

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Scoil Mhuire agus Íde
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Newcastle West Co Limerick
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	64170L

Date of Evaluation: 06-02-2019



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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.

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	04-02-2019 to 06-02-2019
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

Scoil Mhuire agus Íde was established in 1992 as a result of an amalgamation and the school building is the result of an early form of public-private partnership in the local community. It is a co-educational, voluntary secondary school and one of two post-primary schools in the town of Newcastle West. The school has a current enrolment of 681 students, and enrolment has been increasing steadily. It caters for an increasingly multi-cultural student cohort. A significant minority of the teaching staff are past pupils and more than half live locally.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- Senior management, with the support and co-operation of the board and teachers, effectively leads learning and teaching; some aspects of curriculum planning and timetabling are in need of review.
- Students' holistic development is richly complemented by a broad range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities and by the very good quality of care, support and guidance provided to all.
- Many positives were noted in relation to provision for students with special educational needs (SEN); the organisation of SEN and the manner in which the SEN teaching allocation is being utilised does, however, require review.
- The school is managed very effectively as evident in the processes in place for collaboration, communication, devolution of responsibilities and development planning. This very commendable work would benefit from a greater use of action plans relating to development priorities.
- Overall the quality of learning and teaching in observed lessons was very good; teachers' questioning of students was identified as an aspect for development.
- While some possibilities for improvement exist in relation to school self-evaluation (SSE), there is a very good capacity for improvement in the school.

Recommendations

- Timetabling practices should be reviewed including those relating to Physical Education (PE), timetabling of shared lessons and, in line with Circular M29/95, the practice of timetabling students for study classes should be discontinued.
- Senior management, together with the board, should ensure that the additional teaching allocation provided to support students with SEN is fully utilised on an ongoing, weekly basis

to provide focused intervention for identified students, and the approach to the deployment of related personnel should be informed by Circular 0014/2017 and related guidelines.

- Action plans should be prepared for identified developmental priorities and included as appropriate in the school plan.
- To further enhance the observed very good quality of teaching and learning, a whole-school approach to the development of teachers' questioning of students is recommended.
- Aspects for improvement identified through SSE need to be highly focused on the improvement of learners' experiences at classroom level and related learner outcomes and, therefore, the development of teachers' practice.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall the quality of school leadership and management is good, and many very good leadership and management practices are in place.

Leading learning and teaching

Senior management, with the support and co-operation of the board and the teaching staff, is effectively leading learning and teaching. Related efforts are informed by a set of highly relevant aims and shaped by the desire to equip students to meet life's challenges. Senior management recognises that leading teaching and learning is a daily task, one firmly rooted in the provision and maintenance of an environment conducive to teaching and learning. Provision for regular review of the code of behaviour, as well as its consistent implementation, promotes and fosters such an environment. Conscious of the importance of tracking students' progress as a means of ensuring that they are achieving to the best of their ability, the principal and deputy principal review all reports in advance of issuing to parents. The latter serves as a fine example of very hands on leadership.

Acutely aware of the importance of high quality teaching and learning in maintaining the school's reputation, management is supportive of teachers' desire to enhance teaching, learning and assessment practices. Teacher sharing of ideas designed to improve student engagement and learning is encouraged and facilitated. Teachers are also encouraged to be creative in their practices. Teachers are conscious of the value in supporting new and newly qualified staff. The mutual benefits that accrue to accommodating student teachers is also fully recognised and related requests are regularly accommodated.

In the construction of future timetables further consideration should be given to the possible impact on learners' experience of timetabling shared classes. The accommodation by senior management of individual meetings with all teachers in advance of the construction of the timetable each year also merits consideration.

The board is aware of and responsive to the need to provide a comprehensive and relevant curriculum. Curriculum organisation processes are supportive and equitable with provision for subject sampling opportunities, student-centred, subject-choice systems and mixed-ability class groups. Provision for a Junior Cycle wellbeing programme is underway. A very well co-ordinated Transition Year (TY) programme bears many best practice hallmarks, and both students and parents value the significant opportunities it offers; very high-quality TY programme planning was evident. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is very well co-ordinated and is appropriately timetabled. The school also offers the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) but there is no current demand for this programme in the school. In the interest of ensuring that all students get access to a broad and balanced programme of learning a number of areas for development in terms of curriculum planning were identified. This includes the need to: cease the timetabling of study periods in line with Circular M29/95; timetable all senior-cycle students for PE; provide a double, as opposed to two single lessons, for third-year PE; explore student perceptions of provision for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).

Work to promote the holistic development of students is richly complemented by management's support and teachers' generous provision for a broad range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

The quality of support and care provided to students is very good. Admissions, transition and induction processes are carefully planned and managed. Responsibility for the identification of

students with additional support needs is shared by all staff. Provision for continuity of year head through the three years of junior cycle and the two years to Leaving Certificate fosters high levels of knowledge and understanding amongst year heads about students' ongoing support and care needs. A very well co-ordinated, team approach to the management of students identified as in need of additional care exists. It is suggested that the SEN co-ordinator be included in the weekly student support team meetings. Subject teachers are kept well informed in relation to the sensitive management of at-risk students.

Guidance related learning is prioritised. The school's three guidance counsellors have prepared detailed plans that demonstrate how both junior cycle and senior cycle guidance programmes seek to support students' personal, educational and vocational needs. All senior cycle students, including TY students, have access to timetabled Guidance; Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Life Skills in junior cycle provide an access point for the guidance counsellors; and all students can access individual guidance and counselling.

A number of positive features are noted in relation to the school's provision for students with SEN. This includes the recent appointment of a qualified co-ordinator, provision for a core planning team, and a related timetabling of formal planning time. In addition, school systems support early identification of students with SEN and support files have been prepared for some students. The core planning team provides whole-staff inputs to support differentiated planning for teaching and learning. In the deployment of teachers for the delivery of learning support, student needs are matched with teacher expertise and team teaching has been initiated. The support provided by the special needs assistants (SNAs) in observed lessons fostered participation, inclusion and independence.

The current underutilisation of the SEN teaching allocation provided by the Department to the school is, however, a matter of concern. Less than a third of the available hours are currently being utilised and a significant minority of the students identified as in need of additional, focused intervention are not accessing such support. SEN hours are being banked for use when demand for support increases later in the school year, a practice that is not in compliance with Circular 0014/2017 and the related guidelines. It is recommended, therefore, that the teaching allocation provided to support students with SEN, is fully utilised on an ongoing weekly basis to provide additional, focused intervention for all identified students. In addition, the co-ordinator, as the only fully trained SEN teacher on staff, should be facilitated to be involved in the delivery of support to students. The approach to the deployment of learning support teachers should also be reviewed and future approaches should seek to build a team of teachers who have relevant experience and expertise. Finally, consideration should be given to how team teaching could support provision of targeted support to students who have been identified with SEN.

Managing the organisation

The senior management team, with the support and assistance of the board of management, is very effectively managing the school.

The board is democratically constituted and inclusive of key stakeholders. Board composition is a healthy blend of experienced and relatively new members, who collectively have a rich knowledge of management, education, and the needs and wants of students. Training has been availed of by almost all members and so the role and responsibilities of a board are well understood. The principal keeps members informed of statutory obligations, while teachers provide inputs relating to curricular change and school initiatives.

Meetings, which are regular and well attended, are appropriately organised and managed. Minutes indicate that discussions are comprehensive. The development of a recording template with

standardised headings, including a teaching and learning section, would be valuable. Much research and development work is undertaken by an active finance sub-committee, with regular reporting to the board.

Consensual decision-making is informed by highly-inclusive discussion. The board prepares and circulates an annual report; it is necessary that future reports refer to progress made in relation to identified priorities, including SSE priorities.

Discussion with members indicated that the board is very supportive and fully appreciates the work of senior management and all the staff. Members place an important emphasis on the school's Christian ethos. It is clear that the board is highly reflective, solution focused, and guided in its decision-making by the best interest of students.

As the senior management team, the principal and deputy principal effectively oversees the day-to-day management of the school. A team approach to leadership and management is evident, with senior management personnel describing their roles as fluid and responsibilities as shared. Communication between both the principal and deputy principal, while largely informal, is constant in nature.

Communication across the school is very effective. Decision-making at senior management level is collaborative and informed by a range of consultative processes. Senior management's recent provision for middle management meetings is commended, as this will strengthen assistant principals' role in supporting planning for school development and improvement. Year heads make a very significant and valuable contribution to student management and leadership on a day-to-day basis.

The school building and grounds are well maintained and classrooms, including specialist rooms, are well resourced and equipped. A health and safety statement is being drafted; it would be important that a risk-assessment approach be more widely incorporated. Provision of digital technologies has been enhanced recently, and further infrastructural development will be informed by a school-specific, five-year plan. In response to a steadily increasing enrolment the board is actively pursuing additional accommodation; senior management is commended for its efforts to manage related challenges and demands.

Leading school development

Leadership for school development and related outcomes, are of a good quality. Related work is informed by a clearly articulated mission statement, a set of highly relevant aims, and a succinct motto. Against this backdrop, and with a view to empowering the whole-school community to translate the agreed vision into action, senior management sets high expectations for all, whilst also seeking to motivate and inspire.

The permanent section of the school plan is very well developed. A comprehensive suite of policies is in place, with significant review and updating work undertaken recently. The board maintains an active role in this work, and the process is inclusive of both teachers and parents. Efforts to establish a parents' association should be maintained so as to provide for further and more transparent parental involvement. As appropriate, consideration should be given to the inclusion of students in the policy development process.

It is recommended that: the anti-bullying policy be reviewed annually; the admissions policy be revisited and aligned with actual inclusive practice; an outside visitors' policy be prepared in line with Circular 0043/2018. It is advised that ratification and review dates be provided on all policies. The policy section of the school website should also be updated.

Developmental priorities have been agreed. It is recommended that corresponding action plans be prepared and filed in the developmental section of the plan. A strengthening of the task-group approach to support the progression of identified priorities is suggested for consideration.

Collaborative, subject-department planning is very well established. Agreed programmes of work have been prepared, both outline and detailed. Planning for units of learning in junior cycle is evident, with an appropriate emphasis on learning outcomes and assessment. Subject departments have considered their role in promoting student wellbeing, with a commendable focus in some departments on the impact of teaching approaches. A number of plans document the outcomes of review activities, and some also provide related action plans; such reflective practice is encouraged across all departments.

Despite the difficulties being experienced in relation to establishing and maintaining a parents' association, partnership with parents is valued. Work to both build and maintain positive, constructive relationships with parents is apparent, with strong provision for two-way communication. With a view to supporting a realisation of the school's mission and aims, a series of productive and often mutually beneficial relationships have been forged with businesses, organisations and agencies.

Developing leadership capacity

The board and senior management recognise the importance of building leadership capacity and related work is of a very good quality. Distributed leadership is facilitated, and while this is most evident in the roles assigned to assistant principals, leadership opportunities are open to all teachers. There is a corresponding desire and willingness amongst the teaching staff to assume leadership roles. Provision for formal, end-of-year meetings of senior management with teachers who hold key management and leadership roles merits consideration.

Teachers described feeling trusted and supported; they demonstrate high levels of commitment and manage workloads efficiently and effectively. Senior management recognises teamwork as key to successful student management, leadership and support, and resources this accordingly through the scheduling of weekly meetings, the provision of weekly planning time for key teams and personnel, and the timetabling of administration time for year heads and class tutors.

Students' views are sought and valued, with a number of examples provided of where student voice shaped decision making. Students are facilitated in assuming active roles in key school events. The current TY 'Pay-it-Forward' and robotics initiatives serve as fine examples of student leadership. Senior cycle students have the opportunity to actively participate as a member of the students' council; this opportunity should be extended to junior cycle students. Work designed to refocus and reinvigorate the students' council also merits consideration.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning in observed lessons was very good overall. Some exemplary teaching practice was noted. In a small number of lessons, teachers were provided with recommendations to support them in achieving a good standard of teaching and learning.

Learner outcomes and experiences

The quality of both the learners' experiences in lessons and related outcomes were very good overall. Students were enabled to be active learners. Best practice was when they were facilitated to participate in a variety of ways over the course of each lesson. Opportunities to work with others

were also well facilitated. Differentiation in task assignment and an explicit sharing and discussion of related criteria for success are worthy of further extension.

Students were able to recall prior learning and apply it to lesson tasks. Students' demonstrated very good levels of understanding of the subject matter explored in lessons.

Classroom atmosphere was very positive. Teachers communicated high expectations in terms of behaviour and participation and students responded positively; they appeared interested and engaged. Students' contributions were encouraged and related efforts were acknowledged and appropriately affirmed. Overall, students were happy and at ease in terms of answering or asking questions and offering opinion or comment. Many students thanked their teachers at lesson end, which suggests high levels of both appreciation and respect.

Rooms were print-rich, displaying student work alongside displays designed to both inform and support student learning. Where possible, consideration ought to be given to the rearrangement of desks and a related strategic grouping of students, to enhance the very good collaborative learning observed.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

Teachers' individual practice was very good overall. Planning and preparation for lessons was very good. Lessons were well-structured, and there was a developmental approach to knowledge acquisition and skill development. A range of valuable resources was prepared or collected. As appropriate, learning intentions were shared at the start of lessons and this was best when these incorporated action verbs and emphasised students' participation requirements and learning.

Teacher explanations were very clear. Prior learning and experiences were well utilised to introduce or refine new concepts and skills and to consolidate learning, with very good links to future lessons also provided in a number of instances. Both of these approaches are commended as they help to set learning in context. Teachers made significant efforts to make learning relevant and meaningful for students. In language lessons very good use of the target language by both teachers and students was observed in the majority of lessons. Most teachers recognised opportunities to develop students' literacy skills; overall, by comparison, teachers were not as aware of the possibilities to develop students' numeracy skills.

A highly student-centred approach was adopted to the delivery of lesson content in almost all instances and overall there was a very good balance between teacher inputs and student inputs. There was regular provision for experiential learning. In many lessons students were provided with opportunities to take part in self-assessment and peer-assessment activities and this is highly commended.

Teachers made valuable use of digital technologies in almost all lessons. Provision for a separate pull-down presentation screen was observed as necessary in some classrooms. The plan to further embed digital technologies through the introduction of a digital learning platform is commended and encouraged, as this will support the greater student use of this potentially powerful learning tool.

Questioning was noted as a key inclusion strategy for teachers. Much best practice was observed in terms of teachers' use of questioning but overall it was noted as an aspect for development. Best preparation for questioning, as observed, was when there was clear planning of questions, including planning for differentiation and provision for open and closed questions, and questions that promoted higher-order thinking. Best practice, as observed, in terms of in-class use of questioning was when there was provision for strategic distribution, adequate wait time, follow up on incorrect answers, all-student response systems, and periodic collaboration before answering. Student

participation was enhanced where teacher encouragement, acknowledgement and prompting was appropriately generous. A whole-school focus on the use of questioning is recommended and it is suggested that it may be a possible aspect to explore and develop as part of SSE.

Teachers were very conscious of the need to check students' levels of understanding and learning. This supported teachers in addressing common areas for further exploration as well as in agreeing, at whole-class level, the key learning. In terms of evaluating the quality of student learning in written homework activities, there is some scope for greater use of formative commentary.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

The progress that has been made in terms of the implementation of recommendations from previous reports is very good.

Leadership and Management

Almost all key recommendations provided in the 2010 whole-school evaluation (WSE) report are being fully implemented. Further work is required in relation to one key recommendation which read as follows: 'The voluntary nature of contributions requested of parents should be clearly stated'. Therefore, it is further recommended that any school literature that makes reference to or requests what the school refers to as 'School Financial Support' must state that this is a voluntary contribution.

Teaching and Learning

Progress reports provided by the biology and agricultural science, Irish, music and French subject departments demonstrate that both management and teachers have implemented or are working to ensure ongoing implementation of recommendations provided in relevant subject inspection reports. It was clear from both lesson observations and a review of a cross-section of subject plans, that recommendations provided are being considered by teachers across all subject departments. Use of questioning, which was raised in two previously published subject inspection reports, emerged as a common area for development across a number of lessons observed as part of this evaluation.

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

While some possibilities for improvement exist in relation to the school's SSE work, there is a very good capacity for improvement in the school.

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school has engaged effectively with SSE in the past but is behind in terms of requirements and time frames set out in Circular 0040/2016. However, the recent appointment of an SSE co-ordinator demonstrates that this important work is being prioritised again. The school's original SSE work demonstrates a good level of understanding of the six-step process. Current work and more recent work being undertaken as part of SSE, while still valuable and valid, is not consistent with the SSE rationale as set out in the relevant circular. It should be noted that identified aspects for improvement need to be highly focused on the improvement of learners' experiences and outcomes

and, therefore, the development of teachers' practice. The board is reminded of the need to publish an SSE report and a school improvement plan (SIP), as well as the role it has in relation to monitoring and reporting on related progress.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The board fosters a culture of development for improvement. It is clear that senior management and the teaching staff are open to change, with much documentary evidence of established reflective and evaluative practices and also, at times, high quality and considered action planning. As relevant, management and teachers also seek to harness the voices of both students and parents to inform change and development.

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;