

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Mary's Academy CBS
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Station Rd Carlow
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	61120E

Date of Evaluation: 26-04-2018



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

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.

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 meets 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 did not meet the requirements in relation to 4 above and therefore was not fully compliant with the checks undertaken.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	26-04-2018
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with board of management• Meetings with principal and deputy principal• Meetings with key staff• Review of relevant documents• Student focus-group interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with parents• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers

School context

St Mary's Academy CBS, Carlow is a voluntary secondary school for boys under the trusteeship of Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The diverse cohort of students that attends the school comes from urban and rural backgrounds. The school has a current enrolment of 542 students. In addition to the Junior Cycle, the school offers the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- School management is aware of the school's changing needs and has effectively led the school through significant change; the overall quality of leadership and management is good.
- Some areas for improvement in the leadership and management of the school were noted, including the need for: review and enactment of essential policies; review of posts of responsibility to meet school needs; enhancing the involvement of parents; monitoring and tracking of student academic progress.
- The quality of care for students is very good; there is a high level of whole-school commitment to the wellbeing of students.
- Curriculum provision is generally broad and balanced and is good overall; however, some aspects of curriculum planning and provision will require review in order to better meet the needs of the full cohort of students.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good with some instances of exemplary practice; where learner experiences were less than good, students had limited opportunities to lead their own learning through inquiry-based learning.
- There was good progress made in the implementation of some recommendations made in previous inspection reports and the level of engagement by the school in the school self-evaluation (SSE) process is good.

Recommendations

- The board of management should put measures in place at a whole-school level to develop, review and enact essential policies as an integral part of the overall school plan; some policies require immediate attention.
- School management and teachers should ensure that the duties attached to the revised posts of responsibilities promote leadership of learning and meet identified school needs.

- School management and other leaders in the school should work towards greater involvement of parents in their children's education so that parents can more fully contribute to their vital partnership and advisory role.
- Senior management and teachers should put measures in place for enhanced assessment practices to include tracking, monitoring and feedback of student academic progress to help students have an increased awareness of how to improve.
- There is a need for some teachers to plan for active student methodologies which enable students to lead their own learning through inquiry-based learning; enhanced collaborative curriculum planning should support this practice.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

The overall quality of leadership and management is good. The board of management and senior management work to promote a learning culture and a culture of improvement that supports teaching and learning.

Teachers are encouraged by senior management to collaborate and to share their expertise. Purposeful teacher continuing professional development (CPD) is supported by school management and availed of by teachers. Teacher participation in Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century (TL21) has led to improved teacher collaborative practices at whole-school level, the sharing of expertise and prioritised SSE actions which are focused on wellbeing, and improved assessment practices.

The curriculum provided by the school is good overall. Senior management ensures that curriculum provision is generally broad and balanced, meets student needs and provides a variety of learning opportunities. Some aspects of curriculum planning and provision will require review. The introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme should be considered in order to better meet the needs of the full cohort of students. Three teachers are timetabled to deliver Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) to junior cycle students on a rota basis. In the interests of continuity, current timetabling arrangements for SPHE should be reviewed.

Student uptake of higher level and attainment in certificate examinations is good in some subject areas and not good in some other areas. All subject departments need to reflect on the reasons for this and some will need to plan for improvement as necessary.

Tracking and monitoring of student academic progress at whole-school level is not yet well established. Senior management and teachers should put measures in place for enhanced assessment practices to include tracking, monitoring and feedback of student academic progress to help students have an increased awareness of how to improve.

The quality of care for students is very good overall. Teachers demonstrate very high levels of commitment to the care and wellbeing of students. Students' holistic education is developed through the range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Student support structures are well planned, organised and implemented. The student support team meets regularly to identify appropriate interventions required for particular students. Supervised study and the homework and breakfast clubs also support students. The wellbeing committee has drawn up a draft wellbeing policy which fosters a commitment to inclusion and the holistic development of each student. Practices are in place to acknowledge and celebrate student achievement and endeavours.

The provision for guidance counselling is well planned and delivered at junior and senior cycle. There is no whole-school guidance plan currently in place. The school should prioritise development of a whole-school guidance plan taking account of recent curricular changes at junior cycle. The guidance counselling service provides support for students who may be vulnerable or those with behavioural difficulties.

There are effective systems in place for monitoring students with learning support needs. The learning support team works effectively with the student support team, year heads, class tutors, subject teachers, parents and school management to support students with identified learning needs and those who require support in English as an additional language (EAL). Team teaching is in place but this requires further monitoring and agreed guidelines around team teaching are necessary. It is suggested that smaller trained teams of teachers become involved in the delivery of curricular programmes and specific interventions that support students, including SPHE, RSE and special needs. Students in the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) unit are very well supported by dedicated and committed personnel.

Managing the organisation

The board of management and the principal fulfil their responsibility to create and maintain a climate of security, wellbeing and inclusivity. Existing school policies promote this practice. For example, the code of behaviour is currently under review in order to better meet school needs, and policies on homework and wellbeing have been drafted.

In general, there has been inadequate attention paid to reviewing and updating many policies. The board should put measures in place at a whole-school level to develop, review and enact essential policies as an integral part of the overall school plan. Some policies require immediate attention. Priority should be given to updating, reviewing and ratifying the anti-bullying policy, the critical incident management plan and the health and safety policy. Reference should be made to the SSE policy checklist.

The board is kept very well informed on school business by the principal and is very supportive of decisions which are taken in the best interests of all students. The recently appointed principal and deputy principal, who make up the senior management team, foster a positive school climate, work effectively together as a team and oversee the smooth day-to-day running of the school. Senior management actively supports school improvement by promoting a learning culture and implementing effective systems for communicating information.

The principal and deputy principal manage the school's organisational structures and human resources very well overall. It is suggested that, within the culture of collaborative review, the principal could meet teachers annually to discuss their work and delegated responsibilities. Some current posts of responsibility require review. School management and teachers should ensure that the duties attached to the revised posts of responsibility meet identified school needs, promote leadership of learning in line with *Circular 3/2018* and *Looking at Our School (2016)* and continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

The principal provides clear educational leadership, is aware of the school's emerging needs and has successfully managed significant recent change. The principal empowers staff to work in teams and to take on leadership roles that maximise students' learning opportunities. The principal also successfully delegates appropriate responsibilities and has a positive and significant on-the-ground presence. The deputy principal supports the principal and promotes leadership of learning. The deputy principal also develops the school timetable, plays an active role as part of the senior management team, deals effectively with any referred discipline issues and liaises with teachers, year heads and parents.

The board of management maintains the school buildings and grounds to a very good standard overall. Classrooms and specialist rooms are very well maintained by teachers and provide very good physical learning environments. Mindful of student wellbeing, the board has been very proactive in acquiring additional space for school expansion and has applied to the Department for phase two of a major building project.

Leading school development

The trustees, board and principal are proactive in maintaining the guiding vision for the school. This vision is based on the development of student talents and abilities, respect, confidence and belonging. It is suggested that, in light of changing school contexts, the guiding vision be further collaboratively developed to include goals and expectations for students and that it be communicated to all school partners.

The board has overseen the development of the school plan. There is a strong focus within the school plan on preparation for the Junior Cycle Framework, the merits of the one-hour lesson, technology in education, SSE and school improvement, wellbeing, inclusion, extra-curricular activities and student leadership. The board articulated its priorities for school development which focus on maintaining the school tradition of excellence, provision of enhanced school facilities, support for CPD and maintaining strong student enrolment. However, there is insufficient focus on time-bound action planning. School management should further develop strategic planning in collaboration and consultation with the whole school community. The plan should include agreed targets and timeframes for school development and identify responsibilities for implementation and review.

Those leading SSE are working to ensure improvement plans are put into action on a whole-school basis. School leaders are aware of educational developments and use the SSE process with increasing effectiveness as a means of managing change. There have been useful surveys conducted with some year groups to gather information about homework. Areas prioritised for development in the current school improvement plan include improving student attendance, promoting positive relationships, improving assessment and homework practices and increasing the uptake of higher level Mathematics at junior cycle.

The board and principal value and support partnership, good relationships and communication with parents as a means of supporting student learning and wellbeing. Parents regularly attend school meetings and events. There is ongoing communication between parents and school management. The parents' association is actively involved in supporting the school. It should be made clear to parents that financial contributions are voluntary. The partnership and advisory role of parents is not well established. Parental involvement in the school requires improvement. School management and other leaders in the school should work towards greater involvement of parents in their children's education so that parents can more fully contribute to their vital partnership and advisory role. There were some areas raised in the parent questionnaire responses that merit attention by the board.

The principal and other school leaders build good relationships with other schools and with the wider community. For example, strong links have been forged with the local primary school, local post primary schools, Carlow Institute of Technology and with Carlow Regional Youth Services.

Developing leadership capacity

School leaders, including the board, the senior management team and teachers, have availed of professional development and training and are willing to work on areas of practice that require improvement. There is an increasing culture of self-reflection among staff. There is a good level of input from teachers at staff meetings. Teachers who are involved in various initiatives, programmes, CPD activities and working groups make presentations to their peers. New members of staff are well supported through peer mentoring. The school welcome pack for new teachers is informative and is a valuable resource.

There are many opportunities for teachers to develop leadership capacity. Year heads effectively oversee the welfare of their year groups and reported that they are very well supported in this regard by senior management. Co-ordinators work diligently to support students and contribute effectively to whole-school initiatives. Class tutors carry out a vital support role for students and this is in collaboration with the year heads.

School management and teachers value students' views and support students' involvement in the operation of the school. Opportunities are provided for students to assume leadership roles in many ways including through the student council, Meitheal, Peace and Justice group, Gaisce and Green Schools. TY students work with ASD classes as part of their range of experiences and there is ongoing student involvement in competitions, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and team sports. Responses from student questionnaires and interactions with students identify the need to place increased emphasis on listening to the student voice. This should take place inside the classroom through greater ownership and responsibility of learning by students and outside the classroom through increased opportunities for students to engage in decision making and policy formation and review.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Learner outcomes and experiences

The overall quality of learning in the lessons observed was good. Learning of very good quality was observed when students were actively engaged in their lessons, and where they demonstrated high levels of enjoyment and motivation combined with a positive and reflective approach to their work. In these lessons, teachers skilfully created a stimulating classroom learning environment that ensured learning was explorative, investigative and challenging.

Students took responsibility for their own learning when methodologies were appropriate. Such methodologies included well-planned group and pair work, student-teacher discussions, dynamic information and communication technology (ICT) use and higher-order brainstorming activities. Students applied themselves to the tasks assigned. Most students engaged very diligently in classroom tasks and activities and displayed a high level of co-operation with their teachers and with each other.

In the majority of lessons, students experienced effective differentiated approaches through the teachers' use of higher order questioning techniques and individual student attention. In a few instances, greater use of differentiated strategies to support the learning styles and abilities of all students is recommended. In a minority of lessons, students had limited opportunities to be productive and to lead their own learning through inquiry. It is praiseworthy that in some lessons, students were given opportunities to reflect and clarify their learning at the end of the lesson; this good practice should be extended.

Best practice was observed when students showed an ability and willingness to engage in discussion and activities, to express their own ideas, and to offer a range of responses and solutions, whether working individually or in pairs and small groups. In most lessons, students were able to connect with lesson topics and readily took the opportunities offered to apply and develop their knowledge and skills.

In some classrooms, the change from the linear classroom layout to grouped tables facilitated ease of movement of students when they were engaging in activities.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

The overall quality of teaching was good in the lessons observed. While there were some elements of exemplary practice, there was scope to further develop active and inquiry-based learning in a minority of instances. There were consistently positive interactions between teachers and students. There was very good classroom management in lessons.

Teacher preparation was good or very good for most lessons; materials and resources, including well-designed worksheets, were well selected and the sequence of learning activities was well planned.

Learning intentions were outlined at the outset of many lessons. Best practice was observed when the learning intentions were set as what students should know by the end of the lesson and when high expectations were set for planned attainment by learners.

Very good practice was observed when the teachers used teaching approaches and resources that both challenged and supported learning. Best practice was observed when there was clear exposition and demonstration, well-managed and monitored student collaborative work, and teacher enthusiasm for the subject. In a minority of lessons, the activities set for students lacked challenge and provided little opportunity for student engagement. In these lessons a teacher-led approach was predominant. There is scope to identify and discuss collaboratively teaching and learning approaches that will promote greater student engagement and independence in learning. It is recommended that teachers provide greater opportunities for student-centred and student-led activities.

Collaborative learning opportunities were provided in most lessons. The quality of collaborative tasks provided for students varied. Best practice in language lessons was observed when students were encouraged to be fully immersed in the language and this helped students to gain confidence in the use of the target language.

There was some evidence of a whole-school focus on assessment for learning in classroom practice and in copybooks and students' work. Overall, during the evaluation, there was scope to further develop and embed assessment for learning practice. There was also scope for increased emphasis on assessment practices that would assist students to build on their capabilities and address areas where they need to improve. In many lessons, effective oral feedback was given to students when assigned work was corrected in class. Good quality written formative feedback was observed on some student work. A more consistent approach should be taken to the provision of written formative feedback with affirmation of good work and clear directions for improvement.

Teachers used questioning to assess students' learning in most lessons. A few instances of exemplary practice were noted when teachers used questioning strategies that promoted higher-order, critical-thinking skills and encouraged learner autonomy. The review of a sample of student journals and copybooks from most lessons indicated variation in the quantity and recording of homework. Teachers should ensure that students take a consistent approach to the recording of homework and the quantity of homework completed.

Subject plans reviewed were found to be of good quality in terms of setting out the organisational plans for the subject. There was variation in the quality of the sample of plans inspected.

Collaborative curricular planning for subjects with new specifications as part of the Junior Cycle Framework require substantial development. It is advisable that teachers in subject departments consult the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) website. Significant improvement is required in planning for TY. The TY plan requires further development in order to record how the programme is organised and delivered in the school. A common template available from the National Council for Curriculum and Development (NCCA) should be used for TY curriculum planning. There is limited evaluation of the TY and LCVP programmes. Students, parents and teachers should be involved in on-going evaluation and review of TY and LCVP programmes.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

The implementation of some of the recommendations made in previous inspection reports is good; however, there has been limited progress with other recommendations. School management has made substantial progress in improving Physical Education provision and in the quality of reporting to parents. Changes regarding work experience for LCVP students in order to broaden their enterprise skills have been implemented.

Teaching and Learning

Some subject areas have included an analysis of certificate examination results as part of subject planning. Collective reflections by subject departments on uptake of higher level and trends in examination results should be documented. Subject departments should collaboratively develop time-bound action plans for subject improvement and development.

The infrastructural development of ICT has progressed; further planning for ICT to be more fully integrated into teaching and learning is necessary. Very good teaching and learning practice was observed in many lessons, including teaching approaches that supported students' taking responsibility for their own learning. Teaching and learning areas that still require development include improved assessment practices to include provision of written formative feedback, improved homework assignment and higher-order questioning. There should be increased student activity leading to improved ownership and responsibility of learning in some lessons.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

Current whole-school SSE actions relating to wellbeing are becoming integrated into teaching and learning and are leading to improved reflective practice by teachers and school management. Engagement by school management and teachers in SSE is good. There is a strong level of commitment to the SSE process as reflected in school planning documentation. Literacy and numeracy actions at whole-school level have been ongoing and there is a high level of visibility of these actions in classrooms. Recent SSE focus has been on improving homework and formative assessment including constructive feedback for students. However, progress on implementing these new areas has been incremental and requires ongoing vigilance, review and monitoring at whole-school level.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school's capacity for improvement is very good. Recent change has been managed very well and capacity building among school management and teachers is very good. There is an awareness of the school's changing needs and a strong commitment by all to respond to these. A culture of review and self-evaluation has been established and is leading to positive outcomes.

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 in each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	<i>Very good</i> 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 <i>outstanding</i> 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	<i>Good</i> 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	<i>Satisfactory</i> 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	<i>Fair</i> 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	<i>Weak</i> 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 board acknowledges the findings of the Inspectorate in relation to the positive engagement by the school in the SSE process, the high level of whole school commitment to the wellbeing of students and the effective way in which school management has led the school through significant change.

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 is committed to the review and enactment of essential policies and will continue to encourage parents to fully contribute to the partnership.

School management and teachers have ensured that the duties attached to the revised posts of responsibilities promote leadership of learning and meet the identified school needs. This includes the tracking, monitoring and feedback of student academic progress to help students have an increased awareness of how to improve.

School management and staff will continue to promote inquiry based learning and active student methodologies that enable students to lead their own learning.