

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**Management, Leadership and Learning**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	St Muredach's College
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Sligo Road Ballina Co Mayo
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	64510J

**Date of Evaluation: 17-01-2018**



## **What is 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; a response was not received from the board.

## WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	15 – 17 January 2018
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with board of management</li><li>• Meetings with principal and deputy principal</li><li>• Meetings with key staff</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Student focus-group interview</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with parents</li><li>• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers</li></ul>

### School context

St Muredach's College is an all-boys' post-primary school, with a current enrolment of 294 students. The school operates under the trusteeship of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Killala, and students are drawn from the town of Ballina and surrounding areas. The school has a long tradition of education provision and its identity is intrinsically linked to this tradition and its position within the community. In recent years enrolment in the school has declined, posing a significant challenge for the school. In particular, the school is overstaffed for the number of students enrolled.

### Summary of main findings and recommendations:

#### Findings

- Overall, the quality of management is good and the quality of leadership is satisfactory; the recently appointed board of management has very good capacity to lead developments in the school, as demonstrated by its approach to strategic planning although its work will need to be supported by realigning the in-school management structures.
- Student care and the promotion of wellbeing are characterised by good relationships at school level; the structures in place to support this are in need of review.
- The school's capacity to provide a very broad curriculum is dependent on the overstaffing situation; teachers are very committed to providing a range of extra-curricular opportunities for students.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was mostly very good or good with some fair practice.
- Assessment practices varied from very good to satisfactory with some changes necessary in the assessment approaches used in order to reflect the changes in assessment required for Junior Cycle.
- Good progress has been made in relation to the recommendations of previous inspection reports and, while school self-evaluation (SSE) to date has been fair, in the current school year a new developmental phase has been initiated.

#### Recommendations

- The strategic planning being undertaken at board level should be supported at school level through the engagement of the staff with progressing the identified priorities.

- The distribution of duties among the posts of responsibility should ensure balance and equity and the duties assigned should more fully address the current and future needs of the school cohort.
- The school needs to plan for its curriculum in the context of returning to normal resourcing levels.
- Whole-school teaching, learning and assessment approaches should be progressed using the SSE process.
- Structures to support students including student leadership, pastoral care, and academic progression should be further developed.

## **DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

#### **Leading learning and teaching**

The senior management team (SMT) has been in place for a number of years and they have a well-established, positive working relationship and present as a unified team. The day-to-day administration of the school and the development of policies and procedures form the core work that is undertaken by both of them. Overall, the quality of management is good and the quality of leadership is satisfactory. Where scope for development exists, it is in progressing the development of teaching and learning priorities.

A key operating constraint on the school is the decline in enrolment. The management of the school's resources in this context has been an ongoing area of concern for the SMT. They have endeavoured to prioritise continuity in the breadth of curriculum provision. However, whole-school teaching and learning initiatives, especially those promoted by SSE, have not been progressed at the same pace. This lack of progress in terms of teaching and learning initiatives is due in part to insufficient shared recognition among management and staff of the need for change, which is a significant limiting factor in the change management process within the school.

The school provides a broad curriculum for students, in particular in senior cycle where a wide range of optional subjects is available to students. Also, the school's Transition Year (TY) programme and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) are well embedded with a significant proportion of eligible students participating in them.

The school's TY programme is managed on a voluntary basis by two teachers. Students participate in a range of subjects and modules that also provide opportunities for them to engage with projects inside and outside the classroom. An inventory of interests of students is compiled at the application stage of the TY programme, which is used to inform its development for the year. The plans to formalise an end-of-year portfolio of achievement will further strengthen the programme's impact for individual students.

The curriculum in junior cycle comprises a core of seven compulsory subjects with students selecting, at the end of the year-long first-year subject sampling, three optional subjects. It would be beneficial at this point to discuss the structure and suitability of the year-long sampling programme in the context of the Junior Cycle Framework (JCF) and the resources available to the school. In addition, junior cycle class groups are organised on a mixed-ability basis with ability grouping for the

core subjects of Irish, English and Mathematics at the end of first year. Consideration should be given to developing a less rigid approach to ability grouping with the objective of promoting greater higher-level take-up of subjects for certification.

The school is in compliance with the requirements of the JCF in terms of the minimum length of lessons and the maximum number of subjects for certification. Teachers have recently engaged in continuing professional development (CPD) in relation to the JCF and will be in a position to use the outcomes of the CPD to initiate a discussion at whole-school level about its implications for the curriculum, teaching and learning, and the assessment approaches used in the school.

The school has placed a strong emphasis on the provision of guidance supports to students. All first-year class groups have one weekly timetabled period for guidance, which forms part of the school's wellbeing programme. In addition, all three aspects of guidance: educational, careers and personal guidance are provided. In conjunction with the special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinator diagnostic testing for some students is undertaken. A priority will be the introduction of diagnostic testing for all first-year students. This will support a more systematic organisation of students into mixed-ability groups in first year, and well as providing additional information to target the delivery of SEN supports to students.

The behaviour of students observed during the evaluation was very good. The role of the year heads and SMT in the ladder of referral are clear. However, currently all teachers can contact home directly in relation to issues arising in relation to for example, homework or behaviour. It would be preferable to have a single point of initial contact for home and that minor infractions of the code of behaviour be dealt with using the in-school systems.

Interactions with teachers and students during the evaluation indicated that teachers are interested in students' wellbeing. Responses of students to surveys completed as part of the evaluation also indicate that students are happy in school. Attendance in lessons is recorded using the school's electronic attendance management system and data is readily available to inform SMT and teachers. The current attendance model focuses on record-keeping and accountability. There is scope for a more strategic intervention system to be developed to encourage higher attendance levels among those students for whom attendance is an issue.

### **Managing the organisation**

The capacity of the new board, as evidenced by the work completed to date and the interactions with the inspectors during the evaluation, is very good. Members of the recently appointed board come from a range of diverse backgrounds. Many have a direct link to the school as either teachers, parents or past students. The breadth of expertise that they bring is directly relevant for planning to meet the challenges currently facing the school, most relevantly the decline in enrolment and its consequential impact on the school's resources.

The board and management are anxious to maintain the integrity of the original school building as it encapsulates the history and tradition associated with the school's origins and its evolution. Remedial work is underway to update aspects of the physical infrastructure and the board has plans to extend this approach to other parts of the campus.

The school is in a significant over-quota staffing position. The impact of this has not been felt in the current school year, as the school's management has used the additional resources available, including some of the school's SEN resources to arrange smaller class groups and to continue to

provide the wide range of optional subjects. As a result of this, class groups are generally small. Given that during the evaluation, absenteeism was high in a number of lessons; there is the potential for this to impact on lesson continuity when students are absent from one lesson to another. While smaller class groups may have perceived benefits in terms of classroom management and more individualised support, other teaching interventions including team teaching could be planned for to optimise the support for identified students.

The pastoral care team includes the SMT, guidance counsellor, SEN co-ordinator and one year head. While not formally timetabled, the team ensures that they meet weekly, and when necessary additional input from the year heads of other year groups is facilitated. Given the central role of year heads in the pastoral structure within the school, formalising their involvement with the pastoral care team would strengthen the whole-school approaches.

The school has one fully qualified SEN teacher who acts as co-ordinator and who is heavily involved in planning for, and the delivery of SEN supports. Information is collated and available to teachers on a confidential basis. The main model is the withdrawal of students on an individual or small group basis. A substantial proportion of the school's SEN resources is targeted at providing smaller class groups in English and Mathematics. Given the new resource allocation model, it is timely that the SEN model within the school is reviewed to reflect the relevant advice in relation to the operation of the continuum of support. This will also be supported by the development of student support files, which is a priority for the SEN co-ordinator in the current school year.

### **Leading school development**

In the short timeframe since their appointment at the end of November 2017, board members have completed training, agreed the developmental priorities for the school for their term and have established working groups at board level to advance these priorities. As a follow on to these actions, the board will need to involve teachers in progressing the associated school-based objectives.

In addition to its administrative role, the board should also inform itself more fully as to the quality of teaching and learning in the school and the progress of initiatives aimed at improving teaching and learning approaches, especially those advanced using the school's SSE process.

The parents' association (PA), with the support of the SMT has been actively engaged with promoting and supporting the school. Its members have successfully channelled local goodwill towards the school resulting in a substantial number of parents, especially parents of first-year students committing to volunteer to help the PA in its work in the year ahead.

The school has well-established links within the local community and with businesses that support the co-curricular aspects of programmes including the LCVP and TY. Also, the school's link with the parish is developed and promoted through the school's liturgical programme and outreach events including the construction of a crib in the nearby cathedral at Christmas.

### **Developing leadership capacity**

It is evident that traditional approaches continue to prevail across a number of areas within the school, including the duties attached to the posts of year head, and the special duties posts, none of which include a focus on school development planning or teaching and learning. In particular, the duties attached with the position of year head, have not adequately evolved to reflect the decline in

enrolment. To further develop the pastoral element of the role, year heads could, for example, have a greater involvement in managing the processes that support student attendance and attainment. Though a recent review of the posts of responsibility has been completed, the board should review the proposed schedule of duties to ensure that the duties match the priorities identified by the board and the current and future needs of the school.

The introduction of a reporting system for post-holders to the board and senior management team would enhance transparency in the completion of the duties and enable the board to inform itself about the wider management of the school.

Within the school, opportunities to demonstrate leadership have been availed of in a number of areas including the re-establishment of the SSE team and the voluntary co-ordination of TY. Also, many teachers are highly committed to enhancing students' experience and development through the provision of a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular programmes. The school has frequently won national recognition for the achievements of students across a range of disciplines.

The school is currently in the process of establishing a student council (SC). This will provide a structured mechanism to encourage student leadership and the engagement of the wider student body with student-centred developmental priorities in the school. Mechanisms to support the effective operation of the SC will be the development of its constitution and associated support systems. Currently, the main mechanisms that encourage student leadership are a mentor system, the Gaisce Awards, the school's open night and engagement with the school's sporting extra-curricular programme. In many instances the mechanism for selection for involvement is based on teacher nomination. The development of formalised, representative structures with the direct involvement of students and promoting wider use of teaching and learning methodologies that encourage student voice will strengthen and broaden student engagement and participation.

## **2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**

### **Learner outcomes and experiences**

In most lessons, students were motivated and enjoyed their learning. Students were comfortable contributing in class when the format of the lesson facilitated their contribution. Where high expectations were set for students, they responded enthusiastically and ably. In some lessons, however, the approach was less focused. In such cases, students were less likely to engage with the lesson content.

In a number of lessons very good use of assessment for learning approaches (AfL) was observed including: students reflecting on their learning at the end of the lesson, the provision of written feedback by the teacher, and in-class activities being used to inform how learning developed. Sharing and building on these and other AfL approaches will support students' learning and progression.

In the main, the assessment approaches used in the school are summative. Testing is regular and the timetabling of lengthy house exams twice yearly for most class groups is embedded in the school's culture. In the context of the requirements of assessment for Junior Cycle, the school should review its assessment policy. Greater balance between formative and summative assessment approaches may encourage students to take more ownership of their learning and broaden the means by which they can reflect on their progress. It may also promote increased higher-level take-up and attainment, which are areas for development.

Positive and courteous interactions between students and teachers were evident. Classrooms were well maintained and contained good displays of subject-specific content, including students' own work in some cases. There is scope to include more student-generated materials which result from the completion of projects or assignments.

Where students were given opportunities to participate actively in lessons, they responded enthusiastically and articulately in most cases. In some lessons, students were more passive as the format of the lesson didn't facilitate a sufficient level of active engagement.

In many lessons students demonstrated high levels of motivation and were diligent in their work. In other cases, there was scope to broaden the learner experience through the incorporation of a wider range of learning activities.

### **Teachers' individual and collective practice**

High levels of subject expertise were evident in most lessons, and teachers demonstrated interest in their subjects. Lesson content was mostly well planned. However, there was scope for further planning in some cases to ensure that the lesson was sufficiently differentiated to cater for the range of abilities and learning styles, particularly the creation of opportunities for the more able learners to extend their learning.

A good mix of methodologies was evident in a majority lessons involving teacher exposition and student activity. Most activities centred on the development of pair opportunities or where students were assigned tasks to be completed. In a small number of lessons, matching exercises and cloze tests were used effectively as the working tool for the pair work activity.

Other lessons were overly teacher directed. Therefore, in these lessons there was scope to give students more ownership of their learning, and encourage greater engagement of students with the content of the lesson through providing a range of active learning opportunities.

In the majority of lessons differentiation was well catered for through teacher-led questioning, which included a mix of global and directed questions with students selected to answer in most cases. The questions that were asked tested recall and, in the best lessons, included higher-order questions which challenged the more able students within the group. Where questioning was good, wait-time was facilitated and time was set aside for students to pair up and discuss the material. Well-planned group activities were evident in a small number of lessons.

Subject plans followed a common template for the most part, including the tabular presentation of schemes of work. There was evidence of teacher collaboration in the preparation of the plans and there was also some good tailoring of resources, methodologies and assessment modes. In most cases the approaches to literacy, numeracy and SEN were individual to the subject. Using the SSE process to support whole-school approaches across these areas will strengthen collaborative and collective practice.

## **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

### **Leadership and Management**

Progress in relation to management recommendations in the most recent inspections has been good. For example, safe operating areas (SOAs) have been marked in technology rooms and qualified teachers assigned to specialist subjects in almost all cases. Some additional developmental work in relation to whole-school approaches to assessment for learning (AfL) is advised as priorities for SSE.



## **Teaching and Learning**

Based on an analysis of previous subject inspection reports, progress in relation to three whole-school aspects of teaching and learning was observed. In many lessons, opportunities were provided for students to work actively and, the prevalent methodology for collaborative learning was pair work. Good progress in differentiating oral questions was evident which aided in assessing students' learning and is appropriate in the mainly mixed-ability settings. Students' homework was regularly monitored and dated and initialled by teachers. There remains scope to develop whole-school and subject-specific approaches to the provision of written formative feedback to students on the quality of the work completed and to provide students with directions for improvement.

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

### **The School's Self-Evaluation Process**

Progress to date with SSE has been fair. The school is at an early stage in the development of SSE priorities under the current phase of SSE. A core team of teachers, including the school's SMT, has been established to identify and progress whole-school strategies. A key factor in ensuring the success of SSE will be getting whole-staff buy-in to the process and the implementation of the agreed strategies. The initiatives already identified have focused on in-class strategies that all teachers can engage with, though progress to date has not been consistent. In further developing SSE, the process and guidelines will further support the school in its implementation of the JCF.

### **The School's Capacity for Improvement**

The school's capacity for improvement depends to a large extent on maintaining and building on enrolment, making progress of the range of developmental priorities identified by the board and embedding new initiatives in teaching, learning and assessment. The role and oversight of the board and the SMT will be of critical importance in developing the school's capacity for improvement.

## **5. CHILD PROTECTION**

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

1. The school principal is aware that revised child protection procedures for primary and post-primary schools came into effect on 11 December 2017 and arrangements are in place to begin the process of implementing these procedures.
2. The name of the designated liaison person for child protection matters was prominently displayed near the main door of the school / in the school's reception area.
3. The school has a Child Protection policy in place.
4. All teachers are aware that they are mandated persons and of their responsibilities in that regard.

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

### 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;