

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning
REPORT

Loreto Secondary School,
Granges Road, County Kilkenny
Roll number: 61580P

Date of inspection: 15 January 2014



**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 January 2014 in Loreto Secondary School, Kilkenny. 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 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

Loreto Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school for girls. Founded in 1868 as a boarding and day school, the school is one of eighteen Loreto secondary schools which are now under the trusteeship of the Loreto Education Trust. The boarding section of the school was discontinued in 1984. Enrolment has increased over the past six years and the school has a current enrolment of 843 students.

The school offers a broad range of curricular programmes including the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) Programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate. The school has recently completed a protracted building project and this has enhanced the educational facilities of the school.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is effective in fulfilling its roles and responsibilities and benefits from the diverse range of expertise and experience of its members.
- The school community strives to ensure that high expectations are maintained and achieved in all aspects of school life.
- Senior management team has introduced effective leadership practices in the development of the school and identifies priorities.
- The quality of teaching and learning observed was consistently high and ranged from good to very good with a significant number of excellent lessons.
- There are areas in curriculum planning and timetabling which need to be addressed.
- Extra-curricular activities are given prominence and there is very good student participation and success in these areas.
- The overall quality of care for students is very good and effective structures are in place to support students' well-being and academic progress.
- Students responded to high expectations through purposeful engagement and demonstrated interest and focus on their learning.
- Resource allocations targeted for specific students with special educational needs are not being fully utilised for their intended recipients.
- Continuing professional development (CPD) for staff is supported by management and some teachers are participating in middle leadership courses offered through the Loreto Education Trust.

- There has been significant investment in information and communication technology (ICT) and these facilities enhance the teaching and learning for students while also supporting the administrative working of the school.

Recommendations for Further Development

- School management should ensure full compliance with Time in School Circular Letter M29/95 and ensure full compliance with Circular Letter 0027/2008, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).
- Senior management in their overarching role as leaders of staff should establish working groups of members of staff to coordinate and lead future initiatives within the school relating to identified priorities.
- In the context of curricular reform and examining new ways of curriculum delivery, senior management should review the deployment of available teaching resources.
- The provision of special education needs (SEN) requires attention in order to ensure that the allocated resources are being used for the intended recipients and that the models of provision are broadened through, for example, team teaching.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The Loreto Education Trust provides very good support to the school. This is reflected in the training provided by the trust to board of management members and in the presentations that it has made to the whole-school staff. At the end of its term the board prepares a hand-over document informing the incoming board of its achievements and priorities for the school. This is in line with the Loreto Education Trust policy and is very good practice.

The board of management is appropriately constituted and is in its final year in office. The board benefits from the diverse range of expertise and experience of its members. Board members demonstrated significant commitment to the school. The chairperson provides very effective leadership for the board and communicates effectively to ensure that decisions are implemented and progressed.

The board of management is effective in fulfilling its roles and responsibilities. During the evaluation, the board demonstrated a keen awareness of national education policy and is mindful of the principles of the Loreto Education Trust. Priorities identified for school development focus on the implementation of national policy at school level. They include junior cycle reform and school self-evaluation. Policy development, review and ratification are also prioritised, a hallmark of an effective board.

All mandatory policies are in place. A comprehensive admissions policy is in place and reflects the many open and inclusive school practices. A number of policies including special education needs and anti-bullying have been updated and are awaiting ratification. The board has also identified the relationships and sexuality education (RSE) policy as being in need of updating.

Minutes of board meetings are very informative and clearly indicate that the board is aware of all aspects of school life. In line with best practice, an agreed report to the school community is published on the school's website. More recently, the board has met with the assistant principals and members of the student council for the purpose of fostering optimum communication between the board and the school community overall.

The principal and deputy principal demonstrate a firm commitment to the ethos of the Loreto Education Trust and to the development of the school in line with priorities identified by the board or trustees. Both members of the senior management team regularly attend events organised by the Loreto Education Trust. They also have attended external CPD individually. Daily and weekly meetings are used by senior management to discuss on-going and strategic issues for the school. Their complementary skills ensure that the school is managed in an effective manner.

In recent years, the principal has successfully overseen the completion of a school extension, including the enhancement of ICT facilities within the school. He has also established a Smart School partnership with an international company in order to further enhance ICT capabilities in the school. The principal takes overall responsibility for the management of resources and for the leadership of staff and students. He has been effective in managing a review of the post of responsibility structures for the purpose of developing devolved leadership.

The deputy principal has a central role in the day-to-day management of the school. This role encompasses overseeing aspects of attendance and punctuality, ensuring the consistent implementation of the code of behaviour and attending to the organisation of supervision and substitution rosters. In addition, the deputy principal has coordinated a recent review of the anti-bullying policy. These varied management and leadership roles are carried out efficiently and to a high standard.

In addition to the priorities identified by the board of management, the principal and the deputy principal have articulated the need to develop leadership at school level. This is welcomed as it supports the future development of the school and increases capacity within the staff for future leadership roles. To this end it is recommended that the senior management team in their overarching role as leaders of staff establish working groups of members of staff to coordinate and lead future initiatives within the school relating to the identified priorities. Clear parameters should be developed for this work in a planned consultative manner with action plans devised to progress the work of such working groups or committees.

Senior management affords all members of staff with the opportunity to avail of on-going CPD. Currently four teachers are participating in the Loreto Education Trust middle management training. In addition, some teachers have also participated in the Equality of Challenge Initiative to support the higher achieving and gifted students. The principal has made presentation to the staff and has invited external speakers to provide in-service on topics such as junior cycle reform and school self-evaluation. Other staff members have been given opportunities to present on their areas of expertise at staff meetings. These are good leadership practices.

The school's post structure has been reviewed and duties assigned to post holders support the administrative and pastoral needs of the school. The openness of staff and management to on-going review and reflection in relation to the duties assigned to post holders is progressive. This should result in a culture of ongoing development and review of the posts in response to the changing needs of the school while ensuring the equity in post holder duties.

Teachers also collaborate within subject departments throughout the school year. Subject department documentation reviewed during the evaluation indicates that the quality of planning is mostly very good with some scope for development mainly in the area of schemes of work.

The school has an active parents' association who are involved in many aspects of school life. Currently, the parents' association, supported by the deputy principal, are preparing a parents' handbook for the school community. The school communicates effectively with the wider parent and school community through the school website and academic reports to parents.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The overall quality of care for students is very good. Effective structures are in place to support students' well-being and academic progress. Many teachers undertake the class tutor role and successfully support the year heads in their duty of care to students.

The school's code of behaviour is effective, clear and is underpinned by the principles of natural justice. Students' behaviour in all lessons and in the school environs was exemplary during the evaluation.

Overall academic achievement is very good, with findings from parent questionnaires affirming that their child is achieving well in the school. While management and some subject departments undertake a review of student performance in certificate examinations, this practice is not common across all subject departments. It is recommended that all subject departments undertake an analysis of students' attainment to inform the planning for and development of subjects.

A care team is also in place comprising senior management, the learning support and guidance departments and the Home School Community Liaison co-ordinator. The team meet on a weekly basis. A comprehensive guidance plan details arrangements for students' access to guidance and counselling within the school. Two qualified staff members provide the guidance and counselling service. During the evaluation, teachers demonstrated considerable commitment to the school, and to the students' academic progress and pastoral welfare.

Significant resources are available to support students with additional education needs. However, resource allocations targeted for specific students are not being fully utilised for their intended recipients.

The current SEN student register is inaccurate in some instances and does not fully reflect the reality within the school. Three qualified special education needs teachers form part of the team providing support within the school. The SEN team has developed individual education plans and individual learning plans for students in receipt of support. A review of the SEN policy has been undertaken and an updated policy is being prepared for the board of management for ratification. These are examples of very good practice. Current models of provision do not optimise the available resources as the majority of the SEN allocation is being provided on a one-to-one withdrawal basis and limited use of small group or team teaching. It is recommended that senior management and the SEN team should work towards addressing these issues.

There are areas for development in curriculum planning and timetabling. The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum. It operates a forty-five class period week based on a combination of thirty, thirty five and forty-minute class periods. The current structure of the school's timetable does not maximise the deployment of teachers and therefore, cannot optimise the learning opportunities for students. The provision of study periods at both junior and senior cycle does not constitute instruction time and should be discontinued to ensure full compliance with the time in school, circular letter M29/95. Management should also ensure that provision is made for sixth-year students to study Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), to fully comply with circular letter 0027/08. In the context of

curricular reform and examining new ways of curriculum delivery, senior management should review the deployment of available teaching resources.

The efforts to support the subject choice for all students is commendable. For example, Agricultural Science was added to the curriculum this year in response to student demand. Senior management should be cognisant of the impact that such curricular decisions have on teaching resources and the sustainability of subjects in the longer term. An advisory board of studies could be established to advise school management about how curriculum and timetabling can be improved.

Student leadership opportunities are promoted by the school's mentoring programme, school prefect system and the school's student council. Students participate in a wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular events and there are high levels of participation and success in these areas.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Post-Primary Schools*.

1.3 Management of facilities

The overall upkeep and maintenance of school buildings and facilities are excellent. The school corridors are enhanced with displays of students' work and some areas are zoned for specific curricular information.

Significant investment has resulted in enhanced ICT facilities that support teaching and learning and the administrative work of the school. These resources coupled with the Smart School partnership have supported the implementation of ebooks for first and second-year students.

Concern for the school environment is promoted through green school activities while the Active Flag was awarded to celebrate physical activity and a physically educated school community.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning observed was consistently high and ranged from good to very good with a significant number of excellent lessons. School management and teachers have appropriately high expectations for student learning and in turn students responded through purposeful engagement and focus on their work.

The structure and pace of most lessons was appropriate and facilitated very good learning and progress by students. In line with best practice learning objectives were shared at the beginning and revisited during and at the conclusion of lessons.

Teacher preparation and planning for lessons was very good in almost all instances and this enhanced the learning experience for students. The target language was used effectively by both the teachers and students during language lessons. In addition, some teachers recorded key words for use or understanding during the lessons, which is very good practice.

In many lessons teachers used video clips, applets, subject specific resources, graphics and worksheets. Such support materials enhanced the student learning experience. Best practice

was observed where tablets were effectively used as a research tool for the presentation of homework and as an image capturing device. However, further integration of the tablets into the work of lessons is recommended, where appropriate, to maximise their full potential as a teaching and learning resource.

In almost all lessons observed, the chosen methodology was effective and included teacher-guided discussion, collaborative learning tasks such as group or pair work and practical task-based skill development. In one instance, where effective group work was observed, students were assigned and assumed key roles. This improved the group dynamic, contributed positively to the whole-class discussion and ensured individual accountability for students. Such practice should be further utilised in all group activities where practicable.

Tasks and activities maintained interest and motivation within lessons while ensuring that the key learning objectives for the lessons were achieved. Active engagement by students in their learning enabled very good knowledge, understanding and skills to be developed.

Student interest, motivation and focus was excellent. Teachers affirmed students' contributions in a respectful and sensitive manner.

Overall, the quality of questioning strategies used in lessons was very good. A wide variety of challenging questioning strategies was used to probe and challenge students' understanding of learning. In almost all lessons, global questions were used to initiate discussion and were followed up with individual questioning. However, in a small number of lessons the questioning strategy did not allow for an appropriate balance between global and individual questions. Students' responses to questions were of a high standard indicating a depth of knowledge and understanding of the topic.

Homework was assigned in all lessons observed and where appropriate many teachers appropriately linked the homework with key aspects of the lesson. Informal peer and self-assessment practices were also observed and these supported independent learning among students. This is good practice and could usefully be extended where appropriate. Throughout lessons many teachers provided individual oral formative feedback to students as they corrected students' contributions. A review of students' copybooks noted that the practice of written formative feedback varies; there is further scope for the development of this good practice in some subject areas.

Teachers are generally classroom based and have access to ICT facilities. Classrooms benefited from a range of student developed displays and commercially sourced resources. In one classroom the window was also used to record mind maps for key areas of Business Studies. The current layout of most classrooms does not always support collaborative learning, such as the integration of group and pair work. Teachers should explore alternative configurations of the classroom.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Eight subject inspections have been published since 2006 for Loreto Secondary School. Following a subject inspection the board of management requires each subject department to prepare a document outlining how they plan to address the recommendations. This is very good practice.

Many of the recommendations for previously published inspections have been successfully addressed by management particularly in relation to increased use and availability of ICT.

3.2 Learning and teaching

During the evaluation, very good progress was observed to have been made with teaching and learning recommendations from previously inspected subjects. For example, many of the previous inspection reports recommended greater use of alternative range of methodologies. During the evaluation it was noted that many subject areas have implemented this recommendation and students are benefiting. The creation of a print rich environment as recommended in previous subject inspection reports has also been achieved and many classrooms benefited from such displays.

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

The school has engaged with the school self-evaluation process. Presentations from the education officer from the Loreto Education Trust and from the Department of Education and Skills have been facilitated. A staff survey has been conducted and key areas for improvement have been identified.

The school has chosen Literacy as its first theme for school self-evaluation. To-date a literacy committee has been established comprising members of the English department. This committee has collaborated and developed a draft literacy policy which identifies a range of strategies to develop Literacy in the school. While work in this area is very good, it is recommended that membership of the literacy committee is extended to include teachers from other disciplines to promote a whole-school literacy approach.

Evidence gathered during the evaluation indicated that management and staff have the capacity to embrace change and improvement through the self-evaluation process.

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 welcomes the report and is pleased with its contents. Loreto Secondary School will continue the process of School Development Planning and curricular review and welcomes the constructive recommendations made in the report. The Board welcomes the report's recognition of the continued commitment of staff and management to the achievement of Loreto's educational goals.

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