

**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>	Mount Mercy College
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Model Farm Road Cork
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	62661U

**Date of Evaluation: 6 December 2018**



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An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Scileanna  
Department of  
Education and Skills

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

Dates of inspection	3, 4 and 6 December 2018
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with Board of Management</li><li>• Meetings with the principal and deputy principals</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

Mount Mercy College is an all-girls voluntary secondary school in the suburbs of Cork city. It was founded in 1966, by the Sisters of Mercy. Since 2008, the school operates under the trusteeship of Catholic Education An Irish Schools' Trust (CEIST). The school offers the Junior Cycle programme, an optional Transition Year programme (TY), and the Leaving Certificate (Established). The school has a current enrolment of 824 students.

### Summary of main findings and recommendations:

#### Findings

- The board, senior management team, and staff are dedicated to the school and conscious of the responsibility that they bear in bringing to life the values of the CEIST charter and the school's mission statement.
- The overall quality of school leadership and management is good; significant positive changes to systems and structures, that will assist the development of a greater level of distributed leadership, have been enacted through the valuable leadership of the recently appointed senior management team.
- A number of key policies and plans, that would further support the holistic and academic development of the students, need to be developed and overseen by the board.
- The overall quality of care for students is very good; the meaningful use of student voice presents as an area for exploration.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good, with highly effective practices that should be shared at whole-school level.
- The school's engagement with the SSE process is good and there is a very good capacity for improvement in the school.

#### Recommendations

- The board, in partnership with all stakeholders, should oversee the development of a long-term, strategic vision for the school that is underpinned by coherent action-planning at whole-school level.
- The school's use of student voice, as a means to gain understanding of the students' needs, and to further empower students to be active participants in the evolving development of the school, needs to be explored and developed.
- Building on the good work undertaken in the Forbairt project to enhance collaboration, subject departments should develop systematic ways to share experience and expertise through the subject planning process.

## **DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

The overall quality of school leadership and management is good; significant positive changes to systems and structures, that will assist the development of a greater level of distributed leadership, have been enacted through the valuable leadership of the recently appointed senior management team.

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

The leadership of teaching and learning is good. The principal and two deputy principals work together as an effective senior management team. They are a relatively newly formed team and have made a number of significant changes to the systems and structures in the school in the past year. As a team, they are very dedicated to the school, and conscious of the responsibility they bear in bringing to life the values espoused in the CEIST charter and the school's mission statement. It would be very worthwhile for them to outline areas for which each is responsible in leading the school.

Teachers reported that they were well-supported in attending continuing professional development (CPD) and further education. The board of management is appreciative of the skills that teachers bring to enhancing the learning experience of students through regular upskilling.

In Junior Cycle, students study eight core subjects, including French, along with two subjects that are chosen prior to entry. Consideration should be given to developing approaches which would provide students with an experience of the relevant subjects prior to making this decision. Senior management has ensured the provision of a double Physical Education (PE) lesson for every junior cycle class as of this academic year. The school has held open evenings to educate parents about the new Junior Cycle Programme and changes have been made to reporting templates used by the school. Subject departments are developing units of learning. A whole-school assessment policy should be developed. This policy should ensure there is a balance of summative and formative assessment taking place, and that agreed standards and systems for feedback are in place to scaffold the high expectations of students and to manage the workload for teachers and students.

It is very positive that the school has introduced a Learning to Learn module as part of its Wellbeing programme this year. Social Personal and Health education (SPHE), part of the Wellbeing programme, is timetabled for first-year and second-year only. As SPHE is developmental in nature, it should also be timetabled for third-year classes as per Circular 0079/2018.

In fifth year and sixth year, valuable holistic learning opportunities that support students' wellbeing are provided through a modular system that includes philosophy and cookery. The school is aware that students' access to PE is limited in this modular system. The school should examine ways in which it can provide the recommended time allocation for PE for all senior cycle students.

It is suggested that the school review their approach to wellbeing at both junior and senior cycles to ensure that the time is spent purposefully serving the needs of the students.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is appropriately provided in senior cycle. In light of the responses of parents in the evaluation survey, the school should look at the procedures that they have in place for informing parents about this policy

A very effective Transition Year (TY) programme is in place, providing students with a wide range of interesting learning experiences. A new approach incorporating subject sampling to support students' choices for Leaving Certificate is being explored in TY this year. The school has achieved

many successes through the modules provided in TY. There is a focus on raising students' awareness of their capacity as citizens to implement change, and the school has very strong links to local businesses and community organisations.

Students interviewed in the course of the evaluation felt that a greater range of subjects should be available within the school. While it is commendable that the school has an agreement with a local boys school to provide Applied Mathematics, and intends to provide Leaving Certificate PE once the sports hall has been constructed, the school, in partnership with the school community, should review the range of subjects provided at senior cycle.

The school understands the importance of helping students manage the transition from primary school. There is a comprehensive programme in place to ease transfer, including a mentoring programme run by the fifth-year leadership group. There are very good links between the Special Educational Needs (SEN) team and feeder schools. The school is currently ascertaining the benefits of using non-standardised assessment tests prior to entry; it is recommended that these be discontinued.

Care structures in the school are very good. There are weekly meetings of the care team and of the SEN team. It is commendable that senior management is eager to develop and evolve the role of the class teacher and year head; training has been undertaken to develop the role of the year head in this regard. Given the size of the school, it is very positive that senior management plans to provide further time to year heads in the longer term, to enable them to effectively and efficiently carry out this important role. The school should document the structures, roles and responsibilities of all school personnel in a whole school guidance plan, so that the cohesive nature of support in the school is understood by all stakeholders.

The SEN team is well-organised and communicate very well with the staff body. It is very positive that changes in the construction of the SEN timetable have been made, acknowledging the inclusive approach that is vital for the progress of these students. The main mode of support is through small group withdrawal. One-to-one lessons are used where needed, and there is ongoing development of team-teaching as a mode of support. Smaller mainstream class groups are created in English and Mathematics in some year groups. Such groups are not in-keeping with the use of the allocation as per SEN Circular 0014/2017 and consequently this practice should be reviewed and adjusted.

The school reported that it regularly provides placements for student teachers. 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 all involved. The Droichead programme was introduced into the school in 2014/15 and is now firmly embedded with six trained mentors in place.

### **Managing the organisation**

The management of the organisation is very effective. The members of the board of management are very committed to the school and are highly supportive of the work of the senior management team. The board is appropriately constituted, has regular meetings and adopts a consensus approach to decision making that is aligned to the ethos of the school. The finance sub-committee meets prior to each board meeting and an agreed report goes to all stakeholders after each meeting. Academic outcomes are reviewed, and extra-curricular and co-curricular developments reported on. An annual school report is issued, giving a comprehensive overview of the school. The report on progress in school self-evaluation (SSE) should be included with this. A wide range of policies have been ratified by the board. Some policies, such as the anti-bullying procedures, need to be ratified annually and the board should use the SSE regulatory checklist to assist them in this process. A comprehensive admissions policy is in place; some aspects of the policy need to be reviewed and amended to ensure they meet future needs.

The board has been actively engaged in overseeing the recent review of posts of responsibility and has identified a number of priorities for the school. They are: to embed the new Junior Cycle; to promote and support CPD amongst all staff and to see to fruition the building of a new sports hall. Much time and energy has been devoted to the latter priority, as the board and senior management are very cognisant of the opportunities such a facility would provide for students.

Communication across the school community is very good. There are strong structures in place for communication between staff and management. The school has a very vibrant presence on social media and a new website will launch soon. A substantial teacher's handbook, weekly staff updates, and an annual newsletter all support this communication. Behaviour of students was exemplary and all staff in the school model respectful and dignified interactions with each other and with students.

The management of school facilities is very good, and a very welcoming, respectful environment has been created. Senior management ensures the timetable is managed so that access to specialist rooms is maximised. A full health and safety statement needs to be put in place; the principal and another member of staff are attending training in this regard.

### **Leading school development**

The leadership of school development is good. Staff committees are working in many areas including: policy review; wellbeing; a teaching and learning advisory group; IT resources advisory group; amber flag and green flag groups.

The school has well-embedded literacy and numeracy plans in place. It is very positive that members of the senior management team are involved in a Forbairt project aimed at enhancing subject department planning and teacher collaboration through the use of digital technologies. A Digital Learning Plan, with a focus on teaching pedagogies and learning strategies, needs to be developed. The plan, informed by the Digital Learning Framework, should harness the current experience and capacities of the staff and should have a clear vision for how the use of digital technologies will be developed in the coming years.

The school has identified the importance of addressing student experience in the period spanning the latter stages of Transition Year (TY) into the early stages of fifth year, in order to best support students' wellbeing and academic outcomes through holistic planning. It is very positive that the decision to focus on this area is firmly rooted in addressing the needs of the students, with input from students and staff.

Notwithstanding the good work that has been done in relation to the priorities set by the board, the board, in partnership with all stakeholders, should oversee the development of a long-term, strategic vision for the school that is underpinned by coherent action-planning at whole-school level. The board, in partnership with the staff, should identify how the reviewed posts, the committee structure and the middle leadership group, can lead school development through the implementation of this plan.

Parents feel very positively about the school, as indicated in questionnaires distributed during the evaluation. The school has an active parent's association, kept well informed by senior management. The school, in partnership with the parents, should investigate how greater numbers of parents can be more actively involved in the association.

### **Developing leadership capacity**

The development of leadership capacity is good. Overseen by the board, a substantial review of posts of responsibility, in conjunction with an assessment of the needs of the school, has taken place. Senior management understand the importance of further developing leadership capacity amongst the staff. The staff has displayed enthusiasm and eagerness to bring their professionalism to bear in developing key areas in the school.

There is a very significant commitment to extra-curricular and co-curricular activities by staff across the school. In addition to sporting activities, the school offers many subject-specific trips with a learning-based focus and more holistic activities that develop friendships and relationships.

A student council is in place. It is very positive that the school has made changes to how class representatives for the council are elected to allow more students gain leadership experience. While the council is involved with the activities of the school, there is scope to develop its role in being a change agent in its own right. It is one, very important, means to hear and acknowledge the voice of the students. The school should identify how this ready-made structure can provide students with leadership opportunities, consistent with the ethos of the school.

A very effective student leadership programme is in place in fifth year. Students also have the opportunity to develop leadership capacity through the extensive range of activities that the school is involved in, particularly in TY.

These very good initiatives to promote leadership should be consolidated by implementing strategies to take student views on board in a meaningful way through the distinct areas of wellbeing, SSE and policy development. As indicated in the questionnaires, a significant majority of students do not feel that they have a say in how things are done in the school. It was evident throughout the evaluation that students are very articulate and have the capacity to take responsibility for implementing change in their environment. In light of this, the school's use of student voice, as a means to gain understanding of the students' needs, and to further empower students to be active participants in the evolving development of the school, needs to be explored and developed.

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

The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good, with very effective practices that should be shared at whole-school level.

### **Learner outcomes and experiences**

The quality of learner outcomes and experiences is very good. The relationships observed throughout the evaluation were very positive in all instances. Interactions were characterised by respect and dignity, with a welcoming learning environment evident in each lesson. Students displayed excellent levels of motivation and interest, and there was a high level of student engagement.

New concepts were linked to students' own experiences and the informal language of student feedback was related back to appropriate technical terminology. Students were articulate in responding and demonstrated very high levels of prior knowledge. Well thought out and engaging activities were planned for many lessons and were enacted very effectively in most lessons. Learning was most effective when coupled with skill-based, student-friendly learning intentions where opportunities to check in on students' learning were provided throughout the lesson. This very good practice in relation to learning intentions should be shared and utilised at whole-school level.

The use of pair work and group work was a frequent element in lessons. Where it worked effectively, students were clear about the purpose of engaging in this type of collaborative learning. These approaches allowed more students to be actively engaged for a greater proportion of the lesson, taking greater ownership of their learning. In some cases, there was a need to highlight the rationale for these approaches with students and bring rigour to how they transact in class. It would

be beneficial for staff to agree pair work and group work strategies at a subject department and whole-school level.

Very effective learning took place when students were allowed to engage with a task for an extended period of time, with careful scaffolding of the task by the teacher. This practice should be adopted more widely, and this type of activity should be planned for at individual teacher and subject department level.

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

Teachers' individual and collective practice is very good. Classroom management was exceptional in all instances. Varied approaches to introduce and consolidate new content were employed including engaging visuals, the use of concrete materials and effective learning games. Teachers managed very well in rooms with space constraints, usually with very effective use of digital technologies to support learning.

Well embedded strategies to support students' written and oral literacy were observed in numerous lessons, with a focus on subject specific language. Questioning was very effectively employed to differentiate content and to assist students to develop their critical thinking skills. Teachers encouraged students to expand and clarify answers, further supporting the development of students' oral competencies.

Teachers were cognisant of using approaches that encouraged students to be able to take ownership of their learning both inside and outside the classroom. In a small number of lessons, the strategy of note-making, rather than note-taking, was used very effectively to consolidate and develop students understanding. The advantages of this student-centred approach included: the immediate differentiation of pace and challenge appropriate to each student; the provision of opportunities for students to work together in small groups in a manner that maximised each student's learning and the co-creation of materials, valued by the students, that would be useful in continuing learning outside the classroom environment. It would be worthwhile for teachers utilising this approach to share its merits at a whole school level.

Teachers' verbal formative feedback was a regular feature of lessons; students should be assisted to develop the same skill. To support the further development of students' assessment skills, visualisers should be distributed and used more widely across classrooms. Very good practice was observed where teachers provided planned-for opportunities for students to reflect on their own learning, particularly at the end of lessons. This was done in a variety of engaging ways. Strategies to share and develop these very good practices should be included in agendas for subject department meetings

Digital technologies were used to very good effect to enhance learning in a large number lessons. As not all students have tablet devices, there is a need to consider how this disparity can affect the progress of students' learning. Very good use was seen where students used tablets to research current topics. The Digital Learning Plan will support the development of this aspect of lessons.

The subject department planning process is well-embedded in the school. There is evidence of very good collaboration between teachers, especially informal collaboration as a learning community. Building on the good work undertaken in the Forbairt project to enhance collaboration, subject departments should develop systematic ways to share experience and expertise through the subject planning process; this includes putting teaching and learning pedagogies on the agenda for subject department meetings and the creation of subject improvement plans, linked to agreed whole-school strategies and approaches through the SSE process.



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

The implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations is very good.

#### **Leadership and Management**

Amongst others, significant progress has been made in addressing recommendations relating to the concurrent creation of the SEN timetable with the mainstream timetable. The use of non-standardised assessments prior to entry is under review.

#### **Teaching and Learning**

As seen in classroom observations and subject department files, very good progress has been made in addressing teaching and learning recommendations.

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

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

The school's engagement with the SSE process is good. The school has completed the first cycle of SSE which focused on Literacy and Numeracy (SSE 2012 – 2016). The plans for these areas were developed and implemented as envisioned.

SSE work relating to the use of digital technologies needs to be approached in the same manner, with the setting of SMART targets and a focus on enhancing teaching and learning. An agreed whole-school approach is needed; this would feed into and inform the targets set in the Digital Learning Plan.

The second area, the identification of how to address the needs of students in the transition point from TY to fifth year, is at an early stage of development; the data collection stage is complete. A clear teaching and learning focus needs to be brought to bear on this area moving forward.

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

Given the strong relationships between staff, their support for the senior management team and their dedication and professionalism, it is clear that there is very good capacity for improvement within the school. This was also evidenced through the respectful manner in which the review of roles of responsibility was conducted and the efforts already underway to develop and evolve the roles and structures in the school.

## 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**

**TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management of Mount Mercy College, on behalf of our Senior Management team, the Staff, and the entire school community, wishes to acknowledge receipt of our WSE-MLL report. The BOM welcomed the opportunity of the WSE-MLL and the BOM is delighted that the Inspectorate acknowledged the very good standards that exist within Mount Mercy College. Among the many positive findings made by the inspectors in their report, we are particularly encouraged by the following acknowledgements by the Inspectorate:

- The board, senior management team, and staff are dedicated to the school and conscious of the responsibility that they bear in bringing to life the values of the CEIST charter and the school's mission statement.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good, with highly effective practices in place.
- The care of the students is very good and very good practices are in place to support the care of the students. The care of students was seen as a key element of the school's work and the BOM feel very positive that both parents and students are in agreement with the WSE-MLL findings.

## **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 following practices have already been put in place since the WSE-MLL:

- The school website is now live.
- The school enrolment form was amended to reflect recommendations from the Inspectorate.
- A health and safety update audit is currently underway.
- Issues pertaining to the timetabling of SPHE have been addressed.

The following will be undertaken in the coming months:

- The senior management team will clearly define their individual roles and responsibilities.
- A digital strategy framework will be put in place.
- The school will continue to support the initiative undertaken by the Forbairt team.