

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Christian Brothers Secondary School
Wexford, County Wexford
Roll number: 63640R**

Date of inspection: 12 November 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 November 2014 in Christian Brothers Secondary School, Wexford. 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

CBS Wexford, also known as Coláiste Éamonn Rís Wexford, is a voluntary secondary school for boys, operating under the trusteeship of Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The Christian Brothers have provided education for boys from Wexford town and its hinterland since the 1850s. The school's care for students and its prioritisation of a holistic education is guided by the ethos of the ERST charter. This inclusive school caters for students of all abilities, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. It is one of five post-primary schools in Wexford town. Enrolment has steadily increased and the school is now oversubscribed, with a current enrolment of 603 students. A re-build of the school, on its current site, is due to commence in 2015.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The highly effective board of management and senior management team combine vision and detailed attention to the running of the school.
- Assistant principals and special duties teachers carry out their duties in a conscientious manner, but there is scope to further enhance the middle management structure within the school.
- A key strength of the school is its effective pastoral care system and the commitment, flexibility and dedication of staff to the operation of the school.
- The positive merit awards and the newly introduced restorative justice system further underpins the school's mission statement.
- A significant number of students who were surveyed felt they did not have a say in how things were done in the school.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good to very good overall, with some instances of exemplary practice but with scope for improvement in a few pedagogical areas.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The board should undertake a whole-school review and development of the posts of responsibility (POR) structure and work to establish a cohesive middle management team.

- The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy, whole-school guidance plan and whole-school assessment policy should be reviewed, updated and expanded.
- All teachers should fully adopt the merit and restorative justice system in order to further enhance the school's care for students.
- More leadership opportunities should be developed for students.
- A whole-school teaching and learning action plan should be developed with a focus on active learning, skills development, and the embedding of assessment for learning (AfL) practices and strategies that enable students to take on more responsibility for their learning.

QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The newly formed board of management has a good balance of experienced and new members. The highly effective board presented as hardworking, well-informed, committed and reflective. Members possess a diverse range of skills that greatly enhance the board's management capacity. ERST provides a range of effective supports to guide the work of the school. The dedicated board is committed to maintaining the provision of a holistic inclusive education, guided by Christian principles.

The mandatory policies have been adopted and a systematic process of review is in place. Recently, the school has been oversubscribed. The board continues to keep the admissions policy and the admissions criteria under review. It is advisable that the board also reviews its criteria to ensure that families new to the area can access the school.

The board communicates effectively and discharges its responsibilities with integrity and transparency. Minutes of board meetings indicated that very good attention is given to all aspects of school management, including health and safety, finance, school planning, teaching, learning and student engagement and progress. Agreed procedures are in place for effective communication with stakeholders.

The board demonstrates effective educational leadership through its support for continuing professional development, the development of e-learning and through its plans to establish a curriculum advisory board. The principal presents an annual statistical account of the school's performance including reviews of overall student academic achievement, which is good practice.

Senior management, in consultation with staff and the board, has identified a number of priorities which have formed the basis of a three-year action plan. The board's identified areas for school improvement and development include the school building project, staff and student welfare and mental health, and promotion of student leadership. In addition the board should also initiate the review and development of the following policies: RSE, a whole - school assessment policy and a whole-school guidance plan, to fully reflect the school's current practice.

The principal and deputy principal work together as a very effective senior management team. They bring a complementary range of skills and qualities to their roles and have a shared vision for school governance and direction. Together, they ensure the high functioning day-to-day management of the school. Senior management has developed open channels of communication with staff, school-related committees and individuals within and outside the

school. Senior management and the board affirmed the work ethic and the professional and caring nature of all staff working in the school.

Teachers with remunerated POR fulfil their agreed duties. Many of the duties attached to POR are administrative and, while they contribute to the running of the school, they provide limited opportunity to build educational leadership capacity. It is recommended that the board initiates a whole-school review of posts and works to establish a more formalised middle management structure. The review should be informed by Circular PPT 29/02, and should provide for equity within and between posts and aim to ensure that the distribution of posts actively meets the pastoral, academic and administrative needs of the school now and into the future.

The parents' association makes a meaningful contribution to the work of the school. In addition to consultation on school policies, parents also support the running of school events, organise student lockers and make financial contributions to projects. The use of the school's website as a communication tool could be further advanced by the parents' association. Parents interviewed and surveyed as part of this evaluation reported high levels of satisfaction with school management, the quality of pastoral care and the quality of teaching and learning in the school.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The senior management team is actively involved in every aspect of the school. They work collaboratively and respectfully with staff, students and parents to effect a strong, caring and learning community. The principal is responsible for the day-to-day administrative tasks required for the effective management of the school. The deputy principal takes particular responsibility for the supervision and substitution rota, co-ordination of extra-curricular events, mentoring of staff and has a significant role in the discipline system.

Through the POR structure, year head and class tutor system, leaders of initiatives and membership of committees, there is significant distributed leadership in the school. Senior management encourages initiative and facilitates empowerment of individuals and groups. Key tasks, responsibilities and roles such as year heads and leaders of initiatives are often undertaken by the teaching staff on a voluntary basis. This is highly commendable and exemplifies the strong commitment, flexibility and dedication that staff have to the school.

Teaching staff are deployed according to their qualifications and expertise. Teachers are encouraged and supported to engage in continuing professional development. A number of staff have been supported to engage in post-graduate studies. The school's involvement in the Action Learning Network as part of the Forbairt Programme is praiseworthy.

Collaborative subject department planning is synchronised so that all teachers can meet as a team. Some of the reviewed plans were of a very high quality, and were presented as manuals of how the subject department operates and organises its programmes of work. A small number of subject plans were underdeveloped and lacked sufficient detail about how the subject is provided and organised and how it supports students' engagement, learning and assessment. The high quality plans should serve as a bench mark to guide the ongoing development of all subject plans.

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum. The Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Transition Year (TY) are available to students. These programmes are very well planned. Currently there is no sixth-year group in LCVP. To widen access, senior management should consider the provision of an ab-initio modern language course for students who do not fulfil the language requirement. The TY programme offers a good range of diverse activities.

Twenty eight hours of student tuition time is delivered in a thirty-nine period week made up of forty and forty-five minute lessons. Currently, some class groups are timetabled for five class periods of English and Mathematics lessons over four days and as daily lessons are recommended in the National Literacy and Numeracy strategy this should be instigated. The planned establishment of a board of studies to progress the review of the curriculum could also investigate ways to accommodate daily contact in English and Mathematics.

Curricular provision is complemented by a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities including sports and these are highly valued by students and parents. Activities such as public speaking and shared reading are seen as integral to the development of students' literacy skills. The commitment of individual teachers and school management to these activities is acknowledged.

The successful implementation of the positive awards system and the newly introduced restorative justice system for students is highly commendable. The focus on positive discipline and promoting personal accountability has already had a positive impact on student behaviour. The adoption of these effective practices by all staff in the school would further enhance students' perceptions of fairness and responsibility and continue to develop the ethos of care, inclusion and respect. A ladder of referral is in place to support the effective implementation of the code of behaviour. It is advisable when revising the code of behaviour to articulate how the restorative justice practice is enacted in the school.

Procedures for the daily monitoring of student attendance are in place. It is recommended that strategies that target the improvement of attendance for the small cohort of student for whom attendance is an issue, be devised and implemented

The ethos of the school as a caring and supportive learning community is actively promoted by all in the school. An effective pastoral care system is sustained through weekly meetings of key staff, the year head and class tutor system, health promotion weeks such as "Stay Strong" and the delivery of a well-structured personal development programme for senior cycle students. There was a resounding positive response from students to the statement "I can talk to an adult in the school if I am having problems". In addition to the chaplaincy and guidance service, the relationship fostered between students and their class teacher and year heads is pivotal to the monitoring of student progress and the provision of targeted interventions when necessary. The role, responsibilities and inputs from the guidance service are presented in very good detail in the guidance plan. It is advisable to further develop and extend this plan as a whole-school guidance plan as recommended by the Department's *Guidelines on Wellbeing in Post-Primary Schools* (2013).

The school has a strong and well organised learning support department. A core team of teachers provides additional learning support to students through a range of effective in-class, individual and small group teaching. It is highly commended that students attending the school's special unit for students on the autistic spectrum are integrated and supported in mainstream classes, as appropriate.

A mentoring programme has been recently established to encourage and support sixth-year students to set attainment goals. Year heads have recently embarked on the monitoring and tracking of student attainment using data from primary school and results from school-based assessments. This along with the students own tracking and setting of targets is praiseworthy and its further development will help students become responsible and self-motivated learners. In the context of this new initiative, it is timely to review the school's assessment policy.

Students have opportunities to develop their leadership skills through membership of the student council, as Meitheal leaders in sixth year, and in sporting and cultural activities. The

student council has made some meaningful contributions, including some involvement in policy review. A sizeable majority of students, surveyed as part of the evaluation, disagreed that they have a say in how to make the school a better place. The board's intention to advance the greater provision of opportunities for student leadership and participation is timely in this regard.

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.

1.2 Management of facilities

Improvements have been made to the school building and facilities on an ongoing basis in recent years including the building of a new classroom block. The planned building of a complete school on the same site is to commence in 2015, which will enhance the quality of the learning environment.

Many classrooms provide very good visual learning environments with subject-specific posters, charts and displays of students' work, but there is potential to develop some classrooms further. The seating arrangements in some classrooms were configured to suit collaborative learning.

Good attention is paid to health and safety practices and a detailed health and safety statement has been developed based on a risk assessment audit. The priority of the board to provide healthier options in the school canteen is timely. The pursuit of the International Green Flag would further enhance students' sense of school ownership and environmental responsibility.

1. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Overall, the quality of learning and teaching was good to very good in almost all lessons observed, with some examples of exemplary practice noted. In a small number of lessons there was scope for development, particularly in the use of methodologies that support full student participation and active learning.

A common characteristic of the lessons observed was the high quality inter-personal relationships, which promoted a positive and productive learning atmosphere. Classroom management was very effective throughout. Students were enthusiastic and participated well in assigned tasks, especially when teachers displayed high expectations for their progress and achievement. Students were willing and confident to ask questions for clarification and to contribute to class discussion in a number of lessons.

At the outset of the majority of lessons, teachers established the purpose and shared the content of lessons with students. Best practice was observed when teachers also established the intended learning outcomes in terms of what students should know and be able to do by the end of the lesson. This provided students with a clear focus for their learning and supported their engagement and productivity.

ICT was used effectively in many lessons to stimulate students' interest and understanding of lesson content and concepts. A small number of lessons would have benefited from some use of ICT. The emergence of an e-learning platform is praiseworthy. Some teachers are actively developing a blog and subject-specific webpages which are readily accessible by students.

Teaching approaches were most effective where there was an appropriate balance between teacher input and student activity. In almost all lessons, students were actively engaged, either through independent or collaborative tasks. Examples of these tasks included responding to class assignments, appropriately focused pair and group work, researching design briefs, interpreting texts in various forms or conducting experiments to determine underlying principles. These effective learning activities also afforded teachers time to provide more focused support for individual students, where relevant.

Student engagement and learning was less effective in lessons where there was prolonged teacher explanation or an over-emphasis on closed questioning. In these lessons, there was scope to reduce student passivity through the use of more varied approaches to questioning and the greater use of applied tasks.

In a small number of lessons, students were encouraged to make their own notes, rather than transcribe notes directly into their copybooks. To build on this good practice, consideration should be given to exploring the use of graphic organisers to further support students' concept attainment and learning.

Good attention was paid to literacy and, to a lesser extent, numeracy in a number of lessons. Exemplary practice was observed where oral literacy was promoted in addition to vocabulary.

There was very good use of the target language in language classes and students made commendable efforts to use the language. Where students are having difficulty in communicating, some sample questions and answers should be provided to scaffold their linguistic competencies.

In the samples reviewed, the use of the homework journal by students varied, as did the assignment of homework by subject teachers. Exemplary practice was noted in some cases where class tutors have embraced the merit system to provide motivating and affirming comments to students on their effort, contribution and achievements.

The quality of monitoring students' written work also varied. Excellent practice was noted where teachers provided detailed formative feedback on students' written assignments or project work. However, this was not always evident. It is recommended that the principles of assessment for learning (AfL) be revisited with a view to adopting a consistent approach to establishing learning outcomes, criteria for success and models of providing formative feedback to guide learning.

There are consistently good levels of achievement in certificate examinations across many subject areas, with progressive trends noted in the uptake of higher-level papers. In a small number of subject areas however, a deeper analysis of outcomes in certificate examinations is required to address lower levels of achievement. Issues arising from this analysis should be addressed in subject department planning.

To enable students across all levels to achieve their full potential in all subjects, school management and staff are encouraged to develop a whole-school teaching and learning action plan, which places a greater focus on active teaching approaches and student learning. Such a plan should promote active skills development, embed AfL practices and enable students to take greater responsibility for their learning.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Eight subject inspections have taken place since 2006. Most of the recommendations from previous inspection reports have been implemented by school management. Some of the recommendations, such as the advancement of a whole-school assessment policy, require further development. School management has supported subject departments in addressing specific recommendations. A review of subject department plans indicated that most of the recommendations have been acted upon.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Teachers have embedded most of the recommendations from previous subject inspections into their teaching practice. There was evidence of increased use by students of the target language in language lessons, while ICT and electronic resources were effectively used in many lessons. Greater use of differentiated approaches to questioning, would further improve students' engagement.

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

The board, senior management and staff are committed to the the process of self-evaluation and school improvement. As part of the school's self-evaluation process, high quality action-based school improvement plans, with a focus on literacy and numeracy, have been developed. The school has a number of processes in place to evaluate the effectiveness of its programmes and processes. These include regular formal and informal consultation and review with staff, students' and parents. A detailed analysis of both uptake rates and achievement in the certificate examinations, parent turnout at parent teacher meetings, school completion rates and progression to third level is undertaken each year. The school has considerable management and leadership capacity to address ongoing issues and priorities identified for future development.

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 Coláiste Eamonn Rís welcomes the Whole School Evaluation-Management, Leadership and Learning report and, in particular, its endorsement of the quality of teaching and learning and the caring ethos within the school environment.

The Board also notes the positive recommendations towards enhancing the quality of teaching and learning within the school and is committed to implementing them on a progressive basis.

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 following actions are planned or ongoing since the completion of the inspection activity.

1. The Board of Management is to set up a sub-committee of the Board to review the Middle Management Structure and the associated Posts of Responsibility with a view to strengthening the structure.
2. School Assessment policy is to be reviewed by the Board.
3. A Board of Studies has been established to review a range of issues including subject choice and timetabling.
4. The Green Flag application process has commenced.
5. Options for increasing the involvement of the student cohort in school management issues are being considered.
6. A review of the school canteen including menu options is ongoing.
7. Progress reports on the implementation of recommendations from the WSE-MLL will be a regular item on the agenda for Board of Management meetings.