

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

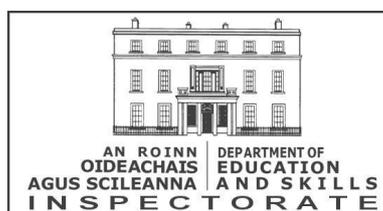
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Mary's CBS
Borris Road, Portlaoise, Co. Laois
Roll number: 63430G**

Date of inspection: 16 May 2012



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in May, 2012 in St Mary's CBS. 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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Introduction

St Mary's CBS, a boys' Catholic secondary school, was originally established in 1847 by the Christian Brothers. The school is now under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST) and moved to a new campus on the outskirts of Portlaoise in August 2010. The new school building has been built under the Public Private Partnership model and the campus is shared with Scoil Chríost Rí, a girls' secondary school. The school's enrolment has increased significantly over recent years to its current level of 525 students and is expected to increase further to over 700 students in coming years.

The school provides the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate, and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- St Mary's CBS is a growing school with excellent well-managed facilities.
- The board of management is well organised and very supportive of development of the school; in this regard the board has identified priorities for school development but has not formulated specific action plans.
- The quality of leadership of staff is very good. Members of the senior management team work well together and ensure that the school is efficiently managed and organised.
- Staff are motivated and committed to the success of the school; posts of responsibility are well used to support day-to-day running of the school and leadership capacity is being developed within the staff.
- A very good quality of leadership of students is evident in the proactive and positive support provided by the discipline and pastoral care systems and in the well-mannered, confident and articulate young people encountered during the evaluation.
- Good systems are in place to provide resource teaching and learning support but there is a need to develop a register of the supports provided to individual students.
- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in over half of the lessons observed, but there is scope for teachers to raise the level of expectation of what students can achieve and to work towards increasing the uptake of some subjects at higher level.

- The school is developing and enhancing its capacity for self-evaluation and work has commenced on the production of a school improvement plan. Recommendations from previous evaluations have received careful consideration.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- It is recommended that the board devise more detailed action plans and set measurable targets to assist in addressing the priorities it has identified for school development.
- It is recommended that the school develop a register linking the supports allocated by the Department of Education and Skills to the in-school provision for individual students with special educational needs.
- It is recommended that teachers implement strategies to raise the level of expectation of what students can achieve and promote an increased uptake of some subjects at higher level.

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 board of management is very well organised. It meets regularly, has accessed appropriate training, and keeps good records of its activities. Through its close liaison with the school's senior management team, the board is kept well informed of the school's progress and of any issues requiring the board's attention. The board is very supportive of the development of the school and provides good leadership for the school community.

A particular focus for the board in recent years has been the transfer of the school to its new premises. The board has overseen and supported the successful move by the provision of funding for equipment and staffing.

The board is committed to the preservation of the school's ethos and the promotion of the key elements of the ERST charter. It values the creation of good working relationships and consultation with all the members of the school community. Through its representative structure the board has established good links with trustees, parents, and staff. The input of the students' council has been facilitated through meetings with the chairperson of the board. The parents' council is very supportive of the school and contributes to the development of the school through the parents' representatives on the board. The results of a survey of parents indicate high levels of satisfaction with the organisation and atmosphere in the school.

The board has been very active in the development of school policies and an extensive range of policies has been developed in recent years. In order to further facilitate this work, it is suggested that the board should devise a schedule for the review of policies.

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's priorities for development

The board has identified nine developmental priorities for its current term of office. Several of these priorities relate to managing the growth of the school in its new location. Others relate to developing the curriculum, staff, school policies and ethos. Though it is clear from the records of meetings that the board is engaged in developing these areas, no formal actions plans or strategies are in place at board level. In line with the advice provided by the

School Development Planning Initiative, it is recommended that the board develop action plans to address the agreed priorities. Such action plans should include measurable targets which can be used to monitor progress in achieving the desired outcomes. For example, one of the priorities identified by the board is to encourage and provide for the continuing professional development (CPD) of staff. An action plan in this regard could identify the very good support currently provided by the board for CPD but also plan for the identification and prioritisation of future needs, how provision will be organised and what will be the impact on student outcomes.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The quality of leadership of staff is very good. The members of the senior management team work very well together to ensure that the school is run in a very efficient and organised manner. The principal and deputy principal have clearly established roles and bring complementary strengths to a team effort.

Good practice is evident in the review of posts of responsibility during the 2009/10 school year and in the clear description of the objectives and role associated with each post. Assistant principals act as year heads; special duties teachers have responsibility for a range of areas such as health and safety, house examinations and programme coordination. The post structure within the school is well used to support senior management in the day-to-day running of the school. Funding has been provided by the board to create an additional assistant principal post.

The commitment of staff to the development of the school is evident in the participation of staff in various initiatives. For example, staff members have led the introduction of electronic textbooks and planning for the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. Extracurricular activities are also provided with the support of staff. The school's administrative and other support staff also play an important role in the effective operation of the school.

School development planning has successfully focused on the development of school policies over recent years. Staff have contributed to both drafting policies and to their review prior to ratification by the board. A wide range of policies are in place which support the efficient operation of the school. The lack of a policy for supporting gifted students has been noted by the school and it is suggested that the development of such a policy should be prioritised for the coming school year.

The current focus of school development planning is on the establishment of school self-evaluation and the development of a school improvement plan at the end of the 2012/13 school year. This work has begun at subject department level and initial progress is good. The school is planning the next steps towards developing concrete and measurable targets in the areas of literacy and numeracy and other additional themes.

Good practice is evident in the development of leadership capacity among the staff through their participation in both internal and external leadership training. Staff development is also facilitated through general encouragement to attend in-service training and the opportunities for professional development provided at staff meetings. Financial support is available from the board for teachers wishing to pursue further studies.

Staff work in a collaborative manner. There are regular meetings of the whole staff and of subject departments. Subject departments are well organised and considerable work has been done on the development of subject plans. Communication structures are good: all staff members have a school-based email address and there are shared folders for subject

departments on the school's intranet system. The school's annual staff handbook is a useful means of ensuring that the most up-to-date information is available to all.

Leadership of students

The quality of leadership of students is very good. The school has an open admissions policy and provides good support to students on their transition from primary to post-primary school. Attendance and retention of students is very good and in this regard the school has put a home-school liaison group in place to provide extra support where needed.

Year heads and class tutors play a central role in well-organised pastoral care and discipline systems. Good practice is evident in the importance placed on positive affirmation of students' achievements. The students encountered during the evaluation were well mannered, confident and articulate young people who gave great evidence of the success of the school's mission 'to maintain an atmosphere of respect, Christian care and concern in which our students can grow to maturity'.

The majority of students surveyed felt proud to be attending the school and felt that there is a good atmosphere in the school. The students' council is very active and along with the Meitheal group provides students with good opportunities to develop their own leadership skills. However, when surveyed, a significant proportion of students indicated that they did not have a say in how to make the school a better place. It is recommended that the school explore the reasons behind this dissatisfaction with a view to enhancing the profile and role of the students' council.

Good systems are in place to support students when they transfer from junior to senior cycle and when they prepare to move on to further study or work. The majority of parents and students surveyed were satisfied with the level of advice they received about subject choices. However, some parents and students indicated dissatisfaction in this regard. It is recommended that the school explore this outcome with a view to putting any additional supports in place if necessary.

The curriculum provides an appropriate range of subjects and programmes such as the TY and LCVP. These are generally well organised though it is recommended that work experience should not be scheduled immediately prior to school holidays. Home Economics and Metal Work have been introduced in recent years and Spanish will be added in September 2012. The openness of the school to providing for students of all abilities is evident in the planning that has been completed for the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme in September 2013. The school also has facilities for the introduction of an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) unit and this will be further developed when required.

Learning support is provided through a variety of mechanisms including individual withdrawal, the creation of small groups, and team teaching. The model of team teaching generally used at present involves one teacher acting as the main teacher while the second teacher assists students where required. Other models of team teaching are not generally used and thus it is recommended that teachers share their experiences of team teaching with a view to identifying good practice and exploring the use of other models.

The school has an allocation of approximately 120 hours for resource teaching and learning support provision. Some of this allocation has been used to introduce new subjects to the curriculum, to provide for year-head duties and to support the home-school liaison group. In order to ensure clarity with respect to the allocation and provision for students with special educational needs, it is recommended that the school creates a student register which identifies the needs of individual students, the teaching hours allocated (learning support and resource), the ways in which support is being provided, when, by whom and

how frequently. The register may also briefly outline the content of the support programme, the agreed learning goals and the learning outcomes achieved. In this way the register will help school management to ensure that all the hours that are provided for resource teaching and learning support are deployed for the purpose for which they were allocated.

The school provides a good range of sporting and other activities for students' personal and academic development, for example, the TY musical which had been completed shortly before the evaluation. The Zambian Immersion Project, where a number of students visit and work with disadvantaged people in Zambia, is an important part of school life.

2.3 Management of facilities

The board and senior management have ensured the successful transfer of the school to its new location and building. The new school building is very well equipped with a variety of specialist rooms and information and communication technology (ICT) facilities. The school liaises closely with the onsite management company to resolve maintenance or ongoing issues regarding the upkeep of the building.

The school is very well maintained. Teachers are generally based in specialist rooms which has allowed for the creation of an attractive learning environment through the display of relevant resources and student work.

The school's environmental awareness is reflected in the awarding of a green flag to the school and its commitment to reducing its carbon footprint through initiatives such as reducing the use of electricity and water.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning was good in nearly all cases and could be described as very good in over half the lessons observed. The lessons were very well managed and conducted in a respectful atmosphere. Students were very cooperative and worked well with their teachers. Practical activities in relevant subject areas were well organised.

Very good lessons were characterised by the clarity of the aims and purpose of the lesson. Students were actively engaged in learning activities and the lessons were well paced and structured. Thought had been given to the different learning needs of students in devising the approach taken in the lessons and appropriate resources had been prepared in advance. Learning was monitored and consolidated by appropriate assessment strategies. An *assessment for learning* (AfL) approach was evident where teachers used learning outcomes to both plan the structure of the lesson and to assess students' progress before moving on to new content.

Where students' learning was very good, students were challenged and expected to perform well. For instance, they were expected to provide high-quality written work or they were expected to discuss the lesson content in an in-depth manner. However, in general there was scope for raising the level of challenge to students. For example, in some lessons there was an overuse of lower-order questions and students asked few if any questions themselves. Students' journals showed that in some cases relatively little homework had been recorded. Hence, it is recommended that teachers implement strategies to raise the level of expectation of what students can achieve in lessons. For example, greater use could be made of higher-order questions to elicit lengthier or more in-depth contributions from students, and students could be encouraged to ask more questions themselves.

Analyses of student outcomes in state examinations have been carried out by subject departments and the school is aware of a relatively low uptake of some subjects at higher level. The school has been making efforts to address this issue with some success over recent years. Along with an examination of teaching practice and raising the level of expectation in the classroom, subject departments are recommended to continue to examine student outcomes in school and state examinations and to promote an increased uptake of subjects at higher level.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

The school has given careful consideration to the findings and recommendations with respect to management from previous evaluations. For example, the number of history lessons per week has been increased and a subject specialist has been employed to teach Mathematics. In other cases, the move to the new school building has meant that some recommendations are no longer relevant. For example, excellent ICT infrastructure is now available to all subject departments. Similarly, the new art facilities address any shortcomings identified previously.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Many of the recommendations from previous reports focused in some way on enhancing the use of resources, the level of expectations of students, and the implementation of AfL strategies.

It was evident from the lessons observed that very good use is being made of appropriate resources to support teaching and learning. For example, good use was made of textbooks and ICT in this regard.

With respect to AfL, there was some good use observed. For example, students' engagement in independent learning was facilitated in cases where students were required to assess their own work. However, there was room for more teacher correction of written work. The desired learning outcomes were shared with students at the start of some lessons but were, however, generally not returned to or assessed at the end of the lesson. Questioning and discussion were frequently effectively used as a teaching strategy but there was scope for more thinking time and use of higher-order questions and involvement of all in the lessons observed.

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

The school is developing and enhancing its capacity for self-evaluation. It is currently moving from a focus on policy development and the establishment of subject departments towards school self-evaluation and the preparation of a school improvement plan. A self-evaluation process has been initiated at subject department level with the aim of building towards an overall school improvement plan at the end of the next school year. Individual subject departments have begun by examining the current provision for literacy and numeracy needs of students and by examining student outcomes in state examinations. Initial progress is good and is being ably led by the senior management team.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

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 are considering the results of the student and parent questionnaires
- The school is currently in the process of developing a register linking the supports allocated by the D.E.S. to the in-school provision for individual S.E.N. students
- Subject departments continue to develop and implement strategies to raise the level of what students can achieve
- TY work experience has been re-scheduled so that it is not scheduled immediately prior to school holidays
- A schedule of policies to be reviewed by the board this year is in place
- A major study on subject choice will be carried out in the school this year.