

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**St. Joseph's College  
Lucan, Co. Dublin  
Roll number: 60263V**

**Date of inspection: 5 March 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 March 2014 in St. Joseph'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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

### ***Introduction***

St. Joseph's College is a girls' voluntary secondary school established by the Presentation Order. It is under the trusteeship of CEIST (Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust). It welcomes students from diverse socio-economic, ethnic and religious backgrounds and from a wide catchment area. It offers the traditional certificate programmes and a compulsory Transition Year programme. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is also offered at senior cycle. The school is a pilot school in the Junior Cycle Network of schools for curricular reform at junior cycle. At the time of the evaluation there were 887 students enrolled.

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

#### ***Key Findings***

- Management structures in the school are of very high quality and the school is exceptionally well run.
- The senior management team provides outstanding leadership to the school community.
- Members of the middle management team are committed and dedicated and provide very good support for the smooth running of the school.
- The exemplary school planning structures ensure that planning for improvement is embedded into all aspects of school life.
- Members of staff are progressive and professional.
- The quality of care for students is excellent.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good to excellent with many exemplary lessons observed.
- The school self-evaluation processes are at an advanced stage and are of very high quality.

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

- At the end of the school year post-holders should submit a short account to senior management detailing the successes and challenges of the year as well as their resource needs for the coming year.
- The school should continue to build on and expand the whole-school emphasis on assessment for learning (AfL) to include giving formative feedback to students on their work.
- The student council structures should be reviewed to ensure that the composition and procedures of the council are inclusive of the entire student body.

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

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

Management structures in the school are of a very high quality and the school is exceptionally well run. The board of management is properly constituted. Members of the board are dedicated and committed, are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities and have had appropriate training for their role. Board members are very involved in the life of the school and are kept informed of all aspects of school life by high quality principal's reports. They are very supportive of the principal and have taken a number of affirmative actions to support the effective administration of the school. Members of the board showed a very good awareness of the educational developments in the school, for example, of recent changes to the school reports and of the initiatives taking place in relation to the promotion of literacy and assessment for learning (AfL).

The board has very good communication systems with the education partners. Agreed reports of board meetings are prepared for staff and parents. Members of staff and members of the student council are invited to speak to the board to update them on developments in the school. Good relationship with the trustee body CEIST was evident. It has provided training for members of the board. The CEIST representative at the meeting between the evaluation team and the board was very informed about and supportive of recent initiatives in the school. The board issues an annual report to parents and the trustees.

Parents and students are consulted in relation to policy development. The board has put in place all mandatory policies and a number of other policies that assist the effective administration of school activities. It is commendable that all policies are dated and contain a date for review.

An active parents association meets regularly, is very supportive of school management and contributes in a very effective manner to many aspects of school life. For example, it regularly organises talks for parents.

The principal and deputy principal provide outstanding leadership to the school community. They are hard-working, open and consultative, are committed to school improvement and have fostered a culture of innovation and creativity. Their approachable leadership style supports, empowers, and encourages leadership among the staff. The school's involvement as a junior cycle network school has been carefully and skilfully managed and the school has piloted a number of initiatives in this regard including digital citizenship and e-portfolios. All members of the school community spoke very highly about the interpersonal and organisational abilities of the senior management team.

The principal is an inspirational leader with a clear vision for change. Under her leadership the school has consulted widely with staff, parents and students to identify and prioritise action on a range of issues pertaining to school life, based solidly in a vision of improving outcomes for students. High quality communication systems, for example, the morning meeting with staff and the staff email system, have ensured that staff members are kept up to date on developments. In addition, frequent meeting times with members of staff across the school ensure that they have the opportunity to contribute to and refine this vision for change. The principal and deputy principal are very supportive of one another, work closely together but also have clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

There was good evidence from documentation examined and meetings held during the course of the evaluation that post-holders are informed, committed, diligent and collaborative. Post-holders meet regularly with management and have proved flexible in

regard to duties undertaken. To build on this good work, it is recommended that post-holders submit a short end-of-year account to management of the successes and challenges of the year as well as suggestions and resources needs for the following year.

Planning structures in the school are exemplary with clear evidence of targeted and reflective action planning for improvement going back a number of years but sharpened by the school's involvement as a junior cycle network school in recent years. This has involved the systematic mapping of strategic direction and associated actions of eight key areas prioritised by surveys and meetings with staff and led by the senior management team and planning coordinator who meet weekly to map and steer planning. Wider strategic planning structures also exist and a number of staff members are involved in action planning in areas such as information and communications technology (ICT), literacy and student leadership. Indeed, there was much evidence of distributed leadership across the school with individual staff members sharing their expertise in relation to areas such as further study, ICT and the world of business with other staff members leading to a dynamic learning environment for both teachers and students where teacher energy and enthusiasm and a whole-staff commitment to the fostering of excellence was evident. The school committee system where each member of staff is a member of a school committee that focuses on one of the eight key priorities is another indicator of distributed leadership and an emphasis on planning for improvement.

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

Leadership for learning is of a very high quality. This is evidenced by a well-organised timetable and an emphasis on the continuous professional development of teachers in relation to teaching methodologies, information and communications technology (ICT) and AfL and other areas. Following on from the 2012 "Self-Evaluation on School Life" survey, the staff has prioritised "Learning to learn" and "Assessment for Learning" as two key areas for development. Additional data in relation to these areas has been collected. In this school year staff members have agreed changes to the modes of assessment, and have adopted continuous assessment as an additional assessment component for house examinations. This has involved subject departments agreeing task criteria for assessment as well as changes to the format of student report cards where teachers are encouraged to give learning advice to students in addition to an evaluative comment. In addition, the school has commenced the tracking of first year students. As a result, the school has decided to introduce the moderation of student results within subject departments on a pilot basis. This attention paid to student learning and student achievement is highly commended. The school should continue with this present emphasis on Assessment for Learning as an appropriate focus for on-going school improvement.

Additional priority areas at the moment are the areas of literacy and numeracy. A commendable number of initiatives has been introduced in relation to literacy such as a library upgrade, the "book in the bag", word banks and a literacy section in the reports of junior cycle students. Very good data has been collected and a literacy committee is steering the process. Work has also started in relation to the area of numeracy and high quality data collection and record keeping was evident in both areas.

Management monitors subject department planning in the school. A range of subject department folders was examined by the evaluation team. In each case these were of excellent quality, organised to a common template and had a learning outcomes focus linked to resources, methodology and assessment. Other very good indicators were references to task criteria, to literacy and numeracy, self-reflective practices and action planning for the areas of AfL and certificate examination results. Students are encouraged to sit subjects at higher level and achieve very well in certificate examinations and the

school is particularly proud of the results achieved by its cohort of students with additional educational needs.

The school offers instructional hours in compliance with DES circular M29/95. A broad curriculum with a very good range of subjects, especially languages, is available. A taster programme of optional subjects is available in first year and receives widespread support from parents and students. The Transition Year programme has a very good range of subjects as well as a number of innovative optional modules. TY students undertake a wide range of activities, such as the TY musical and *Gaisce* awards. The coordination of this programme is effective and in interviews undertaken during the evaluation parents and teachers were very complimentary about the programme. The Leaving Certificate Vocational programme is also available for a significant cohort of students. The business department in the school and others provide good support towards the delivery of the programme.

Over the course of the evaluation it was evident from observations, questionnaires and interviews undertaken that the characteristic spirit of the school is one of respect for others. This was also evident in the motivational posters and artwork around the school. Many people interviewed linked this ethos back to core Presentation and CEIST values. Students and parents interviewed commented positively about the inclusive nature of the school.

Student behaviour is very good. This is supported by parent and student questionnaires. During the course of the evaluation students presented themselves as well-behaved, happy and secure. The code of behaviour stresses positive discipline and restorative justice principles are used to resolve any issues that arise.

The quality of student care is excellent. A student care team meets weekly and this team is supported in its work by the tutor and Year Head system. Counselling hours are available to students. There was evidence from questionnaire results and interviews undertaken that the school deals well with any incidents of bullying.

Student leadership is encouraged. Fifth year *Gluais* students help first year students to settle in to the school. A prefect system is also available and prefects have duties such as supervision and library. Student council representatives have been elected from each class and good links between senior and junior council members were evident. However, only sixth year students attend the weekly student council meetings and whole-school student council meetings take place only once per term. The school has prioritised the democratisation of the student council as one of its key areas for development. This should be progressed as soon as possible and the procedures reviewed to ensure that student council structures are representative of all students.

Admission procedures are transparent and well managed. The school has very good links with primary schools and uses information received from primary schools to organise students into mixed ability classes. Setting arrangements are available for core subjects in subsequent years.

Very good communication systems with parents are evident. Parents are sent texts when students are absent. A home school links teacher has been employed one day a week to liaise with students' homes. Parents interviewed indicated that members of the senior management team are open and available. Parents are very appreciative of the well-organised parent-teacher meetings and the new style reports. Additional information about school activities is available on the school's website and the school's "Twitter" account. During the course of the evaluation a number of student journals were reviewed. In some instances, they could be better utilised to communicate with parents.

The guidance systems in the school are very effective. Student and parents are very satisfied with the level of support they receive for subject choice. The guidance counsellors take first year students for Social, Personal and Health Education in turn and thereafter maintain links with that year group for all of their time in school. This helps assure that students settle in well and have a good network of support. All senior cycle students have guidance hours and good preparation for careers and college entry was evident.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is provided for students both in junior and senior cycle students. However, there was a perception among a significant minority of students, as evidenced by student questionnaires and interviews, that more RSE education would be welcome. This should be explored by the RSE team and the programme reviewed if necessary.

Very good quality support for students with additional educational needs, including students with English as an additional language (EAL) was evident, with very good and systematic record keeping evident. Individualised Education Plans were available where appropriate and communication with parents is excellent. Special Needs Assistants provide good support to individual students. The SEN, EAL and literacy teams should build on work done to date and ensure collaboration where appropriate. The model of support provided is mostly withdrawal from regular lessons along with the creation of smaller class groups for core subjects. The school should consider supplementary support configurations such as in-class support and team-teaching to further promote inclusion of students within mainstream classes.

A wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities support teaching and learning and the personal development of students. For example, St. Joseph's students take part in and frequently achieve well at debating, Camogie, the Young Scientist and Young Social Innovators. Students get frequent opportunities to go on educational trips such as the outing to the theatre that took place over one of the days of the evaluation.

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 premises is bright, clean and maintained to a high standard. Members of the school community spoke highly of the contribution made by ancillary staff such as the caretaker and secretarial staff to the running of the school. The school has a good range of facilities including a well-stocked library and canteen. Many classrooms are teacher-based. This facilitates the storage of resources. The modern school Sports Hall has been out of commission for many months as the roof is leaking badly. The board of management is exploring different avenues to address this problem.

Innovative integration of ICT into teaching and learning was evident as was a very good emphasis on environmental responsibility. The school is expanding and consultation is ongoing in relation to an extension to the school.

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

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

Thirty two lessons were observed over the course of the evaluation. The overall quality of teaching and learning ranged from very good to excellent and included many exemplary lessons. In all of the lessons observed teaching was effective.

Teachers were very well prepared for lessons. Innovative and effective use of ICT was frequently observed such as teacher and student use of the open learning platform *Edmodo* and *ipad* applications. Creative use of other resources such as “show-me” boards to advance or review the lesson was observed. It is recommended that teachers consider the use of peer observation to consolidate and share the many good practices evident.

In all instances instruction was clear and there was a strong teacher expectation of student participation in their learning. Students were engaged and responsive. Key strengths included the quality of student questioning where teachers used a mix of higher and lower order questioning to engage students at all levels and develop thinking, as well as the many excellent examples evident of co-operative learning, where teachers facilitated pair or group work which led to very good peer to peer interaction and strengthened learning. In most cases there was very good attention to and consolidation of students’ literacy skills where students were given opportunities to present and explain their learning and introduced to the key words of the lesson. In a few instances, introduction to the key words of the lesson was cursory or absent. It is recommended that students be given the opportunity to pronounce, write and review difficult vocabulary.

The emphasis on assessment, and specifically on AfL strategies, was very good. In all classrooms the learning intention was made clear. Where best practice was observed it was presented in terms of the intended learning outcome which was returned to and checked at the end of the lesson. In some cases teachers ran out of time and a review of learning was not completed. In some lessons teachers introduced task criteria for success which clarified and consolidated learning. In a few lessons the key skills of the new junior cycle were explicitly noted. Homework is given and corrected frequently and regular testing was also evident. Some very good examples of correction for improvement were seen but there was scope for improvement in this area in a minority of classrooms visited. It is recommended that a staff CPD session on giving formative feedback, to include formative feedback on reports, is arranged for the next school year.

Classroom management was effective in all cases and relations between students and teachers were warm and respectful. The classroom environments were supportive of learning with many examples of posters, resources and student work evident.

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

### ***3.1 Management***

Good progress was evident in the implementation of recommendations from previous reports and a clear strategy has been adopted in this regard. For example, management have steered subject planning in the school in line with recommendations made in evaluation reports. An extra period for Maths has been provided for first year students as recommended.

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

A number of areas were chosen from recommendations in previous inspection reports to check progress made. A commendable range of AfL strategies were evident in every classroom visited, although there was still some scope to give students more frequent formative feedback on their work in a minority of classrooms. Very good use of the target language was evident in language classes. Students were active in their learning in every classroom visited. The attention paid to improving the range and quality of teaching and learning strategies in line with recommendations made is highly commended.

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

The school self-evaluation processes are well advanced and are of a very high quality. Over many years management has engaged with staff, parents and students to assess and review programmes and activities. Improvement and planning processes are grounded in research, statistical data and surveys. The results of certificate examinations are analysed by management and subject departments. Good reflective processes are evident across the school. A comprehensive school self-evaluation report has been developed and school improvement plans are being prepared in prioritised areas. The excellent senior management team supported by the committed board of management and progressive staff have demonstrated that they have the insight and vision to plan strategically for school improvement and to sustain and extend the high quality provision that exists for students.