

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Borris Vocational School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Borris Co Carlow
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	70400L

Date of Evaluation: 16-11-2017



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 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

Dates of inspection	06-08 November 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

Borris Vocational School is a co-educational school with a current enrolment of 516 students. The school is under the trusteeship of Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board. The school provides Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). In addition, the school has a new autistic spectrum disorders unit.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of school leadership and management is good; the senior management team is effective in leading learning and managing the organisation but there is scope to strengthen the role of the middle management team.
- Teachers and the senior management team effectively promote inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of students by providing a broad range of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular learning opportunities.
- While there are deficits in strategic planning and school development, the professional expertise and commitment of the board and the senior management team is evident and this will facilitate the identified issues relating to strategic planning, policy development, compliance, and school development to be addressed effectively.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons ranged between good and very good with best practice noted during well planned collaborative learning activities and in instances where students took responsibility for their own learning; in other lessons there was scope for more student-centred active learning.
- The school has made some good progress on previous recommendations, but there is scope to advance areas such as assessment for learning which could form part of the next school improvement plan.
- The quality of engagement in the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process is only fair at this time but there is a willingness to re-engage in the process and identify other areas for improvement.

Recommendations

- School management should further develop the middle management structure by providing a more meaningful distributed leadership role for assistant principals (APs).
- The board of management should take a stronger governance role in leading and developing a school plan which identifies clear goals and expectations for the school while also addressing issues of compliance such as policy development and review, accuracy of the school self-evaluation (SSE) mandatory checklist, and provision of the minimum weekly tuition time for students on the timetable.
- To build on the good teaching and learning practices observed, all teachers should develop their assessment for learning and differentiation strategies.
- The principal and other school leaders should lead the School Self-evaluation (SSE) process and ensure it is reflected and embedded in classroom practices.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1 QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of school leadership and management is good. School leaders have created a collaborative, inclusive and well-managed school. The key areas to focus on are the development of the guiding vision for the school, leading the school's engagement in self-evaluation and further empowering middle management in leadership roles.

Leading learning and teaching

The principal and teachers work hard to promote a learning culture by encouraging teaching that is engaging and challenging for learners. This is supported by individual teachers attending instructional leadership training and sharing their learning with the wider staff. In addition, the whole staff has received continuing professional development (CPD) focused on improving teaching and learning. To continue this good practice, areas identified for improvement during the evaluation such as differentiation strategies, assessment for learning, and developing learner autonomy, should be considered for future training.

Staff, students and the senior management team promote inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of students by providing a broad range of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular learning opportunities. The school places a value on diversity; supporting students with additional educational needs and encouraging active participation by all members of the school community. Students play an active role in promoting equality and fairness by engaging in social justice projects.

There are high quality support structures in place to provide for students' wellbeing, learning and individual educational needs. Regular meetings of year head, learning support and student support teams take place. A positive addition to the school is the highly effective autism spectrum disorder unit catering for a full cohort of six students, who are supported and integrated into mainstream and small group settings. Very detailed learning profiles and support materials are available to staff who are teaching all students with special educational needs. This is very good practice and the high priority placed on student welfare is commendable.

The school promotes innovation and creativity through subjects and modules such as Art, Photography, Fashion, Construction Studies and Robotics. Students are encouraged and supported by teachers to participate in competitions and their work is proudly displayed.

While the school offers a broad and balanced curriculum, the current curriculum may not meet the future needs of all students. During the student focus group meeting some students expressed a desire for different subjects to be included in the subject options such as Computer Science and Physics. It is recommended that school management lead a curriculum review of the subjects currently on offer, and to investigate demand for subjects, including new subjects like Computer Science and Physical Education coming on-stream from the Department of Education and Skills.

The TY programme is well structured and facilitates students to select from a wide range of subjects. Very good assessment practices are in place to encourage reflection and self-assessment through the use of an electronic portfolio. Commendably, the TY programme has been reviewed annually. TY students go out on work experience each Friday and therefore are only in school for three and a half days of tuition per week. This practice should be reviewed with a view to providing more meaningful instruction time for students on the programme. In addition, the TY group finishes tuition before the end of the school year, which falls short of the required time in school indicated in Circular M25/95. This shortfall in tuition time should be addressed so students have more time to reflect on their learning and develop their communication, social and group work skills.

Senior cycle students who are not following the LCVP have two study periods per week and as a result are not receiving twenty-eight hours of instruction time as required by Circular M29/95, Time-in-School. In all instances where there is a shortfall in tuition time, school management should ensure that students are provided with valuable learning experiences.

Teachers have engaged effectively with CPD for the new Junior Cycle specifications. Planning time is provided and all teachers are allocated weekly professional time. A Junior Cycle co-ordinator has been appointed in line with Circular 15/2017 to support teachers. Subject learning and assessment meetings are taking place and teachers are working collaboratively to implement the new specifications. It is praiseworthy that team teaching has been introduced in some lessons to support learners.

While the school has highly effective systems for monitoring progress of learners with special educational needs, there is scope to develop more mainstream academic tracking and monitoring systems.

Managing the organisation

The board of management and the principal effectively fulfil their responsibilities to create and maintain an orderly, secure and healthy learning environment. Policies have been developed to support safety and wellbeing but the SPHE and Wellbeing policies needs to be reviewed and updated.

The principal and deputy principal are a strong team with complementary strengths. They have developed effective communication systems with the whole school community. Staff, parents and students agreed that there is an open door policy and a willingness to listen to opinions and ideas. As a team, they are committed to their roles and are effective in managing the day-to-day running of the school.

Deployment of teachers is generally good but the principal and deputy principal are currently teaching a small number of hours. The deputy principal is also fulfilling the guidance counsellor role, providing individual guidance counselling to students. This situation is unsatisfactory, especially as the school is growing in numbers and the management team needs time to focus on leading and developing the school. The senior management team should prioritise the recruitment of a guidance counsellor and reduce their teaching commitments.

The school code of behaviour is communicated effectively by senior management to students and parents and it emphasises the importance of positive behaviour. Students, parents and staff believe the code is working effectively to promote a positive learning environment. Every student surveyed reported that they understand the school rules. Students were observed to be very well-behaved during the evaluation. It is commendable that students' responses to the questionnaires were very positive; particularly relating to the statements that: there is a good atmosphere, they feel proud to attend this school and there is an adult in the school they could approach if someone is bullying them. In a few instances, the responses to a small number of questions in the student questionnaires merit some further examination by the student care team in the areas of student voice and help when choosing subjects.

The school buildings and grounds are maintained by the school community to a high standard. Environmental awareness is promoted through the Green School activities such as recycling and waste management. Students' work, projects and achievements are displayed on the corridors and in classrooms. The TY horticulture group is developing a therapeutic garden to complement the quiet spaces and gardens in the school. The addition of a much needed canteen in the proposed new extension will allow students a dedicated space to socialise at breaks.

Leading school development

The current board is appropriately constituted and represents a wide range of expertise from the local community. In line with good practice, the board has received training and it is evident that there is a strong commitment to the development of the school.

The guiding vision for the school is not clear and it was difficult for the board to articulate the goals and expectations for the school. The board's awareness of its role in leading school development, supporting teaching and learning, strategic planning, and policy formation, is not as well developed as it could be. In recent times, the focus has been primarily on supporting the principal with the new building extension project.

A process of strategic planning should be instigated. Part of this process should include the identification of key priorities, a curriculum review and the development of a systematic schedule of policies with future review dates, beginning with the admissions policy which is in need of immediate attention as it has not been updated for many years.

The senior management team and the board develop constructive relationships with all stakeholders. Students are invited to meet with the board annually and there is close co-operation between the principal and the board about school life. The principal effectively facilitates and supports a very active and committed parents' association (PA) to fulfil its partnership and advisory role through his regular attendance at frequently held PA meetings. Communication with the wider parent body is an area that warrants further development as some parents surveyed did not feel consulted or informed about the work of the board and the PA.

The school has experienced a period of significant change in recent times, including the loss of some middle management posts due to staff retirements; this has been effectively responded to and managed by the senior management team and board. The principal and deputy principal recognise that a crucial part of their role is to lead and manage change and this involves action planning for improvement. However, they agree that this process of school self-evaluation and action planning needs to improve. The identification of school priorities, setting specific, measurable, time-bound targets, agreeing actions and systematic monitoring should lead to identifiable improvements in teaching and learner outcomes.

Developing leadership capacity

It is commendable that the principal and deputy principal critique their practice as leaders on an annual basis and collaboratively identify and plan areas to develop such as timetabling, time management and attending to their own wellbeing and that of others. It is very good practice that the principal offers to meet staff annually on a one-to-one basis to review their work and discuss continuing professional development needs.

The principal encourages the formation of teams and a number of staff focus groups exist in areas such as literacy, numeracy and discipline. The year head team is composed of diligent post and non-post holders; thus building leadership capacity from within the wider staff. However, there was little evidence that the assistant principals' team functions as a middle management team involved in leading school development. There is scope to strengthen the role of the assistant principals by consulting them on matters such as school policy development and initiatives like academic monitoring of students.

School management and teachers actively encourage students to take a leading role in school initiatives such as the student council, *Meitheal*, Green Schools, Amber Flag, Active Schools and peer mentoring programmes. However, there continues to be scope to increase the student voice at classroom level, in decision making and policy development.

Child Protection Procedures

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.

2 QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment ranged from good to very good in the majority of lessons observed. It was satisfactory in the majority of the remaining lessons and was fair in a few lessons.

Learner outcomes and experiences

In all lessons, students were motivated to learn, engaged in respectful interaction with their teachers, and demonstrated a positive approach to their learning. Learners' experiences were developed through positive differentiation strategies that supported individuals at relevant points in the lessons. Very good practice was noted where students were enabled to negotiate their learning thereby increasing their autonomy and effectiveness as learners.

In the majority of lessons, students demonstrated high levels of engagement, interest and participation in learning. In the good and very good lessons, students developed a clear sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning, learning tasks were challenging and appropriate, and students were making good progress. Best practice was observed when learning intentions were shared and revisited so that students were reflecting successfully on their own learning. In a small number of instances, learning activities were not sufficiently student-centred, collaborative or engaging, resulting in limited progression by individuals. This should be addressed by teachers.

Students demonstrated good subject knowledge and had the opportunity to practise subject-specific skills in most lessons. In a few lessons, students did not have sufficient opportunity to practise oral language skills, make presentations on their work or to conduct practical investigations in line with new specifications. In these lessons, student voice should be promoted through an appropriate balance between teacher input and productive student activity, participation and response.

Learner outcomes in the state examinations are monitored by subject departments and school management and show good levels of attainment. Very good practice was noted in the detailed analysis of attainment and identification of strategies to improve learner outcomes which were included in some subject departments' planning documentation. All subject departments should engage in an annual review of learner outcomes.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

Teachers created positive learning environments based on mutual respect, affirmation and high expectations of students' behaviour. In many lessons, teachers' enthusiasm for their subject area motivated students to actively engage in learning.

Lessons were generally well planned and prepared and teachers identified in advance resources suitable for the specific learning intentions. Student activities were well chosen in the majority of lessons and were well adapted to students' individual learning needs. Teachers provided good assistance where students were involved in group or pair activities. In the best lessons, learner

autonomy was supported through well-planned and implemented collaborative activities. This good practice should be extended.

Positive teaching approaches helped ensure that learning was effective. Digital technologies were used efficiently as a teaching tool to support and to consolidate learning. Teachers were observed to work effectively together to support students through team teaching.

In the few lessons that were predominantly teacher led, there was significant scope for improvement in ownership of and responsibility of students for their learning. In a significant minority of lessons, there was a need to create more opportunities for students to engage in meaningful and reflective activities that progressed learning.

Teachers used a range of teaching and assessment approaches in the lessons observed. In the majority of lessons, the use of assessment to support learning was good or very good. Best practice was observed when teachers provided students with constructive developmental oral and written feedback on their work. This good practice should be extended to all lessons.

When teaching was very good, it was evident that teachers' use of formative assessment combined with their awareness of each students' individual learning needs enabled them to adapt teaching and learning practices to help students overcome challenges. In a few cases, more appropriate differentiated tasks and assignments would have better supported student learning. It is recommended that teachers develop their AfL and differentiation strategies.

Teachers used questioning effectively in the majority of lessons. In some lessons, questioning elicited substantial and meaningful responses from students. Best practice was observed when questioning reinforced and consolidated new learning, elicited substantial student responses and enabled students to think, reason and apply learning. In a small number of lessons, better use of higher-order, probing and directed questioning and giving more time to students when answering would have developed students' knowledge and understanding.

Collaborative planning is well established and most subject departments have met regularly and shared resources online. However, there was a wide standard of quality in the subject plans ranging from very good to fair. It is recommended that senior management leads a planning process, highlighting good planning practices. There is further scope to advance collaborative planning for the new Junior Cycle.

3 IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

While some good progress was noted in the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations, there are still recurring themes emerging that need attention such as the role of the board in school planning, development of a whole school guidance plan, and addressing the provision of study periods to Leaving Certificate students.

Senior management has made some good progress in supporting curricular planning and this is evident in the high quality plans for some subjects; however, this standard is not consistent across all departments. Planning is most effective when it is collectively managed by the subject department members. The quality features of the best plans include clear learning outcomes, common exams with agreed marking schemes, very good analysis of student attainment, and clear areas identified for development or teacher CPD. Very good progress was noted in the area of special education needs (SEN) learning outcomes and detailed information is shared with all staff to support students.

Teaching and Learning

The teachers have made very good progress in addressing the use of the target language in lessons. However, the provision of opportunities for students to communicate in the target language is still an area for improvement. Teachers provided good collaborative learning opportunities and digital technologies were used successfully in lessons observed. Other areas identified in previous reports were assessment for learning, homework, and written formative feedback. As AfL is the focus of the current SSE plan, some further progress in these areas could be achieved through a whole-school approach.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The quality of engagement in the SSE process is only fair at this time but there is a willingness to re-engage in the process.

Literacy and numeracy strategies formed part of the initial SSE process and good work was undertaken to develop practices such as common calculation methods, subject-specific key words and non-subject specific literacy development, which have become embedded in some classrooms. Significant baseline data was gathered and good targets were set. However, engagement in this process has lost momentum and as a result progress has stalled. The school recognises this and is aware of its responsibilities. The school management should re-activate this action planning for improvement cycle and focus on aspects of teaching, learning and assessment.

Assessment for learning is identified as the current SSE strand and the school has begun to focus on measuring current practices and setting targets. Consideration should now be given to selecting additional areas of teaching, learning or assessment to move the process forward while supporting the implementation of the new junior cycle in this second phase of SSE. There is additional scope to engage in whole-staff reflection on previous targets and actions to measure the lasting impact and improvements to teaching and learning.

As part of its governance role the board should ensure the SSE process is effectively managed and oversee a school improvement plan which is developed and shared with the whole school community.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school has very good capacity to innovate and improve. School management and staff are supportive, enthusiastic and interested in improving the school. Parents and students are willing and interested in contributing to policy and school development. Collectively, school management, staff, parents, and students are a strong team.

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

The Board of Management welcomes this report and see it as recognition and affirmation of very good practices and a commitment to excellence.

The teaching staff and management are encouraged by many of the findings, most notably that:

- The principal and teachers work hard to promote a learning culture by encouraging teaching that is engaging and challenging for learners.
- There are high quality support structures in place to provide for students' wellbeing, learning and individual educational needs.
- That parents and students are willing and interested in contributing to policy and school development and that collectively, school management, staff, parents, and students are a strong team.
- There is effective promotion of inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of students by providing a broad range of curricular and extra-curricular learning opportunities.
- The school promotes innovation and creativity.
- That students believe that there is a good atmosphere in the school and that they feel proud to attend this school.

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

The Board of Management is committed to addressing the recommendations contained in the report.

The recommendations are welcomed and when fully implemented will further improve the quality of teaching and learning in Borris Vocational School.

The Board and Staff have already made progress in the following areas:

The Board of Management at its most recent meeting has made the commitment to take a stronger governance role in leading and developing a school which identifies clear goals and expectations for the school.

A comprehensive review of Middle Management Structures has been initiated by the Board of Management and is currently underway, the process will be completed before the end of the 2017/18 Academic Year. The process is guided by: the requirements of The Department of Education and Skills and its agencies; the recommendations of this report and by recent subject and programme inspections recommendations and by our school improvement plan.

A detailed management-led review of the Junior Cycle Curriculum has been undertaken involving all stakeholders, a comprehensive Senior Cycle curriculum review will be undertaken at the beginning of the 18/19 academic year.

Demand for Physical Education as a Leaving Certificate Subject was gauged, applied for and will be on the Senior Cycle Curriculum from September 2018.

Further progress has been made on Assessment for Learning, the current SSE strand.

The BOM at its most recent meeting has committed to work with school management in leading and developing a school plan which identifies clear goals and expectations.

The school leadership team have developed the in-school structures to ensure more focused leadership of the SSE process and to ensure it is reflected and embedded in classroom practices.