An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Saint Clare's College,
Ballyjamesduff, Co Cavan
Roll number: 61051L

Date of inspection: 08 May 2014

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 May, 2014 in St Clare's College, Ballyjamesduff. 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 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 Clare's College is a co-educational diocesan catholic secondary school under the trusteeship of the Bishop of Kilmore and caters for 550 students. The school provides the following programmes: Junior Certificate (JC); Transition Year (TY); established Leaving Certificate; Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is very supportive of the school but there is scope for increased involvement in overseeing the management of the school.
- Members of the senior management team work very well together, are dedicated and hardworking and have a clear vision for the school.
- Curriculum provision is very good and a wide range of subjects is on offer.
- Leadership roles are distributed at middle management level.
- Teaching and learning in the majority of lessons was good or very good but there was further scope for improvement in a minority of lessons.
- The school has made very good progress in the development of its review processes.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should access training as a group in order to ensure that it is clear on its roles and responsibilities.
- As part of the school's self-evaluation process, subject departments should set targets and define strategies for improvement based on their analysis of student attainment.
- There is a need for a whole-school approach to the improvement of student attendance and punctuality and to raise parent and student expectations in this regard.
- The good practices that were observed in the majority of lessons should be disseminated and shared within all subject departments.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is appropriately constituted, meets regularly and has developed very good mechanisms for reporting to staff and parents. The board should now ensure that a more effective system is put in place for reporting annually to the general parent body. The board is strongly supported by the trustees. In response to changing demographics, the board's primary focus and commitment has been on the improvement of facilities and resources and it has been very successful in this regard. The board has also worked hard to maintain the ethos of the school. Individual members have received training but no collective training has yet been undertaken by the full board. It is recommended that the board access training so that it is clear on its roles and responsibilities.

A number of developmental priorities have been identified by the school and strategies have already been put in place to address many of these areas. However, due to its focus on the improvement of the school's facilities, the board has not achieved an optimal level of active engagement with these identified priorities. Given the level of individual expertise that exists on the board, there is significant scope for it to become more involved in overseeing the management of the school. This, in turn, will provide valuable support to the principal and deputy principal. For example, the board could ensure that an annual review of the work of post holders is conducted and through the senior management team oversee the implementation of recommendations arising from any Department inspections.

The board has adopted all mandatory policies but the code of behaviour should now be reviewed so that it is in line with the National Educational Welfare Board guidelines and reflects the many positive practices that are in place in the school. The admissions policy should also be updated so that it fully reflects current procedures in the school.

The senior management team comprises principal and deputy principal. Both members assumed their current roles in September 2013. The principal and deputy principal work very well together, are dedicated and hardworking and individually, bring complementary strengths to the team. They have a clear vision for the school and there is a strong sense of shared ownership by them. It is good to note that due to their effective leadership, considerable progress has already been made in the implementation of the school's development plan.

Leadership roles are distributed at middle management level. Staff interviewed during this evaluation stated that they feel empowered and entrusted to fulfil their duties. All staff have been consulted on a wide range of aspects of school life and consequently feel very included in the decision-making process. This is a further example of the high quality leadership that is being provided by the senior management team. A schedule of posts covering a variety of pastoral, administrative and curricular areas has been developed. However, a whole-school review of the schedule of posts has not been undertaken in recent years. It is important to conduct regular reviews of the posts of responsibility to ensure that the current priority development needs of the school are being addressed. For instance, there is an insufficient workload attached to some posts of responsibilities while the deputy principal has retained her year head duties. In that context, during the review of duties attached to posts, the school should ensure that assigned tasks are commensurate with the level of the post.

Students are provided with many opportunities to assume leadership roles in the school. There is a student council which is elected democratically and has demonstrated good leadership for students. For instance, the council recently undertook a survey of the general student population to seek their views on particular aspects of school life. Leadership is

also delegated to students through the prefect and mentoring systems that exist in the school.

It is good that the Parent Association (PA) has recently expanded its role. In addition to its involvement in fundraising activities, the PA has organised talks for parents, reviewed policies and attended key school events. At present, committee membership does not include parents of newcomer students: it would be worthwhile to encourage a wider representation in this regard. In addition, as a high number of parents who responded in questionnaires stated that they were unaware of the work of the PA, there is further scope for it to communicate with the wider parent body more effectively.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The senior management team has demonstrated a strong commitment to excellence and quality improvement. Commendably, senior management has provided effective leadership regarding subject planning. For instance, subject planning meetings are facilitated and the analysis of certificate examination results has now been undertaken by subject departments. As a next step, all departments should use this analysis to set targets and define strategies for improvement as part of the school self-evaluation processes: there is a need to improve uptake at higher level and attainment in some subjects.

Teachers' attendance at relevant in-service has been facilitated and the outcomes are shared with staff. It is good to note that a continuing professional development (CPD) plan for staff has been developed as part of school development planning. This plan contains targets and review mechanisms. Provision for differentiation and mixed ability teaching are two areas that should be included in this plan. In addition, there is further scope to develop the CPD targets regarding ICT.

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 school is not fully compliant with Circular Letter M29/95 *Time in School* and this needs to be addressed by the next academic year. Timetabling arrangements for the delivery of the curriculum for a lot of subjects is generally good. However, some concerns need to be addressed which include the following: the straddling of practical lessons over break or lunchtimes should be avoided; every effort should be made to provide daily contact for core subjects and more regular contact for some optional subjects; and the allocation of two teachers for the delivery of a subject to the same class group should also be avoided.

The school offers a broad curriculum and a wide range of subjects. Provision has been expanded in recent years to meet the needs of students and this is highly commended. There is a need to keep under review the situation whereby some students select science subjects in senior cycle without having studied Science in junior cycle. TY, LCA and LCVP are well organised and, in particular, the work experience aspect of the programmes is effectively co-ordinated.

A clearly structured code of behaviour has been developed which details the rules of the school and is familiar to students as evidenced by their responses to questionnaires. A clear ladder of referral is in place. However, there is a concern around attendance and punctuality which should be addressed. There is a need for the school to raise student and parent expectations regarding attendance and punctuality and for all staff to take a consistent approach to the monitoring and subsequent follow up to poor punctuality and attendance.

Very good care systems are in place in the school. This finding is endorsed by students and parents in their responses to questionnaires. Although there is no defined care team, year heads meet weekly with the senior management team to discuss student care issues. Other systems in place include, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programmes, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programmes, a tutor system, and guidance and counselling services. A guidance plan has been developed but this should be enhanced by the inclusion of more detail regarding the whole-school approach to guidance provision. The supports available from the National Centre for Guidance in Education should be used for developing the guidance plan. Award ceremonies are held to celebrate student achievement and success both in academic and non-academic areas.

The learning support team comprises a high number of teachers. Although there is a co-ordinator, it is challenging to ensure that a coordinated approach is being adopted by all members of the team. The school should ensure that a smaller team is put in place at the start of the next academic year. Individual planning is undertaken for each special educational needs (SEN) student and to some degree, progress is being tracked. It is important that measurable targets are put in place for these students and that progress is regularly assessed to ensure that the support being provided is fully meeting their needs. This information should be communicated to all staff so that teaching and learning strategies can be adapted where necessary and equally, success can be celebrated.

Commendably, the school provides a Moderate Learning Unit to cater for students with moderate learning needs. In the past, students in the unit were integrated into mainstream lessons. This practice should be re-established in order to ensure that these students further develop both academic and social skills. There is much informal communication between the co-ordinator of the Moderate Learning Unit and the SEN department. It is important that time is made available for these two departments to meet formally for planning purposes and to share good practices.

A wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities is available for students in this school. These encompass many areas such as sports and the arts. Students interviewed during the course of the evaluation were very appreciative of the array of activities on offer and of the time and dedication of the teachers involved in their provision. The school has also enjoyed much success in various competitions both locally and nationally.

1.3 *Management of facilities*

The school building is well maintained. Current resources and facilities are very good and efforts have been made to develop the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure. The corridors are vibrant as they contain visual displays. Student awards are placed in prominent locations. The school also takes its environmental responsibility seriously and has acquired the Green Flag.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

A number of long-term and short-term subject plans were reviewed during the inspection. In the majority of cases, a common planning template was used to good effect by subject departments. Commendably, this template also provides subject departments with an opportunity to evaluate the successful delivery of each topic or module. There is scope to strengthen the analytical component in this regard. In addition, the provision of more detail regarding the assessment strategies and methodologies that are in use are two areas that warrant further consideration. In some cases, elements of the course content were linked to

statements of learning, a key component of the new Framework for Junior Cycle. This is very good practice.

Twenty-one lessons were evaluated. The quality of preparation in terms of resources and materials was generally very good. In a small number of cases, great efforts were made to create or acquire supplementary resources. In a small number of cases, concrete objects were used to support learning. In all lessons, there was a very good rapport between the teacher and students and generally, teachers were enthusiastic and interested in what they were doing.

The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of cases ranged from good to very good. These lessons contained most or all of the following: the learning intention was clearly communicated to students and was referred to during and at the end of the lesson; lessons were well structured and the balance between teacher and student input was appropriate; and questions posed to students were varied and included those which invited detailed, critical and analytical responses. In some cases, good use was made of ICT; the pace of the lesson was appropriate and high expectations regarding student learning were established from the outset; and written work was thoroughly and robustly marked and constructive comments were given to students.

In a language lesson, good practice was seen where the target language was used consistently by the teacher and students while ensuring that the needs of less able students were addressed. In many lessons, good efforts were made to incorporate pair work and this practice should now be enhanced to include the use of group work activities. In a small number of lessons, good assessment for learning strategies were used while in others, there was effective provision for the literacy needs of students.

In a minority of lessons, the quality of teaching and learning demonstrated more weaknesses than strengths. This was due to a variety of reasons: the content of the lesson was not treated in a sufficient depth; students' understanding was inadequately assessed; insufficient time was provided to learners to actively participate in the lessons or respond to questions; insufficient development of students' literacy skills was evident and very poor use was made of valuable teaching time. It is recommended that the good practices that were observed in the majority of lessons should be disseminated and shared within all subject departments.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Senior management has implemented the recommendations arising out of previous evaluations which relate to management. For instance, facilities for Art have improved and SPHE is compulsory for all junior cycle students. In addition, LCA students in fifth and sixth year are no longer combined as one year group in English.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Commendably, the recommendations arising out of subject inspections are shared with all teachers for implementation, where appropriate. All have been addressed to varying degrees of success. For instance, learning outcomes were communicated to students at the start of lessons but in some cases, had no bearing on the progress of the lesson. Commendably, subject departments have engaged with the planning recommendations that were made and significant progress has occurred.

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

School self-evaluation (SSE) and review are central to the shared vision of the school and this process is being effectively led by the senior management team. The school has made good progress with the data gathering stage of SSE as the views of staff, parents and students have been gathered in surveys. Commendably, school review and self-evaluation processes are well embedded. For instance, literacy and numeracy committees have been developed and good progress has been made to date. The school has also developed an SSE team. In other key areas of school life, action plans have been created which are time bound.

The school has dealt with a number of changes in recent years including the significant increase in enrolment and an increasing diversity in the student population. There is a palpable sense of shared ownership in relation to the future direction of this school. All staff are to be commended for their professional engagement and positive attitude towards improvement and change. An increased involvement by the board in overseeing the management of the school will support the strong capacity the school has to implement its agenda for improvement.

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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 of St. Clare's College welcomes the positive inspection report.

The Board is pleased that the inspectorate has noted the significant increase in enrolment and diversity in student population. We are happy that it also acknowledged that the school has been successful in providing facilities and resources to meet the increase in numbers and that the school is well maintained.

The Board is also pleased with the acknowledgement that the ethos of St. Clare's has been maintained.

We appreciate the acknowledgement of the quality of teaching, the positive contributions of staff, students and parents to the life of St. Clare's College.

We also appreciate the commendations of the contributions of the Parents Association, Prefects and Student Council.

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 Board notes and will follow up on all the recommendations of the inspection report.

To-date

- the school is now fully compliant with Circular Letter M29/95 *Time in School*
- there is a collective effort/ strategy in place to ensure improvement in the area of attendance and punctuality.
- subject departments are developing and defining strategies to improve target setting in the area of student attainment.