

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Our Lady Of Mercy Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Ozanam St. Waterford
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	64971W

Date of Evaluation: 07-02-2018



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 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.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	5, 6, 7 February 2018
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with board of management• Meetings with principal and deputy principal• Meetings with key staff• Review of relevant documents• Student focus-group interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with parents• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers

School context

Our Lady of Mercy Secondary School, Waterford is a voluntary school for girls under the trusteeship of CEIST. The diverse cohort of students who attend the school come from inner city, urban and rural backgrounds. The school has a current enrolment of 496 students. In addition to the Junior Cycle, the school offers the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- School management has effectively brought the school through significant change in recent years; the overall quality of leadership and management is good.
- There is a very high level of whole-school commitment to the educational, social and personal wellbeing of students.
- Curriculum provision is very good overall, but aspects of TY provision are not satisfactory.
- The involvement of parents in their daughters' education and the promotion of the student voice inside and outside the classroom are areas for development.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good; learning of very good quality was characterised by high levels of enjoyment and motivation, but there were instances where students had limited opportunities to be actively engaged in their own learning.
- The level of engagement in the school self-evaluation (SSE) process is good, the school has made good progress with the implementation of recommendations from previous reports and the school's capacity for improvement overall is very good.

Recommendations

- School management should put measures in place to ensure inclusive access to the TY programme in order to meet the needs of the full cohort of students.
- School management and other leaders in the school should work towards greater involvement of parents in their children's education and the re-establishment of the parents' association.
- School management and teachers should put measures in place to promote and facilitate the student voice both inside and outside the classroom.
- Teachers should plan for and implement active methodologies that support student ownership of and responsibility for learning.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

The overall quality of leadership and management is good. The board of management and senior management promote a culture of improvement and collaboration as a means of improving teaching and learning. Purposeful teacher continuing professional development (CPD) is supported and teachers are encouraged to collaborate and to share their expertise.

Curriculum provision is very good overall. Senior management provides a generally broad and balanced curriculum, endeavours to meet student needs, and provides a variety of learning opportunities. The principal and other school leaders have taken measures to help ensure successful implementation of curricular changes at junior cycle. Teachers and senior management are availing of training in new approaches to teaching, learning and assessment provided by the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) support service. The reintroduction of LCA is commendable. The Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) is a curricular option in the school plan but is not currently active. The school should consider if its reintroduction would benefit students. Some concerns were raised in questionnaire responses regarding advice provided when choosing subjects. The school could survey students in an effort to determine the best way to support subject choice at junior and senior cycle.

A good quality TY programme is in place which meets the needs of those students selected for participation. Students benefit from work experience, the social awareness programme and the various modules offered on Thursday afternoons. However, there should be more inclusive access to the TY programme in order to meet the needs of all students. This could be achieved by expanding student intake to two class groups. This would create further opportunities to expand the range of subjects, modules and activities available to students within the programme.

Senior management efficiently manages curriculum-related planning. Some TY subject plans are not fully developed and should be redesigned as Transition Units as outlined on the NCCA website. It is suggested that a TY core team be convened to support the co-ordinator and senior management on TY curricular and other matters.

The board is aware of students' state examination results. Student attainment in state examinations is good overall. It is suggested that added focus be placed on tracking and monitoring of student progress at whole-school level.

The quality of care for students is very good. Student support structures are very well planned, organised and implemented. The school care team meets weekly. Effective policies, including the whole-school inclusion policy, support students' educational, social and personal wellbeing. Guidance provision is well planned and delivered at junior and senior cycle to include vocational and educational guidance, personal counselling, careers advice and aptitude testing. Students are met in class groups and individually as necessary. The school is prioritising completion of the whole-school guidance plan. Teachers demonstrate very high levels of commitment to the care and wellbeing of students. Many supports are provided including book rental, breakfast club and evening study. The whole school celebrates thematic weeks that support inclusivity and student diversity. This is very good practice.

Students' holistic educational development is advanced through the range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. For example, many students have been successfully involved in sports teams including basketball, camogie and equestrian activities. In addition, the school has actively and successfully participated in SciFest. Student achievements and successes are celebrated in many

ways including at assemblies, on school noticeboards and at the annual prize-giving ceremony and graduation events.

The learning support service is well co-ordinated with an effective team working with the care team, year heads, class tutors, subject teachers, parents and school management to support students with identified learning needs. The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) Continuum of Support is well utilised in the school, and each special needs student has a flexible support plan. Teachers and parents are kept well informed regarding students' special needs and staff receive some expert training in this area. Students are supported in a variety of ways including differentiation in mainstream classes, team teaching, small class groups and individual support. The work of the special needs assistants contributes in a positive way to the learning experiences of students. The large number of teachers involved in special needs provision should be reviewed in order to create a more focused team approach.

Managing the organisation

The principal and the board have a strong awareness of statutory obligations. The board is kept very well informed on school business by the principal and is very supportive of decisions taken in the best interests of students. Policies are regularly updated and reviewed and all mandatory policies are in place. Policies currently in development include the statement of strategy for attendance and the acceptable use policy. A climate of security, wellbeing and inclusivity is promoted through the consultative development and fair implementation of school policies. The staff handbook, which contains very useful information including all major policies, is a valuable resource for teachers. Student attendance is recorded and monitored electronically.

School management has effectively brought the school through significant and positive change in recent years. Staff has been supportive of these measures as evidenced in meetings with groups of teaching staff during the evaluation. The principal and the board constantly monitor the use of budgets and other resources to ensure they are closely aligned with identified learning priorities.

The principal and deputy principal work effectively together as a team, oversee the smooth day-to-day running of the school, and appropriately delegate responsibilities to members of staff. They actively support school improvement by promoting a learning culture, implementing effective systems for communicating information and fostering a positive school climate. The principal and deputy principal manage human resources well overall. It is suggested that, within the culture of collaborative review, the principal could meet teachers annually to discuss their work.

Teachers carry out post duties effectively. Year heads are generally at assistant principal (AP) level and APs and special duties teachers also carry out a range of other important duties. It is now timely that a whole-staff review of the duties of posts of responsibility takes place in line with Circular 0003/2018. Existing school leadership and management structures should be progressed and consolidated in line with *Looking at Our School 2016*.

The principal provides clear educational leadership and empowers staff to take on leadership roles that maximise students' learning opportunities. The deputy principal plays an active role as part of the senior management team, supports the principal, liaises with teachers, year heads and parents and has a positive and significant on-the-ground presence. The deputy principal is also year head of sixth year and is playing a leading role in the current review of the code of behaviour.

The board of management maintains the school buildings and grounds to a good standard overall. Classrooms and specialist rooms are very well maintained by teachers and provide very good physical learning environments. The school has applied to the Department for refurbishment of the science laboratories.

Leading school development

The trustees, board and principal are proactive in maintaining a guiding vision for the school, based on holistic development and excellence in teaching and learning. It is suggested that the guiding vision be further developed to include goals and expectations and that it be communicated to all school partners. School leaders are aware of educational developments and use the SSE process with increasing effectiveness as a means of managing change.

The board has overseen the development of the school plan. There is a strong focus on policy development and review, financial procedures and practices, ICT, Wellbeing, curriculum planning, differentiation, and development of teaching, learning and assessment through SSE. School management should further develop strategic planning in collaboration and consultation with the whole school community. The plan should include agreed targets and timeframes for school development and identify responsibilities for implementation and review.

The board and principal value and support good relationships and communication with parents. Parents regularly attend school information events and there is ongoing communication with school management. School management and other leaders in the school should work towards greater involvement of parents in their children's education and organise for the re-establishment of the parents' association so that parents can more fully contribute to their vital partnership and advisory role.

The principal and other school leaders build good relationships and have developed strong partnerships with the wider community. Activities include student involvement in paired reading, paired science activities with the local primary school, the green schools project, work experience and community service.

Developing leadership capacity

School leaders including the board and the senior management team have availed of training from the trustees and recognise the importance of their own professional development. The trustees also monitor and review board minutes.

There is an increasing culture of self-reflection among staff and a willingness to work on areas of practice that require improvement. Members of the Droichead team provide valuable support and mentoring for new teachers. The principal encourages and facilitates the formation of teams to address school priorities and recognises the importance of building leadership capacity among staff and students. Teams of teachers are currently actively involved in many areas including development and review of wellbeing, assessment, attendance, code of behaviour and ICT. The recent focus on wellbeing practices that support students has been on coping skills, ICT skills and cyber bullying.

Year heads effectively oversee the welfare of their year groups and reported that they are very well supported in this regard by senior management. For example, there are weekly year head and senior management team meetings. Class tutors, who undertake their role in a voluntary capacity, provide valuable pastoral support for students in collaboration with year heads.

Opportunities are provided for students to assume leadership roles in many ways including through the student council, the prefect system, Meitheal, peer mentoring, paired reading in the local primary school and involvement in competitions and team sports. Students and school leaders acknowledge the need to place increased emphasis on student voice both inside and outside the classroom. Responses from student questionnaires indicate that students could have a greater say in how things are done in the school. School management should provide greater opportunities for students to engage in decision making. Teachers should further consult students on their own learning and organise for greater ownership and responsibility of learning through active engagement.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Nineteen lessons including four double lessons were observed. These covered a range of core, optional, practical and non-examination subjects in junior and senior cycle. Third-year and sixth-year lessons were not observed as these year groups were doing mock examinations at the time of the evaluation. The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good.

Learner outcomes and experiences

Overall the quality of learning in the lessons observed was good. Learning of very good quality was characterised by students' high levels of enjoyment and motivation, and their positive and reflective approach to their work. In the minority of instances where learner experiences were less than good, students had limited opportunities to be productive and to lead their own learning through discovery and inquiry.

Students engaged very diligently in classroom tasks and activities, and were punctual and prepared for lessons. Their behaviour throughout was exemplary, and they displayed a high level of co-operation with their teachers and with each other. These significant strengths reflect very well on both students and teachers. Examples of this type of environment were noted in a number of lessons, and in diverse learning settings. Students' enjoyment and active engagement were very evident in these lessons. Students were able to connect with lesson topics and readily took the opportunities offered to apply and develop their knowledge and skills. They showed an ability and willingness to engage in active inquiry, express their own ideas, and offer a range of responses and solutions, whether working individually or in pairs and small groups. The highly effective learning environments created in such lessons should be developed and extended.

Even where learning was good, students sometimes showed a lack of confidence in responding and participating in class discussion. This finding merits attention, especially in the light of the new junior cycle statements of learning, which place an emphasis on the development of oral communication skills across the curriculum, and on oral language competence in English, Irish and modern foreign languages. It is therefore recommended that learner experiences incorporate opportunities to develop these skills and competences wherever possible. In a more general sense, teachers and students could collaboratively explore ways of ensuring that student voice has a strong presence in the classroom, perhaps using the school's self-evaluation process.

A good level of learning and of progress was evident in most of the copybooks and students' folders reviewed. Work was generally well presented and well maintained, including the work being produced in practical subjects. There were some excellent displays of students' work in classrooms and corridors. This was an indication of students' pride in and ownership of their work. This attitude should be fostered as it builds students' confidence in their own abilities as learners.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

Overall the quality of teaching in the lessons observed was good. The interactions observed between teachers and students were consistently positive.

In most lessons teacher preparation was good and at times very good. The materials and resources selected and prepared were appropriate to the learning intention, and the sequence of learning activities was well planned. In a few lessons, material selected had limited interest for students, and more dynamic resources, including online material, would have better served the learning intention.

Learning intentions were stated at the outset in many lessons. Where these were not explicitly stated, a sense of purpose and direction was usually established by other means, such as clear instructions about practical tasks. The most effective practice was noted where the learning intentions were stated not in terms of lesson content, but of learning to be attained by lesson end.

No single teaching approach dominated, so students experienced a variety of methodologies, which were generally well selected to suit the learning purpose and the students. Strengths noted included teachers' clear exposition of topics, demonstration of practical skills, effective management and monitoring of classroom tasks, and obvious enthusiasm and advocacy for their subjects. The impact of the last of these should not be underestimated, as there is great value for students in seeing teachers model engagement and enjoyment in learning.

Because of recommendations made in previous inspections, lesson observations in this evaluation took particular note of the use of active learning approaches enabling students to lead their own learning. Some very good practice in this regard was observed. For example, students were given opportunities to investigate different ways of solving problems, and teachers used questions to steer students towards answers, rather than giving the answers themselves. In some lessons, materials and activities provided students with enough challenge to extend their learning and enough support to enable them to work independently of the teacher.

In a minority of lessons, activities lacked an appropriate level of challenge and scope for meaningful student engagement. Further development of active and inquiry-based learning is therefore recommended, placing greater emphasis on knowledge as something grown rather than given. To build on and extend the good practices encountered during the evaluation, teachers should work collaboratively to identify and develop teaching and learning approaches that will promote greater student engagement and independence in learning.

With regard to the impact of teachers' collective practice on students' learning, there was some evidence of a whole-school focus on assessment for learning in classroom practice, and in students' copybooks and folders. There is scope to further develop and embed assessment practices that assist students to build on their capabilities and address areas for improvement.

Many subject department plans provided evidence of very detailed and dedicated work. Among the positive features noted were collaborative plans of work for each year, and agreed assessment practices. In the best plans, reflective practice was integrated into planning, and records of planning meetings and the plans created showed high awareness of curriculum change and what it entails.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Some recommendations made in previous inspection reports have been implemented effectively; there has been limited progress with other recommendations.

Leadership and Management

There has been substantial progress in some policy development, review and enactment while other policies still require development. The staff handbook is a very good support for teachers. Physical Education provision has improved; further progress regarding timetabling and provision, particularly at senior cycle is necessary. The development of ICT has progressed; further planning for its full integration into teaching and learning is necessary. Teacher-based classrooms are working well. Subject department planning has been reviewed and updated for many areas.

Teaching and Learning

There has been some discussion and planning for active student methodologies, increased use of assessment for learning, co-operative and collaborative learning and the promotion of students' literacy skills. While improvements have been observed, other areas still require development, including increased student activity leading to improved ownership and responsibility for learning and some improved assessment practices that support student learning.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

School management and teachers are strongly committed to the SSE process. The process has a high level of visibility as reflected in school planning documentation, and engagement is good. SSE actions have led to improved reflective practice by teachers and school management leading to improved outcomes for student learning. Literacy and numeracy actions at whole-school level have been ongoing. Recent SSE focus has been on target setting, team teaching, differentiation and constructive feedback for students. It is suggested that the best way to promote the whole-school SSE process is to identify a manageable number of focused actions and to set measurable targets for each action.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school's capacity for improvement is very good. A strong culture of review, self-evaluation and improvement has been established. Teachers work collaboratively on teams and are committed to remaining upskilled and are open to building collective expertise that supports student learning.

Change has been managed very well by school management and teachers. There is currently an acute awareness of the school's changing needs and a strong commitment by all to respond to these.

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 in the school's reception area.
3. The school has a Child Safeguarding Statement 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.

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 welcomes the extremely positive and affirming WSE-MLL report. We note the many excellent comments on the quality of management, teaching and learning in our school. We share in the assessment that change has been managed very well by school management and teachers and that the capacity for improvement is very good.

The board is particularly pleased that the report acknowledges and affirms the many effective practices in the school and among them are:

- The very high level of whole-school commitment to the educational, social and personal wellbeing of students
- The effective management of significant change in recent years
- The very good curriculum provision
- The commendable re-introduction of LCA
- The very good quality of care for students
- The well co-ordinated and effective learning support team
- The very good to good quality of teaching and learning taking place in the school
- The exemplary behaviour of our students and
- The clear educational leadership and empowerment of staff to take on leadership roles that maximize students' learning opportunities

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 of management notes the suggestions for improvement in the school and will address the recommendations of the report, given the constraints of the resources of the school.

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;