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Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Presentation De La Salle College
Bagenalstown, County Carlow
Roll number: 61150N

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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 April 2016 in Presentation De La Salle College. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the board of management, in-school management, and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, twenty-two lessons across a number of subject areas were 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

Presentation De La Salle College is a co-educational post-primary school providing the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme. There are two designated classrooms for students with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorders). The current enrolment is 597 students. The school population has grown over the past six years and the student cohort comprises a wide range of abilities, needs and interests.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- A collective commitment to improvement is notable among the board, senior management and staff, and this is being actively pursed through a coherent improvement plan.
- Leadership for learning is very good, and staff and students are very well motivated, managed and supported.
- Students and parents expressed very high satisfaction with the school.
- The expanding curriculum and wide range of extra-curricular activities are well-managed overall, but the curriculum must be addressed in certain aspects including provision for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).
- The quality of the teaching and learning observed was very good in some lessons, good or satisfactory in the majority of lessons and weaknesses outweighed strengths in a few lessons.
- Self-evaluation and review practices are well embedded, but it would be useful to distinguish school development planning from school self-evaluation (SSE).

Recommendations for Further Development

- Within the improvement plan, management should focus one of the current key priorities explicitly on the monitoring and tracking of attainment, including the setting of clear and measurable targets that arise from baseline data.
- The board of management must ensure that full provision is made for the timetabling and delivery of SPHE and CSPE in junior cycle, that RSE is fully provided for all students in senior cycle, and that a principal's report on child protection is made at each meeting of the board.
- The policies on RSE and admissions, including the application for enrolment form and the code of behaviour require review and should reflect actual practice.

- The extension of the use of assessment for learning and the use of differentiation and active learning should be embedded in the daily classroom practices of every teacher.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management provides good quality leadership. The board meets regularly and is supported in its work by the trustee body. Board members received training and roles are understood. The board has adopted a collaborative approach to school management, seeking input on a range of developmental priorities from all partners. It willingly engages with parents, staff and students, and expressed its dedication to providing quality education for the community. Agreed reports from board meetings are issued to staff and a good level of communication is maintained with the parents' association and the wider parent body. The majority of parents surveyed agreed that the board reports annually on the work of the school and that the views of parents are regularly sought on school matters. The board takes action where necessary. For example, this year the board initiated a sports policy in recognition of possible over-involvement of some students in extra-curricular activity impinging on academic success. The board oversees the implementation of recommendations from inspections.

The board has adopted mandatory policies and completes an annual policy checklist. Some policies require updating, including the policies on admissions, substance use, RSE and the code of behaviour so that they more accurately reflect current practices and positive developments. The recording of bullying incidents in board minutes and the required annual review of implementation of the anti-bullying policy should be implemented to align with the requirements of Circular 45/2013. The students' council and parents' association, while actively consulted on many aspects of school management, have had limited involvement in reviewing policy documents. Their role in this could be strengthened.

In consultation with senior management and staff, the board adopted a coherent, strategic three-year improvement plan for the school. The outcomes of self-evaluation and school surveys were used to inform the plan and it is shared with the community on the school website. The board is committed to this improvement agenda. It is well-informed of the progress being achieved in implementing the plan and discuss progress at all meetings.

The improvement plan has an overarching aim of improving attainment and contains thirteen priorities that are highly appropriate for the school. Many of the priorities are guiding developments in learning and teaching, including the integration of assessment for learning and ICT, developing the use of standardised testing and maintaining high standards for behaviour, homework and the learning atmosphere. Other priorities relate to management, including reviewing the posts of responsibilities, pursuing a school building programme and strengthening the leadership of the students' and parents' bodies. Strategies to achieve the priorities have been developed, lead persons or committees have been established, and there is appropriate follow-through from management supporting the implementation of the strategies. It is very positive that there is evident collective ownership and positive views toward the improvement plan among staff and management. It is recommended that one of the current priorities be focused explicitly on the monitoring and tracking of attainment, including the setting of clear and measurable targets that arise from baseline data.

A representative student council, democratically elected, is constructively engaged in promoting the student voice and improving school facilities for students. Its work is

evidence-based and impressive. Parents are consulted on a range of issues and in a range of ways. The views of first-year parents are regularly sought through surveys, the analysis of which is shared openly. A very high proportion of parents surveyed in this evaluation strongly agreed that that they feel welcome in the school, that the school is well run, that discipline is good, their child is well looked after and that bullying would be acted on effectively. The parents' association has been very active in fundraising and supporting school events. Its activities are widely publicised but there is scope to broaden the association's profile and role.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal work very well as a senior management team. They continually promote a positive atmosphere for staff and students and this approach is highly valued by all partners. The principal demonstrates very strong leadership, and takes prompt and informed action when necessary. The principal's work is highly focused on leading change and strategic development including progressing the school improvement plan and SSE. The deputy principal works in collaboration with the staff, manages many day-to-day issues and maintains a visible presence in the corridors. In meetings and from the questionnaires, staff, parents, students and the board indicated very high levels of satisfaction with school leadership and with the many positive whole-school developments that have taken place in recent years. Cited developments that were evident during the evaluation include improvements in discipline structures, student engagement, homework, communication, school facilities, enrolment and school pride.

Leadership roles are well fostered and distributed at many levels. Teachers have responsibility for directing aspects of student support, pedagogical development, ICT and student leadership. Their work is central to the school's continued evolution and development. The leadership roles distributed at middle management, to date, had appropriate and clearly defined duties. It was acknowledged by many that, as the nature of the improvement plan changes, these roles will require review, including redefining the year head role.

The effectiveness of leadership for learning is very good. Combined with the commitment to quality improvement and the positive atmosphere, it was evident that staff and students were well motivated, managed and supported. A very high proportion of staff expressed satisfaction with the quality of in-school communication. Collaborative work practices are valued and subject department planning is well-structured. Teachers display motivation for progression; they and are increasingly willing to embrace new teaching approaches. Some teachers are actively developing ICT use and assessment for learning. It is now timely to consider whole-school approaches that would extend the developments in teaching and learning and bring greater consistency to the learners' experiences. In particular, the extension and embedding of assessment for learning strategies in the daily classroom practices of every teacher is recommended.

Overall, teaching staff are deployed in accordance with their qualifications and professional training but there are some areas for development in teacher deployment. These include: facilitating essential training for teachers deployed to and interested in SPHE, CSPE and senior cycle RSE, giving consideration to developing a policy for mentoring and supporting student teachers and newly appointed teachers, and supporting student teachers in accordance with the Teaching Council's *Guidelines on School Placement*.

The development of the curriculum is receiving fairly good attention, particularly in the context of increasing enrolment and junior cycle reform. The school provides a wide and expanding range of subjects and a relatively wide range of programmes, although it is

challenging to maintain all subjects at times. The needs of students are supported with subject sampling during first year. The very wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities provided supports students' holistic educational development and contributes greatly to the sense of community.

Within the current curriculum, however, SPHE, CSPE and RSE do not have sufficient allocation. Provision must be made for the delivery of the full SPHE programme and for CSPE with dedicated timetabling for all junior cycle years. All students in every year, including TY, fifth and sixth, must be provided with RSE lessons. Provision for RSE should be enhanced through the establishment of a core group of teachers, with the appropriate training, tasked with the planning and delivery of a developmental programme from first year through to sixth year. It is recommended that personal development lessons be included in TY. It is highly commended that the principal responded immediately to redress these shortcomings during the evaluation, including a commitment to providing RSE lessons for all this year and ensuring the implementation of each area in future.

Lessons in curricular Guidance are provided to all year groups. In the questionnaires and meetings, however, parents and students indicated scope for greater support in subject choice. There is also scope for SPHE and Guidance to adopt a more integrated approach to their schemes-of-work, learning outcomes and methods of assessment. As part of whole-school Guidance, all teachers could give emphasis to communicating progression routes in their subjects and display these in their classrooms.

Management and staff are positive about inclusion. Provision is greatly supported by special educational needs (SEN) co-ordination, including the provision of detailed advice to mainstream teachers on teaching approaches. Resource hours are deployed flexibly to ensure a balanced curriculum. Provision includes individual and small group support, and some team teaching as an alternative to withdrawal. Inclusive practices were evident including the integration of students in the ASD unit in mainstream classes.

The management and leadership of students is supported by the care team, involving personnel in student-support roles. However, the current difficulties in allocating time for regular care team meetings should be addressed. The publication *Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools, Guide to Establishing a Team or Reviewing an Existing Team* could further guide the care team's work. Breakfast, evening study, homework club, homework support and school awards, and student mentors and prefects are greatly beneficial to student support.

There are effective monitoring and co-ordination systems in place to support student management. The anti-bullying policy is well-developed. A very high proportion of students' responses indicated that there are clear rules against hurting others and they can talk to an adult if they are having problems. The high importance placed on positive messages is having a commendable impact on student behaviour. Students, through interviews and questionnaires, indicated very high levels of positivity about the school atmosphere and the nature of relationships in the school.

School strategies to promote attainment include encouraging students to take examinations at the highest level and analysing and reflecting on examination outcomes within subject departments. In some of the subject plans reviewed during the evaluation, it was clearly evident these analyses were used to inform planning for teaching and learning. It is recommended that future analysis compares higher-level uptakes in subjects to national data over a four-year period, in order to establish trends in progress. To further drive the attainment agenda, additional whole-school strategies could include extending the year head role in monitoring academic progress and formalising a system for tracking student

attainment. In addition, there is scope in the TY to develop competences in key areas according to the needs of individual students, including remediation where appropriate.

The school has developed a homework policy that provides useful guidance for teachers, parents and students. It is suggested, however, that in line with the planned extension of assessment for learning, the policy could now be reviewed. It could provide further guidance in the areas of improving learning, including giving feedback to students on their strengths and areas for improvement, encouraging learner responsibility and providing for differentiation in homework.

The current admissions policy and application form should be reviewed as they give unintentional or possible perceived barriers to prospective parents and do not reflect the actual inclusive practices evident during the evaluation. Currently, SEN information is sought prior to enrolment. This should not occur.

While confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools*, the school is not fully compliant. The board must ensure that SPHE and RSE are fully implemented and that a principal's report on child protection is made at each meeting of the board.

1.3 *Management of facilities*

The management of school facilities is very good overall. However, there are ongoing and considerable challenges to space and to the use of the sports hall and library. This is mainly due to substantially increased enrolment and changing needs. Commendably, progress is taking place in developing other sports' facilities and mini-libraries in classrooms. A school extension, including a new sports hall is being actively pursued. The board intends to invest monies from parents' fundraising in extending the ICT facilities. There is a good range of subject-specific reference materials and stimulating displays in the classrooms and corridors. Classrooms and specialist rooms are well-maintained and support learning.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of the teaching and learning observed was very good in some lessons, good or satisfactory in the majority of lessons and weaknesses outweighed strengths in a few lessons. The most successful lessons were characterised by active learning with good differentiation. In a few instances, exemplary practice was observed in assessment for learning. Where scope for development was observed, either minor or significant, it was most often in either differentiation, active learning or assessment for learning.

Lessons were generally well prepared, taking prior learning and interests into account. Best practice was seen where learning outcomes were shared, revisited during the lesson and where students reviewed their own learning.

Most lessons incorporated active learning and students were productively engaged in collaborative and independent work and sometimes in discovery learning. In these lessons, students were involved in constructing knowledge, using new terminology and incrementally gaining understanding. In a few instances, too much focus was placed on giving information through teacher talk or through well-prepared presentations which students either copied or were available on the shared learning platform. In these instances, students were mainly passive recipients rather than active in their learning, and, a few

times, this led to significant weaknesses in learning. It is recommended that all teachers include active learning strategies in the preparation and delivery of all lessons.

In a few lessons, the use of assessment for learning was exemplary. In these instances, students were highly aware of what they were learning to be able to do and know, and teachers advised them as individuals on how to progress their learning. Constructive feedback to groups and individuals led to students growing in confidence and ability. In the majority of lessons, however, there was scope for development in assessment for learning. During these times, students did not get sufficient feedback on how to improve individually as learners and sometimes learning was not sufficiently consolidated. Extending assessment for learning across the school could greatly enhance learning.

A review of student copybooks indicated that a variety of assessment practices exists among teachers. Best practice was seen where teachers regularly corrected written work and included formative comments directing improvement. The use of stamps or signatures to monitor homework without any evaluation was evident in some copies and this practice should be avoided. In half of the lessons visited, there was considerable scope to develop the use of formative written feedback in student copybooks. At times, there were missed opportunities in the copies to develop the students' literacy.

In some lessons, differentiation to cater for the range of student abilities was very good. In the majority of lessons, however, there was scope for development in differentiation, and, at times, the more able students could have been challenged further. This could be achieved by differentiating questioning, tasks, classroom resources and homework.

Classroom interactions were respectful and inclusive. Student behaviour was very good and they listened very well. Students were affirmed and encouraged for their contributions. Good levels of learner confidence and pride in their work were evident throughout.

The students' questionnaire responses indicated strong agreement that teachers encourage students to do their best, but some scope for improvement in teaching and learning was indicated in the responses to teachers talking to students about how to improve their learning and using ICT regularly in classes.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Management has overseen the implementation of inspection recommendations including the development of an assessment policy and improved ICT facilities. Since the SEN inspection, progress has taken place in revising the SEN policy, deploying a smaller teaching team and developing the individual education plans. The Physical Education (PE) follow-through inspection revealed that management has been proactive in addressing the recommendations and good progress has been made, including achieving the Active School Flag and developing a running track around the school. However, optimising provision for PE in fifth and sixth year remains an area that should be addressed.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Progress relating to implementing prior teaching and learning recommendations has been good in the areas of ICT integration, active learning and sharing learning intentions. There is scope for further development with regard to assessment for learning, reviewing learning intentions and differentiation. Recommendations made in Irish, on improving

communication in the target language should be influencing practice in all languages, and this aspect was evident in the more successful language lessons when some very good teacher use of the target-language was observed. In some language lessons, however, teachers should plan for activities requiring and maintaining student use of the target language.

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

Self-evaluation and review practices are well embedded. The school conducts regular analysis and reflection on the outcomes of surveys and these are shared with the school community. Over the past number of years, many benefits have resulted from changes implemented as a result of self-evaluation practices and this is highly commended. Work in supporting literacy and numeracy has taken place and the self-evaluation reports provide good information on students' strengths, areas for improvement and on classroom strategies to address them. In numeracy, measurable progress has been made on baseline data. Each subject department has given consideration to in-class strategies to promote literacy and numeracy in their subjects on a daily basis.

Overall, the school has very good capacity for and commitment to improvement through SSE to build on the best practice identified in this evaluation and to implement all of the recommendations.

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