

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Joseph's Christian Brothers Secondary School
Fairview, County Dublin
Roll number: 60390F**

Date of inspection: 20 April 2016



**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 Saint Joseph's C.B.S. 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

Saint Joseph's C.B.S. is a voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). Established in 1888, the school has a strong sense of heritage and history. The school is included in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department of Education and Skills action plan for educational inclusion. The school provides a broad curriculum with a range of programmes available for all abilities and ages: the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes. Transition Year (TY) is offered as a compulsory programme. Enrolment has increased over recent years to the current level of 316 students.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management has a good range of expertise within its membership and has established clear priorities on areas such as policy review, building, finance and enrolment.
- The principal and deputy principal work effectively to ensure that the school is well run and show a strong commitment to inclusion and to the care and welfare of the students.
- The quality of care provided for students is very good and student-support structures within the school are well organised.
- The quality of teaching and learning in most lessons was good and all lessons were taught in a mutually respectful and supportive learning environment.
- In the very good lessons observed, students were actively engaged in learning; however, the dominant methodology used in many lessons was characterised by an over-reliance on teacher-led discussion.
- The school has the capacity to reflect, review and respond to changing circumstances.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board of management should further develop practices for monitoring key aspects of school provision, such as ongoing improvements in teaching and learning, the implementation of recommendations from inspections, and outcomes in student attainment.

- There is a need to enhance teachers' understanding and implementation of differentiated provision across all subject areas.
- In order to build on the very good classroom practice observed in some lessons, a whole-school approach should be adopted to implementing more effective student-centred active methodologies.
- Subject plans should be more purposeful; they should inform classroom practice more clearly and lead to enhanced student experience.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management has a good range of expertise within its membership, including input from some longstanding members, and is supported by the patron, ERST. New members have received training from the Joint Managerial Board (JMB). The board meets regularly, gives appropriate time to consideration of issues and keeps a good record of its work.

While the board delegates the day-to-day running of the school to the principal, it sees itself as overseeing the running of the school. In this regard, clear priorities have been established on areas such as policy review, building, finance and enrolment. In addition to these priorities, the board provides on-going support to the principal with respect to issues which arise during the school year. However, the board of management should further develop practices for monitoring key aspects of school provision, such as ongoing improvements in teaching and learning, the implementation of recommendations from inspections, and outcomes in student attainment.

Parents are well informed about general school activities and events through the use of text messaging, the school website and letters. However, there is limited communication between the board and the general body of parents. The board should consider how it reports on the operation of the school to the school community. In line with JMB advice, the same agreed report of board meetings should be presented in writing to staff, parents and student council. A dedicated section on the website would be a useful means of facilitating enhanced communication.

The principal and deputy principal work together in a very collegial manner and have complementary strengths. They work effectively to ensure that the school is well run, they are 'hands on' and endeavour to be accessible to parents, students and staff. In their work, they show a strong commitment to inclusion and to the care and welfare of the students. During the evaluation process, it became evident that the principal and deputy principal have the confidence and support of the school community. The results of a teacher survey show that staff believe the school is well run.

The middle-management team provides very good support in relation to areas such as the care of students and policy development. The team has weekly timetabled meetings and members carry out their duties competently. In consultation with staff, school management has undertaken a recent review of posts with agreed changes to be introduced in the next academic year. The outcomes of this review reflect the changing needs in the school.

The school has a well-organised and active student council. They are elected democratically and supported by the work of a liaison teacher. They meet regularly and have been consulted on a number of policies. The student council takes its work of representing students' views very seriously and has presented to senior management and to the board on issues of concern to students. Good use is being made of the school website by

the student council to disseminate information on its work. That said, responses to questionnaires indicate that the majority of students would like a greater say in how things are done in the school. It would be worthwhile to explore further opportunities for the council to engage directly with the student body they represent, for example, through assemblies. There is a prefects' system in the school. The prefects are given a range of responsibilities, and first-year students are mentored by sixth-year students through the 'Big brother little brother' programme.

A commitment to inclusion is evident in the relationship between the school and the parents' association (PA). The PA is actively involved in school life; for example, it meets incoming parents as part of the school's annual open night. It provides details of its activities on the school website. In discussion, parents were of the opinion that their views are valued by school management. The PA has been consulted on many issues such as policy development and curriculum and it is proactive in coming forward with suggestions such as the introduction of LCA and first-aid training in TY. Furthermore, the home-school-community liaison co-ordinator appropriately devotes particular attention to connecting with parents of students identified as early school leavers. However, the school is advised to reflect on the results of questionnaires in relation to communication with the general parent body.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The senior management team has a strong commitment to improvement and maintaining the high quality of care and welfare of students. Over their tenure, they have worked successfully to increase enrolment, manage the major turnover of staff, and upgrade the information communication technology (ICT) facilities within the school. Currently, they are involved in the advance stages of infrastructure improvement. The principal and deputy principal provide leadership for learning through ensuring that the timetable is well organised, by providing whole-staff continuing professional development (CPD) and being supportive of staff who take on further study. Good communications between management and staff is a hallmark of the school. Staff members are afforded and avail of opportunities to lead projects and initiatives; these include involvement in a Board of Studies, school self-evaluation (SSE) and DEIS teams. The work of these teams informs decisions and development of the school.

The quality of care provided for students is very good and student-support structures within the school are well organised. For example, a care team is in place, meets weekly and coordinates a wide range of interventions such as a homework club and afterschool study. Programmes for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) are in place. The students' guidance and counselling needs are well addressed. Strong links have been created with external agencies and third-level institutions and student progression is well monitored. The school also participates in the School Completion Programme (SCP) and, in line with DEIS requirements, attendance and retention are closely monitored.

The commitment to inclusion and meeting the needs of students is particularly effective. Students making the transition from primary school are well supported. Staff and students visit the local primary school and there is an open evening for students and parents. The school has a policy on admissions; however, the criteria for entry should be kept under review in light of increasing enrolment. Once assigned a place in the school, students may also apply for a specific placement in the unit for students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD).

The school's curriculum has been adapted over the years in order to meet the needs of the student cohort. Currently, it provides a wide range of subjects; for example, three modern languages are on offer and plans are well progressed for the introduction of an additional

practical subject, Technology. This latter development is in direct response to demand from students and parents. Students are assigned to mixed-ability class groups on entry. Commendably, first-year students are facilitated to sample all subjects and are supported by advice from teachers when choosing the subjects they will take onwards for junior cycle. All students participate in a well-organised games programme. However, the school should keep under review the employment of a qualified Physical Education teacher. The provision of four classes for students within the ASD unit facilitates access to a mix of mainstream and specialist support so that students can participate fully in the school community.

Considerable attention has been devoted to student behaviour by staff and management. The expectations regarding behaviour presented in the students' journal are a simplified version of the code of behaviour. Results from student questionnaires show that the majority of students understand these rules and get on well with each other. As currently presented, the existing overarching code of behaviour is overly complicated and focuses very much on specific actions and sanctions rather than the promotion of positive behaviour. It is recommended that a greater focus be placed on the promotion of positive behaviour and that the code be simplified to make clearer the roles of various staff including the class tutor and year head.

Support for students with additional learning needs is very well coordinated. Good assessment practices effectively inform the consequent provision for relevant students. The team of teachers who support students with additional learning needs has a high level of expertise and engages in ongoing professional development. The students benefit from the support of special-needs assistants (SNAs) whose work is overseen by the coordinator for special educational needs (SEN). Currently, the main method of providing support is withdrawal from mainstream classes. It would be worthwhile exploring other options such as the greater use of team teaching in order to enhance current provision. It would also be worthwhile for the very good teaching methodologies observed in use with LCA students to be adopted more widely across other subject areas.

The dedication of staff to the provision of a wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities is commendable. Good use is made of local facilities to ensure all students can avail of a wide range of sporting activities. Students and staff are also involved in initiatives such as charitable collections and this year, as happens every two years, students will travel to Zambia as part of an immersion programme.

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*.

1.3 Management of facilities

The school building, parts of which are listed for preservation, is maintained to a high standard. It has undergone major redevelopment in recent years with the provision of new toilets, additional classrooms and office space. The school has approval for further development and the plans for a new practical room are well progressed. The Green School committee has pursued funding for a new bike shed successfully. At the time of the evaluation, the English department was creating a library space and books had been sourced in support of this initiative; this will be a worthwhile addition to the school. All classrooms are well resourced with good ICT facilities. The school has a health and safety statement and is following up on some issues highlighted in a recent audit.

The provision of teacher-based classrooms results in students moving between lessons. During the evaluation, there was a very good sense of order as students moved on the

corridors and stairs and lessons began on time. The administration and operation of the school are well supported by secretarial and ancillary staff.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning in most observed lessons was good. In a few lessons, very good teaching and learning was observed; however, there was also some lessons where there was scope for development.

Student behaviour in all lessons was very good. Good classroom routines were established and very good teacher-student relations were evident. The roll was taken at the beginning of each lesson and students were expected to have all necessary materials. All lessons were taught in a mutually respectful and supportive learning environment.

Overall, preparation for lessons was very good and in many cases teachers made good use of video clips, worksheets and high-quality electronic presentations to present and structure lessons. In some cases, teachers devised specific learning intentions which they hoped the students would achieve during the lesson. Where best practice was observed, learning intentions were expressed in terms of what the students should know or be able to do, and the learning intentions were reviewed at the end of the lesson to assess students' progress. Such good practice should be extended across the school.

Class groups are small and this facilitated differentiated support for individual students during some lessons. For example, teachers set whole-class work and then circulated providing support where needed. However, in most lessons teacher-led instruction was characterised by whole-class teaching with the same content and homework assigned for all. There is a need to enhance teachers' understanding and implementation of differentiated provision in classrooms across the school.

The quality of students' learning was assessed through a variety of means including worksheets, teacher observation, written assignments, and homework. The main method of assessment observed was oral questioning by the teacher. In some lessons, good use was made of directed questions and questioning that probed students' understanding of the relevant material. However, in many cases the questioning style did not challenge all students sufficiently. Questions were often of a closed type; such questions required only very short responses from students.

In the very good lessons observed, students were actively engaged in learning. For example, in some instances, students had to independently analyse and respond to the lesson content. This level of engagement was supported by worksheets or tasks which gave students appropriate time to engage with the material, and incrementally increase the level of challenge throughout the lesson. Group work was also well used to allow students to engage purposefully in learning. Active engagement was also evident in some lessons where students were challenged to explain their learning at various stages in the lesson.

Where used purposefully, active learning strategies worked well and it was evident that students learned effectively and with enjoyment. However, the dominant methodology used in many lessons was characterised by an over-reliance on teacher-led discussion and questioning, which often resulted in students adopting a more passive role. It is recommended that teachers reflect on the link between the teaching approaches adopted and their impact on student engagement and outcomes. In order to build on the very good classroom practice observed in some lessons, a whole-school approach should be adopted to implementing more effective student-centred active methodologies.

A review of students' homework journals highlighted inconsistencies in the recording of homework, particularly with senior students. In the minority of lessons where best practice was observed, homework was written clearly on the board for students to record and teachers checked the journal's completion before leaving the class. A whole-school review of homework procedures with the aim of establishing a more cohesive approach should be conducted.

Subject department planning is well established. All subjects department have adopted a collaborative approach to planning and have developed subject plans which provide good information about provision and organisational aspects related to the relevant subject. Some of the subject plans include common schemes of work which set out the course content and identify the related learning intentions, teaching approaches, resources and assessment. However, many aspects of the plans are not specific enough to provide adequate guidance to inform classroom practice; there is scope to develop the subject plans more as 'living documents' that direct and guide classroom practice and student experience. Most subject plans did not specify how the DEIS targets and actions would be implemented in their subject area.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Good progress is evident in the implementation of recommendations of previous inspections. The TY programme for English has been reviewed, an oral component has been introduced for Irish examinations and policies relating to SEN have been reviewed. It would be worthwhile to seek students' views on what influenced their subject choice for Leaving Certificate, particularly for Chemistry, as was previously recommended in a Science-Chemistry report.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Some progress is evident in the implementation of recommendations of previous inspections. For example, assessment practices in respect of SEN continue to be developed and have been amended over recent years. However, in line with the findings outlined in the teaching and learning section of this report, a greater engagement is required with recommendations relating to classroom practice across all subject areas.

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

The school has addressed many challenges over recent years and taken successful actions to address these. It is clear that there is capacity to reflect, review and respond to changing circumstances. For example, declining enrolment has been reversed and infrastructure has been greatly improved.

The school has engaged actively with school self-evaluation (SSE) processes in relation to the literacy and numeracy strands of DEIS planning. Very good links have been developed with Dublin City University that has provided support and guidance to the SSE team. Very good practices have been established such as gathering evidence from a variety of sources including parents and students. The improvement plans developed as a result of this process are being integrated into the overall DEIS planning.

The current DEIS plan is well developed and clearly sets out targets and actions across key areas. The school will shortly conduct an overall review of the seven strands of DEIS planning and this review will serve to inform the setting of targets and choice of actions in the next cycle. However, more robust arrangements for the on-going monitoring of progress would enhance the outcomes in the next cycle of DEIS planning.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

We wholeheartedly welcome this report and see it as an affirmation of the excellent work carried out by a committed staff. We appreciate the recognition of the work of the Board of Management in establishing clear priorities for the school; of the senior management's commitment to inclusion and the care and welfare of the students; of the well organised student-support structures within the school; of the good quality of teaching and learning observed and of the very good teacher-student relations. We also welcome the recognition of our supportive Parents Council and active Student Council.

We welcome the recognition that the school has addressed many challenges over recent years and taken successful actions to address these, in particular in reversing declining enrolment and greatly improving infrastructure. We welcome the recognition that there exists in the school the capacity to reflect, review and respond to changing circumstances.

Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

The first Board of Management meeting of 2016/17 will address the recommendations of the report.

In staff and subject planning meetings already held the topic of improving student attainment has been discussed and will be brought to the school's Board of Studies. This board has already met and suggested changes in timetabling and class structure (in certain subjects) in 3rd year to improve grades at junior cert level.

While the teaching staff have had inservice in the area of AFL (Assessment for Learning), a component of which was differentiation, it is planned to have a more in-depth inservice in this area.

In relation to more effective student-centred active methodologies, a number of teachers on our staff will present to the whole staff how they use such methodologies in the classroom. Through the use of common "share-all" folders teachers are already sharing their knowledge and experience in this area.

At subject planning meetings held recently it has been emphasised to each department that written subject plans which emerge from those meetings should be more purposeful, inform classroom experience more clearly and lead to enhanced student experience.

The recommendations from the inspection report have been on the agenda of all subject planning meetings held at the beginning of this (2016/17) school year and the collation of each department report with a view to whole school approach being implemented is currently underway.