An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

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<tr>
<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>St Patrick’s Cathedral Grammar School</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>St Patrick’s Close Dublin 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
<td>606601</td>
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Date of Evaluation: 12-03-2020
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. Quality of school leadership and management
2. Quality of teaching and learning
3. Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations
4. The school’s self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement

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.

This evaluation was paused due to the school closures arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. While the majority of the inspection activities took place in March 2020, some inspection activity and the feedback meetings were not held until October 2020.

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.
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 and 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>9, 10, 12 March and 9 October 2020</th>
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<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>• Meeting with parents</td>
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<td>• Meeting with board of management</td>
<td>• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires</td>
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<td>• Meetings with principal and deputy principal</td>
<td>• Observation of teaching and learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Meetings with key staff</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Student focus-group interview</td>
<td>• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers</td>
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School context
Saint Patrick’s Cathedral Grammar School is a co-educational voluntary secondary school, with historical links to St. Patrick’s Cathedral and the Choir School, under the patronage of the Board of Governors and Church of Ireland. It offers the Junior Cycle programme, a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme and the established Leaving Certificate. Current school enrolment stands at 238.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of leadership and management is effective with elements of highly effective practice noted; a few specific areas require development including the school’s strategic plan.
- The highly dedicated senior management team manages the school effectively and promotes a positive, caring, and inclusive environment where learning can flourish; a number of school practices strongly support students’ sense of belonging and togetherness and provide a platform for students to share their talents and develop their leadership skills.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning was effective; practice ranged from very good to good in most lessons, and ranged from satisfactory to fair in a small number of lessons; the strengths identified can be harnessed to develop and extend practice.
- Teacher collaboration is good, and is developing and improving as the school grows; scope exists to further develop subject planning and the sharing of best practice in effective teaching, learning and assessment methodologies.
- The quality of the school’s engagement with the school self-evaluation (SSE) process is good, with some very good practice noted in the area of supporting literacy.
- Overall, good progress has been made in the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations, and the school demonstrates excellent capacity for improvement.

Recommendations

- Management should further develop the school’s strategic plan for the future development of the school, with short and long term goals, and a greater focus on teaching and learning.
- To further enhance the high quality of student care, consideration should be given to the development and implementation of a more formal student tracker system to support and motivate students to reach their full potential as learners.
- Teachers should further collaborate in order to share the highly effective practice found in some lessons, particularly in the areas of effective differentiation, written formative feedback and the use of digital technology to support and assess learning; all subject plans should be used as working documents, reflective in nature and include agreed SSE practices.
DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of leadership and management is effective, with elements of highly effective practice noted; management promote an inclusive, caring and positive school environment in which learning can flourish.

Leading learning and teaching

The leadership of learning and teaching is effective, with elements of highly effective practice noted. There are very high levels of commitment to fostering a positive learning environment. School management and staff share a common vision for the provision of a holistic education which is clearly rooted in the school’s mission statement.

The principal and deputy principal welcome innovative practices and are promoting professional dialogue in relation to emerging teaching and learning methodologies such as co-teaching. This is given expression in the implementation of the new Junior Cycle curriculum, and a commendable peer observation initiative. Expertise is readily shared by teachers who are involved in various initiatives, programmes, continuing professional development (CPD) activities and working groups. In-school communication between senior management and staff is very good. They hold regular meetings with key staff teams and advocate collegiality and professional dialogue with a view to increasing levels of progress and achievement. It is highly commendable that annual meetings are held with all staff in order to support reflective practice, assess levels of progress, inform future planning and identify areas for development.

Teachers feel affirmed in their work and demonstrate a sense of shared purpose with management in leading learning. There is scope for further collaboration in the area of sharing best practice in subject planning, and teaching and learning methodologies. This could be achieved through a more structured peer observation model, the continued use of staff meetings, and harnessing the SSE process. During the evaluation teachers displayed a very positive disposition to advice and support through high levels of professional dialogue.

The school provides a broad, balanced and comprehensive curriculum, notwithstanding its small size. For example, Classical Studies, Music and Coding are available to all first-year students, and all science subjects are provided to Leaving Certificate students. It is notable that a second modern foreign language was introduced in 2020. An opportunity for subject sampling is built into the first-year timetable to assist students in making informed choices, and the TY programme ensures that students sample all subjects before making choices for senior cycle. The curriculum is complemented by a wide variety of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities; for example, Sci-Fest, Model UN, board games club, chamber choir, orchestra and a traditional music group are provided. There is also a wide variety of sports available including football, basketball, athletics and rugby.

A highly valued TY programme is in place; it is well planned and provides for a wide range of valuable learning experiences. Students and parents reported that TY highlights include the school musical, an adventure trip, a Social Concern Week and the Gaisce Awards.

An effective Wellbeing programme has been designed and includes musical performance linked to the strengths of the school. There are themed weeks, including Anti-Bullying Week and Healthy Week. An effective transfer and induction system is in place for incoming students, with initiatives such as the mentoring system with fifth-year students being particularly noteworthy. Within the
school, there is a strong sense of community and family, and this was emphasised by all during meetings conducted during the evaluation process. Findings from both parental and student questionnaires show a high positive response to a statement asking whether students feel safe and cared for in the school. Students also overwhelmingly agreed that there was a positive atmosphere in the school. Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) are provided to all students by a core team. Given the somewhat low response to the question around knowledge of the RSE programme, it is worth considering increasing the levels of communication with students and parents on the delivery of this programme.

Teaching resources and practices to support students with a range of additional and special educational needs are deployed in an organised, targeted and structured way. The school is aligning its practices with the principles of the Resource Allocation Model and the requirements of Circular 0014/2017. Provision is responsive to the needs of individual students, and includes withdrawal and co-teaching. When it is possible, in the future, management should continue to develop the co-teaching model of support.

The weekly school assembly is a time of particular importance during the school week, and encourages a strong sense of belonging and togetherness. Assembly is used to communicate key messages and highlight the successes of groups and individuals. It is highly commendable that students are afforded opportunities to share their talents and develop their leadership skills at this time. The level of student involvement, success and achievement in some extra-curricular and co-curricular activities is exemplary.

Curricular Guidance provision is effectively delivered to all senior cycle classes, and junior cycle students receive some aspects of Guidance. All senior students review their personal, social and educational strengths with the guidance counsellor to build goals and consider future college and career choices. A school counsellor is available to all year groups, and the school’s chaplain provides highly valuable support to the school community.

The school provides placements for student teachers as required. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome and is included among the standards in the Teaching Council’s Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers as it can provide valuable professional benefits for teachers, student teachers, students and the teacher education institutions. Droichead is well established and new teachers are highly supported and swiftly integrated into the school.

Managing the organisation

There are significant strengths in the management of the organisation. The board of management diligently fulfils its statutory obligations as employer and manager, and meet regularly throughout the school year. A high functioning board ensures a systematic review of policies which are shared with teachers, parents and students for their input. Members display a commendable level of shared expertise and are aware of their responsibilities. Minutes of board meetings show that there is good focus on teaching and learning; however, scope remains to increase this focus perhaps through inputs from teachers and students in relation to teaching, learning and assessment initiatives and methodologies.

Management has energetically pursued a school building improvement programme, and this important work has taken up a lot of their time in recent years. They have overseen very successful and substantial improvements in facilities, as the school has doubled in numbers during a five year period as it moved from fee-charging into the free education scheme. A new building, which is well
resourced and welcoming, provides three new classrooms, a music room, an art room, a library, and a general purpose area.

School management maintains a secure and safe learning environment, and the day-to-day operation of the school is highly efficient. The principal and deputy principal co-operate at a highly effective level through a distributed leadership model. They collaborate on all areas of school life with a clear shared vision. They are highly dedicated leaders with an exemplary commitment to student care and inclusion, displaying mutual trust and respect in all aspects of their work.

The school’s available teaching resource are effectively deployed to offer a wide range of subjects. Professional and planning time is used well, with scope for further emphasis on sharing effective resources and developing subject plans.

**Leading school development**

The school has a large catchment area, serving students from a wide range of nationalities and diverse backgrounds. School management views school development in the context of its inclusive ethos, the school’s local high profile and its reputation in promoting music and the arts. Students travel from great distances to pursue the study of Music and the arts due to the school’s rich tradition in this area.

School management has managed recent changes very effectively, as the school doubled in numbers, with the aid of a strong sense of community. Minutes reveal that the board is kept very well informed of school business by the principal through his comprehensive reports, and the board is very supportive of all decisions which are taken in the best interests of the students. School planning is good; however, the school’s strategic plan would benefit from more developed short and long term goals, and a greater focus on teaching, learning and assessment. It is suggested that post-holders are invited on occasion to address the board.

The code of behaviour is perceived as fair by key stakeholders, this aligns itself well with the positive and inclusive ethos of the school and the restorative practice model adopted by the school.

The senior management team possess the leadership qualities necessary to maintain a strong sense of community in which the uniqueness of each individual is appreciated. The questionnaire responses confirm that the morale of the teaching staff is very high, and that the school is well run. It was noted during interviews with parents, students and staff that very good relationships exist between the year groups, which supports wellbeing for all.

An active parents’ association is highly valued by school management. Parents greatly appreciate high levels of communication with the senior management team and it is highly commendable that almost all respondents to the parents’ survey said they feel welcome in the school. Parents are aware of school developments and are involved in targeted initiatives that will benefit the students; for example, an outside seating area. It would be worthwhile for the parents’ association to foster closer links with the student council to help inform its work.

Very good levels of communication with the wider parent body are in place through the positive use of parent-teacher meetings, school newsletters, noticeboards and social media to highlight the many activities and successes for the school community.
Developing leadership capacity

Senior management demonstrates a strong commitment to developing leadership capacity of the teaching staff. CPD opportunities are encouraged and supported. The recent review of posts has enhanced distributed leadership with effective delegation of responsibilities. It is recommended that a clear focus on teaching and learning be evident in the roles and responsibilities associated with posts.

The school provides various opportunities for students to develop and exercise leadership. Opportunities include the student council, prefect system, class captains and leaders in music, clubs and sports. An effective student council has led to strong and focused initiatives to raise the student voice and improve school life. For example, looking at whole-school strengths and areas for development in relation to homework, and surveying students to develop and extend extracurricular activities. It is highly commendable that student leaders are receiving training in order to support the development of key skills.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Learners’ outcomes and experiences

Twenty lessons were observed during the evaluation across a wide range of subjects, class groups and levels. The quality of both teaching and learning was good overall. Most lessons were in the highly effective and effective range and a small number of lessons required considerable improvement.

Students’ learning experiences were good overall; however, some less effective lessons did not ensure optimal learning for all students. In the most effective lessons, students were active in their learning and participated in a range of tasks which necessitated them working together in pairs or groups. In language lessons, for example, students worked together asking each other questions and collaborating on a task which required use of the target language by all students. Teachers circulated ensuring that students were working, and helping with questions when needed. In a very small number of lessons, students disengaged from the task at hand and learning was less than effective. Teachers need to monitor student engagement and adapt lesson tasks accordingly. In one highly effective lesson, students were encouraged to make notes rather than take notes, were asked higher-order questions and student interest was high. In a small number of lessons, students were not given opportunities to participate in active learning and were generally quite passive as a result. It would be beneficial for teachers to share best practice in the area of active learning and teaching methodologies. When it is possible in the future, peer observation would be an effective way of ensuring that all teachers get the opportunity to observe a range of effective methodologies and resources.

In the practical lessons observed, students participated well with a range of tasks. Students’ skills were effectively developed with clear concise explanations and directions from teachers. In a small number of lessons, students were facilitated to use digital technology to do research and to record their work. In some lessons, digital technology was used effectively to enhance learning; for example, video clips were shown which helped to contextualise the content and raise students’ interest. However, more widespread and effective use of digital technology is recommended to support effective learner experiences and outcomes. Some other interesting and effective stimuli were used such as artefacts, songs, and a quiz and these resulted in more effective student
participation in subsequent lesson tasks. The use of a wider range of resources and stimuli is recommended in some cases where there was an over reliance on the textbook and notes.

**Teachers’ individual and collective practice**

Learning intentions were shared with students at the outset in many lessons, and in a small number instances these were revisited during or at the end of the lesson to assess learning. These good practices could be extended so that students can be involved in and take responsibility for their learning. In the most effective lessons, teachers supported learning through the contextualisation of key concepts and making links to learning outside the classroom. The relevancy of links between classroom learning and real life could have been made in some other lessons, however.

Teaching was most effective when teachers differentiated the teaching and learning approaches to ensure that there was an appropriate level of challenge for all students, and where higher-order questions were asked by both students and teachers. In one subject area, highly effective differentiation strategies were evident where students were asked to indicate whether they were cautious, confident or super confident learners in various aspects of subject content. Differentiation, including upward differentiation, is critical where the vast majority of classes are of mixed ability in order to ensure that learning is effective and optimal for all. In the most effective lessons, teachers had high expectations for their students and it was clear that the students had high expectations for themselves. It is recommended that the teachers discuss and plan for effective differentiation across all subject areas and levels.

Positive and respectful interactions among students and teachers and among the students themselves were a characteristic of the vast majority of lessons. Teachers’ passion for their subject was a feature of many lessons and had a very positive impact on learning. In the most effective lessons teaching approaches encouraged depth of thinking and response. Homework was assigned in most lessons and was linked to work completed in class. It would be beneficial if homework could be further differentiated and include some creative skills based assignments. There was a significant lack of formative written feedback in many copybooks reviewed. Teachers and senior management should discuss this important area of learning for students and implement a common approach to giving students feedback on their work. Oral feedback alone is not sufficient as students need to have a written record of how they are progressing and of areas which they need to improve.

Subject planning is well developed in a number of subjects, while others are in need of development. It is recommended that all subject plans should be used as working documents, reflective in nature and should include subject specific strategies to implement and assess SSE practices.

### 3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Overall, good progress has been made in relation to recommendations from previous evaluations.

**Leadership and Management**

Significant recommendations on aspects of provision and planning arising from a whole-school evaluation in 2010 have been addressed. Very good progress has been made in relation to the composition of the board, and punctuality and attendance. School planning with a specific focus on teaching and learning is an area for further development.
Teaching and Learning

Subject inspections in Home Economics, Business Subjects and Mathematics have taken place since 2014. Some key recommendations were related to formative feedback, higher-order questioning, student voice, the further use of digital technology and effective assessment strategies. During lesson observations some effective practice was noted in these areas, and a continuing focus is desirable to further enhance highly effective teaching and learning.

4. THE SCHOOL’S SELF-EVALUATION PROCESS AND CAPACITY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

The School’s Self-Evaluation Process

The school has engaged very well with the self-evaluation process as required by circular, and has used it effectively to support the implementation of Junior Cycle. Some very good literacy initiatives are in place, including the Wellread National Award, book clubs and an active school library. Effective numeracy initiatives include a maths clinic at lunchtimes, and involvement in national maths competitions. Areas of focus in SSE include differentiation and behavior for learning. It is timely now to focus on other areas of learning and to examine ways in which to effectively engage with the SSE process in order to set learner expectations and formally track learners’ progression.

The School’s Capacity for Improvement

The school has excellent capacity for improvement. Senior management has a strong commitment to providing high quality teaching and learning, the principal and deputy principal are committed leaders with very high levels of trust and support from the board, students, staff and parents.
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 are very pleased to receive this report and congratulate all the members of the school community who were involved in the process. The report reflects our common vision for the provision of a holistic education which is clearly rooted in the school’s ethos.

It is a pleasure to read about the innovative ways that the school promotes professional dialogue in relation to emerging teaching and learning methodologies and the way that teachers feel affirmed in their work. We agree that this demonstrates a sense of shared purpose within the school community.

The board is delighted to see the school described as a positive, caring, and inclusive environment where learning can flourish, where students have a strong sense of belonging and togetherness, where a platform is provided for students to share their talents and develop their leadership skills and where the uniqueness of each individual is appreciated.

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 recognises the central importance of teaching and learning and will ensure that this is reflected in the strategic plan for the future development of the school, with short and long term goals clearly identified.

The Board has considered the development and implementation of a more formal student tracker system to support and motivate students to reach their full potential as learners. The relevant data is already available, and a data analysis system has been put in place to make this information more accessible to teachers, learners and parents & guardians.

The Board welcomes the findings of highly effective practice in the areas of differentiation and formative feedback. This has been a main area of focus in the school’s SSE process in recent years. We will continue to support the work of teachers in building on the success of existing differentiation strategies and the use of digital technology to support and assess learning. The Board notes that in recent months there has been a dramatic increase in the implementation of technological supports for learning within the school especially in the area of online learning resources.
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of descriptive terms</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td><em>Very good</em> 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 <em>outstanding</em> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.</td>
<td>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</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td><em>Good</em> 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 <em>very good</em> standard.</td>
<td>Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement</td>
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<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td><em>Satisfactory</em> 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.</td>
<td>Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas</td>
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<td>Fair</td>
<td><em>Fair</em> 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.</td>
<td>Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils’ learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve</td>
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<td>Weak</td>
<td><em>Weak</em> 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.</td>
<td>Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;</td>
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