

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

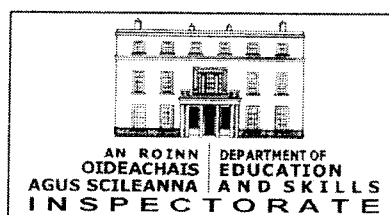
**Whole-School Evaluation  
Management, Leadership and Learning**

**REPORT FOR SCHOOL RESPONSE**

**Our Lady's School  
Terenure, Dublin 6W  
Roll number: 60860Q**

**Date of inspection: 10 December 2010**

**Date of issue of report: 17 June 2011**



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

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in November/December 2011 in Our Lady's School, Templeogue Road, Terenure. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected.

## ***Introduction***

Our Lady's School was established in 1953 to provide Christian education for girls in the Terenure area. The current enrolment is 750 female students and the demand for places in the school far exceeds the number of places available. The majority of students come from the surrounding area, however, there are significant numbers of students coming from further afield. While the school intake is largely middle class, students come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. As part of its curriculum the school offers the Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme and the established Leaving Certificate.

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

### ***1.1 Key Findings***

- The recently appointed board of management is well placed in terms of expertise, educational experience and commitment to lead future developments in the school.
- The school's senior management team of the principal and deputy principal are very effective and motivational leaders.
- Senior management encourages teaching staff to be centrally involved in the school development planning process.
- Self-evaluation and review are fundamental to the school's culture of striving for improvement and maintenance of high standards.
- The school offers an excellent education, and there are very good educational and personal supports in place for the students.
- Teaching and learning is of a very high standard in Our Lady's School.
- An effective and historical pastoral care support is in place comprising of a dual house system and year head system.
- Reflective implementation of team teaching and other supports for students was noted and is commended.
- Classes are of mixed ability other than in some core subjects at appropriate times in student learning. This has proven to be most effective in motivating and encouraging all students to achieve their potential.
- The school offers a wide range of cultural, social, charitable and sporting opportunities and all students are encouraged to participate.
- The school is well maintained and an attractive and motivational learning environment has been created in classrooms and on the school corridors.

- The current addition to the school's plant of several new classrooms, laboratories and other key facilities will enable the school to maintain and develop the quality of its current educational provision.

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

- The completion and ratification of any outstanding school policies should be prioritised and progressed.
- The fortnightly student house meetings should contain a clear instructional element in order to ensure that all students are in receipt of the minimum 28 hours instruction time.
- The development of the information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure in the school should be prioritised.
- Continual professional development (CPD) opportunities should be provided for teaching staff in order to progress the integration of ICT into teaching and learning.
- More active methodologies should be integrated into teaching and learning, where relevant.
- The formation of the student council should be reviewed in line with recommended guidelines.

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

### ***2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management***

The present board of management has just taken office. The members of the board include former board members and new members all of whom have considerable expertise in, and knowledge of education. Previous boards of management have overseen the development of a clearly laid out and comprehensive school plan. School management has been effective over many years and all relevant partners in the school community are consulted on policy development. The school currently has a wide range of policies, both those required by legislation and some additional policies. A small number of policies require to be developed and ratified in line with current guidelines and it is recommended that the new board of management prioritise these. The board demonstrates a good understanding of the school's context and strengths. The integration of ICT into teaching and learning and the provision of a challenging and stimulating teaching and learning environment were identified by the board as priorities for development.

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

#### **The school's priorities for development**

A substantial extension to the school is being built at present with funding from the Department of Education and Skills. A priority for the school in recent months has been to plan for the building phase and for the transitional phase to the new building. This extension will add greatly to the educational provision in the school and should enable the school to offer a new practical subject as part of the curriculum in the future. The limited range of practical subjects and programmes available in the school has been discussed by management and staff. Broadening the curriculum in order to provide some practical

subjects is a priority for senior management and will be addressed in the future as resources allow.

The recent acquisition of a considerable ICT grant for the school will enable school management to progress the provision of appropriate facilities for this area. While the use of ICT was observed as a support to teaching and learning in some lessons, it was evident from the majority of lessons observed that this is an area which needs to be developed. The school management and staff acknowledge that this is a key priority for the educational provision in Our Lady's school.

## ***2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

### **Leadership of staff**

Leadership of staff was observed to be both effective and motivational during the evaluation. The creation of an effective learning environment for students and working environment for staff is a key objective for senior management and one which was seen to be achieved during the evaluation. The principal provides educational leadership and direction and this was seen to be the case during meetings with the board of management and various groups of staff members. Teaching staff are encouraged and motivated to engage in CPD and to pursue further studies. The principal has been instrumental in encouraging the development of a middle management structure in the school. Assistant principals are encouraged to take initiative and have appropriate autonomy in their areas of responsibility. Fortnightly meetings are scheduled with middle management which is very good practice. Senior management articulated the view that the school vision of excellence and self-review must be owned by both the board of management and the staff. Senior management has availed of continual professional development training provided by the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) and the Joint Managerial Body (JMB).

Staff members' views on school development planning are sought on a regular basis. Staff meetings are often used as a forum for discussion and debate on issues relating to school development planning. Consequently, staff members feel ownership of and inclusion in the whole planning process which has led to positive involvement and engagement in school development and improvement.

The schedule of posts of responsibility has been reviewed twice in recent years and is due to be reviewed again shortly. Senior management and staff interviewed during the evaluation were of the opinion that the schedule of posts is meeting the current needs of the school. The potential role of assistant year heads will be addressed as part of the next review.

Subject department planning has undergone significant development in the school in recent years. Senior management has been instrumental in encouraging and facilitating this work and reported that staff members have been energised and enthused by subject development planning. Collaborative subject planning is ongoing. Teachers meet for departmental subject planning and minutes of all meetings are recorded. All subject areas now have an overarching subject plan and detailed schemes of work for the various year groups and levels. These plans have been developed in accordance with the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) template. While some subject plans have been further progressed, others have remained focused on the curriculum content to be taught rather than on desired learning outcomes. It is recommended that all subject plans include the proposed learning outcomes for each year group and the resources, methodologies and assessment practices to support such outcomes.

## **Leadership of students**

An unusual feature of Our Lady's School is that it has a pastoral care and social structure called the house system. Each student in the school belongs to one of five houses in which there are students from first year to sixth year. Through fortnightly meetings and a series of liturgical, celebratory, participative and competitive events organised throughout the year, students develop an affinity and sense of identity with their house and their peers from the house. The system has many benefits both developmental and social. All those interviewed during the evaluation, from parents to board members, from staff to students attested to the unique benefits that students derive from belonging in a special way to a particular house. Questionnaires administered to parents showed that they were overwhelmingly of the opinion that the school is well run and that students are appropriately supported.

The pastoral care of students is also addressed through the more traditional year-head/form teacher system which co-exists in the school with the house system. Senior management and staff are fully committed to meeting the needs of all students under their care. It is a key priority for the principal that every student will meet her full potential and evidence gathered during the evaluation showed that students are individually valued and cared for by a variety of effective systems and supports in place in the school. Questionnaires administered to parents and students reflected an extremely positive outlook in relation to the school and to the care given to students by management and teaching staff. There is a wide range of extra-curricular and charitable activities available for students and these are commended.

The mixed-ability setting of classes is a pivotal factor in encouraging and motivating students to achieve to the best of their ability. The organisation of students into mixed-ability settings is commended. Student questionnaires reflected the view that teachers have high expectations of their students and are readily available for support and advice on all aspects of school life. Students and their parents showed a high level of familiarity with the code of behaviour and attested to the positive effects of this on the school atmosphere in general. Student behaviour as observed during the evaluation was exemplary both in class and in the school in general.

Students with special educational needs (SEN) are well catered for in the school. A meeting with the care team during the evaluation revealed a reflective and dynamic approach to helping students with SEN and the approaches adopted for student support are commended.

### ***2.3 Management of facilities***

Our Lady's School building is extremely well maintained and is an effective environment for both staff and students to work in. A very attractive learning environment has been created both in the corridors and in classrooms. Corridor walls are adorned with murals and students' art work which is framed and displayed for a certain period of time, before being replaced by further examples.

The need for additional classrooms and specialist rooms, as well as extra office and work space for staff, has been an issue for Our Lady's School as the student numbers have continued to grow in recent years. These difficulties will now be addressed by a major extension due to be finished at the end of the school year 2011/ 2012. This will enable the school to develop and grow to full capacity.

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

Forty two lessons were observed during the course of the evaluation. Overall the standard of teaching and learning was very high.

There was very good planning and preparation for all of the lessons observed. In addition to departmental subject plans, teachers submitted schemes of work and in many cases individual lesson plans. There was also good advance preparation of the technical equipment, worksheets and resources to be used in lessons.

Classrooms have colourful displays of school and subject-related information in addition to students' projects. There was good classroom management throughout, and teachers and students worked together in a climate of mutual respect. Where group work took place, it was managed effectively to ensure good student engagement and learning.

All lessons were well structured and paced and a variety of methodologies were used. Most teachers began by communicating the lesson plan to the students. In some instances, it is recommended that the lesson plan be reframed in terms of what the students should know and be able to do as an outcome of their learning. The correction of homework or the use of question and answer sessions facilitated the consolidation of previous learning. Effective question and answer sessions also enabled teachers to introduce the topic of the lesson and to elicit information relating to the work in hand. Teachers provided clear explanations of new material.

In some instances the work of the lesson was supported by the use of maps, diagrams, DVDs and film clips. The use of a PowerPoint presentation to support learning was observed in some lessons. However, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) is relatively limited, as most classrooms do not have data projectors or access to technology as already indicated. The recent acquisition of a grant for ICT is timely, as the judicious use of ICT can significantly enhance teaching and learning.

There was very good use of the target language by the teacher in all of the language lessons observed. In some instances, however, greater opportunity should be afforded to students to use the target language during the lesson. There was good attention in other lessons to the appropriate use of subject specific terminology.

Active learning was observed in most lessons, where students participated in question and answer sessions and in the completion of individual, pair or group activities. Instructions relating to the management of the assigned tasks were clear and teachers circulated to help students in addition to ensuring that they were applying themselves to the work in hand. A small number of the lessons observed were predominantly teacher led and in these instances, more opportunities for active and independent learning should be afforded to the students. There was good evidence of learning in students' responses to questions, in their questioning of teachers and in the outcomes of the student-based tasks. Interaction between the inspectors and the students also indicated good learning. Assessment practices in the classroom included the assignment and correction of homework and in some instances, where appropriate, the evaluation of project work which had been carried out.

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

### ***4.1 Management***

Previous subject inspections in Irish, Science and Physics, Guidance, English, History and Science and Chemistry were reviewed. Collaborative subject planning has been facilitated and progressed in the school over recent years leading to the provision of praiseworthy subject plans in the subject areas evaluated. A comprehensive Guidance plan is now available. Some timetabling issues in junior Science have been addressed and others will be addressed with provision of extra laboratory space when the school extension is finished. Chemical storage and the school's health and safety statement have been reviewed in line with the recommendations in the inspection report. Timetabling issues in relation to English and Guidance have been addressed.

### ***4.2 Learning and Teaching***

Detailed responses to the recommendations from the subject inspection reports issued to the school in recent years were provided as part of the evaluation. The increased use of ICT was a common recommendation across the different subject areas and worthwhile attempts have been made to incorporate ICT into some elements of course work such as the TY programme for Irish. A more integrated approach to the use of ICT across all subject areas and year groups should be achieved with the new technology facilities being developed in the school at present. All recommendations in relation to improving teaching and learning were analysed by the various subject departments and have been implemented.

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

Members of senior management are reflective managers and engage in ongoing self-review and evaluation. This culture of self-review was evident also among staff members, interviewed during the evaluation, who were enthusiastic and interested in ways to improve the educational environment and experience for the students on a continual basis. Staff members were receptive to recommendations for improvements during the evaluation and showed themselves to be reflective and motivated in relation to effecting changes in the school.

There have been two major curriculum reviews in recent years carried out by the teaching staff. There is further review pending which will take account of the new increased and improved school facilities. School management stated that the curriculum was as broad and varied as possible within certain constraints. It is clear that this is an area of school management which is constantly being reviewed and this is commended.