

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Fanahan's College
Mitchelstown, County Cork
Roll number: 71040M**

Date of inspection: 25 September 2013



**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 September 2013 in St Fanahan's College. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Introduction

St Fanahan's College is a co-educational post-primary school in the scheme of Cork Education and Training Board (ETB). In addition to the current, rising enrolment of 209 post-primary students, eighty-four students are enrolled in the school's post-leaving courses. The school is a participant in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan and has maintained strong links with the supports available under the plan. The compilation of a common timetable is enabled by the collaboration of the senior management team with its counterparts in the two other post-primary schools in Mitchelstown.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The school is well led and well managed by the committed senior management team of principal and deputy principal.
- Effective communication and positive relationships are key features in the successful management of the school.
- Staff members in all departments are highly supportive of senior management in the collaborative operation of the school.
- Students are well supported personally, academically and vocationally.
- Students are exposed to as wide a range of curricular experiences as the school's resources and timetabling allow.
- The standard of teaching and learning was observed to be good, with some examples of highly effective teaching.
- The response of the school to the recommendations of inspections has been positive.
- The school is well poised for engagement with school self-evaluation (SSE).

Recommendations for Further Development

- The consolidation of a qualified core learning-support team should be prioritised.
- Plans should be established for the upgrading, use and integration of digital technology into the school's administrative and learning processes.

- The current focus among staff on teachers' professional practices should be reflected in subject-department plans.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is a properly constituted subcommittee of Cork ETB. It meets on five occasions annually. The board engages with the school's decision-making process. In addition to the review and ratification of policies and plans, the board functions appropriately in the oversight and management of the school and is an effective link with the ETB. The board has identified three principal priorities, namely, the maintenance of the current, upward trend in enrolment, the provision of staff to cater for increasing enrolment and the maximisation of subject and programme choice for students.

The senior management team of principal and deputy principal have established a very good working relationship. Although the team has undergone change, with the recent appointment of the deputy principal, the complementary roles and educational experience of the team, past and present, have been instrumental in the creation of a learning environment that is characterised by positive relationships, both within the school and with the wider community. It should be noted that additional change was imminent at the time of the evaluation, following the announcement of the retirement of the current principal.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The system of positive relationships and effective communication that has been established has enabled the distribution of leadership among staff. Although only two posts of responsibility have been retained, staff members in all departments have been highly supportive of senior management in the collaborative operation of the school.

The size and location of the school and the local knowledge of staff have enabled the establishment of systems that are an appropriate combination of informal and formal practices. Increasing enrolment will necessitate the creation of increasingly formalised systems. In this regard, it is suggested that, especially in the context of school self-evaluation and junior cycle reform, some thought at whole-school level be devoted to future needs. The recent appointment of a school development planning co-ordinator and the content of the comprehensive staff handbook are indicative of a commitment to staff development and to professional practice. This is also reflected in the range of continuing professional development (CPD) with which staff, including senior management, has engaged with the encouragement and facilitation of the board.

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 procedures for the admission of students are clearly outlined in the documents observed. The right of parents to appeal decisions of the board is stated in, for example, the code of behaviour and in the staff handbook. It is recommended that, for clarity, the statement be inserted under the paragraphs regarding both suspension and expulsion.

The school documents, such as the code of behaviour are positive in tone and are based on a clear understanding of the collective responsibilities of the school community. The documents include an outline of the achievements of the school and of students in the

recent past. It is recommended that this outline be expanded to form the basis of an annual report to parents regarding the running of the school in accord with Sections 20 and 21 of the Education Act 1998.

Students are well supported personally, academically and vocationally. The school's participation in the DEIS action plan has nurtured a culture of evidence-based practice that enables the maximisation of the effectiveness of the available supports. Collaborative practice ensures the significant participation of non-teaching staff, such as the special needs assistants and the co-ordinator of the School Completion Programme, in the support systems for students. Similarly, the active engagement of the guidance department and the additional educational needs department add considerable structure to the supports available to students.

The availability of breakfast as an option for any student, of after-school study sessions and of a quiet room for students in need of meditative space, contribute to general supports provided by teachers. An atmosphere has been created in which the complementary roles of student support and behaviour management are well balanced. Students were observed to be respectful, courteous and at ease in their dealings with staff.

Recent staff changes have left the school without trained specialists in learning support and special educational needs, and in home-school community liaison. Management should ensure the prioritisation of the replacement of these key staff members and the consolidation of a qualified core learning-support team. As an interim measure, responsibility for the co-ordination of the school's responses to students' additional needs has been delegated to a member of staff who works collaboratively with, for example, the guidance department. With the development of these supports, it is recommended that consideration be given to alternatives to the delivery of learning support during language lessons, as is the current practice.

The plans for student support under the DEIS initiative complement the whole-school support plan drawn up, in collaboration with staff, by the guidance department and the plan for learning support under the additional educational needs department. In the longer term, schools will focus on student support in the context of SSE. In that context, it is suggested that the school's student-support plans, which are of a high standard, continue to affirm these supports as an important element of the school's current focus on teaching and learning.

A range of subject and programme options is provided for students, in addition to the programmes leading to the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations. At senior level, where the demand is sufficient to run the programmes, students may opt for the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) or the Transition Year (TY) programme. Within these programmes, students are exposed to as wide a range of curricular experiences as the school's resources and timetabling allow. These include the experience of all available subjects and participation in the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) during first year. The structure of the timetable displays efficient use of the available resources and is an indicator of the value added by the ongoing review of programmes in which the staff is engaged.

Students' preferences form the basis for decisions by senior management regarding subject and programme provision. This is good practice and reflects the openness on the part of the school to the student voice. The student council is of long standing and is well structured. Meetings of the council are followed by consultations with the senior management team with a view to possible school responses to issues emerging from the student body. The responses of students, in a focus group and in questionnaire responses during the evaluation, were universally positive. Ongoing formal and informal consultation with

students is a result of, and a factor in, the environment of positive relationships in the school.

The responses of parents in the various opportunities presented by the evaluation were, in most cases, very positive. Parental involvement is encouraged by senior management and was noted in the activities of the parents' council, the board of management and in responses to a questionnaire. It is clear that parents are consulted as appropriate in the development of policies and in the ongoing monitoring of student progress through, for example, regular checks of students' journals. The parents' council is not, currently, affiliated to a national association. Consideration should be given to such affiliation as it allows an additional opportunity for parents to participate in the development of national initiatives in education. Similarly, communication issues, indicated by some responses to a questionnaire administered during the evaluation, should be considered with a view to enhancing the already positive views of parents about the school.

1.3 Management of facilities

The school and its environs are clean and well maintained. In addition to the regular classrooms and specialist rooms, some flexible spaces, such as the cafeteria, are used effectively for larger assemblies and ongoing activities such as the breakfast club and homework club. Rooms have been upgraded on a phased basis. Among recent developments have been the refurbishment, to a high standard, of the library and of a science laboratory, and the installation of fixed data projectors with broadband internet access in all classrooms. Effective use of these was observed throughout this evaluation. In light of the availability of space in the school, and in light of the expressed interest of students, it is suggested that consideration be given to engagement with national initiatives, such as the Green-Schools Ireland programme, the Healthy Schools programme and the Active School Flag initiative.

A clear focus on safety was observed. Classroom procedures were carefully monitored by teachers, in keeping with the lesson and subject content. Safety signage and markings were in place and were appropriate to the functions for which the rooms were designed.

Some information and communication technology (ICT) issues were apparent during the evaluation, affecting, mainly, the administrative functions of the school. It was clear that efforts were being made to rectify matters. Considering the potentially disruptive effects of such issues, they should be addressed as a matter of priority. In that context, it is suggested that a longer-term, integrated approach be taken to the development of ICT, both as an administrative tool and, in anticipation of developments in ICT, as supports for effective teaching.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The standard of teaching and learning was observed to be good, with some examples of highly effective teaching among the nineteen lesson-periods observed. Lessons were well planned and prepared. Materials and resources were appropriate to the content of lessons. Familiar routines were employed by teachers, providing effective structures and familiar lesson sequences for students.

The positive learning atmosphere that had been created in classrooms was clearly founded on effective relationships between teachers and students. Teachers were enabled, in that context, to engage personal styles that were creative, affirmative and based on substantial knowledge of the subjects taught. In light of such good practice, it is recommended that it be shared among teachers. The emphasis on teaching and learning in the current phase of

SSE is well supported, at ETB level through initiatives such as the Learning School Project and Instructional Leadership Programme, and is in keeping with this recommendation. Similarly, the school's engagement with the Droichead programme of teacher induction adds another dimension to a focus on, and to consideration of teachers' professional practice.

Individual inspector feedback to teachers included affirmative comments regarding, for example, the clear statement of the learning intentions and desired outcomes of lessons. In some cases, these were stated orally, and, in others, in written form on the whiteboard. Also, assessment practice included a short recapitulation of the aims and objectives prior to the conclusion of some lessons. It was clear that teachers' understanding of students' levels of attainment and interest facilitated the use of questions and of formative assessment that were both challenging and affirmative. Teachers' familiarity and comfort in the classrooms were signified by their movement among students, the variety of teaching methods used, including work in pairs and in small groups that demanded some student activity, and by minimal reliance on the textbook in favour of the imaginative use of other resources.

Although the staff has opted for a current focus on numeracy, in response to a review under SSE, it was clear, both from the ongoing comments of teachers and from the wall displays, that literacy has not been neglected. Classrooms were visually and print rich, with examples of students' work in numeracy and literacy decorating the rooms and corridors, affirming a collaborative learning environment in which student effort is celebrated.

Students were observed to be respectful and engaged, both in the course of lessons and in general interactions throughout the school. This clearly reflects the positive engagements of staff in student support and learning. Teaching was observed to be an interactive process for students and teachers in which students' contributions were encouraged and affirmed. This positive learning environment is the key finding of this report, facilitating, as it does, the work of teachers, management and staff, and the engagement of students in their learning.

Subject-department plans were observed to be current and, in most cases, clearly presented. It was clear from the observation of the plans that formal and informal discussion among colleagues had had a strong influence on current practices, both in and out of classrooms. It was noted, for example, that the minutes of some subject-department meetings included references to reviews of student progress and, in particular, to general performance in the certificate examinations. This is good practice and is recommended for inclusion in all subject department plans.

A focus on evaluation and review was evident in the plans. Many plans included a clear analysis of the results of certificate examinations. A subject-department awareness and interest in current national curricular developments was also evident in references to junior cycle reform, and to literacy and numeracy. Subject-department plans should now assume a developmental focus in the context of SSE to complement the, mainly descriptive, content of current plans. This should include some reference to teachers' professional practice in teaching and learning, and some detail of the actions to be taken as a result of self-evaluation.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

The response of the school to the recommendations of inspections has been positive. By its encouragement of responses among staff in general, senior management has enabled the

implementation of recommendations, such as the creation of a print and visually rich environment and the involvement of staff in subject-department planning. The profile of Science has been raised, as recommended, as a result of initiatives such as the refurbishment of science laboratories and displays by students and staff during open days.

The resolution of some ongoing issues regarding the ICT infrastructure was under negotiation with the ETB at the time of the evaluation and this underlies one of the recommendations of this report.

3.2 Learning and teaching

It was clear from the lessons observed that staff had responded positively to recommendations regarding professional teaching practices. Recommendations regarding the use of the target language in language lessons and the employment of teaching methods that facilitated student interaction and activity were observed, during lessons and in subject-department plans, to have been implemented.

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

The school is well poised for engagement with the process of SSE as outlined in current Department publications. Participation in the DEIS action plan has provided staff with experiences of evidence-based planning and practice. Engagement by staff in the development of instructional leadership and other initiatives supported by the ETB and with a focus on teaching practice has fostered a culture of self-reflection that is central to effective SSE. Symbolic of this are the inclusion of guidelines on professional practice in the staff handbook and the display of relevant information in the staffroom.

Other indicators of the school's capacity for improvement include the environment of effective communication and positive relationships among staff. The openness of teachers to parent and student participation in the process of self-evaluation also places the school in an advantageous position in relation to ongoing reform, particularly of the junior cycle, where such participation is, clearly, a priority.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

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

In promoting the integration of teaching methodologies into everyday practice, plans are in place to further engage teachers with continuous professional development training to enhance and disseminate methods of best teaching practice. A second cohort of teachers will engage with the Instructional Leadership Programme and will form an Academic Council to spearhead teaching and learning within the school.

The school is currently planning for further consolidation of our core learning-support team. Engagement with services such as NCSE, PDST, SESS and NBSS has enabled the core team to establish an effective and unified approach towards the delivery of education to those with special educational needs.

The current IT structure within the school has been audited and works are currently underway in upgrading both the server and internal network. These works in addition to the introduction of 100Mbit Broadband in the summer months of 2014 will provide further scope for the upgrading, use and integration of digital technology into the school's administrative and learning processes.

Templates are currently being devised to ensure that teachers' professional practice is reflected in subject-department plans. These plans are constantly reviewed. Specific times within the upcoming academic year have been allocated to enable teachers to reflect and update plans at department level.