

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

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| School name | Mount Seskin Community College |
| School address | Jobstown Tallaght Dublin 24 |
| Roll number | 70141N |

Date of Evaluation: 15-03-2017



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

Whole-School Evaluations – Management, Leadership and Learning report on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

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

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

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

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

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| Date of inspection | 15-03-2017 |
| 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

Mount Seskin Community College is a co-educational designated college operating under the patronage of Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board and the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. Following a period of decline, school enrolment has increased and steadied in recent years and is currently at 308 students. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme and offers the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Transition Year (TY) is not offered in the school. Provision also includes adult education courses offered through Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme and Back to Education Initiative (BTEI). A sanctioned special class is established and plans for an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) unit are advanced.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall quality of school governance is fair.
- There are evident weaknesses in the quality of school leadership and management at senior management level: there is considerable scope to improve communication and develop a collaborative approach to leading and managing the school.
- The school is highly inclusive and the principal, deputy principal and staff are highly committed to student care and wellbeing.
- Overall, the quality of learning, teaching and assessment was satisfactory: the quality of the lessons observed ranged from very good to fair.
- The quality of the draft DEIS action plan is adequate.
- Not all class groups in third year have completed the Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) for English: most teachers of English concerned participated in Subject Learning and Review (SLAR) meetings. The reason for not all teachers taking part was reported to be industrial action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The board should take a proactive role in meeting its statutory responsibilities and make arrangements for the review and development of the DEIS action plan, incorporating the school self-evaluation process.
- The principal and the deputy principal should include formal planning meetings in their schedule to develop an agreed strategic vision and adopt an agreed and consistent approach to leading and managing the school.

- A complete audit of teaching, learning and assessment should be undertaken to ensure higher expectations of student learning, and improved student engagement and outcomes.
- All aspects of the specification for Junior Cycle English should be implemented in the case of all class groups, including access to the CBAs and participation by all relevant teachers in SLAR meetings.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1. School ownership and management:

The overall quality of school governance is fair.

The board is correctly constituted and is in the third year of its term. Membership reflects continuity with previous boards allowing for a wealth of knowledge and understanding of the school's development and community needs and challenges to inform decisions. Board members have had access to training, including child protection procedures. Regular meetings are convened and mandatory policies are in place. Representation on the board facilitates good communication with the patrons and agreed reports on meetings are shared with staff and parents.

The board concerns itself with matters of student discipline. A review of the ladder of referral is a current priority. The board is urged to support a more comprehensive review of the code of behaviour, taking account of the various supports and initiatives in place in the school, including curricular support such as JCSP and the Behaviour for Learning (BfL) programme, in order to minimise the escalation of discipline issues to board level. The revised code should be implementable on a consistent basis and reflective of the school's inclusive practices.

The school's draft DEIS action plan (2016-2019) is of adequate quality. There was an evident lack of awareness among board members about the school self-evaluation process (SSE) and its function in school improvement. While it is urgent that the board adopts a DEIS plan, a review of the current draft is needed to ensure that targets for the various themes are informed by current baseline data and are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound (SMART). Improvement plans should have an appropriate focus on teaching and learning (Circular 0040/2016).

The development priorities identified by the board reflect current national priorities and include the implementation of the *Junior Cycle Framework* (2015) and planning for the use of the information and communications technology (ICT) grant. Action plans detailing specifics were not available. Time bound action plans should be prepared to support and progress the implementation of priorities.

School policy documentation lacked consistency in detail of dates of ratification and review. There is a need to clearly define procedures for policy development and review and develop a schedule to ensure that policies are reviewed in a timely manner.

It is commendable that the board reviews student attainment in certificate examinations. A review of outcomes in certificate examinations indicates scope for improvement across a number of subject areas. There was some evidence of action planning to address student attainment at subject department level. It is recommended that this very good practice is adopted across all subjects and that student outcomes in in-house examinations be included in the monitoring of student progress.

As evidenced in meetings and in responses to questionnaires, parents are very welcome in the school. The parents' association (PA) is very active and is very well supported by the HSCL co-ordinator. The PA's main role involves fundraising for the school but it is also aware of its voice in the school community and actively contributes to school policy development and review. Members also recognise that they have an important role in encouraging and supporting other parents' engagement with education and participation in the various courses offered through HSCL and BTEI.

1.2. Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The quality of leadership and management for learning is fair.

There are evident weaknesses in the quality of school leadership and management for learning. Each member of the senior management team (SMT) is clearly committed to creating an inclusive learning environment in which all students achieve their potential. Issues around communication and the lack of a collaborative approach to the strategic leadership and management of teaching and learning are however a significant barrier to the achievement of the SMT's vision for the school and are impacting on student outcomes.

The day-to-day management of the school is good. The SMT discuss day-to-day matters at daily meetings. In this academic year, the deputy principal has been freed of teaching duties. This provides considerable scope for a more proactive involvement in school leadership for teaching and learning and an opportunity to significantly review the responsibilities attached to, in particular, the role of principal and middle management.

The principal is keenly aware of the importance of providing strategic leadership and has appropriately identified areas to be addressed including student attendance, differentiation, *assessment for learning* (AfL) and the role of ICT in enhancing teaching and learning, leading to improved student engagement. There is an urgent need for the SMT to collaboratively develop its strategic leadership role with a focus on improved student experiences and outcomes and the management of resources to maximise and enhance students' learning experiences.

There is a willing and committed staff, many of whom have considerable experience in teaching in the school and a deep understanding of the community. Staff engagement in continuing professional development (CPD) is well supported and staff are also encouraged to assume leadership roles such as head of department and class tutor, and to participate in teams such as the strategy team.

Not all class groups in third year have completed the English Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs). Most of the teachers of English with classes in third year participated in Subject Learning and Review (SLAR) meetings. The reason for not all teachers taking part was reported to be industrial action. In order for all students to benefit from the full range of learning experiences as outlined in the English specification, all aspects of the specification for Junior Cycle English should be implemented in the case of all class groups, including access to the CBAs and participation by all relevant teachers in SLAR meetings.

A very good programme is in place to support students and their parents in the transition into first year. A broad curriculum is provided including a range of optional subjects in junior cycle and in senior cycle. All junior cycle students participate in the JCSP, an intervention that aims to support student retention and the successful completion of the Junior Certificate. The school has identified retention in junior cycle as an area for improvement and yet student profiling, which is an essential part of JCSP, was happening only in the case of a minority of class groups. It is recommended that profiling is completed as intended in the case of all JCSP participants.

Senior cycle students have the option of the LCA or the LCVP. Student retention in LCA has also been identified as a challenge. Good progress has been made in addressing the issue. Subject specialisms have been changed on a number of occasions but students' voice has not been included. It is recommended that the LCA programme be reviewed with a particular focus on student experience in the classroom.

TY has not been offered in the school in a long time. It is recommended that TY be kept on the agenda at board level with a view to its reintroduction.

The minimum hours of instruction in accordance with circular M29/95 is provided. However, the equivalent of two class periods per week is allocated to tutorial time and pastoral care. Registration and the checking of journals are the main activities during these class contact periods. It is recommended that a formal programme of pastoral care be devised for these periods. In general, student journals reflected good use in promoting positive student behaviour and work. There is scope for greater consistency in their use.

Time allocation for subjects is generally good. Senior cycle students do not have access to Physical Education (PE). It is recommended that all classes are allocated a double period of PE.

Student attendance is well monitored and improvements are publically acknowledged and rewarded.

The guidance plan is of satisfactory quality. The allocation for guidance and counselling is very good. Given the additional resources now available, it is recommended that the guidance team takes account of student and parent responses to related questionnaire items and explores how it can further integrate Guidance into the curriculum. The school actively supports the participation of the more academic students in senior cycle in a variety of externally provided third level access programmes including Access to College Education Programme (ACE). As part of the ongoing delivery of the curriculum in the school, it is recommended that, in consultation with the special educational needs (SEN) team, approaches be devised to extend the learning experience of gifted and talented students in junior cycle also.

The student-care team is highly effective and well organised. Regular formal meetings are scheduled and issues are dealt with in an efficient manner. The work of the team is supported by the year heads and class tutors and communication between the teams is effective. Very good internal and external links have been established to support students' educational and wellbeing needs. While the importance of links with various agencies and educational institutions in supporting students' continued engagement with education is recognised, there is a need to conduct an audit of the various initiatives, taking the added value to student experience and outcomes as a key criterion.

SEN resources are, for the most part, appropriately deployed. Reflecting the school's commitment to inclusion, support is provided mainly through in-class support or team teaching. No discrete provision was made for students with English as an additional language (EAL) needs. It is welcome that testing to establish these students' needs was underway and that there is a commitment to prepare a suitable programme to support students' access to learning across the curriculum.

There is a small core SEN team. In order to support the coordination of all SEN provision, the remit of the team should be expanded to include teachers involved in the co-ordination of EAL, JCSP, the BfL teacher and a representative of the guidance department.

There is a clear commitment to creating leadership opportunities for students through, for instance, an active student council and also the *Cairde* peer-to-peer mentoring programme. Student representatives in the student focus group spoke very articulately about their experiences in the school and their ambitions.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

1.3. Management of facilities

Internally, the school accommodation is generally well maintained and optimal use is made of classrooms for their designated purpose. The layout in general classrooms was largely traditional. It is recommended that a whole-school approach be adopted to a classroom layout that better supports active and collaborative learning.

Some good displays of students' work were noted, along with commercial charts, to support learning. The displays in classrooms were most effective when they were used to scaffold and support learning during lessons.

The use of ICT to support learning has been identified as an area for development. The ICT grant provides staff with an excellent opportunity to reflect on, develop and plan for the creative use of ICT as a tool to promote student learning.

The school has not engaged in the Green Flag programme. It is recommended that the student council is supported in developing students' environmental awareness and responsibility more generally.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality of long-term and short-term plans for subjects ranged from good to satisfactory. Schedules for delivery of course content generally identified learning outcomes and teaching methodologies and were most effective when these were linked. To build on this, planning documentation should include differentiated teaching methodologies, linked to learning outcomes, with a clear focus on increasing student engagement and expectations.

Literacy and numeracy strategies consistent with whole-school strategies were documented in some plans. A consistent approach should be adopted to the implementation of literacy and numeracy improvement plans across the curriculum.

The quality of teaching and learning ranged from very good to fair, with satisfactory practice noted overall. Teachers generally created an inclusive classroom environment in which students were comfortable and confident in engaging with learning.

Student behaviour was very good in almost all lessons and there was generally a very good rapport between students and teachers. Students were affirmed for effort and contributions in lessons, and overall responded well to teacher encouragement and enthusiasm.

Teaching approaches and practices varied widely and were predominantly teacher led. The best lessons were well structured and paced, and a good balance between teacher instruction and student

activity was achieved. In these lessons, high expectations of learning were supported by suitably challenging tasks, and by topics to which students related well; and students' active participation was facilitated.

Learning intentions or topics were shared with students from the outset in the majority of lessons. Best practice was noted in a few instances where these were referenced throughout the lesson and reviewed at the end. In a small number of lessons, the learning intention was differentiated. This approach should be developed to ensure that the learning needs of all students are met, and to support the raising of expectations of student learning.

In many lessons students were facilitated to collaborate in their learning through group work and pair work. Better student engagement and more meaningful learning could be achieved by providing better structure to the collaboration, such as the assignment of roles and timing of the activity.

Teachers used a variety of questioning approaches and students were generally confident in answering, often willing to risk incorrect responses. Some very good examples of students asking meaningful, content-related questions were observed. Best practice was noted where questions were well distributed, with appropriate wait time and scaffolding to elicit student responses. In some instances there was also a very good balance between higher-order and lower-order questions and this approach should be developed further in all subject areas to support differentiation and develop students' critical thinking skills.

The quality of assessment was satisfactory overall. Effective verbal feedback was given to students in some lessons, and a few examples of high-quality written formative feedback were noted. A more consistent whole-school approach should be taken to the provision of both verbal and written formative feedback. A few examples of self-assessment and peer-assessment were observed, and clear success criteria were shared with students in one instance. This very good practice should be extended.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1. Management

Progress on the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations is fair.

As evidenced in subsequent DEIS (2013) and Follow Through (2014) evaluations, good progress was made in establishing DEIS planning practices following the 2010 Whole-School Evaluation (WSE). Since the Follow Through evaluation, no further identifiable progress has been made.

As recommended in the WSE report, the posts of responsibility schedule was reviewed in 2016 but the revised schedule was not implemented. The ETB has allocated a significant number of posts at middle-management level. A further review of posts is recommended, and the areas of teaching and learning and planning for school improvement (including SSE) should be prioritised. The review should also take account of the need for greater clarity about the roles at middle-management level, and in the case of senior management, a more equitable sharing of duties appropriate to the respective positions of principal and deputy principal. Including the monitoring of student attainment and target setting in the role of the year head should be considered. To keep the board informed of the relevance of duties, it is recommended that post holders provide a written report on the performance of their post duties to the SMT and the board.

Good progress has been made in addressing issues of teachers' class-contact time. In general, good progress has also been made in the adoption of a team-teaching approach. Team teaching however needs to be more structured.

3.2. Learning and teaching

Good progress has been made as regards the sharing of learning intentions with students at the outset of lessons. There is scope, however, for a greater focus on student learning rather than topic.

Pair work or group work featured in almost half of the lessons observed but, as previously mentioned, activities need better structure to ensure their effectiveness in supporting learning.

Very little progress was evident in the provision of formative feedback on students' written work. This is an area that remains in need of development.

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

The school's engagement with the self-evaluation process is an area for urgent development. Many of the targets and actions in the draft DEIS action plan need to be reviewed and updated to reflect current baseline data and appropriate actions for improvement plans across the DEIS themes should be described.

The school's capacity for improvement is weak. The principal is self-reflective and has correctly identified areas for development. The DEIS planning team is committed to improving learner outcomes and experiences. In order for the school to engage in an effective process of improvement, it is vital that the senior management team works collaboratively and in a mutually supportive manner to plan strategically and develop strong and clear leadership for teaching, learning and assessment in the school. There is an urgent need for the establishment of robust structures and processes to support ongoing effective communication and engagement with school improvement.

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

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board of management acknowledges the WSE: MLL inspection report and is pleased with the following positive findings:

- The highly inclusive nature of the school, parent courses, parental voice in policy development and review and the strong sense of “welcome” in the school experienced by parents.
- The highly committed staff, their depth of experience in teaching and their deep understanding of the community in which they teach.
- That the principal, deputy principal and staff are highly committed to student care and wellbeing.
- The commitment shown to continuing professional development (CPD) by the school is also acknowledged.
- The board also acknowledges the excellent programme in place for students and their parents in the transition from primary to first year.
- The board welcomes the commendation in relation to its role in the analysis of examination results and its work on student attainment.

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

A number of initiatives have been put in place by our board of management, management teams and staff:

- Sub-committees of the board of management in the areas of finance and student discipline have commenced.
- Our board includes new members and both principal and deputy principal attend all meetings.
- All teaching staff have engaged in CPD and in all aspects of implementing the new Junior Cycle Programme. There is full participation in both classroom based assessments (CBAs) and Subject Learning and Review Assessments (SLARs) as per circular 0015/2017. National industrial action is no longer an impediment to this.
- The process of reviewing the DEIS Plan and progression on SSE has commenced. All stakeholders will be involved in this process.
- The newly appointed principal, alongside the deputy principal have adopted a highly collaborative approach to the leadership of teaching and learning and overall school management. This collaborative approach has allowed for the development of strong leadership in the area of school self-evaluation in conjunction with the 2016 document entitled *Looking at Our School: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools*.

We would welcome a return visit in order to afford the Inspectorate an opportunity to confirm the significant improvements and the progress that is being made in delivering and leading high quality teaching and learning in Mount Seskin Community College.