

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Louis Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Dun Lughaidh Dundalk Co Louth
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	63910U

Date of Evaluation: 17-01-2019



**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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

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, 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	14-01-2019 - 17-01-2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with Board of Management • Meetings with acting principal and acting 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 Louis Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of Le Chéile. The school provides the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate programmes.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of school leadership and management is exemplary; the members of the whole-school community work together to ensure that each student's individual needs are met in an inclusive environment.
- There is highly effective guidance, care, and support for all students; further training and more effective planning would have benefitted the co-taught lesson observed.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced, and has recently been extended; the TY and LCA programmes are highly successful.
- There is very good practice in respect of developing leadership capacity and there are straightforward systems to manage all key areas of school life.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good; there is scope for emerging teacher collaboration to be used further to share highly effective teaching, learning and assessment practices.
- There has been very good implementation of recommendations made in previous evaluations and the school has very good capacity for improvement.

Recommendations

- The teacher collaboration which is currently underway should be extended to include observation of teaching and learning as a further means of sharing practice.
- Highly effective teaching and learning approaches, such as including a variety of methodologies, using assessment to encourage student reflection and teaching for deep understanding, should be extended to all lessons.
- Training in the use of team teaching should be accessed for all teachers of co-taught lessons and the teachers involved should plan the lessons collaboratively.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of school leadership and management is exemplary. The board and in-school management team, in collaboration with teachers, have successfully led the school through significant development and change. Addressing the challenges posed by a fire in part of the school served to strengthen relationships, promote improvement and develop a sense of teamwork amongst staff.

Leading learning and teaching

Leadership for learning and teaching is of an exceptionally high standard. The members of the senior management team share and communicate a vision that is guided by the right of every child to an education that provides the full range of opportunities in life. The acting principal's oversight role in monitoring each student's progress is highly effective in communicating high expectations for achievement. Teachers are aspirational for their students and work hard to encourage students to reach their potential. The school has a clearly defined identity which is supported by its ethos and which engenders a sense of belonging.

Looking at Our School 2016 is used by the board, in-school management and teachers as an evaluation and reflection tool for all aspects of the work of the school. The school self-evaluation (SSE) goals are supported by the *Step-Up Project*; a Department initiative to enhance the delivery of the Junior Cycle. The acting deputy principal's involvement with the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) is invaluable in implementing the new subject specifications. There is a strong commitment to developing teacher collaborative practice. This very good work should be extended to teachers planning lessons together and observing teaching and learning. Consideration should be given to creating a teaching and learning committee to organise and direct this work.

Overall, the timetable is very well organised to support learning. The board provided outside expertise to support its creation and design. It is evident that the needs of students and individual subjects and programmes were the main drivers of this process. However, in the case of a few subjects, there is a need for better planning of lessons throughout the week.

The school provides placements for student teachers. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome as it can provide valuable professional benefits for teachers, student teachers, and students. Participation in the *Droichead* programme is used in a highly effective manner to mentor and support newly qualified teachers and to share good practice.

Excellent quality care is provided for students. The student support team assesses and implements strategies to meet students' care needs. The SSE process is supporting the implementation of wellbeing across the curriculum. The warm relationships between students and staff contribute greatly to the quality of care provided. Students are encouraged to express their uniqueness, and individual learning needs are met in a fully inclusive environment.

The quality of guidance is very good. Advice is provided through timetabled lessons in the junior and senior cycles. The guidance counsellors also provide valuable assistance to students at key transition points. Personal counselling is provided as the need arises, through referral from the student support team. Questionnaire responses from students indicate that further investigation is required to establish the level of advice provided when students are choosing subjects and to adapt provision if necessary.

The quality of support for students with SEN is very good. There is a comprehensive, highly structured system in place for meeting students' needs. The SEN co-ordinators maintain very good

links with external agencies to support the delivery of SEN interventions. Communication between the SEN co-ordinators and teachers is highly effective. All of the hours allocated to the school are used appropriately and it is recommended that some be used for administration of the provision.

A range of valuable interventions is provided for students with SEN, including team teaching. Some training in the use of team teaching has been accessed by teachers; however, training needs to be extended to all teachers involved in this provision. A very high level of support is provided to some students through one-to-one and small group withdrawal from lessons.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and has undergone recent change to include new and pilot subjects. The optional TY is very well designed to provide opportunities for students to develop a range of key skills. LCA is highly valued as an alternative programme option for students. There are very good supports for students in the transition from primary to post-primary school.

Students' learning experiences are significantly enhanced by the extensive range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities provided. Teachers demonstrate great commitment to the school through their contribution to the extra-curricular provision and their attendance at school events.

The school operates as a welcoming, warm and healthy learning environment through the combined efforts of staff and students. Over half of the student cohort avail of a hot breakfast each morning provided and funded by the school. Students spoke very positively of the sense of belonging, care and of the quality of the learning experiences provided.

Managing the organisation

The school is very well managed. The board fulfils its statutory responsibilities in relation to policy review and development very effectively. The board members bring a wide variety of valuable expertise to their work. The support and commitment they give to the school are highly valued by senior management and staff. There is very good communication between the board and its nominating bodies with the issuing of an agreed report at the end of every board meeting.

The acting principal and acting deputy principal demonstrate the skills of highly effective leadership. When faced with challenges they act with integrity and discharge their responsibilities in a forthright manner. Decisions and the reasons for them are discussed, where appropriate. Through adopting this honest and open approach they model and communicate mutual trust, respect and shared accountability. Additionally, they use *Looking at Our School 2016* to evaluate and improve their own practice. There is a very high level of respect amongst teachers and students for the manner in which decisions are made and there is an understanding that the overall good of the school and the students come first.

There is comprehensive trustee oversight in relation to school self-evaluation, financial management and school improvement. St. Louis Secondary School is committed to the Catholic ethos of Le Chéile. It also caters for the needs of a culturally diverse population. School life has been enriched by the embracing of cultural diversity at a fundamental level and this is exemplary.

There is a highly effective system in place for managing student behaviour. The ladder of referral is clear, understood by all and implemented consistently. The questionnaire responses show that all teachers agree that students behave very well and there was much evidence throughout the evaluation to support this finding. There is an emphasis on restorative practice with an affirming, positive approach to behaviour management. This process is formalised to an extent. However, further development to realise the full potential of restorative practices across the school would be beneficial.

In May 2018, there was a fire which destroyed the central area of the school and meant that the students had to be relocated. The management of this critical incident demonstrated extraordinary organisation and teamwork skills. All staff worked very hard to minimise disruption to learning. In addition, the examinations progressed unaffected and all practical projects were able to be marked. The rebuilding project was very efficiently planned and completed to a very high standard with a focus on the overall enhancement of the school environment and further inclusion.

Leading school development

There is highly effective leadership for school development through the implementation of a clear framework for change and improvement. Data is very well used to provide evaluative evidence to monitor important areas such as attendance, retention, achievement, and progression to further and higher education. All of this important work is guided by the senior management's vision to ensure that the individual needs of each student are identified and met, and that their potential and talents are recognised and celebrated.

The board with the support of the trustees plays a strong role in leading school development. The board's current priorities centre on stabilising enrolment, developing a strong middle management, and managing the continuing development of the school's physical infrastructure.

The school won Trinity College Dublin's *21st Century Schools of Distinction Award* which aims to showcase the efforts of schools to transform their culture and to develop innovative approaches to teaching and learning. To win this award the school was required to demonstrate excellence in several core areas. The work of the guidance team was central to the school's success in this competition.

There is a long-term plan for the upgrading of the physical environment and resources to enhance teaching, learning and wellbeing. This opportunity should be further used to create suitable spaces to display student work and to celebrate past and current achievements.

There is effective communication and cooperation with parents. The input of the parents' association to policy development and review is highly valued. Reports on student progress have been recently expanded to include valuable advice on how parents can support their daughters to improve. There is scope to increase the level of consultation with parents around aspects of the school such as curriculum provision and teaching and learning.

Developing leadership capacity

There is very good practice in relation to developing leadership capacity. The senior management team identifies and develops teachers' strengths and interests, and provides opportunities for teachers to act as leaders of learning. The teachers welcome new challenges and demonstrate enthusiasm for their own professional development. There is a strategic plan outlining the school's CPD needs and provision. Very good use is made of internal expertise and external providers to deliver the CPD programme.

The post-holders provide excellent support to the organisation and are viewed as leaders in the school. Individual teachers also provide leadership on a voluntary basis. A review of the posts of responsibility has recently been conducted. This review involved a highly consultative process. It is recommended that leadership of an aspect of teaching and learning be added to all posts at the next opportunity.

It was widely reported by teachers that their views are listened to and acted upon, and that their ideas are valued. There is very good distribution of leadership and formal planning time is used very well to facilitate this. There are highly effective teams for leading and managing various aspects of the work of the school. An example of innovation is evident in the school's collaboration with subject teachers from the neighbouring school.

Students are given leadership opportunities through participation on the student council, their *Cairde* roles as mentors to first-year students, and through acting as peer mentors in TY. While there are good structures in place to capture the student voice, further ways in which students could contribute to decision making should be explored.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good. There were examples of excellent practice and in some lessons scope for improvement. There is evidence that teachers are highly committed to progressing their own professional development and are keenly engaging with the emergent collaborative practices.

Learner outcomes and experiences

The overall quality of learner outcomes and experiences was very good. Highly-effective learning was observed when the students were engaged by the learning challenge, were motivated to learn and when they fully participated in a range of activities.

Students demonstrated interest in learning when engaged with problem solving and discovery-based activities. Highly-effective learning occurred when students participated in practical activities that allowed them to measure, investigate, and draw conclusions. Students successfully explored different ways to solve problems and engaged in rich discussion around their preferred methods. In a few lessons, the learning would have been deepened by students having further opportunities to engage with probing teacher questioning and discussion to draw out their thinking.

In most lessons, students collaborated well with each other in group or pair tasks. They listened respectfully to the contributions of others and were confident in giving opinions, and asking and answering questions. In the language lessons observed there was scope for increased use of the target language by students, and at times a need to use the target language more naturally and in real-life contexts.

Highly-effective learning was noted when students took responsibility for their own learning. Students completed suitably challenging tasks that facilitated the development of a range of key skills. In a few lessons, students' learning experiences were more limited. It is recommended that students develop as wide a range of key skills as possible by engaging in a variety of learning activities in all lessons.

In most lessons, students demonstrated a good understanding of the concepts taught and were confident in the use of subject-specific terminology. In a few lessons, more attention to the key words was required to ensure that the students had sufficient fluency to discuss concepts and write about their learning.

In general, students were expected to achieve as learners and used success criteria to evaluate and assess their own progress and achievement. Assessment activities that allow students to be more reflective learners should be extended to all lessons. In a few lessons, students needed more challenging tasks to stretch their learning and stimulate their interest. Differentiated tasks that appropriately challenge all students should be further provided.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

The quality of teachers' individual and collective practice is very good. Teacher collaboration is a key priority of the current school improvement plan. This priority is being progressed in a highly strategic and measured way. The work of teacher mentors in promoting the use of technology to collaborate is of particular value.

A wide variety of methodologies was noted in the lessons observed. In the most effective lessons, teachers had prepared a range of learning tasks to facilitate deep learning and engage students. Digital learning technologies in the form of presentations, video and audio clips, and geometry software were seamlessly integrated into lessons. Where video clips were used the learning was enhanced by associated tasks.

The highly effective lessons observed were delivered at an appropriate pace. For some lesson activities there was a need to adjust the pace to allow students more time to meaningfully engage. Additionally, very good practice was noted when the learning intentions were shared with the students and assessed at relevant points. In a minority of instances, there was a need for a more comprehensive consolidation of learning at the end of the lesson.

In almost all lessons, teachers communicated high expectations for student achievement very effectively. They demonstrated trust in students' own ability by encouraging them to work independently. They used differentiated questioning strategies and provided appropriate levels of support. Additionally, they ensured that the methodology and classroom activities enabled students to participate fully.

In-class learning support was delivered in one of the classrooms visited. The teachers involved had broad expectations of each other's roles and responsibilities but had not planned the teaching and learning aspects of the lesson together. It is recommended that all co-taught lessons be collaboratively planned in order to ensure that classroom activities and tasks are designed to best meet the identified needs of students and are delivered using a suitable methodology.

Subject planning is very good overall. New subject specifications in Junior Cycle are being implemented. The school is moving towards an electronic system for subject planning; most subjects are on this system. The best plans from the sample reviewed included a detailed outline of the subject specifications, development of units of learning, and learning intentions that were linked to resources, methodologies and assessment. Self-evaluation and action planning were also a feature of the best plans.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

There has been very good implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations in the area of leadership and management.

The guidance evaluation recommended that there be closer collaboration between the guidance department and the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) department in the planning and provision of guidance and wellbeing supports at junior cycle. There is now very good provision of guidance in junior cycle and links between the guidance and SPHE departments have been developed effectively.

The inspection of Mathematics recommended that students be assigned to mixed-ability classes in first year and that in-class support be provided through team teaching. This recommendation has been fully implemented.

Teaching and Learning

The recommendations made in the area of teaching and learning mainly concerned more student-centred activities suitable for mixed-ability classes and for investigative approaches to be used to

progress learning. There was evidence in this evaluation of such methodologies being used in a highly effective way in a majority of lessons. However, there remains scope for the full implementation of these recommendations across all lessons.

Strategies that encourage students to have greater involvement in assessment were also recommended in previous subject inspections. This evaluation saw some very good use of peer and self-assessment and the use of success criteria to guide learning and evaluation of progress.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The SSE process is well-established and provides a highly effective framework for identifying areas for improvement and promoting change. The current priorities are to develop teacher collaborative practices, to embed the use of digital technology in teaching and learning, and to increase the provision of wellbeing across the curriculum. The school improvement plan is clear, concise, and manageable. Members of the school community have a solid understanding of the part they play in implementing the plan and are committed to contributing to school improvement.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school has very good capacity for improvement. There is an acting senior management team with a clear vision for the future of the school and a commitment to introduce new initiatives. There are posts of responsibility recently filled and soon to be filled which will continue to enhance the school's leadership profile. The school improvement plan outlines a straightforward framework for positive change. The members of the school community embrace new challenges and are open to fresh ways of working. A significant proportion of the teaching staff have gained further qualifications and outside expertise. There is a willingness to share practice within the school and with teachers from other schools. This engagement will contribute to continued development of teaching and learning.

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;