

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Villiers Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	North Circular Road Limerick County Limerick
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	64310B

Date of Evaluation: 05-12-2018



**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.

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.

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.

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 inspection visit did not include inspection of the school's boarding facilities, their management or their compliance with the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.

The school met the requirements in relation to the checks with the exception of 5 above in so far as a child protection oversight report had been presented to the board but it needed to also be appended to the minutes. The school has subsequently furnished evidence of total compliance with all aspects of these requirements.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	29 November – 05 December 2018
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

Villiers Secondary School has a near two-hundred-year history of providing post-primary education in Limerick city. It operates as a day and boarding fee-charging school. The school operates under Protestant management and ethos, through a board of governors, having been founded as a Protestant educational establishment in 1821. However, the school is welcoming of all students and traditions. Enrolment is 562 students. The student cohort is international and multi-cultural in its composition. In addition to the Junior Cycle (JC) programmes the school offers a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate, the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) and the Cambridge First Certificate (CFC). This evaluation's focus does not encompass the IBDP or the CFC. In addition, to the curricular offerings, there is a very impressive range of extra-curricular activities offered by the school and supported by its staff.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- A very strong culture, where the school's values are modelled by staff and inculcated in the students, is coupled with an exceptional level of volunteerism among staff.
- Management and leadership of the school are of very high quality, with change being implemented strategically over time and school development being led by the senior management team in a very effective manner.
- The overall quality of teaching and of learning was very good; the focus for ongoing development should be embedding and supporting JC by teachers linking across subject departments.
- There has been very good progress in implementing recommendations from previous evaluations; expanding the use of peer observation will bring benefits as staff members gain new perspectives from sharing their teaching expertise.
- Engagement with school self-evaluation (SSE) has been very good; facilitating parents and students to become more involved in the process will strengthen SSE even further.

Recommendations

- Teachers collaborating across subjects to share assessment practices and incorporate planning for junior cycle classroom-based assessments (CBAs) is recommended, as it will inform whole-school assessment policy and support teachers' and students' understanding and experience of assessment at junior cycle.
- Developing how students see themselves as stakeholders in the school and empowering them in initiating change in the areas of teaching and learning should be progressed.
- Further enhancing teachers' collaborative practice should be achieved by extending and embedding the practice of peer observation by members of subject departments.

- Building on the existing very high levels of support for students with special educational needs (SEN), the model of team teaching should be further developed so that teachers can be especially responsive to the diversity of students' needs.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The quality of school leadership and management was very good.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

The school has established a culture of improvement to keep pace with societal and educational changes and to ensure that it remains a school of choice. The senior management team has successfully initiated and led a variety of changes spanning areas such as improving the facilities, expanding the curriculum and further developing teaching and learning practices.

A very broad curriculum is offered. The school has been proactive in seeking to introduce new subjects such as Physical Education as a leaving certificate examination subject. Very high-quality information is provided to parents and students to assist them when making subject choices. Questionnaire responses suggested that it would be beneficial to seek further feedback from parents and students about the type and frequency of subject choice information they most require. It is recommended that the school seek this feedback as part of its continuous improvement processes.

It was clear from the evidence gathered that high expectations are set for the students. Moreover, teachers are encouraged to develop their teaching to ensure that it continues to motivate, engage and inform students. In this respect, there is very good support for the teachers' continuing professional development (CPD). The quality of academic support for students is excellent. This was exemplified across a wide range of aspects of school life with, for example, teachers taking students for additional tuition in the teachers' own time. There is much value to be derived from building on these pre-existing systems and relationships to engage students in all year groups in setting goals for their own learning and this is advised.

The school reported that it regularly 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 institutions.

The school's diverse student cohort is a positive and intrinsic part of its character. Students reported feeling included and frequently referred to the school as being "like a family". This atmosphere is derived, not just from the excellent intra-personal relationships that staff members have cultivated with students but also, from the systems and processes that are in place. For example, the special educational needs team is well co-ordinated and has a clear focus on helping all students, those who are experiencing challenge in their learning and those who are very academically capable.

Care for students is very good with effective systems in place. This was echoed by feedback from parents and students. The school is at an initial stage of embedding the National Educational Psychological Service's (NEPS) continuum of support and this important work will bring additional benefits when completed. One of the ways in which the school supports students with educational needs is through the use of team teaching. Due to the inclusive nature of the school's approach, it is possible to have students with varying needs in the same class group. So, it is recommended that the school explore ways of developing team teaching to be especially responsive to the variety of such

needs, including students with special educational needs, students with social needs or for whom English is an additional language.

Support for students' personal and social well-being was evident across a variety of areas with, for example, form tutors and prefects meeting students every morning. Supports such as the role of the chaplain and developmental opportunities such as the Governors' awards are beneficial in developing students' leadership and growth. The transition into first year is very well supported. Some students suggested including a map of the school in the student diary and the school has indicated that this will be actioned and included in the next printing. For those students who are not partaking in school meals, there is a need to provide seating.

Managing the organisation

The quality of governance is very good. The members of the board of management display a diversity of skills and give extensively of their time and expertise. In managing the learning environment, the board made a strategic property acquisition, facilitating the provision of a dedicated IBD learning centre and more extensive grounds.

Policy development has been an area of ongoing activity for the board. A very extensive range of policies has been developed. It would be worthwhile to upload more policies to the school's website to act as an information resource and to showcase the very good work done. The board has identified policy work as an area with a particularly intense workload. Thus, to assist in managing this work, it is recommended that a register be created which facilitates scheduling of policy review. In addition, extending the use of staff-led policy groups and enhancing the involvement of parents would be beneficial.

In managing the day-to-day running of the school, the energy and commitment of the senior management team is outstanding. Effective systems and processes are in place to ensure the planning, reporting, and accounting for work are progressive and strategic. The principal and deputy principal are a constant presence throughout the school. Parents and teachers expressed very positive views about how the school is run and these views were well supported by observations during the evaluation. There are multiple systems in place to enable and support communication within the school and with parents and students. These were seen to be working well. Fundamental to the school's approach is its focus on the student as a valued person. Leadership in this area was clearly evident from the way senior management modelled the importance of giving time to parents, students and staff. To further inform parents, providing more information about topics such as school self-evaluation and CBAs at junior cycle is advised.

Leading school development

The school's vision is clearly stated in its policy documentation but its clearest enunciation is in the manner in which the school's values and aspirations are modelled and lived out by staff. Staff members, at all levels, model the school's core values and bring to life its characteristic spirit. To support the school in realising its vision, SSE is used in a structured manner to ensure a focus on continuous improvement. There was significant evidence of action plans for improvement being included in the sample of subject plans that was viewed.

The school is very supportive of the parent-teacher association and, reciprocally, the association is very highly supportive of the school. Very good relationships have been developed by senior management and staff across the wider education sector through, for example, membership of and participation in professional associations. In addition, the school has established very good links with the wider community and has a long-established tradition of supporting outreach work.

The school facilities are in very good condition and are well maintained. Ongoing development has been a hallmark of the school, with a clear focus on improving provision and facilities. Most recently, very good work was undertaken in developing the broadband infrastructure and the electronic

platforms used to support administration and teaching and learning. The next phase of this development is to focus on developing further use of digital technologies by students. It is recommended that this be progressed as an integrated part of ongoing improvements to teaching and learning within the SSE process.

Developing leadership capacity

The willingness of staff to be involved in all aspects of school life and to engage in ongoing school development is a key strength of the school. For example, the support given by staff to facilitating students' involvement in a very extensive range of extra-curricular activities is highly commendable. It was clear that there are exceptional levels of staff volunteerism and nurturing and sustaining this needs to be a visible priority for the school.

The extra-curricular activities, which are very varied, support the holistic development of students and contribute to the excellent relationships between students and staff. With the recent addition of the IBD programme, further integrating the students taking this programme into the life of the school is an area for development.

A very strong work ethic was evident among staff. There are multiple teams that aid in-school management functions. The sense of the staff being a team was very evident and is a significant strength. The members of middle management play very valuable roles in supporting the school's operation. The staff has, as its focus, the provision of the best possible educational experience and recently undertook a review of the posts of responsibility structure to ensure that it provides the best supports possible.

Students demonstrated exemplary behaviour during lessons and when moving in and around the school. It was notable that students referred to a sense of openness and ease of mixing with students across different year groups. These facets of school life are indicative of the leadership that students demonstrate themselves. Opportunities for student leadership are supported by the student council and the prefect system, with the student council being the democratic organ representing students' voice. It was evident from the data gathered that expanding the sense of ownership and the understanding that students have in relation to how the school is run would be valuable. Thus, developing how students see themselves as stakeholders and empowering them in initiating change in the areas of teaching and learning should be progressed.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good.

Learner outcomes and experiences

In responding to questionnaires, a very high percentage of parents and students reported very positive views about the quality of teaching and learning. The inspectors considered that overall the quality of the lessons observed was very good. In almost all lessons observed, practice ranged from commendable to highly commendable and in a very small number of lessons improvement was needed in some areas.

Students' enjoyment and their motivation to learn were notably positive. Students present as eager learners. Moreover, they recognise and are appreciative of the support that is available from their teachers.

In all lessons, the relationships between students and their teachers were very positive. These relationships were based on mutual respect. Teachers were highly affirming, used positive language, and modelled appropriate behaviour for students. Overall, a very suitable learning space has been created in very many classrooms. This has been achieved by ensuring that the physical environment

is maintained to a high standard and by creating pleasant and stimulating learning spaces through displaying suitable materials such as students' work.

Students engaged purposefully with lesson objectives and tasks. These had been suitably planned to progress students' learning in line with the relevant subject requirements. In responding to teachers' questions, students generally demonstrated very good-quality answering. During practical lessons, it was clear that the students had, overall, developed subject-specific skills to a very high level. In almost all lessons, students successfully achieved, and at times surpassed, the intended learning intentions for the lessons.

Analysis of the examination outcomes in the State examinations revealed that students' attainment is generally very good. Discussions with students revealed that while they value the emphasis on academic attainment, they also feel a degree of associated stress. Staff members also reflected an awareness of this issue and its impact on students. Thus, it is recommended that future work focus on reducing the in-house examination load for junior-cycle students in particular.

School reports include reporting on summative assessment marks as well as effort marks; this is indicative of the school's approach to valuing and encouraging student motivation and engagement. An examination of a sample of student journals showed that the journal contains very useful information. However, there is scope to develop the journal's use by students. The school should examine how consistent use of the journal may be of benefit in terms of recording and planning work, and further supporting communication between the school and home.

Samples of students' work, including homework, were viewed. Homework is a regular feature of students' learning. Almost all students reported that it was corrected regularly. There was scope in some instances to extend the variety and types of homework assigned. This should be achieved by all subject departments agreeing a range of homework types that extend beyond revision, answering questions and memorisation. Currently, the school is developing its use of continuous assessment and it is recommended that the assessment policy include a section outlining practices in relation to continuous assessment.

Those samples of work viewed showed very good-quality written feedback to students. Such formative feedback is commendable. Oral feedback was noted as a core element of all lessons observed. The strong relationships that exist between students and their teachers are foundational to the manner in which teachers give feedback and students act on it.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

The quality of planning for individual lessons was of a very high standard. The teachers demonstrated subject matter and pedagogical expertise. In classrooms, the learning environment was inclusive, orderly and student centred.

The subject plans that were reviewed were, overall, of very good quality. The school has been working to embed Junior Cycle subject specifications. It has achieved good success in this. The next development needs to be to plan at junior cycle in an integrated way across subject areas. Collaborating across subjects to share assessment practices and incorporate planning for junior cycle CBAs is recommended, as it will inform whole-school assessment policy and support teachers' and students' understanding and experience of assessment at junior cycle.

In observed lessons, learning activities were well chosen. Appropriate resources had been developed and were used to good effect. Very positive elements noted included the use of learning intentions and success criteria, use of show-me boards and the development of students' critical thinking skills. Teachers' instruction was highly effective and questioning was used to very good effect. In a small number of instances, there was scope to extend the range and type of teaching methods used. This should be achieved by teachers supporting each other and by expanding the sharing of practice through peer professional observation.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

The implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations has been very good.

Leadership and Management

The school has been highly diligent in implementing recommendations from previous evaluations. Whole-school recommendations have been addressed in a comprehensive manner. Developmental recommendations from the previous WSE-MLL in 2011 have been addressed in a progressive manner. The areas of sharing pedagogical strategies and enhancing supports for students for whom English is an additional language are areas where ongoing work will bring continued benefits.

Teaching and Learning

Recommendations relating to teaching and learning have been engaged with by the staff in a very professional manner. Many of these recommendations have been developmental in nature and thus they remain as priorities. Lesson observations showed that differentiation was a regular feature of lessons but that improvement was needed for a small number of lessons. This had also been identified by the school as an area for ongoing development and a focus on this area is advised.

A recent inspection recommended the introduction of supportive peer professional observation. This has been successfully introduced. Its expansion is recommended as a means of further supporting the highly collegial approach taken by teachers.

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

The SSE process is very good and its capability to support ongoing school improvement is very high.

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The SSE work has encompassed a large number of areas. There was evidence of the use of standards from *Looking at Our School 2016 – A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools*, to inform the SSE process, and this is commendable. Overall, the process has been working well. The next steps should be to expand the role of the student council to assist when identifying areas for future SSE initiatives and to share the school's improvement plans and self-evaluation report with the school community.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

Evidence of very high capability to support ongoing improvement included extensive use of action planning and reflective practices. The breadth and depth of professional expertise among staff members at all levels combined with their exceptional commitment to the school means that the school is very highly capable of sustaining ongoing improvement.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Villiers School appreciates the effective manner in which the inspection report conveys an appreciation and understanding of Villiers School and of the family-like environment we wish to maintain and develop for our students and staff.

The report has very positively recognised the commitment of all stakeholders in the school community; senior management, teaching staff, parents and students.

In particular we appreciate the recognition of the following:

- A very strong culture, where the school's values are modelled by staff and inculcated in the students, coupled with an exceptional level of volunteerism among staff.
- Management and leadership of the school of very high quality, with change being implemented strategically over time and school development being led by the senior management team in a very effective manner.
- Very high standard of teaching and learning
- Students high levels of engagement and exemplary behaviour

Part B Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The Board welcomes the recommendations of this report. They are developmental in nature and as such are part of the school's focus in this and in coming school years.

In this regard, the following are in development:

- Enhancement of teacher collaboration across subjects to share assessment practices and to incorporate planning for junior cycle classroom-based assessments (CBAs).
- Further enabling the student council, so students see themselves as stakeholders in the school with the capacity to initiate review and change.
- Further enhancement of teachers' collaborative practice by extending and embedding the practice of peer observation in subject departments.
- Expansion of the existing very high levels of support for students with special educational needs (SEN), the model of team teaching is being further developed to respond to the diversity of students' needs.