

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Coláiste Sheosaimh
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Gearrbaile Beál Áth na Slua Co. na Gaillimhe
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	62880J

Date of Evaluation: 24 November 2016



WHAT IS A WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING?

Whole-School Evaluations – Management, Leadership and Learning report on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. They affirm good practice and make 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.

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	14-15, 17-18, and 24 November 2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with board of management• Meetings with principal and deputy principal• Meetings with key staff• Review of relevant documents• Student focus-group interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with parents• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers

SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Joseph's College is a voluntary secondary day-school for boys operating under the trusteeship of the Diocese of Clonfert. It was founded as a junior seminary in 1892 to help educate priests. From then on, it provided second-level education for boarders and day students until it ceased offering a boarding service in 2008. A dual governance structure exists. A board of governors holds ultimate responsibility for the Catholic ethos and future direction of the college and administers its endowment. The board of management has responsibility for the management of the school.

In recent years, learning facilities and curriculum options have been expanded to meet the wider range of students' needs. In particular, the school has made a very significant contribution to meeting the needs of students with special educational needs in the Ballinasloe hinterland through its special needs unit. The unit incorporates special classes for students with moderate to severe general learning difficulties and for students on the autism spectrum in two school-financed junior and senior settings: Seomra na mBuachaillí and Áras na mBuachaillí.

Enrolment dipped from the time of the announcement of the end of boarding but has been steadily increasing since 2009, with a current enrolment of 534 students in 2016/17. The school is a strongly inclusive organisation, educating students from a variety of ethnic, faith, economic and social backgrounds.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- Care for students is a key strength of the school; inclusion, student support, and positive collaboration with parents, outside agencies and the local community underpin the ways in which school life is enacted by all staff members.
- The senior management team provides very good quality leadership and management; the overall quality of management and leadership at all levels of the school is good, with some notable strengths and some areas for improvement.
- The teachers of English are not implementing the school-based assessment aspects of the junior cycle specification. The reason for this was reported to be industrial action.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in most lessons, with some exemplary practices observed, and some scope for improvement in a few lessons.
- A very student-centred model of education planning operates in the school's special needs unit; there is scope for improvement in mainstream classes in learning/resource support planning, co-ordination, and information sharing among teachers.

- The school has very good capacity for change and improvement, based on its productive engagement with school self-evaluation (SSE), with peer learning, and with the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The board of management should consult with all main stakeholders regarding its identified priorities, gather feedback and then prepare a strategic plan to implement the priorities.
- Senior management should lead evidence-based action planning to address Framework for Junior Cycle implementation, health and safety risk assessment practices, and gaps in school policy requirements.
- Improvements in co-ordination, planning and administrative time are needed to support the literacy and numeracy needs of students with low achievement in mainstream classes.
- Teaching and learning would be further improved by consistent implementation of differentiation and assessment for learning strategies in all lessons.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management:

The board of management functions collaboratively, motivated by a deep commitment to the school's Catholic ethos and to providing students with a holistic, life-skills focused education. It has an effective role in helping to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for students, in supporting ongoing teacher professional development, and in managing issues relating to staffing, discipline, finance reports, and transfer applications and some school policy work. The strategic approach it has taken, over the past nine years, to leading a very extensive whole-school programme of addition and renewal to school facilities is highly commended.

The board of management has identified a number of developmental priorities for the school. It is recommended that a consultation process be overseen by the board of management to share those priorities with other stakeholders, to gather necessary feedback and then to prepare a strategic plan to implement those priorities. In shaping its strategic plan for improvement, the board needs to become more informed about the implementation elements of the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) and about SSE as an evidence-based model for managing change.

The school's partnership model of policy development is very good practice. However, the timeliness of policy development is problematic. The board of management needs to complete a policy and legislative checklist of their ongoing process of policy development and review, and their compliance with requirements, as an annual internal record. Available on the inspectorate website (www.schoolself-evaluation.ie), that checklist can be used to prioritise the missing school policies needing ratification or development. Draft Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE), special needs, and whole-school guidance policies are well developed but need to be brought through to ratification. A small number of required policies also need to be urgently developed, including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), data protection, and internet acceptable use policy.

Finally, programme planning for students in the special needs unit needs to take into account core messages in the SPHE/RSE curriculum, at an appropriate developmental level.

The long-established parents' association (PA) engages in a variety of activities including providing feedback on draft policies, organising talks for students on wellbeing issues, and fundraising. The principal provides detailed oral reports at PA meetings on general school life matters and, from time to time, on SSE and inspection report outcomes. Parent questionnaire responses indicated that parents feel happy with the school, feel welcome in it and feel that it is well run.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

It is evident that the principal and deputy principal work well together and that they form a very effective team. They lead by example and are both highly-committed to building positive relationships among students, parents, and staff. The principal demonstrates a consultative approach to school development and the deputy principal plays an important operational role in the school. Teacher and parent questionnaires indicate very high satisfaction ratings with how the school is run and students report that they are proud to attend the school.

The principal and deputy principal lead learning in a number of ways. They have invested a significant amount of time and effort into creating a positive, orderly atmosphere. The principal's sharing of findings and recommendations from inspection reports at staff meetings supports discussion and planning for whole-school improvement. Also, the commendable practice has been established of formally gathering staff feedback on a draft policy through group work at a staff meeting, simultaneously supporting policy development and identifying targeted continuing professional development (CPD) training for staff.

In practice, it is important to acknowledge that scope for leadership of learning is reduced by senior management's involvement in day-to-day management of student, parent, and staff-related issues. Evidence-based action planning for improvement has been established for some aspects of school life but needs to be extended to others.

A whole-school review of the posts of responsibility was completed in 2014. Currently, all posts deal with year head, assistant year head duties or exam secretary duties. It is clear that changes in practices have been accommodated by post holders. Looking to the school's future needs, it will be important to examine how the post of responsibility structure can accommodate changes that are needed to further support the principal, by creating more time where he can augment leadership of learning.

Significant evidence was gathered of non-post holders also demonstrating leadership capacity in different aspects of school life. A learning community has been established in the school, where peer leaders present at staff meetings about specific aspects of pedagogy or student support. This teamwork is having a positive impact on teaching and learning and is highly commended.

The school's curriculum has been regularly reviewed and adapted over the years, with the needs of students central to decision making and every effort possible made to preserve high levels of choice for students. Transition Year (TY) is a highly-regarded programme in the school and the numbers participating in it have more than doubled in six years. Evaluation and review are based on student and parent feedback. Closely connecting TY students and their learning with local community agencies is a key strength of the programme.

With regard to the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015), planning for its implementation needs to be prioritised, through consultation and the gathering of evidence to support decision making. The benefits of incorporating JC Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) within special needs unit programme

provision should also be actively examined. The teachers of English, Business Studies, and Science have not attended the relevant training provided by Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) for teachers of these subjects since 2014. The reason for this was reported to be industrial action. Teachers of these three new specifications have prepared schemes for them and, without the benefit of CPD, are delivering them to the best of their ability. The teachers of English are not implementing the school-based assessment aspects of the specification. The reason for this was reported to be industrial action. It is recommended that the teachers plan collaboratively for all aspects of the specifications for the benefit of students.

A positive atmosphere and respectful relationships were evident throughout the evaluation. A significant review of the code of behaviour in 2014 has led to positive outcomes, most evident in reduced suspensions. Awards for a broader range of student achievements are being presented at St Joseph's Day ceremonies and this is commended. It was noted during the evaluation that in one year group, students are dispersed among three post-holders with primary responsibility for their management and care. This creates confusion among some students and parents. Feedback on the effectiveness of this arrangement needs to be examined.

The ethos of care is clearly evident from the goodwill and commitment of staff members to organising co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. The school has broadened its supports for student care in recent years, grounded in a core student support team who inform year heads of relevant information as appropriate. In particular, senior management's openness and co-operation with external agencies to support improved outcomes for individual students, combined with school-financed home-school-community work by another staff member, is highly commended.

The school facilitates students in their subject choices through a variety of sampling arrangements and information sessions. A very good model of providing guidance information is in operation, where parents and students are brought together to the same information session to support decision making. Also, the guidance department's provision of resources to support third-level course applications decisions on the school's website is highly commended.

The school operates an open, inclusive admissions policy. A maximum of six students can be accommodated in each of the school's three special classes. Seomra na mBuachaillí contains a classroom, 2 showers, toilet, computer suite and fully fitted kitchen. Áras na mBuachaillí houses a classroom, library/ games room, shower, toilet and relaxation room. The designated co-ordinator of this special needs unit organises a QQI programme either at level 1, 2, 3 or 4, depending on the education plan for each individual student in the unit, as decided in consultation with parents, the special needs unit co-ordinator, the primary teacher of an incoming first-year, special needs assistants, and external service providers. This is a highly commended model of individual education planning.

The education plans prepared in the special classes identify whether a student is full time in the special needs unit working on a QQI programme or if the student attends classes in the special needs unit and in mainstream classes, accessing non-examination and/or examination subjects in the Junior Cycle or Leaving Certificate programme. Also, the planned integration of students from the special needs unit with students from mainstream classes is a particular feature of Transition Year, focused on the sharing of swimming, music and drama, work experience, and social action activities. Parents praised these integrated activities as powerful learning experiences for both sets of students.

Recruitment and planning for recruitment of teachers with special educational needs (SEN) specialist qualifications has been of high quality. School management has rightly identified that another staff member is needed for whole-school SEN support, to help with the co-ordination of the special needs unit and with the planning and co-ordination of learning/resource support in mainstream classes.

Provision of support to students with learning needs is less developed in mainstream classes. A large number of staff are deployed to provide learning/resource support to such students. For the non-post-holder who functions as learning support co-ordinator for mainstream classes, the expectation that all SEN-related administrative work would be completed in addition to a full teaching load is not sustainable. It is recommended that the number of staff assigned to deliver learning/resource support be reduced to facilitate more continuity for students and that the co-ordinator be provided with some administrative time to fulfil the role.

A very wide diversity of leadership roles is undertaken by students of the school and the student council contributes to decision-making on aspects of school life and policy. Student questionnaire responses indicate that listening to and acting on student feedback is an area for improvement. Regularly surveying student views on learning, future curriculum provision, and wellbeing issues is recommended. It will be important for school management to monitor issues surfacing in survey responses from different year groups, to ensure that differentiation of supports, where necessary, is planned for.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

1.3 Management of facilities

Over the last nine years, a comprehensive programme of developments and improvements has equipped the historic campus with very attractive, well-maintained facilities that will serve future generations. While significant information and communications technology (ICT) improvements have been made over the past decade, a significant proportion of teachers reported that they still do not have good access to ICT facilities. An e-learning plan should be prepared to identify strengths and needs in this area to guide the utilisation of the ICT infrastructure grant allocated to the school as part of the implementation of the “Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 Enhancing Teaching Learning and Assessment.”

School practice is to source health and safety risk assessments and a whole-school statement from an external contractor, supported by some in-house safety practices. Templates from the HSA’s 2010 *Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools* should be provided to all staff, for completion at an agreed time each year, and tracking of actions should be systemised. Finally, the board of management should include health and safety on its agenda items and ensure that risks identified are addressed in a planned manner.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Subject planning is effective, based on the sample of plans reviewed. Features of the best subject plans included the detailing of subject-specific differentiation supports for the less able and more able, some good templates for success criteria in writing in some subjects, and some TY modules requiring student investigation or presentation work based on topics connected to the local environment. It

would be helpful to include, in the subject department plans, the annual certificate examination results analysis and state the departmental actions to be taken based on any trends identified.

Seventeen lesson periods across a range of subjects and programmes were observed by inspectors. The quality of teaching was assessed as good or very good in most lessons, with some exemplary practices observed, and some scope for improvement in a few lessons.

Some features of the best lessons observed included teachers setting very high expectations for students, utilising good quality questioning that linked new concepts to the school environment or students' experience, and incorporating active learning opportunities into lessons. Other teaching approaches utilised in the best lessons included the use of visual or digital aids to support student learning, the use of literacy and numeracy support strategies, and the preparation and use of differentiated learning intentions and activities.

In the small number of lessons where there was scope for improvement in teachers' individual practice, assessment practices were not used effectively to allow the teacher to gauge what students were mastering and were struggling with during the learning of that topic. Also, teachers' preparation did not include the differentiation of learning intentions and learning activities sufficiently.

The quality of learning was assessed as good or very good in most lessons, with some exemplary practices observed, and some scope for improvement in a few lessons. A common feature of the best learning experiences and outcomes was the sharing of attainable learning intentions with students to help them engage purposefully with their work. Providing active learning opportunities to students enabled them to demonstrate enquiring attitudes and approaches and to model their thinking, writing, or performance process for others, to support peer learning and student reflection. The provision of very good quality formative feedback to students orally or in writing also supported their learning.

In a small number of lessons, there was scope for improvement in supporting students' learning. In those lessons, the real-life benefits of learning new content or skills needed to be highlighted to increase students' engagement and motivation. Also, more active methodologies needed to be incorporated to create a greater balance between teacher and student activity.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

The school has very diligently implemented almost all management-related recommendations made in previous inspections. Partial progress has been achieved with regard to the implementation of previous whole school evaluation report's recommendation about the board's role in overseeing school development planning.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Very good progress has been made in implementing the broader schemes of work model within subject planning recommended to departments by previous inspections.

Partial progress has been made in relation to the three teaching and learning themes that recurred in previous subject inspections: the need for the consistent integration of assessment for learning (AfL) approaches, of differentiation, and of active learning approaches into classroom practices. This is a positive finding, since pedagogical change takes longer to achieve than planning recommendations.

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

The school has engaged very positively with the SSE process. It has consulted and gathered quantitative and qualitative data from teachers, parents, and students to support action planning. Evidence that the process is having a positive impact on teaching and learning was gathered by inspectors during classroom observations, in subject department schemes, and in the school's SSE documentation.

Of particular significance is the way that SSE review among staff has led to a structured sharing of teaching methodologies to support improved student learning. The culture of peer learning and sharing that has been created through this work testifies to the school's very good capacity for change and improvement.

Two developments are now advised in relation to SSE. The outcomes of the school's SSE process should be communicated clearly to all members of the school community, and especially to parents, at least once annually. Finally, future engagement in SSE should be guided by Circular 40/2016, which outlines the school's flexibility and autonomy to focus its SSE process on its own teaching and learning needs, while also providing the option to use SSE to help introduce and embed relevant aspects of the Junior Cycle Framework.

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 findings and recommendations of the inspection report. The Board found the inspection process very helpful and informative. The Board acknowledge the areas for improvement identified by the Inspectorate.

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 will prioritise the areas for improvement identified in the inspection report and the Board will implement the recommendations.

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 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;