

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Meanscoil Naomh Ioseph,  
Presentation Secondary School,  
Castleisland, Co. Kerry  
Roll number: 61260U**

**Date of inspection: 4 April 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 April 2014 in Meanscoil Naomh Ioseph, Presentation Secondary School, Castleisland. 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***

Meanscoil Naomh Ioseph Presentation Secondary School is a girls' voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of CEIST, Catholic Education An Irish Schools Trust. The secondary school was opened in 1946 by the Presentation sisters and currently has an enrolment of 167 students. The school has recently entered into an educational partnership with the local boys' post-primary school, St. Patrick's Secondary School. Besides the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes, the Presentation School also provides the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme which is run in conjunction with St. Patrick's School.

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

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

- Meanscoil Naomh Ioseph Presentation Secondary School provides a rich and holistic education for its students.
- The board of management plays an active role in supporting school self-evaluation and improvement.
- The senior management team provides very effective leadership and management to encourage and facilitate good quality teaching.
- Teachers and other members of staff demonstrate a high level of commitment and professionalism, and have embraced and welcomed recent changes.
- The process of school self-evaluation is well established and has brought about many very positive developments.
- A representative, democratically elected, student council contributes considerably to school life.
- The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum for students, including a Transition Year programme and the LCVP.
- A very good quality student-support system is in place.
- Good procedures have been established for students with special educational needs and their progress is monitored on an ongoing basis.
- Teacher-based classrooms have provided the opportunity for a visually stimulating, print-rich physical learning environment.
- The quality of teaching and learning was overall very good, with some examples of excellent practice.

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

- Decisions regarding higher and ordinary levels for Junior Certificate Mathematics should be deferred until, at the earliest, the end of second year.
- Work on the finalisation of a health and safety policy should be prioritised and the policy ratified by the board at the earliest opportunity.
- A whole-school assessment policy should be developed.
- The current use of one of the science laboratories as a base classroom for Mathematics should be reviewed.
- Some of the wording of the Admissions policy should be amended to reflect the inclusive practices of the school.

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

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

Meanscoil Naomh Ioseph Presentation Secondary School has a properly constituted board of management, with several long-standing members who provide a high level of expertise. The board plays an active role in the life of the school, supporting senior management and promoting good practice in major areas of school life. The board is supported by CEIST in its work and strong links are maintained. The board's annual report to CEIST on the operation of the school is made available to all of the partners on the school's newly created website. All board members are aware of their statutory obligations and responsibilities. They have regular meetings and issue agreed reports of meetings to the staff, parents' association and student council. The board has well established practices for the development, adoption and review of school policies and most mandatory policies are in place, with dates for review. The board facilitates and welcomes input from all of the partners. Decision-making procedures are open, clear and shared, and in the best interests of the school.

The board is very proactive in supporting school improvement. Priorities for school development, agreed through a commendably consultative process, are categorised into six main areas and are actively discussed at board meetings. A strategic plan for the school was drawn up for 2012-2013 and this resulted in many very positive developments in the school. One of these developments was the introduction of a very successful educational partnership with the local boys' school, St. Patrick's Secondary School. The strategic plan for 2014-2017 is currently being developed and priorities include an increase in student enrolment, further development of the educational partnership with St. Patrick's, planning for the new junior cycle and enhancing the school's ICT structure.

The board is also aware of the findings of subject inspections that have taken place in the school, and receives reports in advance of meetings to facilitate full discussion. The board is happy with the quality of teaching and learning in the school and also that recommendations made in reports are being implemented.

A parents' association which is affiliated to the national body has been in place for many years. The parents' association is actively involved in school activities and has made a considerable contribution to the life of the school. However it is felt that there is scope for developing this further, as the active involvement of a greater number of parents could bring an added richness to the school. It is also suggested that the school website could be used to highlight the work of the parents' association and to facilitate communication with the whole parent body.

In recent years a representative and democratically elected student council has been developed and already makes a very impressive contribution to the life of the school. It is particularly noteworthy that at the end of the school year, two representatives from the student council make a presentation to the board of management on their work during the year.

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

### ***Leadership of staff***

The senior management team provides very effective leadership and management to encourage and facilitate good quality teaching, leading learning in a very real way. Both principal and deputy principal use a range of skills to motivate and support staff, and it is evident that relationships between senior management and members of both teaching and non-teaching staff are caring and supportive. The senior management team also maintains very good relationships with the board, with the trustees, and with the parent body. Very good school self-evaluation strategies have been in place over the last few years and have been used to highlight areas for development.

Senior management has introduced many positive changes to school practices in the last few years, including the introduction of teacher-based classrooms and the provision of laptops to teachers. The introduction of an e-Portal system and electronic folders for staff has been a very positive development which has been embraced by members of staff. There is an established structure for continuing professional development (CPD), and in recent years this has focussed on classroom practice and teaching methodologies. Staff members are encouraged to lead projects and initiatives, such as the Learning School Projects on literacy and numeracy. Members of staff demonstrate a high level of commitment and professionalism, as evidenced by the quality of care shown in their work and their willingness to take on leadership roles. A middle-management team is made up of an assistant principal and four special-duties posts and the duties attached to these assigned areas of responsibility are decided according to the needs of the school.

### ***Leadership of students***

Despite the fact that the school is dependent on curricular concessions to sustain core subjects on the curriculum, it manages to provide a broad and balanced curriculum, enhanced through the successful educational partnership with St. Patrick's Secondary School. It is to be commended that the management of both schools have worked in close collaboration to bring about this partnership which reflects a shared vision, openness and a sense of community. As a result of this partnership, a broader range of subject choices is now available to students in both schools and a well-organised and thoughtfully planned joint Transition Year programme has been introduced. This provides a rich and varied programme for students, with activities such as film-making, production of an annual musical, work experience, volunteering and community work. Feedback from students who are taking the TY programme this year was very positive. The school also offers a well-organised Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and this is proving to be a popular option with students.

It was noted that decisions regarding higher and ordinary levels for Maths are currently decided at the beginning of second year. It is recommended that this be deferred until, at the earliest, the end of second year so that students can continue to aim for the higher level for as long as possible.

Appropriate assessment procedures are in place to monitor and record students' progress. It is recommended, however, that a school assessment policy be prepared to provide a framework for the assessment procedures in the school, and that this would reflect a range of

assessment approaches. The recent inclusion of practical and oral components in reports to parents is a very welcome development.

The school's admissions policy and practice, together with the arrangements for transition from primary schools, are inclusive, fair and transparent. It is recommended that some of the wording of the admissions policy be amended in order to reflect the inclusive practices in place. The school commendably tracks the progress of students when they leave 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*.

A very good quality student-support system is in place in the school and this has been further strengthened by the fact that the recently reviewed pastoral care policy clarifies the roles of all of the partners in student care and support. Guidance, counselling and care strategies including Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programmes are in place to support all students. Responses to the student and parent questionnaires in relation to student support and care were overwhelmingly positive, and interaction with students indicated that students are very happy in the school and feel well cared for. Weekly meetings of the pastoral care team and the group of year heads have also reinforced the care system in the school. The school has a total of eight hours allocated for guidance this year and a fully qualified guidance counsellor fulfils this role and is very much involved in decision-making in relation to student care. The year heads meet on a regular basis. A good number of initiatives have been introduced to strengthen the student-support system in the last few years: these include mentoring of individual third and sixth-year students by teachers, a buddy system organised by fifth-year students for first-year students, a breakfast club, uniform and book donation schemes and an annual team-building activity for each year group.

An anti-bullying policy and charter have been developed and very positive steps have been taken to highlight positive behaviour. A recent collaborative review of the school's behaviour code places an emphasis on positive behaviour, with a system of merit cards and special awards such as 'hidden heroes' being introduced. Theme weeks have been organised to highlight themes such as friendship and respect. It is evident that these developments have contributed to the overall wellbeing of students. Responses to questionnaires indicated that the vast majority of both students and parents feel there is a good atmosphere in the school.

Information is provided for parents and students at important transition stages of the students' school life. Procedures in place for the transition of pupils from primary school are very comprehensive and an orientation day is arranged for incoming students. Information on options in senior cycle is provided at senior options evenings, and responses to both students' and parents' questionnaires confirm that the majority feel that helpful advice is available when choosing subjects.

Good procedures are in place for students with special educational needs (SEN) and their progress is appropriately monitored and recorded on an ongoing basis. Information regarding incoming first-year students is obtained in good time to apply for resources and designated resource hours are used appropriately. Two members of staff have relevant qualifications and two special needs assistants (SNA) contribute greatly to the overall wellbeing of students with special needs. Individual education plans (IEP) are maintained for relevant students and good communication and dissemination of information is provided by the SEN team to subject teachers in relation to individual students' specific learning needs. Commendably, subject plans include strategies and teaching methodologies for students with special learning needs.

Students' learning is enriched by a range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities. The school has a strong commitment to sports such as football and athletics, and is well known for its strong basketball tradition. The school participates in many national initiatives such as the Student Enterprise Awards, the MS Readathon, Young Social Innovators and poetry competitions. Students are also involved in many community and subject-related activities such as theatre visits, art exhibitions, field work trips, organising Christmas hampers and contributing to local parish celebrations. Teachers are to be commended for the effort and time which they contribute to these activities.

### **1.3 Management of facilities**

The school accommodation is maintained to a high standard and a caretaker has recently been appointed. Recent refurbishments have brought about improvements to the school environment and the teacher-based classrooms have provided the opportunity for teachers to create bright and airy rooms where students' work and subject-specific posters etc. can be displayed. Photos, students' art work and posters are now displayed around the school, giving a sense of history and pride in the school's achievements. Social areas have been allocated for students and a tuck shop and catering service have been put in place. While specialist rooms are generally used for their designated purpose, a science laboratory has been used as a base classroom for Mathematics. It is recommended that this be reviewed. School management has prioritised the integration of ICT into learning and teaching and to this end, has provided each teacher with a laptop. All classrooms have a PC and digital projector and an ePortal system is used by members of staff as an administrative tool. Shared folders are used by teachers to share and collaborate in their subject areas. A new school website was created at the beginning of this year and further development of this as a tool for communication is encouraged. Now that most of the infrastructure for ICT is in place this should now feed into an eLearning plan.

The board of management has adopted a health and safety statement but a comprehensive health and safety policy has not been finalised and ratified by the board. Procedures in relation to health and safety are in place, as evident in subject planning documentation and safety statements contained in the teachers' journal, but these need to be reflected in a comprehensive health and safety policy which should be reviewed annually. This policy should include clarity in relation to who is responsible for completing the safety checklist on specialist and individual classrooms and how often this should be carried out.

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

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

The overall quality of learning and teaching was very good, with some examples of excellent practice. It was clear from responses to the students' questionnaire that almost all of the students feel that the teaching in the school is good and that they are getting on well with their school work. Parents' responses were also overwhelmingly positive about the teaching and learning in the school. During the course of the inspection, a total of eighteen lessons were observed.

There was evidence of good planning and preparation for lessons, and lesson content linked with previous learning. A variety of interesting and colourful resources were creatively used to enhance learning and included music, games, film clips, flashcards, PowerPoint presentations and the use of a visualiser. Many examples of co-operative learning such as brainstorming, role-play, group and pair work, *table mats* etc. were incorporated into lessons. This was most effective where students were advised in advance how long they had to

complete the particular task. Clear instructions and explanations, effective questioning techniques and good awareness of individual learning needs reinforced students' learning.

Where examples of excellent practice were in evidence, clear learning objectives highlighted the actual skills or learning which would be taking place and were expressed as 'can do' statements, using phrases such as 'you will be able to...' and were then revisited at the end of the lesson. A good focus was placed on literacy and numeracy in a number of lessons. In some classes homework copies contained formative comments to highlight opportunities for improvement and, in one instance, students completed a self-evaluation sheet as part of a reflective log at the end of the lesson, which is excellent practice. In a number of lessons, differentiated strategies were used to ensure that all students were challenged.

Excellent student-teacher rapport and very good affirmation by teachers of students' efforts contributed to the very positive learning environment in evidence during lessons. Students were fully engaged with learning activities and it was evident that good learning was taking place.

Recommendations were made in the few instances where lesson planning did not allow for sufficient student activity, where learning objectives were unclear and where a short plenary session following practical work or group work would have consolidated learning and provided opportunity for student feedback, reflection and discussion. In language lessons, teachers' use of the target language for classroom interactions was mostly good and it was suggested in some instances that the students could be encouraged to use the target language more for classroom interactions.

As part of a school literacy survey carried out last year, teachers highlighted strengths such as: encouraging reflective dialogue; providing supportive and formative feedback to students; co-operative learning; cross-curricular links; encouraging self-motivation; and support for literacy. It is suggested that this reflective professional dialogue be continued, within and across subject areas, in order to discuss and share good practice, to continue to expand AfL and active learning across all subjects, to encourage feedback from students, to facilitate student autonomy and self-evaluation, and to analyse the results of certificate examinations in order to provide a basis for further development and improvement across all subject departments.

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

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

Good progress is evident in the effective implementation of recommendations from previous subject inspection reports. A geography module for TY has been developed in line with a recommendation from a recent geography inspection report. Following a Spanish inspection, requests for extra Spanish resources have been included in the budget request form for this year. It is commendable that developments and improvements suggested in subject inspections are shared with all members of staff.

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

In general, good efforts have been made to implement the recommendations from previous subject inspection reports. There is, however, a need to ensure that all members of subject departments are aware of, and take on board, the recommendations in order to ensure consistency.

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

Meanscoil Naomh Ioseph Presentation Secondary School has engaged very proactively in the process of school self-evaluation, resulting in very positive developments. Priorities for development have been agreed with all of the partners and this has led to many very positive developments in the school. Surveys of teachers, parents and students were carried out and the findings analysed. A school improvement plan was prepared for 2013 and improvement targets, required actions, persons responsible, timeframe, success criteria and a date for review were specified. In addition to this, results of state examinations are analysed annually and comparisons made with national norms. While it is evident from planning documentation that some subject departments use this information to guide planning, all subject departments are encouraged to use this analysis to highlight anomalies where they exist and to inform development.

The school community has shown itself to be very committed to improvement through self-evaluation and has already made very good progress. It is suggested that the school could consider professional collaborative review of learning and teaching as the next step to school improvement.

## **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 was pleased to receive this report on the WSE of the school.

The Board of Management is very pleased with the findings of the whole school inspection and wishes to thank the inspectors for their thoroughness, efficiency and courtesy during the course of the inspection.

We are particularly happy that the inspectors acknowledge that the school provides a rich and holistic education for its students.

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

The Board appreciates the relevance of the recommendations.

The Board of Management has already implemented three of the five recommendations:

- The Health and Safety Policy which had been under review during the year was ratified by the Board of Management in May 2014.
- The Board of Management amended the Admissions Policy in May 2014 to reflect the inclusive practices in the school.
- The science laboratory is no longer being used as a base classroom for a maths class.

In relation to the two remaining recommendations

- Work has commenced on a Draft Whole School Assessment Policy.
- Decisions in relation to the uptake of levels in Junior Cycle Mathematics will now be made at the end of second year at the earliest.