

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	C.B.S. Thurles
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Rossa Street Thurles Co. Tipperary
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	65450W

Date of Evaluation: 16-10-2019



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

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning reports on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. It affirms good practice and makes recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspectors evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. Quality of school leadership and management
2. Quality of teaching and learning
3. Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations
4. The school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management 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	14, 15 & 16 October 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

CBS Thurles is an all-boys post-primary school situated in Thurles town, which operates under the trusteeship of Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). Currently, there are 574 boys enrolled. As well as the Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle programmes, the school offers an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- Overall, the quality of management and leadership is good, including the work of a supportive board of management which brings a range of experience and a senior management team with very good capacity to lead developments; a number of systems to support the work of the school have been developed and future plans for systems to monitor effectiveness discussed.
- There is a broad curriculum on offer, and teachers are very committed to providing a range of extra and co-curricular opportunities for students.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good, with some exemplary practices noted and a small number of instances where practice was fair; overall assessment was satisfactory with scope for further improvement.
- Student care and the promotion of wellbeing are characterised by good relationships at school level; there is scope to improve some aspects of student support such as provision for special educational needs.
- Good progress has been made in relation to the implementation of recommendations relating to teaching and learning from previous inspection reports; some recommendations pertaining to leadership and management still require further attention.
- The overall quality of school self-evaluation (SSE) to support school improvement is good; there is very good capacity in the school for delivering school improvements

Recommendations

- The board and senior management should develop the school improvement plan into a cohesive document, including prioritised targets with strategies and initiatives aligned to these as well as systems to assess the levels of progress and effectiveness.

- A unified teaching and learning plan should be developed to incorporate all the initiatives for improvement, and the six-steps of the SSE process should be used as the means of monitoring effectiveness and modifying accordingly.
- A whole-school assessment policy should be developed to broaden the range of assessment strategies, to support classroom-based assessments, and to guide a whole-school approach to feedback.
- The provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) should be supported through regular and targeted continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers, and individualised student targets and support strategies should be reviewed regularly for effectiveness.

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 management team is leading the whole-school endeavour to improve teaching and learning using a large number of initiatives. This endeavour will benefit from alignment to the six-step process of SSE in terms of monitoring effectiveness and in taking action based on results.

The school offers a broad curriculum and has recently introduced Home Economics, which is proving a popular option with students and parents. Short courses are offered as part of the new junior cycle, and TY and LCVP are options available to students in senior cycle. A subject sampling programme, which runs in the first term, allows first-year students to experience subjects before deciding on options. The subject-availability bands are based on student choices and, hence, change from year to year. It is recommended that the school look at the benefits of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme and consider its suitability for some students.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) are provided in line with guidelines, although there was uncertainty shown by some students and parents in meetings and in questionnaire responses around RSE provision. It is recommended that the school identify the reasons for this uncertainty and address any outstanding issues for parents and students.

Students with SEN are supported in a number of ways, including small group withdrawal and team teaching. In the main, support plans set out a range of needs and support strategies, and parents and students are consulted in the development of support plans. It was observed that the support plans outlining provision for junior-cycle students were more detailed and specific than those for senior-cycle students. The plans for senior-cycle students should have appropriate specificity in respect of how the identified needs of the senior cycle students will be supported. The special education department keeps mainstream teachers up-to-date through whole-staff inputs, individual discussions, and maintaining hardcopies of relevant files. Online systems are being developed to share relevant information with all teachers more readily.

Recent changes in personnel had resulted in significant loss of expertise in the special education department. One teacher who had recently upskilled in the area of SEN moved to another school and the longstanding SEN expert was on maternity leave. At the time of the inspection, the department was being co-ordinated jointly by two experienced teachers without SEN qualifications.

The broad range of opportunities to upskill in terms of SEN teaching should be explored and every effort made to build capacity among staff. Whole-school CPD on team teaching is recommended as well as more regular training on how best to support a range of additional needs in the classroom.

The school prides itself on the quality of pastoral care which permeates all aspects of its work. Class tutors, year heads, guidance counsellors, a dedicated care team and all staff members work closely together to ensure students have the necessary supports for a happy school life. It is commendable that the school has supported two teachers to qualify recently as guidance counsellors thereby building capacity in the department.

Managing the organisation

The overall quality of managing the organisation is good. The board of management is very supportive of all school developments and members demonstrate high levels of pride in their involvement with the school. The senior management team has been instrumental in developing and putting effective systems in place to support the work of the school in the two years of their tenure.

The board members bring a range of expertise and interests to the school. There is scope for the board to further support the work of the school: by strengthening its oversight role in purposeful and informed policy development; and by having additional systems in place, such as teacher inputs at board meetings to keep informed of initiatives and investments made, to complement the information provided in the principal's and post holders' reports.

The roles and responsibilities assigned to post holders have undergone changes, as a result of the recent review, with many undertaking new duties. Duties are being undertaken in a committed and capable manner. In addition, there are a number of teachers who support the work of the school commendably by volunteering for a range of duties.

There was an orderly and positive atmosphere throughout the school during the evaluation and all observed interactions were positive and respectful. Learning environments were maintained to a high standard and were clean and well decorated. Student questionnaire responses indicate that most students were proud to be in the school. Almost all teachers agreed that facilities in the school are good, and the majority of parents feel the school is well run.

The school regularly provides placements for student teachers who work closely with the subject teachers and departments. A link teacher is responsible for supporting the student teachers and liaising with colleges. 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, students and the teacher education institution.

Leading school development

The leadership of school development is very good. School management has a clear vision in terms of how it intends to stabilise enrolment and to offer the best-quality education possible.

Good communication systems are in place which include a number of social media platforms, the newly established school app, regular newsletters and texts as well as regular features in the local newspaper. Management is pro-active in endeavours to create and maintain links with local industries and businesses. In line with good communication practice, the board publishes agreed minutes of board meetings on the school website; there is a need to ensure the details on the website are kept up to date. There is still scope to strengthen the lines of communication between the board and teachers, and between the parents' association and the wider parent body.

In questionnaire responses, almost all teachers agreed that their views are considered in decision-making processes. High levels of collegiality and collaboration were reported and the number of changes and initiatives being managed and led by individuals and working groups are indicative of good working relationships within the school.

Developing leadership capacity

The development of leadership capacity is very good. The principal and deputy principal have defined roles and work very well together. The pro-active support of the board and devolved responsibility among post-holders is working to safeguard the sustainability of the management systems in the school.

The commitment of teachers to avail of opportunities for CPD is commendable. The willingness of teachers to lead working groups and the whole-staff engagement with in-house CPD is a testament to the good working relationships within the school.

Students also have a number of opportunities to develop leadership skills. Some TY students are involved in a mentoring programme for first years which was reported by students and parents to be beneficial. The broad extra-curricular programme provides many opportunities for students to represent the school regionally and nationally. There is a democratically elected students' council which is credited with a number of improvements such as changes to the uniform and the canteen menu and for being responsible for a number of features such as outside benches and a water font. There are plans to develop the role of the student council further. This may help to address findings from the student focus group which suggest that a higher profile is needed for the student council. Development plans should include strategies to ensure the wider student body has a greater say in how things are done in the school.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good, this included some exemplary practices and a small number of instances where practice was fair.

Learner outcomes and experiences

Enjoyment and motivation to learn were highest in lessons where expectations were suitably pitched, for both ability and knowledge, and where students had opportunities to be actively engaged with the lesson content. In the majority of lessons, students demonstrated good knowledge and understanding of the subject and were competent and confident in their responses. Where lessons were well differentiated, all students had opportunities to experience elements of both challenge and success. There were opportunities for better levels of differentiation and more active engagement in some lessons.

A number of assessment strategies were seen during the inspection, with varying levels of effectiveness. The benefits of developing peer and self-assessment skills among students were evident in many lessons. Students demonstrated good capacity to self and peer assess and these skills should be utilised across all subject areas. In one exemplary lesson, students were co-creators of the success criteria for the task at hand.

A range of questioning strategies was used to include, differentiate, prompt thought and check for understanding. Best practice was where a combination of lower and higher-order questions was used and sufficient time was given to allow students to think and respond. There was scope in some lessons to further develop the use of discussion among students to deepen learning. Regular verbal

affirmation and guidance was a feature of most lessons. Some examples of good-quality formative written feedback on students' work was seen but the practice should be extended to support learning in all lessons.

Learning environments, both inside and outside the classrooms, were very well decorated with student work and posters. Seating arrangements varied in classrooms and teachers moved students to facilitate lesson activities, where needed. In the good and very good lessons, the learning of content was combined with a focus on skills' development. There was scope to improve the balance between teacher voice and student input in a small number of lessons.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

Teachers demonstrated high levels of expertise in and enthusiasm for their subject areas. In the majority of lessons, it was clear that time went into lesson planning and learning intentions were used to frame the lesson. These were most effective when there was a clear student-centred learning focus as opposed to a target for content completion.

Overall, a broad range of teaching methodologies was used; there was scope for better variety in a small number of lessons observed. Exemplary examples of students working purposefully together were observed in a few lessons. Collaborative tasks ensured students had purposeful engagement with lesson content and ensured elements of success and challenge for all. This should become more commonplace. Team teaching can be an effective student support when collaborative work is happening in classrooms. In many instances where two teachers were timetabled for the same lesson, small group withdrawal was used. There is scope to improve and extend the use of team teaching to support students' learning.

Subject departments meet regularly and minutes of meetings are maintained. As well as formal subject department meetings, a lot of informal collaboration and discussion happens. At the time of the inspection, a new online platform was being populated with relevant information. Subject plans and schemes of work were being developed on the new system which provided a framework to plan around learning intentions and include specifics on methodologies, resources, online links and assessment strategies. Subject departments were at different stages of development but very good progress was being made in some subject areas.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Good progress has been made in implementing recommendations relating to teaching and learning from previous inspection reports; some recommendations pertaining to leadership and management still require further attention.

Leadership and Management

A number of recommendations relating to management and leadership are yet to be implemented. At the time of the inspection, the Inclusion Policy was ready for ratification, addressing one recommendation from the previous whole-school evaluation (WSE). Assessment has been an area for improvement identified in a number of reports and includes the incorporation of classroom-based assessments (CBAs) as set out in circular 55/2019. The assessment policy should be updated to help identify, consolidate and extend good practices and the use of available resources, and to incorporate CBAs effectively in place of some in-house examinations.

Teaching and Learning

Overall, there has been good-quality implementation of recommendations related to teaching and learning. Learning intentions are used widely to plan lessons and a range of methodologies was observed. There remains scope to develop the use of learning intentions; in some instances, the focus is predominantly on what would be done in class as opposed to what will be learned. A variety of assessment strategies was seen including some very good examples of peer and self-assessment among students. In the majority of lessons, good differentiation ensured all students progressed with their learning. There is a need to ensure that the good practices observed are extended to all lessons.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The overall quality of using the SSE process to support school improvement is good. Data has been gathered from all stakeholders and the school is availing pro-actively of opportunities to upskill teachers in wellbeing to support the current SSE target. The deputy principal has played a lead role in developing SSE and will continue to work closely with the newly appointed assistant principal (AP) 1 and AP2 who have been allocated specific duties relating to SSE.

Very good progress has been made to embed the SSE targets of learning intentions and success criteria. There is whole-school awareness of the relevant terminology and evidence in the majority of lessons that they are being used by teachers. There remains scope to ensure the effective uses of learning intentions and success criteria observed in some lessons become whole-school practices by using all six steps of the SSE process.

Many teachers are involved in Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century (TL21), a professional development programme, and the SSE process is being used to incorporate innovative and creative teaching and learning strategies in all areas.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

There is very good capacity in the school for delivering school improvements. Evidence of this can be seen in the current whole-school endeavours to improve teaching and learning and the very good working relationships among staff and with students, parents and the wider school community.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

We welcome the report and the report will assist the school in its commitment to ongoing development and school improvement. The full engagement by our staff, students and broader school community with the Inspectorate is indicative of our commitment to excellence and we acknowledge that the report frequently references our very good work.

The report highlights the high quality of teaching and learning as well as student care in CBS Thurles which we are particularly pleased about. It has been recognised that the management team is progressive in leading whole school endeavours to improve teaching and learning whilst ensuring a broad curriculum is made available. The report acknowledges the high levels of collegiality and collaboration and notes the orderly and positive atmosphere in the school. We look forward to building on our strengths and embracing the recommendations made in 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.

We accept the findings and recommendations of the report. The school community has identified many of the areas referenced in the report and has already commenced work to advance such areas. We recognise the need to plan more effectively and to exploit planning through the 6 step SSE process. A whole-school teaching and learning plan, which was drafted in September, is currently being prepared for ratification by the Board of Management. This plan will in turn address the interdependent nature of assessment as identified by the report.

Attention has already been given to continuous professional development and learning for all teachers. We hope our application to access postgraduate professional learning in the area of inclusive learning will add to our capacity building in this area as will promotion of our team teaching provision. Individualised student targets and support strategies now form the basis of our weekly SEN meetings.

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;