An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ainm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Rice College</th>
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| Seoladh na scoile / School address | New Road
Ennis
Co. Clare |
| Uimhir rolla / Roll number | 61910K |

Date of Evaluation: 05 April 2017
WHAT IS A WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING?
Whole-School Evaluations – Management, Leadership and Learning report on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. They affirm good practice and make 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.
INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>03-05 April 2017</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting with board of management and a representative of ERST.</td>
<td>Meeting with parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meetings with principal and deputy principal</td>
<td>Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meetings with key staff</td>
<td>Observation of teaching and learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>Examination of students’ work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student focus-group interview</td>
<td>Interaction with students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Feedback meetings to the senior management team, to the board of management and a representative of ERST, and to the teachers</td>
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SCHOOL CONTEXT

Rice College is a co-educational, voluntary secondary school, located in Ennis. The school’s current enrolment is 643 students. The school operates under the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST), whose ethos is central to the school’s identity, as are its long-standing links with the town. Enrolment is very stable as most incoming first-year students’ transfer from the adjacent Christian Brothers Primary School. Rice College is heavily over-subscribed, and this situation is likely to continue into the future given the pupil numbers in the main feeder primary school. This stability in enrolment provides a positive context for the school to progress developments in key aspects of leadership and management, teaching and learning, and student support.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- Management structures in the school are in immediate need of improvement.

- Teachers and senior management are very committed to the holistic development of students; a wide co-curricular and extra-curricular programme is in place, and the main mixed-ability class groupings have a consequential positive impact on students’ expectations and outcomes.

- In the majority of lessons observed the quality of teaching and of learning was good or very good, and in a few lessons it was fair.

- Student care structures have been going through a period of transition and, although key personnel are in place and they are actively supporting students, the procedures in this area need to be updated.

- Those resource hours which are timetabled by the school for students with special educational needs (SEN) are used appropriately, however, timetabling including the allocation of resources to students with SEN and the allocation of time to some teachers for non-teaching duties is in need of review.

- Good progress has been made in relation to the implementation of the recommendations in previous inspection reports, though poor progress has been made to date in advancing school self-evaluation.
- At time of the evaluation, the teachers of English were not fully implementing the school-based assessment aspects of the junior cycle specification; the reason was reported to be industrial action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Under the oversight of the board, the senior and middle management structures within the school need to be reformed to reflect the improvement agenda that will form part of the new board’s priorities for development.
- The role of principal needs to be used more effectively to lead developments in the school.
- A review of the school’s curriculum should be undertaken to ensure that the school is actively preparing to meet requirements for the implementation of the junior cycle framework.
- The deployment of teaching resources, including those for students with special educational needs, should be reviewed to ensure optimum and appropriate use of all the resources allocated to the school.
- The operation of the school’s student support team should be reviewed using the guidance provided in the published document Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools.
- Key whole-school aspects of teaching and learning, including the use of assessment for learning strategies, should be actively advanced using the school self-evaluation (SSE) process.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

School ownership and management

The board of management, appointed in October 2016, is properly constituted. Its members bring a variety of educational and non-educational experience that will contribute well to the operational and decision-making processes that will be required of the board. It has established a number of sub-committees to advance progress in key areas including the development of the school’s physical infrastructure. The board is currently formulating developmental priorities for its tenure, which aim to provide continuity with those of the preceding board, as well as meeting the emerging needs of the school. It has recognised the need to adapt its working systems. As an initial development, the recording of board minutes has been adapted using guidelines provided by the management bodies. A further development in the conduct of board meetings has been decided upon; this is the inclusion of standing agenda items to enable in-school developments in teaching and learning and school self-evaluation (SSE) to be discussed on a regular basis. These developments will support the work involved in updating the school plan to reflect the board’s priorities and ongoing engagement with policy review.

The operation of the board benefits from the support provided by the trustees, including the training provided. Overall, the board members were open in their interactions with inspectors and demonstrated the capacity and willingness to discuss the issues that emerged.
The parents’ association is well established in the school. The parent nominees on the board, interviewed as part of the evaluation, were well informed about the association’s role, as they are also committee members of the association. Capacity is good within the association to progress a developmental agenda including both parent and student priorities and the development of the school’s infrastructure. The survey conducted with a sample of parents during the evaluation indicates that scope exists to further inform the wider parent body of the work of the association. It is suggested that this form part of association’s developmental agenda.

**Effectiveness of leadership for learning**

The quality of leadership and management requires improvement. The day-to-day operation of the school is managed through a clear division of duties between the principal and deputy principal. During the evaluation they reported that they have developed and maintained a positive working relationship. While they have clearly identifiable roles, it is of particular concern that these roles have not evolved adequately over the years to include the progression of a teaching and learning agenda; this is necessary to ensure that adequate leadership of learning is in place.

The deputy principal has primary responsibility for the management of student attendance, the application of the code of behaviour, and managing and providing cover for absent teachers, while the principal’s responsibilities include student management and leading school-based initiatives. While students are well managed, it is evident that the management approach that predominates in many areas is more reactive than proactive. Insufficient attention is paid to forward planning for the development of the school’s systems and processes, especially in relation to progressing teaching and learning focussed initiatives. While much work has been delegated and such distributed leadership can be very effective, there is a lack of oversight of the progression of the actions required to ensure the successful implementation of these initiatives.

Of immediate concern is the development of a clear vision for improving the school across a number of areas including curriculum planning, planning for students with special educational needs, developing student support structures and ensuring that the duties and responsibilities of senior and middle management reflect the school priorities from both an educational and administrative perspective. The needs of students need to be placed more at the centre of decision-making processes and the greater involvement of parents in decision-making is also needed.

The posts of responsibility were last reviewed in 2010. This review process was protracted, taking two years to complete, with no further review until recently when the new board initiated a review of the post structure. This review was necessitated by a change in the number and profile of post holders, the need to achieve greater equity in the distribution of duties, and to ensure that the duties reflect the level of responsibility attached to the post. Existing post holders provide an optional oral report to staff on the completion of their duties. It is recommended that this process extend to providing the board with an annual written report on the completion of duties. This would provide a forum to discuss how the posts are operating and how they might evolve to further meet the developmental priorities of the school. It would also provide scope to agree changes that might be necessitated where aspects of the posts no longer remain relevant to the school’s needs or are not practicable. The principal’s leadership and management role in ensuring these objectives are progressed will be very important.

Considerable effort and commitment on the part of teachers and the principal and deputy principal underpins the school’s extra-curricular and co-curricular provision. The breadth of activities is balanced between sporting and academic. It provides a full range of opportunities for students to engage in an activity that is suited to them.
The school offers a broad curriculum with a wide number of subjects provided in both junior and senior cycle. Of particular merit is the school’s commitment to the organisation of classes at junior cycle into mixed ability groupings, with setting in Mathematics and Irish from second year onward. The commitment of staff and management to this method of class organisation, and its consequential impact on expectations, contributes to the above average level of higher level take-up in subjects in certificate examinations.

At the time of the evaluation there had been no engagement by staff with the junior cycle framework or the relevant training available to support the implementation the programme to date. The reason for this was reported to be industrial action. While some classroom-based assessments for English had been completed, no subject learning and review meetings had been conducted. During the evaluation it was evident that teachers and management had insufficient awareness of the impact of the junior cycle in terms of subject provision and the requirements of the relevant Department circulars for the implementation of the programme for forthcoming years.

The principal liaises with the Department with respect to the school’s teacher allocation and at school level is responsible for the allocation of teachers and students to class groups. There is currently a gap in expertise in the area of timetabling, specifically the use of timetabling software, which needs to be filled urgently. One approach to addressing this would be the creation of a team of people from the staff who could support the principal in this work. The existence of such a team would guarantee that, in the event of personnel changes, sufficient expertise would remain in the school to produce a viable and efficient timetable. A significant advantage in the current timetable structure is that the school already provides forty-minute periods for each class, which is a requirement for implementation of the new junior cycle framework. The timetable also has core elements in place around which the school’s wellbeing programme can be developed. However, the inspectors review noted that not all of the full-time teachers are currently timetabled so that their class-contact time is maximised. In some instances, potential class contact time is used to facilitate some teachers in carrying out various management functions. However, in other cases no such accommodation exists. This situation needs to be reviewed and every effort should be made to ensure any such inequities are addressed, in order to maintain good staff relations and cohesion.

The school’s structures for student support have been going through a period of transition. Changes brought about through the retirement of post holders, including some involved in student care. Currently, the operation of school’s student support team centres on the roles of year heads and, in the case of first-year students, volunteer class tutors also play a significant role. The work of year head and class tutors is complemented by supports provided by the guidance counsellor and deputy principal. Though key roles have been identified, it is evident that the way in which the roles are carried out is largely dependent on the individual approach of the personnel involved. An immediate development should be to establish regular meetings of the team, a step which would serve to strengthen communications in relation to student support issues. Overall, the school’s student support structures should be reviewed using the guidance provided in the publication Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools.

The school’s ongoing development of its structures for the transition of students to first year includes developing student leadership through the school’s mentoring programme. Given that the responses of students to the questionnaire administered as part of the evaluation process indicate that students would like a greater say in how things are done in the school, the school should explore how this programme, and the work of the student council can have a higher profile in the school as mechanisms for promoting student leadership and student voice.
The school has three fully qualified teachers for students with special educational needs (SEN) and these teachers, including the co-ordinator play pivotal roles in the delivery of SEN supports to students. Overall, sixteen teachers are involved in the provision of support. In keeping with good practice, a smaller number of teachers should be involved to ensure continuity of supports to students.

The SEN co-ordinator and guidance counsellor work with the feeder primary schools to profile incoming first-year students and the school is moving to a new assessment testing system for profiling incoming students. A register of the needs of all students in receipt of resource hours has been compiled, and individualised learning profiles for these students have been completed. However, less formalised is the development of learning plans for students in receipt of learning support, and the systems by which additional learning needs are identified and provision put in place for these students. In addition, in mainstream settings, the learning support and resource hours are mainly deployed to the withdrawal of students individually for additional support in the areas of literacy and numeracy. These systems will need to be further developed in light of the ongoing changes to the allocation model for schools due to commence in September 2017.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

**Management of facilities**

The school is currently pursuing an infrastructural project to develop an adjacent site which will increase the school’s accommodation and provide for additional specialist classrooms. This development is needed as the school is on a restricted site and, while well maintained, some corridors are narrow and the school lacks general circulation space for students.

Information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure is currently being developed and a well-formulated e-Learning plan is in place that identifies time-bound actions for development. When the associated continuing professional development (CPD) requirements of staff are addressed, this will ensure that teaching and learning priorities in the use of the technology can be advanced.

The school is currently reviewing its commercially produced health and safety statement. Staff-led risk assessments have been completed in key areas. However, as advised during the inspection, safe operating areas should be demarcated around all machines in practical rooms and student egress points should be addressed.

A new administration software package is being introduced to the school, to be completed over the summer of 2017. This will provide the school with the potential to improve in-school communication systems and to develop the student attendance management system, by providing valuable in-time data for the management of the school.

**QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

Subject department structures are well established in the school. Collective practice within departments is evident. Very good practice exists in many departments in the use of common summative assessments at main testing periods. Whole-school literacy and numeracy statements are
also included in plans. These whole-school elements require further developments to how they will be implemented. In a number of instances, subject departments have started to discuss and trial varied pedagogical approaches, and this work is commendable.

The lessons observed were well managed in terms of student movement, students’ readiness for lessons and in many cases, the use of seating plans for junior cycle classes. Lessons were well prepared and where practice was very good, new material was introduced by activating students’ prior knowledge through intensive oral questioning. Learning intentions, when used, were mainly shared orally. Overall, intentions should be more explicitly shared in order to increase the scope for differentiation and review and assess student learning during and at the end of the lesson. Further development of learning intentions to include both learning and doing dimensions is needed to encourage active learning opportunities being built into lesson planning.

Oral questioning techniques were very good and included strategies to test knowledge and recall, and in many instances included both lower and higher-order questions. Whole-class and targeted questioning was evident, though whole-class questioning approaches should promote greater participation by girls in this aspect of lessons.

Many of the lessons observed were teacher-led, with pair work the main mechanism for encouraging students to engage in collaborative learning. Very few examples of group work were observed in the lessons inspected. Better planned pair tasks, evolving into more strategic group-based tasks over time, would achieve deeper student engagement in learning and in students’ development of a wider range of learning skills.

Mutually respectful interactions were evident between teachers and students and among students. Room layout was mainly traditional, though this is a factor of both class size and room dimensions in some instances. Teachers circulated around classrooms to check on student progress during the lessons.

A number of subject departments are leading good practice in developing the school’s print environment by involving students in project work and the development of subject-specific materials. In addition, some very effective uses of information and communication technologies (ICT) were noted, where students were directed to use ICT to assess their own learning against exemplars of similar work.

Teachers have high expectations of students’ ability and work rates. Homework is frequently assigned and teachers monitor copybooks, ensuring that completion rates are high. Homework is most frequently corrected as a whole-class activity, an approach which does not provide sufficient opportunity to reflect on the quality of the work completed or to give direct feedback to students on areas for improvement. A small number of teachers are providing very good quality written formative feedback to students and a number have also been trialling self-assessment strategies, based on teacher-led parameters, as a means of students taking a greater role in determining areas for improvement. More widespread use of these assessment for learning (AfL) strategies would further develop students’ capacities as learners.

Lessons where engagement and motivation were very good were lessons where students were provided with a very good mix of independent and collaborative learning opportunities, and where student voice was high.
Overall, in the majority of lessons the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good, with a few instances where it was fair. The quality of assessment varied, though a majority of lessons had good or very good practices.

IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Management

An analysis of the most recent recommendations in inspection reports indicates that good progress has been achieved in many aspects, including the development of the learning environment, subject plans and the Transition Year (TY) programme. Individual subject departments have, with the support of the principal, worked collaboratively to achieve this level of progress and this is highly commended.

Learning and teaching

Following an analysis of previous inspection reports, inspectors followed up on progress on specific recommendations made in relation to learning and teaching. In the majority of lessons, the learning intentions used, along with the associated learning activities, provided scope for differentiation. The majority of lessons included collaborative learning in the form of pair work, though there were very few examples of group work. The recommendation in which least progress has been made is the provision of written developmental feedback to students on their work. Practice is greatly individualised, with some teachers developing their own techniques including trialling self-assessment strategies. Mechanisms for sharing the outcomes of these approaches with all staff would help develop practice.

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

Poor progress has been made in relation to SSE. At the time of the evaluation, only one school self-evaluation report and associated school improvement plan had been fully completed, despite the requirements outlined in Circular 0040/2012. The process used to identify school improvement targets involved teachers’ individually setting subject-specific tests for their class groups and reflecting on the outcomes in terms of students’ literacy development. This did not provide data that could be easily collated. Neither did the actions that were adopted provide scope for the tracking of whole-school measurable targets for literacy improvement. The lack of a whole-school approach, the absence of parent and student reflection and/or measurable outcomes, seriously weakens the process.

Among the advantages to the school in progressing future improvements in SSE are the systems that are in place to analyse student outcomes in certificate examinations and the new assessment testing system being introduced for in-coming first years. Using this data, and applying the six-step SSE process, could support improved engagement with SSE. The principal’s role in leading this will be of critical importance in developing the school’s capacity for improvement.
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

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

The Board of Management of Rice College is very pleased to welcome the MLL report and the acknowledgement that the ERST ethos is central to the school’s identity with the commitment to the holistic development of students also recognised. The Board welcomes the Inspector’s observations including:

- The good or very good quality of teaching observed
- The progress of individual subject Department’s in the implementation of the recommendations in previous inspection reports with the support of the principal
- The considerable effort and commitment of the principal, deputy principal and staff to extra-curricular activities and co-curricular provision
- The broad curriculum available to students.
- The school’s commitment to the organisation of classes at junior cycle into mixed ability classes
- The above average take up of Higher level subjects in Certificate examinations.
- The well formulated e-learning plan in place that identifies time-bound actions for development

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, with its partners in Education, will continue to actively engage in addressing issues raised in this report through regular review and evaluation. It will strive, as always, to provide the highest quality teaching and learning in a supportive and caring environment. As industrial action in all schools has now been suspended, the Board, principal and staff will be in a position to engage more effectively in holding planning and evaluation meetings to progress further the leadership of teaching and learning. The Board of Management is confident that, in co-operation with the school partners, its realistic targets to implement the recommendations, which have already commenced, will be met without delay.
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 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><strong>Very good</strong> 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><strong>Good</strong> 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><strong>Satisfactory</strong> 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><strong>Fair</strong> 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><strong>Weak</strong> 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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