

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

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**Management, Leadership and Learning**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Saint Finian's Community College
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Swords County Dublin
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	70120F

**Date of Evaluation: 08-11-2017**



## **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 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

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	6-8 November 2017
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with board of management</li><li>• Meetings with principal and deputy principal</li><li>• Meetings with key staff</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Student focus-group interview</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers</li></ul>

### School context

Saint Finian's Community College is a co-educational, multi-denominational school under the patronage of the Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB). The school caters for 613 students and provides the full range of curricular programmes. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion.

### Summary of main findings and recommendations:

#### Findings

- The overall quality of school management and leadership is good; while there is scope to develop an overarching strategic plan, very good practice was evident in the active promotion of a culture of improvement in teaching and learning.
- The quality of student care and support is very good; a wide range of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular interventions provides for students' wellbeing.
- School management and staff are committed to providing a wide range of programmes to meet students' needs, although the deployment of resources needs review.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons was good, with very good practice also evident; however, there was scope to deepen student learning in a significant minority of lessons.
- The school has a very good capacity for improvement; robust DEIS planning processes support a clear agenda for school improvement with some very positive trends noted.

#### Recommendations

- To enhance learning experiences and outcomes, well-planned teaching and assessment approaches should be deployed strategically and aspects of the organisation of team teaching should be reviewed.
- Current allocations of special educational needs (SEN) and guidance hours should be fully utilised.
- More targeted whole-school and subject planning is required in supporting international students.
- To continue to lead and coordinate school development, the board of management should oversee the development of an overarching framework.
- A core team should be established to further develop the Wellbeing programme.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1 QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of school management and leadership is good, with some very good practice evident.

#### **Leading learning and teaching**

School management and staff have a strong commitment to providing an inclusive learning environment that promotes student achievement. The core values of the school are 'respect, honesty, responsibility and inclusion' and these are evident in the implementation of the DEIS plan and curricular programmes.

A key strength of the school is its very good range of student support systems. A comprehensive whole-school guidance plan and weekly meetings of the care team ensure an integrated, co-ordinated approach to student care.

The school offers a very broad range of subjects and programmes at both junior and senior cycle. In addition, an extensive range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities is available to meet student needs.

In response to interest from parents and students, a Transition Year (TY) programme was reintroduced. A core team is in place and a broad range of learning opportunities including Coding and Chinese is provided. An evaluation of the programme has informed planning for the future years. There is a good emphasis on continuous assessment through the development of a student portfolio. However, some TY subject plans show that further development of assessment practices is required.

The school is highly commended for its reintroduction and rejuvenation of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. It is very well coordinated and endeavours to provide additional vocational specialisms in consultation with students.

There is a good uptake for the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). LCVP students are not timetabled for Physical Education (PE); this practice has been reviewed and is currently being addressed. An important component of the school's LCVP programme is work experience over three days; the duration of work experience should be increased to enhance student learning.

It is school practice that class tutors also teach Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) to their assigned class. However, collaborative planning and consistency in the SPHE programme are difficult, given the large teaching team involved. A small core planning team should be established to coordinate provision in this area.

The quality of support for students with SEN is very good. Relevant students are mainly withdrawn from other subjects for one-to-one, or small-group support. Commendably, this approach is complemented by initiatives such as paired reading, spelling initiative, team teaching and the 'gifted students' programme. During the evaluation, it was evident in the lessons observed that some aspects of the organisation of team teaching, such as the tracking of student progress and collaborative planning, require review.

The SEN coordinator and core team use data effectively from the feeder schools to inform planning and provision of supports for identified students. In consultation with parents, student profiles have been developed to advise mainstream teachers of suitable teaching approaches. Very good

procedures are in place for tracking student progress. However, at the time of the evaluation, a significant number of the designated hours allocated by the Department for SEN were either not being availed of or were not used in accordance with guidance provided in Circular 0014/2017. This underutilisation should be addressed as a matter of priority.

Very good systems are in place for supporting students for whom English is an additional language (EAL). To complement initiatives already underway as part of the literacy strand of DEIS, there is scope for subject departments to plan more systematically for these students' needs.

A recent initiative has led to an increase in the number of international students attending the school. A liaison teacher coordinates their integration appropriately into school life. However, more consideration is required at whole-school level to matters such as the placement of international students in classes, the range of learning experiences provided and the opportunities for subject teachers to plan for the full engagement of these students within lessons.

As the school provides a wide range of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular interventions that provide for students' wellbeing, it is recommended that a core team be established to further develop the wellbeing programme.

### **Managing the organisation**

The board of management is appropriately constituted and has a commendable level of shared expertise. The trustee provides very good support to the school. The board is very committed to providing an inclusive education, and makes deliberate and informed efforts to meet the evolving needs of students. Effective links between the board and senior management team support the appropriate consideration of on-going issues and decision making.

The board is fully aware of its statutory obligations and all mandatory policies have been adopted. The development and review of policies is led by staff, in consultation with all the relevant stakeholders.

Parents are well informed about general activities and school events. However, questionnaire responses indicate that a significant minority of parents did not agree that the board keeps them fully informed of its work. Ideally, an agreed report of board meetings should be presented to staff, parents and the student council.

The admissions policy, which reflects the inclusive ethos of the school, is reviewed annually. Appropriate transition procedures for enrolment onto TY, LCVP and LCA are also in place.

Attendance and retention are well monitored. DEIS planning strategies seek to maximise attendance and retention for target groups. The school completion officer and home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator ensure appropriate interventions are put in place to improve the attendance of specific students.

The code of behaviour sets out clear expectations of the roles and responsibilities of students and parents in promoting a positive learning environment. Year heads and tutors play an important role in promoting good behaviour. Questionnaire data indicates a need to consider some aspects of the implementation of the code in consultation with students. A restorative approach to dealing with behaviour has been adopted by some staff and this approach is worth developing further at classroom level.

The principal and deputy principal manage the day-to-day running of the school effectively. They are committed to leading learning through a partnership approach with high expectations for all

students. They empower teachers to take on leadership roles and to lead learning through the distribution of responsibilities. Staff members demonstrate a strong sense of loyalty and commitment to the school. Concerted efforts are made to deploy staff in accordance with their subject expertise. At the time of evaluation, it was noted that some teaching and guidance hours were not fully allocated, in part due to staff shortages. The guidance allocation should be fully utilised.

The school has managed significant change in personnel in recent years. A number of trained mentors support new staff, under the Droichead programme. As part of this mentoring process, new teachers should also be guided on the integration of DEIS targets and whole-school approaches in areas such as classroom management.

School management is very supportive of teachers' continuing professional development (CPD). There are commendable levels of staff engagement in CPD. The deputy principal has also led peer-collaborative review effectively. During the evaluation, it was evident that there is a need to devise a structure for staff to share and embed practices, at whole-school level, that have proven successful in improving student learning. The next cycle of DEIS planning will be an opportune time to reflect on learning and engagement in CPD and identify key teaching and learning priorities that would support achievement of targets.

The school building is well maintained and evacuation procedures are practised at regular intervals. Staff involved in practical subjects are accessing appropriate health and safety training.

Very good displays of student work and vibrant posters in corridors and open spaces create a very positive environment. All classrooms have good information and communication technology (ICT) facilities. An eLearning plan to support the upgrading ICT is being developed. As a first step, an overall vision for ICT as a teaching and learning tool should be agreed collaboratively to inform the eLearning actions.

### **Leading school development**

It was evident during the evaluation that the whole-school community demonstrated a strong commitment to the DEIS planning process as central to promoting a culture of continuous improvement. Leadership of DEIS planning is very good. A coordinator oversees the development of the plan with teams of staff involved in each strand.

In addition, the board has identified highly relevant areas for further development such as the extension of the school building, and the continued promotion of the school.

The school is to be commended for the range of initiatives facilitated by staff for the students. To continue to coordinate school improvement, the board should oversee the development of an overarching framework to link the various initiatives going on in the school. Such a framework should articulate the school's priorities, be integrated with the DEIS plan and communicate and guide the vision of the school.

The board, principal and staff value partnership with parents as a means of supporting students' learning. The majority of parents surveyed feel that there is a good atmosphere in the school and they feel welcome. A parents' association is in place. To keep parents better informed the board should prepare a summary report of its DEIS plan and share this with the school community.

The HSCL service focuses appropriately on connecting with parents of students identified as potential early-school leavers. HSCL initiatives have led to increased attendance at parent-teacher meetings.

Very effective partnerships have been forged with local businesses, Dublin City University (DCU), Access programmes, and student support services to enhance students' experience and engagement.

### **Developing leadership capacity**

There is good development of leadership capacity within the school. Leadership roles are formally distributed at middle-management level with appropriately defined duties for each post-of-responsibility that are reviewed annually.

All staff make a significant contribution to the running of the school through various initiatives and planning committees which provide for a wide educational experience for students.

Student leadership is fostered through a variety of roles such as the student council, prefects and head boy and girl system. The student council is democratically elected and is well supported by a liaison teacher. Members actively represent students' views at regular meetings with the principal and in the review of policies.

Good systems are in place to support students in first year where senior students act as mentors or *Cairde*. Currently, prefects act as ambassadors for the school and assist at school events. There is scope to develop their pastoral role.

### **Child Protection Procedures**

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the child protection procedures for post-primary schools without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the child protection procedures for post-primary schools.

## **2 QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons was good, with some very good practice evident. In a significant minority of lessons, there was scope to enhance the depth of students' learning.

### **Learner outcomes and experiences**

Student-teacher interactions were very positive and students were appropriately supported by special needs assistants (SNAs) in highly inclusive learning environments.

Some exemplary noticeboards have been developed highlighting relevant literacy and numeracy concepts. Displays of student work fostered high expectations and modelled best practice.

Students were informed of the learning intentions at the outset of all lessons. Student engagement was exemplary in lessons where meaningful discussions on the success criteria created a shared ownership and understanding of the planned learning. Very effective learning was evident when the learning intentions were re-visited to assess actual progress and students were encouraged to reflect on their learning.

Some good examples of differentiated approaches to teaching and learning were evident through oral questioning, provision of well-designed worksheets to scaffold learning and where some students were provided with additional attention as tasks were completed.

Very good collaborative learning was observed where students worked in pairs and small groups. Student engagement was very good in some of these lessons where they were sufficiently challenged through appropriate differentiation of set tasks. In these instances, appropriate time was provided for students to process, apply and consolidate their learning.

In lessons where student engagement was less effective, students were passive with insufficient time to process information and few or no opportunities to collaborate and reflect on their learning.

### **Teachers' individual and collective practice**

Where highly effective learning was evident, this was built on students' prior learning and the range of teaching approaches facilitated students to actively engage and reflect. In a few lessons, there was scope to improve the pace or pitch of lesson delivery to improve learner outcomes and experience.

Very good emphasis was placed on developing students' literacy skills through subject-specific vocabulary in all lessons. Highly effective learning was evident in a few lessons when teachers modelled approaches to paired reading, and facilitated students to read in pairs, to discuss the information and to work collaboratively. In language lessons, students would have benefited from further opportunities to use the target language.

Effective use of resources enhanced students' engagement and understanding in many lessons. These resources included electronic presentations, images, video clips, the whiteboard and textbooks. To maximise learning from video clips, students would benefit from an accompanying worksheet to promote active listening and viewing.

The overall quality of assessment was good. Questioning strategies were used effectively in a majority of lessons to recap on prior learning, prompt discussion or enquiry and extend learning. Very good practice was noted when the questions posed promoted critical-thinking skills and students were given sufficient time to develop answers. In a few instances, strategies that encouraged students to reflect on, consolidate and evaluate their learning were noted. This very good practice should be extended to all lessons.

In a minority of lessons, where there was significant scope for development, the teaching methodologies chosen were predominantly teacher-centred, with an over-reliance on global questioning strategies.

It was evident from reviewing students' journals and copybooks that homework is assigned regularly and student progress is monitored in most lessons. Good-quality feedback to students was evident in some copybooks when teachers provided specific guidance on how to improve. This very good practice should be extended across all subject departments.

Progress of students involved in the JCSP programme is monitored by individual teachers and by a coordinator. There is scope to further integrate statements of learning into day-to-day lessons and programme plans.

A collaborative approach to subject planning was evident. Best practice was observed where the learning intentions demonstrated incremental progression and were linked to specific teaching, learning and assessment strategies. This approach should be adopted by all departments.



Planning for the implementation of new specifications for the Junior Cycle is well progressed and staff have engaged fully with CPD in their subject areas. It is commendable that some subject departments have started to integrate Wellbeing into their subject plans. Subject departments should also integrate types of teaching and learning approaches that support the development of key skills and areas of learning across the curriculum.

### **3 IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

#### **Leadership and Management**

School management has made very good progress in implementing previous recommendations. The LCA programme has been successfully reintroduced and students have greater access to internet resources for career guidance.

#### **Teaching and Learning**

Subject departments have made good overall progress in the implementation of recommendations that related to teaching and learning. As observed in lessons during this evaluation, there is scope at whole-school level to further develop feedback practices to support students to reflect and build on their learning.

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

#### **The School's Self-Evaluation (SSE) Process**

Overall, there has been very good engagement with the SSE process. School management and staff correctly view the DEIS and SSE planning processes as one entity, leading to a single integrated plan. It is good practice that there are high levels of staff involvement in planning committees and in strategies to support educational inclusion. There is a clear focus on achieving improvement targets and baseline data informs the agreed interventions. Responses to teacher questionnaires indicated that almost all agreed that the SSE processes are used to improve student learning in the school.

#### **The School's Capacity for Improvement**

The school demonstrates a very good capacity for improvement through its commitment to DEIS and to meeting the evolving needs of students. As the school moves into a new cycle of DEIS, there is scope to develop closer alignment between DEIS and subject department plans. For instance, there is a need to consider how progress in the literacy, numeracy and attainment targets can be further monitored at subject-department level to contribute to the review of targets.

## **Appendix**

School response to the report

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

### **Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The BOM welcomes the positive findings of this WSE-MLL and wishes to commend its staff, students and parents on a very affirmative report. The Board was delighted to see the school's robust SSE/DEIS planning processes recognised and happy that the quality of leadership and management in the school was commended for its active promotion of a culture of improvement in teaching and learning. The Board was delighted to see the very good quality of student care and support acknowledged, with the wide range of programmes provided to meet students' needs and the school's commendation on the range of initiatives and extra-curricular activities facilitated by staff. The commitment of the school to providing an inclusive learning environment promoting student achievement was also highlighted. With the development of our new school building in the next few years, St. Finian's C.C. will have state of the art facilities and this, along with our continual engagement in the SSE process and the dedication of the staff, will give the school community further capacity to advance to even higher standards

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

School management, teaching staff and the board of management have already begun to implement recommendations contained in the WSE-MLL including:

A core team has been established to enhance the delivery of special education needs hours in accordance with the NCSE guidelines. This team will also look at the organisation of team teaching.

A committee has been set up draw together the work of the DEIS committee, the SSE committee and the SDP committee to combine all their work into an overarching framework.

All subject departments are integrating plans for international students in their particular subjects.

A Wellbeing core committee has been established. CPD for staff on wellbeing has recently been given to all staff.

## The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	<i>Very good</i> applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is <i>outstanding</i> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	<i>Good</i> applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	<i>Satisfactory</i> applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	<i>Fair</i> applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	<i>Weak</i> applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;