

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

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

REPORT

School name	St. Mary's National School
School address	High Street Croom Co. Limerick
Roll number	09306W

Date of inspection: 20-11-2019



**An Roinn Oideachais
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 inspector(s) 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

Dates of inspection	20-11-2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meetings with principal and in-school leadership team• Meeting with representatives of the board of management• Meeting with parent representatives• Meeting with teachers• Review of relevant documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analysis of parent, pupil and teacher questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of pupils' work• Interaction with pupils• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers, and to parent and board of management representatives

SCHOOL CONTEXT

St. Mary's National School is a co-educational primary school, in Croom, County Limerick. It operates under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Limerick. There are six mainstream classes, two classes for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), and five special education teachers, one of whom is shared with nearby schools. Currently, 172 pupils are enrolled. In recent years, enrolment has increased; this trend is expected to continue. Pupils' school attendance rates are good overall.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall quality of pupils' learning, including that of pupils with special educational needs is good; in aspects of the curriculum, there is potential to broaden the pupils' learning experiences and develop their skills more progressively.
- The quality of teaching is good overall; the teachers are hardworking and they collaborate regularly; there is scope to develop aspects of curriculum provision, teaching practices in some classes, and the models of in-class support.
- The quality of support for pupils' well-being is very good.
- The quality of school leadership and management is commendable; the principal's leadership of the school is highly effective; as a priority, school accommodation requires attention.
- The quality of school self-evaluation is very good.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In aspects of the curriculum, pupils' outcomes and learning experiences need to be broadened and their skills need to be developed more progressively; to this end, a focus on implementing and embedding the recently revised curriculum policies in classroom practice is necessary.
- To enhance teaching practices, the school needs to expand the range of provision in aspects of the curriculum, the teaching methodologies and aspects of the school's approaches to supporting pupils; in addition, further development of the in-class model of support is required.
- The board of management should take steps to improve school accommodation for the school's long-term needs and for the benefit of the current cohort of pupils.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

- Overall, the quality of pupils' learning across the curriculum is good and aspects of their learning are very good.
- The pupils are afforded valuable opportunities to work with their peers and they eagerly engage in class discussions. In the infant settings, pupils' learning is enhanced through playful approaches.
- In many settings, the pupils recall and connect their learning confidently. In English, they write well in various genres and their oral communication skills are good. In Irish, their ability to communicate ranges from satisfactory to good.
- In some settings, the pupils understand and explain mathematical concepts and processes accurately. There is some potential for more practical exploration of mathematical concepts, including in the outdoor environment.
- The pupils respond positively to challenges and to higher-order tasks where these are provided. Their project work is of a high quality, and in Science, they confidently devise experiments and tasks independently. There is scope to expand these practices throughout the school so that the pupils' higher-order skills are further developed. Vibrant, literacy-rich environments are cultivated in some settings.
- The pupils are physically active. Nonetheless, they would benefit from a broader range of experiences in Physical Education. In the Arts, their learning experiences could be broadened and their skills could be developed more progressively.
- The school's curriculum policies were revised recently. To further enhance pupils' learning, there is a need to commence a process whereby these policies are implemented in a phased and purposeful manner.

2. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

- The quality of teaching is good overall; aspects of satisfactory and very good practice were also observed during the inspection. The teachers are hardworking and committed.
- Many of the lessons observed were well prepared, aligned with pupils' interests and featured good questioning, active methodologies, talk and discussion, concrete materials and visual aids. In some settings, a more favourable balance between teacher input and pupil input needs to be achieved. The physical space and layout of some learning environments pose significant challenges for class teachers and special education teachers. Accordingly, pupils' learning experiences and the type of support provided are restricted to some extent.
- Pupils are very well managed. They understand and contribute to class rules and they take turns and negotiate during group work.
- Pupils' progress is assessed frequently and data are carefully maintained. The school should review its approaches to assessing all of the pupils' oral language skills, and the competencies of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- Pupils with special educational needs receive good support, and very good support is provided in classes for pupils with ASD. Well-structured one-to-one and group support sessions were observed during the evaluation. Appropriate individual plans are devised for many pupils. The school needs to ensure that measurable targets are set out in each pupil's plan. In addition, the pupil's support file should clearly outline the pupil's progress and the nature of support across successive periods of instruction.

- The mainstream class teachers and the special education teacher collaborate to provide in-class support at stage one of the continuum of support. The school plans to extend its focus on literacy and numeracy; relevant CPD is being accessed. Aspects of in-class support are clearly defined, including literacy lift-off and support for playful learning. To improve the overall quality of in-class support, more clearly defined roles need to be set out for both teachers. In addition, further time-bound, differentiated in-class support is required for pupils who experience challenges either on an ongoing basis or periodically. To this end, alongside standardised tests, ongoing assessment data such as weekly and end-of-topic tests need to be used to a greater extent to clearly identify the target pupils, and the type and duration of support.

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

- The quality of support for pupils' well-being is very good. An orderly and respectful school atmosphere prevails. Responses to pupil questionnaires indicate that the majority of pupils like school and feel safe in their class.
- The parents' association provides valued support to the school. In parent questionnaires, all of the respondents agreed that the school is welcoming and well run. The school liaises with external agencies to support pupils and there is frequent communication with parents.
- There are weekly school assemblies; these engender a sense of belonging to a school community. The pupils are rewarded for positive behaviour, and for their efforts and achievements.
- Healthy eating and an active lifestyle are promoted. A sense of civic responsibility is nurtured through participation in the Green Schools programme. The school's sensory room and sensory garden provide relaxing spaces. The sixth-class pupils engage in a programme which supports their transfer to post-primary school.

4. THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- The overall quality of leadership and management is good.
- The board of management undertakes its duties effectively. The board is aware of school initiatives and it supports the school to address identified challenges. Notwithstanding the work undertaken to date by the board to improve school accommodation, the current accommodation does not adequately cater for the current cohort of pupils, or for the school's emerging needs.
- The principal is a very effective school leader. Since his appointment, he has judiciously identified and addressed a number of priorities and he has earned the support of the school community. He successfully promotes a positive, inclusive school climate and a culture of collaboration. The deputy principal and two assistant principals contribute effectively to the leadership and management of the school. There is scope for them to adopt a cyclical approach to embedding the revised policies and initiatives throughout the school.
- The school reported that it is open to providing placements for student teachers. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome and is included among the Teaching Council's Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers, as it can provide valuable professional benefits for teachers, pupils and the teacher education institute.

5. THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

- The school self-evaluation (SSE) process is implemented very effectively.
- The school's improvement plans are clear; targets are set and actions are identified. The school has acquired resources and it has accessed CPD to support teachers in the priority areas. A positive impact on pupil's learning experiences and learning outcomes is noted.
- Parents' views are sought as part of the SSE process. Commendably, the involvement of parents in supporting targets is noted in the school's improvement plans, and parents can access these plans through the school's very informative website.

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 of quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good 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 outstanding 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
Good	Good 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 <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Satisfactory 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
Fair	Fair 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
Weak	Weak 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

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of St. Mary's National School warmly welcomes the positive report following our recent whole-school evaluation. We are pleased that the report highlights the very good levels of care achieved in our school for the wellbeing of all the pupils. The Board of Management is particularly pleased that the learning of pupils in the school is reported to be good and that the report acknowledges the good work of our teachers. The report also highlights our commitment to pupils with special educational needs, particularly our ASD Unit, which is recognised as very good. We are also pleased with the recognition and affirmation of the very effective leadership and the good quality of management within the school and that the School Self-Evaluation process is implemented effectively. The report acknowledges the hard work, commitment and dedication of all those involved in our school community.

Part B 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 In School Management team will continue to meet on a consistent basis and focus on implementing and embedding the recently revised curriculum provision. The ISMT team will focus on individual areas and consult the P.D.S.T. in this regard, highlighting any professional courses available to teachers in this area. The transfer of learning and skills across all curricular areas will continue to be priority in all classrooms.
- The school will continue to refine and modify teaching practices, including the in-class model of support. Continuous professional development in this area will continue to be promoted by the school management. The availability of extra space in the near future, due to the scheduled building works, should enable support staff to diversify the support given to pupils. The SEN team will also continue to meet regularly to refine teaching practices within the team teaching model. The SEN team will continue doing fortnightly planning and targets set are reviewed so as to align them more closely with the pupils' priority learning needs. These will be reviewed on an ongoing basis.
- The Board of Management recognises the need for extra space and facilities within the school and is in the process of finalising the details of a new building, consisting of two new SEN classrooms. The Board will also endeavour to provide future accommodation in line with the needs of the school.

This report gives the school community great encouragement in striving to achieve the highest of standards in education in line with our mission statement and vision for St. Mary's National School, Croom.