

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Joseph's Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Rochfortbridge Co. Westmeath
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	63310T

Date of Evaluation: 13-03-2019

Date of issue of report:



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agus Scileanna**
Department of
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WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning reports on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. It affirms good practice and makes recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspectors evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. Quality of school leadership and management
2. Quality of teaching and learning
3. Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations
4. The school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.
4. The Child Safeguarding Statement meets the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.
5. The records of the last three board of management meetings record a child protection oversight report that meet the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017.
6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all school personnel on the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2017
7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE, Wellbeing).
8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	13-03-2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with board of management• Meetings with principal and deputy principals• 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 Secondary School is a co-educational voluntary secondary school in Westmeath serving a wide catchment area of Rochfortbridge and surrounds. The school has a current enrolment of 848 students, and operates under the trusteeship of Catholic Education An Irish School's Trust (CEIST). The school offers the Junior Cycle Student Award (JCSA), Transition Year (TY), established Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of leadership and management is very good; the board and principal promote a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement for staff and students.
- A very good range of pastoral supports is in place for the wellbeing of students, underpinned by the school's core values of inclusivity, care and respect; the structure of the pastoral care team needs greater clarity.
- A very good school plan is in place which includes a range of whole-school policies, some of which are in need of review.
- Senior management empowers staff to take on leadership roles, and commendably the recent review of posts focuses strongly on teaching, learning and school improvement; however there is some duplication of roles.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good to very good with instances of excellent practice; consistent provision of written formative feedback is an area in need of improvement.
- The effective implementation of recommendations made in previous inspection reports is good overall; the school's engagement in the school self-evaluation (SSE) process, and its capacity for improvement is very good.

Recommendations

- The pastoral care function of the weekly year head meeting should be clearly delineated from other aspects of the year heads' role; furthermore pastoral care structures such as the care team and role of class teachers and mentors should be formalised.
- To build on current strategies in place to improve attendance, classroom interventions that reward and promote positive behaviour and engagement in learning should be extended; policies such as the attendance strategy and code of behaviour could be reviewed in this context.

- To ensure that maximum value to the school is gained from the review of posts of responsibility, middle-management structures should be strengthened and the duplication of roles should be minimised.
- To improve consistency in the presentation and quality of students' written work, and to improve their learning, a whole-school approach to the provision of regular formative written feedback to students should be agreed and implemented.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is very good.

Leading learning and teaching

The senior management team is progressive and proactive, and promotes a culture of continuous improvement for staff and students. They are reflective and consultative, and have a clear vision for the school, underpinned by CEIST values and the school's mission statement to provide a holistic education for all.

Senior management manages the planning and implementation of an academic curriculum that is broad and balanced overall. Some good timetabling practices are in place. However a few anomalies exist, such as the absence of Physical Education for students taking LCVP. This should be addressed. The full Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) programme for senior cycle is provided in sixth year. This should be delivered over fifth and sixth year in line with Circular Letter 0037/2010. Commendably, the range of optional subjects on offer has been extended recently, and the school continues to explore the expansion of the curriculum to meet the needs of its students. Consideration could be given to the re-introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme in this context.

The TY programme is well planned and implemented. Students are assessed through portfolios of their work, whereby credits are awarded for progress and participation in a range of curricular modules. This is now being extended to include participation in extra-curricular activities. In line with good practice, the programme is reviewed regularly, with input from students. To build on the highly effective programme already in place, it is welcome that the newly appointed co-ordinator plans to formalise the core TY team, and to further develop leadership roles for students.

Year heads, who have responsibility for student welfare, attendance, personal development, behaviour and application to work, aim to promote a culture of improvement, collaboration and commitment to success through tracking and monitoring of student attainment. This is good practice. The code of behaviour is democratic, outlining the responsibilities of students, staff and parents, and promotes positive behaviour for the most part. A clear ladder of referral is in place, but responses to student and staff questionnaires indicate that while the code is clearly understood, consistent implementation warrants further investigation. Students' journals reviewed during the evaluation indicated good oversight by relevant staff. Journals are generally well utilised by students to record homework, and by teachers to communicate with parents on day-to-day matters. However, teachers' recording of behavioural issues significantly outweighs their recording of positive behaviour in journals. This should be addressed to ensure consistency and promote positive behaviour.

A recent focus for year head meetings has been attendance. A range of strategies have been developed to promote good attendance, including interaction with students, assemblies with a focus on motivation, and contact with parents. Management reported improvements in attendance from the recent tightening of structures, however absence still remains an issue for some students. To build on these strategies, classroom interventions that reward and promote positive behaviour and engagement in learning should be extended. This could include an investigation of students' perceptions of their learning experience in the school. The attendance strategy and code of behaviour could also be reviewed in this context.

Student welfare is at the heart of the school and is promoted through the school's wellbeing programme and the very good range of pastoral supports. The wellbeing programme encompasses the pillar subjects of SPHE, PE, CSPE and Guidance for JCSA, as well as a range of whole-school initiatives, such as *Smile Week*, run by the wellbeing team. A highly effective induction programme is in place to support students in their transition from primary school.

Year heads meet weekly with members of senior management, the special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinator and a member of the guidance team. While student care is at the forefront of discussion, there is also a disciplinary and academic focus. The pastoral care function of this weekly meeting should be clearly delineated from other aspects of the year heads' role, and the functioning of the pastoral care team, as outlined in the teacher handbook, should be formalised.

Class teachers and mentors, whose role is primarily student care, have regular class contact with students assigned to them. This voluntary role effectively builds strong student-teacher relationships, however there is scope to formalise these roles to ensure consistency. This could include the re-introduction of the weekly tutorial lesson.

There is very good provision for the delivery of Guidance. The guidance department has developed a comprehensive whole-school guidance plan with detailed information about the aims, objectives and implementation of all aspects of Guidance. Links with Wellbeing, SPHE, relevant school personnel and outside agencies are documented. A clear schedule for guidance personnel's class visits and modules, and structures for counselling referral and follow-up are outlined. This is very good practice.

Very good structures are in place to support students with SEN, outlined in the detailed SEN policy. Support is mainly provided through small classes where students are grouped on the basis of similar needs, and a well-established system of team teaching and co-teaching. Student support files have been prepared, the most effective of which outline strategies to address specific needs of students, with clear targets for improvement. The SEN team is very ably led by the co-ordinator who chairs weekly meetings of the core team. Commendably, a few teachers have accessed requisite training, and there are plans to expand this. A large number of non-specialist teachers are currently timetabled to support students with SEN and the rationale for this in some instances is based on teacher availability rather than students' needs. To ensure consistency in provision for all students with SEN, the size of the team delivering support should be reduced.

Managing the organisation

The board of management meets regularly, is highly committed to the school and carries out its role effectively. The board is correctly constituted and all members have accessed appropriate training for their role.

The principal and deputy principals manage the school's organisational structures and human resources very well overall, and the day-to-day running of the school is very good. It is praiseworthy that, within the school's culture of collaborative review, the principal consults with all teachers annually through a written report from teachers, and more recently a face-to-face meeting, to discuss their work.

The school building and grounds are well maintained. Many of the classrooms visited created attractive learning environments through subject-related displays and student work. Recent developments include the upgrading of the information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure, and a staff workroom, new classrooms for practical subjects and a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) classroom to facilitate collaborative learning. The board's current focus for developing the school building includes a major refurbishment and extension project.

Leading school development

The principal keeps the board well informed of relevant educational developments through reports from the principal and from the teaching and learning committee. The principal presents data on attainment in certificate examinations and the board is aware of both good uptake and overall attainment of subjects at higher level and of areas where there is scope to improve. This is good practice.

Posts of responsibility have been reviewed in line with Circular 3/2018 and Looking at Our School 2016. The principal meets annually with all post-holders to discuss their work and delegated responsibilities. In line with good practice, management has provided post-holders with clear statements of their roles and responsibilities. Commendably, the schedule of posts includes a range of duties that support the long-term vision for the school and many responsibilities attached to posts focus on teaching, learning and school improvement, however there is some duplication of roles. To ensure that maximum value to the school is gained from the review of posts, middle-management structures should be strengthened and the duplication of roles should be minimised.

The board has overseen the development of the comprehensive school plan which contains current policies and a school improvement section, focusing on teaching and learning priorities, and other areas that require attention including policy review. Priority should be given to review of the admissions policy to ensure that the inclusive nature of the school is fully reflected.

The parents' association is strongly supportive of the school. Parents are encouraged to participate in school life, including input to relevant policies. The focus group of parents indicated that they feel happy with the school, and consider that the school is well run. However, questionnaire responses indicating some parental concerns, such as being informed of the details of the school's RSE policy, should be investigated further.

Developing leadership capacity

Teachers are actively encouraged by school management to collaborate and share their expertise. School management has built good relationships with other schools, and regularly seeks advice from peers. Teachers have also forged links with local schools, including the collaborative music project, *Sound of Unity* concert.

Senior management empowers staff to develop leadership roles through a range of initiatives, including a strong extra-curricular programme which is a testament to the culture of volunteerism among staff. Teachers' willingness to participate in initiatives such as peer collaboration, instructional leadership, *Teach Meets* and the assessment group has led to regular professional dialogue and improved teacher collaborative practices at whole-school level. Purposeful teacher continuing professional development (CPD) is encouraged by school management and availed of by teachers, who share their expertise by presenting to their peers.

The school regularly provides placements for student teachers. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome, and provides valuable professional benefits for all involved. Commendably, the school is also involved in the *Droichead* programme for the induction of new teachers. New members of staff are effectively supported through peer mentoring.

Opportunities for student leadership are provided through the student council and prefect system. Responses from student questionnaires, and interactions with students during the evaluation, recognise that there is a good atmosphere in the school, and that teachers encourage students to do the best they can, but also highlight the need to place increased emphasis on students having a say in how things are done. The school has identified this need and has appointed an assistant principal to co-ordinate the promotion of student voice. This work has already led to changes, such as revision of the first-year induction programme, to better support students coming from smaller primary schools.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The overall quality of teaching and learning was good to very good with instances of excellent practice.

Learner outcomes and experiences

Throughout the evaluation, a highly inclusive learning environment was noted, where students' efforts were affirmed and encouraged. The very good rapport between teachers and students was noted in the positive and supportive classroom interactions observed.

Teachers shared learning intentions with students in almost all lessons. This consistent approach is a testament to the well-established collaboration and sharing of practice that is evident among teachers. Achievement of learning was most effective in lessons where the intended learning was referenced by the teacher throughout the lesson, and reviewed by students at the end to consolidate learning. In a few instances teachers facilitated students to develop success criteria for the achievement of the intended learning. This excellent practice should be extended to all lessons.

Commendably, student behaviour was very good during the evaluation. Students generally showed high levels of interest and enthusiasm in lessons, noted in the questions they asked to deepen their own learning. This was particularly evident in lessons where teachers created a connection for students with the learning material by referencing their interests, experiences and prior knowledge.

School improvement plans have placed a considerable emphasis on active learning in recent years and the embedding of this was evident in many lessons, particularly in junior cycle. Overall, a good balance was achieved between student activity and teacher instruction. Students demonstrated the ability to work independently, predominantly in lessons where they were active, and where the level of challenge was appropriate.

Teachers facilitated collaborative learning in most lessons through group or pair work. This was most effective where teachers implemented good structures such as clearly assigned tasks and roles for students, and facilitated meaningful plenary sessions to reinforce and deepen learning. This approach should be extended to all group-work activity.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

Teachers took a range of approaches to delivering and differentiating curricular content. In the best lessons the selected approaches aligned with the learning intention and with needs of students. Teachers circulated throughout most lessons, directed their attention appropriately, and responded well to the needs of their students. Teachers generally had high expectations of students and the level of challenge was appropriate in most lessons. Very good provision for more able students was noted in a few lessons where they were challenged through questioning or extension tasks that involved a deeper learning of, rather than an addition to, the core activity.

The use of ICT was seen in a few lessons, most frequently as a tool for teachers to present material. The school's digital learning strategy encourages more creative use of ICT to enhance learning, teaching and assessment. A few examples of this were observed, such as the use of visualisers, simulators and assessment tools. The school's digital learning platform is used highly effectively by teachers and students to share work and to collaborate. Many teachers have availed of ICT-related CPD to build confidence and expertise. The digital strategy should now focus on developing and embedding the creative use of ICT in classroom practice in order to maximise learning.

A range of approaches was taken to assessment for learning in lessons, such as exit slips and placemats. Teaching, learning and assessment teams are exploring ways of improving assessment practices, such as the use of appropriate wait time for students before responding to questions, and this was seen in many lessons. They have also implemented recent, positive changes to structures of in-house examinations and reporting to parents, with a greater focus on formative assessment. Instances of very good questioning were noted, where teachers used scaffolding to prompt memory, and took a balanced approach between higher-order and lower-order questions. Effective formative assessment approaches should now be extended to all lessons.

High-quality verbal feedback from teachers was a feature of many lessons. To build on this very good practice, students should make a record of the feedback provided and use this to plan for improvement in their work. The digital learning platform is used by some teachers to provide formative feedback to students and limited examples of high-quality written formative feedback were noted in students' copybooks. Procedures and practices for providing written formative feedback, with clear directions for improvement, should now be developed by all subject departments, and implemented consistently.

Subject planning was generally of a high standard. The sample of subject plans reviewed indicated a consistent approach to many aspects of planning such as literacy and numeracy and, where appropriate, planning is based around learning outcomes for junior cycle. Plans generally include long-term and short-term plans for the delivery of curricular content and outline approaches to teaching, learning and assessment.

Minutes of meetings and subject plans reviewed indicate discussion and analysis of attainment in certificate examinations, which is good practice. In a few instances this was used to develop an action plan for improvement in the subject. This highly effective practice should be adopted by all subject departments to inform future planning.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

Very good progress has been made in the implementation of recommendations for leadership and management, to address the development of a whole-school strategy to implement the long-term vision for the school. A school improvement plan (SIP) is prepared each year with a focus on improving teaching and learning, aspects of which are now included on the agenda for all board meetings.

Teaching and Learning

Overall, good progress has been made in the implementation of recommendations for teaching and learning. Very good progress has been made in the sharing of learning intentions, with scope to further develop the review section of these in lessons. Good progress has been made in the area of active and collaborative learning, however limited progress has been made in the provision of written formative feedback in most subject areas. Very good progress has been made in the development of an action plan for improvement in a few subjects. This now needs to be extended to all subject areas.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

School self-evaluation processes are well developed in the school. School leaders are aware of educational developments and use the SSE process as a means of managing change. Those leading SSE regularly seek views of staff, students and parents and are working to ensure improvement plans are put into action on a whole-school basis. The SIP focuses on ongoing implementation of the JCSA, Wellbeing, and support for an enhanced student voice. The SIP should now place added focus on the promotion of positive behaviour and attendance and their potential links with classroom practice.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school has a very good capacity for improvement. The senior management team is proactive and promotes a culture of innovation and collaboration. Members of the middle-management team are dynamic and enthusiastic and a culture of volunteerism is evident among teachers.

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

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Report was very broad and detailed and reflects the excellent work going on in the school. The Board was very pleased to see that the culture of collaboration and continuous improvement with the school was recognised. The report was affirming of the work of the school and highlights the many strengths of the school and the commitment to the holistic development of all students in St Joseph's.

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 accepts the recommendations and has already begun to implement them.

The recommendations will inform our School Improvement going forward.

We have already amended the Admissions policy to reflect our inclusive nature.

We do intend to focus on the area of formative feedback. Our assessment team are involved in developing this through subject departments. We are presently reviewing our Pastoral Care system and the recommendation re classroom interventions that reward and promote positive behaviour and engagement in learning will be a focus of our Pastoral Care Programme.