An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**St Kevin's College
Ballygall Road East, Dublin 11
Roll number: 60581M**

Date of inspection: 6 February 2014

AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS
INSPECTORATE

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in February 2014 in St Kevin's College, Finglas. 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Introduction

St Kevin's College is an all-boys Catholic school and is a member of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The school population has almost doubled in the past decade and at the time of the evaluation there were 515 boys enrolled in the school. The school offers the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year, the Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. St Kevin's College participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative and the School Completion Programme.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management and senior management provide very effective leadership to support good quality teaching and learning and have identified a range of developmental priorities in line with a strategic vision for the school.
- The school's first DEIS plan has been completed and work has commenced on the gathering of data to support the development of the next DEIS plan.
- The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum with deliberate efforts made to meet the needs of its student cohort.
- Very well organised and effective support structures including guidance, learning support and student care teams are in place in the school.
- The atmosphere in the school is calm and affirming, and interactions between staff and students were respectful and good humoured.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed, with some instances of excellent practice.
- There was scope for a greater level of planning for learning in a number of lessons.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board of management, together with senior management, should ensure that the new DEIS plan is completed and implemented as soon as practicable.
- Middle management roles and responsibilities should be reviewed and redefined to ensure that they meet the current and future needs of the school.
- The very good teaching and learning practices that were observed should be extended to all lessons.
- All of the school's initiatives, projects and action plans should be integrated into the school's DEIS plan.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management and senior management are focused on the continuous improvement and development of the school so that it serves the needs of the students.

The board of management is appropriately constituted and is supported by the trustees to ensure the effective provision of education in the school. Board members bring a range of experience and expertise from the world of education and business to bear on their work. The board benefits from continuity of membership across terms of office. All members of the board have received training.

The board has well-established practices for the review of key aspects of the school. For example, issues related to student support are dealt with at board level when appropriate, school development planning is examined and financial matters are discussed. Student attainment statistics are presented annually by the principal for the attention of the board. The board should use this opportunity to consider the attainment levels of students relative to DEIS plans and targets.

School policies are reviewed and developed collaboratively with staff and parents in response to current needs. To ensure that timely updates for all policies are effected, a rolling schedule for the systematic review of polices should be put in place. The student council should be included in the policy development cycle, as appropriate.

An agreed report is issued following each board meeting to keep parents and staff abreast of decisions and issues that are relevant to the management of the school. The requirement to report on the operation of the school to the wider school community by June 2014, as specified in Circular 40/2012 (Implementation of School Self-Evaluation), should also be included in the board's communications strategy.

The principal and deputy principal work closely together and are very supportive of each other's role in the management of the school. They are available to meet with parents, staff and students as needed and meet together daily to discuss administrative and student support issues. Strategic planning meetings could also be scheduled.

Management has encouraged and supported a number of staff-led initiatives and projects to enhance the student experience and to develop teaching and learning in the school. Responsibility for specific areas of school life is linked to a number of posts of responsibility. In order to ensure that current and future needs of the school are adequately catered for, middle management roles and responsibilities should be reviewed and redefined.

The student council was established in 2011 and members have received training. The activities of the council are reported on the school web site and a newsletter is published periodically. The council has held a number of successful fund raising activities and is also leading some in-school initiatives. Involvement in the council is greatest among junior cycle students. Ways in which the visibility and relevance of the student council could be enhanced for all students should be examined.

The parents' association is actively involved in the life of the school. Parents contribute to policy review and have effected change through this practice. Fundraising activities are focused on specific projects and have contributed to school improvement projects such as the renovation of the computer room. Communication with the parent body is carried out

mainly through the school's texting system. Other ways of communicating with the full parent cohort, including the use of the school's web site, should be explored.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning
The board and senior management have identified a range of developmental priorities that correspond to a strategic vision for the school. A significant priority is the introduction of a modern language initiative that will see the provision of both French and German for all students. Other priorities include development of facilities, further investment in computer equipment, and the roll-out to parents of electronic access to student's progress reports.

An evaluation of the school's DEIS planning process by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills in 2011 highlighted the need for the setting of specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) targets. In response, senior management has initiated a number of data-gathering exercises to facilitate the setting of such targets. However, the term of the school's first DEIS plan expired in 2013 and a new DEIS plan has not yet been finalised. An action plan and schedule for the formal review of the previous DEIS plan and the development and completion of the new DEIS plan with target dates and prioritised actions is required. The action plan for the implementation of the strategic vision for the school should be developed as part of the DEIS planning process.

School management provides very effective leadership and management to support good quality teaching and learning.

Teachers are encouraged and supported by the board of management to undertake continuing professional development (CPD) programmes where relevant to the needs of the school. Whole school CPD is provided by external facilitators as well as by staff members. This proactive approach to staff development complements a highly motivated and energetic staff.

Staff members are afforded and avail of the opportunity to lead projects and initiatives. The establishment of a virtual learning environment (VLE) for the school and the development and implementation of the whole school literacy strategy are just two examples. Other innovative examples are initiatives that link academic and sporting activities. One such initiative is the rugby scholarship through which students commit to attendance at after-school study in order to participate in a specialised rugby training programme.

Staff members are deployed according to their skills and qualifications and great care is taken in the appointment and deployment of substitute teachers. Timetabling practices include appropriate consultation with staff. Commendably, some opportunities for team-teaching are facilitated.

Provision is made for formal subject department planning meetings twice yearly and some exemplary subject plans were examined. Those plans that link learning outcomes with resources, methodologies and assessment reflect very good practice. This approach should be implemented for all subject plans.

All subject departments are provided with the opportunity to analyse state examination results and some subject folders showed good evidence of planning based on this analysis. Subject action plans should also explicitly reference DEIS attainment targets.

The school has a policy that describes student teachers' and their mentor teachers' obligations and responsibilities. This good practice supports the provision of a positive and enriching experience for both the student teacher and the school.

Peer observation as a means of sharing and supporting good practice is encouraged and is promoted as part of the Droichead pilot programme for the induction of newly qualified teachers. This practice is highly commended.

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum with deliberate efforts made to meet the needs of its student cohort. The re-introduction of Art into the curriculum, the establishment of mixed-ability classes at junior cycle and the provision of the LCA programme are evidence of a willingness to enhance the students' experience of learning.

All students and their parents sign up to a clearly structured code of behaviour which was reviewed and ratified by the board of management in October 2013. The full code of behaviour is included in the student journal. Almost all parents who were surveyed agreed that they had been informed about the school rules, while most students stated that they understood the school rules. The student council should be formally involved in the future reviews of the code of behaviour.

A very well-organised and effective student support structure with a focus on the holistic needs of the student is in place in the school.

The guidance department provides a comprehensive set of services related to the transition from primary school, subject choice and progression. DEIS planning and target setting is a key factor in the development of the services. Individual counselling and timetabled classes at both junior and senior cycle help students to explore options and to realise their potential. A mentoring system whereby fifth-year students are assigned to first-year classes has had great success in helping students to manage the transition to post-primary school.

The special education needs department co-ordinates very good provision of learning support. A file detailing needs and planned provision is maintained for each student who receives learning support, while individual education plans (IEPs) are defined for students with low incidence disabilities. Support is usually provided to students in small groups and, where the timetable allows, through team teaching. The progress of students is monitored and evaluated by teachers using skills and achievements lists, and by assessing priority learning needs that are defined in the IEPs. These very good practices could be supplemented with a strategy to involve students in the assessment of their own progress.

Care teams, comprising a year head and form tutors, meet regularly to review student progress. Academic and pastoral concerns are addressed and, where deemed necessary, referred on to the school student support team (SSST). The SSST includes the guidance teacher, the home school community liaison teacher and the learning support co-ordinators as well as senior management. The broad range of inputs ensures that referrals are progressed internally or with outside agencies as appropriate.

The delivery of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education programmes at both junior and senior cycle is carried out by a well-trained team of teachers. The SPHE department works closely the student support services to ensure that timely interventions are delivered as appropriate.

Attendance is monitored and tracked in an organised and systematic way. Incentives to encourage punctuality have been established. The measures included in the next DEIS plan should focus on strategies to address the particular issues related to absenteeism that have been recognised by senior management.

The school journal is the principal means of daily communication between school and home. Commendations and behavioural and academic issues are noted in the journal. Some

parents sign the journal on a daily basis while others sign weekly. The school should clarify the rationale for the signing of journals and implement an agreed and consistent practice.

Student award ceremonies which recognise achievement and improvement in each year group are held four times each year. This creative and practical approach brings immediacy to the efforts and hard work of students.

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
School accommodation is well maintained and a clean and orderly environment is evident. Many classrooms have been updated and redecorated in recent years as part of a rolling plan that will see all rooms modernised.

The school participates in the Green-Schools programme and has recently been awarded its first flag for litter and waste management. A campaign has been started for the award of a second flag under the theme of energy.

The school celebrates the lives and achievement of its students and many displays of photographs and artwork were observed. Some classrooms had very attractive displays of student work.

Links with the local community are promoted through an initiative which has seen students developing a set of raised beds that are used to produce fruit, flowers and vegetables.

The school has provided appropriate and up-to-date resources for teaching and learning. There is provision for information and communications technology (ICT) in all classrooms and a VLE has been implemented and is widely used. Some innovative uses of technology were observed. In one instance, the teacher had made a video recording of an in-class demonstration available through the VLE. This facilitated students to revisit and review the subject material at their own pace outside the classroom.

Teachers use shared folders on the school computer system to support subject planning and the sharing of resources. Electronic communications are commonly used to update teachers on the progress of in-school initiatives.

An up-to-date health and safety statement based on a risk assessment has been prepared by the school.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching
The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed, with some instances of excellent practice. There was, however, scope for a greater level of planning for active learning in a number of lessons.

In all lessons, teachers had prepared resources, including worksheets and hand-outs, to support teaching. ICT was used extensively to present material. In some cases online resources were used to engage students with learning in a more interactive way. For example, simulations on a subject-specific web site were used to deepen students'

understanding. The use of the VLE for recording and submitting homework assignments, as well as for accessing notes and additional materials, is to be commended.

In many lessons, teachers had prepared lessons carefully to facilitate student learning and the assessment of learning. A variety of methodologies was used resulting in high levels of student engagement. Very good use was made of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies such as the sharing of success criteria, and peer and self-assessment to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. Differentiated resources and activities enabled the participation of all students. Students were given a variety of opportunities to demonstrate their learning. Teachers used a range of higher-order and probing questions to assess and develop students' understanding. These very good practices should be extended to all lessons. The resources related to professional collaborative review including self-reflection, peer observation, and student questionnaires available through the school self-evaluation web site (www.schoolself-evaluation.ie) would be useful tools in the sharing of good practice.

There was a positive and affirming atmosphere in all lessons throughout the school. Classroom interactions were respectful and good humoured and were indicative of a good relationship between students and teachers.

Homework is monitored by teachers and some good examples of formative and constructive feedback were observed in copybooks. Strategies to encourage students to engage with and benefit from AfL commentary could be used to ensure that maximum benefit derives from this good practice.

Teachers engaged well with literacy development strategies in most lessons. Widespread use of keywords to support subject-specific learning was evident. Students were encouraged to use comprehension techniques, including skimming and scanning, that had been pre-taught as part of the excellent whole-school literacy strategy. Very good practice was observed where students were given the opportunity to present the findings of in-class research to their peers. To consolidate these very good practices, teachers should continue to emphasise the importance of oral language skills.

The school is dedicated to improving student attainment. Teachers encourage students to take subjects at the highest appropriate level and higher-level uptake is good. Students are supported in accessing a wide range of progression options and the school has very good links with third-level institutions.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management
Good progress is evident in the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations. Student support structures have been enhanced and the number of qualified learning support teachers has been increased. Recommendations related to the provision and storage of resources used for teaching science subjects have been implemented.

The positive features recognised in the 2011 DEIS evaluation continue to be evident, however, as noted earlier in this report, DEIS planning is an area that requires further attention.

3.2 Learning and teaching
Recommendations related to teaching and learning in previous evaluations have been addressed by senior management.

Specific recommendations that have been implemented include: whole staff CPD related to AfL and the implementation of common summative assessments where appropriate.

Some subject plans contain detailed reference to previous evaluations and show evidence of their implementation. This good practice should be extended so that developments and improvements are shared between subject areas.

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

The school's management is committed to continuing development and improvement and it is evident that the school has very good capacity for managing and leading school self-evaluation.

A large number of initiatives related to school improvement are in progress. Action groups and policy development teams are working in many different areas: curriculum audit, study and homework, testing, academic monitoring, ICT development, acceptable use, support for student transitions, care team development, pastoral care provision and dignity in the workplace. Data gathering including results analysis and surveys of the school community is also in progress. All of these initiatives, projects, action groups and plans should be integrated into the DEIS planning and reporting process.

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