

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Saint Mary's National School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Tudor Grove Ashbourne County Meath
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	19768U

Date of inspection: 12-02-2020



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 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 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).
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	12-02-2020
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

Saint Mary's National School, Ashbourne is a co-educational school that operates under the patronage of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Meath. At the time of the evaluation 493 pupils were enrolled and deployed across eighteen mainstream classes. Staff allocation comprises an administrative principal, nineteen mainstream class teaching posts, six teachers for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and five special needs assistants. Attendance rates are very good.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The quality of pupils' learning achievements across all settings is very good.
- Teaching is of a very good standard.
- Targets in in-class, group and individual education plans are not always sufficiently focused to enable effective monitoring and tracking of pupils' progress.
- While pupils engage with drama as a methodology in lessons across the primary school curriculum, whole-school provision for Drama, as a full component subject of arts education, is not currently in place.
- The support for pupils' wellbeing is very good.
- The quality of leadership and management is very good.
- The school has engaged systematically with the school self-evaluation (SSE) process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Target setting in in-class, group and individual education plans should be rendered more consistent within teachers' collective practice across all stages of the continuum of support.
- Provision for the implementation of Drama at all class levels as a component part of arts education alongside Visual Arts and Music should be progressed without delay.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' LEARNING

- The quality of pupils' learning achievements across all settings, as observed during the evaluation, is very good. Pupils' enjoyment in learning is evident and arises from a sense of making progress and of achievement. Their engagement with learning contributes to their sense of wellbeing. They actively and enthusiastically participate in a wide range of learning activities in whole class, group and independent learning activities. During group learning tasks pupils demonstrate their ability to take ownership of their learning and to work purposefully and collaboratively. Lessons observed in social, environmental and scientific education subjects were highly effective in promoting pupils' curiosity and interest in the world around them. Pupils' visual art works are displayed and reflect a variety of skill development. Lessons were activity based and were focused on promoting positive attitudes, in particular in Physical Education (PE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). Provision for pupils' learning in Drama is less than satisfactory. While pupils are engaged in drama related activities integrated across other subject areas they do not engage in discrete drama lessons of the Primary School Curriculum. It was unclear both to the inspection team and to school leadership how this situation evolved.
- Learning outcomes in literacy and numeracy are very good with pupils consistently achieving in line with and, in many instances, exceeding their ability levels. Early literacy skill development and Irish and English choral recitation of rhymes, poems and songs are highly commendable. Pupils' penmanship and writing in a variety of genres are very good. Progression of their reading levels is very effectively monitored during in-class peer tutoring sessions. While pupils are confident in using reading comprehension strategies there is potential to further enable them to apply these strategies across a range of texts during in-class literacy sessions. In Mathematics, pupils demonstrate a very good understanding of number concepts and this is closely linked to the early intervention in-class lessons. Similar approaches to pupils' learning in middle and senior classes should be progressed. Overall, learning in settings for pupils with SEN is very good with lessons informed by clearly identified priority learning needs for pupils. Play-based learning is a regular feature of learning in infant settings; the most effective of these practices should be consistently implemented across settings. *Léiríonn na daltaí dearfacht i leith na Gaeilge agus ghlac siad páirt go fonnmhar sna ceachtanna a breathnaíodh le linn na cigireachta. Pupils have a positive disposition to the Irish language and engaged with enthusiasm in the lessons observed during the evaluation.*

2. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

- Teaching is of a very good standard with a few areas such as target setting in need of further development. Teachers employ a very good range of approaches that result in interesting and engaging lessons. They communicate very effectively the key learning intentions of lessons and set high expectations for learners. Their collective practices are consistently used to progress agreed strategies in literacy and numeracy. Teachers are very open to further developing their practices, they work collaboratively and they share their expertise gainfully with other teachers in the school. In parent questionnaires almost all indicated that teaching was good in the school.

- Provision for pupils with SEN takes place in withdrawal and in-class settings. Teaching in withdrawal settings focuses very effectively on pupils' needs identified in support plans and arising from in-class interventions. In-class teaching is predominantly informed by agreed teaching approaches based on well-established programmes such as *Literacy Lift Off*, *Peer Tutoring* and *Mata sa Rang*. The development of gross motor skills is a feature of provision; integration of those strategies that align with curricular areas such as PE should be progressed across mainstream settings. Group and individualised education plans are in place for all pupils with additional learning needs. While targets are linked to priority learning needs they are not always sufficiently focused or phrased in terms of outcomes for pupils to enable effective monitoring and tracking of pupils' progress at all stages of the continuum of support. To this end, more consistent collective practices identifying specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) targets is needed. A very good range of SEN appropriate resources including information and communications technology (ICT) programmes is used to support pupils with additional learning needs.
- A timeline is in place to guide the review of whole school curricular planning and organisational policy documents. The curricular review must now focus on the whole school drama curricular plan so as to inform full implementation of the drama curriculum at all class levels as a component part of arts education alongside Visual Arts and Music. Currently, discrete lessons in Drama as a subject of the Primary School Curriculum are not being taught. Teachers' timetables, long-term and short-term planning and monthly progress record documents should also be revised to include provision for Drama.
- Overall, assessment practices are commendable. A comprehensive range of whole-school screening and diagnostic data is gathered and analysed. A very purposeful range of work samples at infant class level is used to support teaching and learning. At other class levels there were many instances of highly commendable written formative feedback evident. These very effective assessment practices and those associated with literacy and numeracy interventions should be extended on a whole-school basis.

3. THE QUALITY OF SUPPORT FOR PUPILS' WELLBEING

- The support for pupils' wellbeing is very good. The school has identified wellbeing as a priority area of focus. Consequently, it is enthusiastically progressing a range of measures to further enhance the wellbeing of staff and pupils. Collectively, staff members are highly responsive and sensitive to the needs of pupils in their care and this contributes to the supportive and nurturing environment created in the school. The behaviour of pupils, as observed during the evaluation, is highly commendable. A pupil council has recently been convened and is represented by senior class pupils. In responses to questionnaires, more than half of the pupils surveyed indicated that they did not know or disagreed that they had a say in how things are done in the school. To address this, pupil voice needs to be augmented. The expansion of representation of the pupil body on the pupil council is advocated.
- In a meeting with parent nominees on the board of management they emphasised the very stable environment the school provides for pupils and the mutual respect evident between pupils and teachers and pupils and pupils. While there is regular and very positive home-school communication there is potential to improve parental involvement in whole school

planning and policy development. In surveys conducted during the evaluation almost all parents indicated that there is a good atmosphere in the school, that they feel welcome, that the school is well run and that their child feels safe and well looked after.

4. THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- The quality of leadership and management is very good, with aspects of policy development requiring further attention. The board of management has consistently been focused on nurturing the ethos of the school, building on its traditions and on its growth and development. The board has a very clear understanding of its role. A schedule is in place for the review of policies and plans; the drama curriculum whole-school plan and aspects of the enrolment and SEN policies require particular attention. The board should also communicate an annual report on the operation of the school to the parent body.
- The leadership of the principal is very effective. He is committed to empowering and supporting teachers in taking on leadership roles through the effective use of distributive leadership. The work of the in-school management team is appropriately focused on the school's identified priorities. This collective leadership team is very dedicated to promoting a safe, calm, caring and positive learning environment with high expectations for its pupils. The team creates and motivates staff working groups to lead developments in key areas, thus building leadership capacity. The school is very well resourced especially in the areas of literacy and numeracy and digital learning resources. All teachers surveyed during the evaluation indicated that there is a good atmosphere in this school, that there is good communication among the staff and that the school is well run.

5. THE QUALITY OF SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION

- The school has engaged systematically and very meaningfully with the school self-evaluation (SSE) process. It has very effectively communicated its priority areas of focus to the school community. There is a shared commitment to these priority areas and the implementation of agreed practices is visibly impacting on learning. The digital learning framework is contributing to the development of ICT as an authentic teaching and learning tool in the school.

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 welcomes the WSE- MLL Report which asserts and affirms the dedication and commitment of all of the school staff, the Board, the Principal, the In-school management team and Parent Body of our school.

It acknowledges that the report identifies leadership and management in the school as being very good, in maintaining highly constructive relationships and managing curriculum and organisational change.

The Board is pleased that the report identifies and acknowledges the very high standards of teaching, learning and pupil achievement evident in the school. The Board is particularly pleased that the quality of support for pupils' wellbeing was acknowledged as being highly responsive and sensitive to the needs of pupils in the school's care. It also welcomes the comment that the teaching of children with SEN is very effective.

The Board extends congratulations and thanks to the staff whose continued work and efforts were affirmed and to the children who are ambassadors for our school every day.

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 of St Mary's National School acknowledges and welcomes the recommendations in the report which will inform our planning and will be integrated into our School Self Evaluation Plan and School Improvement Plan.

The school has started the process of implementing Drama at all class levels in line with a curriculum plan for drama and will build upon the methodologies currently used within our school.

The Student Council will be used as an effective resource to promote and augment Student Voice in our school.

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 very good 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;