An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Ursuline Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Blackrock Cork
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	62650P

Date of Evaluation: 09-05-2019

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	7, 8 and 9 May 2019
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with Board of Management • Meetings with principal and deputy principal • Meetings with key staff • Review of relevant documents • Student focus-group interview	• 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

Ursuline Secondary School is an all-girls voluntary secondary school which operates under the trusteeship of Le Chéile. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. The school has a special class to support students with autism spectrum difference (ASD). A new principal was appointed in January 2019. It has a current enrolment of 222 students.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of leadership and management is good; the combination of a new principal with the valuable support of the deputy principal, staff and the board of management has brought a renewed focus and energy to the school community.
- While good structures are in place to support student care and wellbeing, opportunities exist to review some aspects of timetabling and to develop policies and structures at whole-school level that will further support students in this area of provision.
- Leadership of school development is very good and senior management has a vision for building a sustained culture of improvement that involves all stakeholders.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good, with a large proportion of very good practice observed; opportunities exist for the greater inclusion of students in their learning in order to improve their communication skills and confidence.
- A number of significant whole-school recommendations made in previous reports have yet to be implemented.
- The school has very good capacity for improvement and has actively re-engaged in the DEIS planning process; there remains a need to ensure that the DEIS plan acts as the key driver for improving the learning outcomes and experiences of students.

Recommendations

- Senior leadership should ensure that the aspects of timetabling relating to support for students with special educational needs (SEN) and other curricular areas are changed as a matter of priority to ensure they comply with Department of Education and Skills policy and related circulars and guidance.
- Senior leadership, in partnership with the board and staff, should oversee a process whereby policies, action-plans, and structures are aligned with, and informed by, the

school's mission statement and the needs of students; the necessary development of a whole-school guidance plan should assist this process.

- All teachers' practice should focus on the development of student voice and confidence through the regular provision of structured collaborative learning opportunities and the embedding of agreed whole-school literacy and communication strategies into classroom practice.

- Senior leadership, in partnership with teachers, should ensure that all initiatives are informed by and align with the specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) targets set in the DEIS plan as the main driver of school improvement for the coming years.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is good.

Leading learning and teaching

The quality of leading teaching and learning in the school is good. The principal and deputy form a very strong team and are providing valuable leadership for the school community. Their willingness to assess previous methods and approaches for their effectiveness and make changes where necessary, has allowed the school, in a very short timeframe, to form a cohesive vision for its future development. This vision is articulated in a number of whole-school development plans, including the DEIS plan.

The school offers all available programmes and a wide range of subjects. These include the Junior Cycle programme, a Transition Year (TY) programme, a Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme which is offered every second year, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), and the Leaving Certificate Established (LCE). The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) is in use in a small number of subjects; it would be beneficial for this programme be extended to include all subjects.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) are appropriately timetabled for all year groups. Considering the student surveys and the responses at the student-focus group meeting, there is a need for the school to look at senior cycle students' experiences of RSE and to adjust the programme accordingly.

There is an effective TY programme which is providing worthwhile and new learning experiences. Currently, students choose their senior cycle subjects at the end of third year. The school should review and change this practice to allow students to choose their subjects at the end of TY. This would enable students to be better informed following their TY experience. There is also a need to review the manner in which TY is timetabled so as to maximise all students' learning experiences. The content of the TY modules should also be reviewed to ensure all subjects are approached in a manner that is in-keeping with the spirit and ethos of TY.

The LCA programme is well established and is provided every two years. The timetable should be reviewed and adjusted to ensure it fully meets the requirements of the programme. Students in senior cycle have limited access to Physical (PE) in the timetable. As recommended in a previous report, this should be rectified.

It is positive that the school is now examining the use of cognitive ability tests and other data-related assessments to track performance. There is, however, an urgent need for the school to develop a holistic assessment policy to take account of changes in Junior Cycle and ensure there is an appropriate balance of summative and formative assessment distributed throughout the school year.

Good care structures have been established in the school and all staff are cognisant of the role they play in student support and wellbeing. Since September 2018, the school has participated in a very effective pilot project for the existing student support team, which has assisted the team in systematising their work.

Daily morning assemblies are used to bring the school community together and to celebrate students and their achievements. Year heads use this opportunity to check in with students. Year heads have expansive roles that incorporate many aspects of care, discipline, and curricular support for both students and parents. Given the context of the school, and responses to the student

questionnaires, it is recommended that the school introduce a class teacher structure, whereby students are meeting a teacher on a regular basis who is monitoring their wellbeing and academic progress, thus supporting the work of the year heads.

The school has a home-school-community liaison co-ordinator (HSCL) who works with identified students and their parents, with many initiatives in place that encourage parental involvement. A mentor teacher provides support for students who are members of the travelling community. There are very strong links between the school and outside agencies who are also involved in supporting students.

Given the wide range of needs and the many partners involved in providing support, there is a need to review how the various student support roles and structures complement each other. The development of a whole-school guidance plan, which clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of all teachers, is necessary and recommended.

There is a well-organised approach to supporting students identified with SEN, and good coordination is evident. While continuity of support for some students is provided by a core team of six teachers, other teachers provide curricular support particularly in senior cycle. The number of teachers providing support should be kept to a minimum to ensure that support is not fragmented across a large number of teachers as it is currently.

The school has a special class for students with ASD. Currently, there are two students in the school with an allocated place in this class. These students spend most of their time in mainstream lessons. Consequently, the teaching supports allocated to this class are used to support other students with SEN. Students availing of the resources of the special class should be reviewed to ensure that these resources are used for their intended purpose.

The school currently withdraws students from English and Mathematics to create small classes in these subject areas. Decisions on student allocation to these class groups are based on ability. Some of the school's teaching allocation to provide additional support to students identified with SEN is used to create these classes. This practice should cease, as it is contrary to inclusive principles and is not in-keeping with the Department of Education and Skills policy. Students with SEN should be provided with additional targeted supports to meet their identified priority learning needs and should be included meaningfully in mainstream mixed-ability subject groupings.

The school regularly provides placements for student teachers. Such engagement in the initial teacher education programmes is welcome as it provides valuable professional benefits for all involved. The Droichead program has been introduced to the school and trained mentors are in place.

Managing the organisation

The overall management of the organisation is good. The board of management is very committed to the school and is very supportive of the work of the senior management team and staff of the school. Very good work has been done by the board in relation to the development of the school and involvement at school level, but several policies require attention.

The board has a clear vision of how the school can develop into the future and it has identified seven priorities for the school. Some of these priorities have clear associated action plans. Others are at a developing stage for future implementation. The board has been instrumental in assisting the school to develop its Digital Learning Plan and the whole-school development plan. It has also overseen the post of responsibility review that has taken place within the school. The board should now assess how staff can be enabled, through the decisions made at board and senior management levels, to lead in these areas, both in their respective roles and as individual teachers. This would include

planning for how the posts of responsibilities can, over time, evolve and continue to support student needs.

A checklist to manage the process of the review and ratification of policies has recently been put in place. The board should review the admissions policy and remove any conditional clauses to enrolment that may be perceived as barriers to inclusion. As part of this review, the policy should be changed to ensure that students are not being excluded from accessing the ASD class because of the policy's requirement for students to be able to access mainstream lessons 70% of the time, as this is not the purpose of the sanctioning of this class.

In light of student responses, there is a need to review the implementation of the code of behaviour, and ultimately the code itself, to ensure that all of the positive supports available in the school are readily understood by the students. The Health and Safety statement also needs to be reviewed and completed as a matter of priority.

Communication across the school community is good. In recent months, the school has become very active on social media. Parents spoke positively about the clarity of communications coming from the school. Consideration should be given to how all fora are used to communicate the changes underway in the school, so that parents can best support the school and their daughters.

Management of school facilities is very good. A very welcoming environment has been created. Senior management has ensured that the facilities needed for ongoing development in relation to the targets set in the Digital Plan are available. The school has good sporting facilities, which will be further enhanced by the planned redevelopment of the tennis courts.

Leading school development

The leadership of school development is very good. Senior management has a vision for building a sustained culture of improvement whereby all staff are involved in implementing change whether through posts of responsibility, working on committees, or as individual teachers. Building on this good work, senior leadership and the school community have come to a point where they recognise a need to serve a common vision that has the students at its heart. Consequently, senior leadership, in partnership with the board, should oversee a process whereby all plans, actions and structures are aligned with, and informed by, the school's very clear and inspirational mission statement and the needs of the students.

Staff committees and teams are working very effectively in many areas. The recently established DEIS team is progressing its work, while the Digital Learning committee, and a recruitment and transition team are, very effectively, implementing plans in their respective areas.

Parents speak very positively about the school. The process of encouraging parents to become active in school life by using their own skills has begun. There is a need to look at wider communication with parents and their involvement in changes that the school wishes to bring about. One route would be to establish a clearer, more defined role for the parents' association in reviewing policy, alongside their overall involvement and partnership with students.

Developing leadership capacity

The development of leadership capacity is good. Senior management understands the importance of establishing a culture of distributed leadership more firmly within the school. The school has undertaken a substantial review of the posts of responsibility and needs of the school in light of Circular 03/2018. Consequently, a number of new appointments has been made and the teachers involved are enthusiastic and eager to bring their professionalism to these roles. This middle leadership group should act as a strategic driver of key priorities for the school. Beyond this, it is

important that other teams formed at staff level to address specific areas should link with and effectively support these priorities.

There is a well-organised student council in operation, which has input into school policy. It is positive that the school has started to include all representatives from every year group more regularly at meetings, which will further enhance student voice.

There is a very significant leading of extra and co-curricular activities by staff. Many are linked to DEIS initiatives and successfully provide students with a wide range of learning experiences and leadership opportunities. There is a developing vision amongst the senior leadership and members of the parent's association of creating a school community whereby students become active citizens that are of service in their community. Both students and parents speak very positively about how the developing range of initiatives is enhancing the perception of the school in the community.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The overall quality of teaching and learning was good, with a large proportion of very good practice observed.

Learner outcomes and experiences

Good quality learner outcomes and experiences were observed in almost all lessons. Very good student-teacher rapport was evident in all lessons. Where outcomes were of a very high quality, students were able to articulate and demonstrate their learning by being provided with opportunities to work together, formulate and agree opinions, and share their learning with the wider class group. Where this was very effective, students were enabled to simultaneously develop skills; this assisted them to become more confident as learners. Skill development was achieved through the provision of scaffolded tasks and the need to research given topics.

Where teachers held high expectations for students' participation and overall learning, teachers facilitated student-led learning. Conversely, in a number of lessons, students were passive and it was unclear if new learning had occurred. In these lessons, students needed to be given the opportunity to be more actively engaged in recalling, thinking and making new connections in their learning. Teachers should be more aware of, and responsive to, student passivity and there is a need to plan for the development of skills which are required for students to become more active participants in their learning.

In a small but significant number of lessons, students spent a disproportionate amount of time taking notes. Given the good ICT structures in place and the necessity for students to be able to make notes to become independent learners, lesson planning should ensure that less time is spent on this type of activity.

Very effective team-teaching was observed in one instance and was seen to have a very positive effect on the experience of students. Senior management should embed team-teaching, and support its development so that identified students can be provided with this type of very positive experience and outcome.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

The quality of teaching was good overall, and a significant number of lessons were of a very good standard. Learning intentions were shared in all lessons. Where used effectively, students had the opportunity to reflect on the progress they had made, were enabled to experience success, and

were motivated in their learning. This practice of providing planned-for opportunities for students to reflect on their learning should be incorporated into all lessons.

Clear structures and routines were evident in all lessons observed. Where very effective preparation was observed, teachers made very good use of digital technologies, mini-whiteboards, and visuals to engage students.

On occasion, success criteria, exemplars of work and prompt sheets were used to guide the work of students. In one very effective lesson, flash cards were used to engage and encourage students to recall, to think, to make links, and to verbalise their learning. The strategic use of these materials, and their potential to enhance student voice and participation in their learning, should be shared, explored and utilised by all teachers.

Key words were highlighted in most lessons and, in very effective lessons, students were enabled to develop the skills associated with the comprehension of texts. In some lessons students did not effectively participate in verbal communication and collaborative work even when encouraged to do so. Consequently, literacy strategies related to the development of students' expressive language and acquisition of vocabulary need to be identified, used, and embedded at individual teacher level. It is recommended that teachers extend and embed the range of collaborative learning strategies adopted in lessons and become more aware of the need for inclusive practices which will enable all students to make progress in these areas, regardless of their ability level. Some teachers have undertaken CPD which, if shared at whole-school level, could be very beneficial in this regard. This development can be supported by the consistent application of the DEIS planning process at whole-school level, and by setting targets around these areas which have the potential to enhance student voice, confidence and self-esteem.

Subject plans are in place and the school is in the process of formalising its approach to planning. It is positive that departments are commenting on the outcomes of state examination results; subject department should identify subject-specific strategies that will address any identified trends.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Overall, implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations is satisfactory. However a number of significant recommendations, that need to be enacted at a whole-school level, should be addressed as a matter of priority.

Leadership and Management

Recommendations relating to the organisation of SEN supports as outlined in the recent SEN inspection, the timetabling of PE at senior cycle as indicated in the previous PE report, and a substantial number of recommendations outlined in a whole-school evaluation report of 2008 should be addressed without delay.

Teaching and Learning

There is evidence that a large proportion of teaching and learning related activities have been enacted. It is very positive that subject departments that have undergone inspection are now sharing their learning from the process with the wider staff, so that relevant teaching and learning recommendations are shared at whole-school level.

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

The quality of school self-evaluation, as evidenced in DEIS planning, is good. The school has a very good capacity to improve, given the quality of school leadership and the dedication of the staff.

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

Building on work done in previous years, the school has been very proactive in improving and re-establishing its DEIS planning process, which includes the SSE process. While much work has taken place to identify relevant and appropriate targets in all areas of the plan, scope exists to more clearly identify SMART targets which will meet the current needs of the students, and to ensure that all the initiatives which the school is involved with link clearly to the goals of the DEIS plan. It was evident that whole-school awareness of previous plans was low. Thus, it is of the utmost importance that all members of staff, as individuals and as departments, understand their role in implementing the plan. In this regard, classroom strategies identified in the plan should be discussed at subject department level and implemented consistently on an individual level. The board, in its annual report, should include specific detail on progress being made in regard to the SSE process.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school has begun a process of renewal over the last number of years. Given the quality of school leadership, the willingness of staff to lead school development, and the strong links the school has with agencies in the community and industry, the school has a very good capacity for improvement in the coming years.

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	*Very good* applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is *outstanding* and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	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	*Good* applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a *very good* standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	*Satisfactory* applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	*Fair* applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	*Weak* applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	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 Ursuline Secondary School is at an exciting time in its development and the Board is pleased that this was acknowledged in this report. There is a strong sense of team spirit, common purpose and energy within the whole school community. Students, parents and staff feel this, and we are pleased that this was evident during the inspection process. The Board also endorses the high standards of teaching and learning achieved in the school and is pleased that the report highlights the very good rapport that is present between staff and students. The report draws attention to the very effective work being carried out by various staff committees and notes positively the strong emphasis that school is placing on the development of both staff and student leadership capacity. The report presents an accurate reflection of our school at this time and the Board looks forward to using this report as a guide to aid forward school 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.

Recommendation 1:
Recommendations relating to the timetabling of SEN and other curricular areas have been fully implemented for the start of the 2019-20 school year.

Recommendation 2:
The development of a new whole school guidance plan using the recently released NCGE framework is currently underway. A working party has been established to spear head this area of school development. As in line with NCGE guidelines, our initial area of focus will be on Junior Cycle. Time at staff meetings throughout the year will be allocated to ensuring that the framework is embedded into all areas of school life and teacher practice.

Recommendation 3
The continued development of student voice is a key area of focus for the school and as such, many of our DEIS targets directly and/or indirectly seek to impact positively on this area of student development. Work has already begun on developing the reach and influence of the student council within the whole school community. The student council participated in a pre-school training/planning day for student leaders in August 2019 and has presented at the most recent Board of Management meeting.

Recommendation 4
The establishment of the school DEIS team in February 2019 and its subsequent work refining and focusing the DEIS plan objectives has enabled all staff to begin the 2019-20 academic year with a strong sense of clarity and purpose in this area. All staff members are part of a DEIS objective sub-team and significant time and emphasis was given over to further clarification of our goals for this year during the start of term staff training days.