

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

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| Ainm na scoile / School name | St Finian's College |
| Seoladh na scoile / School address | Mullingar Co. Westmeath |
| Uimhir rolla / Roll number | 63280N |

Date of Evaluation: 07-02-2019



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 did not meet the requirements in relation to 7 above and therefore was not fully compliant with the checks undertaken.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

| Dates of inspection | 04-08 February 2019 |
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| 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.Finian's College is a co-educational voluntary second-level school located in Mullingar, Co.Westmeath. Curricular programmes on offer include Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate (Established) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Furthermore, the *Schola Cantorum* provides a specialised music education in addition to mainstream tuition for a number of students. The enrolment at the time of the evaluation was 774.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of leadership and management is effective at all levels in the school; the board and the newly formed senior management team (SMT) have correctly identified areas for improvement in leading learning and teaching.
- A range of subjects and programmes has been introduced recently; there is scope to increase the class contact time allocated to a number of subject areas.
- Student management is very good, with further scope to review existing processes for monitoring student attendance.
- Staff and student well-being practices are being developed within the school; current provision for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is less than satisfactory and, consequently, the school is not fully compliant with the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good, or very good, in most lessons; where aspects of practice were satisfactory, there was scope for further continuing professional development (CPD).
- Progress has been made in the implementation of recommendations from previous inspections and the school has a long-standing tradition of positive engagement with school self-evaluation (SSE) processes.

Recommendations

- The board, in conjunction with the SMT, should oversee a curriculum review in areas such as planning and timetabling; this should include a rebalancing of the time allocated to subjects at junior cycle and enhanced provision for both Physical Education (PE) and Guidance.
- The SMT should review existing practices for monitoring attendance, with a view to devising specific strategies aimed at encouraging good student attendance.

- The board should make adequate provision for both SPHE, at junior cycle, and RSE, for all year groups, in order to meet the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017*; the development and ratification of the draft RSE policy should also be prioritised.
- The SMT, supported by the board, should formulate a whole-school action plan for CPD and promote further training opportunities for staff in identified areas.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

A range of curricular programmes are on offer to cater for the student cohort. To facilitate growing numbers of students and to provide a more inclusive education the school has diversified and recently included Technology and Technical Graphics. Students also have the opportunity to study two modern foreign languages throughout their education; this is very positive and reflects government policy, as outlined in *Languages Connect – Ireland’s strategy for foreign languages in education*.

Commendably, a small core team of SPHE teachers has been formed in the last academic year. Currently, only first and second-year students have timetabled provision for SPHE and RSE; this is less than satisfactory. As a result, the school was not fully compliant with the child protection checks undertaken during the evaluation. The school should timetable RSE and SPHE in line with Circular letters 0037/2010 and 0079/2018. SMT have indicated their intention to address these matters without delay.

The school has taken steps to improve provision for PE; for example, a double lesson period was recently introduced for third-year students. As part of that rebalancing for that same year group, the school reports that SPHE became unavailable for this year only. While the majority of students in fifth and sixth-year have access to PE, this is not timetabled for the full year. This should be addressed in line with syllabus recommendations.

Care team meetings take place weekly and are facilitated by SMT. The school benefits from the services of two Guidance Counsellors and first and second-year students have individual meetings with a Guidance Counsellor to support their needs. Guidance is not scheduled weekly on any student timetable and provision could be enhanced through rebalancing the focus from individual to regular whole-class contact at critical times.

The taster programme was commended by parents, staff and students as an opportunity to experience a range of subject areas and to make more informed subject choices. Staff also acknowledged that the year-long programme was creating instances of increased urgency to complete course material at a later stage in Junior Cycle. In order to incrementally develop student skills at Junior Cycle, a review of how the taster programme operates should be undertaken.

Inequities in the provision of time allocated to certain subjects were identified. For example, the timetabled provision for Science at Junior Cycle is significantly less than the time allocated to modern foreign languages, even though both subject areas have the same minimum specification requirements. This should be rebalanced.

In the context of timetabling and curriculum planning, it is recommended that the new post of responsibility for Curriculum Development and the school's Curriculum Group, work together to re-examine current school provision in curricular areas and make recommendations for improvement. As part of that timetable review, the length of the taster programme may need to be examined.

Overall deployment of staff is good. A number of teachers are availing of job-sharing and to facilitate such arrangements, a practice exists whereby some classes are shared. This practice is not ideal and should be reviewed, with the educational needs of the students prioritised.

The school 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 teachers, student teachers, students and the teacher education institution.

Positive steps to open the school to the wider community include the addition of the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) units. Special educational needs (SEN) support models in operation include one-to-one tuition, team-teaching and small class groupings, all of which support student learning. SEN staff have also presented to colleagues on a number of relevant issues, with further staff-to-staff presentations imminent. In line with good practice, the number of teachers providing SEN tuition has also been rationalised in recent years. To build on these very positive developments, the overall numbers of staff involved, which are still significant, could be further reduced in order to build up the expertise of a smaller team, as well as ensuring that students gain from contact with a reduced number of teachers.

Managing the organisation

The board is properly constituted and provides positive and supportive leadership to the school. Members have received training for their role and meetings are held regularly.

Administrative matters are the main items of discussion recorded at board meetings. Recent board discussions relating to SSE are welcome. In the past, the board has also engaged in reflection and action with regards to outcomes in certificate examinations. These very good practices should be extended through further emphasising the promotion of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for staff, policy development and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning as items on the agenda of board meetings.

All mandatory policies are in place, or in draft form. The board has identified the draft RSE policy as a priority for development and further review should ensure that it reflects Circular letter M20/96 requirements in terms of the instruction time allocated to each year group. The SPHE policy will also require amendments.

Although newly formed since January of this year, the SMT has demonstrated a strong commitment to the school and are mutually supportive. SMT meetings take place daily, the minutes of which are recorded. The principal takes responsibility for overall leadership within the school and is supported by the two deputy principals. Together, they manage the school effectively on a day-to-day basis. Roles have been delineated amongst the SMT and the enthusiasm that they bring to their respective roles at this turning point in the life of the school is very positive.

A review of the existing post of responsibilities was recently undertaken, and new roles to support teaching and learning were identified. Post-holders meet regularly with SMT and provide reports on their tasks. These developments are very positive. Overall, duties are carried out diligently; further delineation of roles is advised as part of the ongoing review and development of the post structure to ensure that roles are further developed to support teaching and learning.

Student attendance is monitored by management at various levels, including an assigned post-holder. This has resulted in a level of monitoring that is time and labour-intensive. Overall attendance data indicated static trends in absenteeism over recent years and minutes of staff meetings also acknowledge concerns regarding student attendance. Attendance was noted to be problematic in some lessons during the evaluation, particularly in TY. The school's Attendance Strategy contains a number of potential routes to promote student attendance and the implementation of such strategies, including the further development of a student-centred learning environment, is advised.

At present, the tutor for each class group is, in most instances, also a subject teacher for that group. Tutors carry out related tasks during core teaching time. The school should review the current structures in order to enhance the role of the tutor, to minimise the time taken from class tuition, and, where possible to ensure continuity in tutor-student contact from year-to-year.

Student behaviour was noted to be very good during the evaluation. The code of excellence sets out clearly the sanctions and ladder of referral. Future review should look at the implementation of agreed measures to promote positive behaviour, including greater use of the student journal.

The recently ratified Admissions policy is clear and comprehensive, with plans are in place to review this policy in line with the Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2018.

Leading school development

The board, school management and staff share a common vision to place teaching and learning within a modern context; this includes the implementation of the *Digital Learning Framework for Post-Primary Schools*, policy development, and the implementation of national educational reforms and curricular change.

Parent representatives from the board were interviewed during the evaluation and were very supportive of the school; parent questionnaire responses also demonstrated satisfaction with the service that the school is providing to students.

In order to support the students' transition from primary to post-primary education, links have been established with feeder primary schools, to include regular visits prior to enrolment. Links with the community include collaborative concerts with local schools and an exchange link with a school in Germany.

Developing leadership capacity

Both staff and SMT have engaged in CPD to develop leadership capacity and support teaching and learning in areas such as wellbeing and masters-level programmes. This is good practice.

In addition, a number of staff-to-staff CPD events have been held in areas such as the exploitation of information and communications technology (ICT) as a teaching tool. An upcoming “teaching and learning week” represents an opportunity to further encourage collaboration amongst teachers. During the course of the evaluation, there was an awareness of the need to build on the evident improvements observed in teaching and learning. In that regard, it is recommended that senior management undertake an audit of staff professional learning requirements and devise an overall strategy for CPD to support identified needs, and support greater consistency in effective teaching strategies to support the overall student experience. This could also be an opportunity to inform and further develop school-wide teaching and learning initiatives.

Independent of the post structure, staff volunteerism is evident in areas such as leading subject and programme co-ordination, as tutors, and in the provision of a Saturday morning study programme for students. This is commendable.

Student leadership opportunities are very good and include the mentoring system and the students’ council. The mentors receive training for their role from an external agency and this very good practice should be extended to student council members to support them make the best possible use of the opportunity to participate in the council. Commendably, members of the council also meet with the board annually.

A range of extra and co-curricular activities is provided in the school, to support students’ moral, spiritual, social and personal development, all of which is supported and co-ordinated by staff. This impacts positively on the student experience by broadening their opportunities to extend their learning beyond the classroom.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in most lessons; some areas of practice were identified as satisfactory in a small number of lessons.

Learner outcomes and experiences

Learning intentions were presented at the outset of most lessons and, in the best examples, they were clearly stated and focussed on what learners should be able to do or know by the end of the lesson, with a review of learning taking place at the end. In a number of instances, the learning intentions were either not stated, or overly generic, and there was scope to expand the learning intentions to challenge students and progress their learning.

A very positive teacher-student rapport was a feature of lessons, with students on task and focussed at all times. It was noted that, in a number of lessons, students were also willing to ask questions and risk answers, indicating that this is an established practice within the school.

The most effective lessons involved a very good balance between teacher instruction and student activity. In those lessons, the student voice was central and momentum for learning was optimised. In other lessons, the teacher voice was more central and learning did not progress at the same pace, nor was the experience as engaging as it could have been for students. Going forward, teachers should collaborate further to identify strategies that could enhance the development of more student-centred learning environments.

Some very good questioning strategies were observed in lessons. These included targeted and spontaneous questions to individual students, often to extend their knowledge of the topic in question. In lessons where teachers used more global questions, this resulted in some chorus answering and this practice should be reviewed. There is some scope for greater use of more challenging questions and the use of wait time to deepen students' understanding.

Strategies to promote a differentiated approach to student learning included circulation around the classroom by teachers to provide individual support, as well as differentiated homework and questioning strategies. Overall, further planning for differentiation is advised, for example through the use of differentiated outcomes.

Oral formative feedback was observed in lessons; and more generally, formative assessment strategies observed included some use of 'traffic lights' and 'exit slips'; these good practices should be extended.

A review of student copybooks indicated that there is significant scope for a more consistent whole-school approach to the correcting of students' written work, to include the provision of written feedback. The current SSE strategy regarding the provision of formative feedback, as a means of encouraging students to reflect on and to improve the quality of their written work should, in time, lead to greater application of this approach to student work.

A working group has been established to embed the *Digital Learning Framework for Post-Primary Schools*, with a focus on devising a digital plan for the school and to present to staff at staff meetings. In addition, TY students avail of ICT devices for the duration of the programme in order to support and enhance their learning. Following evidence gathered from staff and students that indicated a need to employ ICT as a teaching and learning tool to a greater extent, these recent developments are very positive and should assist in that regard.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

Very good individual preparation for lessons was noted in terms of teaching resources, including worksheets and visuals. A good sequence and structure was generally observed in lessons, with learning objectives attained.

Teachers were noted to be open to change, for example, a number of the classrooms have been adjusted to reflect the seating arrangements identified as most supportive of active learning. This should be extended where possible.

Good attention to student literacy skills was noted in some lessons including, appropriate care to keywords and spelling. In many classrooms, there were displays of students' work and commercially sourced materials also on display. Numeracy moments were also observed in a number of lessons, including in a Music lesson, where student responses to a quiz were turned into percentages.

Homework was assigned in most lessons, however, a review of students' journals indicated variation in the level at which such work is recorded and monitored. The use of the journal, for example through the inclusion of positive behaviour messages or detailed student reflections, is an area for development.

Opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively are facilitated. In addition, time at staff meetings is used to allow teachers to share practices, including innovative ICT teaching and learning methodologies. This is good practice.

Teachers' collective curriculum planning for subjects' areas is progressing and good practice was observed. Some subject plans are overly focused on the content to be delivered and these should be further developed to become active working documents; in addition the time-bound aspect of delivery should be developed.

The overall quality of programme planning was good. A calendar of events is maintained for TY and feedback is sought to ensure ongoing improvements to the programme. As the recently introduced programme becomes more embedded, further development should focus on emphasising experiential learning. The LCVP plan outlines and schedules the content to be covered; further development should examine and review the role of LCVP within the school curriculum, particularly with regard to LCVP student access to Guidance and PE.

School management provides detailed analysis of student attainment, in order to plan for improvements in educational outcomes. A review of the available data indicated many positive outcomes and a smaller number of trends giving rise to concern. In a number of instances, the data analysed by subject departments included comments that reflected on the overall outcomes. However, targets for improvement that were specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) were not observed, and this is an area for development.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

Overall, good progress has been made with many of the recommendations arising from previous inspection reports. These include the introduction of team-teaching and the reduction in the size of the SEN team, as well as the rationalisation of the code of excellence, and the timetabling of Art lessons in adjacent classrooms.

Teaching and Learning

Progress achieved in relation to the implementation of previous teaching and learning recommendations varied from excellent to limited. Good questioning strategies were observed and some strategies to promote differentiation were also noted in lessons. The provision of formative written feedback and the development of student-centred learning environments are areas that require ongoing development.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school has a long-standing tradition of positive engagement in the SSE process; the current focus is assessment, reporting, and embedding ICT as a teaching and learning tool. Baseline data has been gathered and all partners in education have been consulted. While SMART targets have yet to be established, it is laudable that the areas of focus identified by the school community accurately reflect the recommendations for development identified in this report.

Good strategies to promote literacy and numeracy were observed in a number of lessons. Going forward, updating and reviewing plans for literacy and numeracy is advised to ensure that these areas of practice continue to remain at the forefront of teaching and learning.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school has successfully managed many changes, including the increase in the student cohort and moving to co-educational provision. Questionnaire results show overall satisfaction with the school. In light of these strengths, and the willingness of the school community to recognise and engage with the areas in need of development, the school demonstrates very good capacity for improvement.

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

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of St.Finian's College acknowledges the very positive WSE/MLL report completed by the Inspectorate. The whole school community has been affirmed by its contents.

Area 2 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 work with parents, pupils and staff to implement the findings and recommendations contained in this report.

In relation to Child Protection, the school will be fully compliant for the academic year 2019/2020. A curriculum review team, led by the SMT, has been already established, with a view to rebalancing subjects at junior cycle and to examine enhanced provision for Guidance and PE.

The SMT have begun the process of devising specific strategies aimed at encouraging good student attendance.

The BOM and SMT have begun the process to formulate a whole school action plan for staff CPD. All staff qualifications and areas of interest to staff, have been identified. Areas for further training and opportunities for the utilisation of staff expertise will be developed.