

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Loreto College
Cavan Town, County Cavan
Roll number: 61070P**

Date of inspection: 7 March 2012



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in March 2012 in Loreto College Cavan. 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

Loreto College Cavan is a voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Loreto Education Trust. The school was established in 1930 at the request of the Bishop of Kilmore. It currently has an enrolment of 714 students and is the only all-girls, Catholic post-primary school in the Dioceses of Kilmore.

The school is guided by the values of Mary Ward, the founder of the Loreto Sisters. The school's focus is on providing a holistic and person-centred education through which each student is encouraged to strive for excellence in all areas of life and work. In addition, the school aims to educate students to be responsible global citizens and leaders with a critical awareness of contemporary issues.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board of management is very supportive of the school, has established very good links with the educational partners, and has identified an appropriate and achievable set of priorities.
- The senior management team is hardworking, committed and effective with an open and collaborative leadership approach. The teaching staff is highly motivated and dedicated to the welfare and progress of students.
- A very effective and collaborative planning process has resulted in a highly developed set of policies underpinning the work of the school.
- Care for students is a core strength of the school. Very good opportunities for students' leadership are provided.
- The quality of teaching and learning was found to be good to very good with some examples of exemplary practice. It is worthy of note that the Key Skills Framework, as promoted by the NCCA in the context of the proposed Junior Cycle reform, has been introduced.
- The school has responded well to recommendations made in previous evaluations. Loreto College Cavan has a good culture of self-evaluation and a very strong capacity for school improvement.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The duties associated with the schedule of posts should now be reviewed.
- The school's strategy to promote good attendance should be reviewed to provide a clear focus on analysing the data collected and developing specific strategies to address student attendance issues.
- The provision for Physical Education should be expanded.
- All opportunities should be taken by teachers to facilitate students' active engagement in the learning process so as to support their independent learning.

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 in the first year of its term and all members have received relevant training. The level of collaboration between the board and senior management of the school is very good, as is communication with the whole school community. An agreed report is made available to the teachers and the parents' association following each Board meeting.

The board feels very well supported by the Loreto Trust. The Trust's Education Officer visits the school annually. Together with senior management, the board prepares a comprehensive report on the operation of the school for the trustees. In its report, the board evaluates its own effectiveness. This is very good practice.

The board is currently involved in policy review and in strengthening links with staff, parents and students. Representatives from subject departments have begun to make presentations to the board to inform them of the core work of school. This is very good work.

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 new board carried out a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis to inform their work. Five areas have been identified by the board for priority attention. These include preparing for the changes in the junior cycle curriculum, further developing literacy and numeracy, and the establishment of a board of studies to guide curriculum implementation. The priorities identified are appropriately student centred, achievable and focus on the core work of the school. These priorities should now be communicated to all of the school's stakeholders.

The school has made very good progress in policy development. The board is currently reviewing and updating a range of existing policies.

The parents' association is very active and supportive of the school. It has been involved in policy formation, fundraising and in providing practical supports to the school. This work is commended.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The newly-appointed principal and well-established deputy principal combine to form a dedicated, committed and effective senior management team. Their leadership style is open and collaborative and tasks are effectively delegated. The senior management team meets formally on a daily basis with minutes of these meetings maintained.

The school has six assistant principals' posts and ten special duties teachers' posts. The post holders make a strong contribution to the effective operation of the school. Senior management has a weekly meeting with year heads who are drawn from across the spectrum of post-holders. These meetings are attended by the pastoral care co-ordinator and the guidance counsellor at appropriate times to ensure that additional support is provided for students where necessary. To build capacity, the chairing and minuting of all such meetings should be rotated. The school has lost a number of posts in recent times. In light of this fact, it is timely that the duties attached to posts be reviewed. At present, regular formal meetings are not held with post-holders. Structures should be put in place to facilitate further opportunities for post-holders to contribute to decision making at whole-school level.

The teaching staff at the school is highly motivated, dedicated and committed to the welfare and progress of students. The professional development of staff is strongly supported by senior management and teachers are encouraged to engage with subject associations and relevant in-service. Information gathered is shared amongst the members of subject departments which is good practice. Teachers have shown a willingness to embrace new methodologies and practices. For example, the Key Skills Framework promoted by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in the context of the proposed Junior Cycle reform has been introduced by a member of staff and is in the process of being adopted by all subject departments. Some good examples of the implementation of this approach were evident in the lessons observed. Recent whole-school continuing professional development (CPD) is appropriately targeted on teaching and learning. It is good to note that teachers with specialist expertise are given opportunities to share their knowledge with the whole teaching staff at formal CPD events.

The school has established a very effective planning process and it is commendably collaborative. All of the required policies have been developed and a range of policies supporting the work of the school has been devised. Policies are in line with the school's mission and are supportive of a good working environment for staff and students. To support the school's priorities in teaching and learning, consideration should be given to developing a policy for the education of exceptionally able students.

The quality of subject department planning was generally very good. However, some subject plans are in need of further development. Senior management should give consideration to further enhancing the whole-school implementation of specific initiatives across all subject departments. The use of specifically designed templates may help in this regard.

Leadership of students

The school's admission and enrolment policy is reviewed annually. This policy is well developed and transparent. The school's mission espouses inclusion and this is clearly reflected in school activities such as friendship week and specific cultural awareness events.

Student transition is carefully managed and is given priority as a method of ensuring that the students' school experience is successful. A comprehensive programme of induction is

prepared for students joining the school in first year. This includes mentoring by senior students and targeted support from the school's pastoral care team. It is good to note that a sample of students and their parents are included in an evaluation of the first-year induction programme. The induction of students into the TY programme is also very well organised. Team building exercises and an orientation programme help students to acclimatise to TY.

Students and their parents are well informed in advance of students making subject and programme choice decisions. The guidance counsellors, subject teachers and senior management provide a range of supports such as information evenings, class group input, support for individual students and a taster programme for first-year students to ensure that their subject decisions are well informed.

Communication with students and their parents is good. Methods of communication include telephone calls, text messages, the school website, letters from the principal, the school's blog, induction meetings with parents and students, information evenings, parent/teacher meetings, masses, the cultural afternoon and the student journal.

The school prides itself on the provision of care for students and it has appointed a pastoral care co-ordinator as a post of responsibility. Evidence provided during the evaluation showed that care for students is a core strength of the school. The school's pastoral care system is closely aligned with the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) syllabus. Pastoral care is concurrently timetabled for every year group to facilitate visiting speakers. The fact that pastoral care is provided for senior students means that they receive additional supports and that whole-school approaches to topics and themes can be effectively implemented. The school's implementation of anti-bullying strategies is a good example of the success of this whole-school approach.

A computerised system is in place to record and track students' attendance. The school commends students with full attendance each year with an award. The level of student absenteeism in the data returned to the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) for the 2010/11 academic year is of concern. It is recommended that the school's Statement of Strategy to Promote Good Attendance be reviewed to provide a clear focus on analysing the data collected and developing specific strategies to address student attendance issues.

The school offers very good opportunities for student leadership and development. The student council is well organised and is a very effective voice for students in the school. The engagement of the student council with students, teachers, senior management and the board is of a very high quality. The student council meets the board annually and presents a report on its work. The council has been involved in policy development, fundraising for charity and addressing student welfare.

All senior-cycle students are offered leadership development opportunities. Students are invited to apply for positions as prefects commensurate with their areas of interest such as sports, the environment and first-year mentoring. The school also appoints a head girl and deputy head girl following a selection and interview process. Prefects are seen as role models by the whole student population and the prefect system is a very effective way of supporting students' personal development.

During the evaluation, the behaviour of students was exemplary. The school has a very well developed code of behaviour with a clear ladder of referral. The schools' approach to positive student behaviour is very good. Consideration should be given to ensuring that the school's daily emphasis on the positive is reflected sufficiently in the code.

The school offers the following programmes; the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate (LC) and the Leaving Certificate

Vocational Programme (LCVP). The range of programmes being offered meets the needs of the students in the school. A wide range of subjects is offered in both the junior cycle and the senior cycle. Generally, subjects have good timetabling allocation and classes are well distributed across the week. Currently however, many year groups are provided with only one class period of Physical Education (PE) per week and some class groups have no access to PE. It is recommended that the provision for PE be expanded and work begin towards providing the subject in line with the recommendations of the Department of Education and Science (DES) *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools* and the school's own mission statement.

The school endeavours to assign students into mixed-ability groupings for subjects where possible. This very good practice should be extended.

The school provides support for a small number of students with special educational needs. There was widespread evidence of sharing information such as differentiation and general strategies for addressing the specific needs of students. Support for students with additional needs is delivered primarily by three teachers with specialised qualifications in the area. This is good practice. However, there are a large number of other teachers who are involved in the delivery of additional allocated teaching hours. Due regard should be given to reducing the numbers of teachers involved in the delivery of additional teaching to avoid fragmented delivery and to further promote collaboration between the support team and mainstream teachers.

A broad range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities is provided for students. These activities have provided students with opportunities to compete in local, regional and national events in a wide range of disciplines. Teachers are commended for their generosity in providing these activities for students.

2.3 Management of facilities

The school is situated on a large, well-appointed site and has developed its facilities as it expanded. Although some of the buildings are old, with attendant maintenance difficulties, the school is very well maintained and provides a warm, welcoming learning environment for students. Most teachers have base classrooms. The majority of classrooms have been developed into stimulating and attractive subject-specific environments for students. This is very good work.

There has been significant investment in ICT in the school with all classrooms well equipped. Teachers have been provided with relevant input to support their use of ICT and its use was a significantly positive feature of teaching and learning during the evaluation.

The school has achieved a Green Flag and students are given opportunities to address environmental issues. At the time of the evaluation the school was reviewing its health and safety statement and the school is employing an outside agency to support this work.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The evaluation team visited thirty-six lessons over a range of subjects and programmes. The quality of teaching and learning was found to be good to very good with some instances of exemplary practice. Where best practice was observed, learning outcomes were

displayed from the outset, were referred to at appropriate times during the lesson and were used as the basis for the conclusion. This good practice should be extended.

Planning for lessons was very good with resources such as ICT presentations and worksheets prepared and accessible for students. It is good to note that ICT was used effectively in the majority of lessons.

In all cases, a variety of methodologies was used during lessons. Where this worked best, the methodologies used were sufficiently varied to support the interests and developmental stages of the students. In some cases, very good use was made of motivational subject matter for students such as video clips and references from contemporary culture to support engagement with the learning outcomes. This very good practice should be extended wherever possible. Other stimulating methodologies were used such as discovery learning, active learning and pair work. In some cases, however, an over-reliance on teacher-led exposition resulted in passive learning. All opportunities should be taken by teachers to facilitate students' active engagement in the learning process so as to support their independent learning.

Some team teaching was observed during the evaluation and team teaching has also been used to support students with special educational needs. This is a very good use of the resources provided.

The school has identified literacy and numeracy as a priority area for development. In some lessons visited, literacy and numeracy strategies were well integrated into classroom routines. In other cases, there is scope to include strategies such as the displaying of key words. Where appropriate the skills associated with literacy and numeracy should be further emphasised in all subject areas.

Some good assessment practices were observed during the evaluation. Students' work is monitored regularly and homework is regularly assigned. There is scope for an increase in the provision of written teacher developmental comments to help students improve their work. Questioning techniques were used to good effect in some lessons. Where this was most effective, named students were asked specifically pitched higher-order and lower-order questions. This very effective technique should be implemented across all classes.

In every lesson visited, the atmosphere was positive and supportive of students' progress. Teachers' rapport with students was of a very high order with good affirmation of effort made. Students were very willing to engage with tasks and assignments, and in all cases, classroom management was good.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

The board has good procedures in place to document and track the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluation reports. In previous subject and programme evaluation reports, there have been very few recommendations made in relation to subject provision and school support. Senior management has implemented all of the recommendations relating to whole-school support in a systematic way.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

The majority of recommendations regarding teaching and learning issues have been implemented. This is very good work. In the case of the Mathematics report, this has necessitated a change of culture regarding provision for teaching and learning. The school is commended for following through on recommendations made.

With respect to the recommendations made in the TY evaluation, there is further scope to develop the lesson outcomes in the TY subjects and modules. Greater efforts should be made to align the planning for TY with the good practice observed in lesson planning for other year groups.

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

There is clear evidence that self-evaluation is embedded in the culture of the school. A range of self-evaluation instruments and processes are in place to assist the board and the subject departments in reviewing their work in the interest of enhancing the educational experience of the students. Students, their parents and teachers are meaningfully involved in various stages of the review processes. This is very good work.

Loreto College Cavan is a school with a very progressive outlook. It has the capacity to adapt promptly and appropriately to the changing educational environment with care of students central to all decisions made.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

All partners in Loreto College Cavan are delighted with the M.L.L. Report. We feel the process was positive and worthwhile. Also, we would like to compliment the three inspectors involved in the evaluation. They were positive and professional in their work.

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 B.O.M. have drawn up a strategic plan to implement the M.L.L. recommendations and suggestions.

The P.O.R. review has begun.

An Attendance sub-committee has been established. They are reviewing procedures and the strategy to promote good attendance.

The P.E. provision has been enhanced.

Teachers continue to work on ways to actively engage students.