

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Presentation Secondary School  
Kilkenny City, County Kilkenny  
Roll number: 61590S**

**Date of inspection: 23 January 2015**



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS  
AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION  
AND SKILLS  
INSPECTORATE**

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

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in January 2015 in Presentation Secondary School, Kilkenny. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

## ***Introduction***

Presentation Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school for girls. Founded by the Presentation Sisters in 1940, the school is under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). With a current enrolment of 694 students, the school welcomes students from urban and rural areas of Kilkenny. The Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year Programme (TY), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate are provided in the school.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

### ***Key Findings***

- The Board is a committed body with a diversity of educational knowledge and expertise.
- Senior management works collaboratively with all educational partners in providing students with an appropriate balance between academic achievement and personal development, within a caring, welcoming and supportive learning environment.
- A comprehensive whole-school plan is in place but not all mandatory policies are fully developed.
- A good range of leadership opportunities are provided to students and student behaviour observed throughout the evaluation was exemplary.
- The allocation of additional teaching hours to support students with additional educational needs is provided to the school but these and other allocated resources are not always deployed for their intended purpose.
- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in almost all lessons observed, with instances of exemplary practice in many lessons, while in a very small number of lessons there was scope for development.

### ***Recommendations for Further Development***

- Mandatory policies should be prioritised for development, ratification and review.
- The Strategic plan for 2014-2017 should be further developed using a SMART model of planning.
- Timetabling and curriculum provision should be reviewed to ensure optimum use of resources.

- To further support student learning, teachers should fully embed assessment for learning (AFL) strategies, higher-ordering questioning and oral literacy strategies in lessons.

## 1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

### *1.1 School ownership and management*

The properly constituted board of management has just begun its three-year term and the good balance of new and established members supports continuity in the operation of the school. Board members have a range of skills and areas of expertise that is beneficial to the school. A profound sense of loyalty and commitment to the school and to the care of students is demonstrated by the board. This is exemplified by its provision of additional student supports such as personal counselling and the chaplaincy service. The board is well supported by CEIST with regard to training and advice.

Minutes of the board meetings indicate that it well informed about school activities and of students' general progress in terms of achievements, including certificate examination outcomes. In line with best practice, the student council has made presentations at board meetings on its work and initiatives, and an agreed report of board meetings is prepared for staff and the parents' association. It is suggested that the board also progresses an overall report on the operation and performance of the school for the wider school community on an annual basis, as envisaged by the Education Act 1998.

The board has ratified many of the required mandatory policies including enrolment and admission, code of behaviour, anti-bullying and child protection. However, a considerable number of policies including mandatory policies such as those relating to special educational needs, Social Personal and Health Education, Relationships and Sexuality Education and data protection are currently in development. Policy development should be prioritised to ensure that all mandatory policies are in place. In addition, key policies such as the admissions policy and the discipline policy, which have not been reviewed since 2010, should be updated and reviewed regularly. All policies should contain not only the date of ratification by the board but also a planned review date.

The admissions policy should reflect actual practice within the school in terms of enrolment including its actual practice with regards to students with special educational needs. It should also note the voluntary nature of students' financial contributions.

Senior management, in consultation with the board and staff, has devised a comprehensive whole-school plan and it is a good blueprint for the operation of the school. In the developmental section of the plan nine educational priorities such as academic focus, communication, attendance, teaching and learning have been identified for strategic planning 2014-2017. Within the priority areas some of the targets identified are not developmental in nature. Key developmental priorities should be identified to form an overall strategic plan based on SMART planning principles. To ensure that the overall strategic plan is fully realised within its timeframe it is recommended that senior management establishes a number of sub-committees drawn from relevant stakeholders to further each of the plan's identified areas.

The school's committed parents' association actively makes a meaningful contribution to the school. In addition to fundraising to enhance school facilities, they provide a third level bursary and offer valuable feedback to management on school policies and on many relevant aspects of school life. Parents interviewed and surveyed as part of the evaluation reported high levels of satisfaction with how the school is run, the quality of teaching and learning and the pastoral care of students.

## *1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning*

The principal and deputy principal work as a united cohesive senior management team. Their team-work is characterised by high levels of respect, communication and a shared ownership of the day-to-day management of the school. Senior management devotes a considerable amount of their time to necessary day-to-day matters and this is laudable. However, it is now timely that they dedicate time to ensuring the successful implementation of the 2014-2017 strategic plan.

Senior management works collaboratively with all stakeholders in providing a holistic education, by providing a balance between supporting academic achievement and personal development within a caring and supportive environment. There are good channels of communication in the school such as regular staff meetings and the Friday Flyer briefing document for staff. The visibility of senior management through an open-door policy and presence in the school environs enables high levels of openness, sharing of information and accessibility for staff, parents and students alike.

On-going instructional leadership is provided by senior management through the facilitation of subject planning meetings and the organisation of whole-school continuing professional development (CPD). In 2011, senior management instigated a curriculum review which has positively impacted on curricular provision. In 2012, a post of responsibility review has had positive outcomes. The work of the school's information and communication technology (ICT) committee in exploring future options for the use of ICT as a student learning tool and the provision of in-house ICT in-service is laudable. Staff members have been given opportunities to present on their areas of expertise at staff meetings. Senior management is encouraged to continue to build on such good practice.

Following on from the post of responsibility review, assistant principals operate as an advisory and consultative body, a commendable development of the in-school management structure. Fortnightly meetings of assistant principals supports their work in the school. Assistant principals as year heads liaise with relevant personnel such as the pastoral care team, subject teachers and senior management to effect good pastoral care and discipline of students. Incremental changes such as the addition of the monitoring of student attendance should form part of the annual review of the roles and responsibilities of year heads. Assistant principals, special duties teachers, programme co-ordinators and members of school-based committees actively embrace the roles devolved to them as part of distributed leadership practices.

The contribution of teachers to the smooth running of the school was palpable during the evaluation. There was much evidence that teachers react quickly to concerns that students' exhibit and in doing so lessen transgressions so that students can achieve in a happy environment.

Students have a wide choice of optional subjects provided in a broad curriculum. The allocation and distribution of class periods meets the needs of most subjects across the curriculum. New subjects to the school such as Agricultural Science are piloted in TY. Time allocation to Mathematics and English across the three years of the junior cycle should be addressed in line with Circular Letters 0058/2011 and 0025/2012 to support the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. Management should continue to optimise the time provision and timetabling arrangements for Physical Education in senior cycle in accordance with Department of Education and Skills (DES) recommendations. In LCA the career guidance module should be provided by the qualified guidance counsellor in line with DES guidelines. It was noted that a number of allocated

teaching hours are being used for non-teaching activities such as games co-ordination, policy development and public relations activities. This practice should be revised to ensure that the teaching allocation is used for its intended purpose.

An exceptionally well organised TY programme is provided for students. Bi-annually students are offered the opportunity to avail of LCA. Currently, there is one group of students availing of LCVP. The LCVP should be further promoted as a viable option for senior cycle students and participation in this programme encouraged. It is recommended that an equitable share of planning time for co-ordination is also allocated.

The formal curriculum is supported by a good range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities including a very successful choral programme, a wide range of sports achievements, and fundraising, celebratory and charitable events delivered to a high standard.

The DES provides the equivalent of almost four teachers to support students with additional educational needs. Learning support is provided by a core team of teachers through small group withdrawal from Irish lessons when students have exemptions and the provision of teaching hours to create an extra class group for Mathematics and English in Leaving Certificate. The practice of allocating much of the provision for the creation of smaller class groups in Leaving Certificate should be reviewed so as to ensure overall equity and use of teaching resources to support students at all levels and in particular for core subjects at junior cycle. To further optimise the provision, the creation of a smaller core team with the necessary experience and training to support inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream classes should be considered. In addition, a system for monitoring and reviewing the progress of students who are in receipt of individual and small group learning support should be implemented.

Commendably, student achievement at all levels and uptake of higher level in certificate examinations is very good and exceptional in many subjects. Relevant year heads and the principal closely monitor the twice-yearly student reports. To further develop educational leadership, an over-arching profiling system to monitor, mentor, track and support the academic progress of all students in a concise manner should be considered.

A range of good leadership opportunities are provided for students through the student council, John Paul 2 awards system, green flag committee, Le Chéile, Gaisce, extra-curricular activities and the Presentation girl. A dynamic student council is democratically elected and is actively engaged in a range of activities including policy development. The addressing of weekly student assemblies by council members is innovative and exemplary practice. A wide range of students' achievements are affirmed at the school's awards ceremony.

It was evident during the evaluation and was confirmed by students and parents in questionnaire responses and interviews that a welcoming atmosphere prevails for all in the school. The whole-school's priority to provide a caring and supportive environment for its students is underpinned through the operation of a well organised and effective student pastoral care team who meet formally once a week. A good induction system that includes peer mentoring from Le Chéile supports first-year students coming from almost thirty feeder schools. The pastoral care team, guidance teacher, counsellor, chaplain, year heads, senior management, teachers, anti-bullying initiatives and initiatives such as Energise week all contribute to the creation of the obvious happy and caring school environment.

High expectations of students, respectful relationships and the implementation of the school's discipline policy contribute to the maintenance of the school's purposeful learning environment. A clearly structured ladder of referral is understood by students. The 2010

discipline policy is in need of review so as to take cognisance of recent changes in discipline practice and the enactment of an anti-bullying policy so that there is consistency between policy and practice.

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 development of the library as an enjoyable reading area, the canteen for student recreation, the student focussed games room, and reflective oratory are examples of praiseworthy developments to support student learning and care. Most teachers are classroom based and this has resulted in a bright, print-rich, and visually stimulating learning environments.

A detailed health and safety statement has been developed. Environmental responsibility is actively promoted through the Green-schools programme. The caretakers and cleaning staff ensure that the school buildings are maintained to a high standard.

## **2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### **2.1 The quality of learning and teaching**

Subject department planning is well established in the school. Subject plans reviewed were found to be of good quality in terms of the organisational aspects of the subject. Curriculum plans in many instances document the agreed list of topics with general learning outcomes to be covered in a set time period. It is recommended that subject departments focus more closely on curricular planning and reflect on teaching and learning practice. Curriculum plans should be revised to include student-focused learning outcomes for each topic. These learning outcomes should be closely aligned to an agreed set of appropriate teaching, learning and assessment strategies. Subject teams should use all available data such as outcomes in certificate examinations to reflect on teaching and learning.

In almost all of the twenty-five lessons observed the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good. In many of these lessons instances of exemplary practice was evident, while in a small minority of lessons there was scope for improvement in the use of teaching strategies to support student involvement in their learning.

In lessons where best practice was observed, teaching methodologies and challenging tasks enabled students to be active in their learning, promoted higher-order thinking and developed key skills. In lessons where a discovery approach was used students had to seek a solution to a problem and this was very effective in engaging students in their own learning.

In the few lessons where scope for development existed, a teacher-led approach was the predominate methodology used. On occasion, this limited opportunities for students to be actively involved in their learning. Although students were very attentive, it is recommended that where appropriate, a greater balance between teacher input and student activity be maintained.

Classroom management and student behaviour were uniformly excellent. Students were cooperative and applied themselves to assigned tasks in a diligent manner. Interactions between students and their teachers were characterised by mutual respect and affirmation.

In most lessons students had opportunities to work in pairs or small groups. This methodology was most successful when students had a clear understanding of their individual and collective roles and responsibilities and teachers' planning of the task allowed for meaningful and productive student exchanges. Such effective teaching approaches should be shared at subject meetings.

In most lessons there was a good balance between recall and higher-order questioning. Students confidently asked teachers questions so as to clarify their knowledge, and demonstrated a high level of engagement with their learning. In lessons where very good higher-order questioning was used students had ample opportunities to deepen their understanding of concepts and knowledge.

At the outset of the majority of lessons teachers noted learning objectives on a white board. As a few lessons concluded teachers took time to review the learning intention for the lesson by questioning students. Individual lesson planning was very good. A wide range of resources was effectively used to support teaching. ICT was effectively and appropriately used in lessons as a teaching and learning tool. For example, pertinent video clips were carefully selected by teachers and used at key points to support and bring to life topics in many lessons.

In almost all lessons, good attention was paid to the appropriate use of subject specific terminology and in language lessons the use of the target language was very well used by both the teacher and students.

Literacy strategies as outlined in the school's literacy plan featured in many lessons and were mostly very effective. In some lessons, teachers took time to ascertain students' understanding of keywords in advance of providing a definition. The use of dictionaries in some lessons to support student literacy was also noted. In some lessons the opportunities that existed to further develop students' oral literacy were not fully exploited.

A review of student copybooks, project work and diaries indicated that homework is assigned regularly. Most teachers took opportunities to circulate during lessons and provide individual support and oral feedback to students. Very good practices were noted in the correction of students' written work where a code has been devised indicating for example, incorrect spellings.

In addition to summative and oral feedback there were some very good examples of written formative feedback in students' copybooks. This feedback provided guidance for students on how to improve the quality of their work. The use of this assessment for learning strategy that emphasises students' responsibility for their own learning could be further developed and used more often by all teachers.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

### ***3.1 Management***

Ten subject inspections, a programme evaluation and a Whole School Evaluation have been conducted since 2006. Very good actions have been made to progress recommendations in previous inspections. A small number of recommendations relating to subject department planning and timetabling are still being implemented.

### ***3.2 Learning and teaching***

Teachers have attended well overall to the implementation of most of the recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports.

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

Presentation Secondary School has a number of processes in place as an aid to evaluating the effectiveness of its programmes and processes. A very good system of evaluation is embedded in review of curriculum programmes such as TY, LCA and LCVP. The tracking of student progression into third-level and the progression of recommendations from previous inspection reports are also positive indicators of a focus on school improvement. The school has embarked on SSE and action targets were set to ensure success. It is recommended that the school further embed the whole-school partnership approach to the SSE process in keeping with the SSE guidelines.

School management and staff have the capacity to continue to bring about school improvement in a sustained manner.

# **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 Presentation Secondary School, Kilkenny is delighted to congratulate the school community on receipt of this very positive report. It is gratifying to have our present work commended by the inspectorate and to know that we can embrace future education challenges with confidence. The exceptionally affirming report from both parents and pupils as to the education and care being received by all girls under our care is testament to the hard working, diligent and caring staff of our school.

The report is very affirming of the Teaching & Learning, the support structures, as well as the broad range of co- and extra-curricular activities organised and supported so generously by the teaching staff in Presentation.

### **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 Policy Development team has completed two of the mandatory policies and these have been ratified by the B.O.M.

There has been a complete review of curriculum provision to support students with additional educational needs and this will be reflected in the timetable for 2015/2016.

The Strategic Planning teams have already had two meetings to discuss further development.