

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning
REPORT

St Louis High School
Rathmines, Dublin 6
Roll number: 60890C

Date of inspection: 16 October 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 October 2014 in St Louis High School. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Introduction

St. Louis High School, established in 1913 by the Sisters of St. Louis, is an all-girls non fee-paying voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of Le Chéile Trust. Its enrolment has been steadily increasing since 2007 and it has a current enrolment of 663 students. Its students come from a wide range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds from an extensive catchment area. It has learning, creativity and inclusion at the core of its mission statement and has a history of engaging in educational development and innovation.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- St. Louis High School provides a high quality education for its students within a dynamic energetic school community.
- The board of management has undertaken its governance and educational leadership roles very effectively through the clear identification of priorities and strategies.
- The newly appointed senior management team provides committed effective leadership, characterised by good communication, consultation, shared decision-making and a clear vision for the school.
- There is significant experience among the teaching staff who are motivated, engage in educational innovation and development, and demonstrate an openness and willingness to work together.
- The quality of teaching and learning was very good overall, and some exemplary practice was noted.
- An integrated system of student support, welfare and wellbeing is in place and features of very good practice were evident in the provision for the additional learning needs of students.
- The school has developed its capacity to identify challenges and to act effectively in implementing its improvement programme.

Recommendations for Further Development

- Developmental priorities for the new board of management should include: the review of essential policies; the development of a whole school assessment policy; the further development of the whole school guidance plan; curriculum review; the re-evaluation of current middle management structures; and the addressing of identified infrastructural deficits.
- The Transition Year (TY) programme and corresponding plan should be progressed and reviewed to include additional curricular diversity.
- A review of the structures of the student representative council (SRC) should be undertaken, which incorporates the clarification of the role of the SRC and the role of the school's prefect system, to ensure that the SRC acts as a construct for the student voice at all levels in the school.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) as an effective tool for learning should be further integrated, extended and progressed across all subjects.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board of management has been properly constituted. It has high levels of skills and educational expertise among its members. It is aware of its statutory responsibilities and has provided valuable oversight and educational leadership for the work of the school. It is very well informed and knowledgeable on school matters and maintains good communication with the parents' association and the students' council. Le Chéile Trust provides valuable support and expertise to the school and to the board through training and advice.

The board has successfully engaged with junior cycle reform, the national literacy and numeracy strategy, eLearning and the school self-evaluation process in a proactive and strategic manner. As an outgoing board, its impact will continue to resonate through the priorities and strategies it has clearly identified and through the establishment of a new senior management team. Significant continuity is being maintained with the incoming board through a number of reappointments.

The newly appointed principal and deputy principal have formed an effective and committed senior management team, working together within a shared vision for the school and carrying out their roles effectively. They have identified three key areas for development: the junior cycle curriculum; the integration of new methodologies, especially ICT into teaching and learning; and the up-skilling of teachers.

Together with the board, they are committed to maintaining the legacy of the St. Louis Sisters whose motto 'ut sint unum', meaning that 'that they may be one', continues to inform the ethos of the school community. This is expressed through the dynamic and collaborative community spirit evident in the school which is both welcoming and familial. The voluntary staff council operates effectively as an important advisory and consultative body to the senior management team.

The incoming board should continue to pursue these priorities. It is recommended that it continue the review and finalisation of key policies including the admissions policy. The school's policy of cancelling applications for admission based on unconfirmed non-attendance at the incoming first year students' information meeting should be reviewed and

revised. A proactive approach to attendance and participation has been adopted through the preparation of a draft strategy which now should be progressed to finalisation.

The incoming board should address curriculum review to include undertaking a review of the TY plan and progressing the school's eLearning plan. The review of the posts of responsibility is timely and should now be progressed through a participative and reflective process, taking account of the current needs of the school and enabling the effective use of resources. The staff council could play a vital role in this regard.

School enrolment has increased steadily for the past seven years and the board made the decision to cap the school's intake, given the limitations in its buildings and facilities. The board has identified the infrastructural deficits in the school and has actively sought to address these in recent years with some success. It is timely that these deficits should now be addressed by the new board through drafting and progressing an infrastructural development plan.

The school has a long established partnership with the parents, which is exemplified through a meaningful collaboration with and extensive contribution from the executive committee of the parents' association. The highly active and energetic executive committee contributes to policy development, a wide range of school activities, and educational fundraising. Consideration should be given to further strengthening the profile of the parents' association through greater use of electronic communication.

The school has established and maintains close links with the local Rathmines community, working in collaboration with local schools, businesses, and a range of local organisations and services including the library and the local gym facilities which it uses.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal brings a wealth of professional expertise and educational experience, energy and enthusiasm to her role. She is committed to developing the school as a dynamic centre of learning which provides a holistic student-centred education, to developing a vibrant learning community, and to providing ongoing support and development of staff. The deputy principal has a proven track record of experience in her management role. She brings valuable organisational, communication and leadership skills, together with an integral knowledge of the school system, to her work in a dedicated and professional manner. As a senior management team, they bring complementary skills to their work, with frequent communication and shared decision-making. They maintain a strong visible presence throughout the school, working collaboratively with staff, students and parents.

The teachers bring significant experience to their role and are highly motivated. They are actively engaged in educational innovation and development and demonstrate an openness and willingness to work together. They are afforded a good range of opportunities, both formal and informal, to lead projects and initiatives which enhance student learning, for example through the literacy, numeracy and eLearning committees. Many teachers have availed of these opportunities with commitment and generosity.

The school provides a broad, progressive and balanced curriculum, which provides a very good focus on a wide range of subject areas across the sciences, languages, humanities, arts and health.

Timetabling is effective overall, with very good attention given to the core subjects of Irish, English and Mathematics, particularly in senior cycle. The timetabling and distribution of lessons in some subjects requires improvement. In the timetabling of teachers, it is important that the utilisation of the teaching resource is maximised to meet the needs of the school. In

particular, management should ensure that Circular Letter 18/98 regarding the timetabling of teachers who are job-sharing is implemented.

Almost all teachers are deployed in accordance with their qualifications and expertise. In the small minority of situations where this is not the case, this should be addressed. Good opportunities are provided for continuous professional development (CPD) through whole-school staff days and support for individual CPD.

The aims of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme are being met successfully and there is a high level of achievement by students. A good quality optional TY programme is in place, which has a significant uptake among students. However, the current plan should be reviewed as planned and revised in line with Circular M1/00 and DES TY guidelines. The re-evaluation of how TY work experience is organised and implemented should be prioritised with a view to extending TY curricular diversity.

Subject planning is well established. Subject department meetings are held regularly and are agenda-driven. A strategic focus has been incorporated into subject planning with a review and evaluation of areas prioritised for development being undertaken at the beginning of each year, which is good practice. Subject plans and schemes of work are well developed overall, and some excellent practice was noted. To promote consistent practice in subject planning, the development and use of a common template for schemes of work should be considered. Analysis of examination results is being undertaken and trends in student achievement in certificate examinations are being tracked and monitored.

The development of the school's eLearning plan is commendable. Teachers are engaging in a creative and innovative manner with 'Moodle' as a virtual learning environment to provide, inter alia, resource materials for students. Students are encouraged to use this platform for learning, with a reward for the 'Student Moodler of the Month'. The further integration of ICT into teaching and learning should be progressed as planned, especially with a view to providing greater opportunities for students to use personal electronic devices for their work.

The year head and class teacher roles are student-centred, integrating responsibility for pastoral care, welfare and discipline, tracking and monitoring student academic progress, tracking and monitoring attendance and punctuality, and incorporating a high level of commitment to the care and well-being of students. A well-organised system of communication between year heads and class teachers, and between year heads and senior management, is an important component of the school's support system for students.

The implementation of the code of behaviour works well, and students indicated a clear understanding of the school rules through the MLL questionnaire, with ninety six percent of students agreeing that the school has clear rules against hurting other people by what is said or done. A rewards system which recognised participation as well as academic success is in place. A review of the code of behaviour is recommended to strengthen its focus on 'positive behaviour' and to incorporate a greater emphasis on the rewards system.

A comprehensive guidance and counselling programme which provides individual, educational and personal guidance and counselling, is in place for all year groups.

A very good coordinated system is in place to address the additional educational needs of students. It incorporates best practice through different models of support, including one-to-one withdrawal, team teaching and small group classes, being used by the resource and learning support team.

The pastoral care team system involves class teachers, year heads, guidance counsellors, school chaplain and senior management. The student care team should be formally

established as recommended by the Department of Education and Skills '*Guidelines on Wellbeing in Post-Primary Schools*' (2013) and a review of the pastoral care system would be worthwhile to facilitate this. The further development of the whole school guidance plan, to fully incorporate and document the school's pastoral care practice in line with these guidelines is recommended.

A wide range of co- and extra-curricular activities are provided for the students. These include themed weeks, and a very good range of opportunities for creative, artistic, musical and sports activities as well as opportunities for voluntary charity work.

Leadership opportunities are provided for students through the SRC, peer mentoring, and involvement in leading co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. A team of sixth year students including the head girl and deputy head, whose role also incorporates the school's prefect system, lead the junior cycle and senior cycle SRCs. These are actively involved in a wide variety of activities including the organisation of fundraising events and the review of relevant policies. A review of the structures of the SRC is recommended, which should incorporate the clarification of the role of the SRC and the role of the student prefect system, to ensure that the SRC acts as a construct for the student voice for students at all levels in the school.

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*.

1.3 Management of facilities

The school buildings are well maintained but there are deficits in the schools' infrastructure. Strategic development of the facilities has been undertaken to support the curriculum through the provision of upgraded classrooms, library and concert hall and refurbished science laboratories, art and home economics rooms and computer facilities.

The visual environment, enhanced through displays of students' work and posters, is print rich and is very good overall. Most classroom layouts are facilitative of collaborative learning and were used very effectively in most lessons. The school librarian and library is a highly valuable resource and plays an important role in the school's literacy strategy.

Environmental responsibility and sustainability is promoted and excellent work has been undertaken in achieving three Green Flags to-date. A fourth is being worked towards, with the TY students leading out on it.

The schools' facilities and broadband access should be reviewed in the context of the needs of the school. Plans for the further development of the school's infrastructure should be progressed.

2 QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Twenty-one lessons were evaluated, including three double lessons. All year groups and curricular programmes in the school were covered. The range of subjects included core, optional and practical subjects.

In a significant majority of lessons observed the quality of teaching was good, very good or exemplary. There is scope for development and improvement in a few lessons.

Almost all lessons were very well planned, prepared and resourced. Individual teacher planning of work and for resources in advance of lessons was very good overall. There was very good continuity with prior learning.

A positive supportive affirmative atmosphere was facilitated throughout with very good rapport between students and teachers evident in all classrooms. Motivation levels were high resulting in meaningful learning experiences. Teachers were caring and supportive of their students who in turn were courteous and respectful of their teachers. Classes were generally well managed and students enjoyed the learning experiences.

Lesson objectives were shared in almost all lessons. Lesson structure could have been strengthened by teachers in some instances through revisiting key lesson objectives when summarising the lesson. The provision of an additional board or flip chart may facilitate teachers in this regard.

Differentiation worked well overall. However, teachers should increase the level of challenge for students by setting meaningful higher-level tasks and incorporating higher-order questions in some lessons. Best practice was observed when differentiated tasks were implemented to support increased levels of student participation and engagement.

The majority of lessons facilitated students' self-directed learning, often through pair work, group work and practical activities. Very good participation and engagement by students in active learning was evident in many lessons. This approach should be extended so that there is a good balance between teacher instruction and student activities. For example, a few lessons did not afford many students the opportunity to participate fully and to act as autonomous learners.

A good range of methodologies was effectively utilised to reinforce learning. Opportunities were provided for co-operative learning in many lessons. Very good use of target language was observed across all language lessons. Best practice was observed when teachers received ongoing feedback on student learning through the use of 'show me' boards, questioning and worksheets. The white board was used effectively in many lessons to record lesson objectives. Key words, concepts and subject-specific terminology were noted on the board to reinforce learning. This contributed to the development of literacy across a wide range of subjects. ICT was used effectively by many teachers to support, consolidate and reinforce learning. In particular, video, animation and photographs were expertly utilised to advance these lessons and to enable students to experience the world beyond the classroom. Opportunities whereby students are actively involved in using ICT and in particular, personal electronic devices, as part of lessons should be facilitated by all teachers.

Students' knowledge and skills were well developed in most lessons, supported through high-quality teacher expertise. Best practice was observed in lessons when students were encouraged to evaluate, reflect and think on their work.

There was very good use of questions overall, including higher-order questions which enabled effective assessment of students' knowledge and understanding. Greater encouragement and support of students to ask questions is recommended.

Skills development, including the analysis of data, prediction and observation skills, self and peer assessment, was of a high standard in some lessons. This focus on skills development should be extended to all lessons.

Student journals were well utilised to record homework and for communication with parents. Homework was observed to be given and corrected by most teachers. Setting student research tasks in lieu of homework will support learning and should reduce time spent on student note-

taking. While oral formative feedback was given during many lessons, best practice was observed when formative written feedback was given on students' written work.

There is scope for development in the provision of formative written feedback in a consistent manner across all subjects. This is an essential element of assessment for learning and the school should strive to implement it in every subject area. The development of a whole-school assessment and homework policy is recommended to facilitate a consistent approach to assessment across all subjects.

3 IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

The inspections of Physics and Science, Physical Education, German, and Business Studies undertaken in recent years were reviewed. Good progress has been achieved overall in the effective implementation of recommendations made. Significant progress has been achieved in providing Physical Education (PE) for all students, though challenges still remain in providing PE for all students in senior cycle. Assessment practices have been improved in Science and Business Studies as well as across a range of subjects. There is scope for further development of subject and TY planning.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Recommendations to develop and improve teaching and learning have been effectively addressed with good progress being achieved. The balance between teachers' input and student activity was improved in most lessons. The type, quality, correction and consistency of homework has improved across all subjects. There is scope for development in a minority of lessons, through greater provision of student activities, a greater level of challenge for more able students and attention being given to the pace of lessons.

The board has actively engaged with and formally responded to the key recommendations in subject inspection reports. In addition to the key recommendations, good practice recommended within evaluation reports should be shared across all subject departments to enhance the ongoing development of subject plans.

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

School self-evaluation processes are well established and have led to the identification of the school's strengths and areas for development. An actioned '*SMART*' school improvement plan for 2014/15 has been developed to address the areas for improvement and this is being implemented. The planned establishment of a school development planning task group to lead the school development planning process together with the Staff Council will be an important resource for the school's SSE work. The findings from the WSE-MLL questionnaires administered to students and to parents should be explored and used to inform the SSE process going forward.

Through the school's ongoing review and self-evaluation, the school has developed its capacity to identify challenges and to bring about improvement in a strategic and effective manner.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

We pay tribute to our recently retired Principal whose strong and generous leadership during the past decade contributed so much to the positive findings of this evaluation.

We very much appreciate the affirmation given to the students, teachers, parents' association, senior management team and board of management.

The DES Inspectorate's recognition of the following aspects is particularly gratifying:

- St Louis High School provides a high quality education for its students within a dynamic energetic school community.
- The school provides a broad, progressive and balanced curriculum, which provides a very good focus on a wide range of subject areas across the sciences, languages, humanities, arts and health.
- The development of the school's e-learning plan is commendable. Teachers are engaging in a creative and innovative manner with 'Moodle' as a virtual learning environment to provide, inter alia, resource material for students. Students are encouraged to use this platform for learning, with a reward for the 'Student Moodler of the Month'.
- A wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities are provided for the students. These include themed weeks, and a very good range of opportunities for creative, artistic, musical and sports activities as well as opportunities for voluntary charity work.
- The school buildings are well maintained. Strategic development of the facilities has been undertaken to support the curriculum through the provision of upgraded classrooms, library and concert hall and refurbished science laboratories, art and home economics rooms and computer facilities.
- A positive supportive affirmative atmosphere was facilitated throughout with very good rapport between students and teachers evident in all classrooms. Motivation levels were high resulting in meaningful learning experiences. Teachers were caring and supportive of their students who in turn were courteous and respectful of their teachers.
- Through the school's ongoing review and self-evaluation, the school has developed its capacity to identify challenges and to bring about improvement in a strategic and effective manner.

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

Most of the recommendations made had been identified in our school plan. We are happy to progress all recommendations as speedily as possible.

We are planning to submit a third application to the DES for a replacement sports hall. We are applying also for a fourth science laboratory. These are elements identified by the inspectors as infrastructural deficits. A Capital Development Team is being established in order to lead the infrastructural development of the school.

Progress has been made in the following areas:

- A review of several policies has already commenced as has the planning for the further development of a whole school guidance plan.

- A review of the middle management structure has commenced with the assistance of outside facilitation.
- A comprehensive review of Transition Year is well under way.
- A review of the structures of the Student Representative Council has begun.
- Research in relation to further ICT integration for teaching, learning and communication is being carried out and the use of e-portal has been extended to support attendance, punctuality, participation and in-house communication. We would welcome DES financial assistance to further develop ICT in the school.
- The Parents' Council is now affiliated to the National Parents' Council.