

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Saint Mogue's College
Bawnboy, County Cavan
Roll number: 70360C**

Date of inspection: 9 February 2012



Whole-School Evaluation

Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in February, 2012 in St Mogue's College, Bawnboy. 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; a response was not received from the board.

Introduction

St Mogue's College operates under the trusteeship of County Cavan Vocational Education Committee (VEC). It serves a large rural catchment area. The school offers a range of programmes to meet the needs of its students, including the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and the Transition Year programme (TY). The school participates in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion and the School Completion Programme (SCP). There has been a steady growth in enrolment over recent years: in the current school year, the mainstream enrolment stands at 175 students.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- Enrolment trends are very positive in the school and much work has been done in this regard.
- A strong culture of consultation and collaboration between management and staff has been established.
- The school operates an open and inclusive admissions policy and the atmosphere is welcoming and caring.
- Curriculum and subject provision is excellent given the size of the school.
- The quality of learning and teaching ranged between good and very good, and some exemplary lessons were observed.
- The school has demonstrated a strong capacity to engage with school improvement.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The expertise and experience of individual members of the board of management should be harnessed so that the board can take an increased leadership role in the school.
- Priority should be given to the development of the DEIS plan so that it becomes an integral component of the planning process for everyone in the school.
- Senior management should now draw up a list of all necessary management and leadership duties and agree individual responsibilities.
- The school should ensure that a co-ordinated approach is taken with regard to the provision of support for students with SEN.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools* (September 2011) without modification. The school is compliant with the requirements of Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006. School authorities provided evidence that arrangements are being put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the recently published Circular 0065/2011 and *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* as a matter of priority.

The board of management, a sub-committee of County Cavan Vocational Education Committee (VEC), is appropriately constituted and meets four times each year. The chief executive officer (CEO) does not normally attend board meetings. Instead, the CEO meets regularly with the principals from all post-primary schools within County Cavan VEC, thereby maintaining ongoing communication with St Mogue's College. Training has been provided to individual board members. The board is aware of its statutory requirements and, in this regard, has discussed and ratified many policies. However, the board needs to ensure that all policies are signed and dated and include a timeframe for implementation and review.

The board is very supportive of, and committed to, the school. For instance, individual members attend key school events, as required. However, leadership in educational management tends to come from the school's senior management team rather than from the board of management. There is considerable scope for the board to develop its role. As a first step, there is a need to harness current levels of experience and expertise which exist among board members. When the DEIS plan is progressed, the baseline data, targets and actions should be discussed by the board, which should receive regular reports from senior management on progress in meeting the targets set.

There is a very active Parents' Association (PA) in St Mogue's College and much work has been achieved to date. However, half of the parents surveyed stated that they were unaware of the work of the PA. This is unfortunate given the amount of time and commitment currently being given by the PA to the school. It is recommended that the PA devise strategies to ensure that the remaining parents become more aware of its activities.

The school's priorities for development

The school now enjoys a very good reputation in the local community, and growth in enrolment is due, in part, to this reputation, together with the regular communication between the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator and the local primary schools. For instance, sixth-class primary students, who come from a variety of feeder schools, attend St Mogue's College for computer lessons each week for a period of eight weeks during the spring term.

The school has developed a strategic action plan and has achieved many of its objectives. Some of these include expansion of the curriculum, increase in enrolment and the establishment of very good links with the community. The board and senior management cited a number of other priorities: to continue to be inclusive; to continue to be a centre of academic excellence; to continue to increase the use of technology in teaching and learning;

to review policies; and to expand the self-evaluation strategies already initiated. School management should now devise action plans in order to implement the stated objectives. Furthermore, the DEIS plan should be progressed and become an integral component of the planning process in the school.

Parents and students surveyed stated that they appreciate the fact that the school makes every effort to challenge students to fulfil their potential.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The senior management team, comprising principal and deputy principal, has complementary skills and share a common vision for the school. However, there is a need for them to draw up a list of all management and leadership tasks necessary to run the school and to agree individual responsibilities. This should be regularly reviewed and adapted as necessary. For example, where contact with parents currently involves the principal in the first instance, in many cases this could and should be dealt with by the year head. In that context, it is also recommended that the role of the year head be revised.

The principal and the deputy principal set high standards for the teaching staff and the students. They maintain exemplary relations with staff, and are readily available to support and advise parents and teachers in dealing with all difficulties as they arise. However, the principal and deputy principal need to create more formal time to meet as a senior management team in order to support strategic planning. This is recommended.

Senior management sees its leadership role as providing a positive environment where learning can take place. It has successfully promoted a strong culture of consultation and collaboration among members of the teaching staff. The teachers, including both post-holders and others, have shown commendable flexibility and willingness to share burdens as duties have been redistributed to serve the needs of the school.

The school engaged in a review of the schedule of posts in 2011. However, as the principal is currently co-ordinating school development planning, there is a need to revisit this again in order for this role to be reassigned. Many policies are in place, most of which were reviewed last year by all staff. It is suggested that the school adopt a more systematic approach to this process. A timeframe should be drawn up for the review of each policy and where appropriate, for the development of new policies.

Regular informal meetings of the assistant principal (AP) post-holders occur and there are good arrangements in place for meetings of the care team. Subject departments have been introduced, the role of convenor is rotated and collaborative subject planning takes place.

The VEC provides professional development courses for staff. Senior management has also placed a strong emphasis on the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers. Teachers are encouraged to participate in professional development courses and to report back to colleagues in order to share their learning. All of the teaching staff has received inputs on assessment for learning (AfL) strategies and teaching for mixed ability groupings.

The school prides itself on the time and efforts it has invested in developing the competencies among members of staff in the area of technology. In the lessons observed, many staff members demonstrated proficient levels in this regard. A contributory factor to this positive outcome has been the provision of iPads to staff and students in first year and second year. Senior management is actively encouraging all staff to make greater use of ICT in their teaching.

Leadership of students

The school operates an open and inclusive admission policy and the atmosphere in the school is welcoming and caring. In questionnaire responses and during interviews conducted in the course of the inspection, students strongly agreed that they felt safe and cared for, and that there is a good atmosphere in the school. They also commented positively on the relationships that exist between teachers and students. In addition, a high number of questionnaire responses stated that teachers encourage students to work to the best of their ability.

Attendance is closely monitored by all teachers and checked by the deputy principal. Parents are contacted in cases of unexplained absence. These strategies have been effective in improving the culture of attendance in the school but there are some outstanding issues which the school is seeking to address.

Support for students is very good. There is a care team which meets regularly. Other initiatives which support the work of the SPHE teachers are in place. The HSCL co-ordinator is very active both in the school and in the community. Classes, such as cookery, have been established for adults. The HSCL co-ordinator also plays a very significant role in the transfer of students from primary school. This work is supported by the guidance counsellor who, in turn, makes every effort to meet with each first-year student individually. The guidance counsellor is shared between this school and two other schools and is managing this work very effectively.

Senior cycle students are provided with timetabled guidance lessons and can attend one-to-one sessions, as required. Information regarding subject choice is provided to parents and students. However, in questionnaire responses, over one-fifth of students and over a quarter of parents stated that helpful advice was not provided regarding subject choice. The school should explore the reasons for these sentiments and address any issues.

Subject provision is excellent in the context of this school. There is a good balance of language, practical, science and humanities subjects. The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum, suited to the needs and interests of its students. Students and parents were very positive in their comments about the curriculum and about the provision of the JCSP, which has now been in place for two years, the LCVP and the TY programmes. These programmes are a vital part of the school's retention strategy. It is good to note that JCSP students are integrated into mainstream settings for many subjects. There are many reading initiatives in place to support their literacy needs. Extensive tracking procedures are used for these students, where progression is measured throughout each year of the junior cycle.

The TY plan is creative and provides students with many opportunities to participate in a variety of activities. The contribution by staff members to the provision of these activities is commended. Work experience is closely monitored. Opportunities are provided to both teachers and students to review the TY programme each term and this is excellent practice. In any future review of the programme, some of the subjects being offered should be re-titled in order to demonstrate the true innovative nature of their content. In addition, teachers should be required to critically evaluate the content, methodologies and assessment procedures being used.

The arrangements for student choice and timetabling are very good. First-year students are given a taster course in the option subjects before they make their choices, and their wishes are accommodated as far as possible. This is the case also as students progress through the school, even to the extent that teachers make themselves available outside normal school

time so that the school can provide the widest possible range of subjects. Management and teachers are highly commended on their commitment and flexibility in meeting students' needs.

The school is in receipt of 1.68 whole-time equivalences (WTEs) for the support of students with special educational needs (SEN). Small class groups have been created to provide additional support in English and Mathematics. All tracking is currently undertaken by the individual teachers assigned to the small groups. Four individual education plans (IEPs) have been created and this is good. A SEN register of students is available to all teachers. In developing the SEN department, the school should ensure that a co-ordinated approach is being taken in relation to the provision of support for students with SEN and that progress for these students is regularly tracked. This will ensure that, when necessary, support is discontinued once the particular learning need has been met or that, where ongoing support is required, revised learning targets are set.

As student council is in place which has a number of achievements to its credit to date. In addition, the council has brought issues to the attention of staff at whole-staff meetings, thereby giving recognition to the importance of its work. The acquisition of badges, as well as the enhanced use of the notice board, will improve its profile.

During the inspection, parents and students testified to the high level of interest, care and commitment which the management and teaching staff have for the students. The fact that the principal and deputy principal are very visible around the school and readily accessible to students and parents who wish to speak with them is evidence of this care. When students were asked to name the strengths of the school, they mentioned, among other areas, the quality of relationships between teachers and students. Communication systems in the school are very good and were commented favourably on by both parents and students.

2.3 Management of facilities

The building is clean and very well maintained. It provides a bright, cheerful and practical environment for learning and teaching. During the inspection, the parents commented positively on the school's facilities. In recent years, the summer works scheme has contributed to the upgrading and improvement of the building. There is a very good ICT infrastructure in the school: many classrooms have data projectors; there is a newly refurbished computer room; and all first-year and second-year students have iPads.

The school takes its responsibility about health and safety very seriously and has allocated part of a post of responsibility to this area. An extensive health and safety audit has been undertaken and fire drills are regularly held and logged.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Students and parents were very positive about the quality of teaching and learning in the school. The students said that teachers explain things very well to them and regularly assign homework. A sizeable majority stated that teachers encourage them to work to the best of their ability.

During the course of the inspection, twenty lessons were observed, straddling twenty-five class periods. In almost all lessons observed, the quality of teaching and learning ranged

between very good and good, and there were some instances of exemplary practice. ICT was used to great effect in almost all lessons.

Where teaching was very good or exemplary, it was characterised by the following practices: good planning; the use of stimulating and appropriate teaching resources; a clear statement of learning outcomes at the beginning of the lesson; and the recapitulation of learning objectives at the end. These lessons were purposeful and well-paced and a variety of methodologies was used. In some lessons, opportunities for active and cooperative learning were taken and students' interest and engagement were maintained. Where teaching was good rather than very good, some but not all of these features were present. In almost all language lessons, very good practice, which included the use of the target language by the majority of teachers, was observed. This very good practice should be adopted in all language lessons.

Assessment for Learning (AfL) is an ongoing project within the school and there was evidence of the application of the principles in the majority of the lessons observed. While learning outcomes were usually shared with students at the beginning of lessons, in some, there was no assessment of their attainment. In many cases, correction of written work by teachers was sporadic, and there was very little evidence in students' copybooks of suggestions by teachers for improvement. It is important that students' written materials are regularly assessed and commented upon. Teachers should also enhance current students' profiles by maintaining a record of homework as well as assessments.

From subject department planning folders and interviews with staff, it is evident that a good level of collaboration is occurring. Some departments also provide common assessments to students where possible and this is good. In order to build on the good work already taking place, subject departments could now devote some planning time to exploring models of excellence in planning and teaching methods. In this way, the very good practices and considerable professional expertise already in evidence could be shared across all departments. Consideration should also be given to expanding the very good practice of peer observation already established in one subject department.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

All of the key recommendations concerning management in previous reports have been implemented. For example, the health and safety issues which featured in the Art report have now been addressed.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Many of the recommendations regarding teaching and learning in previous inspection reports have also been documented and implemented. Lesson observation in the course of this inspection suggests that while some of the recommendations are being implemented by the relevant departments, many of the same recommendations could be made again across a range of subject areas. It is suggested that the recommendations in subject inspection reports should also be examined for whole-school applicability and for the potential to develop school self-evaluation practices.

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

The culture of self-evaluation is developing in this school and there are some examples of exemplary practice. Senior management and teaching staff are adopting a reflective approach to their work. Management is very capable of leading the process of self-evaluation and school improvement. It is important that the board of management be fully involved in this process.

It is recommended that the school's priorities for development be revisited in the light of the findings and recommendations of this report and that a new overarching plan for improvement be developed, with a strong focus on the progression of the DEIS plan.

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