

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

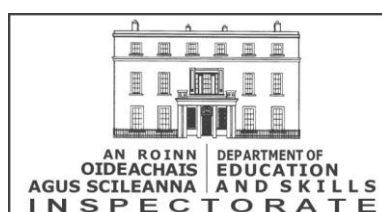
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Sancta Maria College
Louisburgh, County Mayo
Roll number: 64660F**

Date of inspection: 24 April 2012



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April 2012 in Sancta Maria 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

Sancta Maria College was established by the Sisters of Mercy in 1919 as the first Catholic co-education secondary school in Ireland. Under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST) it is the sole provider of second-level education in the local area and is an integral part of the community. While the original school building has served the school very well, the need for an extension to replace it is fully recognised and work began in that regard more than ten years ago.

The holistic development of students in a caring and affirming school environment is central to the school's Christian inclusive ethos. This caring atmosphere motivates students in developing good interpersonal relationships which promote self-esteem, mutual respect and consideration for others. There are 312 students currently enrolled, drawn from a wide area. A small number of students from local off-shore islands attend the school.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The school is inclusive, student-centred and community focussed.
- The principal and deputy principal provide very effective leadership.
- The school community is actively engaged in ongoing collaborative planning.
- Teachers set high expectations for student learning.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is generally very good and it was found to be excellent in some cases.
- A commendable range of student-support structures exists.
- The school has responded well to recommendations made in previous evaluations.
- School self-evaluation is well established and management and staff have shown very good capacity for change and improvement.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should oversee the development of a strategic time-bound plan to advance its identified developmental priorities.
- Subject department planning should be further developed in a small number of subjects.
- Once completed the guidance plan should be progressed for ratification by the board.
- The use of active learning methodologies should be extended throughout the school.

- Until the proposed extension is in place it is recommended that any health and safety risks associated with the current accommodation be kept under review and appropriate actions be taken as necessary.

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 board of management is very supportive of the school and is committed to fulfilling its statutory obligations. Collectively, the board members display a wide range of expertise. The board functions very effectively in the following areas: policy development and review; support for teachers' continuing professional development (CPD), and advancing school accommodation and refurbishment. The values of CEIST underpin the work of the board and catering for the needs of students is central to all decisions taken by the board.

The board holds regular meetings and has very good lines of communication with the stakeholders. Board members have a visible presence at school events. The board invites formal inputs from such key groups as the school development planning team. The board supports high-quality teaching and learning by activities such as regularly discussing student attainment and the curriculum. Since these activities strengthen the board's role in leading learning, it should continue to seek inputs from subject departments and from staff who lead other school-based initiatives.

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 board demonstrates a clear vision for the school. Current priorities for development include: supporting student and staff welfare; supporting high quality of teaching and learning; further incorporating information and communication technology (ICT) into classroom practice; maintaining enrolment figures; maintaining breadth and balance in the curriculum; developing school accommodation; continuing school planning and further developing the self-evaluation process. These priorities reflect the forward thinking focus of the school and significant progress has been made towards achieving many aspects of them. The school is advised to select and focus upon on a manageable number of these priorities.

To further advance the school's development work, the enacting of priorities has been devolved to a number of school-based priority groups who have developed short and medium-term action plans. The board supports school self-evaluation by monitoring this work with a view to ensuring that the planning priorities are achieved. This work is a key component in the school's self-evaluation practice.

The board is aware of the challenges facing schools due to cutbacks in national education expenditure and the implications these may have for resources and curricular provision. Given the school's extensive agenda for school improvement the board in consultation with staff should discuss these issues and articulate a shared vision for future school development. To support the management of change, the board should oversee the development of a strategic time-bound plan for the achievement of its identified priorities. This should link together the plans and policies already developed or in train and set realistic targets for the achievement of identified priorities

within specific time frames. Action plans should then be drawn up to support the achievement of targets. This approach would facilitate a more focused process of review and self-evaluation and enable the school community to establish more readily its achievements and areas where further work is required. The school's plans for additional accommodation should form a key part of this strategic plan.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The principal and deputy principal are deeply committed to the school and together they form a highly effective senior management team. They have a shared vision for the school, both were long-serving teachers at the school before their appointments to their current positions and they are well established in their management roles. They work in partnership and have a highly visible role in leading learning in the school. Their individual talents and abilities are complementary and their management style is open, collaborative and consultative. They have successfully driven and managed change over a number of years. They approach their work with utmost professionalism setting high standards for themselves, the teaching staff and the students. Parents indicate high levels of satisfaction with how the school is run and with how their children are progressing.

The staff is hardworking, demonstrating high levels of commitment and a strong sense of care for students. Staff welfare is a significant priority for senior management. The changed profile of the staff in recent years, due to retirements and the appointment of new teachers, provides both opportunity and challenge for management. Senior management is skilfully building capacity by identifying staff to lead new initiatives. High priority is given to CPD, based on a needs analysis, and over half of the teachers have undertaken post-graduate studies. The secretarial and caretaking staff and the special needs assistant (SNA) make a valued contribution to the school.

Distributed leadership is evident at all levels. In the current context of reduction in the numbers of posts of responsibility, the school's senior management, its post holders and its teachers have shown flexibility and willingness to share burdens as duties have been redistributed to serve the needs of the school. Examples of distributed leadership include the tutor system, which operates on a voluntary basis, co-ordination of school programmes and teachers' involvement in extracurricular activities.

Duties attached to the posts of responsibility are undertaken in a diligent manner and are currently under review at whole-staff level. At the beginning of the school year each post holder creates a plan for the year in consultation with the principal. Subsequently, post holders are afforded opportunities to give progress reports to the principal and at staff meetings throughout the year.

School development planning is firmly established and is quite advanced in a number of areas. A high level of team planning, co-ordination, and ongoing evaluation has been invested in continually improving the school plan. The permanent section of the school plan outlines the school's operating structures and includes all policies ratified by the board. The developmental section of the school plan incorporates action planning which is undertaken by key priority teams. The outcomes of such initiatives are bringing about school improvement in tangible ways. This is very good. To further enhance this work greater links should be made between school development planning and school self-evaluation.

The emerging guidance plan, and subject plans which are at varying stages of development, are other valuable elements of school planning. The schemes of work in the case of a small number of subject plans could be further developed through the inclusion of agreed developmental priorities, student learning outcomes, appropriate teaching methodologies, suitable modes of assessment and resources. There should also be further development of subject plans to include assessment for

learning (AfL) strategies and to reflect the school's ongoing work in relation to promoting literacy and numeracy. While a culture of review and self-evaluation is evident in some plans, others need to be further developed collaboratively. Following the analysis of certificate examination results in all subjects, each department should formalise their observations on students' attainment and submit this to senior management annually. This should lead to target setting in order to further enhance students' performance.

Communication among staff and management is excellent and includes regular staff meetings, a comprehensive staff handbook as well as the principal's annual report on the operation and performance of the school. Collaborative approaches to the running of the school ensure that meetings are well planned and regular, both at the level of the whole-school and of the individual subject department level. The goodwill of staff is evident in the significant work that is accomplished informally, in addition to formally convened meetings. Responses from student and parent questionnaires indicate very positive attitudes towards the school.

Leadership of students

The school operates an inclusive enrolment policy, which results in a diverse range of academic abilities and socio-economic groupings among students currently attending. Traditional expectations of high academic achievement are prominent and students experience very good success in proceeding onto third level. An academic monitoring team supports students well.

Students' welfare and educational needs are at the heart of Sancta Maria College and regarded as a responsibility of all staff members. A commendable range of student-support structures exists. Year heads and tutors play a pivotal role and are highly valued by the students. Good communication serves to consolidate a whole-school approach to student care. Social, personal and health (SPHE) and relationships and sexuality education (RSE) programmes are appropriately delivered. The dual role of chaplain and home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator is highly effective. While nurturing school ethos in daily life, the chaplain is also a leader in promoting positive, whole-school pastoral approaches. In addition, a range of retreats and liturgical celebrations is undertaken in line with the school ethos.

Practices in relation to the management of students are very good and are facilitated through the school's code of behaviour. Exemplary standards of behaviour and respectful student-teacher relationships were evident during the evaluation. Student leadership is promoted effectively through such mechanisms as the mentoring system and the student council.

Attendance, punctuality and retention are closely monitored and records indicate that students have good attendance. Daily tutor time is used effectively to affirm students' efforts, reinforce procedures and monitor students' progress.

The guidance counsellor is centrally involved in pastoral care and has good links with the special educational needs department. The guidance plan and provision are currently under review and strategies to restructure guidance provision are being developed. Whilst an emerging guidance plan is in place, it should be further developed to reflect a whole-school approach to guidance. Once completed the guidance plan should be ratified by the board.

Very good communication, planning and co-ordination are invested in organising customised programmes for students with special educational needs. There is comprehensive testing and retesting of students along with good work on needs analyses leading to good profiling of students and to a flexible model of provision for their needs. This is underpinned by ongoing review and improvement. To build on this good practice, the special educational needs team should formalise the good work done in reviewing the progress of some individual students to determine the effectiveness of interventions which have been put in place.

In a number of subject areas, team-teaching arrangements have been established and there was evidence that these are supporting the learning of students with additional educational needs effectively. The school should extend team teaching further, where appropriate, and as resources permit.

The school provides very good supports for students at various transition times. First-year students do a short subject sampling programme and then select their optional subjects from pre-set subject bands. The arrangements for the sampling of optional subjects and the pre-set subject bands should continue to be kept under review in consultation with the partners. Students entering senior cycle are provided with an open choice from a variety of optional subjects available. Subsequently, option bands are developed based on students' preferences. This is an effective arrangement.

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum. In addition, an excellent variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities contribute to students' holistic development. Uptake for TY is always very high. The spirit of collegiality and volunteerism demonstrated by teachers supports school activities well. The school promotes and celebrates achievement by students in many aspects of school life. The curriculum is reviewed regularly and it is evident that keeping the needs of students central to all decision making is a core value. The arrangements for timetabling are very good and include concurrent timetabling of some subjects. Additional designated teaching hours are being used for their intended purpose.

The parents' association takes an active role in supporting many school initiatives. The responses to the parents' questionnaires indicate high levels of confidence in and support for the school. Effective mechanisms to communicate with parents are evident across the school.

2.3 Management of facilities

Management of school facilities is very good and school management addresses maintenance and upkeep issues as they arise. While classroom environments are, in the main, pleasant and adequate for the variety of learning activities that were observed, several health and safety issues were identified as causes for concern during the evaluation. These relate primarily to structural matters and requirements for circulation space for students. The board's position is that these matters will be addressed when the school gains its proposed extension. The board should continue to ensure that all avenues to progress the proposed extension are being actively explored. In the interim the issues identified during the evaluation should be kept under active review to mitigate any health and safety risks and to ensure the best possible working environment for all. The school's two Green Flag awards reflect its commitment to its environmental responsibilities. The school's health and safety statement had recently been reviewed and updated.

Provision of ICT facilities throughout the school is very good, and there are plans to further enhance broadband connectivity. The school's web site is well advanced and is testament to a wide variety of extracurricular activities which support teaching and learning.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The overall quality of teaching and learning was generally very good and excellent in some cases. This was supported by the high levels of subject matter and instructional expertise demonstrated by the teachers. All the lessons had been well prepared. Consequently, the lessons had clear objectives, and ran smoothly, with all necessary resource materials readily to hand. Learning outcomes should be reviewed at the end of all lessons to gauge and consolidate the learning achieved.

Lessons were well structured, followed a logical progression and were tailored around students' individual learning needs. In the main, teaching methods were centred on a teacher-led approach with opportunities for students to ask and respond to questions. To support this approach activities were used that reinforced the students' learning. These, in several lessons, involved group work or pair work. There was scope to extend this good practice in other lessons through the use of more active learning methodologies. ICT was well used across all lessons to aid the presentation of new material and support students' learning. A particularly noteworthy feature of lessons was the high level of individual support that the students received from their teachers.

Subject terminology was reinforced through the use of key word strategies in many lessons. As part of the school's plan to further develop students' literacy and numeracy skills, the more widespread use of strategies to support literacy and numeracy development was recommended in some lessons.

There was evidence of very good practice in ongoing assessment of students' learning. The quality of the students' engagement during lessons was very good. In addition, students displayed very good levels of knowledge and understanding in responding to questions and in the work they were completing. Samples of students' work were viewed and these showed that homework is a regular feature of their learning. Very good practice was noted in a number of lessons where teachers had given regular written feedback to students on their work. There was scope to extend this good practice in other subjects through the provision of more detailed formative feedback.

The classroom environments were characterised by positive relations between the students and their teachers, with excellent classroom management underpinned by mutual respect. The classrooms were conducive to learning and many benefited from well-developed visual displays which acted as supports for learning.

The school informs parents of students' progress through school reports and annual parent-teacher meetings. A student questionnaire accompanies reports home in order to encourage reflection on achievements. Students achieve very well in certificate examinations.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

All subject departments submitted progress reports in relation to the recommendations made in the eight previous evaluations. The school has made very good progress in the implementation of recommendations related to whole-school provision. This finding reflects the high levels of support given by school management to subject provision.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Almost all recommendations made in previous reports have been implemented or significant progress has been achieved in relation to them. Given the pedagogical nature of many of the recommendations, continuing work is necessary to address them into the future.

The board of management should lead a whole-school approach to monitoring the implementation of existing and future recommendations and assessing the impact of their implementation on other subject areas.

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

The school demonstrates very good capacity to initiate change and drive school improvement. Since 2009 a post holder has been assigned to the role of school self-evaluation co-ordinator. There was evidence of a good deal of self-evaluation on the part of the school through the use of surveys, short questionnaires, curriculum review, end-of-year programme evaluations, and regular review of policies and procedures. This informs the school's priorities for improvement.

It is now timely to examine existing approaches for review and self-evaluation with a view to developing an agreed process for school self-evaluation as part of the school development planning process. A regular review cycle of the stakeholders' views should be established, moving toward electronic data capture and processing, to make information gathered as useful as possible. In time, the school should also seek to broaden its self-evaluation techniques to include focus groups and case studies. In this way, both quantitative and qualitative evidence will be available to aid decision making.

The school is proactive in anticipating and responding to the evolving needs of students and is very well placed to implement the recommendations of this report. The shared vision for the school held by all the stakeholders will be essential to the school's ongoing development.

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 welcome the very positive whole school evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning report. The board wish to thank the whole school community who contributed to the process. We also acknowledge the courteous and professional manner in which the inspectors interacted with the management, staff, students and parents of the school.

The board congratulates senior management staff and students of the school on the excellent findings of the management, leadership, teaching and learning taking place in Sancta Maria College. Consistently high academic standards in a broad curriculum, a shared vision with excellent planning were especially highlighted. The quality, commitment and value placed on the holistic education underpinned by an excellent pastoral care and special needs provision acknowledged by the inspectorate is particularly noteworthy.

The Board is very pleased with these findings.

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 is committed to addressing the recommendations made in the report. The board has already made progress in the following areas:

As part of a time-bound plan the board is seeking an immediate response from the Department of Education and Skills in relation to the proposed building extension in light of the recommendation from the inspectorate.

The school has recently commenced a shared distance learning initiative with a partner school and plans to further develop this over the next three years.

The recently reviewed guidance plan will be ratified by the board on completion.