

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Castleknock College,  
Castleknock,  
Dublin 15  
Roll number: 60100Q**

**Date of inspection: 14 January 2015**



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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 St. Vincent's Castleknock 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, 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***

Castleknock College is a boys' fee-paying post-primary school in extensive grounds in Castleknock, Dublin 15. It is under the trusteeship of the Vincentian order. The school has been a day school for the last number of years. The school offers the traditional certificate programmes and a mandatory Transition Year (TY) programme. Students travel to the school from locations all over Dublin, the surrounding counties and beyond and from both urban and rural backgrounds. At the time of the evaluation there were 595 students enrolled. The school has strong links with their past pupils.

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

### ***Key Findings***

- Management systems in the school are very effective.
- The trustee (Vincentian Community) offers very good support to the school and the Vincentian ethos is central to the vision of the school.
- Every effort is taken to involve parents in the life of the school and the vast majority of parents feel that the school is well run.
- The whole-school planning processes are excellent.
- Staff members across the school show great commitment to their students.
- The leadership of learning in the school is of very high quality.
- A broad curriculum is offered to students as well as a very good range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.
- Students are well cared for and student behaviour is very good.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in a significant majority of lessons with elements of excellent practice in a number of lessons.
- Planning for improvement is firmly embedded into the school's planning processes.

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

- Role descriptors for the posts of principal and deputy principal should be prepared.
- A smaller core team of teachers involved in learning support should be formed.
- Frequent meetings of the care team should take place.
- There should be a good balance between teacher input and student activity in lessons.
- The intended learning outcomes of the lesson should be introduced early in the lesson and learning reviewed at the end; in addition, students should receive formative feedback on their work.

## **1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

### ***1.1 School ownership and management***

Management systems in the school are very effective. The present board took office in 2013 and is properly constituted. Led by a proactive chairperson the board take a very business-like approach to planning. Members of the board have a very good understanding of their governance role and have received training for this role. Board meetings take place regularly and members of the board work very well together in the interest of the school.

The school reports annually to the trustees who give very good support to the board and school. The Vincentian ethos of mutual respect and caring for others is central to the school vision in Castleknock College and was frequently referenced over the course of the evaluation. The president of the college is a trustee representative on the board. Various sub-committees of the board are assigned the responsibility of monitoring, managing and reporting on a range of areas and very good progress was evident in these areas.

Among the responsibilities of the Education and Ethos sub-committee is policy development. A number of staff members are on this committee and the board has ratified a range of policies in consultation with its partners. There are very good procedures in place for policy development and review. The board prepares an agreed report for the school community but this is not always circulated in a timely manner.

The whole-school planning processes of the college are excellent. Improvement processes in the school are guided by a five year school improvement plan. A range of priorities have been identified, which include areas such as information and communications technology (ICT), infrastructural development, pastoral care and teaching and learning. These long-term plans are complemented by yearly school improvement plans, TY and sports plans which are reviewed each June. In addition the plans are accompanied by action plans and review processes. This close attention to long-term and short-term planning is highly commended. This underlines the culture of continuous improvement that exists throughout the college.

A proactive parents association supported by six core parents groups, one for each year group, meets regularly and is involved in a range of fundraising and other activities. Every effort is taken to involve the parents in the life of the school. Parent questionnaire data indicate that the vast majority of parents feel that the school is well run.

The senior management team maintains a visible presence in the school throughout the day. Parents interviewed see both members of the team as approachable and proactive. Staff acknowledge the commitment and dedication of both members of the senior management team. The headmaster is involved in many areas of school life but is the primary point of contact with parents and he has a particular focus on the promotion of high quality teaching and learning. Teachers appreciate the enthusiasm that he brings to the role and the support that he gives teachers in relation to new initiatives. The headmaster and deputy principal have complementary skills. The deputy principal co-ordinates the day to day running of the school, including supervision and substitution, the promotion of ICT, the induction of new teachers and policy development. An organised, considered approach was evident in the delivery of these functions. However, role descriptors have yet to be developed for both roles as recommended in whole-school evaluation of 2006. This should be advanced.

There are many positive elements associated with communication in the school. A staff newsletter is produced every Friday and good use is made of the email system and other means to communicate with staff. A weekly newsletter to parents is published on the

school website. However, there was also evidence that some aspects of communication in the school are in need of development. As examples, it was reported by staff that agreed reports from board of management meetings are circulated infrequently to staff and that consequently some staff members are unaware of developments at board level. It was also reported that information is not always circulated by management in a timely manner and that opportunities for feedback and follow-through on foot of initiatives and meetings could be further developed. It is praiseworthy that improved communication has been identified as an area for development in the 2014-15 school improvement plan. To further this aim it is recommended that a review of the communications processes within the school take place with the aim of developing enhanced communication channels in order to expand the staff's contribution to school development and so optimise the student experience and strengthen learning.

A range of post-holders play an important role in the smooth running of the school. Frequent reviews of posts take place and post-holders have annual review meetings with management. This is good practice. A number of staff members have shown good leadership in areas such as staff induction, ICT, School Self-Evaluation (SSE), the Advisory Board of Studies and in the organisation of extracurricular and co-curricular activities. A majority of staff members give willingly of their time and show great commitment and dedication to their students.

### ***1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

The leadership of learning in the school is of a very high quality. A comprehensive high quality staff handbook supports teaching and learning. A feature of very good practice in the school is that the headmaster often observes teachers' lessons. The board have introduced a new post for continuous professional development which encourages staff self-evaluation and peer observation. It is encouraged that the school builds on the good work done to date in this regard. The senior management team supports subject department planning. For example, it is very good practice that each subject department is encouraged to produce an action plan for improvement which it presents to the board each year. A review of a sample of subject plans revealed that subject department planning is generally of a very good standard. Minutes of subject department meetings often show considered discussions of methodologies and resources as well as reflection on certificate examination results. Common schemes of work leading to common assessment were evident. Where best practice was in place these schemes of work were presented in terms of expected learning outcomes per topic allied to resources, suggested methodologies and assessment. It is recommended that all subject departments adopt this high standard when preparing their schemes of work.

A broad curriculum is available to students with three modern European languages and all three Science and Business subjects at senior level. Timetabling and time allocation for subjects is very good. This year a decision was made to vary the times of the mid-morning break across the week. This has led to mixed reaction and should be kept under review. Teachers are generally deployed according to their qualifications and expertise. The school provides instructional hours in line with circular M29/95.

The Transition Year (TY) programme is mandatory for all students. Students interviewed expressed their satisfaction with the quality of TY and parents interviewed appreciated the very good information available about TY on the college website. TY students get the opportunities to avail of a broad range of activities including rowing, Chinese and a language exchange programme. The programme is very well co-ordinated. The modular nature of the programme gives students the opportunity to sample a broad range of subjects.

Designated hours allocated by the Department to support students in need of additional help are used for their intended purpose. Resource hours are delivered in a well-equipped purpose built resource area. A highly effective, reflective, approach to the coordination of resource and learning support was evident, including the preparation of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and very good communication with the Special Needs Assistants. It is positive that students exempt from Irish at senior level are given the opportunity to study another subject. However, a very large team of teachers, more than half the staff, is involved in delivering resource hours to students. This militates against the building up of expertise in the area and a coordinated approach to the delivery of ILPs. It is recommended that a smaller core team of teachers in this area be formed. The school should also consider extending the range of team-teaching undertaken. The placing of an additional teacher in the English and Maths bands as happens in some year groups is also commended as an additional useful way to offer support.

The admissions policy reflects the characteristic vision of the school. Enrolment is rising and a consequent pressure on the admissions process was noted and therefore it is timely that the school intends to review its admissions policy. Induction of first year students is very good. The guidance counsellor engages with all first year students in the first term and a very good student mentor scheme, the buddy-buddy scheme, was noted where sixth years are paired with first year students.

Attendance and punctuality are monitored in an organised fashion. The school has adopted *e-portal* as its means of tracking students but a paper-based system is also used. The school is encouraged to move in a more comprehensive way to the electronic monitoring of student attendance.

Questionnaire data and interviews undertaken indicate that the care systems in the school are very good. Teachers, parents and students interviewed emphasised the very good atmosphere in the school and the sense of community and belonging. Each class has a tutor who meets the students for twelve minutes each morning for Literacy and Pastoral Care (LAPC). Students, parents and teachers were very positive about the efficacy of this LAPC period where students get the opportunity to undertake silent reading. It was evident from interviews undertaken and questionnaire data that the school deals very effectively with bullying. A student mentor post has been created to provide an additional point of contact for students. A Year Head co-ordinates support for students in the year group. Year Heads meet weekly with the senior management team. In line with good practice, these meetings should have an agenda, minutes should be kept and follow-up action points agreed.

Meetings of the care team, which comprises the learning support co-ordinator, the chaplain, the student mentor, the guidance counsellor the senior management team and Year Heads take place occasionally. It is recommended that regular meetings of the care team with associated appropriate record-keeping, take place in line with the advice given in the Department of Education publication *Student Support teams in Post-Primary schools*. In a school of this size it is suggested that a weekly or fortnightly meeting time is appropriate.

Effective guidance systems were evident. Parents interviewed appreciated the level of individual guidance on offer. The guidance counsellor is available to counsel students. A whole-school guidance plan and pastoral care policy is due for review. This should be progressed. TY students have a timetabled guidance period. Consideration should be given, as resources allow, to timetable an additional guidance period for fifth year students.

Subject choices are made prior to entry to first year. Parents stressed the importance of the very good open evening in helping students to make their choices. It is positive that students are given an open choice of optional subjects and it was evident that most students are happy with their subject choice. Every effort should continue to be made, within reason,

to ensure that students receive their choice of subjects. Questionnaire data indicates that a sizeable minority of students disagreed with a statement that they were given good support when choosing subjects. The school is encouraged to engage with the student body to ascertain if there are any areas for development in this regard.

As is required, Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is provided in junior cycle. Management should ensure that frequent meetings of the SPHE teaching team take place. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is provided to students in both senior and junior cycle. An RSE policy is due to be ratified shortly by the board. This will fulfil the requirements of Circular Letter 0037/2010.

Behaviour in the school is very good and discipline systems work well. A code of behaviour has been ratified with a good emphasis on positive behaviour. Some minor adjustments are needed to align policy and practice. Students presented themselves as confident, articulate and engaged over the course of the evaluation.

A wide range of sporting, cultural and spiritual activities is available to students. Rugby is the leading sport in the school and all students play rugby in first year. A good range of other sports is also available. Students have access to a broad range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities: as examples, music ensembles, debating, the Comenius projects, Maths club, and *Gaisce*. A yearly publication, *The Chronicle*, documents life in the college. Students are affirmed at the annual awards ceremony.

Student leadership is encouraged by means of the prefect system, mentor system and the student council which meets weekly. Questionnaire data and a meeting with students indicate that many students feel they have a limited voice in the school. The school should engage frequently with the student body and the student council to ensure that possible areas for development are identified.

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 is very well kept. Very good school facilities are available to students and include a fine library with a dedicated librarian, *astroturf* pitches, specialist rooms and an oratory. However there is at present no assembly area in which all students can be accommodated. Fundraising is ongoing for a sports hall that will provide such accommodation.

A number of ICT initiatives have been adopted. An excellent school website is an important point of contact for parents. An *e-learning* committee meets regularly and has made proposals for improvement. A very considered, systematic and thoughtful approach to planning for improvement in this area was evident. Each teacher has been provided with a netbook and *Office 365* account and a trolley of laptops for students has been purchased.

The ancillary staff in the school make an important contribution to the smooth running of the school. This was acknowledged by staff, students and parents interviewed. An up-to-date safety statement has been prepared.

## 2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

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

Twenty-one lessons across a range of subject areas and year groups were observed over the course of the evaluation. The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in a significant majority of classrooms visited with elements of excellent practice in many lessons. In a small minority of lessons observed there were a number of areas for development.

Most lessons observed were well planned, structured and presented. The aims of the lesson were presented clearly in the majority of lessons, sometimes in the form of intended learning outcomes, and there were good links with prior learning and students' experience in many lessons. Review of learning took place in a few lessons only. Where learning was at its best there was a good balance between student activity and teacher instruction. All students interviewed indicated that they learn best when given the opportunity to undertake independent or collaborative learning in lessons.

Classroom management and student behaviour were of a high standard in the vast majority of classrooms visited and warm and respectful relations between teachers and students were evident. Lessons were taught in a print-rich environment in many cases with many exemplars of students work in classrooms and corridors.

Student engagement was very good and teacher expectations were appropriately high in the majority of classrooms visited. In a few instances teacher expectations of student learning and student engagement need to be raised to ensure that high quality learning is taking place. In many lessons the use of collaborative learning methodologies such as group work or pair work promoted student engagement and the development of students' oral skills. This good practice should be extended. Other very good practices observed such as the use of mini-whiteboards, the traffic light system, discovery-based learning and guided discussion merit wider use in some cases.

Questioning strategies in the majority of lessons observed were of high quality with a mixture of higher-order and directed questioning promoting very good engagement with the subject matter. In many instances student answering was reflective, thoughtful and considered which showed that deep learning was taking place.

Innovative use of ICT was evident in a number of lessons. For example, the use of visuals and short film clips added interest and variety to some lessons. In others the use of ICT methodologies would have added to the student experience. When film clips are used they should be short and students should be given the opportunity to process the learning involved in the clip.

In the majority of language lessons observed student and teacher use of the target language was very good. Consistency in the use of the target language is recommended.

In a small minority of classrooms visited teachers presented the key words of the lesson clearly to students and good classroom keyword displays were evident. To help students deal with the literacy demands of the subject teachers are encouraged to bring the keywords to the attention of students in a more consistent way.

Assessment is generally of good quality. Homework is given frequently and regularly monitored in the vast majority of cases. In some cases teachers annotate helpful advice for improvement in students' copybooks. This good practice is commended and should be extended to all classrooms. Student achievement in certificate examinations is very good.

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

#### ***3.1 Management***

A clear strategy has been adopted to achieve the implementation of recommendations at a whole-school level. The school community has engaged very well with recommendations in line with the school's emphasis on continuing improvement. A board of management has been set up. TY activities are now confined in the most part to Tuesday afternoons. The ICT infrastructure has advanced. A mentoring system has been set up to support first year students.

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

Good progress has been made in implementing recommendations in inspection reports in many areas. For example, some very good examples of active learning methodologies were evident in many classrooms visited. However, there is still some scope for development in relation to other recommendations made. In one recent inspection report it was recommended that Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies such as introducing the intended learning outcomes at the start of the lesson and reviewing this learning at the lesson end be extended. The introduction of the intended learning outcomes took place explicitly in just about half of lessons observed and learning was reviewed in a few lessons only. It is recommended, in line with good AfL practice, that a consistent whole-school approach to the sharing and reviewing of the intended learning outcomes of lessons be implemented.

Another AfL strategy recommended was that students receive formative feedback on their work. In random checking of copybooks during this inspection, there was evidence of formative correction on students' written work in fewer than half of the classrooms visited. There is considerable scope for more written feedback to students on their progress in line with good AfL practice. It is recommended that formative feedback become central to practice in classrooms to facilitate students in the management of their own learning.

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

Self-evaluation and review is central to the vision of Castleknock College and a key strength of the college is that annual review processes with time-bound plans have been established to address developmental priorities. The surveying of students takes place annually in TY but there is perhaps scope to expand this to gather the views of staff, parents and students to help identify additional school priorities and strategies to address them. The school self-evaluation drive for literacy was led last year by the senior management team and has been expanded in this school year and a number of staff members have adopted leadership roles in promoting the areas of literacy and numeracy. A commitment to continuing school improvement was evident across the school and the school is encouraged to continue to expand the high quality review processes already in place.

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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 findings of the inspection report, especially the positive things said about the management systems, the support from the Board of Management and the Trustee, the involvement of parents, the whole-school planning, the commitment of staff (teachers and ancillary staff) and their willingness to give freely of their time, the leadership of learning, the broad curriculum, the efficacy of the 12-minute reading in LAPC each day, the well-coordinated Transition Year Programme, the care of the students, the effective guidance system, the very good behaviour, the well-kept facilities, the considered, systematic and thoughtful approach to IT planning, the strength of the self-evaluation and review process in the school, the quality of teaching and learning, and the fact that planning for improvement is embedded in the culture here.

#### **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 Principal and Deputy have written role-descriptors to make clear their respective roles.
- A smaller core team of teachers in Learning Support is planned for next year.
- More frequent meetings of the care team will be written into the timetable next year.
- Each subject department will plan for more student activity as part of their improvement plans for next year.
- AfL techniques will continue to be promoted and ingrained into the way we all go about our teaching.
- More consistent use of the target language in language lessons will be promoted.
- We plan to use several Croke Park hours next year to further enhance the skills of our teaching staff in their use of IT in the classroom and for record-keeping, attendance, discipline, homework, etc.
- Agreed Communications by the Board of Management to Staff and the Parents' Representative Association are now shared with the teaching staff and the PRA each month.
- Year Head meetings have minutes and an agenda.
- A post-holder will manage Student Council next year to make their voice more effectively heard.