

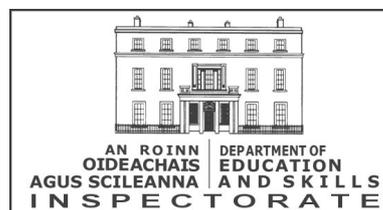
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

**Loreto College
Swords, Co. Dublin
Roll number: 60810B**

Date of inspection: 9 March 2011



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in March 2011 in Loreto College, Swords, Co. Dublin. 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, 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

Loreto College is an all-girls secondary school under the trusteeship of the Loreto Education Trust Board. The current enrolment of 630 students is drawn from eleven feeder primary schools located in Swords and its immediate rural hinterland.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board of management, in association with the trustees, provides good leadership and is strongly committed to school improvement: there is some scope to enhance the planning processes to support this agenda.
- The principal and deputy principal operate as a competent and reflective team who are committed to leading staff in providing a quality learning environment.
- Staff members are committed to their work: high priority is placed on the creation of a collegial and collaborative working environment.
- A conscious effort is made to ensure that the values espoused in the school's mission statement are lived out through school practices and procedures.
- Student achievement is very good with some very good practice in tracking students' attainment.
- There is a strong focus on the development of student leadership.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good to very good in most lessons observed.
- The school's capacity for improvement and self-evaluation is very good but the involvement of parents and students in this process should be enhanced.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- School priorities should be refined and ranked in collaboration with school stakeholders and their implementation systematically supported by the development of clear action plans.
- The procedures for monitoring and tracking attendance should be closely examined and arrangements should be made for the development of an attendance strategy.
- Junior cycle Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and senior cycle Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) should be timetabled in accordance with Circular Letters M11/03 and 37/10.

- The range of methodologies used in lessons should be broadened. Subject department planning should focus more closely on planning for and reflecting on the effectiveness of chosen teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

The board of management is properly constituted. Board members are very committed to their task and demonstrate a good understanding of their managerial and leadership role. The sub-committee format operated to address issues such as enrolment makes very good use of the board's diversity of expertise.

The board cultivates a spirit of partnership with the school community. Agreed reports are issued following each meeting. Annual meetings are held with members of the parents' association and the students' council and the board responds positively to issues that arise. It is recommended that the board considers ways to report to the wider school community on the operation and performance of the school.

The board works hard to ensure that decisions taken are informed by the school's mission statement. The Loreto Education Trust actively supports the school in upholding its ethos by providing a very good level of ongoing advice and training to various school groups.

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

A culture of school development planning that is based on progressing priorities is evident. Some very good past practice in developing action plans to progress stated priorities was noted in *The School Plan 2002 - 2008*. Since 2008, school priorities in a variety of areas have been identified. Although these priorities have not been arrived at in a systematic way, very good progress has been made in the development and review of some. The lack of system in the planning process, together with the absence of current documented action plans for each priority, limits the capacity to measure actual progress. It is recommended that the board, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, refine and rank the list of priorities to be achieved. Action plans that identify the strategies, specify timeframes and name the personnel responsible to address current priorities should be documented and included in a cohesive school plan.

Most of the mandatory whole-school policies have been ratified with some good levels of collaboration evident. Some policies are in need of updating while the whole-school guidance plan needs to be ratified. It is recommended that the board develops systematic procedures for the review and ratification of policies. As policies are updated they should be dated and include a timeframe for review. Questionnaire data indicates that there is further scope to seek the views of parents and students as part of the school planning process.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

School management is strongly committed to providing a holistic education programme that meets the needs of all students, within a caring and supportive environment. The board strives to deploy specialist teachers in each subject area and proactively supports staff to attend relevant continuing professional development (CPD). To support its diverse student cohort the board provides additional resources in the area of special educational needs (SEN) and has employed a full-time chaplain.

The principal and deputy principal operate as an effective and competent team. They are very supportive of staff and are actively involved in the induction and mentoring of new teachers. Staff members are encouraged to attend CPD and a very good level of engagement with a range of in-service activities is evident. An expectation is created that all staff will carry out their assigned duties to a high standard. Teachers are given the autonomy to fulfil and further develop their roles. Non-post holders are encouraged to take on responsibility and thus build expertise. The approachability of the senior management team, together with their commitment to ongoing school improvement have resulted in there being good quality leadership for learning.

Instructional leadership is provided through the facilitation of subject planning meetings and the organisation of whole-school CPD. This has impacted positively on teaching and learning. The current literacy and numeracy priority could be led by a dedicated sub-committee. Senior management should take a stronger role in leading planning for teaching and learning by for example indicating a developmental agenda for subject meetings. The past practice of plenary meetings with subject co-ordinators could be re-introduced to enhance self-evaluative practice among subject teams.

Very good practice is apparent in establishing core teams of teachers in areas such as SEN, SPHE and Civic Social and Political Education (CSPE). There is a need to build staff expertise to support the needs of students for whom English is an additional language. Given that an increased number of EAL students is expected to enter the school it is recommended that this gap be addressed as a matter of urgency.

A strong focus is placed on the creation of a collegial and collaborative working environment. Staff members work well together and carry out all aspects of their work in a professional and committed manner. Good systems of communication support this process. There is scope to organise additional formal meetings of teams such as year heads, SEN and TY core teams. The arrangement of the calendar of full staff and parent-teacher meetings should be brought fully into line with Department Circular Letter M58/04.

The schedule of posts reveals a number of inconsistencies in the distribution of duties. It is recommended that the post schedule be re-configured with specific reference to the agreed strategic priorities. The established post review group which is representative of the full staff may be well placed to lead this work.

Subject departments are well established and subject plans have been developed for all areas. The plans reviewed are generally of good quality. Very good reflective practice and an improvement agenda with relevant action planning were evident only in a small number of instances. There is a need for subject meetings to focus more closely on planning and reflecting on teaching and learning. Curriculum plans in many instances documented an agreed list of topics to be covered that often was dictated by the text book. It is recommended that curriculum plans be revised to include student-focused learning

outcomes for each topic. These learning outcomes should be closely aligned to an agreed set of effective teaching, learning and assessment strategies. Subject teams should use all available data more effectively to inform a developmental agenda for teaching and learning.

Leadership of students

Management makes a conscious effort to ensure that the school's mission statement underpins all school activities. The admissions policy indicates a strong commitment to the community and to being an inclusive school. The board, in devising the selection criteria for enrolling students, has made deliberate efforts to meet the needs of its local community with very transparent procedures for allocating places in the event of over subscription. In this context some of the current criteria merit further review. While parents agreed that enrolment procedures are clear and that students are made feel very welcome, it is recommended that the reference made to a possible deferral of enrolment of a student with SEN until resources are provided by the Department be amended to avoid any ambiguity. Documentation relating to the financial contribution needs refinement to emphasise its voluntary nature and that payment is not related to obtaining a place in the school.

Students are well supported at times of transition. The role of the care team and the student leadership group in the first-year induction programme acts as a valuable support for students. Great care is taken in supporting students' transfer into senior cycle. Parent and student responses to questionnaires suggest that additional support in relation to subject choice is needed.

While the school provides a broad range of subjects, further consideration should be given to the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) as a means of broadening the range of curriculum programmes. There is adequate timetabled provision for almost all subjects with good efforts being taken to improve provision of Physical Education and modern languages. The current provision for SPHE in first and second year is below the required timetabled allocation. Furthermore the modular arrangements for SPHE do not facilitate best pedagogic practices. It is recommended that the board in consultation with senior management addresses this issue as a matter of urgency in accordance with Circular Letter M11/03. The provision for senior cycle RSE is not sufficient and should be amended in accordance with Circular Letter M37/10. A very good range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities is available.

Student achievement in the certificate examinations is generally very good with a commendable uptake of subjects at higher level. The year head and principal closely monitor the twice-yearly student reports and there is very good follow up of any issues identified. This facilitates students of all abilities to be well supported in optimising attainment. The range of assessment tests used for incoming students should be reviewed to enhance school procedures for tracking students' attainment.

The system for monitoring and reviewing the progress of students who are in receipt of resource teaching and learning support is well developed. However, support for EAL students is not satisfactory. All EAL students should undergo systematic initial assessments of their language level and an appropriate programme of language development should be devised. Support should focus on enabling students to access the school curriculum and should be provided on a small-group basis, in line with Department recommendations. Progress should be regularly monitored and communicated to parents and other teachers thus maximising the effectiveness of the provision.

The code of behaviour promotes a positive and respectful learning environment and includes a clear ladder of referral. However, information on the right to appeal a suspension or expulsion needs to be included in this policy. Parents and students reported high levels of satisfaction with the operation of this code. The year head and tutor system is a valuable

support to the management and care of students. Currently in a number of year groups the year head role is shared between two post holders. In the interest of ensuring consistent practice and of facilitating regular meetings among year heads this practice should be reviewed as part of the post review.

Students' attendance is tracked and monitored in a number of ways and the commendable practice of rewarding good attendance was noted. Data reviewed during the evaluation indicated a notably high level of absenteeism but there was a lack of certainty around the accuracy of the figures returned to the National Education Welfare Board. It is recommended that procedures for monitoring attendance be closely examined to establish the extent of absenteeism. The board should make arrangements for the development of an attendance strategy.

There is a strong focus on the development of student leadership. Its effectiveness can be seen through the work of the student council, student leadership team, sports captains and the wide range of other student committees. Commendably student achievements are recognised at prize giving ceremonies.

2.3 Management of facilities

A proactive approach is taken to upgrading and maintaining the school infrastructure to a high standard. Significant investment has been made, particularly in information and communications technology (ICT). It is particularly good practice that staff training in the use of this technology has underpinned the success of this project. The parents' association plays a significant role in supporting ongoing improvements to facilities.

The board is actively seeking an extension to the school building to cope with the ongoing excess demand for school places. The lack of a sufficient number of available specialist rooms impedes the school's ability to offer desirable subject options.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning was good to very good in most lessons but in some instances there was scope to support higher quality student learning. Good short-term planning was evident. Lessons were well structured and had a clear focus. Learning outcomes were normally shared with students from the outset. To support learning, time should be taken prior to the end of each lesson to re-visit these objectives.

In all lessons visited the atmosphere was conducive to learning and teachers were very affirming and supportive of students' contributions. Teachers made commendable efforts to ensure that explanations were clear with some very good reinforcement of key terminology. Additional resources, including ICT were successfully interwoven into the majority of lessons to support learning. In some lessons the use of appropriately chosen visual images and video clips deepened students' understanding by illustrating complex concepts and successfully bringing the outside world into the classroom. However, in the majority of lessons there was scope to adjust the balance between teacher-led and student-led activity. It is recommended that the range of methodologies used in lessons be broadened to support different learning styles and to achieve more active involvement of students.

Students showed a good understanding of the topics under discussion. Particularly good practice in encouraging learner autonomy and student creativity was noted in about one

third of the lessons observed. Students' progress was monitored, predominately through oral questioning and the checking of class work. In most lessons observed however, this monitoring could have been more thorough. It is recommended that additional opportunities be integrated into all lessons to assess students' progress and understanding of lesson content. In a significant minority of lessons students were not sufficiently challenged. It is recommended that the learning outcomes devised for all lessons are sufficiently differentiated to ensure that daily progress is made by all students.

In almost all lessons copybooks were well organised with an appropriate range of work assigned. There was evidence in copybooks that teachers monitor students' written work. In the majority of instances there was scope to improve the quality of this monitoring. Best practice was observed in copybooks where teachers explained why work was of a good quality or provided specific guidance on how to improve. It is recommended that all subject teams review their assessment practices and incorporate strategies that support assessment for learning in their monitoring of students' written work.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Almost all of the recommendations made to school management in relation to whole-school support and provision for subjects have been implemented. The board did not implement a previous recommendation made regarding the timetabled provision of junior cycle SPHE. While the rationale for this decision is noted, the board is reminded that this is a compliance issue that should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

A few of the subject planning issues identified in previous subject inspection reports have been addressed, particularly in relation to sequencing topics and the integration of co-curricular activities into curriculum plans. Limited progress has been made in the identification of learning outcomes and integrating teaching and assessment strategies as recommended in six of the reports. There is still significant scope for improvement in this area.

Some very good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations made regarding teaching and learning, particularly in the integration of ICT and the increased use of targeted questions. Recommendations made in relation to active learning and the expansion of the range of teaching methodologies have not yet been fully realised.

In order to facilitate the execution of recommendations arising out of subject inspections, subject departments should devise an action plan which would prioritise areas for development and indicate a timeframe for the completion of this plan. A system of checking for the successful implementation of the plans should be put in place by management.

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

A very good capacity for school improvement and self-evaluation is evident. In recent times the board invited the Financial Services Support Unit of the Joint Managerial Body

(JMB) for voluntary secondary schools to evaluate its practices and has responded positively to the recommendations made. The template provided by the trustees to inform the drafting of the annual report that they receive from the board also provides for a good level of strategic review.

The work of in-school teams like the curricular planning and ICT teams has positively impacted on teaching and learning. Some excellent reflective practice that was informed by student feedback was noted in a small number of subject plans. Commendably plans are in place to include parents in the annual review of the transition year programme.

The fact that there is no longer a school planning co-ordinator is limiting the school's capacity to engage in review and planning as effectively as it has done in the past. This gap should be considered as part of the post review.

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