

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**Management, Leadership and Learning**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	St. Mary's Secondary School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Smith's Road Charleville Co Cork
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	62450H

**Date of Evaluation: 14-10-2019**



---

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 meet 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 met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

## WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	23, 24, 25 September & 14 October 2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting with Board of Management</li> <li>• Meetings with principal and deputy principal</li> <li>• Meetings with key staff</li> <li>• Review of relevant documents</li> <li>• Student focus-group interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting with parents</li> <li>• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires</li> <li>• Observation of teaching and learning</li> <li>• Examination of students’ work</li> <li>• Interaction with students</li> <li>• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers</li> </ul>

### School context

Founded in 1838 by the Sisters of Mercy, St Mary’s Secondary School is an all-girls voluntary secondary school. Informed by the ethos of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy schools, it is managed under the trusteeship of Catholic Education: An Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). The school has a current enrolment of 333 students and offers the Junior Cycle programme, an optional Transition year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

### Summary of main findings and recommendations:

#### Findings

- The quality of leadership and management is good; school leaders promote an inclusive, caring school community.
- A committed board is in place which is aware of its statutory obligations; the role of the board, the identification of a unifying vision and key priorities, policy review and ratification, distributed leadership, and communication are areas for further development.
- The overall quality of care for students in the school is very good.
- The quality of teaching and learning in lessons observed was good overall with some exemplary practice noted.
- While there was some progress made in the implementation of some recommendations in previous evaluations, there was limited progress with others, including in the area of special educational needs.
- The school’s engagement with the school self-evaluation (SSE) process is good and the school is well placed to engage in school improvement as part of the SSE process, provided the process is collaborative and inclusive.

#### Recommendations

- An overarching strategic plan should be developed by school leaders once the key vision for the school and its priorities are identified by the whole school community.
- The board of management should examine elements of its practice and put systems in place for structured policy ratification and review, improved communication with the wider school community, and continued oversight of teaching and learning.
- The enhancement of communication structures, including the school’s website, should be undertaken.
- The Special Educational Needs (SEN) policy should be finalised as a matter of priority, and the use of allocated SEN hours needs to be reviewed and adjusted to ensure compliance with Circular 14/2017.

- Practices to ensure the effective deployment of distributed leadership models should be developed, encompassing whole-school leadership.

## **DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The overall quality of school leadership and management is good.

#### **Leading learning and teaching**

The quality of leadership for learning and teaching is good. The principal and deputy principal work well together and have complementary roles and responsibilities. Systems to support good quality teaching and learning are being developed, which include working groups on various aspects of teaching and learning and one overarching teaching and learning committee. A system of academic tracking has also begun which involves data analysis with regard to levels of attainment, uptake of higher level and tracking of student progress. The school is confident that this will inform support strategies and interventions for key identified students, including those that are gifted and talented.

The minutes of board meetings show that the principal keeps the board informed of many school issues and events. It is very positive that teaching and learning is on the agenda for board meetings and that the board supports a wide range of teacher continuing professional development (CPD).

The school offers a relatively wide range of subjects, given the current enrolment, and subject timetabling is good overall. Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) are appropriately timetabled. Anomalies such as the timetabling of personnel for modules in TY, however, need to be addressed. In addition, while there are positive developments in relation to supports for students with SEN, some matters relating to the deployment of the SEN teaching resources provided by the Department of Education and Skills require attention as a matter of priority. The school should ensure that the full allocation of hours provided to support students with SEN is deployed for its intended purpose, that it complies with Circular 14/2017, and that the current draft SEN policy is finalised without further delay.

Student care is a significant strength and is central to the school's ethos. While the year heads and class tutors play a key role here, all staff demonstrate very high levels of commitment to the care and wellbeing of the students. In recent years, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on student wellbeing, with the school committed to the ongoing inclusion and holistic development of each student. Very good transfer and induction systems are in place for incoming students, with initiatives such as the buddy system and a bonding day for first-year students being particularly noteworthy. Findings from both parental and student questionnaires show a very high positive response to a statement asking whether students feel safe and cared for in the school. Students also overwhelmingly agreed that in the event of bullying, help was available from a teacher or other adult in the school.

The school regularly provides placements for student teachers as required. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome and is included among the standards in the Teaching Council's *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* as it can provide valuable professional benefits for teachers, student teachers, students and the teacher education institutions. There are effective systems in place to support new members of staff, and some staff are trained as professional support team members to support newly qualified teachers through the *Droichead* process.

#### **Managing the organisation**

There is good management in the school. The current board of management, appointed in September 2017, is committed to the school, is aware of its statutory obligations, and all statutory policies are in

place. In this context, there is a need for a more structured policy audit, development and review framework. Completing the policy and legislative checklist annually would do much to provide useful clarity on the ongoing process of policy development and review. This would also allow for the development of a more defined timeframe for the completion, review and evaluation of policies on an annual basis.

The board meets regularly but the minutes of the previous five meetings indicate that although there was always a quorum, there was never full attendance. It would be worthwhile to examine practice in relation to organising board meetings to maximise attendance. This would do much to ensure that all board members are fully conversant with all initiatives in the school.

Some effective communication structures are in place but there is potential to strengthen communication with the whole-school community. Questionnaire responses indicate that there is scope for more formal reporting to parents by the board. Exploring the potential of ICT to strengthen the existing channels of communication among all stakeholders would bring further benefits in terms of communication, information dissemination and collaboration between all school partners. In this light, one area in need of immediate development is the school's website. Unnecessary, outdated and inaccurate material and information should be removed and consideration should be given to upgrading and re-designing the site to maximise the potential of this powerful communication tool.

School facilities are maintained to a very high standard and there is a calm and orderly environment in the building. The entire school community is commended for the standard of the interior environment. Bright, clean, comfortable, visually-stimulating, print-rich classrooms and well-resourced specialist rooms help to support learning and teaching for all students.

### **Leading school development**

The leadership of school development is of good quality. The school's improvement and development plan outlines short-term and medium-term goals over the next number of years. However, it is difficult to ascertain any key priorities. It would be appropriate at this stage to formulate a clear guiding vision for the school and communicate it appropriately and effectively.

Given that there are some good structures already established for SSE, and a co-ordinator is in place, it would be timely to begin further action planning on a whole-school basis to ensure identifiable improvements in learner outcomes. In partnership with the board, the SMT should then ensure that all plans, actions and structures are aligned with a clear vision for the school.

Partnership and links with parents and the wider community are valued and supported in the school. To this end, strong links are fostered and maintained with local businesses, community organisations and sports clubs, particularly camogie which features strongly in the school, and with both the neighbouring feeder primary school and a number of small rural primary schools in the locality. Enhancing the communication structures, as outlined above, would do much to build and maintain relationships with these key stakeholders.

The school presents a very successful Open House on an annual basis. Along with the innovative taster days that have been facilitated in the school for the past three years, the Open House was mentioned as a key contributory factor in enrolling in the school by both parent and student focus groups.

Senior management and staff are currently involved in mediating change through the various working groups and new posts of responsibility which were formulated in the previous school year. These various groups and leaders are ensuring awareness among staff of some current educational initiatives such as the new assessment practices associated with the Junior Cycle Framework, and strategies particular to the Digital Learning Framework.

## **Developing leadership capacity**

There is scope to develop leadership capacity, building on some effective processes already in place.

The school had a substantial review of posts of responsibility informed by the needs of the school in light of Circular 03/2018. While a start has been made on distributed leadership, there is potential to develop this further. The roles and responsibilities of the new middle leadership team have been clearly defined but significant support by the SMT in some of these posts makes it difficult for some staff to lead learning. Whilst acknowledging that some level of support may be needed to ensure that the school's needs are being met in the early stages of the team's development, it is also important to distribute and delegate leadership responsibilities appropriately. This would help to build capacity and also harness the experience and expertise of the middle leadership team and allow it to lead developments in key areas.

The school values student voice and aims to facilitate active student participation in the school. There are two Head Girls, who speak at school events such as Open House, and there is also a prefect system. The student council is democratically elected, has regular meetings and serves as another communication link between students and teachers. The council and student body have been involved in initiatives in the past, such as the design of the new school uniform. However, only a small proportion of the students who completed questionnaires within this evaluation agreed that they 'had a say in how things are done in the school'. It is important that management remains conscious of positive student engagement, consults students regarding policies and self-evaluation, and tries to find other avenues for the student voice. Formal links could also be established between the student council, parents and the board. This would help to promote leadership qualities among students.

## **2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**

In the lessons observed, the quality of learning was very good and the quality of teaching was good.

### **Learner outcomes and experiences**

The overall quality of learning during lessons observed was very good with certain features of both the learner experience and learner outcomes consistently of a high quality across a range of lessons.

Students demonstrated high levels of self-motivation and they engaged in lesson activities with interest and a sense of collective purpose.

Students' organisation of their work and materials for lessons was of a very high standard and the introduction of digital technologies to complete lesson activities and to store work is a positive development.

Existing levels of subject-specific knowledge amongst students were high and in accordance with students' general ability levels. All students displayed a capacity to apply and adapt prior learning to the new learning situations presented during the lessons observed.

Learning achieved during the lessons observed was most evident in instances where, towards the lesson conclusion, students demonstrated the extent of their newly-acquired learning through their capacity to undertake new tasks independently or through their responses to various assessment for learning strategies.

Classroom experiences for students were very positive overall. All students were encouraged to participate in lesson activities, to interact respectfully with one another and to contribute to the lessons with their views and queries. Exemplary practice was evident when mistakes were considered by both teachers and students to be opportunities for further learning. The levels of self-motivation and persistence exhibited by students in these instances was particularly noteworthy.

The effective use of a range of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies in many lessons bears witness to the positive impact of the school's self-evaluation process. Adjusting the focus of AfL to incorporate the role of the student in assessing their progress, both during and following lessons would strengthen the emphasis on one of the key skills of Junior Cycle - 'managing myself' – and would extend the use of the very good practice observed in some lessons to more lessons.

### **Teachers' individual and collective practice**

The overall quality of teaching during lessons observed was good with very good practice or exemplary practice noted in a significant minority of lessons.

Preparation for lessons was very good for most lessons and it was evident that all teachers had carefully considered the sequencing of lesson activities in order to accommodate the achievement of learning intentions, many of which were shared with students at the outset of the lesson.

Teaching approaches that were appropriate to the subject area or to the skill being developed were adopted by all teachers and highly effective practice was observed when teachers' actions, particularly around the delivery of instructions, explanations or questions, promoted meaningful student participation and engagement with new areas of learning.

Lessons were characterised by respectful engagement and cordial interactions between teachers and their students. All teachers had high expectations for all of their students. All classrooms were safe spaces and activities were designed to ensure that all students worked purposefully and were afforded opportunities to utilise and develop a broad range of skills. It was positive to note that many teachers deployed a range of strategies to ensure that all students could make connections with new material and their existing knowledge.

Most class groups are of mixed ability and in these settings, all teachers displayed an awareness of the various needs that students present with, be they special education needs or other additional needs. As well as facilitating high levels of SNA support in some classrooms, many teachers provided additional support material and made very effective use of collaborative tasks to ensure that students of all abilities experienced success. Other strategies that ensured optimum participation during lessons more generally included question boards for students, the use of placemats and the rotation of roles during group work.

Group work proved an effective means of ensuring that all students were meaningfully included in lesson activities and many teachers availed of the opportunity to provide differentiated support to students during these collaborative activities. Best practice was observed in instances where teachers carefully managed their own input, listened carefully to students' contributions and responses and then deployed a range of facilitative techniques that optimised students' thinking and self-reflection, thus creating further opportunities for learning.

Team-teaching is being introduced gradually as an intervention to support greater and more meaningful inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream settings. Where observed, the presence of two subject specialists in the setting allowed for students with a significant level of need to be given high levels of targeted support. Where practicable, the extension of this model of support to other subject areas is recommended.

Questioning and teacher circulation during task completion were the predominant means of assessing levels of progress. Moments of formative assessment were observed in very effective lessons and, in these instances, students were guided to deploy their own critical thinking skills to determine how the quality of their work might be further improved. The discerning use of success criteria proved invaluable in these instances and all teachers should foster in their students the capacity to benchmark their progress against shared and agreed measures of success.



### **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

While there was some progress made in the implementation of some recommendations in previous evaluations, there was limited progress with others.

#### **Leadership and Management**

Recommendations from recent evaluations including SEN, Mathematics, TY and Guidance were considered. Some recommendations from previous evaluations have been met, such as, for example, developing students' ability to take responsibility for their own learning. Almost all recommendations in the SEN report, however, have not been fully met.

It is recommended that a strategic approach to support the implementation of recommendations, which includes the board, should be adopted. As a means of supporting the provision of quality teaching and learning, the board should ensure a consistent practice of considering and responding to subject and programme inspection reports and seek to monitor the implementation of recommendations therein. It would be important however to ensure that all such reports are circulated to all members of the school community. This includes the Student Council and the Parent Association.

In this light, the adoption of a strategic approach to achieve the implementation of recommendations in future reports is recommended.

#### **Teaching and Learning**

It is suggested that any teachers involved in future evaluations should address all staff shortly after the oral feedback from that evaluation, in order to disseminate the key issues and recommendations that have arisen in a timely way. This strategy could be enhanced if school management and staff examined all evaluation reports once they are issued in order to ascertain the valuable learning experiences which can contribute to improvements in teaching and learning across all subject areas. Where recommendations have general implications, they should be compiled for circulation to all subject departments to provide a focus for planning and ultimately influence improvements in practice in all subject areas.

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

The school's engagement with the school self-evaluation (SSE) process is good and the school has good capacity for school improvement.

#### **The School's Self-Evaluation Process**

The school has undertaken considerable work in the area of school self-evaluation with significant progress made in a number of areas, specifically literacy and numeracy and AfL. The school's engagement with the SSE process has been strengthened through the recent appointment of a coordinator. Team teaching is the current theme for SSE and a start has been made on this topic. Engagement with the SSE six-step process should be prioritised to ensure ongoing improvement. Furthermore, the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and SSE report should be communicated to all stakeholders annually.

#### **The School's Capacity for Improvement**

The school is well placed to engage in school improvement as part of the SSE process. It would be important to ensure, however that this process is consistently collaborative and inclusive.

## 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 welcomes the comprehensive report, which affirms the very good practices in our school. We acknowledge the need to progress recommendations.

- We are committed to effective leadership processes and systems to develop good quality teaching and learning.
- We value student care and safety, as significant strengths of our school. We provide a calm orderly environment.
- Student voice and positive links with our wider community, are vital to the effective development of our school.
- Leadership mediates changes positively, particularly in the areas of the Junior Cycle and Digital Learning Frameworks. The value placed on Continuous Professional Development is evident.
- Student transfer systems into the school is commendable.
- The student experience is positive, self-motivated, respectful and engaging. Teaching practices range from good to exemplary. We have high expectations of our students.
- Digital technologies and Assessment for Learning strategies are deployed, along with other educational initiatives, to optimise student thinking.

## **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 Management is committed to forming a steering committee to develop a strategic plan with the whole school and wider community. Discussions have begun to this end.
- The Board of Management has conducted a policy audit and legislative checklist.
- The Board of Management is committed to improved communication with its stakeholders. The school's website has been prioritised as a key communication tool in conjunction with our active social media presence.
- The Special Educational Needs policy continues to be reviewed to ensure compliance with Circular 14/2017.
- The Board of Management endeavours to strengthen a culture that supports teachers in developing their leadership.