

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Stratford College,
1 Zion Road, Rathgar, Dublin 6.
Roll number: 61020A**

Date of inspection: 5 February 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 February 2014 in Stratford 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 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

Stratford College is a fee-charging co-educational secondary school founded and run by the Dublin Talmud Torah, an elected group of representatives from the Jewish community, who are the patron and trustees of the school. Established sixty years ago in 1954, it currently has an enrolment of ninety-eight students. While it is a denominational school, it welcomes a broad diversity of students.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is a highly organised and motivated board which has engaged very effectively and innovatively with its educational responsibilities.
- The emergence of a holistic professional learning community is tangible in this school.
- The principal demonstrates highly dynamic leadership including engagement and leadership in educational innovation.
- The principal and deputy principal work closely together as a cohesive senior management team which fosters high levels of collaboration and shared ownership of the school's educational priorities.
- Teachers are highly committed, motivated and enthusiastic; they have engaged effectively with up-to-date professional development, are leading in giving peer in-service which is highly commendable.
- Student support structures are very good, and features of exemplary practice were noted in many aspects of the learning support provision.
- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning observed was very good and some excellent practice was noted.
- Both parents and students confirmed that the atmosphere and ethos of the school are permeated by key principles of kindness and tolerance.
- The school has a highly developed capacity for school improvement.

Recommendations for Further Development

- The recent pilot to monitor at regular intervals students' progress relative to their cognitive ability should be progressed and extended to all subjects. In this context,

the student journal could be used to facilitate students' monitoring of their own progress.

- Teachers should facilitate more opportunities for the incorporation of student self-assessment and peer assessment strategies in lessons.
- Consistent practice in providing written formative feedback should be implemented across all subjects.
- As a few students are timetabled for study periods, the school timetable should be reviewed to ensure that all students receive twenty-eight hours tuition time in line with Circular M29/95 Time in School.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The school had a unitary management structure up until 2012 when it moved to establishing its first board of management which is welcomed. The board manages the school on behalf of the trustees of Dublin Talmud Torah and is appropriately authorised and supported by them to undertake responsibility for the conduct, management and financial administration of the school. It is highly organised and motivated with its members possessing a broad diversity of skills and experience.

The board has addressed its governance role in a very professional, innovative, and communicative manner. Significant progress has been achieved through its effective engagement with its "fiduciary, strategic and generative" roles, addressing its educational responsibilities and developing and adopting a strategic plan in a relatively short space of time. This comprehensive approach has enabled the board to engage and respond creatively and meaningfully with the challenges being faced by the school as well as identifying opportunities for development.

The board agreed its priorities for school improvement and development through a process of consultation and collaboration with the whole-school community including trustees, parents, staff, students. They also sought advice from the school management bodies which is good practice. A three year strategic plan for the period 2013-2016 has been developed and is now being implemented to address the following priorities: improvement of the quality of teaching and learning; the holistic educational experience of the students; management of change, in particular, changes in pedagogy and assessment; the development of the information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and the further strengthening and development of communication strategies for students, parents, staff and wider community.

While student numbers have been stable for the past four years, increasing the numbers of students attending the school has been given high priority as there had been a decline in enrolment. The school has successfully maintained its viability with an increase in the enrolment of students from other denominations which augurs well for the future growth of the school. The board has identified a number of strategies to promote the school more vigorously. It is important that the board, together with the whole school community, continues to actively progress this work.

The board is effective in policy formation and review actively consulting with parents, students and teachers and there are a number of examples of good policy development. A comprehensive assessment for learning (AfL) policy that informs teaching and learning across the whole school has been developed and is being implemented. The school's anti-bullying policy has been recently revised to take account of Circular 045/2013 and the

revised anti-bullying procedures for schools. The Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy needs to be updated to take account of changes to the delivery of SPHE and RSE in the curriculum. A whole school policy on visitors and visiting speakers based on Circular M23/2010 should be developed.

The principal demonstrates highly dynamic leadership underpinned by a clearly articulated vision, which is being progressed in a positive, inclusive and strategic manner, in full and open consultation with the board. A willingness to engage and lead educational innovation is a key strength of the strategic leadership of the principal. The principal has ensured very effective engagement by the staff with national developments. In her role, the principal maintains open lines of both formal and informal communications with all partners.

The principal and deputy principal work closely together as a cohesive senior management team, whose roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and complement each other. As a team, they foster high levels of collaboration, respect, communication and shared ownership of the school's educational priorities. In particular, they have placed teaching and learning at the centre of their vision.

The parents' association is highly engaged with organising events and supporting the work of the school. It is energetic and dynamic, providing opportunities for all parents to be involved in its events, thereby fostering a sense of community. It is very effective in communicating and consulting with the wider parent body and is innovative in using online surveys to seek parental opinions.

A highly significant response rate of over eighty percent was returned by parents to the WSE-MLL questionnaire administered to all the parents during this evaluation. The majority of parents were satisfied that their views were being sought by the school and almost all parents agree that the school is well run. A few aspects of the questionnaire responses could be further explored by school management to inform the school improvement agenda. When interviewed, both parents and students confirmed that the atmosphere and ethos of the school are permeated by key principles of kindness and tolerance.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Highly effective leadership of teaching and learning by the senior management team is evident. They are actively supporting and encouraging teachers' incorporation of a wider diversity of teaching methodologies to support learning. The deputy principal is providing enhanced educational leadership, through leading a pilot project profiling students' progress. An exit survey of sixth years has provided valuable feedback on teaching and learning and a staff survey regarding their use of various methodologies is planned.

Very good distributed leadership opportunities are provided for teachers and the development of their professional capacities at individual and subject level is being progressed by the principal. Significant academic, pastoral and administrative in-school management roles are undertaken by the teaching staff. Teachers demonstrate collective responsibility, willingness and flexibility to engage with the school's identified priorities. For example, dedicated teams have been formed to address, inter alia, literacy and e-learning. Most teachers are deployed according to their qualifications and skills and where this is not the case, teachers should be assigned in line with their subject specialisms.

Teachers are highly committed and motivated and have engaged fully with up to date professional development to progress their students' learning. Some teachers provide in-service to their colleagues to advance the schools' implementation of stated priorities which is highly commendable. Regular formal and informal meetings of teaching staff actively

promote professional collaboration and the emergence of a holistic professional learning community is tangible in this school.

A good academic curriculum is provided at junior and senior cycle incorporating the Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programmes. There is very high uptake of the very well organised TY programme. It has been informed by student and parent feedback which has led to the development of a very varied and engaging TY programme.

A review of the curriculum in the context of the Junior Cycle reform is being considered. A few students are timetabled for study periods. This practice should be reviewed by management to ensure that these students receive twenty eight hours tuition time as per Circular M29/95 Time in School. In line with best practice, the provision of a minimum of a double period for Physical Education in third year should be further explored and progressed.

The role of the class tutor is student centred and comprehensive. The tutor has responsibility for student wellbeing and discipline, the reporting of student progress, attendance and punctuality. There is a very effective system of communication between the class tutors and senior management. The class tutors play an important role in the ladder of referral and the implementation of the code of behaviour.

The clearly structured code of behaviour is based on the principles of roles, rights and responsibilities of all members of the school community. It incorporates a merit system and is working well. High expectations of students' behaviour are maintained and respectful relationships were evident throughout the evaluation.

Student support structures are highly developed with a caring and effective system in place to support students' welfare and well-being; this is underpinned by a comprehensive whole-school guidance plan, class tutor role, student mentoring, care team and valuable comprehensive guidance and counselling provision. The school is proactive in supporting student inclusion and belonging through, for example, the use of the sociogram as part of restorative practice.

Features of exemplary practice were noted in many aspects of the learning support provision which incorporates an openness and willingness to engage with a variety of models of support and in this context, team teaching should be further explored.

Analysis of students' achievement in certificate examinations is undertaken by all teachers and by senior management. Very good uptake of subjects at higher level was noted. The recent introduction of a pilot system to track and monitor students' academic progression in some subjects, based on their assessed cognitive ability at regular intervals is commendable. The extension and formalisation of this process to all subjects should be progressed with a view to maintaining this record of students' progress centrally. The revision of the student journal to enable tracking of students' own progress is recommended. The implementation of the revised school report provides parents and students with greater detail about progress and achievement in each subject, while also providing a focus for further improvement.

Alongside the recognition of academic achievement, holistic achievement and progress is rewarded across a broad diversity of areas, abilities and individual personal and social development. A very good variety of co-curricular and extracurricular activities including themed weeks, debating, poetry, computer, sports and enable students to discover their academic, artistic and sporting interests.

A diverse range of library-based activities provides student with very good opportunities to develop their e-learning and literacy skills.

A highly active student council is in place and its role includes organising and leading events, conducting and analysing of student surveys and fund raising. A very good variety of opportunities for student leadership are promoted through the student council, mentoring of first year students, leading assemblies, organising events including the awards ceremony and leading school teams, presenting to the board and to parents.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

1.3 Management of facilities

The school buildings, specialist rooms and grounds are maintained to a high standard, which contributes to a welcoming and well-ordered environment. The layout of most classrooms, which are teacher based, is facilitative of collaborative work. The ICT infrastructure has recently been upgraded to take advantage of 100mB broadband. The school library and the employment of a librarian is a both highly valued and valuable resource. The schools' website is excellent, highly informative and interactive.

Having achieved green school status for environmental responsibility, the green school committee is currently working on achieving its next Green-Flag award. Optimum use of the school's space and facilities is being made in a very effective manner to the benefit of the whole school community.

1. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of learning and teaching in a significant majority of the lessons observed was very good. Features of exemplary practice were noted in many lessons. A systematic approach to lesson design was a common feature of these lessons. In such cases, teachers effectively embedded the principles of AfL and prioritised the junior cycle key skills of managing information and working with others through purposeful and progressive tasks.

Parent and student responses to the WSE-MLL questionnaire reflected very high levels of satisfaction with teaching and learning. Most students responded that they are encouraged to work to the best of their ability, have their work checked regularly and receive feedback on how they can improve. In almost all of the lessons observed, students' demonstrated high levels of enthusiasm and participated productively in the range of tasks presented to them.

A very positive atmosphere prevailed in lessons with an excellent rapport between teachers and students, and amongst students. Teachers are knowledgeable about their students and hold high expectations for their participation and achievements. Most teachers made a deliberate effort to serve students' differentiated needs. This was evident when teacher circulation was effective in providing additional attention and support, when required.

Planning and preparation was very good in almost all lessons. Effective preparation included a range of appropriate electronic resources and an array of materials, worksheets

and relevant tasks to support learning. As a result, these lessons were very well structured and paced and achieved high levels of engagement and learning.

All teachers established the learning outcomes at the beginning of lessons. When these were articulated in terms of what students should know and be able to do by the end of the lesson, this was very good practice. In most lessons, teachers revisited the learning intentions to assess students' learning and progress both during and at the end of the lesson.

When introducing new topics, teachers built on students' prior knowledge and appropriately contextualised and clearly explained the relevant concepts. Teachers progressed and consolidated learning through purposeful and progressive tasks that involved high levels of student engagement and activity. These tasks involved both the acquisition and application of knowledge and skills, for example. Good examples of self-directed learning were observed in lessons where students completed assigned tasks either independently, in pairs or in small groups. In most instances, these tasks were very well constructed and provided sufficient scope to challenge all students across the ability spectrum.

Questioning was used effectively to develop understanding and to assess learning. Students were given sufficient time to frame their answers and were given opportunities to consult one another. Students were encouraged to think, to reflect and to provide considered responses to questions posed. Students were willing and confident to ask questions for clarification or to enhance class discussions. To further develop this good practice, the further exploration, development of and incorporation of student questioning strategies in lessons is recommended. Such approaches enhance students' involvement and responsibility for their learning.

Teachers have developed their subject-based classrooms to a very high standard with a range of materials being displayed. These attractive and stimulating displays support students' understanding of various themes, concepts and vocabulary and the classrooms are print and graphic rich. Good attention was paid to the development of literacy skills in particular and to numeracy when relevant. An evident benefit from the integration of the junior cycle key skill of working with others is the development of students' oral proficiency. Good use of subject-specific terminology and vocabulary was evident throughout. Excellent use of the target language in the language lessons observed was noted.

ICT was effectively used in a majority of lessons to stimulate students' interest, assist their learning and to provide graphic, video or auditory exemplars. Good use of online platforms and blogs is being made by teachers to support teaching and learning and by students to share and record their experiences and insights in to a variety of topics, and events.

Students displayed very good aptitude in applying their learning, whether in completing assigned tasks, in responding to questions posed or in their use of language. Sometimes, teachers used technology, vocabulary, graphic organisers in stimulating and innovative ways facilitating independent and collaborative learning.

A range of assessment modes were employed including questioning, facilitated discussion, oral feedback and in-class testing. Self-assessment and peer assessment strategies were used to a limited extent and all teachers should provide more opportunities for these approaches, for example, through sharing success criteria with students.

Homework is regularly assigned as evidenced in the student copy books and homework journals examined. Very good practice was noted where teachers provided detailed formative feedback on students' written assignments. However, in some cases this was not

evident. Consistent practice in providing written formative feedback on significant pieces of work should be implemented across all subjects.

2. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

A proactive approach has been taken to the implementation of recommendations from previous inspections and these have been shared with the whole teaching staff to inform ongoing subject planning which is good practice. Most management recommendations have been implemented including the development of common subject department plans and structuring and updating the TY modules and plan in line with Department guidelines. Subject planning is very good in all subject areas with some excellent practice being noted however, consideration should be given to the development of common yearly schemes of work using the recommended template by all subject departments.

3.2 Learning and teaching

The recommendations relating to teaching and learning have been addressed effectively by the relevant subject departments. Engagement by all subject departments with recommendations advocating the greater use of AfL to increase student engagement in learning, the integration of ICT and the use of a range of resources to support teaching and learning and generally monitoring and annotating of copy books is good.

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

School self-evaluation (SSE) and review is well established. The school has actively engaged with SSE processes in a collaborative manner, thereby providing a coherent focused framework for school improvement. Through the active oversight of the board of management and very effective strategic leadership by senior management, purposeful and timely engagement with SSE using both quantitative and qualitative evidence has led to the development of and ratification of a comprehensive School Improvement plan (SIP) for 2013 to 2014 school year. This 'SMART' SIP addresses new and ongoing areas of priority, and incorporates a number of carefully selected actions and good strategic thinking. In addition, an ICT audit has been undertaken and the ICT infrastructure is being developed to support teaching and learning through a detailed e-learning plan which is also a key element of the strategic plan.

The whole school community has engaged very effectively and meaningfully with SSE processes leading to collective ownership and understanding of the process. It was clearly evident that the school has a highly developed capacity for school improvement, enabling it to respond effectively to the needs of its students.

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 Stratford College is delighted with this independent validation of the high standards of teaching and learning in Stratford College. The Board found the process and experience to be a very positive and affirming one for all the members of the Stratford community.

The following points made by the inspectorate are particularly noteworthy:

- The board of management is a highly organised and motivated board which has engaged very effectively and innovatively with its educational responsibilities.
- Both parents and students confirmed that the atmosphere and ethos of the school are permeated by key principles of kindness and tolerance.
- Teachers are highly committed, motivated and enthusiastic; they have engaged effectively with up –to –date professional development and are leading in giving peer in-service which is highly commendable.
- Features of exemplary teaching and learning were noted in many lessons.
- The emergence of a holistic professional learning community is tangible in this school.

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 suggestions and recommendations of the inspectorate have already been incorporated into our on-going School Self Evaluation (SSE) process and have either been completed or are under review by both the board and the senior management team.