

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Christian Brothers School
The Green, Tralee
County Kerry
Roll number: 61440W**

Date of inspection: 19 April 2013



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

Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in April 2013 in CBS, The Green, Tralee. 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

Christian Brothers School, Tralee, known locally as 'CBS, The Green' is a voluntary secondary school for boys founded in 1927. The school has a current enrolment of 600 students. The school is managed under the auspices of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST) and its ethos reflects and is guided by the Edmund Rice Charter. The school serves the educational needs of boys from the town of Tralee and its surrounding hinterland.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board is actively engaged in its role and has clear priorities for the future development of the school
- The senior management team provides very effective leadership of learning, of change and of people
- A comprehensive school plan and good quality subject department plans have been developed that inform a vision for the further development of the school.
- Staff at all levels display professional commitment, care and pride in their work and share a vision for the future of the school.
- Very good quality support for students is in evidence.
- Very good quality teaching and learning was observed in lessons.
- Questionnaire responses from students and parents reflect a very positive educational experience for students in the school.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The curriculum provided for students should be reviewed in the context of the current provision for Physical Education (PE), the potential for the expansion of the Transition Year (TY) programme and the potential to provide further senior cycle programme options.
- The development of students' literacy and numeracy should be integrated across the curriculum.
- Further formality should be brought to the existing student-support structures in the context of whole-school guidance planning.
- Subject departments and individual teachers should engage with a generic framework for teaching and learning to collaboratively develop and enhance teachers' professional practice in their classrooms.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management has a clear vision for the school community that is informed by priorities representing ongoing school improvement and repositioning the school to meet the changing needs of the student cohort. This vision is grounded in the Edmund Rice Charter that reflects Christian values, partnership within the school, quality in teaching and learning, student support and leadership.

The board is appropriately constituted, meets regularly and is actively engaged in its role in supporting school management and their leadership. The board, having overseen the recent building and renovation programme, is aware and supportive of school planning and development strategies, and shares clear priorities with the principal and deputy principal for the future development of the school. These priorities include the development of a school improvement plan, an ongoing focus on academic achievement, a systematic review and update of the policy framework that underpins school activities, and the update of the school website. These priorities reflect the level of engagement of the board in planning for the future and its engagement in established and ongoing school improvement processes. These priorities are clearly supported by the professional engagement and commitment of staff at all levels of the school.

To build upon this shared commitment within the school community and the very positive relationships that underpin this, the board is encouraged to integrate the recommendations of this report into its own school improvement plan but within a time-bound action planning cycle. In this way, the board can oversee the cycle of planning, implementation and review of the outcomes of these strategies within a reasonable timeframe. Furthermore, it is recommended that, within this planning cycle, the board should focus particularly on reviewing outcomes for students with a view to supporting the development of pedagogical practice and the students' experiences in the classroom.

The board is supportive of the involvement of the active parent association in the school. The parent association is commendably engaged in supporting students' learning, and particularly in support of student literacy, through their efforts to re-develop the school library and to establish a textbook rental scheme.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The school has experienced recent changes in the senior management team of principal and deputy principal. The current team demonstrates very effective leadership of the school and operates as a cohesive team in combining their leadership of learning, of people and of change.

Leadership of learning is manifest through the provision of very good school and classroom facilities for teachers and students in the context of the new and existing buildings. Base classrooms have been provided that have facilitated the creation of print-rich and visually stimulating learning environments for students. These have been complemented by the ongoing development and provision of information and communication technology (ICT), and in some classrooms, a visual emphasis on developing students' literacy and numeracy.

The current emphasis on, and the development of, subject department planning with a particular focus on outcomes for students are further evidence of leadership of learning.

Such evidence is also found in the general openness to and encouragement of professional learning among the staff. The emphasis on the development of collaborative subject departments and the sharing of materials and good teaching practice reflects the positive engagement and commitment of teachers towards student learning and achievement.

The recent development and expansion of the provision for students with additional educational needs, and capacity building focused on a core team of teachers, further reflects leadership of learning. The special needs department has been expanded, a coordinator is in place and dedicated space has been provided. The valuable resource provided by the special needs assistants (SNA) team has also been effectively linked to the special needs department. A designated 'home room' for the SNA team and the students they support is a further valuable resource. The cohesion and effective communication between all members of the additional education needs team reflects very good practice.

Initiatives that reflect the empowerment of staff members are a further important element of leadership in the school. The spirit of volunteerism is clearly evident in the coordination role for the TY programme, in the area of student support through individual mentoring of targeted students, the *sport at dawn* initiative, the breakfast club, and in the wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities that are provided to students. The commitment of teachers and all school staff in providing and supporting these activities is particularly acknowledged and commended in this report.

Leadership of people is also manifest in the commitment of assistant principals, in the light of recent retirements, to prioritise key areas of student support within their role. The focus on the year-head role supported by the class tutors has become the central focus of the current pastoral-care system. Teachers have volunteered to act as class tutors with a focus on student support. This system is informed by good communication and is supported by the principal and deputy principal through the provision of a designated meeting time to discuss immediate issues of student support.

Change has been an ongoing feature of the school in recent years. The leadership of change has been and is evident through the work of both the recently retired and current senior management team. Leading change has been underpinned by the development of a detailed policy framework as the permanent section of the school plan and the ongoing engagement with development planning, particularly through subject department planning. A clear and established subject department structure has been developed that is now poised to engage with aspects of teaching and learning practice, the integration of literacy and numeracy and ongoing engagement with ICT. School self-evaluation is now a further challenge and opportunity for the leadership of change in the school.

Students are provided with a comprehensive curriculum for junior cycle, an optional TY programme and a range of subjects for Leaving Certificate. Class groups are of mixed ability with concurrent timetabling in some subject areas facilitating the creation of differentiated class grouping. Timetabling for subjects and for the TY programme is appropriate and the school complies with the requirement to provide twenty-eight hours of instruction time per week for students.

Transitions are well managed and informed by good communication and information to parents and students. The opportunity to sample subjects is provided in first year and in TY in advance of a subject-choice process that is, in the first instance, based on students' preferences.

Curriculum provision has been reviewed in the past and should again become the focus of a curricular planning review. Provision for PE should be addressed in the light of the availability of PE teaching resources and Department of Education and Skills (DES) recommendations regarding timetabled provision for the subject (Rules and Programmes, 2004-2005). Currently, students in first year are provided with one class period of PE and another labelled as 'Games'. TY students are provided with two single class periods of PE while third-year, fifth-year and sixth-year students are allocated one class period per week. It is recommended that, in working towards DES recommendations, all students are provided with a minimum of a double period of PE on the basis of the fundamental educational, health and well-being benefits which this can promote.

Senior cycle students are offered an optional TY programme of very good quality and the established Leaving Certificate. There is an increasing demand from students to access the TY programme that is currently confined to one class group. Similarly, the absence of provision of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme is noteworthy. Discussion relating to senior cycle curricular provision has taken place in the past. However, in the context of the leadership qualities and initiatives already outlined, widening provision at senior cycle should now be reconsidered within a curriculum review process.

The current school timetable consists of eight lesson periods per day. Six of these periods are of forty-five minutes and two are of forty-minutes duration. The timetable currently does not provide for double-lesson periods. In the context of the aforementioned curriculum review, a change to the provision of nine forty-minute lesson periods per day should also be considered in the context of maximising available resources in curriculum provision.

Attention to the daily attendance of students is very well organised and monitored. A swipe-card system is used by students to register their daily attendance, while a text system is used to alert parents to student absences. Annual patterns of overall student attendance seem to suggest poor attendance from a cohort of students. While these patterns have improved recently, analysis of the available data should be used to identify particular students, or groups of students, towards whom intervention strategies could be targeted.

Structures to support students are established and well developed. These supports include the aforementioned year-head and class-tutor structure, the special educational needs team and the guidance counsellor. Guidance counselling is provided to support students in their transitions through the school in the context of educational, personal and career guidance. These formal structures are also supported by the aforementioned effective SNA team, the breakfast club, interventions by individual teachers to support students, mentoring, and the various support initiatives organised by the year-heads and tutors. While all are clearly centrally focused on the welfare and support of students, it is recommended that further formality in relation to role and communication should now be considered as this aspect of the work of the school expands. This could be achieved by two initiatives. The special needs co-ordinator and the guidance counsellor should join the weekly year-head meeting as appropriate, to create a wider student support team and to enhance appropriate communication and record keeping in relation to students' needs, with due consideration to confidentiality. Equally, the wider student support structure should be guided and defined by engagement in whole-school guidance planning. Such a planning process would bring further formality to existing layers of support and critically, define and bound roles and responsibilities within the structure. This should be particularly effective in defining and planning the role and engagements of the guidance counsellor, the year heads, the special needs co-ordinator and all staff in the context of further maximising the use of limited resources to the benefit of students.

An active and assertive student council is appropriately organised to provide a student voice in the school. The council meets regularly, is representative of the student cohort and has engaged in a range of activities that support their involvement in the affairs of the school. Its visibility and communication with students is enhanced by a number of high-profile activities and by a highly visible notice board.

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

The new school building and the renovation of existing buildings have resulted in the creation of a visually very impressive school campus. Facilities are of very good quality and are maintained to a high standard. A recent health and safety audit has been completed in the context of the completion of the building project.

Classrooms, offices and practical rooms are equipped to a very high standard and ICT provision has been updated. Existing good quality sports and PE facilities will be further enhanced by the planned addition of an all-weather pitch on the campus. The pursuit and achievement of an Active School Flag should be viewed as an achievable challenge for the PE department and all those involved in active, extracurricular activities, given the impressive sports infrastructure that is available.

The caretaking staff ensures both the cleanliness and minor maintenance of facilities. This good work also combines with their attention to creating a sustainable environment in the school. In co-ordination with a student committee, the caretaking staff has engaged in the achievement of a Green Flag environment award. This level of teamwork in relation to environmental quality represents very good practice.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

Planning and preparation by teachers were clearly evident in relation to the students' very positive experiences in classrooms. Collaborative subject planning had informed the overall experience of the curriculum for students and individual lessons demonstrated careful planning in almost all cases, to ensure the active engagement of students in their own learning. The resulting classroom atmosphere was very positive and purposeful. Interactions and relationships between students and their teachers were courteous and mutually respectful.

Twenty lessons involving a range of subjects and cycles were observed in the course of the evaluation. The quality of learning and teaching in these lessons was very good. The lessons were informed by a planned approach to teaching methodology, active engagement and clear learning outcomes for students. A range of methodologies and stimulus materials was utilised focusing on an appropriate balance between teacher inputs, and student engagement and responsibility for their own learning. Examples of well-structured cooperative learning strategies were observed to be very effective as was the use of visual stimulus materials and student tasks. Most lessons observed combined teacher exposition, student questioning and responses, discussion, responses to stimulus materials and a variety of student activity, whether individual or group focused. Where the balance between

teacher inputs and student activity was most effective there was ample opportunity for the teacher to support the learning needs of individual students.

Students demonstrated their understanding and their learning through their responses to questions from the teacher, their completion of tasks and in their own questioning of the teacher. There was clear attention to both assessment of learning and assessment for learning in many lessons. A review of homework provided a link to previous learning and also placed clear expectations and responsibilities on students to advance their learning arising from the lesson. Due attention was paid to the quality of completed homework and to its recording in students' journals in most lessons. Teachers had high expectations for their students, uptake of higher level and achievement at all levels in certificate examinations is strong.

Generic recommendations made to teachers relating to teaching and learning concerned the potential to structure some lessons around a clear and shared learning intention. This could be referenced throughout the lesson and its achievement could be reviewed with students on completion of the planned learning. Teachers should further integrate their identification of key words into the lesson structure so as to achieve the initial purpose of identifying and understanding these particular key words. In a small minority of lessons the dominance of teacher inputs encouraged passivity among some of the students rather than actively engaging them in their learning. Similarly, the provision of formative comment at reasonable intervals on students' homework in some lessons is required. Strategies to encourage the further use of digital resources for learning and teaching were recommended in a minority of lessons, as was attention to the visibility of digital presentations to some students in classrooms.

To build on the very good practice in evidence, it is recommended that individual teachers and subject departments should engage with the school's own strategies in relation to literacy development in subjects in the context of planning, classroom practice and school self-evaluation. It is also recommended that at whole-school level the teachers and subject departments should engage with and interrogate a generic framework for teaching and learning to further enhance the students' experience in the classroom. At an appropriate pace and within a time-bound action-planning and review cycle, subject departments could engage with elements of instructional leadership, assessment for learning or teaching for understanding within their current classroom practice.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Recommendations arising from previous subject inspection reports referencing management and teaching and learning have been implemented. Recent follow-through inspections by inspectors on the recommendations of French and Geography subject inspection reports demonstrated the implementation of recommendations by the relevant subject departments. A formalised whole-school approach to the recommendations of evaluations should now be considered to ensure the sharing of generic findings and recommendations of reports to support improvement in all subject departments and to support school self-evaluation strategies.

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

Within the context of the very good leadership at all levels and the shared vision for the ongoing development and improvement of the school represented by partnership between the board, senior management and teachers, the school is very well placed to engage with formal school self-evaluation processes. Similarly, the school is now poised to implement both literacy and numeracy strategies arising from the work of a focus group and the literacy link role.

The recently completed building and renovation project has resulted in the creation of a very high quality learning environment. The current very good quality school prospectus captures and reflects the recent changes that, through very effective leadership at all levels, positions the school to continue to grow and develop based on its long-established tradition and culture but with a clear focus on the academic, vocational and social needs of the students. The responses of parents and students surveyed through questionnaires as an element of this evaluation clearly endorse the leadership and development of the school and the current student experience.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of CBS The Green Tralee welcomes a most positive and encouraging report on the WSE, Management, Leadership and Learning in the school. The Board feels that the whole process was a very worthwhile experience, involving all the stakeholders and facilitating their participation in the review, reflection and evaluation of the many dimensions of our school life. The Board would like to thank the whole school community who contributed to the process and also wishes to acknowledge the very courteous and professional manner in which the inspectorate members carried out their duties.

We feel affirmed by the report, which acknowledges:

- The Board of Management has a clear vision for the school that is informed by priorities representing on going school improvement and repositioning of the school to meet the changing needs of the school cohort.
- That this vision is grounded in the Edmund Rice Charter that reflects Christian values, partnership within the school, quality in teaching and learning, student support and leadership.
- That the board is supportive and aware of school planning and development strategies, and shares clear priorities with the principal and deputy principal for the future development of the school.
- That the senior management team of principal and deputy principal demonstrates very effective leadership of the school and operate as a cohesive team in combining their leadership of learning, of people and of change.
- The development and expansion of the learning support department and the cohesive and effective communication between all members of this department.
- The key strength of the school is its committed and hardworking staff. The spirit of collegiality and volunteerism demonstrated by teachers supports school activities well.
- The year-heads and class tutors being a central focus of the pastoral-care system supported by the principal and deputy principal through a designated time to discuss immediate issues of student support.
- The development of a clear and established subject department structure.
- The provision of a comprehensive curriculum for junior cycle, an optional TY programme and a range of subjects for Leaving Certificate.

- An active and assertive student council, which provides a student voice in the school.
- A visually impressive school campus which contains facilities of a very good quality and which are being maintained to a high standard. Classrooms, offices and practical rooms are equipped to a very high standard and ICT provision has been updated.
- The work and commitment of the student committee and caretaking staff in achieving a Green Flag award.
- The students' very positive experience in the classroom.
- The interactions and relationships between students and their teachers is courteous and mutually respectful.
- The quality of learning and teaching was very good.
- That planning and preparation by teachers was clearly evident.
- Classroom atmosphere was very positive and purposeful.
- That the recommendations arising from previous subject inspection reports referencing management and teaching and learning have been implemented.
- The Parents' Association support the school actively. The response of parents and students surveyed endorses the leadership and development of the school and the current student experience.

The Board is pleased that the inspectorate acknowledges that the school is "well placed to engage with formal school self- evaluation processes". The Board is committed to the self-evaluation process and the implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy strategy. It is the Boards immediate intention to include the recommendations from this report as part of the schools' improvement plan.

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 provision of a double period of PE has been implemented in first year and second year. The school will explore the possibility of providing two classes of PE in third, fifth and sixth year.
- The school will explore the possibility of expanding the TY programme and the potential to provide further senior cycle programme options.
- Steps have already been taken in the process of bringing further formality to the existing student-support structures in the context of whole-school guidance planning.

- Subject departments have begun reflecting on the recommendations made in this report. The departments have begun the process of engaging with a generic framework for teaching and learning in order to collaboratively develop and enhance teachers' professional practice in their classrooms. The integration of Literacy and Numeracy across the curriculum was prioritised at the September 2013 subject and staff meetings.

The Board is confident that the committed and dedicated staff of CBS The Green will continue to work and strive for excellence in education.