

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

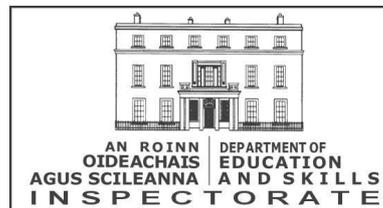
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Meánscoil Iognáid Rís
Naas, Co. Kildare
Roll number: 61710C**

Date of inspection: 14 May 2012



Whole-School Evaluation

Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in May, 2012 in Meánscoil Iognáid Rís. 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

Meánscoil Iognáid Rís is an all-boys Catholic voluntary secondary school operating under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The school was established in Naas in 1871 by the Irish Christian Brothers and moved to its present site in 1958. The school operates an open enrolment policy and provides a broad and balanced curriculum which includes the Transition Year option (TY).

The school's enrolment has grown steadily over the years creating the need for three separate extension programmes. The most recent extension and the complete refurbishment of the existing buildings means that the school is very well equipped and has the capacity to accommodate the predicted enrolment of over 900 students in the coming years.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The school is very well managed and operates in an effective and progressive manner. Positive relationships are maintained with all of the school's stakeholders and the lines of communication are clear and unambiguous.
- The principal and deputy principal constitute a very effective team.
- Student care is a high priority for the school and the relationships between the students, management and staff are very good. Discipline procedures, which focus on promoting positive behaviour and cultivating an atmosphere of mutual respect, are very effective and supported by all of the relevant partners.
- The school enjoys very positive relationships with parents. A very active parents' association supports the school in a number of ways, including the organisation of supervised study for students.
- The quality of teaching and learning was, in the vast majority of lessons, very good and was most effective when the teaching methods were adapted to meet the needs and abilities of all of the students.
- Senior management and the board of management have been very successful in managing the development of the school's facilities. The school is now very well resourced, and is planning for its future development.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- The priorities for future development identified by the board of management need to be refined. The list of priorities should reflect the changing educational landscape and should include school self-evaluation and the implementation of a literacy and numeracy strategy. Structured plans detailing the actions to be taken, timelines, and

evaluation and review procedures should be put in place and a schedule of reports on progress against the agreed targets should be submitted to the board.

- Subject department planning should reflect the board of management's priorities in relation to literacy and numeracy and school self evaluation. Annual reports, including plans for improvement and progress against targets should be prepared by each subject department and submitted to the board.
- The middle management team should develop its role in relation to strategic planning, development school self-evaluation and driving improvements in teaching and learning.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

The board of management is properly constituted and its members have a very good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The board maintains positive links with the trustees and communicates with all of the school's stakeholders in an open and timely fashion.

The board is very supportive of management and staff and provides very good leadership in relation to the ongoing development of the school. The relationship the board enjoys with the principal and deputy principal is reflected in the manner in which the development and maintenance of the school's infrastructure is managed. The mutually supportive environment that exists ensures that the significant challenges encountered during the school's recent extension and refurbishment were managed successfully and resulted in minimal disruption to the school's day-to-day activities.

The board's activities, which have focussed primarily on the schools' infrastructural development, should now turn to the area of educational leadership. Procedures should be established to track the implementation of recommendations from subject inspection and other reports, monitor the status of subject department planning and lead the development and implementation of the school improvement plan.

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*.

The school's priorities for development

The Board has identified a range of priorities for future development. These include: the expansion of the school site and the development of an all-weather sports facility; the completion of the most recent phase of construction and the resolution of issues which arose during an earlier construction project; promoting excellence in classroom management and in teaching methods, including the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching and learning; and the development of a comprehensive school self-evaluation process.

Very good progress is evident relation to the majority of these development priorities. Negotiations with Kildare County Council and the Department of Education and Skills in relation to the site expansion are at an advanced stage while the completion of the school extension and refurbishment is in its final stages. There has been considerable investment in the school's ICT infrastructure and a very good ICT plan is in place. A peer-to-peer training programme in integrating ICT in teaching and learning is ongoing and the importance of ICT as a teaching and learning tool is regularly discussed at staff meetings. Issues relating

to classroom management are dealt with through the school's engagement with the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS). This worthwhile initiative reflects the innovative approach adopted by school management and the adaptability of the teaching staff in driving school improvement. Formal school self-evaluation is at an early stage of development.

The range of priorities identified for development is extensive and needs to be refined. The board should reduce the number of priorities. The list of priorities should reflect the broader educational landscape and therefore school self-evaluation and the implementation of a literacy and numeracy strategy should be retained. Structured plans describing the actions to be taken, timelines, and procedures for evaluation and review should be put in place and a schedule of reports on progress against the agreed targets should be submitted to the board. There is considerable expertise available to the board in engaging in this process. The committee established to manage the school's engagement with the NBSS, the school's middle management team and senior management all have the requisite skills set.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The principal and deputy principal constitute a very effective team. They are open to new ideas, act as very good role models to the staff and students and have successfully created a vision for the school which is at once supportive and challenging. The manner in which the school functioned effectively during the renovations and extensions in recent years is testament to the leadership of the senior management team and, in particular, to the dedication of the principal.

The members of the senior management team have excellent facilitation skills and maintain very clear lines of communication with the school's various stakeholders. Their pastoral approach to the leadership of the school reflects the school's ethos and is evident in all aspects of their work.

The staff of the school is dedicated and hard working. They approach their work in a collegial manner and contribute greatly to the pastoral atmosphere which permeates the school. The approach adopted to continuing professional development (CPD) by both management and staff is very good and has contributed not only to enhancing the skills set available to the school but to developing a culture of reflection and innovation.

The middle management team performs a key role in the school's pastoral and academic activities. Members have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, meet regularly, and adopt a collaborative approach to their work. In order to continue the development of the team and to reflect the changing educational landscape, they should be facilitated to adopt a more active role in strategic planning, including school self-evaluation, and improving teaching and learning and literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

Subject department planning is well established and the very good practice of framing the schemes of work in terms of learning outcomes and detailing the teaching methods to be adopted in achieving these was evident in a significant number of cases. This practice should be adopted by the remaining subject departments. The systematic use of data to inform subject department planning is at an early stage with analysis of student performance in the certificate examinations being conducted by subject departments for the first time this year. Data analysis should, in future years, be extended to include an examination of trends in student performance over time and should inform the targets for improvement in each subject area. Furthermore, each subject department should prepare an

annual report containing targets for improvement, for submission to the board of management.

An immediate focus for subject department planning is the adoption of the priorities identified by the board of management in the areas of school self-evaluation and literacy and numeracy. Each subject department needs to identify how these developments will impact on the operation of the department and how, in turn, the department can contribute to the development and cohesive implementation of whole-school policies in these areas.

A very effective learning-support team is in place. The team receives the active support of senior management and is very well resourced. The members of the team have high expectations for the students in their care and adopt a collaborative approach to their work. The expertise of the team members will be crucial in developing and implementing the school's literacy and numeracy strategy and it is recommended that members of the team be identified to adopt a lead role in this area.

Leadership of students

The relationships between the students, management and staff are very good. The school's code of discipline is student centred and focuses on promoting positive behaviour and cultivating an atmosphere of mutual respect. The decision by management to engage with the NBSS and to adopt a range of strategies to support student development and enhance classroom management practices has been very successful. This is reflected in the fall in the number of suspensions and the satisfaction expressed by students and parents of the manner in which the school operates its discipline procedures. A student council which actively communicates the views of students to management is also in place. In the past, council representatives were invited to meet with the board of management each year. This innovative approach which enhanced the council's profile and provide should be reinstated.

Very good procedures facilitating student transfer into first year are in place. A mentoring programme and the work of the class tutors, year heads and guidance counsellors all contributes greatly to the transfer programme and to the ease with which the first-year students settle into the school. Parents and students described the transfer process as inclusive and effective.

The school maintains very good communication with parents. The student journal, which is the primary means of ongoing communication, is subject to frequent review. The latest review resulted in the production of two versions of the journal, one for students in TY and one for the remainder. The journals have an innovative structure including a daily record of learning. This is very good practice as it is in keeping with the use of learning outcomes by teachers during lesson delivery. The positive relationship with parents is further supported by the activities of the parents' association, which supports a range of initiatives, including supervised study for students and community-based activities for TY students.

Curricular provision is very good, is subject to ongoing review and is supported by very effective timetabling. The review process has resulted in the introduction of additional subjects including Religious Education and Agricultural Science in the recent past. Future reviews should assess the feasibility of introducing the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, Applied Mathematics and Home Economics.

A very good TY programme is in place. It is a popular choice with students and features a number of innovative approaches designed to engage the students actively in their own learning. Procedures for reviewing and evaluating the programme are very good and reflect the dynamic and insightful manner in which the programme is managed. Recommendations from previous inspections relating to assessment, skills development and the use of learning outcomes in lesson delivery in TY are not yet fully implemented. Measures to ensure the

uniform implementation of the remaining recommendations should be put in place as a matter of priority.

A range of procedures designed to support students regarding subject choice are in place. These include information evenings for parents of students in first and third year. It was evident from the questionnaires that a significant number of parents and students feel that arrangements relating to subject choice could be improved. It is recommended that the guidance counsellors liaise with the parents' association and the students to establish the precise nature of these concerns and take the appropriate steps to address them.

Provision for extracurricular activities is very good. Students have access to a wide range of activities which adds greatly to their enjoyment of school and develops their interest and proficiency in sporting, cultural and academic pursuits. Great credit is due to the staff of the school whose voluntary efforts ensure the continued provision of this extensive programme.

2.3 Management of facilities

The school has undergone a number of developments over the years, the most recent involving a refurbishment of the existing facility in addition to a large four-floor extension. The school is now very well equipped and boasts an extensive ICT infrastructure, and attractive and well-equipped classrooms, laboratories and workshops.

The process of continually developing the school has been managed with great skill and perseverance. Despite the significant difficulties encountered, the school's day-to-day work proceeded uninterrupted. This is testament to the dedication of the senior management team and the positive relationship it enjoys with the board of management.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning was, in the vast majority of lessons, very good. The best lessons featured very good teacher planning, effective integration of resources and presented the students with an appropriate level of challenge. In the small number of lessons that were less effective, the pacing was pedantic, links with the students' prior learning and with related areas of the curriculum were not made and the purpose of the lesson was unclear.

Very good strategies to differentiate the lesson content were in evidence in many of the lessons. These included the use of key words, a focus on subject-specific skills and language and effective teacher questioning. Pair and group work was also employed in a limited number of instances and resulted in lessons that were engaging and effective. There were, however, some lessons which were completely teacher led and it is recommended that the existing good practice, in facilitating lesson delivery to take account of the abilities of all of the students, be universally adopted.

While there were some very good examples of ICT integration, greater use of the school's ICT infrastructure should be made in lesson delivery. Each classroom is equipped with a computer and digital projector but ICT integration only featured in a small number of classes. Whole-school planning relating to ICT in teaching and learning is at an advanced stage and should be mirrored in subject department planning. Targets for the greater integration of ICT in lesson delivery should be agreed by each subject department and included in the subject department plans.

Very good use was made of directed teacher questioning, which served to involve all of the students in the lessons and to maintain a clear focus on the lesson content. The use of

higher-order questioning was less common. Opportunities for students to propose alternative approaches to problem solving, and to explain their reasoning, evident in some instances, should be more widely adopted as an integral element of lesson delivery. Homework is regularly assigned and corrected but the quality of written feedback provided to students varied widely and in some instances was entirely absent. In order to standardise the very good assessment practices evident in some instances it is recommended that a whole-school assessment policy be developed as a matter of priority.

The atmosphere in the classrooms was warm; the rapport between the teachers and students was respectful and contributed to a positive and purposeful learning environment.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

Procedures for implementing the recommendations from previous evaluations need to be improved. The board of management should agree procedures to oversee the implementation of recommendations and to seek confirmation that they have been implemented. While good progress has been made in implementing many of the recommendations, a more systematic process for prioritising and tracking their implementation should be put in place.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

A number of the subject-specific recommendations relating to active teaching and learning, planning, ICT integration in lesson delivery and use of subject-specific language have been implemented. Recommendations relating to skills development and the use of learning outcomes in TY are still outstanding. Each subject department should adopt an agreed approach to implementing the recommendations from subject inspection reports together with procedures to ensure that recommendations in one subject area that are pertinent to other disciplines are appropriately adopted.

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

5.1

Self-evaluation is already a feature of whole-school planning. The senior management team fully understands the role of school self-evaluation in leading to improvement and a number of structures to facilitate the process are already in place. The committee established to manage the NBSS initiative, the middle management and learning-support teams all have the requisite skills to lead the development of good practice in this area. The board of management must establish self-evaluation priorities and ensure that target setting and review are embedded in the school's core activities and should seek annual reports from senior management, subject departments and other key teams on progress being made against the targets.

Time-bound plans for school improvement should be agreed and implemented and should initially focus on subject department planning, literacy and numeracy, and assessment. Lead subject departments should be identified to progress specific development priorities including peer evaluation, differentiation strategies and the promotion of excellence in classroom management.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report.

The Board welcomes the Inspection report. In particular, it welcomes the acknowledgement of the very positive relationships which exist in the school between students, staff, management, parents, Board of Management and trustees.

The report recognises the pastoral leadership and vision of senior management, the emphasis on student care, the focus on positive behaviour and the atmosphere of mutual respect which pervades the school.

The Board welcomes the recognition of the dedication and hard work of the staff, their spirit of collegiality, their positive approach to continuous professional development and the culture of reflection and innovation which is a hallmark of the school. The acknowledgement of the very good provision of extracurricular activities and the credit due to staff who take these activities on a voluntary basis is very welcome.

The report acknowledges the time and energy given by the Board and senior management to improving school facilities over the years and the determination of the Board to bring to fruition its plans for the external sports facilities and the expansion of the site.

The Board welcomes the acknowledgement of the quality of teaching and learning, the quality of subject department planning and the increasing use of the new ICT facilities in classroom practice. Given its commitment to school improvement, the Board welcomes the recommendations in relation to school self-evaluation and subject department planning.

As a school in the Edmund Rice tradition, its inclusive nature is very important. The Board welcomes the recognition of the school's open enrolment policy and its broad and balanced curriculum. The school is committed to mixed ability teaching, to catering for students of all backgrounds, abilities and nationalities. The Board is acutely aware of its role in the community of Naas and in the neighbouring townlands and villages from which it draws its student cohort.

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 Board of Management views the report as an important roadmap to assist the school in improving the quality of teaching and learning and in meeting the needs of its students over the coming years. The Board acknowledges the school's role in the national drive to improve literacy and numeracy and through a process of self-evaluation, continue to improve all aspects of school life.

The Board has mandated the senior management team, in consultation with staff, students and parents, to prepare an action plan which will reflect the recommendations of the report. This work will be assisted by the in-school management team who will have an active role in strategic planning and self-evaluation and by the learning support team who will assist in developing and implementing the school's literacy and numeracy strategy.

Regarding school self-evaluation, the Board recognises the importance of incremental change and the need to prioritize an achievable set of objectives.

The Board is conscious of the high quality of current subject department planning; nevertheless, it recognises how an emphasis on learning outcomes, action plans and annual reports to the Board will contribute further to school improvement.

The Board recognises the importance of assessment in student learning and will be giving priority to the development of a whole school assessment policy.

The Board acknowledges the positive role of the school's engagement with the National Behaviour Support Service. The school will continue to build on the work already commenced which has enhanced the culture of mutual respect and the quality of learning within the school.

The Board will continue to support senior management, staff and students in developing their leadership potential so that the school will continue to renew its mission and relevancy in the Ireland of the 21st Century.