

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

School name	Newtown School
School address	Newtown Road Waterford City Co. Waterford
Roll number	65010R

Date of Evaluation: 07-10-2016



WHAT IS A WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING?

Whole-School Evaluations – Management, Leadership and Learning report on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. They affirm good practice and make 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

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	07-10-2016
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

Newton School is a co-educational, voluntary secondary school with a current student cohort of 372 students, 115 of whom are boarders. It is under the ownership of Quakers (the Religious Society of Friends) in Munster. It offers the Junior Certificate, Transition Year, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Newtown School has recently been through a period of significant change. It has moved from being a small fee-charging school to membership of the free education scheme with plans for a significantly increased student cohort and a resulting diversity of student needs and abilities.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The professional expertise and commitment of the board of management to Newtown School augur well for school governance in the years ahead.
- Strategic planning to date has focused on managing the school's finances, addressing issues pertaining to the boarding school and managing the changes arising from moving from a fee-charging school to the free education sector; planning for teaching and learning and progressing a school improvement agenda are not adequately being addressed by the board.
- The principal and deputy principal manage the day-to-day running of the school effectively; however, action is required to further develop their own leadership roles and to facilitate greater distributed leadership within the staff.
- A positive learning environment is promoted through the school's code of behaviour and the good range of educational and pastoral supports provided.
- The quality of the teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in the majority of lessons observed, was satisfactory in some and required considerable improvement in a small minority of lessons; there is scope for improvement across all lessons in the use of differentiation, the correction of homework and in the provision of formative feedback.
- The school has not as yet instigated the school self-evaluation (SSE) process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The board of management should ensure that attention to teaching and learning and strategic planning are progressed in parallel with the board's other priorities.

- Senior management should further develop its own leadership role and facilitate more opportunities for distributed leadership, with particular emphasis on creating a more meaningful middle leadership role for assistant principals (APs).
- All issues of compliance should be addressed forthwith; policy development and ratification, time in school provision and the school self-evaluation (SSE) process.
- All teachers should ensure that work in lessons is suitably differentiated and that homework is appropriately corrected; and the practice of written formative feedback should be implemented where it is not currently happening.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1. School ownership and management:

Newtown School's management structure has recently moved from governance by a school committee to the establishment of a board of management. The composition of the incoming board, with its wide range of professional expertise and commitment to Newtown School augurs well for school governance in the years ahead. Since its establishment in 2015, both the interim and the current boards have focused primarily on issues of finance and infrastructure. Subcommittees have been formed and progress reports on these issues have formed the main items for discussion at board meetings. These are good practices.

The board identified a number of priorities for development. They include the successful resolution of the school's financial challenges and the marketing of the school with particular emphasis on increasing the number of boarders. The board also cited a proposal to create an advisory board of studies comprising teachers and a member of the board; this has not happened as yet. The minutes of recent board meetings also indicate that there has been no active discussion of teaching and learning nor of educational implications of an increased and more diverse student cohort. In order to accord teaching and learning and a school improvement agenda their rightful place in school governance, the development of this advisory board should be progressed in parallel with the board's other priorities. Its remit should be to lead and oversee teaching and learning for the purpose of continuing to provide a quality educational experience in accordance with Departmental regulations, the school's Quaker ethos and the responsibilities of boards of management.

Members of the board articulated their vision for the future of Newtown school in terms of continuing to provide a truly holistic educational experience and enabling lifelong friendships in accordance with the Quaker ethos. This ethos espouses the discovery of true self, nurturing confidence, independence and respect, in addition to ensuring appropriate attainment in the certificate examinations. The board and senior management should use the SSE process to instigate the initiatives necessary to bring this vision to full fruition. This reflective process which involves the garnering of relevant data from teachers, students and parents, the identification of the school's strengths and areas for development and the subsequent development of a school improvement plan is a requirement by the Department of Education and Skills. Its purpose is to foster teaching and learning as a shared partnership, according students greater ownership of and responsibility for their own learning and, in this way, prepare them for the challenges of life-long learning in all domains.

Current challenges include the need to review the school's development planning process and how it is managed. There are presently a number of school policies in need of development, ratification or review. The board should initiate or expedite as a matter of urgency these policies as a collaborative endeavour between staff, parents and, where appropriate, students.

The parents' association, known as the Newtown Association is strongly supportive of the school. However, as a parent body they were unaware of national strategies to promote literacy and numeracy in schools and did not recall consultation with parents regarding the development of recent whole-school policies. These deficits should be addressed.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is generally compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*. The school however, does not currently have a policy in place for the provision of relationships and sexuality education (RSE) and there is currently no provision for the delivery of RSE in senior cycle. This needs to be addressed forthwith.

1.2. Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The principal and deputy principal are strongly committed to the well-being of Newtown School and are effective in carrying out the day-to-day running of the school. However, there is considerable scope for development in furthering their own leadership capacity as a senior management team. The promotion of leadership capacity within the staff to support and progress the school's change management agenda is also recommended.

The middle management team comprises two Assistant Principals (APs) who act as junior-cycle and senior-cycle co-ordinators. A special duties post-holder co-ordinates the organisation of parent-teacher meetings and the issuing of school reports. The school provides one privately paid post for the co-ordination of the Transition Year programme.

The evidence accrued during the course of the evaluation indicates that the work of the co-ordinators is assiduously carried out and contributes to the effective management of students' pastoral, social and academic progress. However, there was limited evidence that APs function as a middle management team, consulting with and being consulted by senior management and the general body of staff on matters relating to the overall leadership and management of the school. The absence of working groups from within the general body of staff to support forward planning indicates limited opportunities for distributed leadership. Furthermore, the board's praiseworthy proposal to establish the advisory board of studies has not been explicitly shared with the staff. It is recommended that structures and practices be established in the school that would facilitate a more meaningful middle leadership role for APs and afford all members of staff greater opportunity to take on leadership roles.

As leaders of school development, senior management articulated its desire to increase discussion and dialogue and improve overall communication within the staff. To this end, the board and senior management should consider facilitating a whole-staff reflection process for the purpose of developing a shared vision for the future of the day school that can retain the rich Quaker ethos within its changed context; a whole-staff reflection day could be helpful in this regard. Such an initiative could also incorporate the establishment of working groups for the purpose of providing leadership and management opportunities for staff in addition to bringing the vision to fruition and advancing the SSE process.

Continuing professional development (CPD) initiatives in recent years have been primarily for the purpose of managing discrete aspects of student supports. There have been limited interventions from senior management to lead general teaching and learning. Given the increasing number of students with diverse needs and abilities, it is now timely that whole-school CPD be provided, prioritising student learning, through a focus on assessment for and of learning, differentiation and learner autonomy. Teachers reported engaging in individual CPD events such as the annual subject association conferences and this is good practice.

There was no evidence that teachers have engaged with the CPD provided to date for the new Junior Cycle specifications. This non-participation was due to industrial action taken at national level by the members of the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI).

The minutes of staff meetings indicate that they are primarily of an organisational and informational nature. In order to improve discussion and dialogue, as desired by senior management, it is recommended that all future staff meetings incorporate short presentations arising from individual CPD events or discussion on aspects of teaching and learning together with progress reports from working groups.

The school currently offers a very broad and balanced curriculum. However, there is low uptake of certain subjects at senior cycle. A curriculum review is recommended to address how these subjects may be sustained in a more resource-effective manner. Furthermore, timetable provision for senior-cycle students taking fewer than eight subjects falls short of the minimum twenty-eight hours instruction time required by Circular M29/95, Time-in-School. This should be addressed forthwith by school management.

A positive learning environment is facilitated by the school's code of behaviour, entitled *Living and Working in the School Community*. Rules are kept to a minimum and the focus on fostering qualities of adaptability, confidence, the courage to make changes and the ability to get on with other people is praiseworthy. Students were observed to be very well behaved during the course of the evaluation and this was corroborated by the results of the teacher questionnaire. However, while teachers were unanimous in their responses that all students are treated fairly and respectfully in the school, a significant minority of students either disagreed with that statement or did not know. Consideration should be given to discussing these findings with students in order to ascertain how best to ensure overall consistency and transparency in approach. However, students overall reported that there is a good atmosphere in the school and almost all parents responded that they were happy with the school.

The school's ethos of promoting the holistic development of all students underpins the range of pastoral supports in place. There is good provision for the delivery of educational and vocational guidance to all class groups through timetabled lessons at senior cycle and Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) at junior cycle. Personal counselling is also available to all students as appropriate.

A number of good practices are in place to support students with additional education needs. A register has been compiled of all identified students, tabulating their areas of difficulty, how they may be helped in mainstream settings, whether or not they have an exemption from Irish, the additional supports provided through learning support or resource teaching and the contact teacher. The use of team teaching to support students within the mainstream setting is also praiseworthy. To maximise the benefits of these good practices, the deployment of resources should take into account how to best provide for students, particularly in situations where they have diverse needs, but are grouped for additional support when they are exempt from Irish. In situations where students are allocated

resource hours, but do not wish to avail of them through the withdrawal or small group situation, team teaching should be considered to provide them with the supports they may need but in a more discreet manner.

Opportunities for student leadership are promoted through the work of the student council and the sixth-year prefect system. The carefully planned and well executed Transition Year programme with its focus on developing students' awareness of self and others and on promoting independent learning also affords students good opportunities to take on leadership roles.

1.3. Management of facilities

The school is currently in the active planning stage for a new building and significant time and effort have been devoted to this project by the board of management. The current campus which spans a number of separate buildings is well maintained and grouped in accordance with relevant disciplines, thereby facilitating intradepartmental dialogue. Many of the classrooms visited had created attractive learning environments through displays of subject-related posters and charts.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1. The quality of learning and teaching

An examination of a sample of subject plans indicated a need to review subject department planning as a collaborative process for informing teaching and learning. The documentation examined indicated a lack of cohesion and consistency in terms of curricular planning. Some subject plans identified learning outcomes and methodologies, while others focused on curriculum content. Some referred to assessment practices while others did not. All subject plans should include the learning outcomes to be achieved, the methodologies and assessment practices to be used including strategies to support literacy and numeracy and differentiation.

Twenty lessons were observed during the evaluation, comprising all year groups and covering core, optional, practical and non-examination subjects. The quality of the teaching and learning observed was good or very good in the majority of lessons and satisfactory in some. Teaching and learning required significant improvement in a small minority of lessons.

The quality of preparation for teaching was good in the majority of lessons. Very good planning was observed where teachers designed lessons that included active learning and opportunities for in-class assessment. Where improvement in lesson preparation was identified, more considered reflection on differentiating content and activities in order to cater for the diverse needs and abilities of students, including students with English as an additional language, is recommended.

Lessons were generally well structured and paced. In some instances, teachers communicated the intended learning intentions, outlining for students what they should be able to do as well as know. This approach should be extended to all lessons. Very good practice was also observed where appropriate time was given to a conclusion phase, particularly when it incorporated a review of the lesson objectives and a discussion on how the assigned homework would help improve learning.

The teaching methodologies observed ranged from teacher instruction, interspersed with questions, to the use of varied strategies including individual, pair and group activities. The dominance of teacher instruction in some instances resulted in a small number of students answering all questions, while the majority remained passive throughout the lesson. In these instances, a greater balance between

teacher delivery and active student participation is recommended; this could be achieved through greater use of independent and collaborative student tasks for the purpose of promoting reflection and subject-related dialogue.

In lessons where more active methodologies were used, students were observed to engage effectively with the work in hand and to work independently and collaboratively in a purposeful manner. Interactions among students and between students and teachers in these lessons were productive and in many instances dynamic.

While very good practice was observed in some lessons, overall there was a lack of consistency in differentiating to meet the diverse needs of the student cohort including a number of international students whose first language is not English.

Most teachers circulated productively during the lesson and provided students with constructive oral feedback on their contributions to lessons. Very good practice was also observed where teachers made personalised interventions to help individual students overcome challenges in the active learning phase of the lesson. There were a few instances, however, where teachers did not circulate or monitor the quality of students' work. This should be addressed.

There was considerable variation in relation to teachers' use of assessment to support learning. While good practice was observed in the use of questioning and the provision of verbal feedback, teacher corrections were evident in just half of the copies reviewed. Best practice occurred where teachers regularly corrected copies, gave constructive feedback, and followed through on recommendations. Greater use of assessment to support learning during lessons and the provision of formative feedback in copybooks is recommended across all subjects.

Classroom management was very good. Teachers had high expectations of students' behaviour. Classroom routines were well established and students co-operated well with their teachers. In a few instances, lateness to class impeded the lesson start. Ways of minimising this should be investigated.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Recommendations common to many of the previous inspections carried out related to issues of whole-school provision, the development of learning outcomes and corresponding methodologies as part of subject planning, the use of information and communication technology (ICT), assessment for learning and differentiation to support overall teaching and learning.

3.1 Management

Senior management has revised the class formation for Irish in first year in accordance with recommendations in the subject inspection report. However, recommendations in relation to the provision of Physical Education at senior cycle have still to be addressed.

3.2 Learning and Teaching

There was variation in the implementation of recommendations across subjects. Some recommendations such as class formation for Irish have been implemented, while others relating to subject planning the establishment of learning outcomes and the use of more active methodologies are still a work in progress in some lessons.

There was limited evidence of teachers learning from the recommendations made in subjects other than their own. Senior management should inform teachers of the recommendations arising from inspection reports, particularly in the areas of subject planning, active methodologies and assessment practices for the purpose of integrating best practice in all lessons.

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

The school has not yet engaged in the SSE process and is therefore not compliant with Departmental regulations. While some school-related data has been garnered in the recent past, it did not relate to literacy, numeracy or the promotion of teaching and learning. The school should examine the requirements of circular 0040/2016, begin the SSE process forthwith identifying the school's strengths and areas for development and agree and implement actions to improve learning. The board of management should, in turn, ensure that the process has been instigated and that a school improvement plan is developed and communicated to the school community. The information garnered from the questionnaires carried out as part of the WSE-MLL process should provide useful baseline data for this purpose.

With improved leadership and proactive engagement with the SSE process, the school should have good capacity to embrace change and to progress the school improvement agenda in line with its new status, while at the same time bringing with it the rich legacy of the Quaker tradition. The findings and recommendations contained in the WSE-MLL report should be viewed as such an opportunity, providing an informative roadmap for this journey.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board accepts this report and has already responded positively to its recommendations and suggestions as outlined in section B of this response:

However, the Board feels the report underestimates the cumulative effect of the recent dramatic changes in the school and the challenges these changes present to maintaining the schools ethos. These changes include;

- A move from a fee charging school to one in the Free Education Scheme,
- Putting in place a whole new governance structure,
- Tackling serious financial and human resource issues,
- Preparing to almost double the student numbers
- Planning for an almost complete rebuild of the school

The report does not fully address the considerable work or factors involved in promoting a “positive learning environment” and in fostering the students towards independent learning. The role of boarding with the facilitated supervised study (for boarders and day students), the broad range of extra-curricular activities and a very prominent Transition Year, all contribute positively to this environment.

The Board will adopt the advice of this report as the school continues to develop and grow whilst maintaining the Quaker ethos and holistic approach to education.

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

Response to Recommendations

- The school has engaged with the SSE process with 2 whole staff workshops on the area of assessment facilitated by the PDST. A working group has been established to investigate one area of assessment for future whole school action.
- An RSE policy and programme is in place that adds Senior Cycle to the considerable work done in other years. Training has been received by a member of staff and the programme is currently being implemented in Senior Cycle.
- An Advisory Board of Studies has been agreed with staff and is currently being set up as a sub group of the Board to oversee teaching and learning.
- Oversight of Teaching and Learning at Board level has been enhanced.
- Middle Management: As a result of the moratorium on posts the school lost 6 posts. The 3 APs undertake the roles of Cycle coordinators overseeing the pastoral and academic progress of all students which is central to the teaching and learning environment. It is

regretful to see this diminished in the comment that the AP's should have "a more meaningful management role".

The APs, SEN coordinator and Guidance counsellor meet weekly with senior management to discuss all aspects of school life from major initiatives to individual student needs. These individuals consult regularly with staff both on an individual basis and at group tutor meetings. Staff also meet termly to share information, strategies and concerns for all the individual students each year group. This enhances staff knowledge of each student to create a more understanding learning environment.

The school sees that with the implementation of the SSE process there will be more leadership opportunities for staff. The school also hopes that the national issue of funding of middle management positions will be addressed to help alleviate the deficit created over the last 8 years.

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 the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good 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 outstanding 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	Good 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	Satisfactory 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	Fair 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	Weak 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;