

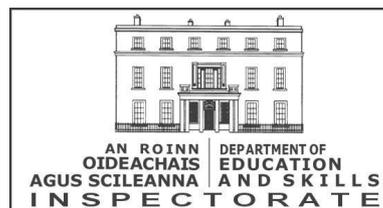
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Coláiste Bríde,
Presentation Secondary School
Clondalkin, Dublin 22
Roll number: 60122D

Date of inspection: 19 January 2011



Whole-School Evaluation

Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in January, 2011 in Coláiste Bríde, Presentation Secondary School. 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 of the school 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

Coláiste Bríde is an all-girls' voluntary secondary school, with a current enrolment of 907 students. Students are drawn from a wide variety of social and cultural backgrounds, mostly from the local Clondalkin area. In recent years, trusteeship of the school transferred to the Catholic Education in Irish Schools Trust (CEIST) from the Presentation Sisters. A new school building opened in 2008.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The school has a welcoming physical and pastoral environment, characterised by positive interactions between teachers and students.
- There is a strong culture of review and self-evaluation that is driven by the board and senior management.
- A motivated and highly visible senior management team leads the school.
- There is evidence of a very good partnership between parents, students and the school.
- The school's planning processes are well established and learning focused.
- Very good teaching and learning was evident in the majority of lessons observed.
- The range of curriculum programmes provided is a key strength in the school's provision.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The organisation of class groups should be kept under review to evaluate the possibility of extending the mixed ability approach across all classes in junior cycle.
- The school should develop its homework and assessment policy with Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies integral to the policy.
- Teachers' awareness of, and skills in, appropriate differentiation strategies for teaching in mixed-ability settings should be increased.

- The information provided to students about subject options at key transition stages, especially the transition from junior to senior cycle, should be improved.
- The school's management must ensure that students' entitlement to the minimum number of days instruction as outlined in Cir M29/95 is met.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

The board is appropriately constituted and it has developed links with its new trustee, CEIST. The board actively informs itself of the operation of the school, for example, it recently reviewed the school's Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). The board, with the co-operation of the principal, has sought to actively engage with its partners. Teachers and students have been asked to present to the board on various occasions, including presentations on policy development and the board and principal have sought to involve past students with the activities of the school.

The board takes a very proactive role in leading learning. Since 2004 each subject department is required to present an annual report to the board outlining developments in the subject. The format of these reports is now determined centrally and key themes identified by the board and senior management are included in the reporting template, for example, improving attainment. Analysis of examination results is at an early stage and the emphasis is on subject departments reflecting on the results achieved by students and reporting their observations to the board. Apart from its annual budget allocation, each subject department received a once-off budgetary allocation in 2010/11 for investment in teaching resources.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (Published September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

The school's priorities for development

Led by the principal and the board of management, the school undertook a strategic review of its operation in the school year 2009/10. The outcome of this self-review, 'Mapping our Future', sets out the school's priorities for development. These priorities are embedded in the trustee values. The process used in the review was excellent in that its evidential base included baseline statistical data, including population data and surveys of the partners including students, parents and teachers. The enacting of priorities has been devolved to eight school-based committees that will develop short and medium-term action plans. The board will adopt an overseeing role to ensure that the planning priorities are achieved.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The school is led by an effective senior management team with defined roles and a highly visible presence in the school. Senior management is accessible to parents. It was clear during the evaluation that the members of the senior management team know their students

as, despite the school's size, they addressed students by name. Management is supportive of staff, and members of staff indicated to the inspection team during the evaluation that they felt they worked in an inclusive and caring work environment.

The school is a very vibrant environment with lots of activities. Senior management and students are supported by a strong spirit of volunteerism among staff in terms of engagement with extracurricular and co-curricular activities. This is also evident where some teachers have taken on additional duties outside of the formal post of responsibility structure. In leading the school the principal has created a culture of distributed leadership, best exemplified by the post holders' engagement with the review of posts in 2006/07 and the committees established to follow up on the school's development priorities identified in 'Mapping our Future'. This culture extends to others, including the parent association, whose involvement with the school, and in progressing school development priorities, is linked to supporting school improvement.

The professional development of staff is encouraged and facilitated by the school's senior management team with the approval of the board. This is evident from the number of teachers involved in the certificate examinations process, teachers' participation in in-service and the number of staff engaged in further study. The senior management team has also undertaken continuing professional development (CPD) relevant to the role. The role of the board and management in recognising the importance of CPD in developing the school is demonstrated by the inclusion of a section on staff CPD within the annual subject department reports to the board of management.

Progress has been made in the development of subject plans under the direction of the school's principal. Based on the inspectors' review of subject plans, the next priority for subject planning should be that all subjects are consistent in their exploration of learning outcomes appropriate to their subjects, matched with appropriate teaching methodologies and resources. Also, greater exploration is required regarding the role of the classroom teacher in learning support.

Leadership of students

Attendance has been identified as a development priority by the board and senior management and the strategies for monitoring and improving student attendance have been revised. Progress is ongoing and there has been initial success in improving the overall attendance rates of students but the school is cognisant that progress will be incremental. Staff engagement with the revised systems is crucial, and during the evaluation it was clear that compliance with monitoring lesson attendance through teachers' use of the ePortal system was very high.

The school's focus on pastoral care and ensuring the widest range of supports for students is very good. The range of structures, including learning support, Rainbows and the school's multicultural centre, support its work in an integrated way and contribute positively to creating a supportive environment for students' learning. This is also supported by the work of the school's special needs assistants (SNAs), and its administration and caretaking teams.

The systems for supporting students' transition from primary to post-primary are very good. Contacts with the feeder primary schools are strong and information sharing is very good. This information, in addition to assessment test information, is used to place students in groups at the start of first year. While the school's stated policy is mixed ability, not all student groups are mixed-ability. Previously classes were streamed and the school has moved to mixed-ability groups for all but two first-year class groups which are designated as those from which students are invited to participate in the JCSP. There is scope therefore to extend the mixed-ability approach across all groups in junior cycle.

The school provides the full range of curriculum options to students including the JCSP, Transition Year (TY) programme and all three Leaving Certificate programmes, including the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The range of provision is well suited to meet the needs of students and each programme has a strong profile within the school. In addition, a Board of Studies exists to review both curriculum and subject provision. One outcome from the school's ongoing review is the introduction of Environmental and Social Studies (ESS) for a specified target group of junior-cycle students.

A broad range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities was observed in the school during the evaluation. These activities are co-ordinated by teachers and support students learning. The results of the parent and student questionnaires indicated that not all parents are aware of the range of activities and a significant proportion of students are not engaged with the range of activities. The school should prioritise improving student engagement with the range of provision. One option is to require all first-year students to engage with one extracurricular activity during their first year in secondary school and write a brief report on the activity for their parents. The school has focused on promoting student attainment through its annual awards ceremony and the implementation within the pastoral care structures of a positive behaviour rewards system. Students' learning is also supported by the provision of study skills and information and communication technology (ICT) skills development.

The school is in compliance with the weekly instruction time requirement. However, the staggered start of formal classes at the start of the school year should be discontinued as it reduces the overall number of instruction days available to students as outlined in the Department of Education and Science circular M29/95, *Time in School*.

2.3 Management of facilities

The new school building was opened in 2008, the facilities are well managed and very good use is made of the available space. The decision to co-locate classrooms to create curricular areas, for example mathematics, is good and reflective of the school's inclusive culture. The decision not to assign base classrooms to teachers on seniority takes cognisance of the availability of offices to Assistant Principals. Development of the library facilities has been identified as a priority and work is ongoing on this project. There is a strong focus on Green-Schools. The school is currently working towards its fourth flag, and has its own garden emphasising horticultural awareness and skills development. A healthy eating policy is in place that is supported by the healthy options supplied by the school's canteen. Use of the facilities by local community groups is encouraged and activities are consistent with those offered within the school's curriculum.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

A total of thirty four lessons were observed over the two days of the evaluation across a range of subject areas. In the majority of lessons very good quality teaching and learning was observed.

Lessons in general were very well planned and a good range of resources had been prepared in advance in most lessons observed. Classrooms were very well appointed; all with computers and data projectors, good storage areas and in most instances a print-rich environment. Very good use of ICT to support teaching and learning was seen across the

school. It should be noted, however, that the quality of teaching was not dependent on the use of ICT, as teaching of the highest standard was observed in some lessons where ICT was not used. In most instances the teacher shared the lesson objectives orally or in writing with the class group. In some classrooms the good practice of reviewing the learning that took place at the end of the lesson was noted. It is recommended that these good practices be extended to all classrooms.

Most lessons were well structured. Good pace and timing was in evidence in most instances. Good links with prior learning and between the lesson content and the wider world added clarity and structure to many lessons. In a small number of lessons the pace was either too fast or too slow. Where the inspector considered that lesson pace was too fast the teacher indicated that course completion was a priority. In the cases where the lesson pace was too slow there were indications of over-planning. Teachers should challenge all of their students to a greater degree and set appropriately high expectations of them.

The teaching methodologies varied from a traditional didactic style approach where the teacher did most of the talking to the use of a range of active learning methodologies where the students had the opportunity to engage cooperatively with the material being taught. Cooperative learning was evident in about half of the lessons being taught. Some teachers were very creative in their approach to lesson organisation and methodologies used to support students learning. Good use of pair and group work was seen in some lessons observed. Indeed in some instances the teacher acted as a facilitator of the students' self-led learning. In these instances the quality of students' engagement with and understanding of the material was very good. In other lessons where pair work was planned, the students' lack of engagement with the activity suggested that it was not a regular feature of lessons even though the room layouts were well-structured to accommodate pair work.

In about half of the language lessons observed the target language was the primary language of instruction and good integration of the four key skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing was observed. Where grammar was being taught it was integrated into lessons as recommended by a previous subject inspection report. In a number of lessons simultaneous translation was used to communicate with students. It was noted in these instances that most students addressed their questions to the teacher in English and students were given little opportunity to develop their oral skills in the target language. There is a need in these cases to improve the emphasis on the use of the target language and ensure that development of the four key skills, including speaking, is included in the lesson structure.

Lessons observed provided some good examples of the effective use of differentiation in terms of the range and quality of learning opportunities offered to students and particularly in the use of questioning. In a number of lessons effective questioning styles ensured that students were encouraged to engage with the lesson activity and be creative and reflective in their learning. While it was noted that students were willing to participate when invited by the teacher, more effective use of differentiated questioning approaches, ensuring a more even distribution of questions among the group, would improve student engagement with the lesson content and strengthen the teaching approach in a mixed-ability setting.

A very good classroom atmosphere was observed during the evaluation with positive student teacher interaction and well established lesson routines. It was noted that in nearly all lessons some students stayed behind to interact with teachers. Behaviour expectations of students were clear and there was evidence of the use of the school's positive behaviour systems. At all times during the evaluations student behaviour observed was very good.

In almost all lessons teachers were observant of student progress within the lessons. In a minority of cases Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies, where teachers give students

formative feedback on their work, were in evidence in students copybooks. This approach is commended. There is a need to further explore AfL as a support to teaching and learning in the context of a school-wide assessment policy.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

The English subject inspection report recommended increasing the number of first-year lessons. Though this has not been directly done, two periods of study skills with an emphasis on literacy and supporting learning have been provided for first-year students. This report and the French subject inspection report recommended that class groups should not be shared between teachers. As priority should be given to the students in framing the school timetable it is recommended that this situation is avoided in future and that the existing arrangements are supported by close collective planning by the teachers concerned.

Previous reports recommended improving students' access to the level at which they took subjects for examination. It is evident that work is ongoing in developing mixed-ability groupings and appropriate strategies for mixed-ability teaching within subjects. However, there is scope for improving students' access to levels of subjects and this should be factored into individual subject plans and teaching strategies where appropriate.

It was also recommended that the Guidance department and subject departments work more closely together to provide up-to-date information to students about subject choice, especially at senior cycle. The parent and student survey results in addition to review of information provided during the evaluation indicate that further work is required in this area. One option is to involve the Board of Studies in this process.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Following a review of recommendations made in previous inspection reports a number of areas were selected for attention in the evaluation.

ICT featured as a teaching and learning tool in the majority of the lessons observed with the majority of teachers demonstrating skills in the use of ICT, especially in lesson planning. Improved use of ICT had been advised in previous reports.

The recommendation to extend the opportunities for extended writing had been enacted in the teaching of English but not as recommended in the teaching of History. Opportunities to practice extended learning were more evident in language departments.

The use of key words and visuals to support students' learning has also been advised. In many lessons observed during this evaluation, the creative use of visuals catered for those students with a visual learning style and served to augment the learning that was taking place. In about half of the lessons inspected the use of key words provided a good bridge to student understanding. Increased use should be made of keywords to improve the supports available to meet the needs of identified students within the class groups. In some instances higher-level students in the class group were not appropriately challenged. When lessons are being planned, planning for differentiation across the ability range and for students with an active or visual learning style should be a key consideration.

An examination of student copybooks and journals indicated that the majority of teachers are assigning homework regularly. However in many instances there was a lack of

monitoring of completion or quality of work done. Many instances were noted of inappropriate homework being assigned. Teachers must ensure that students are supported in organising their learning by having a consistent approach to the method by which homework is recorded and monitored. It is suggested, for junior cycle classes, that improving the engagement of parents and tutors with the homework process including regular signing of the students' journal would prove beneficial.

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

5.1

The board and senior management's capacity for self review and evaluation is a key strength of the school. It is best exemplified by the self-review activity undertaken with 'Mapping our Future' and the processes established to action the priorities identified. Key to the successful implementation of the areas identified for improvement will be the engagement of staff with the change agenda as identified by the school's self-evaluation process.

While some subject departments demonstrate a greater capacity for review and improvement than others, there is a large pool of teachers within the school who have the capacity to engage with the change agenda and ensure that strategies are developed to progress the school's development priorities.

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, Principal & staff welcome this report and appreciate the content therein, The WSE-MLL was a positive experience for the school and a great opportunity to endorse the great work being achieved in the school.

Our appreciation is due to the Inspectors who visited our school and engaged in detail with all concerned, in particular the Principal and Deputy Principal are grateful for the level of analytical feedback which helps the constant improvement agenda of the school.

The report in written form was received in late August as the school returned for a new academic year, 6 months after inspection. It is felt that this would have had a greater impact if received at the end of April or in May 2011.

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

Recommendations incorporated into planning meetings for 2011/12 during April and May 2011. Themes incorporated into staff feedback/priority questionnaires and agenda setting

Vision/Focus for 2011-12 set in light of WSE-MLL.

167 days tuition as per The Croke Park Agreement implemented.

JCSP presentation and differentiation in-service delivered by the JCSP Team and Dyslexia Association speakers – September 2011

Assessment for Learning Strategies promoted to all staff October 2011

As we are mid-way through our strategic review “Mapping our Future” and with a new Board of Management the WSE-MLL recommendations and with review with all partners is envisaged for early 2012

The use of target language is on the subject department meeting agenda for relevant subject areas

The Guidance team are revising subject information provision for transition to senior cycle.