

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

<b>School name</b>	Mercy Primary School
<b>School address</b>	Chapel Lane Birr Co. Offaly
<b>Roll number</b>	03220F

**Date of inspection: 23-09-2019**



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agus Scileanna  
Department of  
Education and Skills

## **WHAT IS WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING?**

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning reports on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. It affirms good practice and makes recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

## **HOW TO READ THIS REPORT**

During this inspection, the inspectors evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. The quality of pupils' learning
2. The quality of teaching
3. The quality of support for pupils' well-being
4. The quality of leadership and management
5. The quality of school self-evaluation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum, which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

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.

## **CHILD PROTECTION**

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.
4. The Child Safeguarding Statement meets the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.
5. The records of the last three board of management meetings record a child protection oversight report that meet the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017.
6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all school personnel on the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2017
7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE, Wellbeing).
8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

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

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	23-09-2019
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meetings with principal and in-school leadership team</li><li>• Meeting with representatives of the board of management</li><li>• Meeting with parent representatives</li><li>• Meeting with teachers</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Analysis of parent, pupil and teacher questionnaires</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning</li><li>• Examination of pupils' work</li><li>• Interaction with pupils</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers, and to parent and board of management representatives</li></ul>

### SCHOOL CONTEXT

Mercy Primary School is an all-girls urban school under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Killaloe. The school has an administrative principal, seven mainstream class teachers, four school-based special education teachers (including one special class teacher), one home-school-community liaison (HSCL) teacher, three externally-based support teachers and two special-needs assistants. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. At the time of the evaluation there were 144 girls enrolled in the school.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### FINDINGS

- The quality of learning is good; there is scope to develop pupils' use and transfer of skills across curricular areas.
- While pupils with special educational needs (SEN) are well supported, target-setting is not sufficiently aligned with priority learning needs.
- Teaching in the school is of a very high quality, but there is scope for the refinement of assessment practices at whole-school level.
- Pupils' well-being is supported very effectively and the atmosphere in the school is warm, inclusive and conducive to learning.
- The quality of leadership and management is very good and the principal fosters a collaborative school culture which promotes the sharing of good practice.
- The school self-evaluation (SSE) process is implemented effectively in the school.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should explore additional practices to promote the use of skill sets among pupils and encourage them to evaluate and transfer their learning across a broader range of contexts.
- Programmes of learning for pupils with special educational needs should be underpinned by weekly planning and should incorporate specific, measurable and achievable learning targets that address pupils' priority learning needs as identified through the analysis of assessment data.
- A whole-school collaborative approach to the strategic use of assessment data should be developed so that the data gathered is used consistently in planning for the differentiated learning outcomes of pupils.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

- The quality of pupils' learning is good and pupils demonstrate a positive attitude to their learning. Teachers maintain a balance between their own input and pupil-led learning. Pupils are given many opportunities to work collaboratively and independently in a supportive and well-resourced learning environment.
- Pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are progressed through the effective implementation of whole-school interventions and initiatives.
- Tá na daltaí dearfach i leith na Gaeilge. Tá a ngnóthachtáil sa teanga ó bhéal le moladh agus iad ábalta cumarsáid fhiúntach shimplí a dhéanamh mar theanga bheo i suímh fhoirmiúla agus neamhfoirmiúla. Chun tógáil ar an bhfoghlaim seo, b'fhiú deiseanna a chruthú dóibh an teanga ó bhéal a úsáid mar bhunús don obair scríofa agus tabhairt faoi réimse níos leithne seánraí scríbhneoireachta chomh maith.

*Pupils are positive in their attitude to Gaeilge. Their oral competence is praiseworthy as they are able to conduct basic meaningful conversation in the living language in formal and informal settings. Using this skill as a basis for improvement, opportunities should be created for them to develop further their written skills and undertake a wider range of genres.*

- The local environment and community are used effectively as a learning resource, and pupils' interest in history, heritage and the environment is commendable. Progress in the acquisition of instrumental musical skills and engagement in project work add a further enriching dimension to pupils' learning. It was noted, however, that pupils did not always make meaningful learning connections across the curriculum and beyond their school context. The use of skill sets acquired in one learning area should be extended to and facilitated in other learning situations across and beyond the curriculum and pupils should be encouraged to see the relevance of those skills as they apply them to new learning activities.
- Pupils with special educational needs are supported effectively. The school is currently reviewing its provision for SEN support and has begun to implement the continuum of support. As practice evolves, the school should aim to achieve a balance between in-class support and group and individual interventions. Short-term planning should be carried out on a weekly basis and should specify the development of skills and content that address pupils' priority learning needs. Based upon relevant assessment data, target-setting should be aligned with the priority needs of pupils, and learning objectives should be specific, measurable and used to inform future planning.

### The Quality of Teaching

- Teachers create an inclusive, pupil-centred and stimulating learning environment.
- Classroom management is excellent. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour and they communicate these expectations effectively to pupils.
- Teaching, as observed by the inspectors during the evaluation, was characterised by the clear communication of desired learning outcomes, high quality instruction and skilful questioning and concluded with the consolidation and review of learning.
- Teachers use a range of methodologies including focused pair and group activities and purposeful talk and discussion to provide an active and engaging dimension to learning.

- In the junior classes, pupils' social and communication skills are progressed through appropriately-supported, play-based learning experiences. The oral language proficiency of pupils in all classes is developed consistently through targeted exposure to topic-specific vocabulary across the curriculum.
- Individual teacher planning shows an awareness of the priorities for school improvement and reflects a collective commitment to the SSE process.
- While a range of worthwhile assessment practices is used by teachers, there is scope to develop a more cohesive whole-school approach to formative assessment so that the data gathered is used consistently to inform short-term planning for the differentiated learning outcomes of pupils.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS' WELL-BEING**

- The quality of support for pupils is a significant strength of the school. An orderly, inclusive learning environment permeates the school. Teachers are sensitive to the challenges faced by pupils and place great importance on nurturing their confidence and positive sense of identity. The pupil questionnaires returned indicate that all pupils feel they can approach their teachers and almost all agree that their teacher listens to what they have to say.
- The principal and HSCL teacher are committed to making the school a welcoming place for parents. The school values partnership with parents and the parents are, in turn, very supportive of the endeavours of the school on behalf of their children. The parents' association gives valuable assistance to the extra-curricular and co-curricular activities which enrich the learning experiences of pupils. Almost all parents agree that their child is doing well in the school.

### **4. THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

- The overall quality of leadership and management is very good. Those in leadership and management roles operate in a collegial and effective manner to create a holistic teaching and learning environment in the school. Questionnaires returned as part of the evaluation indicate that almost all parents agree that the school is well run.
- The board of management discharges its administrative and leadership duties very effectively. It has a clear understanding of its role and adheres to principles of good governance. In light of circular 0013/2017 the board should review and revise its admissions policy to reflect the inclusive nature of the school. Board members are well informed regarding the quality of teaching, learning and pupil well-being.
- The principal fosters a collaborative school culture which facilitates professional conversations and promotes the sharing of good practice and whole-school approaches among staff. The in-school management team works collaboratively with the principal to manage the changing needs of the school. The school improvement plan informs its work. The team meets regularly and reports annually to the board on its progress.
- The school regularly provides placements for student teachers. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is highly praised and provides valuable professional benefits for teachers, student teachers, pupils and the teacher education institutions.

## **5. THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION**

- The quality of SSE is good and the collaborative practices and structures established in the school support this process.
- Key areas for improvement have been identified and a whole-school approach is evident in implementing the agreed actions. The setting of realistic targets aligned with these areas is impacting positively on classroom practice. There are established procedures to monitor daily attendance and the attendance levels of the majority of pupils are good. A more robust system of encouragement needs to be implemented however, to improve the attendance of the significant minority of pupils for whom attendance is poor.
- The school has used the SSE process to identify the potential in using digital strategies as a means of improving outcomes for pupils. All teachers have completed training to extend their skills in this area.

## THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum, which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very good</b> applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is <b>outstanding</b> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b> applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <b>very good</b> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Fair</b> applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b> applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**



## **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The staff and Board of Mercy Primary School welcomes the findings outlined in the WSE-MLL Report.

We are pleased that the report recognises the many strengths of our school including an atmosphere that is warm, inclusive and conducive to learning. We value the recognition of excellent classroom management, that the overall quality of teaching is very high and learning is good. We are also pleased with the recognition and affirmation of the very good quality of leadership and management of the school and that the School Self-Evaluation process is implemented effectively.

## **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 of Management will support the implementation of the recommendations made in the WSE-MLL.

Actions taken/planned to address recommendations:

- The SEN team are now doing weekly planning and targets set have been reviewed so to align them more closely with the pupil's priority learning needs. These will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.
- Teachers have commenced a review of the different forms of assessment used across the school and will work towards creating a consistent and whole-school plan of assessment.
- The transfer of learning and skills across all curricular areas will continue to be priority in all classrooms.
- The Board has reviewed and revised the admissions policy to reflect the inclusive nature of the school and this will be ratified at the next scheduled meeting.
- A system of attendance texts has been set up to encourage improved attendance of the minority of pupils for whom attendance is poor.