

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

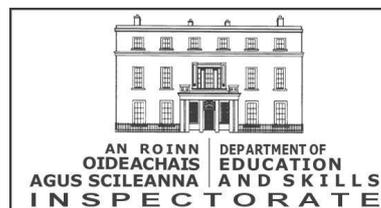
Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Middleton College
Middleton, County Cork
Roll number: 62370J**

Date of inspection: 09 March 2011



Whole-School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in March 2011 in Midleton 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, 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

Midleton College was founded in 1696 to meet the educational needs of the protestant community in Munster and beyond. Today the school is a fee-paying co-educational boarding and day school. The long history and tradition of the establishment are allied to a desire to cater for the needs of current and future students. The school is a Church of Ireland school under the patronage of a board of governors. The ecumenical and inclusive ethos of the school is evident in the diversity of the college community with regard to faiths, backgrounds and educational ability. The school has planned for and managed a gradual increase in enrolment in recent years and hopes to continue this in the coming years. Management has made significant efforts to secure additional accommodation and facilities and there have been recent, positive developments in relation to a phased realisation of these goals.

1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1.1 Key Findings

- The board of management is very effective.
- There is a highly effective senior management team who are aware of preserving the traditions of the school along with facilitating the changes needed to provide for present and future students.
- The management and organisation of the school was fully endorsed in parent responses to questionnaires.
- The school has an open and welcoming admissions practice. The welcome afforded to each and every student on enrolment received unanimous praise in the parent questionnaires.
- A dynamic students' council, prefect system and mentoring process are in place.
- The parent-teacher association takes an active part in the life of the school.
- Communication between the school and parents is effective.
- Arrangements for students' choice of subjects are well managed.
- The school's provision of extracurricular and co-curricular activities is to be praised.
- Subject department plans have been compiled but further development is required.
- The quality of teaching and learning observed during the inspection was good and, in some instances, very good.

- A very good relationship between teachers and students was in evidence.
- The board of governors, together with school management and staff, are to be praised for striving towards the creation of an inclusive environment, consistent with the school's ethos.
- Provision for the care of students is very good.
- Genuine attempts have been made to implement the recommendations of previous evaluation reports.

1.2 Recommendations for Further Development

- School management and staff should devise policies on relationships and sexuality education (RSE), whole-school literacy and numeracy, for ratification by the board of management.
- Any expansion of the current curriculum provision should include a technology subject.
- A review of the school's post structure should identify how best the changing needs of the school can be supported on an ongoing basis.
- A broader range of learning support delivery methods should be explored.
- In their subject planning, teachers should now focus on learning outcomes, mixed-ability learning situations and ongoing sharing and discussion of teaching and learning methods.
- Planned learning outcomes should be communicated to students at the outset of lessons, be referred to during the lesson and be used as a framework to check understanding, during the recapitulation phase.

2. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

2.1 School ownership and management – the Board of Management

Composition, functioning and fulfilment of statutory obligations

There is a three-way division to the current governance of the school. The board of governors is the patron. A limited company manages the boarding school and fee finance. Following a decision by the board of governors to constitute a board of management as part of its governance structures, a board of management has been in place for the past two years. This is a very positive development, which allows the stakeholders a formal voice in the running of the school. The board consists of six nominees of the patron, two elected parents' representatives and two teacher representatives elected by the permanent teaching staff members. The principal is an ex-officio member of the board.

The board of management has a very good knowledge of the school and demonstrates an awareness of its role in the management of the school. An agreed report of each board meeting is made available to all parents and teachers. This is a very positive strategy in ensuring that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of matters addressed by the board. It also has very good lines of communication with the senior management of the school. Board members take an active role in policy development and have a keen interest in the school. Significant work has been accomplished within the short lifespan of this first board.

The school's priorities for development

As part of its role, the board has undertaken a review and revision of all of the existing policies of the school. Following an extensive consultation process, the existing policies have been adopted by the current board. It is positive to note that a realistic review date has been agreed for these policies. The requirement of the school to have an RSE policy and

whole-school policies on literacy and numeracy can now be addressed in the next phase of planning activities.

Current priorities are both infrastructural and educational. In the context of the further development of the school's infrastructure, the first phase is at an advanced stage of planning with work expected to commence shortly on an eight-classroom extension. This will form phase one of an ambitious development of the school plant. In parallel with this development, there has been an increase of curricular provision at junior and senior cycle in line with the planned expansion of enrolment. The oversight of the board of management with regard to these development strands is praised. The board is also cognisant of the importance of the role of self evaluation in the further development of its own work and the work of the school.

2.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership of staff

The school has a very effective senior management team who have a good relationship and display a very significant commitment to the school and its continued development. The principal has significant experience in his role. The deputy principal has been in his current role for three years and is an experienced member of staff. Although they operate as an effective team, the principal and deputy principal have well-defined areas of individual responsibility associated with both the day and boarding sections of the school. Both are conscious of the need to lead by example when addressing matters to do with staff and students. The open-door policy which they operate has facilitated good communication both internally and externally.

Every effort is made to support staff wishing to avail of continuing professional development (CPD) and management is mindful of the need to constantly develop teaching and learning practices in the school. The strong sense of community and continuity, already mentioned, is a clear strength in the leadership of both staff and students. The comprehensive procedures in place for the induction of new staff help to maintain and promote a sense of belonging and the strong sense of tradition which is so valued by the entire school community. The management and organisation of the school was fully endorsed in parent responses to questionnaires.

Formal communication structures exist between senior management and other members of staff. These include scheduled whole-staff meetings, in-school management team meetings, subject co-ordinator meetings, subject department meetings as well as individual meetings with and between members of staff. The regular information session with all available staff during the Monday morning break helps to ensure that each week's activities are co-ordinated and have a minimum impact on the daily functioning of the school.

Senior management expressed appreciation for the work of post-holders during the course of the evaluation. The schedule of post duties has evolved as a result of reviews of the needs of the school. It is recommended that the current post structure should now be examined to ensure that the current needs of the school continue to be addressed and any imbalances are eliminated.

Reviews of programmes and subjects offered in the school have resulted in the addition of Agricultural Science as a Leaving Certificate subject and the planned development of a home economics room in the new classroom block. The practice of having an open choice of option subjects and the operation of a best-fit model for Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate optional subjects is good. As part of any future review of subject provision, consideration should be given to include a technology subject as part of the curriculum.

Leadership of students

The welcome which is afforded to each and every student on enrolment received unanimous praise in the parent questionnaires. The personal interest which senior management takes in the leadership of students is exemplified by the meeting between the principal and the parents of each applicant to the school as part of the enrolment process and the inclusion of a personal comment from the principal on all school reports. Information on absences, lateness and the student's overall performance is provided to parents in these reports as well as the grades and marks which students have achieved. This information is clearly valued by parents as questionnaire results indicate that the overwhelming majority of parents feel that they are provided with good data regarding the progress of their children. A similar, overwhelming majority of parents are happy with the school overall, a finding from which staff, management and the school's board can take great satisfaction.

The management of student behaviour is very good. This finding is endorsed by ninety-four percent of student responses in the questionnaires. The school has prepared a documented code of behaviour which is communicated to students through the school prospectus and is also available on the school website. It is clearly laid out and accessible to all students. A focus for a future review of the policy could be a further development of the merit and awards systems to add to the existing means of encouraging positive behaviour.

Regular monitoring of student achievement occurs and many strategies are in place to affirm and acknowledge positive achievements by students, particularly at the school prize giving day and at assemblies where students are publicly acknowledged for their achievements in a wide range of areas.

The care of students and learning-support structures in place in the school are very good with the important role played by student prefects and mentors, a critical group of leaders of student learning, worthy of particular mention. Students are withdrawn for resource teaching from Irish, provided they have the appropriate Department of Education and Skills exemption from the study of Irish. Students are also withdrawn for learning support from other subjects, as appropriate, where these students follow a reduced programme. The school should include additional methods of delivering learning support, such as team teaching or in-class support to add to the existing good practice.

Confirmation was provided that, in compliance with Post-primary Circulars M44/05 and 0062/2006, the board of management has formally adopted the Department's Child Protection Guidelines for Post-primary Schools (Published September 2004). Confirmation was also provided that these child protection procedures have been brought to the attention of management, school staff and parents; that a copy of the procedures has been provided to all staff (including all new staff); and that management has ensured that all staff are familiar with the procedures to be followed. A designated liaison person (DLP) and a deputy DLP have been appointed in line with the requirements of the guidelines.

2.3 Management of facilities

The age of the current school buildings has meant that significant remedial action was and is required to address some of the more urgent shortcomings. The use of the summer works scheme in recent years along with investment by the governors has ensured that the school buildings and grounds are maintained to a high standard. The already mentioned new classroom block and the future plans for further phases of development which will integrate the new structures into the main building clearly indicate an overall development plan that is forward-looking and appropriate.

3. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

3.1 The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning in Middleton College is good and in some instances very good. Lessons observed were well planned, had a good structure and were well resourced. In some lessons the topic to be covered was outlined. In a minority of instances this was delivered in the form of intended learning outcomes and reviewed at the end of the lesson. Building on this good practice, it is recommended that the planned learning outcomes should be communicated to students at the beginning of all lessons, be referred to during the lesson and be used as a framework to check understanding, during a recapitulation phase.

A range of appropriate and varied teaching methodologies was employed and students were motivated by the teaching and learning activities. Opportunities were provided to promote students' active involvement in the learning process. There was evidence in some lessons that students were encouraged to think for themselves, through open-ended questioning, investigative approaches and opportunities for independent research. In addition, teachers used to good effect students' own experiences and previous learning to develop the lesson content. This is very good practice. In language lessons, there was very good use of the target language.

In many lessons, clear board work aided the delivery of the subject matter. In a number of instances, digital media and ICT were effectively integrated into the teaching and learning. Given the resources available across the school, greater use of ICT is recommended to support teaching and learning in all subjects.

Teachers employed a range of effective questioning strategies which were relevant and clear and were inclusive of students. In many instances student discussion, assisted by directed-higher-order questioning by the teacher, formed the kernel of lesson development. This is very positive. In addition, teachers supported students in developing their answers as necessary, allowing all students the opportunity to contribute in lessons. The effective use of questioning resulted in a good balance between teacher and student talk and this was enhanced by lively teaching in some instances. Students were comfortable asking questions and their questioning and responses to questions reflected a high quality of learning and understanding appropriate to their abilities.

It was evident that teachers are catering for the individual needs of their students. There was evidence of a good attention to the development of students' literacy. Opportunities were provided to enhance students' oral and written skills. Teachers should seek opportunities to promote the development of students' numeracy skills outside mathematics lessons to a greater extent.

In general, there is a print rich environment in classrooms and on the corridors. In instances where teachers are not classroom based, they should be provided with the opportunity to display relevant materials. The new classrooms should provide additional opportunities for subject-based environments.

The atmosphere in all lessons observed in Middleton College was characterised by warmth and mutual respect. There was a very good rapport between the students and the teachers in a secure, enthusiastic and work-orientated atmosphere with some instances of good use of humour.

Students' work was regularly monitored and this was enhanced in some instances by the use of teacher comment-based feedback. Ninety-one percent of the students surveyed supported this finding. It is recommended that teachers should build on this desirable practice of teacher annotation, which reflects the principle of *assessment for learning (AfL)*.

In the lessons observed the emphasis was on student learning and students were interested and engaged. Students' knowledge of the subject matter of the class was continually being assessed and students were required to produce relevant work during the course of the lessons. Students' perform very well in the certificate examinations.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

4.1 Management

The majority of recommendations from previous evaluation reports have been implemented, reflecting the effective leadership and management of the school. This has included implementing health and safety measures in Science and the provision of a more suitable room for music lessons. The school has employed qualified Physical Education (PE) teachers and the stated intention of having PE as a core subject for each year group when the planned sports hall is completed is welcomed; however in the interim the provision of PE to more year groups should continue to be increased, where possible.

4.2 Learning and Teaching

Previous subject inspections have recommended that subject department planning should have a clearer focus on the teaching and learning that takes place in the classrooms. There is further scope for development in this area through the inclusion of learning outcomes for students and the linking of methodologies and resources to these outcomes. The use of more active learning methodologies has begun to impact on the teaching in many classes. The scope for providing more opportunities for self-directed learning in lessons has been enhanced through the use of higher-order directed questioning and the use of pair work and group work. Good annotation of student copies was noted in many instances with excellent formative commentary noted in a minority of cases. This is good practice in motivating students and helping them to evaluate and improve their work.

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

The school has a number of processes in place as an aid to evaluating the effectiveness of its programmes and processes. These include the consultative nature of the school planning process, regular formal and informal consultation with staff, feedback from students' council meetings and consultation with the prefects. Student progress is also tracked as the student progresses through the school and a detailed analysis of both uptake rates and achievement in the certificate examinations is undertaken each year. The recent meeting between the officers of the parent-teacher association and the officers of the students' council with the board of management is a positive means of consultation and should be repeated at regular intervals. There is further scope to assess the views of the wider teacher, parent and student bodies through the use of questionnaires. These measures along with focused feedback from the staff, subject departments, parent-teacher association and students' council meetings will add to the already high level of awareness of senior management and the board on their roles in the leadership of the school development planning and review process and the culture of the school in planning for and responding to the evolving needs of its student cohort.

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 has received the Report of the WSE-MLL which took place in March 2011. The Board is delighted with the very affirming nature of all aspects of the College's activities which are contained in the Report. At the time of the Report a number of recommendations were already in process and have since been completed.

The Boards, Staff, Students and Parents of Midleton College found the process to be encouraging, meaningful and worthwhile. The Inspection Team are thanked for their detailed and considered engagement with the school community.

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