

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Mary's Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Convent Of Mercy Mallow Co Cork
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	62350D

Date of Evaluation: 15-01-2018



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 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.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	15-16 and 18 January 2018
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with Board of Management • Meetings with principal and deputy principal • Meetings with key staff • Review of relevant documents • Student focus-group interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with parents • Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires • Observation of teaching and learning • Examination of students' work • Interaction with students • Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers

School context

St Mary's Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school for girls established by the Sisters of Mercy in Mallow in 1932. The school is under the trusteeship of CEIST (Catholic Education An Irish Schools' Trust), and has an enrolment of 638 girls. It offers the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The board of management provides good leadership for the school, and upholds its educational vision and Christian ethos, while the senior management team provides very effective leadership of learning and of change management within the school.
- Very good structures are in place in the area of support for students, including the Pastoral Care and Year Head teams, and students with special educational needs are well supported.
- There is no timetabled period for the mandatory Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme and its Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) component for students in second year and third year, as per circular M11/03.
- Provision for the delivery of the curriculum is generally very good; however timetabling provision for Physical Education (PE) is limited to a single period per week for students in some year groups, while students in sixth year do not have access to the subject.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good with some elements of excellent practice observed, as well as a clear commitment to the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations.
- Student leadership is promoted through the student council and other initiatives, although some scope for further development of the student voice was noted.
- The school shows a clear capacity for ongoing change and improvement.

Recommendations

- The Board of Management and senior management must ensure full compliance with the mandatory requirement for provision of the SPHE programme and its RSE component.
- Timetabling for PE should be reviewed to ensure that all students have access to the subject.
- The further development of student voice within the school should be pursued.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of school governance is good, with very effective leadership of learning provided by the senior management team.

Leading learning and teaching

The principal and deputy principal work together as a very effective team in the day-to-day management of the school, and in the leadership of learning. They have a visible presence in the school and work to create a positive and safe teaching and learning environment.

A broad curriculum with a wide range of curricular programmes is offered, including TY, LCA, and LCVP programmes in senior cycle. All of these programmes are well-organised, and are designed to offer meaningful choices for students. There is a high uptake of the optional TY programme. LCVP is offered to students who fulfil the subject requirements, while the LCA programme is targeted to meet the needs of students who prefer a less academically-demanding programme.

Very good transition arrangements are in place to facilitate progression from primary school to second-level, and very good communication has been established with the feeder schools. Students participate in a subject-sampling programme in first year, and this allows them to make an informed choice when it comes to selecting their options.

There is a strong emphasis on student care and wellbeing. Effective structures are in place to support students, as represented by the work of the pastoral care team, the guidance counsellors, year heads, class tutors and programme co-ordinators. The concern for students' wellbeing is very visible in the day-to-day greetings and interactions with students, both within and outside of the formal classroom setting.

Students have access to a wide choice of subjects in both junior and senior cycle, and it is positive to note the intention to offer additional subjects in senior cycle as part of the review of curriculum. While the timetabling allocation for most subjects is in line with syllabus guidelines, the timetabling provision for PE varies depending on the year group. Students in first year, TY and LCA have a double period per week, but PE is limited to one single period in second year, third year and fifth year. Students in sixth year have no access to a timetabled class. Given the important role that PE plays in providing students with the foundation for a healthy, active lifestyle, it is recommended that the school revisit its timetabling arrangements in order to address this limited provision for PE.

Very good quality leadership is evident in supporting students and their learning, as demonstrated by the work of the special educational needs department (SEN). Very good practice is seen in the establishment of a core team with a weekly meeting time. While a significant number of teachers

are involved in the delivery of one-to-one tuition for students, it is positive to note the successful introduction of team-teaching for English. The school should look to reduce the current practice of withdrawal of students for individual support in favour of a greater use of team-teaching. This would allow for resources to be optimised, and would further enhance inclusive practice.

A special class is provided for students with a mild general learning disability. Rang Reiltín provides a caring and inclusive learning atmosphere for students, and its positive impact on the whole school community is very evident. The students' integration into all aspects of school life is ably facilitated by staff, student mentors, and by the dedicated contribution of the special needs assistants.

An extensive range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities is offered to students, including sport, music and drama. Opportunities for voluntary and community involvement also provide valuable learning experiences, and allow students to develop their skills and talents. A high number of staff are involved in this extra-curricular provision, and the commitment of teachers is acknowledged.

Managing the organisation

The quality of school governance is good. The board of management is appropriately constituted, and the current board is in place since October 2016. The experience and expertise of the members of the board is very evident, as is their commitment to the quality of the educational experience provided by the school. Ongoing support is available to the board from their trustee body, CEIST. Sub-committees of the board have been put in place to deal with areas such as finance, while a recently established board of studies oversees curriculum development. The board of management also ratifies the curriculum plan each year. Regular meetings are held by the board, minutes are taken, and an agreed report is shared with staff and parents.

The board is aware of its statutory responsibilities, and is pro-active in its response to legislative changes. The *Children First National Guidelines* have been adopted, anti-bullying procedures are in place, and Child Protection features on the agenda of each meeting, as well as pastoral and disciplinary issues. Mandatory policies have been adopted, and staff, parents and students are consulted in the review of policies. A very good checklist and timeline for the ratification and review of policies is maintained, and this has facilitated the regular review and updating of policies such as the admissions policy. A health and safety audit has also been undertaken.

Part of the requirement for compliance with child protection procedures relates to provision for SPHE and RSE. SPHE and RSE have been mandatory in second-level schools since September 2003 under circular M11/03, which states that all schools must timetable SPHE as part of the junior cycle core curriculum. In the current school year, the new, mandatory junior cycle subject of Wellbeing incorporates a weekly period of SPHE, and has been introduced for first-year students in all schools. While St Mary's is fully compliant with the requirements for Wellbeing in first year, a review of documentation as part of the evaluation revealed that SPHE and its component RSE is not timetabled for second-year and third-year students in the school. It is strongly recommended that the board of management, together with senior management, ensure full compliance with this mandatory requirement for the provision of the SPHE programme and RSE.

The school facilities are maintained to a very high standard, and the buildings and grounds include a theatre, sports hall and pitches. The main building includes a range of well-equipped specialist rooms, while recent projects have provided additional social areas. There is very good use of corridor and classroom space for displays of students' projects and art work.

Leading school development

The board, together with the trustees and senior management, strongly supports the school's educational vision and Christian ethos. There is a clear focus on the school as a supportive learning community, and on the holistic development of each student, as well as a commitment to high academic standards.

The school has an active and interested parents' association, and partnership with parents is valued. Good systems of communication are in place to ensure that parents are kept well informed about the work of the school. It is very positive also that the board meets both formally and informally with all members of the school community, including staff, the student council, and the parents' association. In their responses to the questionnaire, a very high percentage of parents stated that they feel welcome, and that they are happy with the school.

As part of its role, the board of management has identified priorities for the development of the school, including a review of the posts of responsibility structure. Very good practice is evident in the use of external facilitation and consultation during this review process. A further priority for the board is the development of school facilities, both temporary and permanent, in order to address the need for additional classroom accommodation, as a result of increasing enrolment. The board has strongly supported the development of information and communication technologies (ICT) within the school, and significant upgrading of the ICT infrastructure has taken place, as well as provision for staff professional development and the installation of a shared electronic folder system. As a result of these improvements, ICT resources are now increasingly used for staff communication and collaboration.

Developing leadership capacity

There is very good leadership by senior management of the organisational structures within the school, in addition to the ongoing focus on school development through effective change management. Strategic planning for the future of the school over a five-year period, including consultation with staff on the implications of increased student enrolment, reflects this focus on school improvement.

An effective system of distributed leadership is evident at middle-management level with teachers encouraged to take on leadership roles, and to participate in teams and working-groups in key areas. Regular weekly meetings of these teams are held with senior management, and this system of communication ensures that the emerging priority needs of the school can be quickly addressed.

There is strong encouragement by management for teacher involvement in continuing professional development, and members of staff have been afforded opportunities to undertake courses in areas of interest, and so are well placed to lead teaching and learning within the school.

Student leadership is promoted through the student council. The council is a well-organised group with regular meetings, and is actively involved in the review of relevant policies. The importance of student leadership is recognised by those in management roles, and it is very positive that the student council meets annually with the board of management. Other initiatives such as Young Mercy Leaders, the mentor programme, and sports leadership training, also provide opportunities for the development of student leadership. In interviews with the inspectors, as well as in their responses to the questionnaire, students strongly supported the importance of a focus on student voice, and this should be pursued so as to ensure their greater involvement in the operation of the school.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good with some elements of excellent practice.

Learner outcomes and experiences

During the evaluation, the inspectors visited lessons across the range of curricular programmes and subjects provided in the school. Where areas for further development were suggested, these centred on maximising the impact of the use of learning intentions, as well as student use of ICT in the classroom to enhance learning.

In their responses to the questionnaires, a very high percentage of parents agreed that their child was doing well; while the majority of students stated that they enjoyed going to their classes and that they were getting on well with their school work.

The in-class pastoral aspect was a significant factor in the creation of a positive learning environment for students. At all times, there was an emphasis on support, encouragement and affirmation of student effort by the teacher, and as a result, very high levels of student engagement and participation were observed.

In their responses to the questionnaire, a very high percentage of students stated that they get opportunities to work together with other students. This emphasis on active-learning approaches was very evident, and students had the opportunity to work together in structured groups. Where a strategy such as placemat was used, students had a clear understanding of the roles within a group. Very good practice was also seen where students were encouraged to present their work to their peers. There was a very good focus on oral production and peer learning in many lessons, and on the use of the target language in language lessons.

Learning intentions were shared with students and, where best practice was seen, the intentions were used to achieve clarity with regard to what the student was going to learn, as well as for recapitulation and assessment at the end of the lesson.

The positive and respectful interactions between students and teachers helped to create a productive and co-operative learning environment. Students showed a high level of motivation and were confident when engaging with challenging work. They demonstrated very good subject knowledge and skills as appropriate for their stage of learning. Levels of student achievement in the certificate examinations are also very positive.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

A calm and orderly learning environment was evident throughout the school. There was good preparation for lessons by the teachers, and resources were well chosen. The teachers showed a high level of subject knowledge together with enthusiasm for their subjects. There was very effective and creative use of ICT for teaching purposes, including well-chosen and interesting resources. It was evident also that the school's online learning platform is increasingly used for the assignment and correction of homework.

In their responses to the questionnaires, a high percentage of parents and students stated that teaching is good in the school. The majority of students also stated that teachers talk to them about how to improve their learning, and encourage them to do the best that they can.

There was evidence of very good work by subject departments with regard to summative assessment, including an analysis of levels of student uptake and attainment in the certificate examinations. The recent introduction of a system of academic tracking, involving the monitoring of students' progress together with targeted interventions and supports, should also facilitate further improvement in student learning.

Good work was evident in subject planning, including resources for the use of ICT for teaching purposes. In order to build on this good work, it is suggested that discussion at subject department level should also look at ways of using ICT as a learning tool for students, while the Digital Learning Framework might serve as an appropriate resource. With regard to junior cycle, the training provided for the implementation of new subject specifications will provide further opportunities for collaborative planning by departments.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

The school has made very good progress in the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations.

Leadership and Management

Recommendations from previous evaluations in Business, Geography and English were reviewed as part of the evaluation. Only one recommendation related to leadership and management, and this recommendation has been fully addressed.

Teaching and Learning

Where recommendations were made, they focused on teacher collaborative planning for the new junior cycle specifications; subject planning for TY; the use of assessment for learning strategies; the use of ICT as a student learning tool; and the choice of teaching methodologies. There was evidence of very good progress in the implementation of these recommendations, in particular in the choice of teaching methodologies and activities.

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

The school demonstrates a very good capacity for further development through engagement with the SSE process.

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

Following on from previous work on literacy and numeracy, the school is currently engaged in a new cycle of SSE. This has involved whole-staff discussion and the creation of an SSE team. The school has chosen to focus on two domains from *Looking At Our School*, namely learner outcomes through the lens of wellbeing, and teachers' collaborative and collective practice. Clear and detailed plans have been formulated, and a survey of first-year students undertaken as part of the data-gathering in this investigation phase of the process.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The structures and systems in place, together with the commitment and strong sense of purpose demonstrated by management and staff, are evidence of a clear capacity for ongoing change and improvement.

5. CHILD PROTECTION

During the evaluation, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The school principal is aware that revised child protection procedures for primary and post-primary schools came into effect on 11 December 2017 and arrangements are in place to begin the process of implementing these procedures.
2. The name of the designated liaison person for child protection matters was prominently displayed near the main door of the school.
3. The school has a Child Protection policy in place.
4. All teachers are aware that they are mandated persons and of their responsibilities in that regard.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above, but did not meet the requirement in relation to the full provision of the SPHE/RSE programme.

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

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of St. Mary's Secondary School acknowledges the receipt of this very positive WSE-MLL Report, which affirms the very good practices in our school. We are particularly pleased that the report endorses:

- The board of management's experience and expertise and their commitment to the quality of the educational experience provided by the school.
- The senior management team's very effective leadership of change management, organisational structures, strategic planning and teaching and learning.
- The effective system of distributed leadership evident at middle-management level with teachers encouraged to take on leadership roles.
- The strong emphasis on student care and wellbeing and effective structures to support students.
- The identification of the school as a supportive learning community with an emphasis on the holistic development of each student.
- The very good teaching and learning with evidence of some excellent practice.
- Teachers' high level of subject knowledge together with enthusiasm for their subject.
- St. Mary's strong commitment to high academic standards.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The Board acknowledges the recommendations made by the inspectors and are committed to their implementation. Since the initial feedback of the WSE-MLL process, the school has already set about addressing the recommendations in the following ways:

- The curriculum plan for September 2018 ensures full compliance with mandatory provision for the SPHE/RSE programme.
- Access to physical education will be enhanced in line with recent recommendations and the school's wellbeing policy.
- St Mary's will continue to develop initiatives which provide an opportunity for student voice.