

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Rice College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Westport County Mayo
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	647000

Date of Evaluation: 05-12-2019



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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 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	3, 4, 5 December 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

Rice College is a boys-only voluntary secondary school operating under the trusteeship of Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST) with a current enrolment of 460 students. The school provides the Junior Cycle (JC) programme, the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme, as well as an optional Transition Year. It provides a special class to facilitate students with multiple learning disabilities, including autism spectrum disorders (ASD). The school co-operates with a local girls' school to extend subject provision in some areas.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- Leadership of management and learning is good, and the recent post review has given rise to an energised approach to school management and leadership at all levels; aspects of the usage of hours allocated to the school for the teaching of students with special educational needs need to be addressed.
- A comprehensive Strategic School Development plan (2015 – 2025) which draws together many aspects of school life has been initiated and, commendably, this plan reflects the board's priorities including the promotion of student voice and aspects of teaching and learning.
- Very good, inclusive, student support structures are in place, and students showed an awareness of their own role in supporting each other.
- The overall quality of learning and teaching was good, ranging from very good or good in most lessons to satisfactory in a small minority of lessons; students' active engagement with the content of the lesson and the assessment of students' learning are areas for development.
- School self-evaluation (SSE) plans with a focus on student engagement are being developed and the overall quality of SSE is satisfactory, following some gaps in engagement in recent years; capacity for improvement is very good.
- There has been good progress, overall, in addressing recommendations from previous inspections.

Recommendations

- The use of hours allocated to the school for the teaching of students with special educational needs should be reviewed with reference to Circular 14/2017; this review should be undertaken in the context of an overall examination of curriculum planning, subject provision, and timetabling at both junior and senior cycle.

- The Strategic School Development Plan (2015 – 2025) should be adopted as a key driver for school improvement: prioritisation of elements of the plan, clear links with the SSE improvement plan, target dates, and a strategy to involve all stakeholders are needed to support its implementation.
- Students' active engagement with the lesson content and the use of a range of formative assessment strategies to support their learning should be prioritised as areas for further development.
- Whole-school involvement in the SSE process is needed and input from all stakeholders planned for; strategies for improvement must have an identifiable impact on learner experiences and learner outcomes.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of school leadership and management is good.

Leading learning and teaching

The board of management and senior management foster teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) to enrich teachers' and students' learning. Teachers are facilitated to attend CPD events and whole-school CPD is arranged periodically. Senior management reported that following their own attendance at CPD, they provide relevant updates to colleagues on new learning. In furthering the promotion of innovation and collaboration, it would be worthwhile providing opportunities for teachers to share the learning from CPD events, with particular reference to teaching and learning, at staff and subject department meetings.

Senior management fosters a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each student. The school's efforts to provide a broad learning experience for the students enrolled in the special class by including them in mainstream lessons, as appropriate, are commendable. The long-established wellbeing programme, which addresses student wellbeing at both junior and senior cycle, is currently being reviewed to ensure that it meets the specific requirements of the Junior Cycle Wellbeing guidelines.

Support for students is of a very good quality. Students may come to the attention of the care team, which meets weekly, through a variety of paths, including referral by teachers, year heads and commendably, self or peer referral. The care team invokes the support of outside agencies as required. While the school does not operate a tutor system, students' journals are checked by teachers during a class advisor period at times designated by senior management. In addition, academic monitoring is used to support students' learning progress. Any concerns arising from either of these interventions are reported to the relevant year head or to the care team. Senior management reported that this system provides support for all students, while at the same time providing teachers with an opportunity to get to know students in a more holistic way than subject teaching may allow for. The school could consider surveying all participants' views on the efficacy of this approach.

The school offers a broad range of subjects at both junior and senior cycle. At junior cycle, first-year students study five option subjects as well as seven core subjects and the Junior Cycle Wellbeing subjects. During the second and third term of first year, students choose three subjects from the options subjects to carry through for the Junior Cycle. The Junior Cycle Coding short course and Music are additional options available for second-year and third-year students. It is positive that the school offers flexibility that allows for change after initial choices have been made. At senior cycle, the

timetable is constructed based on students' subject selection. However, there is demand for some subjects such as Home Economics, Metalwork and Engineering that cannot be taught in the school due to lack of specialist facilities. It is commendable that the board and senior management have responded to this demand through a co-operative arrangement with a local girls' school that makes some additional subjects available to senior-cycle students. At the time of the inspection, the LCA programme was timetabled only for sixth-year students. The school expects to offer LCA for fifth-year students in the coming year.

The optional Transition Year (TY) is very popular. Students engage in a wide variety of activities, including a well-planned work experience programme. There is scope to review the work experience aspect of TY to ensure that there is an appropriate balance between all areas of the programme. Assessment of learning in the various TY modules is based on project work and the recording of students' reflections in electronic portfolios. It would be worthwhile encouraging students to monitor their own progress and evaluate their portfolios against shared success criteria as an ongoing feature of the TY experience.

Commendably, students with SEN are identified and their learning needs categorised using the principles of the *Continuum of Support* and they are supported through differentiation by mainstream teachers, one-to-one and small group teaching, as well as some team teaching. However, not all hours allocated to the school for the teaching of students with SEN are used in line with the provisions of circular 14/2017. It is recommended that a review should be carried out with reference to the provisions of the relevant circular. The review should be undertaken in the context of an overall examination of curriculum planning, teacher deployment, subject provision and timetabling at both junior and senior cycle.

The school has engaged with Droichead, the professional induction framework to support newly qualified teachers. A comprehensive induction programme is being developed to ensure that all teachers who are new to the school are made aware of all relevant school policies, including child protection and anti-bullying policies and procedures. There may be scope to adapt this programme so that it can be made available to all teachers, including short-term substitutes and ancillary staff as appropriate.

The school regularly provides placements for student teachers and has procedures to ensure that they are adequately supported by the "co-operating" teachers. It would be worthwhile using the guidelines on the Teaching Council website as the basis for formalising these procedures. 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 and the teacher education institution.

Managing the organisation

A new board was appointed in October 2019. It is commendable, particularly in light of the voluntary nature of this commitment, that continuity has been achieved through the reappointment of a majority of members from the previous board. The senior management team has been working in partnership for several years and has clear and balanced roles and responsibilities to support the management of the school. They communicate and collaborate on all areas of school life and are supported in their work by the board.

The board and senior management have established a secure and healthy learning environment. The opening of the new school building has enhanced many aspects of school life including the provision of extra corridor space, flexible classroom furniture to support collaborative learning methodologies, enhanced digital resources, social areas for students, accessible classrooms and toilets, and additional options for teachers' work stations. A health and safety risk assessment has been undertaken and evacuation procedures have been tested successfully.

Interactions within the school and between school partners are respectful and reflect fairness and justice as embodied in the school's ethos. Communication between all stakeholders is supported through the school website, social media and shared electronic platforms. A very comprehensive and informative newsletter is published three times each year.

The recent post review has given rise to an energised approach to school management and leadership at all levels. Each post-holder has a comprehensive job description and the requirement to report to the board on an annual basis promotes professional responsibility and enhances the board's role in supporting the management of the school.

State examination results are reviewed annually at board level. To increase its involvement, and to provide more opportunities to share experience and expertise, the board could focus on outcomes in specific groups of subjects at each meeting, so that in the course of a year, a focused and informed evaluation of student outcomes in all subjects could inform its strategic planning.

Policies are in place to guide decision making at all levels and it is good practice that a policy review schedule is in place. To assist with the ongoing tasks of review and endorsement of policies, the review schedule could become a standard agenda item for board meetings.

Leading school development

A comprehensive Strategic School Development plan (2015 – 2025) has been developed which draws together many aspects of school life that had been discussed with staff at various meetings over the past number of years and reflects the board's priorities, including the promotion of student voice and aspects of teaching and learning. To progress this very worthwhile plan, a number of recommendations are proposed: the items in the plan should be prioritised; clear links with the SSE improvement plan should be identified so that duplication is avoided; target completion dates and responsibility for specific items should be assigned; progress reviews should be scheduled for board meetings; and the plan should be shared with all stakeholders.

The school has built pro-active relationships with parents and with feeder schools. Of particular note were parents' comments on the accessibility of the senior management team and on the usefulness of the practical information that the school makes available to them. The questionnaire finding where some parents indicated that their views are not sought regularly should be considered in the context of the further development of the strategic school development plan.

Positive links with the wider community are exemplified by the extensive work experience programmes in TY, LCVP and LCA that have been supported over many years by local businesses. In addition, the relationship with the local girls' schools that has given rise to extended learning experiences for students, both in terms of subject choice and through shared TY projects, is commendable. Further development of this relationship could now be explored in terms of sharing practice and experience.

The digital learning strategy is currently focused on the provision of digital technology to support teachers' collaboration, enhance teaching practice and methodologies, and also to support students through online platforms for accessing material such as project information, assignments and e-portfolios. Teachers are keen to progress the use of digital learning strategies and the school has provided mobile lap-top trolleys to support students' digital learning experiences with particular reference to junior cycle requirements. Anomalies in the code of behaviour should be addressed so that there is clarity around the use of students' personal digital devices in lessons.

Developing leadership capacity

The assignment of posts following the recent post review has provided many leadership opportunities for members of staff. In addition, many teachers are involved in initiatives that require significant leadership and management skills outside of the post structure. It is commendable that senior management supports all teachers in developing skills that will support their ongoing professional development.

The school promotes and facilitates the development of the student voice through the student council and the chairperson meets with the principal to discuss issues arising following each meeting. The status and importance of membership of the student council are promoted through communications to parents and it is noteworthy that the council has an ongoing relationship with the parents' association. Student feedback in questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation indicated that a majority of students did not agree that they had a say in how things are done in the school. It is advised that to promote student voice through the role of the council and to enhance council members' responsibility and accountability, class representatives should be provided with regular and structured opportunities to report back to their class group on issues and actions; members should be encouraged and supported to broaden their agenda to include items related to the learner experience; and meeting minutes should be maintained and passed on from year to year.

Other leadership opportunities exist for students within the school, including the Green School initiative, shared reading programmes, mentoring of first-year students and leadership of sports teams. Of particular note is the school's practice of requiring students from second-year onwards to participate in parent-teacher meetings. This practice provides all students with an opportunity to demonstrate their own leadership in taking responsibility for their learning.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The overall quality of learning and teaching was good, ranging from very good or good in most lessons to satisfactory in a small minority of lessons.

Learner Outcomes and Experiences

Relationships and interactions among students and between students and teachers were very respectful and positive in all of the lessons observed and students demonstrated high levels of motivation, enjoyment and interest in learning.

Learning intentions were shared with students in the majority of lessons. Where these learning intentions were most effective, they referred to knowledge, understanding and skills development and served as a useful means of assessing student learning during and at the end of lessons. In some other lessons, while students made adequate progress, they would have benefited from having a clearer sense of what was required of them in terms of their learning in order to facilitate greater self-reflection and ownership of their learning.

Some very good examples of lesson activities were observed that required students to work collaboratively with their peers and to develop problem-solving skills, teamwork, dialogue and critical thinking. In the best examples, it was highly evident that students were accustomed to such collaboration and adopted the various roles assigned to them with assuredness and vigour. In a significant number of lessons, opportunities were missed to engage students actively in their learning. In such lessons, an excessive amount of time was allocated to teacher presentation and students were primarily passive. In planning for lessons, it is recommended that greater

consideration be given to students' skill development through active engagement with the lesson content, both individually and in collaboration with other students.

Digital technology was used in fewer than half of the lessons observed and was used primarily for the presentation of static content to support teachers' presentations. The emergence of a shared online platform shows very good potential and many teachers and students are already using this platform to share resources and for the submission of coursework. There remains scope for improvement in the creative use of digital technology as a learning tool in classrooms.

Teachers' Individual/Collective Practice

Teachers demonstrated high levels of enthusiasm and subject-specific expertise, and set high expectations for students' learning. This contributed to an overall positive attitude to learning among students.

It was clear during the evaluation that teachers take pride in their classrooms. There were many examples of learning environments that celebrated students' achievements through the display of students' work such as artefacts and other projects. In some cases, the seating arrangements in the classroom had been adapted to facilitate student collaboration. It is suggested that, where feasible, all teachers consider the layout of the student desks with a view to enhancing the student learning experience in their classroom.

Lesson content and resources were prepared in advance of most lessons and were of a high quality in general. In the best lessons, resources were integrated in a way that varied the learning experience for students and appealed to a broad range of learning styles. Examples included the timely incorporation of video content and the use of differentiated worksheets that allowed all students to achieve while providing sufficient challenge for the more able students. In some cases, there was a need for more careful planning to ensure that the resources used supported the attainment of the learning intentions and that the lesson was differentiated to cater for all ability levels.

Very good use of questioning was evident in the majority of lessons. In the most effective cases, teachers used higher-order, targeted questioning as a means of including all students. Wait time was used to good effect in order to facilitate reflection and, in some very good examples, to allow time for students to consult with their peers and explore available resources. In other lessons, the predominance of teacher exposition meant that opportunities to assess students' understanding and skill development through questioning, observation and the delivery of formative feedback were limited. It is recommended that all lessons include opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning and to acquire the skills of self-assessment and peer-assessment through engagement with, and co-creation of, success criteria.

A sample of subject department plans was examined during the evaluation and, overall, department planning was good. To progress collaborative subject department planning, a number of steps are advised. Teaching and learning should be a standard agenda item at subject department meetings. Focussed analysis of state examination results should be undertaken so that trends can be identified and strategies for improvement, specific to each cohort, can be put in place. Also, teachers should engage in action planning for improvement that reflects SSE targets.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

Very good progress has been made in the implementation of previous recommendations related to management. Policies for pastoral care and relationships and sexuality education (RSE) have been reviewed, expanded and endorsed by the board.

Teaching and Learning

Good progress has been made in the implementation of previous recommendations related to teaching and learning. Areas for continued development include students' collaboration and active engagement, the use of a range of assessment strategies and the greater integration of digital technology into teaching and learning. The very good practices observed in many lessons should be shared systematically both within and across subject departments.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The overall quality of school self-evaluation is satisfactory. Improvement plans were developed in the areas of literacy and numeracy some years ago and the strategies implicit in these plans have been embedded at whole-school level. Some gaps in engagement over more recent years have resulted in progress not being as far advanced as might have been expected; the school is moving forward into a new SSE phase.

Currently, SSE plans with a focus on student engagement are being developed. Extensive research and data analysis have been undertaken as part of the planning process. The next steps of the process should focus on developing whole-school improvement targets and strategies for improvement that have an identifiable impact on learner experiences and learner outcomes. Whole-school involvement in this process, with inputs from all stakeholders, should be planned for, in line with SSE guidelines.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

Capacity for improvement is very good. Evidence to support this statement includes the very positive questionnaire responses that indicate teachers' satisfaction with the management structures in the school. In addition, teachers' enthusiasm for their school and the positive views expressed during meetings about the newly formed middle management structures demonstrate a desire for continuous improvement. The Strategic School Development plan (2015 – 2025) also reflects the board's and senior management's focus on improvement. It would be worthwhile ensuring that all initiatives for improvement are included in the plan and that there are regular reviews to provide for professional dialogue and discussion with all stakeholders.

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 Rice College welcomes the Whole School Evaluation - Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL) Report. We take great reassurance and encouragement from the report and are heartened from the affirmation contained therein. We look forward to the challenge of implementing the recommendations of the report.

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

All the recommendations have been observed and work has already commenced in implementing the recommendations by the board of management, the Principal and Deputy Principal, and the Assistant Principals and staff.

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;