

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

| | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Ainm na scoile / School name | Ursuline Secondary School |
| Seoladh na scoile / School address | Thurles County Tipperary |
| Uimhir rolla / Roll number | 65470F |

Date of Evaluation: 14-02-2019



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 did not meet the requirements in relation to 1 and 5 above and therefore was not fully compliant with the checks undertaken. However, the school has subsequently furnished evidence of compliance with these requirements.

The inspection visit did not include inspection of the school's boarding facilities, their management or their compliance with the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

| | |
|--|--|
| Dates of inspection | 4, 5 & 6 February 2019 |
| Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with board of management • Meetings with principal and deputy principals • 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

Ursuline Secondary School is an all-girls voluntary secondary school which was founded in 1787 by the Ursuline Sisters. The trusteeship of the school was transferred to Le Chéile in 2012 and the Ursuline ethos of care, respect, and holistic development of students still underpins school life. The school is inclusive and caters for students with a range of academic abilities and learning needs. The enrolment stood at 790 girls, including boarders, at the time of the evaluation. The enrolment has been consistent for the last ten years with some growth in more recent years.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of leadership and management is very good overall, led by a very effective senior management team and board of management; a realistic, prioritised vision for future school development has been created but awareness of it is limited to only certain stakeholders.
- Students are helped to develop their individual strengths through access to a very broad curriculum and co-curricular opportunities in high-quality learning facilities, and through excellent care supports and student-teacher relationships.
- The quality of teaching was good or very good in all of the lessons observed.
- The quality of learning was good overall; areas for further development are the usage of more varied modes of assessment and homework, and developing consistent “working with others” student skills.
- The school has very successfully implemented previous inspection recommendations to a high standard, though providing written formative feedback for learners is still an area for improvement.
- The quality of the school self-evaluation (SSE) process is good and, commendably, SSE strategies have been adopted by the staff and embedded in teaching and learning.

Recommendations

- The board and senior management should further expand the opportunities for all stakeholders to feed into the school’s development planning process.
- As areas for further improvement in teaching and learning, consistent whole-school practices need to be developed in the management of collaborative learning, in the provision of effective formative feedback to students, and in the use of a greater variety of assessment modes.
- To further develop subject department planning practices, minutes of department meetings should include strategies for improvement and be forwarded to senior management, and schemes of work need to be more closely aligned with the new Junior Cycle and contain more effective cross-curricular links.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The quality of leadership and management is very good overall.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

The quality of leading teaching and learning is very good. The senior management team comprises a principal and two deputy principals. All three are experienced teachers in the school who bring energy and commitment to their work. The principal, in particular, has invested a huge amount of personal service in the school, supporting its musical, faith and co-curricular culture as well as academic pursuits. Surveys conducted during the evaluation demonstrate that teachers, parents, and students all feel that the school is well run. While always conscious of leading the school's implementation of its Ursuline values, the senior management team has also been proactive in leading learning and teaching. Collaborative planning is well established in the school and working as a team is a core strength of the school's staff.

One of the most visible ways in which the senior management team has demonstrated its leadership of learning has been in relation to the embedding of assessment-for-learning (AfL) practices through the SSE process. A progressive approach to implementing these changes was put in place. Departments were given options in terms of which AfL strategies were more suited to their subjects and common practices were agreed. As a result, throughout the evaluation, there was evidence of innovative methods in lessons to implement the changes by teachers.

The school offers a very broad curriculum, which includes an optional Transition Year (TY) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Subject timetabling is generally very good and all students have good access to Physical Education, Civic, Social & Political Education, and Social, Personal and Health Education. Currently in first-year, students get to sample all available subjects for the full year before making an open choice to select ten subjects for certification at Junior Cycle. Similarly an open choice of subjects, based on bands created through student preferences, is available for students entering fifth-year. The school should consider having parents and students in attendance together during information evenings as one of the ways in which they might address the issue raised by student and parent questionnaires around information on subject choice.

The TY programme is well subscribed with each of the four layers of the programme well represented. There is some scope for the subject sampling layer to have greater options in relation to the number of subjects which rotate on a modular basis. Each subject department should provide clarity in relation to the success criteria of their respective portfolio of work. This will help to further strengthen the accreditation system of the overall year. LCVP is well established with good timetabling allocation and a team of teachers is in place to assist in the running of the programme. There is a need for this team to ensure that student, parent and teacher evaluations of this programme be undertaken.

The quality of care for students is of an exceptionally high standard. The importance of care is promoted throughout the school and a dedicated care team is in place which meets regularly to agree on actions to support students. Parent and student survey responses showed high levels of satisfaction with regard to welfare of students.

The school has provided opportunities for students to receive training in strategies to help manage examination stresses and this is commendable. Further developing students' awareness of self-management strategies, both organisationally and emotionally, would be beneficial in this regard.

The code of behaviour, through the actions of teachers, tutors and year heads, ensure that there is a good ladder of referral for any behavioural issues that might arise. Teacher and student feedback indicated that there was inconsistencies in relation to how the code is applied and the school should investigate the underlying reasons for this feedback. The staff should review the demerit system for minor misbehaviours and should give consideration to dealing with the non-completion of homework in a different manner. The school should also consider a more effective and systematic method for the implementation of the merit system for positive behaviour.

The organisation and structures for special educational needs (SEN) are very good. A co-ordinator and a small core team are in place to help with the running of this department. This team has created individualised student support files, prepared through consultation with parents. These files outline the strengths and areas of need, as well as support strategies with short, medium or long term targets being set. Mainstream teachers are provided with regular inputs on relevant SEN developments and procedures at staff meetings as well as shared resources. The number of teachers providing resource teaching or learning support needs to be reduced and consolidated so that there is consistency in the delivery of support for students. The school has started to use team teaching as part of the new SEN model of provision and has plans to make greater use of collaborative teaching into the future.

Managing the organisation

The quality of managing the organisation is very good. School budgets, staff recruitment and the maintenance of the facilities are overseen very effectively by the board and the senior management team. While required policies are in place, the creation of a rolling review of policies needs to be established. Also, annual review and ratification of the school's health and safety policy, including risk assessments of rooms and corridors, should be done. Minutes of board meetings are maintained and staff receive written agreed reports. While the parents' association is informed verbally about the outcomes of the board meetings, they should be provided with a written report, which could then be placed on a parent section of the school website for the wider parent body.

The staff and senior management oversee the very effective day-to-day running of the school. A calm and orderly atmosphere prevailed in the school and teacher and parent feedback affirmed that the school is very well run. Students indicated that they get on very well with other students and their teachers. Effective in-school communication systems are in place, though there is scope for further use of the software package to enhance communication channels for teachers. Similarly the full potential of the software package used by the school could allow parents greater access to their children's records online.

The facilities in the school are very good. Classrooms are primarily teacher-based and good-quality specialist rooms are available for practical subjects. The school also has access to outdoor pitches and sports facilities to support extra-curricular activities.

The staggered start to the school year means that some year groups are not provided with the required minimum 167 days of tuition in line with circular M29/95, Time in school, and this should be addressed by the board.

Leading school development

The quality of leading school development is commendable. The school has very good links with feeder schools, partnerships with trustees and local businesses as well as maintaining very positive relationships with the community.

The board has identified a number of areas for improvement as part of its school development priorities, which are sensible and realistic. These priorities should be shared with all stakeholders with a view to incorporating ideas from staff, parents and students. Time-bound action plans should

then be created so that timeframes, targets and actions to be undertaken are clearer. In planning for further digital learning technologies integration into teaching and learning, the digital planning team should further develop the school digital strategy.

Developing leadership capacity

The quality of developing leadership capacity is very good. The staff shows a strong commitment to student welfare and the school and teachers have engaged very well with any changes introduced to date. The high levels of volunteerism by teachers allows for a large number of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to be provided to students. The board reported that the number of teachers seeking upskilling through CPD is high. Teachers reported very good levels of collegiality and sharing of practices with their peers and this was evident in the fact that colleagues regularly share learning from external CPD with each other either formally or informally.

The post holders meet with the senior management team regularly and are consulted in relation to their duties. A review of the post structure occurred in the last two years and another review is due to occur by the next academic year. At the next review, the school should look to reduce any perceived overlap in the post duties and strive to further match the post duties to the current needs of the school.

Student leadership opportunities include the student council, GAISCE, Green and Amber Flag programmes and the wide range of sporting and musical activities throughout the school. Senior students are involved with a Big Sis, Little Sis programme where they mentor incoming first-year students. While the senior students receive training in relation to this role there is scope to expand the activities of the programme throughout the academic year. Despite the multitude of avenues for student involvement in school life, very few students felt that they had a say in how things are done in the school. The school should investigate this further and look at ways in which the student voice can be captured more prominently in the future.

The school reported that it provides placements for student teachers regularly through the Droichead programme. 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.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The overall quality of teaching and learning was high.

Learner outcomes and experiences

A very caring atmosphere of mutual respect and rapport was evident throughout the evaluation. The behaviour of students was exemplary. The vast majority of lessons took place in rooms which had subject-specific material such as charts, posters and student work on the walls.

The quality of learning was good or very good in all lessons. Learning intentions were used effectively in the majority of lessons to share and gauge levels of learning. There was some evidence in lessons that students were using learning intentions to check on their own learning and this is very good practice and should be further promoted. A range of very good AfL strategies was used in the majority of lessons and effective use of success criteria was observed in some instances. Expanding on the use of success criteria will assist student learning further.

Student-centred approaches were evident in all lessons and many teachers used collaborative learning practices effectively. In some instances though better structures were needed in relation to group activities. Roles should be assigned to group members, timeframes should be applied to tasks,

and the manner in which feedback is sought from groups at the end of the activity should be structured in a manner so as to maximise the learning for all students in the classroom. Some classrooms had alternative desk layouts to promote collaborative learning and there is potential for teachers to explore some of these layouts in order to further enhance collaborative learning.

Homework is frequently assigned and corrected and formative feedback was provided to students in many instances. Based on the copybooks viewed and discussions with students, it was evident that homework tended to mainly involve written assignments. As a result, there is a need for the school to vary the type of homework provided to students. In addition, end-of-topic assessments should also be varied beyond written summative assessments. The assessment modes should take into account the type of Classroom-Based Assessments (CBA)s that students will undertake to meet the requirements of Junior Cycle specifications. In this manner students will have greater exposure to the skills required for completing the CBAs and this should reduce the perception that was reported, where students and teachers saw CBAs as large one-off summative events.

Very good use was made of independent student tasks ensuring that active learning was a strong feature of all lessons. This contributed to student enjoyment and engagement in learning. Due to the AfL strategies and active learning practices, differentiation was generally good or very good in lessons as teachers provided additional supports and challenges to students in mixed ability settings.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

The quality of teachers' individual practices was good or very good in all lessons. Generally very effective, varied teaching methodologies were used throughout the evaluation of lessons.

The standard of preparation for lessons was good or very good. The best lessons ensured that the methodologies, resources and AfL practices used, linked with the learning intentions. The pace and timing of lessons were generally good, though in some cases more time should have been spent on checking the intended learning or providing time for feedback. Teachers demonstrated very good classroom management skills in all the lessons observed. Questioning was generally of a very high standard. Teachers used distributed, differentiated questioning in addition to other AfL practices to ascertain learning. Students were provided with adequate time to formulate a response and they demonstrated good oracy levels throughout observed lessons.

The overall quality of teachers' collective practice was good, though the standard of practices across departments was inconsistent. While subject co-ordinators are appointed to run the departments, the agreed duties of this role need to be documented. Subject department plans generally contained information on the structures of the subject department, details in relation to CPD undertaken by teachers and common schemes of work.

Agendas for meetings should be expanded so that as well as discussing logistical issues, formal subject development planning is engaged in and documented. Practices should be shared, targets set, and strategies devised. Also, subject departments should broaden the analysis of state examination results that they currently undertake. The context of the year group should be taken into account and strategies and targets should be devised and set for year-on-year improvement. Moreover, it is advised that the minutes of subject department meetings be sent electronically to senior management so that agreed practices and targets can be discussed and shared on a whole-school basis in the future.

Overall, a more consistent approach to developing schemes of work is needed across subject departments. Where it is not already the case, schemes should ensure learning outcomes are linked to specific methodologies and a variety of assessment modes. There is potential for senior management to overview all the schemes of work to ensure that more effective cross-curricular links are created for student learning, particularly in the area of CBAs in Junior Cycle and a modular themed approach in TY. For example, whole-staff meetings could set aside some time for teachers

to brief each other on their learning from implementing the new Junior Cycle and subject departments should share their plans. These practices would support a consistent approach to schemes of work and encourage the use of assessment modes that support the facilitation of CBAs and complement teaching and learning across the curriculum.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

The school's implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations is good overall.

Leadership and Management

There have been four subject inspections in the Ursuline Secondary School since the previous whole-school evaluation. Very good progress has been made by senior management in relation to a number of whole-school recommendations including the creation of a student support team, the formal sharing of learning from CPD, the restructuring of the school curriculum and the upgrading of facilities. The schemes of work still need some attention overall and the production of a widely shared action plan for development priorities and the creation of a rolling review of policies are areas for ongoing development.

Teaching and Learning

There was some very good progress noted in relation to some of the teaching and learning recommendations. Based on the lesson observations, as noted above, better structures around collaborative learning and written formative feedback are still areas for future improvement.

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

The school's self-evaluation (SSE) process is good and its capacity for making future improvements is very high.

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school focussed on literacy, numeracy and AfL as strands for improvement in recent years. Good quantitative and some qualitative evidence was gathered during the process. The school should gather more effective qualitative data from parents and students when they formulate future improvement plans. The analysis of the evidence was good and it led to very effective whole-school and in-class strategies for AfL practices. The school has produced SSE reports and school improvement plans; these need to be shared with the wider school community.

During the lesson observations, it was clear that teachers had engaged well with implementing AfL strategies in a variety of ways in their subject departments. Literacy and numeracy whole-school practices were less evident. The school should review the literacy and numeracy practices so that common approaches can be agreed upon by all teachers for use in their classrooms. Team teaching and peer observation were reported to be the next areas that the school wished to consider for the SSE process and these would further embed sharing of practice throughout the school.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school's capacity for making future improvements is very high. The dedicated leadership of senior management and the board and the commitment of the staff to the students and the school will greatly assist in achieving future improvements.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

(blank)

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

Overall the Board is very pleased with the Report and has initiated, with the Principal, some steps with regard to the recommendations, namely:

1. To improve communication with parents, all parent meetings will have a printed Report issued to them.
2. Agreed Report from the board of management will be posted on the website.
3. The Parents' Association will be issued with a printed Report from the board of management; not orally as heretofore.
4. We will include a board of management Annual Report in our end-of-year mail drop to all parents.
5. We are hoping to develop an electronic forum for parents to air their views on issues of importance.
6. Issues regarding Teaching and Learning will be addressed immediately. This will be formalised at a Staff Meeting at the beginning of next term.

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; |