen in students being encouraged to evaluate their own work and discuss success criteria. These very good examples of assessment for learning strategies should continue to be extended to all classes.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Almost all main recommendations made to school management in previous evaluation reports have been implemented. It remains to address the time allocation to a small number of subjects at junior cycle.

A number of subject inspection reports recommended that planned programmes of work should identify student learning outcomes. This has been partially realised to date.

3.2 Learning and teaching

All main recommendations regarding teaching and learning are being implemented.

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

In recent years, the school has been engaging in the process of self-evaluation, including staff self-evaluation, student and parent questionnaires and self-reflection within subject teams with a focus on teaching and learning. Whole-school planning priorities identified include assessment for learning and team teaching, both of which the school has already begun to implement. While some of these planning activities have been broad and overly general, school management is aware of the need to narrow the planning focus and formulate targets that are more specific and measurable. The school has produced its first school self-evaluation report, which describes its journey thus far.

The level of engagement in planning and implementation by teaching staff and management, as exemplified by the current embedding of assessment for learning approaches, clearly indicates a very good capacity for school improvement, which may improve even more with time.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board was delighted with the findings of the report in that there was significant evidence of a whole school commitment to live out its mission statement of care for both students and staff and that staff and students work together to achieve the best for the students. Evidence was also found of the students being actively engaged in their learning as their thinking was challenged and understanding deepened through excellent higher order questioning. Evidence was also in place of a supportive learning environment with mutual respect evident. Students showed a high degree of courtesy and co-operation with their teachers and it was noted that during the evaluation, the behaviour of students was very good, both in classrooms and elsewhere in the school. The high level of student care within the school was commended. The practice of co-operative teaching was expanded and the inspectors commended this. The school's commitment to supporting students in developing their role within the community was highly evident as well as the awards system that supports the nurturing of high expectations within the school community. The year head and tutor structures along with the care team weekly meeting structure were noted and in particular the successful induction programme for first year students. The focus on literacy improvement was also noted with many literacy initiatives in place with the library pivotal in promoting literacy.

The central role of the guidance was noted as it integrates effectively with all of the school programmes and provides a range of educational career and personal supports for students using restorative circles for support and conflict resolution.

In terms of teaching and learning enthusiastic teaching and high levels of affirmation of student effort were evident in many classes. ICT was used in every class with excellent practice seen when digital presentations were used.

The board was also delighted that the evaluation found a properly constituted board with members accessing training appropriately. The board is very involved in policy development with strong links with the parents' council. The management show a strong and commendable vision for the school and are investing much time and effort in establishing structures to achieve this. Considerable progress has also been made in school planning in recent years. It was also noted that the school has made deliberate efforts to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of the students and it was particularly commendable that all now have access to a modern European language. The school was also commended for the development of mixed ability classes. The school's inclusive ethos is reflected in the admission's policy and support mechanisms for students are visible in the year head and tutor systems that monitor attendance and retention. It was highlighted that student absence rates have significantly reduced over the last three years.

The Board is delighted that the inspectorate found evidence of so much positive work across the school and particular the success of the care structures. Overall, the Board is pleased that the report is so positive because Beneavin De La Salle College is very proud of the tradition of supporting students through the ethos of the Lasalian tradition.

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 agreed with all of the recommendations of the report in that they will serve to strengthen the provision for all of our students and ensure that the school offers an even more effective service.

The Board supports the management in ensuring planning time for subject departments to present subject plans in terms of learning outcomes for students and that the data on student achievement in certificate examinations be analysed and used as a basis for planning. The weekly allocation for a small number of subjects will be increased in line with current guidelines from September 2014. The focus of self-evaluation has already been re-examined with a view to narrowing the focus so as to facilitate more effective school planning.

The parents' council has already invited the student council to a meeting and the board will meet the student council following this meeting. A section has already been developed on the school website for the parents' council.

The Board would like to express its thanks for such a supportive report that served to help the Board to get an insight into the management, leadership and learning in the College and to direct the board in ensuring that the College is enhanced and further supported by implementing the recommendations