whole-school-evaluation-management-leadership-and-learning-report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School name</th>
<th>St. Gerard's School</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School address</td>
<td>Thornhill Road</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bray</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Co Wicklow</td>
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Date of Evaluation: 11-03-2020
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, 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 directors’ 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 directors 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

Dates of inspection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>09-03-2020 - 11-03-2020</th>
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<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Meeting with parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Meeting with board of directors</td>
<td>• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires</td>
</tr>
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<td>• Meetings with principal and deputy principals</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 directors and teachers</td>
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School context

St Gerard’s School is a Catholic, co-educational, fee-charging voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 552 students. The school was founded in 1918 by John James, a teacher, and the school is currently administered by a board of directors registered as a charitable trust. The school provides the Junior Cycle, a compulsory Transition Year (TY) and the established Leaving Certificate programme.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of leadership and management is good; the senior management team and board of directors are very committed to the school, however, there is a lack of teacher representation on the board.
- The principal and deputy principals work together very effectively as a team.
- Students are empowered to develop their individual strengths through access to a very broad curriculum and extra-curricular opportunities in high-quality learning facilities, and through very good care supports.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good, with a few lessons needing improvement; differentiation practices and written formative feedback are general areas for development.
- Overall, the school has made good progress in implementing previous inspection recommendations, the school is engaging well with the school self-evaluation (SSE) process and the school’s capacity for improvement is very good.
- Some areas for development were noted in relation to deployment of resources, development of a core special educational needs (SEN) team and a more effective distribution of duties through the posts of responsibility.

Recommendations

- In light of the school’s atypical management structures and in the spirit of partnership as espoused in the Education Act, 1998, a school management structure should be developed that is inclusive of collective teacher voice.
- The recently commenced review of posts should be fully implemented in line with Circular 0003/2018; all teachers should be fully deployed in accordance with department guidelines.
- A core SEN team should be established and all of the additional teaching resources to support students with SEN should be used for their intended purpose in line with Circular
Teachers should extend the very good practice observed, in lessons where learning was differentiated to provide challenge and support as needed, and where students were provided with written formative feedback on how to improve their learning, to all lessons.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

Highly committed management and teachers and very effective structures support students’ wellbeing. These supports include the care team, year heads, tutors, teacher-student mentors, the wellbeing committee and the guidance department. A clear referral system is in place to assist students who need additional supports. Year heads liaise with parents and staff and support students to achieve their full potential. A very good transition programme from sixth class to post-primary school is in place which includes the Cara mentoring programme. Student, staff and parent questionnaire responses were very positive about student care and the good atmosphere in the school. The wellbeing committee steer a number of whole-school initiatives such as a wellbeing week and a cyberbullying prevention week. School management places a commendable emphasis on after-school participation in physical activity and team sports.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is delivered during Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) lessons at junior cycle and at senior cycle students complete RSE modules during Religious Education classes. It is commendable that a core team of trained teachers deliver the RSE programme at junior and senior cycle. Student and parent questionnaire responses suggest a greater need for consistency in the delivery of RSE and in providing parents with additional information about the delivery of the RSE programme.

The senior management team have taken measures to help ensure the successful implementation of curricular changes at junior cycle. The board and the senior management team ensure the provision of a very broad curriculum that meets the needs and interests of students. Physical Education (PE) has been recently introduced as an examinable Leaving Certificate subject and Coding has been introduced as a short course at Junior Cycle. Some fifth and sixth-year students do not have access to a timetabled class of PE and this needs to be addressed.

The coordination of the SEN department shows great commitment and expertise derived from the coordinating teachers’ additional qualifications. The SEN co-ordinators liaise closely with feeder primary schools and parents, assess students in school, present to staff on their learning from continuing professional development (CPD) events, develop student support plans and make teachers aware of students’ strengths and needs. Neither of the SEN coordinators who have additional qualifications to support them in teaching students with SEN are allocated for this purpose. A very large number of non-specialist teachers are deployed to provide for students with SEN. It is recommended that a core team which is inclusive of teachers with SEN qualifications and expertise is established. A small number of hours granted to support students with SEN have been deployed to provide some additional mainstream class groups in core subjects and this is not in line with Circular 007/2014. School management should ensure that all of the resources allocated to support students with SEN should be fully deployed and used for their intended purpose in line with Circular 0014/2017 and the Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools: Supporting Students with SEN in Mainstream Schools.
A whole school guidance plan outlines how guidance is delivered in the school. Timetabled guidance lessons are delivered to all senior cycle students and in addition individual guidance sessions are provided for fifth and sixth-year students. The guidance programme needs to be developed for junior cycle students to begin education and career guidance from first year onwards.

Student and parent questionnaire responses and feedback from the student focus group indicate that there is a need to review how students and parents are supported in making subject choices. Incoming first-year students make subject choice decisions in advance of starting school having attended an information evening. Students and their parents attend a subject information evening about Leaving Certificate subjects in third year. They then choose Leaving Certificate subjects to study in advance of Transition Year (TY). While there is some scope for students to change their subject choices during TY, this is not common practice. It is recommended that in line with best practice, TY students should be given the opportunity to sample a range of Leaving Certificate optional subjects and Leaving Certificate optional subjects should be chosen at the end of Transition Year.

School leaders strive for excellence by setting high expectations for students in all areas of school life. The senior management team shares a comprehensive analysis of Leaving Certificate examination results with the board, teachers and parents. Higher-level uptake in subjects and general attainment compare favourably with national norms.

The principal and other leaders in the school recognise the importance of the systematic monitoring of students’ progress and development. The school uses a software programme to ascertain if third and sixth-year students are achieving in line with their full potential. This very good practice should be extended to include tracking the ongoing progress of all students.

The school provides a very extensive range of extracurricular clubs and activities for students in varied areas including drama, languages, music, sport, debating and the arts. Students participate in a variety of competitions including Model United Nations, Concern debates and in national and international sporting events.

Managing the organisation

The school is managed by a board of directors which is comprised of current and former parents. Members of the board are deeply committed to the ongoing development of the school. The board and associated sub-committees meet regularly, and minutes are recorded. An agreed report of board meetings should be shared with teachers and parents. The principal attends board meetings and provides a report to the board on day-to-day school business. The board supports the principal and maintains very careful oversight of the school’s financial and physical resources. School buildings and grounds are maintained to a very high standard.

Commendably, in nearly all aspects of school life, those in leadership and management roles promote an inclusive school community. Currently, teachers do not have representation on the board of directors. During the inspection, teachers strongly expressed concerns about their lack of representation on the board. In light of the school’s atypical management structures and in the spirit of partnership as espoused in the Education Act 1998, a school management structure should be developed that is inclusive of collective teacher voice.

A wide range of policies have been ratified by the board. In some instances, a more timely review of policies is needed. A structured approach to policy review should be overseen by the board and the principal through the establishment of an index of policies and a calendar of review dates. Draft versions of policies are shared with teachers, the parents’ association and the students’ council, and
feedback is sought. Consideration should be given to including parents and students at an earlier stage in policy development.

Overall, resources are well deployed. However, there are some areas which require attention. Not all full-time teachers meet the minimum deployment criteria as outlined by the Department of Education. The board and the principal should ensure that teachers are fully deployed for their contracted teaching hours.

The principal and two deputy principals work very effectively together as a team and display very high levels of commitment to the school. They model a strong culture of mutual trust and shared accountability and create a very positive school climate which is underpinned by respectful interactions at all levels in the school community. They meet regularly during the week and have defined roles and responsibilities that ensure the effective day-to-day running of the school. The principal and deputy principals have established very effective in-school communication systems.

At the time of the inspection, most Assistant Principal (AP) I and AP II posts did not incorporate leadership of teaching and learning. In addition, duties were not always commensurate with the level of post held. It is noted that a review of posts of responsibility has recently commenced. This should now be fully implemented in line with circular 0003/2018.

**Leading school development**

Members of the board possess a varied and valuable range of skills and expertise. The board has invested considerable resources in creating classrooms and facilities designed to provide excellent environments for learning, and enhance student and teacher wellbeing. The board and the senior management team are proactive in supporting and encouraging teachers to pursue post-graduate studies and attend CPD events. The board should consider how it might strengthen its educational leadership role and seek to initiate and oversee ongoing developments in teaching and learning. There is a broad range of expertise amongst teachers, and the board should consider how it could further harness this capability in leading school development, for example, teachers pursuing post-graduate studies could be invited to present their learning to the board.

It is commendable that the information and communications technology (ICT) committee has undertaken much research work to inform recent investments in ICT devices and infrastructure. To support ongoing developments in the use of digital technologies in the classroom, the school’s digital plan should be further developed to outline current teaching and learning practices and plan for future initiatives.

School management has been proactive in reviewing and realising the guiding vision of the school. The school seeks to make students aware of their responsibilities as global citizens through exchange programmes, outreach programmes and international pilgrimages. It is praiseworthy that links have been created with the local community by sharing facilities, fundraising for local charities and TY students volunteering in the community.

The school has effective systems in place to communicate with parents including the school app, school website, emails, information evenings and parent-teacher meetings. Questionnaire findings suggest that ways to further include parent views should be considered by school management. The school benefits from a very committed and active parents’ association who are involved in many areas of school life including organising events and communicating with the parent body.

The board and principal have identified priority areas for future development and these are documented in the school plan. In order to progress the priority areas, a strategic action planning approach could be beneficial to school management.
Developing leadership capacity

It is good practice that new board members attend CPD to support them in their role. The senior management team endeavours to build capacity amongst staff by encouraging teachers to join working groups including the SSE taskforce and the ICT committee. In addition, all subject departments have a nominated coordinator and this was seen to work effectively.

There are very good opportunities for students to develop their leadership capacity in the school. These include the prefect system, fifth-year student mentors for first year and international students, TY leadership module, Green schools committee, ambassadors, Gaisce and captains of sports teams. A democratically elected students’ council represents students from all year groups. The council has progressed successful initiatives such as eliminating the use of disposable cups in the school. Consideration could be given to facilitating student council representatives to present to the board on their achievements.

It is commendable that the school regularly provides placements for students in initial teacher education (ITE) programmes and views these opportunities as valuable for all. One of the deputy principals is assigned to oversee the mentoring of student teachers. The school also provides the Droichead programme. Teacher questionnaire responses reveal that teachers new to the school feel very well supported. A teacher handbook supports newly appointed teachers by providing information on many areas of school life. It is suggested that effective teaching and learning practices in line with the school’s SSE strategies be included in the handbook.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Lessons were observed over a range of subjects, class groups, levels and programmes. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good, with a few lessons needing improvement. Differentiation practices and written formative feedback are general areas for development.

Learner outcomes and experiences

Overall, students demonstrated very good interest and engagement in their learning. They were given many opportunities to work collaboratively, as well as working independently in a purposeful manner. They co-operated very well with each other. Interactions in lessons between students and teachers, and among students themselves were very respectful and positive. The school’s commitment to student wellbeing was evident in lessons. In the majority of lessons, students were highly engaged and motivated. They were keen to contribute to class discussion, asking questions and confidently suggesting possible answers. Their responses to teachers’ questions revealed curiosity, knowledge and understanding. Their enjoyment of learning and their motivation was palpable. In student questionnaires, almost all students responded that ICT was used regularly in lessons and there was strong evidence of the use of ICT in the lessons observed. In the majority of lessons, audio visual and ICT resources were effectively integrated and used to promote and consolidate learning.

Teachers’ individual and collective practice

Overall, lessons observed were well planned, well-paced and there was good transitions between activities. The highly effective lessons were characterised by the provision of resources and materials that were both supportive and challenging, giving students the structure and stimulus necessary to build and extend their understanding. In these lessons, the teaching approaches and learning activities developed students’ understanding and provided opportunities for them to consolidate relevant skills. A significant minority of lessons lacked the planning and preparation required to fully
challenge the very able and support the more challenged students. Where scope for development in lesson preparation was identified, materials and resources did not meet the needs of learners at different stages of learning. Teachers should extend the very good practice observed in many lessons, where learning was differentiated to provide challenge and support as needed.

In the highly effective lessons, it was evident that teachers had a passion for their subject and excellent subject knowledge. They used their expertise and enthusiasm to create and develop rich learning opportunities for students. They expertly combined subject knowledge and pedagogical skill and varied methodologies to enhance student engagement. In a few lessons, there was an imbalance between teacher and student voice and this led to a lack of engagement and student passivity. Good and very good questioning was observed in the majority of lessons. In the highly effective lessons, a range of question types was used, from basic recall to higher-order questioning requiring students to link prior and new learning, or to explain and justify their responses. In a minority of lessons there was an over-use of global questions to the whole class.

Highly effective or effective use was made of in-class formative assessment strategies in most lessons observed. Learning intentions were shared with students in terms of what they would know and be able to do by the end of the lesson. Expressing learning intentions in this way enabled teachers to revisit the learning intentions to review learning, during and at the end of the lesson. In these lessons, teachers regularly assessed student progress and adapted lessons as necessary to meet students’ emerging learning needs. In some lessons, learning intentions were expressed in terms of the lesson focus or content. The good practice outlined above should be adopted by all teachers.

A review of a selection of student written work revealed that a significant minority of teachers provided students with written formative feedback to improve their learning. All teachers should adopt the very good practice observed in some cases, where students were provided with written feedback on their progress in learning and given guidance on how to improve.

There are many instances of highly effective collective teacher practice. Teachers share learning derived from continuing professional development and some teachers participate in informal peer observation. Digital resources are shared through the school’s learning platform. All subject departments engage in subject learning and assessment review meetings. Regular subject department meetings are held alongside informal discussion of teaching and learning. The quality of subject department planning reviewed varies. The majority of subject department plans reviewed are of a good standard, with time-bound learning outcomes, success criteria and references to resources. In addition, the highly effective plans also include reflection on practice and include reference to how the school self-evaluation targets are achieved at subject-specific level. In these plans, assessment is clearly aligned to learning outcomes. However, in some cases, subject plans do not reflect the quality of teaching and learning observed in lessons. These plans are content focused, with little detail provided. The highly effective department planning described above should be adopted by all subject departments.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Overall, good progress has been made in the implementation of recommendations arising from the following inspections: Religious Education 2019, TY 2017, Spanish 2016, Science and Physics 2015, and the WSE-MLL 2011.

Leadership and Management

Progress on leadership and management recommendations is satisfactory overall. Very good progress is noted in the provision of additional science laboratories and in supporting teachers to
report on students’ learning in TY. However, no progress has been made in including teacher and parent nominees in the school’s management structure and opportunities for student sampling of Leaving Certificate subjects is not yet an integral part of the TY programme.

**Teaching and Learning**

Very good progress has been made in many of the teaching and learning recommendations including students in language lessons being provided with opportunities to use the target language. Previous recommendations made in relation to subject planning should be adopted by all subject departments. Formative written feedback and differentiation remain areas for further development.

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

**The School’s Self-Evaluation Process**

The school has engaged well with the SSE process. A school self-improvement plan has been drafted; qualitative and quantitative data has been gathered, targets and some strategies have been identified. To further progress the work in this area, SSE targets which are specific, measurable and attainable should be devised and processes for monitoring achievement on an ongoing basis should be developed. It is recommended that SSE be a standing item on the agenda of meetings of the board, staff and subject departments. Currently, an annual SSE report is not shared with parents and the wider community and this should be addressed.

**The School’s Capacity for Improvement**

The school has very good capacity for improvement. The senior management team has already progressed some of the areas identified for development in the report including a review of the posts of responsibility system.
# 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>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.</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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<td>Good</td>
<td>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.</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>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.</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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<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>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.</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>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.</td>
<td>Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;</td>
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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Directors
Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Directors of St. Gerard’s School is pleased and encouraged by this WSE MLL report and would like to acknowledge all stakeholders for their hard work and commitment which is endorsed throughout this report.

This report shines a light on the significant and meaningful practices we employ in our school community daily through the strong commitment and dedication of the entire school community.

The Board of Directors note the following findings:

- In relation to school leadership that - “School leaders strive for excellence by setting high expectations for students in all areas of school life” and that “commendably, in nearly all aspects of school life, those in leadership and management roles promote an inclusive school community”.

- In relation to the teaching and learning that - “the overall quality of teaching and learning is very good”; “students were highly engaged and motivated”; “their enjoyment of learning and their motivation was palpable”, and furthermore that “it was evident that teachers had a passion for their subject and excellent subject knowledge” as “they used their expertise and enthusiasm to create and develop rich learning opportunities for students.”

- In relation to the management of the organisation that - “they model a strong culture of mutual trust and shared accountability and create a very positive school climate which is underpinned by very respectful interactions at all levels in the school community” which is reflected in “highly committed management and teachers and very effective structures support students’ wellbeing”.

- In relation to curricular and co-curricular activities that - “students are empowered to develop their individual strengths through access to a very broad curriculum and extra-curricular opportunities in high-quality learning facilities, and through very good care supports” and that “The board has invested considerable resources in creating classrooms and facilities designed to provide excellent environments for learning, and enhanced student and teacher wellbeing”.

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 Directors welcomes the observation that “Members of the Board are deeply committed to the ongoing development of school”. With regards to the recommendation that, “In light of the school’s atypical management structures and in the spirit of partnership as espoused in the Education Act 1998, a school’s management structure should be developed that is inclusive of collective teacher voice” – while the school is currently managed in an open, inclusive and democratic manner, the Board of Directors commits to exploring the incorporation of the collective teacher voice into the School’s Management Structure.

To ensure that we continue to provide the highest quality of education for our students, the Board notes the Inspectors’ Recommendations for further development, which have been and will be given due and in-depth consideration by all relevant stakeholders.

The overall recommendations in the WSE MLL Report are constructive and as such will be an integral aspect of the school’s Self-Evaluation Process and School Improvement Plan in this and in future years. Indeed, much work and progress has been undertaken in relation to the recommendations to date.

Published January 2021 / Foilsithe Eanáir 2021