

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

School name	Franciscan College
School address	Gormanston Co. Meath
Roll number	64420I

Date of Evaluation: 15-01-2020



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 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, 14 and 15 January 2020
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with the board of management • Meetings with the 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 the senior management team, board of management and teachers

School context

Franciscan College, Gormanston is a voluntary Catholic co-educational secondary school, which is currently under the trusteeship of the Order of Friars. Originally fee-charging, the school joined the free education scheme in 2014. Current enrolment is 435 students, 278 boys and 157 girls. The school has two autism spectrum disorder (ASD) classes. A broad range of programmes is provided. These include the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Applied programme (LCA) and the established Leaving Certificate.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of leadership and management is good; school leaders approach the management of change in a collaborative manner, but strategic planning is underdeveloped.
- A number of hours for special educational needs (SEN) have not been allocated in accordance with Circular 0014/2017, but are being deployed to sustain subject options.
- The school offers a wide range of academic subjects and is striving to broaden its curriculum to include more practical subjects; however, the provision of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is not consistent across all year groups.
- While a majority of students reported that they are getting on well with their school work and their peers, there is a significant level of student disaffection with aspects of school life, including the implementation of the school's code of behaviour.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good in the lessons observed; areas for development included differentiation and formative feedback.
- The implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations is good; the school self-evaluation (SSE) process is effective and the school has a good capacity for improvement.

Recommendations

- The board should oversee the development of an overarching strategic plan with agreed short, medium and long-term whole-school priorities developed by all of the stakeholders.
- The deployment of additional teaching resources for SEN should be revised to align fully with the principles of the new allocation model, as outlined in Circular 0014/2017.
- School management and the Wellbeing core team should examine students' perceptions of their learning experiences in the school and implement strategies to rectify any issues; they should also ensure that the quality of RSE provision is consistent across all year groups.
- School management should ensure that the code of behaviour is implemented in a fair, effective and consistent manner, and should provide continuing professional development (CPD) for staff in positive behaviour strategies.
- Teachers should further integrate differentiation and formative feedback strategies in their lessons as a means of engaging students and encouraging them to reflect on and improve the quality of their work.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is good.

Leading learning and teaching

The overall quality of leadership of teaching and learning is good. The board of management and the senior management team demonstrate a clear vision in striving to provide a high-quality education and promote a positive culture of continuing professional development (CPD) among the teaching staff. It is commendable that the school has signed up to the Droichead process.

The school has undergone significant changes in recent years. Having become co-educational, the school later transferred into the free education scheme, and its student cohort has become much more diverse. The recent review of middle management posts, the SSE process, and the creation of new staff teams to focus on key areas such as Wellbeing, curriculum review, teaching and digital learning demonstrate a commendable commitment to improving aspects of teaching, learning and assessment in order to best meet the needs of an evolving school.

The school offers a wide range of academic subjects, including three modern foreign languages, three business subjects and four sciences. Both management and staff recognise the need to broaden the curriculum to include more practical subjects. In recent years the school has added Art, Music, Technical Graphics and Design and Communication Graphics to its curriculum. Subject sampling is a key feature of the induction programmes for first year and TY. There are commendable plans to add more technological subjects and Home Economics to the school's curriculum when their proposed new school building is completed.

The TY programme has proved a popular option for many students and includes work experience and a wide range of worthwhile activities. Participation in TY attracts a once-off charge that covers all events for the year. It is recommended that this charge be kept under review in order to ensure that access to the programme is affordable to all.

It is a positive development that the school introduced the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme for the first time in September 2018. It has enjoyed a mixed success to date, with student attendance proving the greatest challenge. During the evaluation it was noted that a number of staff who had previous experience of teaching LCA in other schools were not part of the core LCA team. It is recommended that the school draws on all of the staff's experience in order to support the ongoing development of the programme.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is appropriately timetabled for all class groups at junior cycle, but at the time of the evaluation the majority of SPHE teachers had not received the required training. School planning documentation indicates that Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is provided to all year groups. However, questionnaire responses from both parents and students indicate that RSE provision across the school is inconsistent and warrants closer monitoring. It is recommended that all teachers of SPHE and RSE receive the appropriate training, and that school management ensures that the quality of RSE provision is consistent across all year groups.

In order to further support student wellbeing in first year, school management has timetabled one lesson a week in each of SPHE, Guidance and Study Skills. During the evaluation, first-year students reported that they were benefitting from these lessons. However, an examination of the subject plans demonstrated that there was a need for much closer collaborative planning and coordination between the subject departments in order to reduce the risk of overlap and repetition and to enhance the learner experience for all.

Appropriate structures are in place to support students, and these include year heads, prefects, a Clann system, a Wellbeing team and a student support team. A post of responsibility has recently been established to promote the student voice, and questionnaire data indicate that a majority of teachers and parents agree that students are well supported.

Notwithstanding this good work, it was apparent from evidence gathered during the evaluation that there is a significant level of student disaffection with the life of the school. Students reported that they were doing well with their school work and getting on well with their peers, but they expressed concerns that their views were not being considered in key decisions affecting their school experience. At the student focus group meeting, students disagreed on the quality of care and support provided. Questionnaire data indicated that only a minority of students agreed that they can talk to an adult in the school if they are having problems. Notwithstanding the clear commitment of management and staff to student wellbeing, the reasons for this disaffection among a significant cohort of students needs to be closely examined. It is recommended that school management and the Wellbeing core team, as a matter of priority, examine students' perceptions of their learner experiences in the school and implement strategies to rectify any issues.

Guidance is appropriately timetabled at senior cycle and individual guidance counselling is offered to all year groups. An analysis of the destinations of Leaving Certificate students indicates high progression rates to colleges of further and higher education and to the world of work.

The overall quality of provision for students with SEN is satisfactory. It is commendable that many student support files are in place and that new procedures in relation to tracking and monitoring student progress are being developed. Currently almost all students with SEN receive support through withdrawal, but planning for co-teaching has been initiated. Facilities and resources for learning support are not optimal. The principal reported that a budget is in place to resource the department. It is recommended that the senior management team and the SEN department agree on how this budget should be used to provide a more stimulating classroom environment and appropriate resources to support the students' learning needs.

The ASD classes are housed in the newly refurbished Teach Francis, which provides a bright, airy and vibrant environment for the students. Students are regularly integrated into mainstream classes and they reported that they feel well supported.

During the evaluation it was noted that a number of SEN hours had not been allocated in accordance with the provisions of Circular 0014/2017, but instead were being deployed to provide additional subject options. It is recommended that the deployment of additional teaching resources for SEN be revised to align fully with the principles of the new allocation model, as outlined in Circular 0014/2017.

Managing the organisation

The quality of school governance is good. The board meets regularly and is aware of its statutory obligations. The members demonstrate pride in the school and its ethos. Their key priorities are the construction of a new school on the campus, budgeting, increasing student enrolments and preparation for the college's transfer to a new trust, Catholic Education an Irish Schools' Trust (CEIST). Currently teaching and learning is not a regular item on the agenda of board meetings. In reflecting on its responsibilities, the board might consider how it could further strengthen its educational leadership role.

While the board has a general view of future school developments, a strategic plan is not in place. It is recommended that the board oversees the development of an overarching strategic plan with agreed short, medium and long-term whole-school priorities developed by all stakeholders.

The present board was correctly constituted at the beginning of the 2019/20 school year, but at the time of the evaluation there were two vacancies on the board – a trustee and a parent nominee. The patron should ensure that these vacancies are filled without further delay.

All mandatory policies are in place, but many policies are outdated. Five key policies have been reviewed in the last year, but a more systematic review of policies is required.

The principal and deputy principal work well as a team and provide competent and effective leadership and management. Areas of responsibility have been identified and delegated, and each member brings a relevant skillset to the distributed and shared leadership roles. They demonstrate a clear understanding of change processes and approach the management of change in a collaborative, flexible and sensitive manner. Morale is good among staff, and a majority of teachers agree that their views are valued in the decision-making process.

The senior management team endeavours, with the assistance of staff, to ensure the maintenance of a secure and safe learning environment. The day-to-day operation of the school is efficient overall. In their responses to questionnaires, a majority of parents and teachers agreed that the school is well run.

The issue of poor behaviour by a minority of students, particularly in open areas at break times, was raised as an area of concern by students and by a significant minority of parents and teachers during the evaluation. Students did not agree that the code of behaviour was always being implemented in a fair, effective and consistent manner.

Teachers, year heads, and the senior management team all have a key role in the day-to-day implementation of the code and are committed to bringing about improvement. The role of class tutors at junior cycle in encouraging positive behaviour and attitudes is acknowledged, but there is not a similar class tutor system at senior cycle and this deficit needs to be addressed. Some commendable efforts have been made to run additional fun activities for students at lunch time and after school to develop more positive student engagement with school life.

It is recommended that school management and staff ensure that the code of behaviour is implemented in a fair, effective and consistent manner. School management should provide CPD for staff in positive behaviour strategies and in facilitating greater student engagement in all aspects of school life.

The board of management maintains the school buildings to a good standard. Some classrooms have been refurbished and the board is currently awaiting planning approval for major remedial works to the school's toilets. The sports complex and grounds are under the management of a separate company, and student access is not always guaranteed. It is recommended that the patron ensures that students have priority access to the sports facilities during the school day.

Leading school development

Increasing student enrolments is a key priority. Because the school was originally fee-charging, its links with local feeder schools have been under-developed. Closer links are being established through, for example, school visits, paired reading and science week initiatives, and the use of the college chapel for religious ceremonies by the primary schools.

The school has an active and prominent parents' association, whose work is widely acknowledged and valued. Its regular meetings are attended by a member of the senior management team. It has close links with the board, the student council and the local community association. The parents' association is consulted on policies and is aware of school developments. The parents have assisted in the refurbishment of the music room and the school library, which the parents supervise at lunchtime for the benefit of students. Questionnaire data indicates that a majority of parents are happy with the school.

Developing leadership capacity

The recent review of posts of responsibility has enhanced distributed leadership in the school and encouraged post-holders to develop their roles to best meet the evolving needs of the school and its students. It affirmed the importance of the year head role and regular year head meetings support the sharing of problems and solutions.

Commendably teachers have taken on a range of additional responsibilities which provide for a wide educational experience for students.

Students have various opportunities to experience leadership, including the student council, head girl and head boy, the prefect and mentoring programmes, Clann activities, team sports, and student-led clubs. It would be a very worthwhile exercise to canvass students' views on other ways in which they might experience leadership as students and, more broadly, extend their voice as stakeholders so they can play a part in key decisions about their own learning and development.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good in the lessons observed. Very good practice was evident in a small number of lessons. The quality of a significant minority of lessons was satisfactory. Areas for development included extending differentiation, formative feedback and improving the quality of homework.

Learner outcomes and experiences

The relationships and interactions between students and teachers were generally positive and mutually respectful in the lessons observed. This supported a co-operative and productive learning environment.

Learning intentions were shared with the students at the beginning of most lessons. In one very good lesson observed, students had to co-create the learning intentions using a visual representation as their guide. This task aroused their curiosity and engaged the students' interest and critical thinking from the very beginning. A variety of 'check-ins' on student progress was noted in a few classes and very good practice was observed where the teacher returned to the learning intentions during the lesson to assess progress.

While many of the lessons visited were purposeful, there was scope at times to make the learning more stimulating and more relevant to students' real-life experiences. Enjoyment and motivation to learn were highest in lessons where expectations were suitably pitched, for both ability and knowledge, and where students had opportunities to be actively engaged with the lesson content. Group and pair work were facilitated in many lessons, and this was most effective when students were sufficiently challenged. There was scope to improve the balance between teacher voice and student input in a small number of lessons.

In the majority of lessons observed, students demonstrated good knowledge and understanding and were competent and confident in their responses. Student ownership of learning was evident in a small number of lessons through students' use of prompts to engage in peer and self-assessment.

Regular verbal affirmation was a feature of most lessons and a few very good examples of students receiving oral formative feedback were observed.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

Teacher's preparation for lessons was good. In the majority of lessons observed useful resources such as applications, games, video-clips and worksheets were used to support learning. A few

instances of effective differentiated teaching were observed. For instance, in some lessons when learners were working independently, teachers provided one-to-one support where needed.

However, learning in the majority of the lessons was not differentiated; all students were provided with the same material and tasks regardless of ability. In these lessons there was a need to ensure that the learning tasks and material were differentiated to more accurately meet students' individual needs. It is recommended that teachers plan for the further use of differentiated teaching methodologies to appropriately challenge and extend students' capabilities.

In the lessons observed, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was used regularly by teachers in class, primarily to present material. In very few of the lessons observed were students given an opportunity to use ICT more creatively to develop their own learning. Appropriately the school's digital learning plan has identified the use of digital technologies as an area for improvement.

In many instances the homework set was not sufficiently challenging. Interactions with students and parents indicated that they felt that there was scope to improve the quality of homework. The school's homework policy is quite dated. It is recommended that school management and teachers review their homework policy in consultation with students and parents.

Some examples of good-quality formative written feedback on students' work was noted but the practice should be extended. Commendably the school's teaching and learning team has introduced a school-designed reflection and feedback form on the cover of school tests, but it was evident that it was not being used consistently.

A range of subject department and programme plans was reviewed as part of this evaluation. The quality of subject planning varied and ranged from very good to satisfactory. Very good practice was noted where the plans were closely aligned with the Framework for Junior Cycle. Student attainment in certificate examinations is analysed by senior management and provided to the subject departments. While some subject departments have discussed the results and developed an action plan, reflection and action planning based on this analysis were not evident in most of the plans reviewed.

It is recommended that subject departments be encouraged to set targets and develop action plans to support improvements in student outcomes. A more comprehensive and systematic student tracking system should be established that involves year heads and subject departments collaborating more closely to ensure that students achieve their full potential.

In order to further promote the sharing of effective classroom practices, consideration should be given to facilitating further opportunities for peer observation and co-teaching.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Good progress overall has been made in the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations; these include subject inspections in Art, Mathematics, German and Guidance.

Leadership and Management

Very good progress has been made in relation to the implementation of previous recommendations relating to health and safety, timetabling and subject sampling.

Teaching and Learning

Good progress has been made in a number of areas, including collaborative subject planning and developing classroom practice. While recommendations in relation to formative assessment have been implemented in the subject areas inspected, there is scope to extend this good practice across the school.

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

An effective SSE process has been established and the school's capacity for improvement is good.

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

Good progress has been made in the last academic year with the appointment of a SSE coordinator. Staff teams have been established to review Wellbeing, the school's curriculum, teaching, assessment and digital learning, using the six-step SSE process. Appropriate progress has been made in recent years in developing literacy, numeracy and assessment for learning (AfL) strategies, but the process required a more systematic approach, and this deficit has now been addressed. The current focus is on exploring ways to improve learner outcomes and to promote greater collaborative practice among teachers.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school has a good capacity for improvement. The recent review of the posts of responsibility has enhanced the roles of the middle management team and has contributed to ongoing school improvement. Significant progress has been made since the school joined the free education scheme, but the school is still in a period of transition. Closer collaboration between all members of the school community in addressing the issues raised in this report will ensure that further significant progress is made.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board welcomes this very positive WSE-MLL report and wishes to congratulate and thank all school staff for their work and commitment to the school and its students. They welcome the report which affirms good and effective practice at board, senior management and teacher level.

The Board is pleased with recognition of the following:

- The overall quality of leadership and management is good. The principal and deputy principal work well as a team providing competent and effective leadership. Change processes are managed collaboratively, flexibly and sensitively. Morale among staff is good; staff views and opinions are valued. The Board notes that the majority of parents and staff agree the school is well run. Data also indicates that the majority of parents and staff agree that students are well supported.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good in the lessons observed.
- The board is very pleased to see that the report states: “The board and the senior management team demonstrate a clear vision in striving to provide a high-quality education”.
- School governance is good, members demonstrate pride in the school and its ethos.
- The Board appreciates that all school staff work hard to foster and maintain a safe and secure learning environment.
- The Board noted with satisfaction that the school has an active and prominent parents’ association whose work is widely acknowledged and valued.
- The Board is very pleased to see that the interactions between students and teachers is generally positive and mutually respectful. Furthermore, that this supports a productive learning environment.
- The Board welcomes recognition of the work done in key areas such as Wellbeing, curriculum review, promotion of student voice, digital learning and that the school’s self-evaluation processes are adjudged to have made good progress with good capacity for improvement.
- The Board is pleased to see recognition of the popularity of our TY programme as well as commendable praise in introducing the Leaving Certificate Applied programme.
- It is good to see acknowledgement that the destinations of 6th year students indicate high progression rates to colleges of further and higher education as well as to the world of work.

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 will include as part of each BOM meeting a standard agenda item addressing the recommendations of the WSE-MLL report.

School management will, on an incremental and phased basis, ensure that the deployment of teaching resources for SEN will align with the principles of the new allocation model.

School management in collaboration with the Well Being and Teaching and Learning Team will examine and evaluate students’ perceptions of their learning experiences and will implement strategies to improve these further. Learner experiences will form a key part of the SIP 2020/2021. Formative feedback and reflection will continue to be a primary focus.

The board is determined to develop and implement as a matter of priority, a strategic action plan for Franciscan College Gormanston. It will provide a blueprint for the future of the school, building on its traditions and values as well as successes to date. The plan, translated into actions, will further enhance the opportunities and educational provision for our students.

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;