Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Airm na scoile / School name</th>
<th>Coláiste na Ríochta</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seoladh na scoile / School address</td>
<td>Listowel Co Kerry.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</td>
<td>70500P</td>
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Date of Evaluation: 19-10-2016
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 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>17, 18 and 19 October 2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Meeting with parents</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Meeting with Board of Management</td>
<td>• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Meetings with principal and deputy principal</td>
<td>• Observation of teaching and learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Meetings with key staff</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student focus-group interview</td>
<td>• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers</td>
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### SCHOOL CONTEXT

Coláiste na Ríochta, formerly Listowel Community College, was founded in 1903 and is a co-educational school with an enrolment of 62 students in its post-primary sector. The school is under the patronage of Kerry Education and Training Board (ETB) and its catchment area includes ten feeder primary schools. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. The diverse nature of the student intake has resulted in the development of an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) unit in the school. In addition to the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate, the school also offers the Junior Certificate School Programme (JSCP), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. The school has a large further education sector whose students attend the North Kerry College of Further Education, with whom Coláiste na Ríochta currently shares its school campus.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

**FINDINGS**

- The board of management and senior management display high-quality leadership in all areas of school life and are centrally involved in advancing, sharing and promoting the development of the school.
- There is a clear student-centred focus to all initiatives in the school which is driven by the board of management and Kerry ETB, and led by senior management and staff.
- The commitment of all staff to creating and maintaining a positive learning environment for students is clear.
- The sharing of the school campus with the further education college presents some challenges and opportunities, all of which have been the subject of careful consideration by in-school management, the board of management and Kerry ETB.
- The quality of student supports is excellent and the focus on the care of each individual student is clearly evident in the wide range of supports that are in place.
- The quality of teaching and learning observed during the evaluation was very good with many instances of exemplary practice observed.
- The board of management and Kerry ETB have successfully promoted the development of high-quality teaching and learning and progressive pedagogical practices among teachers.
• Teachers are collegial and collaborative in their work and the idea of the reflective practitioner is clearly embraced by all teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

• The board of management and Kerry ETB should continue to closely monitor the issue of the shared campus between the post-primary and further education sector with a view to finding an optimum solution for both sectors.
• The board should communicate its plans in relation to school improvement in the context of school self-evaluation (SSE) to the wider school community.
• Lessons which have been learned from the many innovative teaching and learning initiatives in the school should now be summarised and consolidated into key strategies that can be embedded into teaching and learning practices for all teachers.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1. School ownership and management

The board of management of Coláiste na Ríochta is properly constituted and is representative of all key stakeholders in the school. Kerry ETB provides guidance to the board on all aspects of the operation of the school and, commendably, has ensured a continued focus on developing and maintaining high quality teaching and learning, and innovative teaching practices. The board, in collaboration with Kerry ETB, has been very much to the fore in promoting initiatives such as Developing Schools Enriching Learning (DSEL), Instructional Leadership, Battelle for Kids, team teaching, and peer mentoring and observation. The board feels that these are having a very positive impact. Board members have had access to training provided by Kerry ETB and are knowledgeable, interested and dedicated to the development of the school. The school’s core values of equality, inclusion, respect and tolerance for diversity are promoted by the board and are lived out in all day-to-day interactions in the school.

In recent years, a decision was taken to create separate identities for the post-primary school, Coláiste na Ríochta, and the further education college. The board views the sharing of the campus and facilities with the further education college as a significant issue with regard to the development of the post-primary school and has been proactive in addressing any related concerns that it has identified. While the students of both sectors operate independently and interact in a positive atmosphere, it is recommended that the board’s plans for the separation of both sectors be progressed. In this regard, a physical separation of the post-primary school and further education college, within the existing campus, would appear to offer the optimum solution in the short to medium term.

Clear and well established steps for policy development and review are in place and the board reviews existing policies following a specific time schedule. Various stakeholders in the school community are consulted, as appropriate, with regard to policy development and ratification.

The board has made considerable efforts to ensure as broad a curriculum as possible is available to the students. The sharing of teachers with the further education college is a significant benefit in this
regard, as many teachers have timetables split between both institutions, and this has also facilitated the introduction of new subjects in recent years.

An active parents’ association is in place and very strong relationships have been developed with parents. Feedback from parent questionnaires, completed as part of this evaluation, was overwhelmingly positive.

Good formal and informal communication systems are in place in the school with regular announcements, emails and newsletters helping to keep all members of the school community well informed. Phone calls are made to students’ homes as needed with regard to absences, but commendably, the school also makes a conscious effort to communicate positive news to parents. Internal communication among staff is facilitated through the use of a shared network drive in school and also through cloud-based storage. The principal’s report at board meetings is very comprehensive. Reports from the student council and from staff are also part of the agenda for board meetings. It is recommended that an agreed report, with due regard to confidentiality, be formulated to issue to staff and to the parents’ association following all board meetings. The school website is used very effectively to communicate information to the school community. It is recommended that the board communicate to the school community its plans in relation to school improvement in the context of SSE and the required report on the operation and performance of the school. The school website may be the most appropriate vehicle through which this can be achieved.

Appropriate Child Protection procedures are in place and the school is acutely aware and proactive in relation to any potential issues. 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.

1.2. Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The school’s new senior management team is operating very effectively and leads the school with the evident support of staff. The leadership of the senior management team is informed by a vision for the school that celebrates diversity, empowers staff and views each student as an individual to be nurtured and challenged to achieve their full potential. The team successfully promotes a culture of improvement, collaboration, innovation and creativity in teaching and learning. Parents, students, and staff all testify to the openness of the principal and deputy principal to suggestions from all members of the school community.

The commitment, engagement and professionalism of staff is very good. This is evidenced by teachers’ high quality work in the classroom, leadership of various initiatives, support for extracurricular activities, and a clear commitment to the shared vision of offering the best education for each individual student. The hugely positive responses to teacher questionnaires completed as part of this evaluation are indicative of a staff that has a very positive disposition towards their work in the school.

The clear focus of the school in prioritising the development of teaching and learning is highly commendable and is co-ordinated by a teaching and learning team in the school. In tandem with other Kerry ETB schools, Coláiste na Ríochta is implementing Battelle for Kids and this is underpinned by a clear strategic plan and is having a positive impact on teachers’ classroom practice. It is noted, and highly commended, that a peer observation week has been planned for May 2017. School management and Kerry ETB have been very much to the fore in promoting this and responses from students to questionnaires indicated very high levels of satisfaction with teaching in the school. Successful professional networks have been established with other Kerry ETB schools. Staff are
encouraged to avail of continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities and have done so extensively. Staff have also provided in-house CPD and a range of innovative teaching practices has emerged from staff participation in such events. The challenge for school management will be to identify key lessons learned from the many worthwhile initiatives which are in place, and to strategically implement these across the school.

The quality of planning in the school is good and a planning template, provided by management, has helped to ensure a clear, coherent structure to subject plans. While it is acknowledged that some subject departments consist of just one teacher, some unevenness with regard to the development of plans for various subject areas was noted. Many plans contained some very good, relevant, generic material but would now benefit from adaptation to ensure that they are appropriate to the school’s own context. Very good whole-school initiatives have been planned around the area of student attainment; however, individual subject department plans should also reflect how teaching and learning will help to achieve school self-evaluation (SSE) targets. There is a need for a brief developmental section to all plans outlining short, medium and long-term areas for development and how these are to be achieved. The assessment policy, which is in development, should also be advanced. A very useful template has been developed to aid teachers in peer observation and reflection. This is very positive. Planning for the implementation of the reform of junior cycle is well advanced. Arrangements for subject learning and assessment review (SLAR) meetings are in place and teachers have attended CPD provided by the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) team.

Good reporting structures are in place with common tests introduced two years ago for Christmas and summer house examinations. Reports are sent home after these examinations as well as after class tests at mid-term and Easter, and following mock examinations at Easter. Good levels of formative written commentary were noted in students' work.

There is clear evidence of distributed leadership among staff with significant staff involvement in leading a range of working groups, not merely confined to teachers who hold posts of responsibility. These groups are facilitated to meet regularly, but a significant amount of voluntary work also takes place. Many teachers are involved in the provision of a wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. These are having a very positive impact on the experience of students in the school and their holistic development.

The quality of supports available to students is excellent. These include the wide curricular provision, the mutually respectful interactions that underpin life in the school, and the strong student support system that is in place in which all teachers feel they have a role. Staff demonstrate a clear willingness to affirm students at every opportunity and to communicate positive news to parents. Students’ performance in certificate examinations is closely monitored with a view to helping each student to maximise their potential and relevant attainment targets have been set as part of the school’s SSE work.

There is outstanding support available for students with additional educational needs, often provided through team-teaching, small classes, withdrawal and other pedagogical strategies, and through the work of teachers in the school’s Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) unit. The work of the school’s special needs assistants (SNA) is particularly valued in providing support to students in all areas of school life. This is having a very positive impact on teaching and learning and in fostering skills for independence among students. Comprehensive whole-school guidance planning is in place. The personal safety board, which is aimed at ensuring that all students feel safe in the school, is particularly praiseworthy.
The student-centred focus of the school has emerged from the school’s ethos. This is evident in the respectful engagements evident in classroom interactions and a wide range of other school activities. Students reported feeling listened to and valued and cited changes to the school uniform, the type of food available in the school’s canteen, the venue for the school tour and the student experience survey questionnaires as examples of the open, collaborative approach of management. There is also an active student council in place who feel able to go to principal with any concerns communicated to them. The responses to student questionnaires administered as part of this evaluation were very positive and the switch to one-hour lessons in the current school year has also been very well received. Good procedures are in place for the monitoring of attendance and punctuality. The role of the school administrative staff is important in managing communication between the school and home in this regard.

1.3. Management of facilities

The school is bright and welcoming and is maintained in excellent condition. This reflects very positively on the work of the caretaking and ancillary staff, and on the pride which students take in their school building. The board of management has initiated clear development plans in relation to the physical separation of the post-primary and further-education sectors of the school and it is recommended that any infrastructural development should view this as a priority item. The school is very aware of its environmental responsibilities and strong links have been forged with the Listowel Tidy Towns committee. This is very positive. The absence of a suitable indoor physical education facility was an area of concern identified by students, but the school has made every effort to compensate for this deficit by accessing facilities available in the local community.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1. The quality of learning and teaching

The overall quality of teaching and learning observed during the evaluation was very good. The significant, positive impact of the school’s teaching and learning team was clearly evident in this regard. Among the most notable characteristics of the lessons observed were: the clear, coherent lesson structure underpinned by effective lesson planning; the wide range of teaching methodologies utilised; the focus on active-learning and cooperative-learning strategies; and the provision of individual attention to students, as required. During practical lessons, students had ample opportunity for individual and practical engagement in a range of activities. A good range of teacher questioning was evident, although students were sometimes reluctant to offer questions of their own. Greater distribution of questions among all students in the class was suggested in a minority of lessons.

Very good use of information and communications technology (ICT) by teachers was noted in many lessons. While this added real value to the students’ experience, there is scope for greater student use of ICT in lessons. This also emerged from interviews with students as something they would like. The scaffolding of learning using ICT during an art lesson was particularly impressive and could serve as an exemplar for such practices in other departments.

Pacing of lessons was good overall and appropriate levels of student expectation were set by teachers. Some issues regarding the amount of content planned for delivery in lessons was noted. It is accepted that this is a function of teachers getting used to planning for one-hour lessons, as this has only been in place in the school since the start of the current academic year.
There was good evidence of differentiation as a support for individual students in the mixed-ability class contexts. In tandem with this, greater use of a “must, should, could” approach to the sharing of learning intentions was advised in some lessons, to identify, respectively, the essential, desirable and exceptional learning intentions for each lesson. The structured approach to the assignment and review of homework, and its link to the extension of learning in lessons, was very evident. The review of work in students' copybooks and the provision of formative written feedback to students on their written work was noted as common practice and this was particularly well facilitated by team teaching.

Teachers modelled courteous, respectful interactions with students and, consequently, a lesson atmosphere of mutual respect prevailed. As a result, students in all lessons had a positive learning experience. Some very good use of pair and group work was observed. A developmental approach to advancing pedagogical practices was evident, which has seen teachers become involved in team teaching, active learning and peer review.

To further develop these very good practices, the school should consider extending team teaching to all subject areas, where possible, and strategies for the use of team teaching should be considered in all subject plans. Excellent practices in this regard were observed in a number of lessons with the approach of the music department being particularly praiseworthy. The use of team teaching by this department was, commendably, underpinned by careful planning in the subject department plan.

While differentiation was well utilised to provide support for students, the school should also consider differentiation in task assignment at various levels, facilitating student choice. Teaching practices that empower students to make appropriate choices and to take ownership of their own learning should also be encouraged. These should complement the aim of increasing recognition of the students as stakeholders in the education process, which is cited in the school’s excellent results based planning document, produced as part of its SSE work.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1. Management

School management demonstrates a clear commitment to the implementation of recommendations from all previous evaluation reports. All recommendations have been implemented where possible and all have been given thorough consideration both by the school’s senior management team and the board of management. The use of SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound) target setting has now become established practice in the school following on from recommendations related to planning in a recent DEIS inspection in the school. This is commended.

3.2. Learning and teaching

Recommendations from previous inspection reports have clearly been taken on board with regard to teaching and learning. It was common practice to see learning intentions shared with students at the start of lessons. Very good monitoring and correction of homework, including very good formative commentary was evident across all subject areas. A range of collaborative learning strategies were used in many lessons, although some scope for improvement was still noted with regard to the need to assign clear roles to students during group work. Following on from a recommendation made in a science inspection, there is now very good health and safety signage evident in practical classes. The commitment of the school to implementing recommendations from all previous inspection reports,
to complement the school’s own improvement agenda, has had a very positive impact on the quality of education provided in the school.

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

The school has established very comprehensive data gathering and analysis processes as part of its SSE work. There are clearly defined areas of focus for SSE in the school and clear SMART targets have been established in the areas of literacy, numeracy and attainment. Commendably, areas of focus beyond this have also been identified to include partnership with parents, attendance, retention and junior cycle reform. The DEIS planning process, Battelle for Kids and the SSE process are all operating seamlessly in the school and are complementing each other. As part of the school’s SSE work there is a need to publish a summary school improvement plan (SIP) to the whole school community. The school has considerable expertise and the capacity for continued school improvement within its own staff and Kerry ETB has demonstrated its willingness to provide any additional support to the school as required.
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 the school’s provision of each area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example of descriptive terms</th>
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<tr>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>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 very good standard.</td>
<td>Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils’ learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;</td>
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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 is delighted that the Department of Education and Schools’ Inspectorate notes that:-

- The board of management and senior management display high quality leadership in all aspects of school life.
- There exists a clear student centred focus on all initiatives.
- The commitment of all staff to creating and maintaining a positive learning environment for students is clear.
- The quality of student supports is excellent and the focus on the care of each individual student is clear in the wide range of supports that are in place.
- The quality of student supports is excellent and the focus on the care of each individual student is clear in the wide range of supports that are in place.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good with instances of exemplary practice observed.
- The role of the board and Kerry ETB in successfully promoting the development of high quality teaching and learning and progressive pedagogical practices among teachers.
- Our teaching staff are collegial and collaborative in their work and the idea of the reflective practitioner is clearly embraced by all teachers.
- Also the work of the schools special needs assistants is particularly valued in providing supports to all students in all areas of school life.
- The school has a comprehensive system of whole school guidance in place.

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 actions the school is taking to address the recommendations are:

1 Kerry ETB is consulting with the Department to address the issue of mixed provision in the one building to reduce child protection concerns. The existence of a primary school on site since 2004 needs to be addressed in the context of finding an overall solution for Coláiste Na Riochta. An alternative location for the primary school needs to be found. Kerry ETB & the Gaelscoil board of management have met since the inspection and regular contact with the Department has been maintained. A few properties in the Listowel area have been looked at and the school board of management is anxious to find a solution.

2 School Self Evaluation (SSE) plans are on the school website in a prominent section. The board will also ensure copies of same will be sent to parents.

3 The teaching and learning team welcome the recommendation from the Inspectorate to consolidate the learning from past and current initiatives into key strategies which can then be embedded into the teaching and learning practices of all our teachers. We believe that teacher professional collaboration with a focus on teaching and learning is pertinent to embedding these key strategies and so will continue to promote the practice of peer observation to enrich teaching and learning here in Coláiste Na Riochta. Finally, through the continued use of the DESL Online Battelle programme, our focus will be on the use of formative instructional practices whilst also using an evidenced based structured evaluation system where the student voice matters.