

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

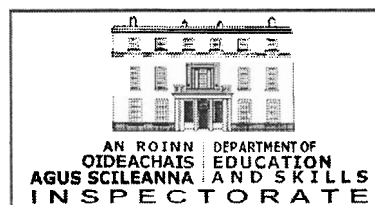
Department of Education and Skills

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

DRAFT REPORT FOR FACTUAL VERIFICATION

**Wesley College
Ballinteer, Dublin 16
Roll number: 61010U**

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Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in September 2010 in Wesley College. 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, 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.

Introduction

Wesley College was founded by the Methodist Church in Ireland in 1845. The Conference of the Methodist Church acts as patron and appoints the governors of the school. The school is now situated on an attractive fifty-acre site and its buildings have been designed on campus style. The campus includes an administration building, individual centres for mathematics, science, technical studies and Music and Art along with a learning resources centre incorporating a library and computer rooms. The school curriculum offers a broad range of subjects and is designed to meet the needs of students of all abilities and interests. The academic work of the school is complemented by an extensive range of sports, extracurricular and co-curricular activities.

The school has an enrolment of almost 900 students, and currently has around 100 boarders. The additional dimension of boarding contributes to the character of Wesley College. The school endeavours to provide a caring and safe environment for its students and to foster a strong sense of community. While it is school enrolment policy to give priority to students from Methodist and other Protestant denominations, those of other traditions and faiths are welcome. Having started as a boys' school, the school will celebrate 100 years of co-education in 2011.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board of management and principal share a clear vision of the development priorities of the school. This vision devolves through senior in-school management and the executive staff committee, and keeps a strong emphasis on teaching and learning.
- Leadership of teaching and learning is evidenced in many ways, including the roll-out of ICT in classrooms and promotion of assessment for learning strategies. The ways in which school management creates opportunities to foster and to promote excellence are examples of very effective leadership of learning.
- In supporting learning, the school places commendable emphasis on recognising the achievements of students and, particularly, on the overall pastoral care of its students.
- A vibrant learning community has been firmly established in the school and respect for learning is promoted widely. The level of individual student responsibility for learning was palpable. Student representatives presented as a critical group of leaders whose contribution to promoting self-discipline among their peers was clear.
- The overall quality of learning and teaching observed was very good.

School management has shown a strong capacity for reflection and school self-review, and a willingness to learn from previous inspection reports when relevant.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- After each of its meetings, the board of management should draft a short agreed report, outlining the key discussions and decisions for dissemination to the nominating bodies, the board of governors, parents and teachers. In addition, an overall board of management report should be furnished to the wider school community on an annual basis.
- Working groups led by experienced members of the executive staff committee could examine particular developmental, curricular or educational priorities and bring the views of all staff members more fully to the decision-making processes.
Themes for examination and discussion by the curriculum committee and management during curriculum review should include the system of options open to students and parents in relation to informed choice of subjects at key transitional stages.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

The board of governors of Wesley College has responsibility for upholding the school ethos. The Methodist conference provides a chaplain to the school who is pivotal in sustaining the founding purpose and Methodist ethos in the daily life of the school. School assemblies allow for the integration of prayer, music, song and reflection, and are daily occasions which serve to forge the school community together in implementing its objectives in practice. The board of governors is also responsible for ensuring the fulfilment of the school's aims, for the buildings and for the regular evaluation of organisational structures and systems. In living out the aspirations of the school's motto, the board of governors sets out to preserve all that is good, while being forward-looking and adapting to student needs. The wording of the motto creates a direct link to self-evaluation.

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

The board of governors provides the strategic leadership for the board of management, which was formally established in 2005. The overlap in membership of the two boards facilitates cohesion. The board of management has responsibility for overseeing the day-to-day organisation and operation of the school. Its members demonstrate a commendable awareness of their statutory obligations and also have a thorough understanding of the traditions and history of the school. Past and present parents are represented on both the board of governors and board of management. This helps to promote and encourage the partnership approach as envisaged in the Education Act, 1998. Such partnership approach should be further advanced through the inclusion of parents on school committees or working groups to review educational provision and update policies in the future.

Since its establishment, the board of management has taken a systematic approach to policy review and ratification. Review and evaluation focus commendably on core aspects of the school's work, such as curriculum, teaching and learning and student attainment. The board systematically avails of opportunities to inform itself on developments and issues relating to the curriculum. Occasions for celebration are also exploited fully in the school's calendar and provide opportunities for board members to acknowledge student attainment and reinforce the school

spirit. It is suggested that the board consider inviting the officers of the student council to address them annually on the activities and achievements of the council.

The principal, as secretary to the board of management, provides a clear vision and clarity of direction for the school. Currently, the principal provides a formal annual report on the work of the board of management to both boards. It is recommended that after each of its meetings, the board of management draft a short agreed report, outlining the key discussions and decisions of the board for dissemination to the nominating bodies, the board of governors, parents and teachers. In addition, an overall board of management report should be furnished to the wider school community on an annual basis, as required by the Education Act 1998. This would provide the school community with greater insights into the school's management and decision-making processes.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with post-primary circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (Department of Education and Science, September 2004).

The school's priorities for development

Senior management applies decisive strategic-thinking characteristics in planning for the school's set of priorities for development. In addition, school development planning is well. The principal is strongly of the view that planning goals and priorities for development must, by their very nature, have a demonstrable effect on teaching and learning. This is a commendable approach which is validated by the fact that ninety-nine percent of parents surveyed indicated satisfaction with the school and agreed that teaching was good.

In a recent self-evaluation conducted at school level, seven separate issues emerged for review, involving different aspects of the educational provision in the school. Though a process of consultation at whole-staff meetings and at executive staff committee meetings, the issues for resolution were addressed. The executive staff committee, which generally meets once a year, comprises members of senior management, year heads, subject co-ordinators, guidance and special needs co-ordinators, the TY co-ordinator and the chaplain. Teachers who have a specific interest in the agenda may also attend. As a result of the above review, systems both long established and newly introduced were revised or adjusted and are now implemented consistently by school staff. Such review resulting in action and revision is very good practice.

It is recommended that the valuable resource of the executive staff committee be drawn upon more frequently, if possible, and that individual members from the executive staff committee with expertise and experience be delegated to act as chairpersons to convene working groups. Such working groups could examine particular developmental, curricular or educational priorities and bring the views of all staff members more fully to the decision-making processes.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

School management creates opportunities to foster and to promote excellence in many ways and these are examples of very effective leadership of learning. The board of management consistently avails of opportunities to affirm teachers and to congratulate staff on achievements. The appointment of new teachers and the selection of staff members for promotional appointments allow board members to assure quality and to promote leadership opportunities among staff.

The senior management team, comprising the principal, deputy principal and vice principal, bring a complementary range of skills and qualities to their varying roles. The constancy of their presence and involvement in every aspect of school life was very much in evidence at the time of the evaluation. The additional role of vice principal, appointed and paid for by school funds, provides an effective means of devolving further management responsibility. The members of the team have clearly defined roles and responsibilities in different aspects of school management and are in constant communication with each other and with the many groups with delegated responsibility. They share a consistent vision of school leadership.

Promoting high quality teaching and maintaining the standards of excellence is a priority for the principal. The ultimate outcome of the principal's targeted focus on teaching and learning is improvement in the quality of students' experiences and achievements. An impressive ninety-four percent of students surveyed felt there was a good atmosphere in the school. The main focus of the deputy principal is concern for the whole person; he is the centre of communications from the individual classroom to the boarding houses, the staffroom and the home. The vice principal has particular responsibility for curriculum and planning and liaises closely with the subject co-ordinators and teachers in relation to teaching and learning, curricular and timetabling matters. In these ways, the work of each member of senior management enhances a team approach to maintaining a high quality experience for the students.

Over ninety percent of parents surveyed expressed satisfaction with communication between home and school. In the context of consolidating communication at staff level, members of the senior management team met every staff member to initiate consultation and professional dialogue in relation to teaching and learning in subject department contexts. This is commended.

Work on examining aspects of teaching and learning was initiated by senior management through subject co-ordinators. The role of subject co-ordinator is one for which subject teachers may apply through the normal posts of responsibility structure or through school-funded promotional appointments. Co-ordinators are given full responsibility for their subject area. Their remit includes ongoing discussions with colleagues on the promotion of student attainment, based on reviews of overall assessment results. Subject co-ordinators are leaders in their subject area; they promote engagement with ongoing developments in the subject and provide practical supports to subject teachers.

The regular attendance of staff at CPD is facilitated and co-ordinated by the deputy principal. This has all contributed to a high quality of planning, collaboration and professionalism within subject departments. Co-ordinators are members of the curriculum committee which meets two or three times a year, and are also members of the executive staff committee. Thus, they are well placed to provide advice and input into decision-making. This is an example of effective distributed leadership in the areas of curriculum and planning, an aspect of management which could be further developed.

Curricular review forms a central strand of planning for the future in a school where one strength of the curriculum is its breadth. Themes for discussion by the curriculum committee and management should include the system of options open to students and parents in relation to informed choice of subjects at key transitional stages. The implications for students of the possible introduction of new subjects and programmes such as the Leaving Certificate Vocational programme (LCVP), continued promotion of assessment for learning (AfL) and further integration of computers as classroom learning tools are other themes which merit ongoing discussion.

Leadership of students

Respect for learning is promoted widely in the school community. Subject teachers and tutors bring qualities to their roles which ensure highly effective relationships and interactions between teachers and students. The system of commendations, the focus on student motivation, the facilitation of meeting times for groups of teachers, the focus on study skills are some examples of the ways in which the work ethic enshrined in the school ethos is promoted. The role of subject co-ordinator already mentioned above contributes to student learning through planning, co-ordinated development of work schemes, looking at methodologies, sharing resources and taking responsibility for leadership within departments. Seventy-five percent of students surveyed said that they enjoyed their lessons. This is a positive acknowledgement of the effort of teachers.

An equally high number of students stated that they felt safe and cared for in the school. The year head system is an example of distributed leadership at the level of management and care for students and is very effective. The pastoral care team, which includes year heads, meets at weekly intervals and has been established as a form of circle of care for students, supporting them in their learning, as do the guidance and the learning support departments. The chaplain, provided by the Methodist Conference, is a central figure in the care team and pivotal in sustaining the school ethos in the daily life of students. School assemblies provide excellent opportunities to acknowledge achievements, whether academic, sporting or personal. Worship is an important aspect of school life and special celebratory services are distributed through out the school's calendar year.

After-school activities are an important part of life in Wesley College. Students are provided with a range of opportunities which complement the academic curriculum. Students are encouraged to participate, and both parents and students are well informed and aware of what is on offer. Activities range from the arts, sports, music, enterprise, to debating and drama and facilities are excellent. Ninety percent of student surveyed participated in activities outside of lesson time.

Prefects and members of the students' council are also a critical group of leaders whose contribution to promoting self-discipline and individual responsibility among students was clear. The code of behaviour makes a positive statement about the kinds of behaviour which the school wishes to promote among students. Responsibility for upholding the code rests with management and staff, with an important role played by prefects and other senior students. The support of parents for this code is crucial and a system of rewards and sanctions underpins the operation of the code. The school places particular emphasis on recognising the achievements of students.

A vibrant learning community has been firmly established in the school.

2.3 Management of facilities

The continued investment in and development of the school's campus and educational infrastructure by the Methodist Conference, by school management, together with the support of parents, is acknowledged. Annual improvements have impacted on the working environment for teachers and the learning environment for students. Almost one hundred percent of students and parents surveyed in the course of the evaluation agreed or strongly agreed that the facilities available in the school are good. Recent focus has been on the expansion of resources, specifically information and communication technology (ICT) in classrooms and specialist rooms.

Art work, displays of photographs, both present and archival, memorabilia, trophies and awards contribute to the attractive nature of the surroundings which are conducive to learning.

3 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The overall quality of learning and teaching in the lessons observed was very good. The very strong commitment to co-curricular activities across the school is also reflected in the high levels of teacher preparedness for lessons and the range of resources, supports and activities planned for. Lessons were mainly held in appropriate settings, such as subject-oriented classrooms, or specialist rooms. These were very well equipped and usually had seating arrangements conducive to student participation and teacher mobility. Effective organisation was a clear goal in relevant lessons, as was compliance with correct procedures in experiments and activities. Very good use of the services of support staff was also evident in such instances.

In a significant majority of cases, teachers laid strong emphasis on the identification of learning outcomes, the proposed structure of the individual lessons and often on anticipated homework tasks. In all lessons, a very positive atmosphere prevailed and a good rapport between teachers and students, and among students, was very evident. Teachers showed high degrees of sensitivity to the gender balance in their classrooms and questions, tasks and time were allocated equitably. Lessons in general progressed with a good balance between teacher instruction or demonstration, and the facilitation of students' self-directed learning, often in pairs. Where relevant, a very clear focus on the use of the target language or subject-specific terminology and vocabulary was evident, often reinforced by students' oral responses and by visualisation on the board or through ICT. The level of computer use in general, particularly in the context of teacher delivery and the use of visuals, was very high.

Within the lessons observed, teachers were encouraging and supportive in all instances. Teacher questioning included a very good mix of lower-order and higher-order questioning, and in many instances the questioning was two-way and helped to develop considerable dialogue opportunities in the promotion of learning. Students were engaged and responsive, and were clearly comfortable in the classroom environment. Students also displayed very good aptitude in applying their learning, whether in the use of language, the completion of experiments and tasks, or the solving of practical problems. In almost all lessons, good opportunities were provided for recapitulation and review of learning, by oral questioning and occasionally by more practical tasks and challenges for students. Overall, there was clear evidence of high levels of student learning being facilitated and being achieved in the lessons observed.

The emphasis on assessment, and specifically on AfL strategies, was very impressive. Many lessons saw the revisiting of initial lesson goals and learning outcomes, students being asked to reflect on how they could improve their own work next time, or to discuss similar issues with a partner, and oral or written feedback from teachers about homework was given in a significant number of the lessons observed. The board and the homework diary were used in most lessons to identify homework tasks, and such tasks were linked directly to the content of lessons and to previous learning. Ninety-five percent of students surveyed agreed that homework was assigned and corrected regularly and ninety-seven percent stated that they were expected to use their homework journal. A strong emphasis was placed on commendation of students' efforts, up to and including simple certificates or in-class prizes, in keeping with the principles of AfL.

Among the individual recommendations made to teachers was the need to consider how seating arrangements can be adapted to group activities in some classrooms. Occasional difficulties with the use of data projectors included text overload on some slides, or text being a little too small for

all to read. It is important to give some general consideration to how ICT can become more of a learning tool, rather than chiefly a teaching instrument, in classroom practices. In isolated instances, recommendations to promote increased student use of target or subject-specific language, coming to the board during lessons and interrogating visual stimuli were proffered, within the broader context of the very good learning and teaching observed during the evaluation.

4 IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

The board of management's presentation very clearly outlined the actions taken in response to recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports. The response indicated a reflective and pragmatic approach. In relation to timetabling and allocation of time to subjects, for example, sincere efforts have been made to avoid two lessons in one day for some junior classes in English. A double period has been provided for Physical Education to facilitate more in-depth engagement with the subject matter, wherever possible.

The excellent quality of the planning in subjects was evident. The planning documentation for all the subjects evaluated has been reviewed, augmented and enhanced.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

The quality of teaching and learning in the subjects evaluated was high. Teachers have attended well to the implementation of many of the recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports in relation to learning and teaching. The image-rich and print-rich classroom environment has been enhanced, where feasible. The physical education department provides opportunities to include gender integration in modules, where appropriate. The school is encouraged to view the celebration of 100 years of co-education to pursue this recommendation further.

A range of actions has been taken by subject departments in response to recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports. TY programme aims for English are now clearly documented; an agreed homework policy for English, including an emphasis on longer writing tasks and formative assessment, has been implemented; a comprehensive overall plan for Physical Education has been developed; the German plan now includes the richness of the range of methodologies and resources deployed; the decline in numbers taking German has been halted; and the German department continue to work on promoting uptake of the subject.

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

The pride in the school's long history and traditions permeates the work of the school boards, senior management, teachers and students. Wesley College is a reflective, evaluative, self-challenging school in constant search for greater effectiveness. Whole-school self-evaluation has been student-centred and concentrated on the school's impact on learning. The school's ongoing focus on formative assessment and AfL, its involvement in new initiatives and innovation, such as Project Maths, and its sustained efforts to maximise students' potential are evidence of the school's overall capacity for improvement. In the pursuit of excellence, the educational provision

of the school draws on the best traditions of the past while at the same time reflecting the latest thinking and insights about teaching and learning. 2011 is an opportunity to reflect proudly on the last 100 years and prepare for the next ten.