

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**St. Andrew's College,
Booterstown Avenue,
Blackrock, Co. Dublin.
Roll number: 60650F**

Date of inspection: 04 April 2014



**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 April 2014 in St. Andrew's College. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Introduction

St Andrew's College is a fee-paying co-educational secondary school under the trusteeship of St Andrew's College, Dublin Ltd. Founded originally in 1894 by the Presbyterian community as a boys school, it has grown substantially since it moved to Booterstown Avenue in 1973 and began operating as a co-educational school. It is currently at maximum capacity with an enrolment of 999 students. The school has a strong international dimension, with twenty-five percent of its students coming from abroad, which creates a unique multi-cultural learning community.

St. Andrew's College provides the Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year programme (TY) and the established Leaving Certificate. It also provides the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme. It is recognised as an International School and is accredited by the Council of International Schools (CIS) and by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) since 1984.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- St Andrew's College is an inclusive multi-cultural learning community where students are both respected and valued yet challenged.
- The board of management discharges its governance responsibilities with integrity and transparency.
- The senior management team provides highly effective leadership, which is founded on consultation, collaboration, communication and trust.
- Senior management has a clear vision for school improvement focused on optimising the quality of learning experiences and educational outcomes for students.
- Teachers are motivated, dedicated and reflective professionals.
- A dynamic, engaged and innovative Parent Teacher Association (PTA) provide a range of practical and strategic supports to the work of the school.
- The school offers a broad curriculum and an outstanding range of extracurricular activities.
- High expectations are set for students in all aspects of their attendance, participation and attainment, which are underpinned by a highly effective student support system and support for learning department.

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good with examples of excellent practice in many lessons.
- A culture of review and self-evaluation is embedded in the school, with a strong professional capacity for self-evaluation and school improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should ensure that action plans, relevant to the achievement of its identified priorities, are developed and collated into a single document, incorporated into the development section of the school plan, and communicated to the school community.
- A review of the overall post of responsibility structure should be undertaken, to assess if the assigned roles are fully meeting the administrative, pastoral and academic needs of the school.
- Management should explore ways of enhancing students' contribution to the school improvement process.
- Teachers should revisit the principles of assessment for learning, with a particular emphasis on formative feedback.

QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

A board of governors act as trustees of St. Andrew's College, Dublin Ltd. The eight members provide overarching support and contribute to school management through their participation on the board of management.

The board of management provides very good leadership and fulfils its corporate governance responsibilities with integrity and transparency, as evidenced in its minutes, published reports and established structures. Board members possess a diverse range of complementary skills are very well organised and informed on all school matters.

The board's vision of maintaining a high quality of educational provision, of student experience and of academic outcomes is central to its decisions. Decision-making procedures are open, clear and shared in the best interests of the school community. The work of its various sub-committees enhances the board's overall efficiency and effectiveness.

The board is currently overseeing the CIS and NEASC accreditation renewal process, which takes place every ten years and involves an extensive external and internal self-evaluation review. This valuable process enables the identification of medium and long-term priorities for the future development of the school.

The current priorities for school development identified by the board are categorised as: school ethos; teaching and learning, including curriculum reform; school organisation; staffing; and School Self-Evaluation (SSE). An extensive number of sub-themes have been identified for each area, with much work completed to date. To create greater coherence across the identified priorities, the board should ensure that action plans are developed and collated into a single document, incorporated into the development section of the school plan and communicated to the school community.

A comprehensive school plan is in place to inform and guide the work of the school community. Through its consultation process with the whole school community, the board has ensured that all required policies have been developed. A useful table has been created to identify the schedule of policy development and review. Whilst the criteria for offering a place in the college

are available upon request, the board should ensure that these are embedded in the published admissions policy.

The school is actively supported by an outstanding, innovative and dynamic Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Through its work, the PTA strives to foster a positive sense of community and to provide practical support to parents, teachers and students. It is very effective in communicating and consulting with the parent body and regularly seeks parental opinions on educational matters. The recent provision of a range of educational resources to subject departments, in response to their identified needs, is an example of the excellent support the PTA provides.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff is very effective. The senior management structure of the school operates at two levels. Firstly, the principal and deputy principal provide the overarching in-school managerial and strategic leadership. Secondly, the board funds three additional posts at deputy principal level. Each of these deputy principals has clearly agreed areas of managerial responsibility and each is highly committed to their respective roles. The formal meeting structures at senior management level facilitate the effective management and strategic development of the school.

The recently appointed principal has worked assiduously to get to know his school community. His vision is clearly focused on optimising the quality of learning experiences and educational outcomes for students. He has engaged purposefully with his role and brings a fresh perspective from his extensive leadership experience. He is committed to a culture of consultation, collaboration and consensus through his engagement with all partners.

The deputy principal is a long-standing and highly respected member of staff. She displays exemplary organisational, communication and leadership skills, and successfully ensured the smooth operation of the school during the transition period prior to the appointment of the new principal. The principal values her support and integral knowledge of the school culture and systems. Both bring complementary skills to their work, characterised by frequent communication and shared decision-making. They maintain a visible presence throughout the school and work collaboratively with staff, students and parents to further develop the school and maintain high standards in educational provision and outcomes.

A substantial number of additional teaching and support staff, including posts of responsibility are provided through the use of school funds. The established middle-management structures ensure leadership roles are distributed across many aspects of school organisation and operation, with appropriate reporting procedures to senior management. In the current school context and in light of curriculum reform, a review of the overall post structure should be undertaken. This review should aim to assess if the assigned roles are fully meeting the administrative, pastoral and academic needs of the school.

Communication systems are well developed. Email communications, weekly staff briefings and regular staff meetings ensure teachers have a forum to discuss matters relating to school organisation and student welfare, engagement and progress.

Teaching staff are appropriately deployed according to their qualifications and expertise. Teachers demonstrate collective responsibility, willingness and flexibility to engage with the schools identified priorities as members of dedicated teams. They presented as highly committed, self-motivated professionals with a strong work ethic.

The provision of a formal induction and mentoring programme for teachers new to the school and for post-graduate diploma students is good practice. All teachers are well supported and facilitated to engage in continuing professional development (CPD). Of particular note is the willingness of teachers to formally share their expertise and professional practice with their peers. For example, the English department has established a professional learning community. In addition, some teachers have begun a process of peer observation to further their pedagogical practices. These examples illustrate teachers' strong commitment to their professional learning.

In relation to subject department planning, some subject plans were very comprehensive and meticulously presented, while other plans provided a general overview of organisational and programme content, but lacked detail. A whole school review to identify the current strengths and areas for improvement in subject department planning should be considered. The subject planning process also provides a means for each subject department to identify and document specific ways to support the achievement of whole-school initiatives and priorities.

The school offers a broad curriculum at junior and senior cycle and makes very good efforts to inform and accommodate student choices. The school-designed TY programme was praised by students and parents as highly engaging, varied and progressive. The IB programme is both innovative and challenging. Its student cohort welcomed the opportunity to study the programme and valued the level of responsibility and skills that it promotes.

The timetable allocates time for each subject in line with syllabus guidelines. Where possible, the timetable should ensure students have daily contact with their core subjects. In a small number of cases, some students, with Irish exemptions or who study one subject less at senior cycle, are timetabled for study periods. School management should endeavour to provide tuition to this small number of students at these times. This would ensure that the school is fully compliant with Circular M29/95 Time in School

A highly valued induction programme is in place to optimise the transfer of students from primary school, and from other secondary schools. A number of additional practices and initiatives also support the effective integration and inclusion of students such as the student mentoring programme, friendship week, anti-bullying ambassadors and international night.

The outstanding pastoral care system and the fostering of a positive school spirit contribute to further developing well-rounded, confident and responsible students. High expectations are set for students in all aspects of their attendance, participation and attainment. Year heads ensure the effective management of their respective year groups, and ensure a very good system of communication between the form tutors, year heads and senior management. Form tutors play a pivotal role, which is enhanced by the fact that they stay with their class groups throughout their time in the school. Daily registration and regular assemblies facilitate form tutors to affirm students' efforts, reinforce procedures and monitor and encourage their engagement and progress.

The school provides for students of all ability levels. The educational philosophy and mission is given expression through the school's well-considered Learner Profile. This profile outlines the characteristics of the learner and takes an outcomes-based approach, which clearly focuses on the holistic development of the individual student. This guides the work of all in the school and is an exemplary educational approach. Students' uptake of higher level and their attainment in state examinations is very good. To build on the school's existing practices in relation to the analysis of student attainment, consideration should be given using students' measured cognitive ability as an initial benchmark when tracking and monitoring students' academic progression.,.

An excellently organised support for learning department provides ongoing and targeted interventions in response to the additional educational needs of individual students. A

comprehensive programme is provided to support students' educational and vocational guidance, in addition to personal counselling and group facilitation to support their wellbeing.

A well-planned Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) programmes are in place for junior cycle and TY students. A detailed RSE programme is provided for fifth-year and sixth-year students. Consideration should be given to reviewing the current model of provision so that the programme could be spread out over a number of weeks each year, which would be optimal. This will enhance students' opportunities to discuss, reflect and revisit issues and topics relevant to their emerging experiences and needs.

The range of additional initiatives and systems to support learning are highly praiseworthy. After-school study, study seminars, the "personalised learning" approach and use of the student journal for self-monitoring enhance students' responsibility for their learning and attainment. Reports on students' progress are regularly sent to parents. Parent-teacher meetings are organised in line with agreed procedures.

A significant strength of the school is the extensive range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities offered to students, including personal training, multiple clubs and societies, including the Model United Nations. The schools' mission of service to the community and active citizenship are exemplified, inter alia, in its Uganda project.

Alongside the recognition of academic achievement, students' involvement and contribution across a broad diversity of areas is recognised and rewarded, both at organised assemblies and at the annual prize-giving ceremony.

Opportunities for students to take leadership roles are promoted for example, through the student council, the prefect system and the mentoring programme. The democratically elected student council provides a useful forum for students to contribute to the decision-making process. However, in the student questionnaire responses a majority felt they did not have a say in how things are done in the school. Reasons for this response should be explored by management.

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 main school building has listed status due to the construction techniques and materials employed. This building presents a number of structural challenges which have been addressed creatively by the school. The board has recently overseen the completion of the construction of a new extension to provide welcomed additional general and specialist rooms over four stories.

The zoning of subject-specialist areas provides a focal point to display topic-specific information. The school has excellent internal and external sports facilities for the provision of its physical education and extra-curricular programmes. The school library and the employment of a librarian is a both a highly valued and valuable resource.

Significant investment has been made in upgrading the schools' ICT infrastructure which has enabled the use of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), the use of online platforms/blogs and electronic communication between students and their teachers.

Good attention is paid to health and safety practices and a health and safety statement has been developed. Participation in the International Green Flag is a positive endorsement of the school's focus on environmental responsibility.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good with examples of excellent practice noted in many lessons. Returns from questionnaires, administered to parents and students, reflected very high levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning. Almost all students agreed that teaching was good in the school and teachers encourage them to do their best.

A common characteristic of the lessons observed was the high quality of relationships, which promoted a positive and productive learning atmosphere. Student engagement and classroom management were excellent in all classes visited. Students were enthusiastic and participated well in their lessons. Teachers held high expectations for students' participation and achievement.

Teachers were well prepared for their lessons, with all required materials and resources available to facilitate students' engagement in the planned learning tasks. As a result, lessons were very well structured and paced and achieved high levels of participation and learning.

Learning outcomes were shared at the beginning of almost all lessons. Some teachers demonstrated good practice through expressing these outcomes in terms of what students should know and be able to do by the end of the lesson. In such cases teachers revisited these learning intentions periodically during the lesson and at the end to consolidate learning. This provided students with a clear focus for their learning and supported their engagement and productivity. The merits of this approach should be considered by all teachers.

There was very good use of the target language in language classes and students made commendable efforts to use the language. Pair work was used in many cases, which provided students with valuable opportunities to apply and extend their linguistic skills through participation in purposeful tasks. Where students are having difficulty in communicating, some sample questions and answers should be provided to scaffold their linguistic competencies.

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

In the majority of lessons visited, there was a very good balance between teacher instruction and explanation and student participation and engagement. Collaborative learning was a feature of many lessons where students were facilitated to work in pairs or groups. In some lessons, teachers structured group work so that it resulted in students presenting elements of their work to their peers and incorporated peer review and feedback, which is very good practice. When students are presenting to their peers, teachers are encouraged to ensure there is also an explicit focus on presentation and oral skills as an important element of learning. To augment the good practice observed, alternative layouts, which facilitate collaborative learning, should be trialled.

Questioning was used to good effect to develop understanding and to assess learning. In most cases, questioning promoted higher order thinking. Many teachers posed questions to activate students' prior knowledge, to encourage critical thinking, to reflect and to provide reasoned and considered answers. Good practice was observed in those lessons where students regularly asked

questions for clarification or to enhance class discussions. Such approaches increase students' involvement and responsibility for their learning and deepen their understanding of the relevant concepts.

The use of the homework journal and monitoring of student progress was observed to be good in the majority of cases observed but in not all cases. Very good practice was noted where teachers provided detailed formative feedback on students' written assignments. However, this was not always evident. It is recommended that the principles of assessment for learning be revisited with a view to adopting a consistent approach to establishing learning outcomes, criteria for success and models of providing formative feedback to guide learning.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Implementation of recommendations made in previous published inspection reports were reviewed as part of the evaluation. It was apparent that recommendations are acted upon in a well-considered and diligent manner. Issues related to the storage of chemicals, amendments reflecting the compulsory nature of TY in the admissions policy, the provision and use of ICT and the introduction of specific modules in TY have all been fully addressed by management. Some timetabling issues, particularly the distribution of time across the week in Mathematics, remain to be addressed.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Good progress was evident in the effective implementation of recommendations relating to the work of subject departments in planning, teaching, learning and assessment. Progress has been made in subject department planning and to increase the diversity of teaching approaches. The greater use of ICT, dialogic methods and collaborative learning has been adopted across the school as a means of supporting teaching and learning.

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

School self-evaluation (SSE) and review is firmly established in the school. The CIS/NEASC accreditation process has ensured that the school periodically reflects on its practice, benchmarks itself against established criteria and implements agreed improvement plans. Of particular note is the collective engagement of the whole-school community across the various committees and groups involved in the self-study and data-gathering process.

An agreed phased approach has been identified to the national SSE process. The structures established and the work of the core team in literacy and numeracy indicate a clear commitment to the SSE process. Data gathering and analysis has been undertaken and agreed whole-school strategies identified and implemented. Management and staff make presentations at staff meetings to ensure familiarity with the process and its purpose, which is good practice. Such presentations strive to develop a shared understanding and ownership over agreed interventions.

It was clearly evident that the whole-school community has the professional capacity to commit to school improvement through the self-evaluation process.

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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

We feel that the content of the report reflects a comprehensive scrutiny of the College's operation and a thorough inspection of our academic, pastoral and extra-curricular provision. Members of the Inspection team were outstandingly courteous and professional in their dealings with the College community and displayed a good understanding of our ethos, culture and mission statement. The WSE process was conducted sensitively and was clearly designed to encourage a dialogue with school management to inform the future development and improvement of the school.

The Board of Management was pleased to receive confirmation of the quality of their work and the quality of the leadership provided by the Senior Management Team. The commitment to school improvement, in particular, reflects our focus on optimising the quality of learning experiences and educational outcomes for our students.

In addition, the description of teachers as 'motivated, dedicated and reflective professionals' and the evaluation of planning and teaching as notable strengths are pleasing findings. The Inspection Team also recognised the high quality of relationships between students and staff and the level of enthusiasm and engagement of our students in lessons.

The recognition of our PTA as 'outstanding, innovative and dynamic' reflects the strong support provided by parents.

The Board of Management was also pleased to note the recognition of:

The extensive range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

A well organised and effective Support for Learning Department providing targeted interactions for individual students.

The Colleges' commitment to Health and Safety and our focus on environmental initiatives.

Finally, the recognition afforded to our 'outstanding' pastoral system, the fostering of school spirit and our commitment to developing well rounded, confident and responsible students indicates that the College is successful in meeting its aims and objectives. In this, our Learner profile is central to the experience that we afford our students.

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 issue of Board reporting was discussed at the June Meeting. It was agreed that the Board Report should have a strategic section detailing action plans relevant to school development and that this should be communicated to parents.

The Headmaster and DP's will undertake to review the post of responsibility structure to ensure that it meets the administration, academic and pastoral needs of the school as recommended.

Year Heads have looked to ensure the active engagement of year group councils and the election of representatives to the whole school council at the start of the academic year. In addition the Headmaster has solicited support for a student Food Committee to be convened in the Autumn Term.

Departments will receive targeted INSET and be provided with time, within Croke Park hours, to revisit the basic principles of AFL

The Headmaster and DP's will also look to address timetabling concerns relating to a minority of pupils. The balance of lesson distribution for core subjects across all years will also be scrutinised.

The Sixth Year RSE Day (15th October) will be formally reviewed by staff and pupils to evaluate the effectiveness of the present programme.

The senior DP and the SfL Department will look to investigate the use of the CAT4 Test to generate baseline data. This will inform a 'value added' approach to monitoring pupil progress and our results analysis.