

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Presentation College
Headford, County Galway
Roll number: 63040Q**

Date of inspection: 18 April 2013



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April 2013 in Presentation College, Headford. 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

Presentation College is a co-educational, voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). Originally founded by the Presentation Sisters in 1942, inclusion and the holistic development of students are key principles underpinning the school's Christian ethos. The school is an integral part of the local community and is the sole provider of second-level education serving Headford and an extensive rural catchment area. The school provides the full range of programme options and currently caters for 787 students.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management functions effectively with individual board members exercising strong leadership within it.
- The senior management team are strongly committed to the school but need to refocus on key management and leadership responsibilities.
- At present, the duties of middle management are not matched well with the needs of the school.
- The commitment of staff is a main strength of the school.
- Good quality teaching and learning was evident in the majority of lessons with some very good practice in evidence.
- The school offers a very broad curriculum and a wide range of extracurricular activities.
- There is a high level of care for students.
- Excellent print and visual rich learning environments were evident in many classrooms.
- Based on the evidence gathered the school's code of behaviour as currently operated in not as effective as it needs to be.
- The quality of whole-school communication at a number of levels is not sufficient to meet the school's current needs and to advance improvement across a number of key areas.
- Shortfalls were evident in the quality of provision and in the use of resources for special educational needs.
- Some good progress has been made in the implementation of the recommendations of previous inspection reports.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The roles of the principal and deputy principal need to be refocused to ensure that the key management and leadership demands of the school are met.
- The duties assigned to posts of responsibility should be reviewed, aligned to the school's needs and developmental priorities and used to facilitate the building of leadership capacity among staff.
- Whole-school communication systems should be improved to provide for more open consultation with staff, parents and students.
- The school improvement agenda should be implemented in a more strategic way.
- Teachers need to focus on three areas to support and improve student learning: greater use of differentiation, more attention to literacy and the further employment of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies.
- The effectiveness of supports for students with additional educational needs should be prioritised for immediate review to ensure that students' identified needs are being met as fully as possible on an ongoing basis.
- The school's code of behaviour and the associated procedures for managing student behaviour are in need of further review as a matter of priority.
- The school's health and safety statement should be reviewed in line with current guidelines and legislation.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management functions very well and has a strong commitment to the school's ongoing development. The range of expertise among its members is a main strength of the board. There was evidence of very good collaboration between the board and all key stakeholders. The parents' association is very supportive of the school and its work is highly valued by the board. It is very positive that the board has initiated the practice of meeting the student council.

The board is actively engaged in policy formulation and review, the development of accommodation and facilities and in overseeing school finances. It is recommended that a cycle of policy review be scheduled to ensure that key policies are updated regularly.

The board is placing increasing emphasis on its role in educational leadership. The results of certificate examinations and the outcomes of inspection reports are presented to the board. To further extend this process each subject department should submit an annual report to the board outlining its achievements and targets for development.

The key developmental priorities identified by the board in collaboration with staff include the development of information and communication technology (ICT), a whole-school approach to pastoral care, implementation of the literacy and numeracy strategy, promoting positive behaviour and a review of the school's provision for special educational needs (SEN). Given this extensive improvement agenda it is recommended that a more strategic approach be adopted to achieving these developmental priorities. This approach should prioritise the school's goals and set realistic and achievable targets. Action plans and timeframes for their implementation should be set within the framework of a specific time-bound plan. Parents and students should be afforded the opportunity to contribute their views and participate in a meaningful way in a shared vision for school development.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The senior management team demonstrates a strong commitment to the school and its continued improvement. Its members have complementary management styles and undertake a range of duties to support the day-to-day running and administration of the school. It is recommended that the roles of the principal and deputy principal be more clearly defined and strategically assigned so that they can adopt more focused management and leadership roles. This realignment should aim to build capacity amongst the middle management team to manage key areas of school life. A distribution of management responsibilities to other senior staff members would enable the leadership dimension of the principal's role to be developed in a more proactive manner.

The members of the middle management team carry out the duties attached to their posts diligently. The work of non-post holders in the co-ordination of key areas of school life such as the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Transition Year (TY) and ICT makes a very valuable contribution and is highly commended. The posts were last reviewed in 2008. It is recommended that a review of the post structure be undertaken to ensure that the school's current main needs and developmental priorities are represented in the post structure. This review should build a greater level of participative leadership across the in-school management team and should provide for equity between posts. In this context the role of the year head should be broadened further to support the holistic needs of students. Structures and procedures should be developed for post-holders to communicate with staff and report to management. This would allow for a more cohesive flow of communication and inculcate a more collective and informed whole-school approach to the management of the school.

Staff members are committed, hardworking and display a high level of expertise and goodwill. There is good support for teachers' continuing professional development (CPD). The school's future CPD agenda should include differentiation and AfL. The use of in-house expertise to upskill staff in the ICT is highly commended as a model of training and is further encouraged.

Communication between staff and management is effected through a variety of mechanisms. While staff meetings are held approximately three times a year, it is recommended that they be scheduled more regularly and be conducted in a manner that ensures basic formalities such as the recording and adoption of minutes and the agreed prioritisation of agenda items are in place. Staff meetings should provide time for adequate discussion on issues raised leading to collaborative decision-making and consequent actions.

Effective structures are in place to support whole-school planning which is currently co-ordinated by the principal. Good progress has been made in the attainment of objectives across a range of areas.

Best practice in subject department planning was observed where there was a focus on learning outcomes linked to methodologies, resources and assessment methods. In order to move from planning as a content-focused exercise this good practice should be extended to all subject areas. While certificate examination results are analysed it is recommended that trends in relation to student attainment and uptake levels be recorded in a documented action plan for improvement. A template for planning in TY should be used in all subjects and modules as recommended in the TY inspection report. The template used should show clear links to the whole-school accreditation system for the programme.

The school has a substantial number of Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) students and substitute teachers. Mentors should be assigned to these teachers on a rotational basis to monitor the delivery of the agreed planned curriculum. This forum

should facilitate the sharing and the exchange of good practice in teaching and learning, as reported to be happening in one subject area.

Students are provided with leadership opportunities through the prefect system and mentoring programme and the student council. The democratically elected student council should be extended to include first-year class groups. Student questionnaires and interviews held indicated that there is greater scope to give students a say in how to make the school a better place. In this regard measures should be taken to raise the profile and increase the operational effectiveness of the student council.

A significant strength of the school is its broad curriculum and the wide range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities offered. Teachers are generally deployed in line with their qualifications. Time allocation for the different subjects is appropriate, however language classes would benefit from the greater distribution of class periods across the week. Notwithstanding the participation of some students in team sports facilitated by the school, it is recommended that Physical Education (PE) be provided as part of the core curriculum for all students in senior cycle.

There are very good strategies in place to record students' attendance. An analysis of these records should be carried out to identify patterns of non-attendance from which focused strategies should be put in place to address any identified concerns. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme is very effective in supporting the retention of students.

There are very good procedures to manage students' transitions from primary school. The role of the home school liaison officer acts as a central support for first-year students. In order to support students in making more informed subject choices it is suggested that consideration be given to the introduction of a short subject sampling programme. At senior cycle students are offered an open choice of subjects.

A good range of pastoral care structures and policies are in place to support students. The role of the link person from the pastoral care team to a particular year group should be agreed in a consultative manner and brought to the board for its agreement. Structures should be put in place to facilitate more open communication links between the pastoral care team, year heads and staff.

There have been a number of revisions to the code of behaviour. The evidence gathered during the evaluation indicates that some of the key recommended strategies arising from these revisions were not given sufficient time to embed and thus, the current code is not considered to be optimally effective in the management of student behaviour. In order to address the evident weaknesses the appropriate linking of the tutor system to the management of student behaviour is essential. The reinstatement of a clear ladder of referral, the agreement of planned early interventions and the consistent application of sanctions to address indiscipline should be agreed at whole-staff level. Appropriate consultation with students and parents should also take place. It is necessary that the punitive aspect of the code be balanced with an emphasis on promoting and acknowledging good behaviour.

Good provision is made for guidance. In order to meet the demands on the guidance service more effectively decisions in relation to guidance provision should be agreed collaboratively between the guidance department and senior management. Taking available resources into consideration, this provision should make appropriate accommodation for students with special educational needs, for personal counselling and for more effective links with the social, personal and health education (SPHE) department. The guidance plan should be further developed and brought to completion through the input of a dedicated working group.

Support for students with additional educational needs is provided through the JCSP, small class groups and some individual settings. Existing good practices evident in the delivery of the JCSP should be applied to the provision and use of SEN resources. In this context it is recommended that the JCSP team be actively involved in the planning, organisation and distribution of the resource allocation to the school so as to ensure that the identified needs of students are appropriately addressed. It is further recommended that arrangements be put in place for formal meeting time for teachers involved in the JCSP and those providing learning and resource support. Structures should be put in place to strengthen communication links with mainstream teachers. As students' needs are identified school management should ensure that the required support is provided in a timely manner.

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 has a large campus spread across a number of buildings and facilities are upgraded on an ongoing basis. The ICT infrastructure is very good and planning for the ongoing enhancement of such facilities is being ably led by an ICT co-ordinator.

General maintenance and hygiene is of a good standard in most areas of the school. All areas should be maintained to the same standard. To build on the system of recycling in place the school might now consider participating in An Taisce's Green-Schools programme.

The existing health and safety statement should be revised immediately and extended to take into account the new extension and the sports centre facilities. This review should be conducted in line with current guidelines and legislation.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Thirty lessons over a range of subjects and programmes were observed by the evaluation team.

Planning and preparation was of a very good standard in almost all lessons. There is scope in some cases for the potential of technology as a teaching and learning aid to be further maximised. In the majority of cases the learning outcomes were explicitly stated and in a minority of cases these were reviewed at the end. This good practice should be extended to all lessons.

Good quality teaching and learning characterised the majority of lessons with some very good practice in evidence. In the remainder of the lessons there was considerable scope for improvement. Where practice was good or very good active learning methodologies were appropriately balanced with teacher instruction. In many classrooms individual tasks and co-operative learning strategies were employed. In other cases the strategies employed facilitated a limited level of student active engagement in the learning process. It is recommended that there be an appropriate balance between teacher direction and student activity in all lessons. Some of the group work observed would have benefited from a more structured approach to include defined roles and timeframes for completion of tasks.

While there was some evidence of differentiation in lessons it is recommended that a greater level of differentiation be implemented for students at both the upper and lower levels of the ability continuum. Questioning strategies were most effective when distributed well across the class, when students were given sufficient wait time to answer and where they promoted higher-order thinking. These effective practices should be implemented across all lessons.

In the majority of lessons good attention was paid to subject-specific terminology and in a small number of cases students maintained word banks. These good practices to support literacy should be implemented across all departments. There were wide variations evident in the standard of presentation and quality of content of students' written work. Strategies should now be agreed and implemented to address this literacy need.

Homework is regularly assigned in almost all lessons. It is strongly recommended that homework be set for all class groups which aims to consolidate student learning. In some cases there was effective application of AfL principles in the correction of students' work. These included the identification of strengths and areas for development with commentary to guide their improvement. These highly effective practices should be mainstreamed across all subject areas. Strategies to promote and develop student self-assessment should be implemented to enhance student learning. Criteria for assessment should be communicated and students should follow up on the feedback provided. There is a need for a greater level of collaboration within subject departments so that a system of common assessment can be put in place.

The learning environment in many classrooms was exemplary and teachers are highly commended for their commitment to the creation of such stimulating and motivational environments. In all the lessons visited a positive atmosphere and respectful and affirming interactions were evident.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Senior management has made some good progress in implementing the recommendations of previous evaluations including the introduction of more single periods for Science, the upgrading of ICT facilities, the development of a critical incident policy, the introduction of Design and Communication Graphics (DCG) into TY and a more formalised approach to planning for Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE). The outstanding recommendations which focus primarily on TY and JCSP should now be prioritised for implementation.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Arising from recommendations made in previous reports some areas were selected for attention as part of this evaluation. Very good progress has been made in the use of keyword strategies and in the methodologies employed to facilitate active learning. There is considerable scope for improvement in relation to the implementation of AfL practices and planning in this area should inform the development of a whole-school policy on assessment. Greater emphasis should be placed on planning for differentiation in line with the range of abilities.

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

There were some good examples of self-evaluation evident such as the whole-staff review of a number of areas of school life through diagnostic window exercises. The annual analysis of certificate examination results and the use of some self-evaluation instruments provide further evidence of reflective practice across subject departments. It is recommended that the outcomes of these discussions be recorded in a more focused manner to support clear action for improvement. In response to the findings from the questionnaires administered, procedures should be put in place to obtain the views of parents and students so that these key stakeholders can contribute more to the school improvement process.

The school has the collective professional capacity to effect change and realise its improvement agenda. However, to drive this process forward it is essential that there is appropriate consultation with all stakeholders and that a process of strategic action planning and follow through on areas identified for development is put in place. The outcomes of the planning process should be regularly reviewed at board meetings so that progress can be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The school welcomes this report, its constructive recommendations and its affirmation of the strong commitment of management and staff to the school, the quality of teaching and learning, the very broad curriculum, the wide range of extra-curricular activities, the high level of care for students and the active and generous support of the parents and local community.

We are pleased that the report acknowledges an exemplary learning environment and a positive atmosphere with respectful and affirming interactions.

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 managerial / leadership roles of principal and deputy principal have been reviewed and more clearly defined.

The in-school management posts of responsibility have been fully reviewed and the revised schedule of posts was adopted by the Board of Management in October 2013.

Protocol for the conduct of staff meetings has been revised and new procedures have been adopted.

A revised mentoring system has been introduced for PGDE students.

Physical Education has been part of the core curriculum for all senior cycle students since the commencement of the current school year.

New structures have been put in place for the support of students with special educational needs, including the appointment of a post-holder to coordinate the work of our special educational needs team.

The Pastoral Care policy, which includes the role-description of the link person, was reviewed in 2012-13 in a collaborative manner. It is again being reviewed at present.

Plans are in place to commence a review of our health and safety statement in the current term.

We have been working continually on developing our Code of Behaviour and the Code has been reviewed and adjusted annually. We believe that the time and effort expended on this work in recent years has contributed to the positive atmosphere and courteous, cooperative behaviour noted by the inspectors during this evaluation and often commented on by visitors to our school.

The most recent review of our Code of Behaviour commenced in May 2013. A draft revised document has been considered by staff, parents' council, student council and trustees. It is proposed to present this to the board of management in December.

The school's revised in-school management structures include a new post for the coordination of school planning which is intended to assist in implementing the school's improvement agenda in a more strategic way.