

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**The Teresian School
Stillorgan Road, Dublin 4.
Roll number: 60892G**

Date of inspection: 9 May 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 May 2013 in The Teresian 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

The Teresian School is a lay Catholic fee-charging secondary school for girls, established in 1965 with a current enrolment of 217. The school offers the Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme and the established Leaving Certificate.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is committed and hardworking, has demonstrated strategic leadership and is very effective in its role.
- The acting senior management team has managed change effectively within the school and has provided stability and consistency in its day to day operation.
- The acting principal has led the development and implementation of a school improvement agenda with a focus on assessment for learning (AfL), e-Learning and school self-evaluation (SSE).
- The teaching staff are committed, motivated and professional in their approach to teaching and learning.
- Subject department planning is very good in all subject areas.
- The teaching and learning observed was of a high quality.
- Student leadership is actively promoted through a broad range of good leadership opportunities.
- In their responses to the WSE-MLL questionnaires, a significant minority of parents raised concerns regarding their experiences of the school.

Recommendations for Further Development

- Policy development and review should be progressed as planned with priority being given to the completion of a special educational needs (SEN) policy.
- The planned review of the school development plan should incorporate the strengthening of in-school management roles and systems and should facilitate a further distribution of leadership roles.

- The shortcomings in the timetable and curriculum provision should be addressed by school management to ensure compliance with Circular M29/95 on Time in School.
- To underpin an effective student support system and implementation of the code of behaviour, a student support team should be established.
- In light of responses to WSE-MLL questionnaires, the concerns raised by parents and students should be explored and greater communication with parents across a range of issues should be established.
- The further development of teaching strategies for effective mixed-ability teaching and differentiation, and AfL should be progressed.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management is a committed and hardworking board, which has demonstrated strategic leadership and is very effective in its role. It is appropriately constituted, aware of its statutory responsibilities and provides necessary leadership in relation to the governance of the school. Its membership brings together a diversity of professional backgrounds and skills and it is experienced in good decision making through consensus. The board's reports of its monthly meetings are agreed with staff and parents and these are published on the school's website. This is very good practice. In addition to the regular monthly reporting, the board is encouraged to report annually to the school community on the work of the school, as well as on the impact of school improvement initiatives and interventions.

Under the strategic oversight of the board, good progress has been achieved to date across all its identified priorities. The board's priorities for school improvement include a focus on teaching and learning, SSE, addressing the continuous professional development (CPD) needs of teachers, the systematic monitoring, review and development of policies, the effective financial management and upgrading of school facilities, and the ongoing realisation of the Povedan educational vision in the school. Policy development and review should be progressed as planned, with priority being given to the completion of a SEN policy. The school's enrolment/admissions policy should also be revised to include information for parents on their right to appeal under Section 29 of the Education Act (1998) and to include the school's policy on the transfer of students from another school.

Senior management, comprising of the acting principal and acting deputy principal, has responded well to changing circumstances, and has maintained stability and consistency in running the school. Senior management has worked closely and collaboratively as a team to ensure the effective day-to-day operation of the school.

The acting principal has provided strategic leadership to the school, has led change and has built capacity for improvement. He has brought a significant focus to teaching and learning, leading the development and implementation of an agreed whole-school focus on literacy, on AfL, on e-Learning and on SSE. He has demonstrated a commitment to the development of leadership opportunities among staff and students, while also undertaking some teaching duties. The acting deputy principal has undertaken an important supportive operational role in the day-to-day management of the school.

Senior management, guided by the board of management, is planning to undertake a review of its school development plan (2007-2013). To ensure the ongoing effective operation of the school, such a review should incorporate the development and strengthening of in-school management roles and systems. For example, the role of the principal as

instructional leader should be more clearly articulated in the school plan. In line with the emphasis on teaching and learning already identified as a priority, the role of all teaching staff in implementing this priority should also be documented. Teachers are currently afforded and have availed of opportunities to lead projects and initiatives including debating, the *Cairde* mentoring programme, the e-Learning committee, and the *Cool School* anti-bullying programme. The plan when reviewed should also facilitate further distribution of leadership roles, in particular, with regard to SEN and sports. The existing in-school management roles of coordinator are student centred with a focus on discipline. The role of coordinator should be strengthened and given a greater profile, such as, through the taking of assemblies. The role of coordinator in tracking and monitoring students' progress should be clarified and strengthened.

Teachers' commitment to the school and to students was evident through their professional approach to teaching and learning and to the care and support of the students. However, this professional approach is somewhat at variance with the long established tradition of all staff and students being on first name terms in the school. Managing the balance between a 'familial' and an 'overly familiar' atmosphere is a matter which should be addressed by school management. The good relationships observed between staff and students are acknowledged and the warm family-like atmosphere created and sustained was also acknowledged by both students and parents. Nevertheless, in the context of the whole-school plan for the students of the Teresian School for the next five years, a review of this practice may be timely.

The parents' council is actively involved in the work of the school. Commendably, it has a representative from each class group on its executive which strengthens its representative role. It maintains a very good profile on the school website and it contributes to the ongoing review of school policies.

The views of students in second, fourth (TY) and fifth year and their parents' views on their experience of the operation of the school were sought through the WSE-MLL questionnaire. Responses were received from fifty per cent of the parents surveyed. The parent and student perceptions identified through the WSE-MLL questionnaire administered during the course of the evaluation warrant further exploration by school management and staff. While parental responses to the Inspectorate questionnaires provided positive endorsement of the work of the school, a significant minority of parents articulated issues of concern and perceived dissatisfaction regarding the running of the school. The concerns expressed related in particular to how bullying and student behaviour is addressed and to the lack of communication and consultation with parents. These responses highlight a need for further exploration and greater consultation with parents across a range of issues as partners in the education process.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The board supports staff CPD on a whole staff and an individual basis. While a fairly good range of whole-staff professional development has been provided to-date, future emphasis should be on the board's articulated priority of developing teaching and learning. For example, to support the teaching of mixed-ability classes introduced four years ago, whole staff in-service on mixed-ability teaching and differentiation strategies should be prioritised. An 'AfL School Report Strategy' has recently been implemented on a whole-school basis. The report format incorporates formative comments for each subject and is excellent. To consolidate and embed AfL as an underpinning rationale and philosophy, the development of a structured coherent whole-school approach to AfL should be progressed and should include whole-staff in-service on AfL strategies.

A range of supports is in place to support students' welfare and wellbeing. A student office, through which student attendance is monitored, has recently been established and a pastoral care officer has been appointed. The class teachers also have an important pastoral role as set out in the school's pastoral care policy. Recent interdepartmental guidelines *Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools* (2013) should be drawn upon to augment the school's guidance plan and pastoral care policy.

Fostering responsible behaviour by students, for example, in relation to student punctuality is an ongoing challenge for the school. A sense of frustration among some students and staff regarding 'low level' discipline was identified in the course of the evaluation which was corroborated by the findings from the WSE-MLL student and parent questionnaires. The school's code of behaviour should be revised and a whole-school approach to both discipline and the implementation of a revised code of behaviour within the school should be implemented as a priority. The code of behaviour should identify clearly named strategies for misbehaviour at class level to enable consistent whole-school implementation by all subject teachers. The system of 'behaviour slips', whereby more serious or persistent misbehaviour is identified, should carry sanctions that are agreed and communicated effectively within the school community.

To ensure the consistent implementation of the code of behaviour, a student support team which meets regularly should be established. Such a team should include the guidance counsellor, pastoral care officer, SEN teacher, coordinators and the principal and would also serve to underpin and coordinate an effective student support system. Formal meetings between the coordinators and their relevant class teachers are recommended to establish an effective communication system.

A wide choice of core and optional subjects is available to students as well as a very good TY programme. A good range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities including sports activities is also available to students. While a broad and balanced curriculum is provided, the timetable provision for senior cycle falls short of the minimum 28 hours instruction time required by Circular M29/95 Time in School. Study periods and assembly time currently timetabled cannot be included as tuition time. The shortcomings in the timetable and curriculum provision should be addressed by school management. A review of the curriculum should examine the first-year programme, the subject options at senior cycle and inequities in relation to the timetabling of specific subjects. The whole school community should be consulted as part of the review of the curriculum. Responses to the student WSE-MLL questionnaire identified student concerns regarding the lack of advice and information given to them in relation to subject options. These student concerns as well as parents' should be addressed by school management.

Subject department planning has been progressed and is very good in all subject areas. A formal system for staff induction and mentoring of student teachers should be introduced and documented. While the ongoing development of most subject plans has been very good, each subject department should identify an area for improvement on an annual basis, for example, literacy, and review the success of the strategies implemented.

Student leadership is facilitated and actively promoted through a broad range of good leadership opportunities which are being provided for students, for example, through the three student Teresian teams, the student council and an extensive variety of school activities and initiatives. Nevertheless, the view was articulated by a significant number of students through the student questionnaire that they did not have a say in how to make the school a better place. The interface between the Teresian team system and student council should be clarified with a view to establishing a more effective means of accessing the student voice.

Student achievement in State examinations is very good. While some analysis of state examination results is undertaken by management, subject departments are encouraged to undertake an analysis of examination results and to plan accordingly. Commendably, students' achievement in personal development and commitment are celebrated and recognised in the school's awards ceremony alongside academic achievements.

Confirmation was provided that, as part of the school's child protection policy, 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 board of management has engaged effectively in the management and upgrading of facilities to enhance the school resources and environment. Teacher-based classrooms are well equipped with ICT facilities that are being used very effectively. The buildings, specialist rooms and school environment are maintained to a high standard. However, responses to the WSE-MLL questionnaires indicate that not all parents and students are happy with the school facilities. Currently, students are leading the work towards the achievement of the Green Flag.

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty lessons were observed covering all years and programmes and a range of subjects.

In all lessons, the quality of teaching observed was good or very good. Individual planning and preparation for lessons was mostly very good and most lessons were well structured and well paced. Teachers used a good variety of teaching methodologies, all of which ensured good learning. Very good opportunities for collaborative learning were provided in most lessons.

Very good practice was observed in lessons when learning outcomes were explicitly stated and recorded on the board at the outset of the lesson and revisited at the end of the lesson to recap and consolidate learning. Very good use of subject-specific terminology by both the teacher and students was noted in many lessons. Very good practice in language teaching was evident when there was substantial use of the target language by both the teacher and the students. Very good practice in the pre-teaching of key vocabulary was also observed.

Teachers made good use of questioning to promote and assess learning. Some very good practice was observed in the targeted use of lower and higher-order questions to facilitate recall and to promote higher-order thinking and understanding whilst enabling differentiated learning. However, some lessons would have benefited from a greater use of differentiation strategies to meet the learning needs of mixed-ability classes.

Very effective use of ICT was evident in many lessons. In one lesson, a very good example of a student-led activity was observed when ICT was actively used by students making a presentation to their peers.

Strategies to address literacy development were seen in some lessons when there was a focus on key vocabulary and in one lesson, the CUPS (capitals, understanding, punctuation and spelling) proofreading strategy was referenced. There is scope for the use of the CUPS strategy across all subjects.

A purposeful, yet friendly and supportive atmosphere was created and very good rapport between teachers and students was evident throughout all lessons, with space for the student voice and student questions. Classroom management of students was generally good but student punctuality was an issue in small number of lessons. Students were affirmed and encouraged for their contributions.

To further develop the good practice observed, teachers could focus on providing greater opportunities for activities which link learning with students' own lives. Activities which encourage active student engagement in their learning and student-led activities such as student presentations and peer assessment are also suggested. The further development of teaching strategies for effective mixed-ability teaching, differentiation and AfL should be progressed.

Student learning ranged from good to very good with high expectations of students learning evident. The flexibility afforded by the classroom layout readily supported good collaborative learning. Students were fully engaged in almost all the lessons observed. They were challenged by the teaching and learning activities and achieved the intended learning outcomes. Classrooms have been enhanced through the good provision of print-rich visual displays and displays of students' work.

Homework was assigned in most lessons and it was evident that in most but not all lessons that homework was regularly corrected. There is scope for more written formative comment in the majority of copybooks examined. The school policies on homework and assessment should be updated to reflect the new focus on AfL in order that, in addition to summative assessments, all significant homework is marked using an AfL approach.

Strategies to facilitate the greater involvement of students in monitoring and assessing their own progress and identifying how they could improve, for example, through the proposed introduction of the 'Making Progress' template, should be developed and progressed.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Inspections of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), English, French, Physical Education (PE) and the Transition Year programme have been undertaken in recent years and the reports have been published on the Department's website. Good progress has been made in regard to the implementation of those recommendations concerning management. This includes the implementation of the timetabling recommendations. Work has been undertaken to ensure the deployment of most teachers to their recognised subjects as appropriate.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Recommendations to develop and improve teaching and learning have also been engaged with effectively. Active teaching methodologies were employed in almost all lessons observed and explicit learning outcomes were shared with students at the beginning of each lesson and in many lessons, were written on the board. It was evident from the lessons observed that the integration of ICT into the teaching of all subject areas is very good.

Most subject department plans have been developed to include learning outcomes based on the subject syllabuses and a range of methodologies has been documented. Individual subject plans for the very effective TY programme have been developed and incorporated into one cohesive TY plan.

Further areas for development pertaining to teaching and learning that should be progressed have been noted earlier. In addition, the role of subject coordinator should be developed.

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

4.1 The School's Self-Evaluation Process

School leadership has prioritised teacher engagement with the SSE initiative, AfL and e-Learning. Developmental priorities have been identified by senior management and ratified by the board of management. It is recommended that SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) action planning is used to maintain clarity and focus on achieving key priorities.

School management employs a good range of strategies to communicate with the school community. However, communication with parents was highlighted as a concern in the parental questionnaires. To address these and other concerns articulated by parents, the parental satisfaction questionnaire currently being developed by the board should be completed and disseminated as planned.

4.2 The School's Capacity for Improvement

The acting principal has identified and led the implementation of initiatives for improvement including AfL and SSE and this is to be commended. In order for robust developmental processes to be put in place, there needs to be a shared ownership of these initiatives and the SSE processes. The ongoing engagement and the support of the whole staff with the identified strategies are essential if the school improvement initiatives and SSE are to be consolidated and embedded.

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 The Teresian School welcomes the WSE: MLL report. The Board is very pleased with the strong affirmation of its work, the work of the acting senior management team and that of the teaching staff. We agree that our staff are “committed, motivated and professional in their approach to teaching and learning” which is “of a high quality”. We have supported and followed with interest the improvement agenda relating to assessment for learning and school self-evaluation identified by the Inspectorate. This has been key to our academic success.

Our Mission Statement sees the development of our students as central to School life so our “care and support” and the “warm family-like atmosphere” are vital. We are pleased to see the acknowledgement of our student leadership opportunities. We would like to point out that first name terms between staff and students are a key aspect of our Povedan ethos and we have emphasised and always will emphasise respect in these relationships.

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

We thank the Inspectorate for feedback which will be a key input into our School Development Plan. As acknowledged in the report, “School management employs a good range of strategies to communicate with the school community.” We will build upon these to ensure the entire school community feels part of our change and development agenda.

- We are actively working on renewing our Special Needs policy with a view to seeking the most inclusive education possible.
- We have encouraged the use of Student Journals for communication between teachers and parents before more formal sanctions are implemented. We encourage parents to sign these journals.
- We are in the process of formalising a Pastoral Care Team which will envision a broader approach to behavioural issues and interventions.
 - We continue to follow existing anti-bullying policies and believe that a positive School culture is the best form of bullying prevention. We will develop and implement the new procedures this year as required by Circular 045/2013.
 - A new student intervention tracking system (in addition to our existing computer network student records) is being used for our weekly Middle Management/Senior Management meetings.
- We continue to engage with parents through our highly effective Parents’ Council and communicate developments to all parents regularly. We seek the views of parents through surveys and meetings and make their concerns part of our development strategy.
- We are engaged in continual self-evaluation and as the report indicates, we have prioritised this process with the “ongoing engagement and support of the whole staff”. Assessment for learning, literacy and numeracy and Junior Cycle Programme development continue to be progressed in the school.

- In keeping with Circular M29/95 “Time in School” students will have full teacher contact time throughout the day with study periods being phased out in the Senior Cycle.