An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Mannix College
Charleville, County Cork
Roll number: 71080B

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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 December 2011 in Mannix College, Charleville. 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, 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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

Introduction

Mannix College, named after Archbishop Mannix of Australia who was a native of Charleville, is a co-educational vocational school close to the centre of the town, under the auspices of County Cork Vocational Education Committee (VEC). Students come from a wide variety of social and cultural backgrounds and there are also a number of students taking the two post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses on offer at the school. Mannix College is involved in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme and has engaged positively in a three-year DEIS planning cycle. The school is a pleasant environment and there are very good facilities for teaching and learning, and non-class activities.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The school demonstrates strengths in its core work, with good teaching and learning evident generally, and in several instances this was of an outstanding quality
- The school has engaged very well with upgrading classrooms and information and communication technology (ICT), as well as facilities for extracurricular activities
- Despite challenges of reduced enrolment, there is a positive atmosphere within the school.
- Students are well cared for and happy and benefit from good pastoral care and a range of in-school supports to learning, and future planning should continue to concentrate on retention, attendance and punctuality
- Parents articulated a positive disposition to the school in the course of the evaluation and the school community is urged to remain focused and positive about the future. The school needs to look at its public relations strategies and seek to get its message to a wider audience
- Considerable supports for students' learning have been availed of through DEIS, the guidance and learning support departments, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), home-school-community liaison (HSCL) and school completion programme (SCP) personnel
- Very good support has come from the County Cork VEC to date.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- Declined enrolment needs immediate prioritisation by the board and school management. The involvement of all stakeholders will be required to support an enrolment initiative which is vitally important and results in a viable solution.
- Middle management structures need to be reviewed and the establishment of a core planning team with delegated responsibilities is recommended.
- The curriculum merits review to consider the maintenance of the existing subject range and possible expansion of PLC courses and night classes.
- The school is urged to plan for further integration of literacy and numeracy within classes and might consider developing student portfolios.
- The continued development of teaching and learning methodologies should focus on collaborative learning and self-directed learning opportunities for students.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

The school's board of management is properly constituted, with representation from County Cork VEC, parents and staff, and it meets a number of times annually. The board has dealt sensitively with some challenging student management issues in recent years and is commended for its commitment in this regard. Unfortunately, examination of board minutes shows that there has been a long gap in time between some meetings in the past year. This should be addressed especially in the difficult context of declined enrolment in which the school finds itself. It is also recommended that a more structured and obviously collaboratively approach be taken to the important aspect of the board's work, that of policy review and ratification.

It has been evident that board ratification of up to ten policy review documents has been accomplished in a single setting. It is very difficult to affect a thorough review of each policy in this way, although considerable time has been put into the drafting of such policies, or the adaptation of generic VEC documents, by individuals at school planning level. Evidence of formal involvement of the parents' association or student council in policy development is limited, although parents and students both attest to the openness of the school culture and way of working.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools* (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Primary Circular 0061/2006 (*or* Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006). School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* as a matter of priority.

The school's priorities for development

The board has stated the following development planning priorities: fostering a collaborative culture, reflective practice and training for teachers. These are all laudable priorities and should be factored into a strategic plan for the school, ideally over a three-year period. Of more immediate concern is the enrolment challenge previously mentioned, which was discussed at a number of board meetings. Clear and specific board action on this

matter is now timely. This situation will impact significantly on the school's curriculum, its teaching resources and its future if not addressed. There is little doubt that the board needs a strong proactive focus on enrolment and it can and should play a key role in the school's future and in staff support. If feasible, a joint meeting between board representatives and staff, including non-teaching staff, ought to be considered as a step towards collective engagement in the school's future. A similar meeting between the board and the very positive parents' association committee would also be worthwhile. The possibility of co-opting some additional local board members is also worthy of consideration, with a view to strengthening the local profile of the board, and thus support an enrolment initiative which is vitally important.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The in-school management team adopts a hands-on approach to many aspects of school life and this includes significant teaching duties. This is understandable, and in some instances vital, in a school of the size of Mannix College. Facility upgrades and provision of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities have supported staff very positively. The latter have included instructional leadership training from a world expert and sessions from County Cork VEC and the School Development Planning Initiative support service.

There is a post structure in place but in many instances the written descriptors of the posts are focused on practical tasks rather than being dictated by the schools immediate and longer-term needs. Greater clarity regarding the personnel who act as year heads or class teachers, many of whom are indeed post holders, needs to be achieved and documented. The restoration of a regular year head meeting deserves to be considered as a support to overall student management. The post structure requires a clearer focus on student outcomes and revision to meet current school and student needs. For example, a post ought to include public relations duties, if at all possible. In the context of overall school planning, some very high quality work has been done in planning co-ordination, including a draft development plan for teaching and learning. Steps should be taken to empower a planning team to identify and work on immediate development priorities in collaboration with other staff and stakeholders.

The school's enrolment difficulties need renewed drive and leadership to maintain staff morale and achieve a turn-around. A structured approach to planning for curricular change needs to be taken, without delay, to protect the school's teaching resources in the context of diminished enrolment. There are some post-Leaving Certificate students at the school and exploring the possibilities of adding to the number of PLC courses, ideally through consultation with local employers and a skills audit of existing staff, is also recommended for immediate consideration. A good range of night-time activities and courses are held at the school and the more use that is made of the school's facilities, the greater the awareness of the quality of these facilities should permeate through the community. All night classes on offer at the school should also be advertised on the County Cork VEC website as a further means of promoting the school's role in education in the Charleville area.

Leadership of students

Mannix College has an extremely fair admissions policy and transparent enrolment procedures which deserve great commendation. Both the students and parents who were met with or surveyed as part of the evaluation reported very high levels of satisfaction with the school. The facilities, the welcoming atmosphere, the level of guidance and educational

supports available and the openness of management and staff to communicating with parents were all felt to be considerable strengths of the school. School management has gone to considerable lengths to ensure that the needs of individual or small groups of students who wish to take additional subjects, or additional classes in core subjects, are met, wherever possible.

One of the few areas where students reported negatively was on a perceived lack of extracurricular and co-curricular opportunities, although good evidence of JCSP initiatives, school tours and other activities is displayed within the school. All avenues for extracurricular activities, especially in sports which do not require large teams, debates and quizzes should continue to be explored. The many important educational and extra-curricular activities which occur at the school could also be brought more into the public domain if the school had a website and made more frequent use of local media than is currently evident. The recent development of a very good promotional DVD is highly commended. It helps to make students proud of their school, and it will be important to ensure that this is seen by as many people as possible in Charleville and its surrounds.

Mannix College participates in the DEIS initiative and makes good use of the supports available for students within this. The school has hard-working HSCL and SCP personnel who are shared with a local infants' school. On-going parent-school contacts and supervised study are two of the benefits to accrue from these supports. Very good levels of individual support for students' learning are provided across the school, and a proactive special educational needs department has recently reviewed the special educational needs plan and is engaged in JCSP and many other support initiatives.

The JCSP has been accessed since 2008 and a number of important initiatives within this, including the 'Make a Book' project, have supported students' literacy and attendance, with six JCSP projects under way in the current academic year alone. The portfolios which have been developed for students under the JCSP umbrella might also be considered for senior students, if there is time and teaching resources available to support it. This is offered as a suggestion only, but one which could exploit the relatively small size of senior classes to produce a form of student-profile document which could benefit the student and be a good selling point for the school as well.

The school's mission statement aims to encourage students to be the best they can be, and it is also positive to note the entry of students for Leaving Certificate non-curricular languages in recent years. This is a good support to both their career prospects and their awareness of their cultures of origin. The organisation of special language and multi-cultural events at the school is also applauded and deserves to be further supported by management wherever practicable. Celebrating the school's cultural diversity is very worthwhile. Attendance and punctuality remain serious challenges, despite the range of supports and imaginative inducements in place, and observation suggests that the agreed system for punctuality monitoring is in need of tighter enforcement by teachers.

2.3 Management of facilities

Facilities for teaching and learning, and for extracurricular activities, are very good at Mannix College. Very good upgrades of information and communication technology (ICT) and other classroom equipment have been undertaken by school management. Classrooms are spacious and well-maintained, with many having good display areas and storage space for books and equipment. The school has a fine indoor sports facility, a full-size pitch outdoors and additional areas which accommodate a canteen, a library and a computer room. The development of the playing pitch is a particularly good example of close co-operation between school management, County Cork VEC and the provincial council of the

GAA. There is good deployment of support staff throughout the school and the school is clean and very well maintained.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Overall, the quality of learning and teaching observed was good, with some outstanding practice seen on several occasions. Planning and preparation for lessons was generally very good, with many teachers having sets of class resources ready for use, or carrying out advance preparation of ICT equipment and other materials. In some instances, individual lesson plans were presented and in these some very productive use of learning outcomes in shaping lessons was noted. A more widespread use of learning outcomes, to be revisited during lessons according as key learning stages have been reached, would be worthwhile.

Teacher-student rapport was very good and was central to a positive atmosphere in all lessons. In general, student engagement was of a good standard, although some students struggled due to previous absence or language difficulties. Within a number of lessons, good evidence of teachers linking content to students' recall of previous learning, or to their daily lives, was also noted and applauded. During most lessons, teachers were able to offer one-to-one support to students when required. Overall, the quality of questioning and answering was good, particularly when questioning was varied and tailored to students' individual needs. A greater emphasis on the use of questions targeted at individual students rather than asked as global 'hands-up' style questions is recommended in several instances.

Strategies to promote greater student autonomy and active learning ought to be employed in some lessons, giving students more responsibility for their own learning and encouraging more student discussion, where possible. Sometimes this could have been achieved through asking students to read, or say or write key points, rather than the teacher being the central instrument of such activities in most lessons. Some good self-directed learning opportunities were seized upon elsewhere when students had to work on projects or on tasks requiring their own initiative in the main. More promotion of collaborative practice in classrooms, like pair work and student-student mentoring, is similarly recommended.

In many lessons, teachers made substantial use of ICT, or of models, handouts and visual stimuli, presented in various ways. This is good practice, and where students were likely to need additional equipment, or access to individual computers, this was also very well provided for by teachers. Lists of key words were prominently displayed in a number of rooms and were referred to by teachers in several instances as well. Some classrooms could benefit from an increased use of print-rich or visual materials, as a further means of adding variation to lessons. Opportunities to promote oral and written literacy should be reinforced whenever possible, as through the use of spell checkers when students work on computers, or a focus on key words which could be interrogated at different levels of comfort by students.

Homework was assigned in most lessons and was corrected. The use of assessment for learning strategies in this regard is recommended for wider use, and the employment of comment-based marking of students' work might be broadened in this respect. Overall, students were given good feedback on their work, whether in class or as homework, and were given good opportunities to learn from teachers' assessment of their work. A very

high proportion of students said in questionnaire responses that their work was regularly checked by their teachers and parents' responses also indicated significant satisfaction with the level of contact between school and home on students' progress.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

There has been a noted improvement in the timetabling of double lessons, which had been a concern in a previous inspection report on a subject with practical elements. At present, very few double lessons are split across break times, which is commendable. Subjects are also fairly spread across timeslots on the timetable and across different days of the week. The augmentation of the school's ICT provision is evident in several classrooms and supports teachers who are anxious to incorporate ICT into teaching and learning. Some good work has been done on whole-school approaches to literacy, which was recommended in a previous report, and the initiatives and resources purchased to support them are obviously helpful.

Some outstanding examples of subject plans have been noted, while others remain less well-developed, and it is to be hoped that the additional time now available for such planning will lead to more cohesive engagement here. The document focusing on the development of teaching skills is a very commendable initiative from the school planning perspective. The school has not yet organised training in assessment-for-learning strategies and this is recommended as soon as possible.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Generally, good evidence of appropriate lesson planning was observed, in line with recommendations form a previous report. This included very good preparation of materials and resources, although in some lessons, planning for a range of methodologies needed further emphasis. Some very good use of ICT in teaching, and to some extent as student learning tools, was noted and included the use of on-line translators for students new to English and this was very helpful. Teachers are encouraged to continue to explore the possibilities of using ICT to engage students through film and visuals. In seeking to build on the whole-school literacy initiative, opportunities to promote oral and written literacy should be reinforced whenever possible within lessons, as previously intimated. Active learning was encouraged in a previous inspection report and some very good examples were noted, though there is still scope for development here in some subjects.

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

5.1

The school has shown some good responsiveness to recommendations from past subject inspection reports. The school's engagement with DEIS planning has helped to focus attention on key areas of student progress, such as retention, attendance and attainment, and the structuring of DEIS planning into four teams, each focusing on a theme over three years, is the correct approach to take. Beyond DEIS, self-evaluation processes appear to have been largely informal to date and these need to be formally facilitated. Some very good ideas for future planning and school development have begun to emerge from the planning activity to date but should involve all staff and stakeholders. Management is urged

to give this aspect of school life renewed attention as soon as possible. There is a need to put more definite structures in place to support planning and improvement, and focus on the evolving needs of the student cohort. A core planning team, with tangential links to DEIS planning, school promotion, curricular planning, teaching methods and attendance is thus strongly recommended.

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