

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta**  
**Department of Education and Science**

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

**REPORT ISSUED FOR SCHOOL RESPONSE**

**Maryfield College**  
**Glandore Road, Dublin 9**  
**Roll number: 60840K**

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**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE**

**INSPECTORATE**

# **Whole-School Evaluation**

## **Management, Leadership and Learning**

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in October 2009 in Maryfield College. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement.

### **Introduction**

Maryfield College is a voluntary, secondary school for girls which was founded in 1945 by the Sisters of the Cross and Passion. Trusteeship has been recently transferred to the Le Chéile Schools Trust and there was much evidence that this transition is being very well managed. The school caters for a diverse intake of students from the local community and from other areas. An ethos of care and commitment to each individual student is very evident. This positive school ethos was strongly acknowledged in questionnaire evidence from students and parents. The school has had a constant enrolment pattern over the last number of years and trends indicate that enrolment is likely to remain steady at over six hundred students in the coming years. Traditions play a large part in Maryfield College. In addition, all teachers and students show great pride in their school.

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

### ***1.1 Key findings***

- Maryfield College is an excellent school where the central focus in the school is on teaching and learning and on care of the students.
- A strong and committed board of management is in place, the senior management team in the school is excellent and there is distributed leadership throughout the school.
- The staff collaborates very well and leadership of students can be seen at all levels.
- The school is well ordered and students were observed to be confident, happy, secure and extremely well behaved.
- There were significant strengths in the quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons and the quality of teaching and learning was good throughout. In a few lessons students were not challenged sufficiently.
- There are very good learning outcomes for students in the school.
- There has been an obvious focus on the implementation of recommendations from previous subject inspection reports.

### ***1.2 Recommendations for further development***

- The school should maintain its focus on developing the skills of mixed-ability teaching to ensure that all abilities are challenged in all classes.
- School management should consider delegating responsibility for coordinating school planning and staff development to build capacity and facilitate a more systematic approach to planning.
- School management should introduce a system of regular review of posts of responsibility to ensure that the posts continue to meet the needs of the school.

## **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 was strong evidence that the current board of management not only fulfils its statutory requirements but also plays a directional role in the school and is very effective. The chairperson of the board has a clear presence in the school and is a strong link with the Sisters of the Cross and Passion. The board is guided by the values of its trustees and these values permeate the school. A very commendable feature of the board is its student-centred approach. The board considers all school policies and leads on the development of relevant policies where appropriate.

Another very commendable feature of the board's work is its strong focus on teaching and learning. It considers the appropriateness of the curriculum implemented in the school and facilitates members of staff to upskill and develop themselves. The board examines the recommendations of subject inspection reports and explores ways of implementing these recommendations. The board encourages and facilitates membership of subject associations and provides funding for appropriate courses to enhance teacher development. It also provides funds for resources to enhance teaching and learning. To this end, on the suggestion of staff and senior management, a laptop grant was made available to teachers so that information and communication technology (ICT) could be used more extensively in classrooms. The board reviews student performance in State examinations on an annual basis and uses the analysis of results to identify aspects of curricular provision, teaching and learning that may require development and support. The excellent recruitment strategy of the board of management, where established subject specialists from the staff participate on interview boards, also helps to ensure high quality teaching and learning. This involvement in the recruitment process builds the capacity of existing staff members and is evidence of the trust and high regard that the board has for the staff.

The board communicates openly with all school partners. The parents and staff representatives on the board of management are the conduits with the Parents' Association and staff respectively. Teachers and students also communicate with the board through letter or presentations. The Parents' Association plays an active role in the life of the school and has supported the school in many ways over the years.

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

Developing an ongoing relationship with Le Chéile Schools Trust, while still maintaining its unique ethos, is a main priority for the school. There was much evidence that the board and senior management are working diligently to develop this relationship.

The board and senior management have also identified the need to constantly upgrade school facilities including further development of the library and ICT facilities. There was much evidence that work in these areas is ongoing. A number of new data projectors and some interactive whiteboards have been installed in the school in addition to the laptop initiative mentioned above.

The board and senior management also identified the further facilitation of professional development opportunities for teachers as a priority. In addition, a possible area for improvement identified by the board was the organisation of more extra-curricular activities. In their feedback, students and parents also agreed that this was an area for development. Co-curricular activities are facilitated and students are brought on regular field trips and other trips of educational interest.

Other key successes include the firm embedding of subject planning and the organisation of a Student Council. Currently, the school's senior management facilitates planning in the school and has developed a very good tracking system to identify the progress of development and review of key policies. Policies that are required by law or circular are in place as well as a number of policies that support good practice in aspects of the school's work. A whole school approach to planning was observed. This included the board of management or members of staff leading aspects of the planning process or being consulted in the development of plans. Students have sometimes been invited to provide feedback through questionnaires and parents have been consulted via the school website or through the Parents' Association. Committees are formed on a needs basis to examine how best to bring about developments of a positive nature in the school when necessary. While the current planning arrangements are working well at present, they are rather ad hoc. It is therefore recommended that a more systematic process of planning and review, including associated staff development initiatives, be brought about by delegating responsibility for leading school development planning away from senior management.

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 (Department of Education and Science, September 2004).

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

### **Leadership of staff**

The quality of leadership of staff in Maryfield College is very high and the very good functioning of the school reflects this. Leadership is distributed across the school and is evident at board level, at senior management level and in the professional commitment of staff. The principal and deputy principal work very well together and have a strong presence in the school. They are dynamic and committed to the school and they work constantly to drive the school forward. They practise reflective leadership and their primary aim, supported by the staff, is to facilitate high quality teaching and learning. In this context, good use is made of statistical data to ensure the highest quality outcomes for students, for example, through analysis of attendance patterns, uptake of subjects and examination results.

Assistant principals, special duties teachers and tutors manage their year groups, form classes or specific areas of responsibility effectively. However, the posts of responsibility are reviewed only as posts become vacant which does not facilitate a more regular adjustment of responsibilities to meet the school's current needs. Therefore, it is recommended that a more regular review of posts of responsibility be implemented. There is good consultation, as part of the decision making process in the school, and this leads to a shared sense of responsibility among staff and an open communication system. It is clear that issues are thought through and much analysis and investigation is done before decisions are finally reached.

There is clear evidence of leadership for learning in the school. The senior management team facilitates subject planning and teachers are constantly introducing improvements to their planning. Some very good self-evaluation processes were evident in many subject departments where teachers evaluate their progress each year and identify areas for improvement. Management also facilitates and leads learning by providing very good support for all subject areas through good timetabling, deploying teachers appropriately, providing teaching and learning resources and ensuring good order in the school. At present, the minutes of subject department meetings are not routinely communicated to senior management. In order to ensure that the principal and deputy principal are fully

aware of any issues in subject departments, it is suggested that minutes of meetings be communicated to them. The overall quality of subject planning was very good and it was evident that these plans are being used as a focus for lessons and for sharing best practice collaboratively. Nearly all subjects set common examinations and this is very good practice. Programmes, including Transition Year, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and Social, Personal and Health Education are very well coordinated.

### **Leadership of students**

The staff of the school is commended for its committed and student-centred approach. Relevant policies and procedures which directly affect students are in place and are evidence of how well the students in the school are managed. These include the school's Code of Behaviour which incorporates an effective ladder of referral. A significant feature of the school is the climate of order in classrooms and throughout the school, which was also noted by parents and students. There is a strong focus on care and security of all students and the pastoral care system in the school is excellent. It is evident that staff members adopt consistent approaches in dealing with issues which may arise.

There are effective procedures for admissions and management of transitions from primary to second level and from third year or Transition Year (TY) to fifth year. It was noted that year groups experience a phased start at the beginning of the school year extending over a number of days. Management is urged to ensure that the integrity of the school year is maintained for all year groups. Students are well led in the school at all levels and the students themselves have opportunities for leadership created through the very effective prefect system and the Student Council.

Care for students with special educational needs (SEN) is a successful area in the school. There is effective communication between the SEN team and mainstream teachers. Resource hours for SEN and students with English as an Additional Language (EAL) are used appropriately and sensibly. Students are generally withdrawn in small groups for support. The possibility of using some SEN resources to provide in-class support for students could be investigated. Guidance and counselling is also central to the school and the Guidance policy is truly whole school and effective. Students and parents are well supported by staff and the guidance department when it comes to making subject choices in the school although some parents suggest that this area could be kept under review.

Students from first year are placed in mixed-ability groups with setting also facilitated where appropriate. The positive effects of this are seen through the very high uptake of higher-level courses in most subjects. Examination students are provided with after-school study and there is also a strong focus on developing the study skills of all students throughout the year.

### **2.3 Management of facilities**

Facilities are well managed and the school is very well maintained. There have been a lot of recent improvements to the fabric of the school and further work is planned. The school has made good use of the summer works scheme and the parents and board of management have also been proactive in providing financial assistance to the school. The school website is an excellent source of information about the school. There was also evidence that the health and safety policy was being properly implemented and there was a good focus on environmental responsibility. The learning environment for the students was stimulating both on the corridors and in the classrooms.

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

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

There were significant strengths in the quality of teaching and learning in the majority of the twenty-four lessons evaluated and the quality of teaching and learning was good throughout. The questionnaire responses from students and parents reflect high levels of satisfaction with teaching and learning in the school. The profile of grades achieved by the students in the state examinations also reflects positively on the high quality of teaching. In the majority of lessons observed much hard work had gone into preparation in terms of the organisation of resources and the structure of lessons. The lessons aimed to facilitate effective learning rather than simply transmit content. Very clear learning outcomes were communicated to the students from the outset and the lessons were delivered successfully and at an appropriate pace.

There were very good links created with students' prior learning and with their life experiences in all lessons. All teachers had very good resources to hand. Many teachers made very good use of ICT in their lessons. The overhead projector and board were also used well and good use was made of worksheets and handouts.

In the many lessons which were characterised as having significant strengths there was dynamic teaching. High expectations were communicated and the appropriate pace of the lesson catered for the better able students while the teacher circulated to support less able students to remain on task. These lessons were also student centred in that students' contributions were invited through directed questioning, discussion and collaborative work.

Another feature of excellent lessons was when students were completely engaged and interested in their lessons and were kept actively engaged and busy by the subject matter and by the teaching approaches. In these lessons, a very good rapport was built up between teacher and students and students confidently answered questions. Teachers facilitated students to learn by their effective and thought-provoking questions and consolidated learning through specific examples and reinforcement.

In some lessons, while there was quite a good mix of student and teacher input, the students were not quite as active or as busy as in the majority of lessons. Although the content was well taught, the students did not have the opportunity to engage with this content through active learning. In a small number of lessons, while there was student activity, it was clear that students were not challenged sufficiently. In these lessons, there was not enough content prepared which meant that time was not used effectively. In addition, it was observed that many students were able to avoid engaging fully in the lesson where the teacher asked global as opposed to directed questions.

An area for development already identified by the school was the need to ensure that high achieving students are pushed to achieve their full potential. In this regard, it was evident that this was the case in most lessons visited. However, more professional development opportunities in the area of mixed-ability teaching are recommended as a way of ensuring that appropriate expectations of all students are set and realised in all lessons.

Students sit two formal examinations annually and parents receive reports on these. It is suggested that, in addition to this, the results of class tests be communicated through the student journal to provide further communication with parents of students' progress. Students were given appropriate homework in all lesson visited.

In every lesson observed, as well as throughout the school, the students were extremely well behaved.

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

### ***4.1 Management***

It was evident that the school's management takes the recommendations made in subject inspection reports very seriously and strives to implement the recommendations as fully as possible. To this end the timetable has been changed in recent years to comply with circular M29/95 *Time in School*. Another area for development, identified in most of the subject inspection reports, was the introduction of ICT into teaching and learning and this area has been very well followed up on. School management has also followed up on the recommendation made in previous inspection reports that assessment for learning strategies be implemented. Development in this area was very evident in the provision made for professional development of staff, in subject plans and in the lessons observed during the evaluation. Other whole school issues identified in individual inspection reports have also been clearly implemented or investigated.

### ***4.2 Learning and teaching***

The teachers are commended for their implementation of learning and teaching recommendations made in previous subject inspection reports. In addition, there was much evidence that the recommendations and findings of all reports have contributed to the good practice of all teachers, not just the teachers in the subject areas inspected. To this end, there was a focus on learning outcomes in lessons and subject plans; in all language lessons visited the target language was clearly in use and oral testing of students in languages has also been implemented. As noted earlier, the principles of assessment for learning were to be seen in many lessons, especially where formative comments which identified areas for improvement were used when correcting students' work.

The use of ICT was specifically mentioned in previous subject inspection reports as an area for development. In the current evaluation, it was observed that very substantial progress had been made in this area. For example, ICT was used in teaching in almost half the lessons observed which is commendable as not all classrooms are yet equipped in ICT.

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