

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Firhouse Community College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Firhouse Road Dublin 24
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	70140L

Date of Evaluation: 04-10-2018



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	04-10-2018
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

Firhouse Community College was established in 1982 as a designated Community College under the auspices of the Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board. The school is co-educational and caters for a diverse multicultural and multilingual student population. All curricular programmes are offered including a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme. The current enrolment is 779.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The newly appointed senior management team is hard working, deeply committed to the school, provides highly effective leadership for learning and the overall quality of leadership and management is good.
- The Deployment of Teaching Resources (DTR) (Timetabling) Returns are not being made on annual basis to the Department of Education and Skills; the school does not provide all students with the minimum required 28 hours tuition, the resources allocated to students with special education needs (SEN) are underutilised and some teachers are not timetabled for class contact for the minimum required hours.
- The school offers a very broad and balanced curriculum as well as a full range of curricular programmes.
- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good; there is very good engagement with continuing professional development (CPD) and the quality of collaborative practice among teachers is excellent.
- Good progress has been made in implementing some recommendations from previous inspection reports, however some significant recommendations have not been implemented.
- There is a very good culture of school self-evaluation (SSE) and review which has sustained school improvement and development over the years.

Recommendations

- The board of management should ensure that the DTR (Timetabling) Returns are made annually to the Department, that students are provided with the minimum required 28 hours tuition and days in school; and that all teaching resources allocated to the school are utilised to maximum effect.

- The board and the principal need to make greater use of the available data in relation to attendance, examination attainment and progression to inform school priorities, to set SMART targets and to engage in strategic planning to improve outcomes for students.
- A review of the posts of responsibilities should take place as a matter of priority to ensure that the posts meet the needs of the school; post holders should have a clear job description and give an annual report to the principal and board of management.
- A more comprehensive and systematic student tracking system needs to be established by senior management that involves year heads and subject departments collaborating to ensure that students achieve their potential.
- Teachers should increase the use of formative feedback and ensure that more effective questioning strategies are used in lessons.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

The quality of leadership for learning is very good.

A very good transfer system is in place for incoming first-year students to ensure they have a positive experience of this critical educational transition. The annual 'Open Evening' provides an effective mechanism for prospective students to gain a deeper understanding of the wide range of optional subjects. Information evenings are held for parents and students at other key transition points, for example between junior and senior cycle.

The quality of care for students is very good. A key element of the care structure is the tutor and year head system. It is particularly effective that every effort is made to ensure continuity of tutors assigned to particular class groups from year to year. This continuity has enabled tutors and year heads to get to know students very well and to build strong relationships with them. A care team is well established, meets on a weekly basis and has very strong support from the senior management team (SMT).

The principal has led very positive changes in relation to support for students with SEN. In relation to building capacity among staff, a number of teachers are qualified or have recently upskilled in this important area and further CPD has been organised. The principal has established a core SEN team comprising teachers with different subject specialisms and a keen interest in providing high-quality support for these students.

The model of provision to support students with SEN comprises withdrawal groups, one to one interventions and team teaching. Very good practice is noted in the variety of students' needs which are being supported, ranging from literacy, numeracy, English as an additional language (EAL) and social and organisational skills.

A broad and balanced curriculum is offered at junior and senior cycles with a good mix of academic and practical subjects. In relation to technology subjects, a notable gender imbalance in uptake was evident in junior cycle. Given the Department's policy in relation to increasing uptake in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) the uptake of these subjects among girls should be more rigorously promoted. In relation to the provision for studying modern foreign language (MFL), only French is on offer in junior cycle. In TY the excellent practice of offering a wider variety of languages including Chinese and Japanese is acknowledged. In the context of curriculum review, broadening the choice of MFL in junior cycle merits consideration. The Department's policy in relation to STEM and Foreign Language Strategy could usefully inform work in this area.

The TY programme is very good and students spoke most positively of the educational benefits accrued. The programme appropriately comprises calendar, core, optional and modular components. The excellent practice of ensuring that students engage in community-care placements in order to enhance their social awareness is commended.

The LCA programme is offered every second year and provides students with an alternative to the established Leaving Certificate. Currently, guidance is not being delivered in line with the requirements of the programme. This needs to be addressed.

The JCSP is provided for a small number of students mainly through smaller learning support classes. Students complete JCSP statements in a number of core subjects. A review of the JCSP planning documentation indicates that updating of information, including the JCSP initiatives in the school, is required.

The code of behaviour is comprehensive and contains a strong emphasis on promoting positive student behaviour. In the course of the evaluation, student behaviour was noted as being exemplary.

The guidance provision in the school is good. Educational and vocational guidance is provided by a qualified guidance counsellor. Currently guidance is only timetabled for sixth-year students and this should be reviewed with a view to increasing provision, particularly in senior cycle. Senior management identified the benefits accruing from providing students with access to personal counselling and assigned resources accordingly. This is a most positive initiative. Good efforts have been made to ensure the upskilling of teachers. This should continue with a view to establishing increased capacity and a whole-school guidance planning team. Systematic analysis of progression data in relation to students leaving the school could be developed further to include a report to the principal and board. The guidance plan needs to be ratified by the board.

Managing the organisation

While the quality of certain aspects of school management is good there is scope for development in some areas.

The current board of management is appropriately constituted and is approaching the end of its three-year term. Many members of the board are long standing and have a wealth of expertise. The principal provides comprehensive reports to the board. A checklist of policies and review dates is used to ensure that all policies are kept updated. The admissions policy reflects the inclusive nature of the school but should include reference to the compulsory TY, and to criteria for entry to other curricular programmes.

The board receives some data in relation to student attainment and outcomes. However, there is considerable scope for the board to seek more comprehensive data in relation to student outcomes, attendance and progression and to use the analysis of this data to establish priorities and set SMART targets for improvement.

The newly-appointed SMT comprises the principal and two deputy-principals. The SMT is very hardworking, dedicated to the school and has a very good working relationship. Each member of the SMT takes on a significant workload. Many tasks are being done collaboratively. It is timely now for formal job descriptions to be established to avoid overlap.

There are aspects of the deployment of resources that require improvement. It is a stipulation of the Department that principals make DTR (Timetabling) Returns each September. The school has not provided DTR Returns on annual basis: these returns should be provided.

Students in senior cycle are not provided with the minimum required 28 hours tuition and students following the TY programme are not provided with the minimum required 167 days. The integrity of the school year should be maintained in line with Circular 29/95.

Teacher deployment needs to be reviewed to ensure that all teachers are timetabled for maximum class contact hours in line with circulars and agreements with the Department. In relation to job-sharing arrangements, some teachers are timetabled for significantly less hours than are required: all teachers should be timetabled in line with relevant circulars and agreements.

The school is in receipt of a significant number of hours to support students with SEN. At the time of the evaluation the timetable for this provision was still, in part, under construction. However, it is clear that the resources allocated for SEN are being underutilised. It is recommended that this situation be addressed to ensure full use of the allocation in line with the relevant guidelines.

The day-to-day management of the school was good overall during the evaluation. However, some classes did not begin on time and this was particularly an issue immediately following morning break. This erosion of teaching time needs to be reviewed; teacher and student punctuality should be addressed.

Post holders, particularly year heads, play a significant role in school management. However, the duties attached to some posts are now outdated and do not meet the needs of the school. Therefore a review of these duties is recommended. Currently, post holders other than year heads, do not have a job description and this can result in a lack of clarity regarding their role. It is suggested therefore that clear job descriptions be developed for each post of responsibility. In addition annual reports should be provided by post holders to the principal and the board of management.

Leading school development

School management is committed to providing high-quality teaching and learning and to support teachers in so doing. The board is also committed to sustaining the good culture of self-review and development.

The parents' association (PA) supports school initiatives very well. Findings from the parents' surveys are very positive and indicate that they feel very welcome in the school. There are good links between the PA and senior management. The school has also developed good links with the community in particular local schools and sports clubs.

Developing leadership capacity

The senior management team employs highly effective strategies to support the development of leadership capacity within the teaching staff.

The SMT work effectively to promote a learning culture in the school. Teachers are empowered to take on leadership roles. The establishment of a number of committees led by teachers with a focus on developing teaching and learning strategies is an example of exemplary practice. The focus of these committees includes the implementation of the Junior Cycle Framework, the school's digital strategy, the assessment, literacy and numeracy policies and many more areas. Excellent work is being carried out in these committees.

The school's engagement as a lead partner in an Erasmus plus programme is an example of outstanding practice and will provide for participation in a wide variety of international CPD opportunities to develop teacher and student leadership skills over the coming years.

Students have very good opportunities to develop leadership skills. The students' council meets regularly and brings forward suggestions to the management of the school. Other very important initiatives such as the prefect system and Green schools committee contribute very effectively to building students' leadership skills. Students' surveys do indicate that some students do not feel they have a say in how to make the school a better place. This is an area that the student council could usefully investigate.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Learner outcomes and experiences

The overall quality of teaching and learning ranged from very good to good in the majority of lessons observed; practice in relation to formative feedback and questioning strategies needs some further development.

In some lessons, group work was used to very good effect to enhance student engagement and motivation. This occurred where the task set for the group was clear, appropriate to their age and stage of learning and roles and time frames were firmly established. Students approached group tasks positively in all lessons and clearly had a sense of achievement when they were provided with the opportunity to give feedback on the outcomes achieved.

In some lessons samples of students' work were viewed, discussed and analysed by the learners. This provided very good opportunities for learners to engage in peer assessment and discuss the features of successful learning outcomes. Students were then facilitated to reflect critically on their own learning and see where they had been successful and what areas they need to develop. This student-centred approach is excellent practice.

Students experienced very positive classroom atmosphere in lessons. Positive rapport between students and teachers was evident. In many lessons there was commendable use of praise and affirmation which created a safe and secure environment for the learners.

Students' experience in lessons was most positive when high expectations were set and a wide variety of active methodologies was used. Students enjoyed activities that involved the use of mini white boards, brain storming and techniques associated with the 'growth mindset' initiative currently running in the school.

The quality of the learning environment in most classrooms was highly effective. The displays of student work and a wide array of other appropriate materials supported students' learning. In some classrooms posters and displays associated with the 'growth mindset' were evident. These created a most positive and encouraging learning environment for students and could usefully be replicated throughout the school.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

Very good resources prepared in advance of lessons ensured the smooth running of lessons. All lessons had a clear focus and a good sequence and pace.

In almost all lessons, clear learning intentions were visually represented to students and explained or discussed at the outset. This provided students with a clear roadmap for learning. Where best practice was observed the learning intentions were revisited throughout the lesson to ensure that learners were still on track. Optimal learner experiences occurred where the students themselves came up with success criteria. This practice could usefully be extended to all lessons.

Questioning strategies were used to very good effect in most lessons where teacher questions were carefully formed to encourage students to think about their answers and allowed sufficient wait time. These questions were used to scaffold students' knowledge in an incremental way. Where there was scope for development, questions were mainly lower-order and not targeted. It is suggested that a whole-school approach to the use of effective questioning strategies be developed.

Most teachers provided regular verbal feedback to students in the course of lessons and some examples of highly effective written feedback were noted in copybooks. To ensure a consistent approach all teachers should provide students with verbal and written formative feedback.

Classroom management in all lessons was very good and teachers ensured an orderly and inclusive environment for learners. Student behaviour was exemplary and this can be attributed to effective teacher practice.

Subject planning is well established in the school and formal subject department meetings take place. A review of a sample of minutes of these meetings indicates that some departments have very good discussions in relation to teaching and learning and implementation of the Junior Cycle Framework. To ensure consistency of this excellent practice staff and management should agree a common template for meetings.

Excellent practice was noted in the review of subject planning documentation. Some teachers have developed very detailed plans for the implementation of new specifications for junior cycle and some subject departments keep a record of the CPD undertaken by teachers. Inspectors noted an impressive correlation between best practice in subject planning and highly effective teaching and learning in lessons. The practices highlighted could be shared across departments and the move to an online platform for sharing staff expertise will assist this.

Student attainment in certificate examinations is analysed by subject departments and records are kept of this analysis. It is now timely to use the analysis and all available assessment data to set targets for students. A more comprehensive and systematic student tracking system needs to be established by senior management that involves year heads and subject departments collaborating to ensure that students achieve their potential.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

Some progress has been made in recommendations from previous inspection reports. In the context of the last whole-school evaluation very good progress has been made by senior management in facilitating the sharing of best practice across staff through staff meetings and subject-department planning. Good progress has also been made in relation to reducing the amount of split classes, although it remains an issue in the case of one Leaving Certificate higher level class in a core subject. Inadequate progress has been made in relation to ensuring that students sit the appropriate level in Junior Certificate as highlighted in a Subject Inspection (2012) and in providing all students with minimum instruction time of 28 hours as was highlighted in the TY report (2007) and again in a WSE MLL (2012).

Teaching and Learning

Very good progress has been made in relation to implementing some of the teaching and learning strategies recommended in previous reports. The whole-school emphasis on assessment as a focus for school improvement provides evidence for this. Good differentiated support was noted also in some lessons. To ensure the consistent implementation of previous recommendations a systematic structure should be put in place which involves subject departments presenting progress reports to the principal and the board.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school has a strong culture of review and self-evaluation. A wide range of data is analysed to identify areas for improvement across a range of themes, from building projects, curricular innovation, implementation of the Junior Cycle Framework digital strategy and innovative teaching and learning strategies.

The current focus of SSE is to bring about improvements in attendance and assessment. Committees have been established to gather and analyse data and establish strategies for use in lessons to ensure a whole-school approach and to form a school improvement plan (SIP). A summary of the SIP should now be shared with the school community.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school has good capacity for improvement. The board, the senior management team and staff are very committed to the development of the school. As there is a new SMT in place and in order to progress the improvement agenda it is suggested that a clear vision for the future of the school be established and that very clear systems and structures be put in place to ensure this vision is realised.

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;

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

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Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

Timetabling Returns have been made for the 2018/19 school year and will in future be submitted each September.

The majority of classes are already on 28 hours and all classes will be from August 2019.

The review of Posts of Responsibility which commenced in December 2017 has been progressed further this term and is nearing completion.

Job description for Posts of Responsibility which have previously been in existence are now being formalised and annual reporting will become standard practice, starting this school year.

While a level of student tracking has been in existence we are happy to take on board the recommendation that this needs to be further developed.

The Guidance Plan will be brought to our December Board of Management meeting for ratification.

In line with the Admissions To School Act 2018 our enrolment policy is currently under review and all recommendations will be taken on board.

Significant work has been undertaken by the Senior Management Team this term and role descriptions have now been established.

A legacy issue in relation to the timetabling of a job sharer has been rectified in line with recommendations.

As part of our SSE strategy we are focused on further embedding our use of formative feedback and developing questioning strategies.

Representatives of the SSE committee are giving an update on progress to the December Board of Management meeting. Following this meeting the School Improvement Plan will be posted on the college website.