

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

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

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Raphael's College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Loughrea Co. Galway
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	63070C

Date of Evaluation: 09 May 2017



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	04 to 9 May 2017
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 Raphael's College is a post-primary co-educational school under the trusteeship of CEIST - Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust and is one of two providers of post-primary education in the town of Loughrea. The current enrolment is 543 students which has increased from 366 students in 2010. The school offers the Transition Year (TY) programme and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), in addition to the Junior Certificate and established Leaving Certificate programmes. The principal of the school is currently on a career break and an acting principal and acting deputy principal were appointed in January 2017. A new school extension is planned to open in September 2017.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The CEIST charter is evident in all aspects of school life and the whole-school community demonstrates a sense of pride in the traditions of the school; the quality of care for students is of a very high standard.
- The quality of school management and leadership provided by the board is good; however, there is scope to extend the board's leadership and oversight of teaching and learning.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in most lessons, with satisfactory or fair practice evident in a small number of lessons; assessment for learning (AfL) is an area that requires improvement.
- The quality of subject planning is good overall and is functioning well.
- The school has made good progress in implementing recommendations from previous evaluations.
- The school has excellent capacity for change and improvement based on the structures which are in place, the highly committed staff and the overall good implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations.
- At the time of the evaluation, new subject specifications of the revised Junior Cycle were being implemented but some elements were not being delivered.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The board should extend its leadership and oversight of matters relating to teaching and learning.
- In developing the school plan, the board should adopt a systematic policy development review cycle to ensure that all policies are in place and up-to-date.
- All aspects of the new junior cycle, as required by relevant Department circulars, should be implemented.
- The current practice whereby some senior cycle students have a significant number of study periods needs to be revised.
- Teachers should further develop their approaches to the assessment of students' learning in lessons including focusing on more effective questioning and providing more regular formative feedback on students' work.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1. School ownership and management:

The quality of school governance is good. The board of management is appropriately constituted and its members have received relevant training. Minutes of meetings are detailed, and a structured principal's report ensures that members of the board are kept well informed about all aspects of school life. The CEIST charter is evident in all aspects of school life and the whole-school community demonstrates a sense of pride in the traditions of the school.

While many plans and policies have been developed, there is currently no overall school plan in place. The board, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, should agree a specific list of whole-school priorities for inclusion in a school strategy document; action plans that support the achievement of each priority should also be developed. Key strategies should include: planning for curricular changes, in particular junior cycle and school self-evaluation (SSE); planning for increasing student enrolment; extending teaching and learning strategies and the continued development of school facilities.

All of the mandatory policies are in place, however a significant number are in need of updating. The board should adopt a systematic policy development review cycle to prevent the current situation reoccurring. In this regard, the admissions policy and code of behaviour need to be prioritised. In response to increased enrolment, it is recommended that the admissions policy be revised so that clear criteria for enrolment are in place. While student behaviour observed during the evaluation was excellent, the code of behaviour lacks clarity in a number of key areas. There is a need to include discipline procedures, information regarding suspensions and expulsions, and review procedures in this policy.

The parents' association is very supportive of the school and has led many initiatives including a careers day which is voluntarily supported by past pupils and local professionals. Parents' association

meetings are held regularly and these are attended by the principal. Parents' surveys expressed high levels of satisfaction with how the school is run and how their children are progressing. However, parents also indicate that there is scope for the parents' association to improve communication with the wider parent body. The parents' association can also play a valuable role in policy review. The school's website is an area that should be developed further to ensure greater parental engagement.

An active and appropriately organised student council is in place in the school and is supported by two student council liaison teachers who have worked with the council members to achieve an Amber Flag award. Student mentoring of first-year students is also in place as an effective leadership role for students.

1.2. Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The quality of leadership and management from the highly committed acting principal and acting deputy principal is good. They lead staff effectively in providing a caring, welcoming and supportive learning environment for students. Both have retained some of their teaching hours since taking up their acting positions and this is challenging given their current considerable workload in managing matters relating to a sizable building development. Also, it impacts on the time available for other key priorities. In conjunction with the board, senior management needs to build a greater role in leading learning and developing long-term strategic planning. Reducing their teaching commitments in the coming year will be required to help progress this aspect of the roles.

Good lines of communication exist between the senior management team and the staff. A variety of tasks are carried out by both post holders and non-post holders and there are very high levels of volunteerism among the staff. The middle management post structure and associated responsibilities were systematically reviewed and changed in recent months. The process, conducted by an external facilitator and in consultation with staff, was prioritised to ensure that key school needs continue to be met. It is suggested that all post holders meet annually with senior management to facilitate review and reflection on progress and challenges within their individual roles.

The school has commendably identified the need to improve monitoring of student performance and the revised year head role will facilitate this. There is clear evidence of distributed leadership among staff with significant staff involvement in a range of working groups and this is not confined to teachers who hold posts of responsibility. While a staff handbook is available, there is potential to include a mentoring system to support the induction of teachers new to the school and of student teachers. Teachers identify and engage in continuing professional development that expands their own practice and meets the needs of students in the school.

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum, including optional TY and LCVP. The curriculum is continuously expanding in accordance with increasing student and teacher numbers. Classes are organised mostly on a mixed-ability basis, and subject sampling in first year and in TY supports informed subject choice in junior and senior cycle; this is very good practice. Overall, current timetabling provision is good but there are a small number of areas which require improvement. First-year students have one single physical education (PE) class per week and this will need to be increased to a double class per week to meet with the requirements of Junior Cycle *Wellbeing*. Management should review the current optional PE arrangements at senior cycle in accordance with the *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools*. It is recommended that all students should

participate in PE. Due to the current optional nature of PE in the school and the timetabling arrangements for students not studying LCVP, a number of senior cycle students have a significant number of study periods each week; this needs to be revised.

Two voluntary TY coordinators are in place and the positions rotate regularly among teachers. The TY programme offers a range of learning experiences for students, however assessment practices need to improve. The development of a programme-wide accreditation system is recommended and, the plan for each subject area of study should include detail on the assessment modes and how each assessment will contribute to this accreditation system. The TY programme is reviewed annually to ensure it is continuing to meet the needs of the students and this is good practice. LCVP is well established within the school and procedures are in place to ensure all students, who are LCVP compliant, can avail of this programme.

Planning for, and implementation of, the Junior Cycle Framework has been limited to date but progress has been made in this regard recently. There is evidence that the new specifications in English, Science and Business Studies are being used to inform teaching. Neither the classroom-based assessments (CBAs) for English or subject learning and assessment review (SLAR) meetings, as required by Circular 0024/2016, have taken place. The reason for this was reported to be industrial action. In order that each student will benefit from the full range of learning experiences provided for in the specifications, it is recommended that teachers implement all aspects of the specifications in their relevant subject areas, including CBAs. Furthermore, teachers should engage in SLAR meetings after the CBAs have been completed in order to build a common understanding of the quality of student learning and to quality assure the assessment of students' work as outlined in the *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015*.

Student care is of a very high quality. Students' welfare is a whole-school priority with year heads, voluntary class tutors, guidance counsellor, special educational needs (SEN) team and voluntary school chaplain all playing important roles. The formation of a dedicated care team which meets regularly to agree on actions to support students could be considered. There is also a need to establish a communications policy which includes procedures on how sensitive student information is communicated to relevant staff. A very good guidance plan is in place which also provides an overview of how career guidance is delivered on the school's curriculum. One fully qualified staff member provides guidance support, and counselling supports are provided with funding made available by the Sisters of Mercy. Additional support is also sourced from outside agencies as necessary.

The structures, organisation and provision for SEN are very good and the core team of teachers has a high level of expertise and training. Interventions include one-to-one and small-group withdrawal support and some team teaching. Currently, the team of teachers providing timetabled support is very large and senior management should, over time, work towards reducing the size of this team to ensure continuity in supports for students. Testing and retesting to monitor students' progress is used, and the school is currently investigating different testing approaches which would provide more robust data. The school is in receipt of funding to provide specific support to students with physical disabilities. The students who attend this unit also attend mainstream lessons and indicated that they feel part of the school community, which is an example of the school's inclusive nature.

Due to the staggered start for various year groups at the outset of the academic year, the minimum number of 167 teaching days is not provided for all students. It is recommended that the board of management ensures compliance with Circular Letter M29/95 in this regard.

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

The school is bright and welcoming and is maintained in excellent condition. This reflects very positively on the work of the caretaking and ancillary staff, and on the pride which students take in their school building. The new school extension is due to open in September 2017 and, it will provide students with state-of-the-art facilities. The information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure has been upgraded recently, and significant progress has been made to enhance in-school communication. The benefits of attendance/academic monitoring software should be investigated to increase the efficiency by which relevant data is collected and analysed. The school website, which is potentially a valuable resource, needs regular updating to provide key information about school life to parents and students.

Provision for health and safety is good in the school. Annual risk assessments should be undertaken by teachers, in line with Health and Safety Authority (HSA) guidelines 2010, and the related school health and safety policy should then be updated every year. Some health and safety issues in the junior building need to be addressed, as discussed during the inspection.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1. The quality of learning and teaching

During the evaluation twenty lessons were observed. The quality of teaching and of learning was good or very good in most lessons; with satisfactory or fair practice evident in a small number of lessons.

Most lessons were well prepared and ensured a purposeful experience of learning for students. A small number of lessons showed some areas needing improvement in respect of enhancing students' ownership of learning and developing aspects of group work and assessment. Lessons were well managed and students worked well with their teachers. Seating in many classrooms had been arranged purposefully to optimise group or pair work.

Highly effective group work was noted in a few lessons; activities were well structured and the plenary sessions facilitated and reinforced the learning during these sessions. This highly effective collaborative approach to learning, seen in a few instances, should be shared and adopted throughout the school. Many lessons began with a focused revision of previously covered material while making links to the next stage in learning. This was established through questioning that allowed students to display understanding and recall.

ICT was successfully used to enhance learning in a small number of lessons. It was most effective when students were required to engage with the resource in some way. Generally, students' own ICT skills showed scope for development. This is an area for improvement when the new facilities are available.

The quality of assessment observed ranged between very good and satisfactory. In most lessons, effective questioning strategies facilitated the development of students' higher-order thinking skills.

However, in a small number of lessons questioning was global in nature, resulting in the same students answering most questions. Directed questioning should be used more often in these lessons to assess all students' learning. Learning intentions were shared with students at the outset of most lessons. They were particularly effective when written in the form of differentiated outcomes and in student-accessible language. Where best practice was observed, they were revisited throughout the lesson and used to support reflection of progress at the end. Improvement is required in the regularity with which students are provided with written formative feedback on their work. Differentiation, to cater for the range of students' abilities and needs, was mostly achieved through monitoring students' work and providing support where necessary.

The quality of subject planning is good overall and is functioning well. Particular emphasis is placed on improving the quality of subject department planning and on having all new initiatives anchored in those plans. Some subject department plans are exemplary and demonstrate a reflective and progressive approach to teaching and learning. Best practice was seen where plans focused on skills development and learning outcomes that were linked to curricular content, timeframes, resources, teaching methodologies and assessment. Subject plans should continue to evolve to reflect best practice and additional advice provided by curriculum support services.

Students have access to a variety of high quality co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to support their learning and to provide a holistic learning experience. To further build upon identified highly effective teaching, learning and assessment approaches, school self-evaluation action-planning should now become the focus to further develop classroom practice.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1. Management

School management demonstrates a clear commitment to implementing recommendations made in previous evaluation reports. Good progress has been made in areas such as developing detailed schemes of work, reduction in the transcription of notes in lessons and subject information sharing at times of transition. Partial progress was noted in regard to providing formal opportunities to discuss issues relating to teaching and learning at subject department meetings and the use of ICT to support learning. It is recommended that matters concerning teaching and learning be a standing item on all staff and department meeting agendas.

3.2. Learning and teaching

Recommendations regarding teaching and learning in previous inspections have mostly been addressed with the strategies to support AfL continuing to be an area for improvement. There has been good progress in the use of literacy strategies and in providing opportunities for student collaborative learning.

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

School self-evaluation practices are well established, and progress has been made through the use of surveys, discussion and review processes. Committees have been formed to progress the themes identified by the school including literacy and numeracy. A second tranche of SSE will be the needed

to refocus the approach to the identification of priorities, with an increased oversight role by the board. The priorities should focus on introducing and embedding relevant aspects of the *Framework for Junior Cycle*.

There is excellent capacity among the board of management, teaching staff, parents and students to embrace change and improvement through the self-evaluation process.

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 of St. Raphael's College welcomes the WSE/MLL Report and is particularly pleased with the affirmation of the very positive relationships shared by Ceist, the Mercy Sisters, Board of Management, management, teaching staff, ancillary staff, parents and students.

The Report notes the many excellent practices in the college and particularly:

- the inclusive, student-centred and caring approach facilitated by a dedicated care team which is very much in line with our Mission Statement
- the broad and balanced curriculum
- the pastoral leadership and vision of senior management and the focus on positive behaviour and the atmosphere of mutual respect which pervades the college
- the Staff's obvious commitment to delivering the best possible learning experience through their hard work and dedication, their spirit of collegiality, their involvement in a range of extra-curricular activities, their embracing of school self-evaluation (SSE), subject department planning and monitoring of student performance
- the wide-ranging support structures which have been put in place for students
- the very positive contribution of the members of the Board
- the time and commitment of the members of the Board
- the excellent role of the team involved in SEN and in the physical disabilities unit
- the active and positive role being delivered by the students and staff in the Student Council
- the essential and valuable role played by the office and maintenance staff

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 acknowledges the recommendations made in the Report and is fully committed to implementing them. Some have already been implemented.

The Board accepts that the national industrial action has impeded full involvement with the Junior Cycle framework, but now that the dispute is over, full participation in the classroom based assessments (CBA) and subject learning and assessment review (SLAR) meetings will take place as per Circular 0024/2016.

The disturbance caused by the building of the new extension and refurbishment work is now over and the new structure is contributing to a more streamlined organisation. The Board will be treating the further extension of classrooms as a priority and absolute necessity.

The new Sports Hall/Gym facilities available have resolved the issue with Senior level study periods and PE.

The Board, in consultation with its education partners, has developed and ratified a new Code of Behaviour which is now in place. The new Child Protection Policy has also been ratified.

The Board had embarked on a complete review and update of all school policies on an ongoing basis, with priority to the Admission Policy, and the development of others including Vetting, Data Protection.

The Board views the Report as a valuable guide to assist it in overseeing the quality of teaching and learning, and will encourage the use of new IT facilities and the SSE Group in the ongoing development of AfL.

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 <i>very good</i> 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;