

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Paul's Community College
Waterford City
Roll number: 72241E**

Date of inspection: April 2013



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS
INSPECTORATE**

Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April 2013 in St Paul's Community 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.

Introduction

St Paul's Community College was founded in 1976 to serve the growing community in the western suburb of Waterford City. Changing demographics and challenging socio-economic factors have impacted significantly on the school in recent years, resulting in a decrease in student enrolment. The school is also the only mainstream provider of second level education for students with autism in Waterford City. The school currently participates in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) initiative. The board of management 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.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- St Paul's Community College has the capacity for meaningful school improvement.
- The board of management is committed to the provision of inclusive education for all.
- The commitment and work of the senior management team contributes to the effective management of the school.
- Assistant principals carry out significant duties to support senior management.
- The school is welcoming and inclusive; a strong ethos of care permeates all aspects of school life.
- A very broad curriculum is offered to meet the varied needs and interests of the student cohort.
- The school provides well for students with special education needs (SEN) and work is in progress to extend supports for higher-ability students.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good with examples of very good or excellent practice.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The Board of Management should ensure that its composition and term of office are in accordance with the articles of management for VEC schools.
- Interrelated priorities identified for development should be clustered together and strategic plans should be developed for each cluster.
- The senior management team should further develop its leadership role, to progress the school at a time of significant change.

- Senior management and staff should explore ways in which middle management duties and responsibilities can continue to be fulfilled within available resources.
- Current deficits in instruction time and timetabling should be addressed.
- Initiatives to support higher-ability students should be progressed.
- Systems to mentor and track students' academic progress should be considered to complement the high quality pastoral supports in place.
- Teachers should ensure that an appropriate balance is maintained between teacher instruction and active student engagement.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is keenly aware of the school's mission to provide inclusive education for all students living in Waterford and its hinterland. Members are kept informed of all that is happening in the school through the principal's report. Other matters discussed include policy ratification and disciplinary decisions. However, while the principal's report forms the basis of most board meetings, there was little evidence of active discussion arising from these reports and leading to key decisions. The pertinent points from such discussions should be included in the minutes of board meetings. An agreed report should be drawn up at the end of each meeting for dissemination to the teaching staff and to the members of the parents' association. The Board of Management should also ensure that its composition and term of office are in accordance with the articles of management for VEC schools.

School management has identified a wide range of priorities for development. These include increasing student engagement with the curriculum, improving retention and academic attainment, further developing student supports, and promoting student and parental educational motivation. Other priorities identified involve developing the inclusiveness policy, improving in-house staff support systems, developing the curriculum, promoting the school and maintaining or increasing the number of girls in the school.

Given that these are all significant priorities, many of which are interrelated, it is recommended that they be clustered together, categorised and prioritised. A strategic plan should then be developed for each cluster, outlining specific action plans that are measurable, attainable, realistic and timely. For example, student engagement with the curriculum, academic attainment, student and parental educational motivation could form one such cluster. Work in this area could also support desired improvements regarding the student cohort and could be worked on in tandem with action plans to increase the number of girls and higher-achieving students.

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 small but highly committed parents' association is cognisant of the value of parental support in promoting educational progression. Members have carried out significant work in recent years managing the school's book rental scheme, organising talks and events for parents and responding to consultation regarding whole-school school policies.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal maintain daily consultation and communication with each other and have a visible presence in the school. This co-operation contributes to the effective management of the school. The principal's strong commitment to the school is demonstrated in her ongoing work to promote good staff and management relationships. She is supported in her work by the deputy principal who, in addition to day-to-day administrative tasks, leads school planning and development, with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy development. The challenge now for the members of the senior management team is to further develop their leadership roles, bringing the school forward at a time of significant change due to recent retirements, reduced staffing allocations and redeployments.

Year heads, all of whom are assistant principals, carry out a range of significant duties to support senior management. Their work in the management of students is twofold: a disciplinary role, and an advocacy role liaising with parents, the educational welfare officer and community workers. Special duties teachers carry out a range of co-ordination duties which also contribute to the effective management of the school. Senior management and staff should explore a range of ways in which student management duties and responsibilities can continue to be fulfilled into the future within available resources.

Continuing professional development (CPD) in recent years has focused on literacy and numeracy and the development of comprehensive policies and strategies to support improvements in this regard. In-service has also been provided to support differentiation. This is of particular importance given the mixed-ability nature of the student cohort. Subject departments should continue to progress this work, integrating identified strategies into their schemes of work for daily teaching and learning. When planning for further professional development consideration should be given to assessment for learning.

Good communication systems are in place including internal email, a texting system for parents and a well designed school website. Good links have been forged with the local community, local business and Waterford Institute of Technology for the purpose of supporting students' progression through and beyond school.

The school has an open and inclusive admissions policy and there are currently 387 students in the second-level section of the school. Efforts to improve enrolment have included working with the local primary schools, organising open days in the school and investigating bus routes that would facilitate greater ease of access to the school. This has resulted in an increased number of student applications for the forthcoming school year.

The school welcomes and supports students of all abilities and very good practices are in place to enable students with special education needs (SEN) including students with autism to progress both academically and socially. Provision for students with SEN includes individual or small group tuition or team teaching within the mainstream classroom. Students with autism receive individual tuition, but are also integrated effectively into some mainstream lessons with the support of a special needs assistant.

The school recognises the benefits of having a student cohort representing the full spectrum of ability. Concerns in this regard have resulted in a number of teachers engaging in an initiative entitled 'Equality of Challenge', to identify and support higher-ability students. Much of the work done to date has focused on raising teachers' awareness of such students and how they might be supported. The project should now be progressed to a pilot stage whereby a number of teachers would implement the strategies promoted in this initiative and evaluate them with a view to integrating them successfully throughout the school. The school's engagement with this project should be communicated to the wider community.

The school offers a range of programmes to meet the varied needs of the student cohort. The success to date of the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) in supporting student progress and retention has resulted in a recent decision to offer it to all students in junior cycle. The very good work carried out by the JCSP library service with its range of supportive and creative resources and initiatives has contributed to this success.

The school's DEIS plan is now in the final year of its three-year cycle. Much of the work to date has focused on literacy and numeracy, attendance and retention. It is recommended that due attention now be given to areas such as educational progression, attainment and partnership with parents, as these targets will support the educational priorities identified for development. Ongoing vigilance in relation to attendance and a review of the school's attendance strategies are also recommended, as the initial improvement has not been sustained.

Transition Year (TY) is compulsory for all students who intend to take the established Leaving Certificate programme. In addition to curricular subjects, students undertake a work experience programme, go on outings and complete a wide range of once-off sporting and community activities. While these activities greatly enhance the students' social and personal development, designated time should be allocated on the timetable to ensure minimum disruption to core subjects.

A very broad curriculum is offered and option bands are formed on the basis of student choice. This results in some subjects having very small numbers in classes. While it is commendable to support students in this manner, this level of provision may not be sustainable into the future. It is therefore recommended that a representative board of studies be created to consider a range of issues including the sustainability of current curriculum provision, curricular possibilities to support the higher-ability students and ways in which desired changes could be implemented. Such a body could also serve to identify and instigate appropriate short school-based courses as part of Junior Cycle reform and in this way continue to support provision for minority subjects.

Teachers are deployed in accordance with their subject specialisms. The deployment of school guidance personnel to the delivery of Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is commended as it will support continued guidance provision within the framework of more limited guidance resources. A review of timetabling for the current year indicated that some of the assistant principals' timetables fall below the required minimum teaching hours. This needs to be addressed to ensure full compliance with departmental regulations and to maximise available resources.

The school operates a 28.5 hour week, with forty-five lessons of thirty-eight minutes' duration. There is currently a significant deficit in instruction time for sixth-year, TY and LCA students. This should be addressed forthwith. A timetabled pastoral care lesson is provided in junior cycle and in Transition Year. To ensure that pastoral care lessons can be counted for the twenty-eight hour instruction time requirements, the tutors from each year group should work together to develop learning outcomes for these lessons. These outcomes could support some of the strategic plans in progress. The current erosion of instruction time due to in-school meetings should be minimised.

The school's code of behaviour, with its merit system, endeavours to promote a positive student environment. Furthermore, the school's engagement with the National Behaviour Support Service significantly benefits students with challenging behaviours. A dynamic care team works to identify and support all students experiencing difficulties.

School management has identified improved academic attainment as a priority for development. This is supported by an analysis of student outcomes in the Certificate examinations. It is recommended that a high-quality system for tracking academic progress be developed in parallel with the high quality care system already in place. To this end, systems to mentor and track students' academic progress from entry into the school, coupled with initiatives to raise student and parental expectations should be considered. The good work currently in place to assess incoming students' abilities and literacy development could provide a useful point of departure.

Students are given good leadership opportunities through the student council with its representation from each year group. A highly valued mentoring system where TY students support the first-year students is also in place.

1.3 Management of facilities

The school is well maintained. Recent building developments include the autism support unit. The care and concern for students with SEN is also evident in the partnership with Ballybeg Community Development Project to build a sensory garden for these students. Machinery for some of the practical subjects has been recently updated. The corridors are adorned with posters and photographs acknowledging student success over the years. The very well resourced JCSP library provides an oasis for students wishing to read or to source information for their class-work. The library is also used to house resource materials for teachers including their subject planning documentation.

The vast majority of classrooms had good displays of subject-specific materials, in addition to displays of students' projects. All classrooms have appropriate information and communication technology (ICT) facilities and an ICT assistant is currently employed under the Job Bridge intern scheme to support the effective integration of ICT into the work in the classroom. To complement the work of senior management and staff in maintaining the school to a high level, students should be made more aware of their environmental responsibilities by establishing a green school committee and working towards a green flag.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Responses to questionnaires administered to parents and students indicated a good level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching in the school. The majority of students responded that they are getting on well with their school work and that teachers tell them how they can improve their learning and encourage them to work to the best of their ability. Building on these positive findings, subject departments should place due emphasis on high expectations in relation to students' attitudes and assessment outcomes.

Twenty-three lessons were observed during the evaluation, including all year groups, levels and programmes and covering core, optional, practical and non-examination subjects. The quality of teaching and learning was good in the majority of lessons. Examples of very good or excellent practice were noted. In a small number of lessons, there was scope for development in the use of methodologies to engage students more effectively in their learning.

Most teachers began by sharing the learning intentions with students. In some lessons, they were communicated as learning outcomes and were written up along with homework on the whiteboard reminding students of the purpose and expectations for their learning. Some teachers also revisited these outcomes in order to summarise and to assess learning. These good practices should be incorporated into all lessons.

The varied methodologies observed were most effective where there was a good balance between teacher input and student activity. Questioning was used in most lessons to develop understanding and to assess learning. In some lessons an appropriate combination of global and directed questioning and of lower-order and higher-order questions supported learning by challenging students to their full potential. These good practices should be extended to all lessons.

There was very good use of supplementary materials to support active learning in some lessons. These included visuals and electronic resources such as audio and short video clips. Other lessons would have been significantly enhanced by the use of ICT. In such instances, it is recommended that teachers seek out the expertise of the ICT intern in the school in order to build up confidence and competence in the use of ICT to support teaching and learning.

Differentiation for ability was good in lessons where teachers provided individual support, graded worksheets and questioning appropriate to the level of ability of the student. This is an area for development in many lessons. Subject departments should consider revisiting this area of pedagogy as a means of supporting all students. The Equality of Challenge initiative should provide an appropriate framework.

Opportunities for active student learning were facilitated through independent or collaborative tasks and problem-solving, particularly in lessons with a practical focus. While excellent practice was noted in some of the more academic subjects, greater use of strategies such as purposeful group work, student note-making and discussion is recommended to ensure better student participation and engagement.

Appropriate attention was paid to the development of literacy and numeracy skills in a number of lessons and there was good use of subject-specific terminology. There is scope for greater use of the target language by teachers and students in many of the language lessons observed. Some teachers made explicit reference to relevant key words and encouraged students to use in their discussions and answers to questions. This good practice should be extended throughout to ensure the effective integration of literacy into all lessons.

Oral feedback was frequently used in lessons to guide students and improve the quality of their work. Homework was regularly assigned and monitored in almost all lessons observed. Good practice was noted where teachers provided regular formative feedback on students' written assignments. To build on this practice, consideration should be given to the use of a broader range of in-class strategies to correct homework assignments, such as self-assessment, peer correction and feedback through the application of established criteria, in addition to the established practice of teacher correction and feedback.

Classroom management was effective and students' behaviour was good in the lessons observed. Teachers demonstrated a good knowledge of their students and promoted a positive rapport and atmosphere in their lessons.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Eight subject inspections have been carried out since 2006. Recommendations common to many of the subjects evaluated related to issues of curricular provision, improvements in subject planning, increased use of ICT to support teaching and learning, and assessment practices.

3.1 Management

Many of the recommendations relating to whole-school support and provision have been implemented. However, the recommendation relating to the provision of a more targeted language programme for TY students of French still needs to be progressed.

3.2 Learning and teaching

While improvements were noted in some subject plans, further development of common schemes of work, setting out the topics, learning outcomes, methodologies, resources and assessment practices is recommended. Progress has been made in many of the aspects of teaching and learning identified in subject reports. However, there is still scope for development in the use of ICT and an integrated approach to language development. Further work in the development of comprehensive assessment practices is recommended in some instances.

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

School management and staff have indicated their capacity and willingness to embrace school improvement. During the course of the evaluation many teachers expressed their openness to new ideas and identified aspects of school life which they felt could be further enhanced. This openness was also demonstrated in the willingness of all teachers to engage in a professional dialogue following lesson evaluation. The school has embraced the school self-evaluation process, initially through its participation in the DEIS initiative and the subsequent development of literacy and numeracy policies.

The findings and recommendations from this evaluation, and the outcomes of the student and parent questionnaires, provide further evidence of the school's strengths and areas for development. The strengths should be harnessed to progress and achieve the priorities identified for development. A judicious focus on key priorities relating to student attainment is now recommended, with reflective practices and initiatives such as Equality of Challenge guiding overall school improvement.

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, Principal and staff welcome the report and find it a fair and accurate reflection of St. Paul's Community College.

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 Inspectors made recommendations in relation to the length of school week for a small number of students. This issue has been addressed in the time-table for the academic year 2013-2014 and the students have the required minimum of 28 hours tuition.

The shortfall in the required minimum teaching hours for the Assistant Principals has also been addressed. The recommendation in the provision of French in the TY programme has been fully implemented in the time-table for 2013/14.