

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Saint Joseph's Christian Brothers School  
Summerhill, Nenagh, County Tipperary  
Roll number: 65370B**

**Date of inspection: 25 September 2013**



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

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in September, 2013 in St Joseph's Christian Brothers School (CBS). 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 Joseph's CBS is a boys-only voluntary secondary school located in Nenagh. The school operates under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). With a long established history of education provision in Nenagh it moved to its current site, which is shared with Nenagh CBS Primary School, in 1970. Students are drawn from a wide catchment area and the current enrolment is 482 students.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

### ***Key Findings***

- The board of management has been actively involved in advancing the school's developmental priorities and while a range of whole-school policies is in place a number of key policies are still at draft stage and require final ratification.
- Relationships across the school are characterised by cooperation and collaboration and are focused on fostering pride in the school.
- The school benefits from the active involvement of the student council, though membership is restricted to senior cycle students.
- The school provides a broad curriculum for students with an emphasis on providing a wide range of subjects to accommodate students' needs and interests.
- The school's planned review of the Transition Year (TY) programme is timely as it is evident that the aims and outcomes of a number of the programme's modules are presently too closely aligned to the relevant Leaving Certificate syllabuses.
- Care for students is an evident whole-school priority and many positive developments in structures and processes to support this have been undertaken involving all staff.
- Senior management encourages continuous improvement of teaching and learning by promoting subject and lesson planning.
- In most of the lessons observed the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good.
- In one third of the lessons observed very effective teaching approaches were used that resulted in high quality learning among students.
- In a small number of lessons there was scope for development. This arose mainly from inadequate lesson planning or the lesson material not being appropriately pitched at the ability level or interests of the group of students.

- The school's capacity for school self-evaluation is very good.

### ***Recommendations for Further Development***

- The incoming board of management should prioritise the finalisation and ratification of relevant policies.
- The school should take active steps to determine the appropriateness of including the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) within the senior cycle curriculum; these steps should include undertaking a detailed profile of subject uptake patterns at senior cycle.
- The school's planned review of the TY programme should focus on the content and emphasis of the programme's modules to ensure that they reflect the principles and guidelines for the development of a TY programme as issued by the Department of Education and Skills.
- The composition of the student council should be reviewed to extend representation to include junior cycle students.
- Greater emphasis is required by all teachers on the use of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies and good practice in effective assessment strategies should be shared within and across subject departments.

## **1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

### ***1.1 School ownership and management***

The board of management is appropriately constituted and meets frequently. At the time of the evaluation the board was about to complete its term. The board members show a high level of commitment to the school, its students, parents and the wider community.

The board's term has coincided with a period of significant change in the in-school management structures. It has overseen the appointment of a new senior management team, and the restructuring of the school's middle management structure through the review of the school's posts of responsibility. In both instances the board has taken a very active role in the change management process.

It is evident from the minutes of board meetings that there is openness in the communication between board members. While there is evidence that summary oral reports of meetings are made to staff and to the parents' association, communication could be strengthened by replacing the existing oral reports with an agreed written report to be finalised at the end of each board meeting.

A review of the work of the board indicates its positive work ethic. The board has been centrally involved in leading the recent upgrade in the school's infrastructure, with the support of funding from both the Department and local fundraising led by the board and assisted by the parents' association and staff. The additional classrooms and specialist rooms will improve the school's capacity to meet the needs of existing and future students. The inclusion of a locally funded canteen and a general-purpose room within the development is indicative of the board's prioritisation of student care.

The board is developing its practices for reviewing and evaluating key aspects of learning and teaching. For example, the board is now reviewing students' attainment in certificate examinations. To improve the board's role in this process, it could seek inputs from subject departments that contextualise attainment and developments within subjects.

The board has recently ratified a number of key policies including the code of behaviour. However, a number of key policies are still in draft format and others are in need of review. The board is cognisant of the need to prioritise the review and ratification of a number of policies and it is recommended that this work is prioritised by the incoming board of management.

The parents' association is very actively involved in the school. It meets monthly and works in partnership with senior management and a liaison teacher. The association supports the school through its management of the book rental scheme and is involved in policy review and fundraising. It is clear that the association's role as a partner in the education process is valued by the school.

The board's vision for the development of the school has centred on the development of its infrastructure, the student care structure and curriculum provision. This vision is closely allied to the school's ethos and mission statement. Much progress has been made in relation to the first two priorities. The board is now in the process of framing its vision in relation to the further development of the school's curriculum, especially within the context of the new junior cycle. However, to further the work in this area, the remaining work on policy review and ratification must be completed, as many of these policies will support the development of the school's curriculum framework.

### ***1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

The senior management team is very effective and enjoys a very high degree of support from staff and the board. The principal and deputy principal have, in their short time working together, established a very good working relationship with defined roles and responsibilities. Additionally, in collaboration and co-operation with staff, they have initiated change in a number of areas most specifically in formalising the school's care system and in restructuring the school's timetable. Their approach is also evident in relationships across the school which are characterised by cooperation and collaboration and are focused on fostering pride in the school. The senior management team has a great degree of capacity to plan for the school's progression and attainment of the school's developmental priorities.

The middle management structure, as represented by the schedule of posts of responsibility has recently been reviewed in co-operation with the post holders. The outcome of the review is that the duties attached to the various posts are more closely aligned to the developmental priorities and the needs of the school. In addition, the duties have been distributed across the school year and there has been an equalisation of responsibilities, commensurate with the level of the post, across the team.

The student support structures have recently been reviewed. Principally, the review centred on formalising the existing good practice. Class tutors have in many instances taken on an increasingly prominent role in supporting students and year heads. For example, tutors are taking an active role in monitoring students' academic progress and using the journal to communicate regularly with parents. The role of year head is well established and as a consequence of the formalisation of the student support structures the pastoral and disciplinary elements of the role are evolving. The establishment of the pastoral care team, its focus on first-year students and the involvement of the guidance counsellor with the year head team are all positive changes in the student support structures. It would be useful at the end of its first year of operation to undertake a short review to establish how effective the new system is.

The school provides a broad curriculum for its students, including an optional TY programme and the established Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes at senior cycle. Given the school's subject provision and the skill set among teachers, school management should profile subject uptake at senior cycle in more detail to assess the level of students' compliance with the requirements of Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) with a view to determining the appropriateness of its introduction.

The school's timetable was revised during the last school year and the structure of provision changed from an eight to nine period school day. During the evaluation it was evident that teachers have made a very good transition to the new provision with lessons being, in nearly all cases, suitably structured to reflect the change. Additional benefits of the change include increased number of weekly class contacts in key core subjects and the school's management has increased flexibility in structuring the timetable.

The school's extracurricular programme while varied is undoubtedly centred on the school's involvement in a number of key team sports. This is supported within the school's timetable by very good access across all year groups for Physical Education (PE). The school's staff demonstrates a good level of commitment to the extracurricular programme available to students.

Students in the TY and LCA programmes attend work experience for one day per week. Given the substantial weighting to work experience as an element of each programme, the systems for monitoring and evaluating the students' experience should be enhanced. In addition, the inspectors' review of the TY programme statement led to concern about the weighting of subject content in relation to Leaving Certificate syllabuses in a number of instances. The upcoming in-school review of TY should include an evaluation of the programme's content and the learning experiences of students. This would help in ensuring that the programme meets both the needs of the students and the Department's guidelines.

The transition of incoming students to the school is aided by a mentoring system involving sixth year students. This is an important element in the transition but also provides opportunities for leadership among students. The school's student council benefits from the involvement of a liaison teacher. However, its constitution provides only for the involvement of senior cycle students. It is recommended that a more representative structure be established involving junior cycle students, thus bringing it more in line with Department's guidelines.

The school attracts a significant allocation from the Department in respect of special educational needs (SEN). The school's senior management and a dedicated core team manage the provision. The core team is currently reviewing its structures and processes through the finalisation of the school's SEN policy. Records were available to the inspection team and indicated a mixed model of delivery with emphasis placed on supporting students across a range of subjects.

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**

One of the board's and the senior management's priorities in the review of the post structure was the appointment of a safety officer. The newly appointed officer has highlighted a number of areas for immediate development including updating the health and safety statement and the development of a systematic approach to undertake risk assessments and completion of consequential actions if required. It is advised that these areas be progressed as a priority.

The school has recently introduced a new administration software package, one element of which is an attendance tracking system. As attendance monitoring is incorporated as a strategy within the school improvement plan, it was noteworthy that use of the new system was very evident in the lessons observed. This is good practice as it will assist the school in the collection and analysis of relevant base-line data.

## **2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### **2.1 The quality of learning and teaching**

Progress has been made in relation to subject planning and short-term schemes of work. There is a good degree of consistency in recording outcomes and actions resulting from discussions at subject department meetings. Subject departments provide senior management with a summary of the subject plan which is useful in developing whole-school priorities focused on teaching and learning. Where possible, sharing of expertise between subject departments is encouraged and this has had a very positive impact on developing and sharing alternative approaches and perspectives in relation to subject planning. In addition, it builds capacity across the school.

The quality of teaching and learning in most of the lessons observed was good or very good. In one- third of the lessons observed very effective teaching approaches were used that resulted in high quality learning among students. In a small number of lessons there was scope for development mainly arising from inadequate lesson planning or lesson material not being appropriately pitched at the ability level of the students or their interests.

Information and communication technology (ICT) resources are widely available throughout the school. Though not used in all the lessons observed, it was used well in most of the lessons where it was deployed. The broad range of ICT applications used demonstrated the capacity that exists among teachers to incorporate additional resources to support teaching and learning. Students were also encouraged to access appropriate on-line resources to complete homework. However, on occasion there was an over-reliance on presentation software as a mechanism for note-taking. Some very good approaches to note-making were also observed which in some instances supported the attainment of literacy objectives.

In nearly all the lessons observed homework was assigned well before the end of the lesson. This technique ensures that the students' practice skills are developed, and it provides scope for including extension activities to be included as part of the homework assigned. There was some evidence of the occasional use of peer assessment and in many instances teachers use the student journal to report on the results of in-class tests to parents. During lessons it was clear that students' homework completion rates were quite high. However, teacher corrections are heavily weighted towards monitoring rather than evaluating the work of the students.

Good rapport and affirmation was evident between teachers and students with high expectations set in terms of behaviour and academic progress in almost all the lessons observed. Students' movement through the school is good and students are on-time for lessons, appearing well organised and bringing with them the correct materials for class.

Questioning was broad and effective with a good range used, appropriate to the mainly mixed-ability settings. Questions were often used to check knowledge and in many instances used as a differentiation strategy. A number of probing higher-order strategies were observed which were very effective in challenging the more able students. On occasion however, students were overly supported in their learning, and in some instances this resulted in the focus of the lesson being too closely centred on examination technique rather than on learning.

The use of learning outcomes and lesson summaries was observed in most lessons and this approach provided a useful framework for focusing on students' learning. In a small number of lessons the learning outcomes were negotiated with students and this approach proved very effective. An emphasis on developing students' literacy skills was evident in almost all the lessons observed and was most effective when integrated through lessons rather than when it was treated as a stand-alone activity. Given the range of literacy strategies observed it is clear that the subject departments have been actively engaged in developing subject-specific approaches to literacy and this is very good practice.

The learning environment was print-rich. Most classrooms are teacher based and they have used this opportunity to strengthen the learning environment through the introduction of subject-specific and literacy-focused material in addition to displays of students' work.

Students worked purposefully during the lessons. Cooperative learning was encouraged in many lessons through the use of pair and group work activities. Such approaches should be encouraged as far as possible.

All subject departments have recently started to compare results against national norms and attainment is improving across and range of subjects.

### **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

#### ***3.1 Management***

The responsiveness of management and teachers to the whole-school support and planning recommendations in subject inspection reports has been very good.

#### ***3.2 Learning and teaching***

The use of learning outcomes including the recap of these at the end of the lessons was very significant. Where this approach was used it clearly contributed to maintaining a good structure to the lesson and thereby good pace and focus. As this approach had been identified as a whole-school priority for teaching and learning it is positive to note that nearly all teachers have worked hard to incorporate the principles of this approach in planning their lessons.

Questioning approaches were in many instances well suited to the mixed-ability groupings that apply for most lessons. While strategies for differentiation were used by teachers some

additional attention should be given to ensuring that the range of approaches used focuses sufficiently on higher-order learning.

In a number of lessons observed oral feedback and spot-checking of homework was evident. However, in fewer than half the lessons observed students were provided with written evaluative feedback on work completed. To support the development and implementation of the whole-school assessment policy, and to strengthen assessment for learning (AfL) approaches, additional attention should be given to providing students with written evaluative feedback on work done.

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

The senior management team have been actively developing the school's self-evaluation (SSE) process. The school has completed its SSE report following a review of relevant baseline data and having surveyed, staff, students and parents. A school improvement plan with a focus on literacy is also in place. Key to the successful implementation of the areas identified for improvement will be the engagement of staff with the strategies that have been prioritised through the school's SSE process.

A strength of the school is the capacity at board and school level to engage in self-evaluation. One indicator of this is the willingness of staff to develop strategies for implementing change intended to improve the school's systems and processes. Teams are in place to lead planning for the school's literacy and numeracy strategy and for junior cycle reform. While some subject departments demonstrate a greater capacity for review and improvement than others, it is evident that teachers within the school have the capacity to engage with the change agenda and ensure that strategies are developed to progress the school's development priorities.



## **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management of St. Joseph's CBS, Nenagh welcomes the WSE/MLL Report for the positive acknowledgement of the contribution made by the Board, Staff, Parents and Students to making St. Joseph's a school to be proud of.

In particular the Board wishes to commend the positive comments on the effectiveness of the Management and Leadership in the school as reflected in the report at both senior management and middle management level.

The Board also acknowledges the positive nature of the report on the standard of Teaching and Learning as observed during the inspection process.

The Board is pleased to note the recognition by the report of the caring atmosphere in the school and the pastoral care system that's in place to support all students.

The acknowledgement by the inspectors of the involvement and dedication of staff in all the co-curricular and extra-curricular activities is welcomed by the Board.

## **Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

A number of policies have been brought to the Board for approval and this process will continue.

As part of the curriculum audit and subject pattern uptake the possibility of introducing LCVP for the coming year is being examined.

The planned review of the TY programme is scheduled for the last term of this school year.

The composition of the Students Council has been amended in line with the recommendations of the report.

The use of Assessment for Learning will be discussed as a whole school strategy.