

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**C.B.S. Mount Sion
Barrack St, Waterford
Roll number: 64930I**

Date of inspection: 23 April 2015



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April 2015 in CBS, Mount Sion. 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

CBS Mount Sion is a voluntary secondary school for boys operating under the trusteeship of The Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). This is the founding school of Blessed Edmund Rice and has a rich history of educational and social provision in Waterford since 1802. It is an inclusive school catering for students across the full ability spectrum from a range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. School enrolment of 213 students has increased steadily in recent years after a period of decline.

The school offers a range of programmes to meet the needs of its students, including the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative and the School Completion Programme (SCP).

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is a properly constituted, experienced and committed body.
- The elements of a whole-school plan are in place but the plan and some mandatory policies are not fully developed.
- The very effective visionary senior management team, through a proactive partnership approach, enables learning to occur within a highly caring and holistic environment.
- There are good links with parents and the local community and of particular merit is the enriching and very effective business school partnership with a local multi-national company.
- An exceptionally committed and innovative staff works diligently and collaboratively to provide a high level of care and support for students, but there is no trained guidance counsellor in the school.
- The quality of teaching and learning in most of the twenty-four lessons evaluated ranged from good to very good, with many examples of excellent practice observed. In a small number of lessons teaching and learning needed significant improvement.
- Student behaviour and courtesy as observed during the evaluation were exemplary.

Recommendations for Further Development

- Mandatory policies, the school plan and subject curricular plans should be prioritised for further development and ratification.
- The deployment of a suitable, qualified teacher to provide guidance and counselling to students should be prioritised.
- In lessons where scope for development was identified there should be a consistent focus on teaching methodologies that fully involve and engage students in their learning.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is a properly constituted, experienced and committed body. A comprehensive report is given by the principal at board meetings on relevant school issues and events. The board is very supportive of senior management and its work in the school. After each meeting an agreed report is prepared for staff and the parents' association. Consideration should be given to facilitating representatives of the student council and teaching staff to address the board on occasion with regard to their work in the school.

Policy review and development is a standing item on the board's agenda. Most of the mandatory policies have been developed and ratified but some, such as an attendance and participation strategy, a whole school guidance plan and a data protection policy have not yet been fully developed. The board in collaboration with relevant educational stakeholders should now oversee their development. It is advisable that in addition to the date of ratification by the board, policies should also detail a review date.

A brief document entitled school organisation currently acts as the school plan. This document in tandem with school policies and curricular programme documentation gives further information as to how the school operates. The board should oversee the collation of all these elements into a single cohesive document so as to fulfill statutory requirements and act as a benchmark for further school improvement. The plan should also document the vision for the school, and incorporate the current DEIS action plan and the school's self-evaluation improvement plan.

Priorities set by the board during its term such as increased enrolment, improved student attainment in certificate examinations, introduction of new subjects such as Art and Music and provision of enhanced physical educational facilities for students are being proactively progressed by the school community.

The principal and deputy principal as the senior management team have a long involvement with the school and have worked very effectively together in progressing a developmental agenda through a strong partnership approach with stakeholders. Enrolment has increased, the school building has been modernised and significantly improved, and the staff is now more positive and confident about the future of the school.

Currently, the middle management team comprises one assistant principal (AP) and five special duties posts. They are an effective part of the management team and carry out their duties in a diligent manner. The AP is year head to three year groups and is the examination secretary while the special duties teachers discharge a range of tasks. As student numbers are increasing and several post holders are retiring, it is now timely to effect a review of the duties attached to posts so as to ensure that the current and future needs of the school are met.

The committed parents' association has a very good working relationship with senior management and the school staff. It supports school management through its fundraising activities and its involvement in school events. Parent questionnaires completed as part of the evaluation process indicated parents' high level of confidence in the way the school is managed and in how students are cared for. There are good links with the local community. Of particular merit is the enriching and very effective business-school partnership with a multi-national company, which has instigated participation in paired science lessons, provides a work placement programme for TY students and has supported and guided the school at an organisational level.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The senior management team is actively involved in every aspect of the school. The principal is a visionary and proactive leader and manager who pursues an agenda for further school development. He is ably supported by a committed and effective deputy principal who takes particular responsibility for mentoring of staff, managing the pastoral care and discipline system and for the co-ordination of extra-curricular events. The senior management team provides support for an active learning community within a caring and holistic environment.

Regular staff meetings, the use of electronic mail and senior management's open-door policy enables good communication within the school. Staff views are valued and they have tangible input into the decision-making process.

A dedicated staff work diligently and collaboratively in the best interests of students and the school. Teachers are encouraged and supported to engage in continuing professional development (CPD). The principal visits classrooms to mentor and offer advice to new teachers. This is very good instructional leadership. Additional initiatives, such as peer-mentoring, could also be considered to further the sharing and promotion of good teaching practice. Many teachers introduce and lead projects and initiatives such as the Treoir and Aistear student mentoring programmes. Teachers are commended for taking on additional leadership and pastoral roles.

Admission procedures are inclusive and reflect the characteristic spirit and mission of the school. It is advisable to note in the admission policy that the school provides a six-year programme including a compulsory TY year. A very good induction programme delivered by SCP staff, school staff and students is in place for first-year students. Student attendance is monitored on a daily basis and there are strategies in place to follow up on absenteeism and late coming. There is a particular cohort of students that has very poor attendance and these are supported and encouraged to attend school by the home-school community liaison coordinator (HSCL), SCP staff and mentors.

In the context of a small school, a broad and balanced curriculum is provided for students through the strategic allocation of teaching resources. Students and their parents are made aware of subject choice implications, such as students not choosing a modern language. The position of guidance counsellor is currently vacant. Presently, career guidance is being provided informally by the HSCL coordinator and teachers in the school. Personal guidance as part of the guidance provision is provided in a variety of ways. However, the deployment of a suitably qualified guidance teacher to formally deliver timetabled career guidance and personal counselling should be prioritised.

All students in junior cycle participate in JCSP, which provides very good experiential learning activities to support them. TY is in its second year and students, teachers and parents were very positive about the programme. In order to maximise the use of teaching resources, TY students complete work experience on a one-day per week basis. This is a

significant amount of time for one area of the programme and it is advisable to review it in terms of allocating some of the time to a social justice or community care programme. LCVP provides students with very good experiential and team-based learning opportunities. These valuable learning programmes are well planned and co-ordinated and they play a pivotal role in the school's retention strategy.

A very good range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities is provided for students. In conjunction with the local Foróige club students can experience art and they can avail of guitar lessons and partake in the school choir. A monthly whole school themed celebration allows students to consider social issues. Teachers are to be commended for the range and quality of subject and programme related outings and the organisation of relevant visitors into classrooms. The paired science programme in the school is innovative and provides students with real life application and understanding of aspects of junior cycle science. As part of the programme parents assist in classroom support in Mount Sion and students are involved in teaching a science module in the primary school.

The special educational needs department is very effectively co-ordinated and staffed by a core team of skilled teachers. Students' learning is supported by the provision of learning support and resource teaching through withdrawal in small groups, the creation of an additional mathematics class group in junior cycle and by some team teaching. Special needs assistants (SNA) work with individual or small groups of students within the classroom. The learning support teacher works closely with the JCSP co-ordinator, the SNAs, senior management and the student support team to ensure that all provision is student-centred. Communication of students' educational needs between all relevant parties in the school is very good.

The school's Aistear support programme for all first and second year students enables them to become responsible and self-motivated learners as they track their own academic progress and set attainment targets. This is an exemplary development. The collation of data from primary school, results from school-based assessments, JCSP profiling and the Aistear programme provides a very good base for academic mentoring that in time will extend to all year groups.

A committed care team meets weekly and takes a targeted approach to supporting more vulnerable students and families aided by provision from HSCL and SCP. Parents and students attested to the high level of care and support provided for students. Each morning students are personally greeted by senior management and small groups of students are mentored before lessons start by a core team of teachers. These practices are indicative of the positive, caring and familial atmosphere in the school.

Student behaviour and courtesy as observed during the evaluation were exemplary. Good student behaviour standards are successfully prioritised in the school. Students were involved in establishing the ten fundamental school rules. The after-school positive behaviour management class for students who disregard school rules takes a pastoral care approach to students' own self-discipline. The code of behaviour should be reviewed to clearly articulate the relationship between the various elements of the discipline structure, and consideration should be given to the inclusion of a positive merits system. The number of suspensions is kept under review and they have been significantly reduced in the last two years.

Currently the student council comprises TY students who canvas all class groups for their viewpoints and recommendations. The composition of the student council should be reviewed to represent all year groups. The Aistear programme provides a good open forum

for students to air any concerns or viewpoints. TY students complete a module on leadership and personal effectiveness which helps to develop leadership skills.

Confirmation was provided that the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* was formally adopted without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary School*.

1.3 Management of facilities

Annual improvements in the school's infrastructure through the summer works scheme have impacted very positively on the school. Teacher-based classrooms are print-rich, and visually stimulating learning environments. The strategic and tasteful development of facilities such as the library, JCSP room and student social area is praiseworthy. Buildings and grounds are very well maintained contributing greatly to a welcoming environment. Currently the school is fundraising to enhance its outdoor physical education facilities. The involvement of students in the design of this project and the financial support of the local community, businesses and past students is praiseworthy. As the mission statement of the school articulates care for the environment, consideration could be given to students leading participation in the green flag initiative.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Subject plans reviewed were found to be of good quality in terms of the organisational aspects of the subject. Most curriculum plans document the list of topics to be taught with general learning outcomes to be covered in a set time period. It is recommended that curriculum plans be further developed to include student-focused learning outcomes for each topic. The learning outcomes should be closely aligned to an agreed set of appropriate teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

The quality of teaching and learning in most of the twenty-four lessons observed ranged from good to very good with many examples of excellent practice noted. There were a small number of lessons where teaching and learning needed significant improvement.

Where teaching and learning were most successful students were actively engaged in experiential learning and worked collaboratively in pairs or small groups. In these lessons students were interested, asked and answered questions and took responsibility for their own learning. Some lessons that were based entirely on group work were highly successful, and student learning was optimised with the aid of worksheets and other visual materials. In a very small number of lessons students were passive and the teacher-led instruction resulted in students becoming disengaged.

Most lessons began with an outline of the learning outcomes for the lesson. In many cases these were presented to students in terms of what they would be able to do at the end of the lesson as a result of their learning and engagement. In some lessons the learning outcomes were revisited to assess student learning and this very good practice should be replicated by all teachers.

Questioning strategies were used to good effect in most lessons with higher-order questions being appropriately used to stimulate students' interest in the subject matter. Most teachers ensured that all students participated by using both global and targeted questions. The use

of higher-order targeted questions could have been more prominent in a small number of lessons.

Some teachers used a range of resources to stimulate student interest and to contextualise lesson content. In a small number of instances these resources were not fully exploited to maximise student learning. Show me boards were used to good effect in a number of lessons as were visualizers in practical lessons. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) was seamlessly integrated into some lessons and some very appropriately chosen film clips were used to support student learning. The use of ICT could be usefully extended to more lessons to stimulate student interest and support learning.

The links with prior learning were very well developed in many lessons. Good cross curricular links and real-life applications of lesson theory were successfully integrated in many lessons and this deepened students' understanding of lesson content. Students were encouraged to contribute to class discussions and showed an understanding of and interest in subject material. Many teachers had high expectations of students.

Teachers used subject specific terminology to good effect and drew students' attention to key words and phrases in many lessons. The use of key words could be usefully extended in some lessons and should be taught in context and not as lists of vocabulary. The use of the target language in language lessons was very good in some instances and needed development in others. In some lessons students had opportunities to engage effectively with the target language through carefully planned pair work. This should be extended to all language lessons.

Classroom interactions between students and teachers were affirming and respectful. Students' contributions to lessons were valued and many teachers encouraged students to express their opinions and views.

Samples of students' copybooks revealed some very good work. In a review of school journals it was evident that most teachers regularly assign homework but not all students were recording it. While this is a difficult challenge for the school, a whole-school review of the use of the student journal is warranted.

Homework was monitored in the majority of lessons observed. Teachers regularly provided developmental oral feedback to students. Best practice was observed in lessons where teachers also provided written formative feedback on students' assignments. TY students do not sit formal summative tests, they submit a portfolio of their work from the year for evaluation and this supports a skills-based approach to learning.

In an analysis of outcomes in certificate examinations a small number of subjects have been identified where the numbers attempting and achieving higher-level papers could be increased. As part of DEIS planning, appropriate, achievable targets for improvement in examination attainment have been set. It is advisable that the analysis of results by subject departments be accompanied by a brief reflective commentary on student outcomes to reflect progress on DEIS targets. Progression rates to third level are monitored and valuable links have been made with Waterford Institute of Technology.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Since 2006, inspection reports have contained recommendations relating to policy development, timetabling, CPD and curricular planning. School management has acted on recommendations relating to timetabling and CPD and has progressed many of the recommendation made in relation to policy development. The school plan and assessment policy needs further development and ratification.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Recommendations in previous inspection reports focused on improvements in the areas of subject and lesson planning, assessment practices, literacy initiatives and use of varied teaching methodologies. Subject departments and teachers have made substantial progress in implementing many of these recommendations. There is a scope to further develop subject plans.

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

A reflective and consultative approach to school organisation and teaching practice was evident among school management, staff and the board during the evaluation. A number of evaluation processes are in place to assess curricular programmes and student engagement. The regular formal and informal consultation with staff, outcomes from the Leaving Certificate students' questionnaires, feedback from student council meetings, and consultation with the parents' association all contribute to the improvement agenda in the school.

The work of the school community is characterised by team work, commitment, professionalism and the shared vision of improving students' personal and educational outcomes. The experience of students and parents in the school is very positive, as evidenced by the very positive responses to the questionnaires administered as part of the WSE-MLL process. Under the leadership of the current school management team and staff members, the school has the capacity to further enhance its work.

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 appreciates the positive affirmation of teaching and learning in Mount Sion CBS Secondary School. We note the many excellent comments on the quality of management in our school and share the optimism for the future of a school that is increasing in staffing and enrolment. The Board of Management would like to acknowledge the process of WSE-MLL as a positive and affirmative experience shared by all the partners in education in Mount Sion CBS Secondary School.

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 of Management notes the positive suggestions for the improvement of teaching and learning in the school and will address the recommendations of the report, given the constraints of the resources of the school.