

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**St David's Holy Faith Secondary School
Greystones, County Wicklow
Roll number: 61830M**

Date of inspection: 12 February 2015



**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 January and February 2015 in St David's Holy Faith Secondary School, Greystones, Co. Wicklow. 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 David's Holy Faith Secondary School is a Catholic voluntary co-educational secondary school under the patronage of Le Chéile Schools Trust. The school is located in Greystones and has a current enrolment of 552 students. Students come from Greystones and the surrounding areas and are drawn from a diverse variety of backgrounds. The school's mission statement emphasises the importance of creating an atmosphere of mutual co-operation where the student is at the heart of the school community. The school offers the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and the established Leaving Certificate.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is cognisant of its legislative and statutory obligations and with the support of the trustees executes its responsibilities in a diligent manner.
- School management places commendable focus on supporting the student learning experience through staff training and support for continuing professional development (CPD).
- The principal provides clear educational leadership, has overseen significant school improvement in recent years and has delivered on extensive and positive change.
- Student care strategies support high quality development and wellbeing of students and are co-ordinated effectively and with dedication by teachers.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good or very good with exemplary practice noted in a number of lessons.
- Teachers demonstrate a willingness to embrace change and engage well with the current curricular initiatives in the school.
- The broad curriculum offered at junior and senior cycle is both balanced and progressive.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should oversee the development of a cohesive school plan which will contain all ratified school policies, updated subject and programme plans and will outline key developmental priorities.
- Senior management, with the over-arching direction of the board should create staff working groups in which each group would focus on a particular priority task within a definite time frame.

QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is appropriately constituted. Board members are cognisant of legislative and statutory obligations and execute their responsibilities in a diligent manner with the support of the trustees. There is an effective finance sub-committee in place. In line with the principles of partnership and collaboration between all stakeholders, the board promotes and values the ongoing contribution of staff, parents and students to all aspects of school life.

The board fosters excellence in teaching and learning through supporting teacher CPD. Student well-being is enhanced through the promotion of extra-curricular activities. The way in which the board reports on the operation of the school to parents, teachers and the school community is an example of good practice. Staff nominees on the board prepare a report for teachers and act as a communication link between the staff and the board. There is also an agreed report for parents. The board is kept well informed of school business by senior management and ensures implementation of decisions which are taken in the best interests of students. Improvement in standards is an ongoing priority of the board. There are improved trends in uptake of higher level and student attainment generally. The board has successfully overseen improvements in school infrastructure over recent years and is currently planning for a major school extension.

The board has adopted mandatory policies covering admissions, behaviour, child protection, health and safety and relationships and sexuality education (RSE). Policies currently in draft form such as an anti-bullying policy, an internet acceptable use policy and a dignity in the workplace policy will require priority ratification by the board. The board should oversee effective procedures for policy review, whereby the date of ratification and the date for review of each policy are clearly stated on the policy. A policy to encourage attendance and participation should also be developed as a priority. While there is a strategic plan in place for school improvement, there is no overall school plan. The board should oversee the development of a cohesive school plan which will contain all school policies and will outline key time-bound developmental priorities.

The parents' association is actively involved in the school and supports ongoing school activities in many ways through student study programmes, organising guest speakers and fund-raising for important projects. Responses to the questionnaires from the parents surveyed were very positive overall, particularly regarding the quality of teaching and learning. The board promotes and values the contribution of parents. The parents' association is actively involved in the life of the school and parents are consulted on relevant policies. Senior management promotes the meaningful involvement of parents in policy formation /decision making which is central to the school ethos.

Student leadership is promoted in the school through the student council, the senior prefect system and student mentoring. A representative student council is actively engaged in school activities. Consideration should be given to officers of the student council addressing the board on an annual basis. Responses from the second-year and fifth-year students surveyed at the time of the evaluation revealed that these students have positive attitudes towards learning, teaching and care strategies in the school. The vast majority of students stated that they get opportunities to work with other students in class and stated that they get on well with other students in the school.

School management places commendable focus on facilitating positive student learning experiences through staff training. Staff has shown a willingness to embrace new approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. These approaches are promoted through involvement in instructional leadership, the use of information and communications

technology (ICT) and through membership of subject associations. The strategic plan for school improvement 2013-2017 highlights prioritised actions for school development in the following areas: communication, consultation, academic excellence, curriculum planning and infrastructural developments. Whole staff review and input into this plan through focused working groups is recommended to progress these priorities.

The senior management team, consisting of the principal and the newly appointed deputy principal, jointly manages the school very effectively and on a daily basis has an active on-the-ground presence. The principal and deputy principal adopt a partnership approach to school leadership, are committed to ongoing school improvement and communicate very effectively as a team. Senior management roles are clearly defined and agreed and are carried out very effectively.

The principal provides clear educational leadership, has overseen significant school improvement in recent years and has delivered on extensive and positive change. Almost all parents surveyed during the evaluation agreed or strongly agreed that the school is well run. The way in which the senior management team promotes leadership for learning and the holistic development of students is exemplified in the following areas: the student mentoring system, the sixth-year school improvement plan, together with improved communication with students regarding change and increased student involvement in social awareness programmes. Effective leadership for learning and teaching is based on a commitment to excellence and quality improvement by senior management. The principal currently carries out year head and guidance duties. To enable senior management to develop planning into the future, these responsibilities should be delegated to staff.

Staff members are afforded and avail of the opportunity to lead projects. Feedback from staff is provided to senior management on an individual basis and is shared with the whole staff at staff meetings. Senior management, with the over-arching direction of the board should create staff working groups in which each group would focus on a particular task within a definite time frame. This would further support distributed leadership practice. Key areas highlighted in the school's strategic plan, as well as policy review and school self-evaluation are areas which should be addressed.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Year heads effectively oversee the welfare of their year groups, help to ensure that student behaviour is appropriate and monitor and consult on academic progress. Duties assigned to post holders and co-ordinators, in the main, meet school needs and all post holders carry out their duties effectively. Further review will be necessary as school needs develop in the future. Students who are absent consistently are reported to the absenteeism administration system. Class tutors, carry out a vital support for students in collaboration with year heads. In this context, a clearly defined ladder of referral should be developed as part of a reviewed code of behaviour.

Academic achievement for sixth-year students is tracked and monitored effectively and actions are identified including target-setting. This practice is having an identifiable beneficial impact on achievement. The school is currently implementing an efficient and effective tracking and monitoring system of student attainment for first-year students. It is commendable that this approach is being expanded to other year groups. The vast majority of teaching staff are deployed in accordance with their qualifications and expertise. Good staff recruitment practices in recent years have contributed to significant improvements in student learning.

Teachers demonstrate a willingness to embrace change, such as for example the current ICT initiative, whereby every teacher uses a tablet computer. An ICT strategy on the successful integration of this technology into teaching and learning should be prioritised in

advance of the introduction of student personal computer devices into the classroom. Instructional leadership practices have had a positive impact on levels of staff collaboration and innovative teaching practices and have improved the quality of student learning.

Examination of a random sample of subject plans indicated variation in quality. Some of the plans include well-tabulated schemes of work while others are limited to a description of the curriculum content. All subject plans should incorporate collaborative schemes of work setting out the learning outcomes, methodologies, resources and assessment protocols in addition to a structured time frame for the completion of work. In addition subject plans should include development themes such as: target setting resulting from an analysis of examination data, a subject-specific literacy action plan, references to the school's SSE process and records of both planned and achieved teacher CPD. There is a substantial variation in the quality of subject planning specific to the TY programme which should be addressed through further specific TY staff training.

The broad curriculum offered at junior and senior cycle is in the main balanced and progressive. The current TY programme is optional. It is praiseworthy that students are actively encouraged to enrol in the TY programme and that uptake trends are positive. The introduction of focused timetabled modules provides for diversity within the TY programme. Guidance has been introduced as a timetabled subject in TY and this helps students make informed subject choices for senior cycle and workplace provision.

Instruction time falls short of the minimum twenty-eight hours required by Circular 29/95. This should be addressed. Instruction time in Physical Education has increased but nevertheless falls short of syllabus recommendations for some year groups. This should also be addressed as resources permit. It is acknowledged that some progress was made in this regard following recommendations made in a subject inspection in Physical Education.

Guidance, counselling and student care strategies demonstrate high levels of commitment to the care and wellbeing of students co-ordinated effectively by teachers. Consideration should be given to the formation of a dedicated care team. There is a comprehensive guidance programme in place for all year groups and this provides individual, educational and personal guidance. A well-organised, qualified and co-ordinated learning support team adopts a variety of models of support in line with best practice. Counselling and care strategies and policies, including social personal and health education (SPHE) and RSE programmes, are in place. The SPHE and RSE plans require review.

The wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities supports students' holistic educational development. Evening study and night-time study provision organised by parents enhance student learning and achievement.

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

A new building project is planned. This involves refurbishment and a new school extension. Environmental responsibility and sustainability is promoted in the maintenance and use of school facilities and resources. Classrooms and specialist rooms are maintained to a high standard. The refurbished library is an immense asset to the school and supports its current student literacy programmes.

2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty-three lessons were observed during the evaluation, comprising all year groups, levels and programmes and covering core, optional, practical and non-examination subjects. Given the time of the year, revision themes and strategies for the forthcoming school examinations formed the focus of many lessons. The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good or very good with exemplary practice noted in a number of lessons. In a small minority of lessons, there was scope for development in regard to the focus of instruction and in the use of methodologies that support good lesson structure and promote active learning.

A positive, supportive and affirming learning environment was facilitated overall and there was a very good rapport between teachers and students. Most lessons were well planned, prepared and resourced and a wide variety of materials was used to facilitate students' learning including teacher prepared worksheets and handouts, video clips and visuals. Students were enabled to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills in lessons.

Most lessons were well-structured and paced and teachers shared their learning objectives with the students at the outset. Excellent practice was noted in a small number of lessons where the plan was clearly communicated to the students in terms of proposed learning outcomes and where these outcomes were revisited at the end of the lesson to assess student learning. These good practices are acknowledged.

A range of methodologies was observed and most were used to good or very good effect. Very good questioning strategies were used in many lessons for the purpose of engaging students, checking understanding and encouraging higher-order thinking. In some instances, a better balance between the use of global and directed questions and greater use of higher-order questions are recommended to ensure full student participation and maximise their potential. The excellent practice observed in some lessons was underpinned by elements of instructional leadership which resulted in improved learning experiences for students.

Teacher instruction was clear and focused. In many lessons, the effective use of visuals, supplementary worksheets and in practical lessons, student activity and teacher demonstration enhanced lesson quality. Innovative and effective use of ICT engaged students in their learning. There is scope to extend the effective integration of ICT as a teaching and learning tool across subjects. Good attention to differentiation was noted in a number of lessons, thereby ensuring appropriate levels of challenge for students.

Active learning was promoted through the use of purposeful discussion in some lessons and pair or group activities in others. Students worked well together and were supported in many instances by the teachers who circulated, offering guidance to discrete groups. There was a small number of lessons where the focus was on the task itself without preparatory instruction by the teacher and insufficient follow-through reflection on the learning outcomes associated with the tasks. Teachers should keep in mind at all times the need to maintain an appropriate balance between instruction and activity. Oral feedback for students in some lessons consolidated and improved student learning and confidence.

There was consistent use of the target language by the teachers in the language lessons observed. There were also very good efforts by students to respond in the language of the lesson. The provision of more opportunities for spontaneous interaction by students to further their oral skills development and extend their communicative competence would enhance lessons further.

There was some attention to the promotion of literacy through displays of key words and literacy-related posters. However, integration of literacy into lessons was not sufficiently explicit to maximise students' learning. This should be addressed as literacy has been the chosen area for development in the school's SSE process. Good attention to numeracy was noted in a small number of lessons and this practice should be extended.

There was very good classroom management and students' behaviour was exemplary throughout. Students were receptive to learning and applied themselves to the tasks assigned. In some instances the move from the traditional classroom layout to grouped tables facilitated ease of movement when engaging in student-based activities. Such changes are recommended for all classrooms where a revised seating plan is physically possible.

Homework was assigned in all of the lessons observed. Many of the copybooks examined had evidence of corrections and the inclusion of affirmative comments. There were some copybooks where there was limited evidence of teacher corrections. It is recommended that this good practice be extended to include more formative written feedback indicating to students their strengths and areas for development. A whole school approach to the practice of providing formative developmental comment on significant homework and assignments should be addressed to ensure that students' efforts are both validated and progressed.

3 IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Good progress is evident in the effective implementation of recommendations made in previous subject inspection and programme evaluation reports. School management has reviewed subject choices at senior cycle in order to support increased uptake of Engineering. Appropriate timetabled provision for Physical Education has been addressed for some year groups. Further progress with this recommendation is necessary. The timetabling of support for students with special educational needs has been in the main optimised, however, the formation of a small core resource team of teachers has yet to be achieved and should be progressed. The school has developed its range of assessment strategies across subject areas. Oral examinations in Irish have been introduced at senior cycle.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Overall teachers have attended well to the implementation of many of the recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports. Inspectors observed improved practice regarding assessment. There was significant improvement regarding the integrated use of resources, the range of teaching and learning strategies observed and the quality of student activity, student engagement and levels of challenge during lessons.

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

School management and staff demonstrate both commitment to and capacity to bring about improvement through SSE. A culture of review and self-evaluation has established itself in many aspects of school operation through the administration of surveys, questionnaires, student tracking and student mentoring. SSE processes have been established and determined in the 2013 school improvement plan (SIP), which focuses on prioritised outcomes to be achieved in relation to subject specific vocabulary for first-year students. It is important that the whole-school approach to planning and implementing a literacy strategy be strengthened. School management should now progress SSE systematically and continue with the journey of improving quality at all school levels.

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. David's Holy Faith Secondary School would like to thank the inspectors for the report.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection