

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Blarney Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	62090D

Date of Evaluation: 19 October 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 point 4 above and therefore was not fully compliant with the checks undertaken.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	17 – 19 October 2018
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with Board of Management• Meetings with principal and deputy principals• 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

Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál is a co-educational voluntary secondary school, founded in 1952 and operating under the trusteeship of the Diocese of Cloyne. It has undergone a period of growth in the last decade, with the construction of a new building imminent. It offers the Junior Cycle programme, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate (Established) (LCE). It has a current enrolment of 767 students.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of school management and leadership is good; the senior management team provides valuable, dedicated leadership and, in conjunction with the staff, is fully committed to fulfilling the aims of the mission statement of the school.
- There is a dedicated special educational needs (SEN) team which is committed to the progress of the students in their care; some aspects of whole-school practice need to be reviewed.
- Members of the board of management are dedicated to the school and are supportive of the principal; there are some areas of the board's functioning which require improvement.
- Overall, the quality of teaching, learning, and assessment is very good; numerous examples of highly effective practice were observed that could be shared at whole-school level.
- There is a very good capacity for improvement evident in the school.
- The school was not fully compliant in relation to the Child Protection checks undertaken at the time of inspection.

Recommendations

- In the context of some very good practice in the area of SEN, the use of the allocated SEN hours should be reviewed and adjusted to conform to the requirements of circular 14/2017.
- The board should align elements of its practice highlighted in this report with the Articles of Management of the Joint Managerial Body for Secondary Schools (JMB), including the effective management of meetings, the policy development process, communication with the wider school community and the creation of a finance subcommittee.
- Building on the good work already undertaken, the board and senior management team, in partnership with the staff, should develop and action a strategic plan for the school that will put in place efficient and forward-looking systems and structures that will support the school, the staff and its students, as numbers increase.

- The very good practices observed in relation to teaching, learning, and assessment should be shared across departments and, through school self-evaluation (SSE) plans, at whole-school level.
- The school needs to become fully compliant with the requirements of the Department of Education and Skills Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2017.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of school leadership and management is good.

Leading learning and teaching

The quality of leadership for learning is good. The principal and two deputy principals form an effective team, providing valuable leadership. They have clearly defined roles and responsibilities that are both complementary and overlapping. They are very dedicated and committed to the school, and to the creation of a safe, welcoming environment where every student is valued “as an individual with different learning needs, abilities and learning patterns”. They are supportive of the staff and encouraging of continuous professional development (CPD). Teachers reported that they felt valued, consulted and supported.

The school provides a very broad curriculum and is fully engaged in providing a Junior Cycle programme underpinned by the principles of the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015). In first year, students study seven core subjects, including French or German, and short courses in CSPE and PE. In addition, students choose three optional subjects prior to entry. Students are taught in mixed-ability classes throughout Junior Cycle, except for Mathematics, which is streamed at the start of second year. In TY, students have the opportunity to sample all subjects again, including those they have not studied at Junior Cycle, so that they are fully informed before choosing subjects for senior cycle. Students and parents were positive with regard to the current system of subject choice.

The school has been innovative in developing a short course in life skills, which currently focuses on meeting the needs of students with SEN. The school is considering offering this short course to all students. All students in Junior Cycle have a double period of Physical Education (PE) per week but, due to space and timetabling decisions, students taking higher level Mathematics or LCVP in senior cycle have no access to PE. This will need to be addressed, and the school has plans to do so, in the context of the construction of the new school building.

The very effective TY programme is responsive to students’ needs. It provides a wide range of new learning experiences, including a recently introduced coding module. The use of a dedicated TY journal, to assist students in reflecting on their learning and experiences, is very valuable.

Smaller mainstream classes in English, Irish and Mathematics are created in all year groups, through the use of resources allocated under the revised allocation model for students with SEN. This use, and the use of the allocation to enhance subject provision and provide guidance hours, is not consistent with the requirements of circular 14/2017. This will need to be reviewed and addressed. As part of this review, the development of team teaching, which has been part of the school’s practice in the past, should be revisited.

The school has developed an innovative system that enables all teachers, and especially year heads, to track individual students’ holistic academic progress. Arising from the literacy and numeracy group, and in consultation with the SEN and Guidance departments, the excellent use of this data-informed system has been modified and developed in a cycle of ongoing improvement to support students’ learning.

There are very good links between the school and its feeder primary schools, with a comprehensive transfer programme in place to support students. Senior management has dedicated significant

resources to ensuring a smooth transition for students. There are two year heads assigned to first year: one moves with the current year group, the other is permanently dedicated to working with first year students.

The care structures in the school are good. There are weekly, timetabled, junior year head and senior year head meetings and a weekly care team meeting. A representative from senior management always attends these meetings. It is suggested that representation from the SEN and Guidance departments at the year head meetings would strengthen the school's approach to student support and allow for more efficient use of time, particularly as student numbers within the school increase.

Year heads remain with their year group as they progress through the school, developing long-term relationships with students and their families. There is a need, particularly as enrolment increases, to explore ways in which year heads can have contact with their year group on a regular basis throughout the week, to support student wellbeing, and to make effective and efficient use of the time year heads have available for this important role.

The team coordinating support for students with SEN is dedicated and committed to the progress of students in its care. In addition to a number of staff undertaking relevant CPD, two staff members have completed postgraduate studies in the area of SEN. A draft policy has been developed in light of the revised allocation model for students with SEN. The number of individual teachers involved in the provision of support has been reduced significantly in the recent past, in line with good practice, with a commitment from senior management to reduce it further.

The school regularly provides placements for student teachers. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome and is among the standards in the Teaching Council's Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers as it can provide valuable benefits for all members of the school community.

Managing the organisation

There are many strengths in the management of the school but there are also a number of important areas for development. The members of the board of management are committed to the school and are supportive of the work of the senior management team. They have regular meetings and provide an agreed report to staff. A review of roles and responsibilities in the school has been overseen by the board and it is supportive of the changes resulting from this review.

The board has identified a number of priorities for the school, including areas related to the development of a digital strategy, the development of student voice, and managing the needs of an evolving school. The board reports that it wants to ensure that the inclusive spirit of the school transfers to the new school building. This is a matter of importance, given the relatively young age-profile of the current staff and the likelihood that there will be a significant increase in the number of staff over the coming years.

The board is aware that there are areas requiring improvement to strengthen its operation. These relate to the effective management of meetings, communication with the wider school community, and the creation of a finance subcommittee. Consequently, the board should align these aspects of its operation to the Articles of Management as outlined by the JMB and put processes in place for the systematic development, ratification and review of policies. In addition, board members should avail of training with regard to their role.

All required policies have been ratified by the board. The format of the recently ratified child safeguarding statement needs to be changed to align with the requirements of the Department of Education and Skills Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2017.

A clear admissions policy is in place; some aspects should be reviewed to reflect the inclusive practice in place in the school. The health and safety statement should also be reviewed and updated.

Multiple versions of the code of behaviour are in use across the school. This key document needs to be reviewed and updated to outline the supportive, positive interventions that are in place. The extent to which this code can support students to achieve the high expectations the school has outlined for them in the mission statement should be borne in mind. When finalised, one version should be used in all documentation to ensure a consistent vision for the school is maintained across all stakeholders.

The school has a very useful and informative mobile phone application available to download, a strong presence on social media and a comprehensive website. It is suggested that all key school policies should be made available on the school website.

Management of school facilities is very good, given the considerable constraints of the current school building. A very welcoming school environment has been created, and behaviour of students is very good. The senior management team has ensured that facilities for the ongoing development of practice in the use of digital technologies are available when needed.

Leading school development

The leadership of school development is good. Staff committees work in areas including wellbeing, digital learning and policy review. Senior management has been pro-active in visiting other schools to get advice and share practice, especially in relation to digital technologies and planning for the transfer to the new building.

The development of a high-quality digital learning plan, with its initial focus on staff collaboration and CPD, is very positive. The focus of the plan is now on supporting students in their learning, inside and outside the classroom.

Nine key areas for development, which align with the priorities set by the board, are identified in a high-quality school improvement plan for the 2018-2020 period. SMART (specific, measurable, assigned, realistic, timebound) targets have been set for each area. In light of the school's recent review of roles and responsibilities, the school should look to further develop the strategic role of middle leadership in leading school development through the development and implementation of this plan.

As reflected in the questionnaire results from parents, and identified in the school plan, the school should review communication with parents and how parents are actively involved in the change processes happening in the school community. Consideration should be given to developing a more defined role for the parents' association in this regard.

Developing leadership capacity

The school's development of leadership capacity is good. The school has recently undertaken a substantial review of posts of responsibility and is in the process of appointing staff to the areas of need identified at a whole-school level. The staff bring enthusiasm and professionalism to these roles and are eager to develop their areas of responsibility. Senior management should consider how middle leadership can meet regularly, as this group can have strategic oversight, be responsible

for the actioning of whole-school initiatives and have a holistic view of the school. Other identified roles – in areas such as the development of teaching and learning, Junior Cycle assessment and reporting, and programme coordination – should also inform the work of this group.

A well-organised student council meets regularly. Students speak very positively about their experience on the council. Fifth-year students have an opportunity to become trained mentors to first-year students through the Meitheal programme. To strengthen student voice, an area for development identified in the school plan and in student questionnaires distributed during this evaluation, further student involvement in policy development and SSE processes could be explored by the student council in coming years.

There is a very significant commitment to extra-curricular and co-curricular activities on the part of staff. This substantial provision caters for all interests; sporting, artistic, musical and scientific. It brings to life the school's commitment to the holistic development of the students and is greatly valued by students and parents.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Overall, the quality of teaching, learning, and assessment is very good; numerous examples of highly effective practice were observed during the evaluation.

Learner outcomes and experiences

Overall student learning outcomes and experiences are very good. During the evaluation, the relationships observed between teachers and students were positive in almost all instances, supporting strong levels of student engagement. Students displayed very good levels of motivation. Examples of this included the capacity of students to work very well for extended periods of time, with teacher support, in a number of lessons.

Good levels of understanding were observed in most lessons. On occasion, further opportunities to elicit prior learning at the outset of lessons would have added value to students' learning. In a small number of lessons, opportunities to check in on student learning were overlooked. Increased frequency of this practice would have served to correct and advance understanding.

Well thought-out and engaging activities were planned in many lessons. In a majority of lessons, these were enacted very effectively, with well-paced activities keeping students on-task and learning on-target. Where lessons were most effective, teachers shared learning intentions with students. In other instances, students were provided with effective scaffolding to ensure that all members of the class would experience success in their learning. Student understanding was further supported where learning was consolidated at the end of lessons. Ways to share and develop these very good practices should be included in agendas for subject department meetings.

In addition, in a small number of instances, very good practice was observed where students were expected to reflect on their own learning and were encouraged to seek additional learning opportunities. These approaches developed a sense of responsibility for students' own learning, along with the skills needed to manage that learning. Their adoption should be considered across subject departments.

Very good practice relating to pair and group work was observed in numerous instances, including the use of well-organised, co-operative learning strategies. These latter approaches encouraged extended discussion among students, facilitating the development of students' verbal reasoning.

Very good examples of formative feedback were observed in different lessons. These incorporated teacher feedback on students' work, but also the provision of feedback to students by their peers.

Teachers scaffolded these approaches through the provision and co-creation of success criteria. Teacher modelling of assessment informed students' assessment literacy in a small number of instances. This incorporated the use of a visualiser in both instances, which provided clear and effective instruction to students. It is recommended that, to support the further development of students' assessment skills, visualisers should be distributed more widely across classrooms, where feasible.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

Teachers' individual and collective practice was of a very good standard. Learning environments presented as secure spaces where students felt free to participate in classroom discussions, and very effective classroom management was observed in all instances. Classrooms incorporated different visual elements to support student learning. Well-embedded strategies to support student literacy were observed in numerous lessons. These included displays in classrooms, as well as a focus on subject-specific language. In addition, an emphasis on students' oral use of key terms was emphasised in some lessons.

Digital technologies were used frequently, to very good effect, by students and teachers. In the context of the current digital learning plan, the school anticipates the further development of digital technologies to support learning, particularly through the identification of a unified platform through which teachers and students can communicate and work.

The subject department planning process is well-embedded in the school. An opportunity exists to further develop the process with continuing, explicit focus on the sharing of good practice, professional expertise, and experience. Subject improvement plans are in place and the analysis of results in the certificate examinations is underway. In this latter area, trends should be identified to inform departmental improvement plans. Improvement plans should incorporate SMART targets so that actions are time-linked and specific. Good examples of this practice were identified in a number of plans.

The move to collective digital planning is very positive and presents an opportunity for enhanced efficiency and communication, along with the streamlining of current paper-based subject plans.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

There is very good implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations.

Leadership and Management

The school has enacted recommendations from previous evaluations in most instances. It is suggested that the board should put in place a system for sharing the learning from inspection processes and reports, and a system for responding formally to reports at board level.

Teaching and Learning

There is clear evidence in subject plans and lesson observations that recommendations made in previous subject inspections, relating to teaching and learning, have been considered and acted upon.

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

The school's engagement with the self-evaluation process is good.

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school has undertaken an initial cycle of SSE which focused on literacy, numeracy, and Assessment for Learning. Aspects relating to the literacy focus are well-embedded in daily classroom practice and the school community. It is very positive that a member of middle management has recently been appointed to co-ordinate SSE. The current area, as outlined in the digital literacy and school plans, relates to how teachers collaborate effectively through the use of digital technologies. Very good practice was seen in relation to this throughout the evaluation. The second area being explored through SSE relates to the school's approach to behaviour management. This second area needs greater clarity with regard to its impact on the development of teaching and learning, as it lies within the scope of the school improvement plan rather than SSE.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

There is a strong culture in the school of consultation, leading to action, followed by reflection, for the benefit of the students. Capacity for improvement throughout the school is very good.

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.

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

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management (BOM) of Scoil Mhuire Gan Smál welcomes this very positive WSE MLL report which validates the school's commitment to recognising each child as an individual with different needs, abilities and learning patterns, while providing a caring environment reinforced through a holistic approach.

The BOM welcomes the report's acknowledgement of the efforts made to enable staff to track 'individual students' holistic academic progress' through an innovative system, highlighting a significant strength.

The recognition of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment as being 'very good' with 'highly effective practice' is welcomed by all.

The recognition of the very good capacity for improvement within the school and of the good work already undertaken strengthens the determination of all stakeholders to seek further development and improvement.

Each student is valued as an individual, with different learning needs and the positive emphasis the report places on the provision of a broad curriculum, including an innovative approach to curriculum development to suit the students with special education needs (SEN) is welcomed.

Part B Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

In relation to the recommendations for SEN, the BOM, Senior Management Team (SMT) and staff are examining ways in which we can conform to the requirements of circular 14/2017, while maintaining the successful and innovative elements from our present system.

A Finance Committee has been established by the BOM and the process of examining all policies with the aim of reviewing them in the context of the changing environment of our present educational system has been implemented.

The school has already seen its numbers double over the past numbers of years with the resultant changes in staff, and we see ourselves as well placed to face the challenges of a new school with an increased enrolment. With forward planning in process, and as the limitations of teaching in a challenging physical environment disappear, time to enhance teaching and learning will increase. The sharing of very good practice will be encouraged and form an item on the agenda of future staff meetings.

We hope to enhance the very good practices of teaching, learning and assessment on a more formal level through the inclusion of 'Assessment' as part of the SSE process. These changes have already been instigated.

The school is now fully compliant with The Child Protection Procedures as the format in which it was presented was not acceptable. This format has now been circulated to the Inspectorate and all other concerned parties.