

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

School name	Scoil Aireagail
School address	Ballyhale Co. Kilkenny
Roll number	70570N

Date of Evaluation: 14-01-2019



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning reports on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. It affirms good practice and makes recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

How to read this report

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

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

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

The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.
4. The Child Safeguarding Statement meets the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.
5. The records of the last three board of management meetings record a child protection oversight report that meet the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017.
6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all school personnel on the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2017
7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE, Wellbeing).
8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	9, 14, 15, 16, 22, 24 January 2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with board of management• Meeting with senior management• Meetings with key staff• Review of relevant documents• Student focus-group interviews• Meeting with parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Feedback to senior management, board of management and teachers

School context

Scoil Aireagail is a co-educational post-primary school with 199 students in the patronage of Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board. It provides the Junior Cycle programme, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and the established Leaving Certificate.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of leadership and management is appropriate overall with opportunities for improvement also presenting. Leadership of school development is good. Some very good practices are employed in school self-evaluation (SSE).
- There is scope for improvement in aspects of instructional leadership, including developing the leadership practice of teachers and students and leading the implementation of agreed whole-school approaches to teaching and learning. Management of the teaching resource hours requires change.
- Teaching resources provided to support mainstream students with special education needs (SEN) are being significantly underutilised.
- Students and teachers demonstrate very positive attitudes to inclusion and good procedures are in place to support student care.
- The quality of teaching and learning observed was mostly good.
- Recommendations from previous inspections have been satisfactorily progressed.
- The school has good capacity to address the areas requiring improvement.

Recommendations

- Senior management should take further action to extend teachers' engagement with and implementation of agreed whole-school approaches to teaching and learning. This should include: meeting with teachers in relation to the implementation of the school improvement plan (SIP) and curricular change, and holding regular deep discussions on how these are being embedded in classroom practice.
- The school should ensure the allocated teaching resource hours are used fully and in line with Circular 0014/2017 and the *Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools*.
- Senior management should increase the opportunities for more students and teachers to develop their practice as leaders, and enable them to take the lead at times.
- All teachers should devise and use a wider range of strategies and resources that support differentiation in daily lessons; school leaders should facilitate continuing professional development (CPD) in differentiation.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

It is good that a focus on improving teaching and learning is evident in the practices of the board, senior management and teachers. The leadership of learning and teaching is appropriate overall with some possibilities for improvement also presenting. Further development is required to lead the implementation of agreed whole-school teaching, learning and assessment practices so that they become embedded at classroom level.

The board is aware of the SSE process, including agreed school improvement planning targets, and engages in discussions on the outcomes. Through school planning, at staff meetings and staff planning sessions, senior management has advocated the development of teaching and learning and has directed teachers' focus on improving their methodologies. This has included facilitating staff engagement in instructional leadership programmes, placing focus on developing assessment for learning practices and developing SIPs for literacy, numeracy, assessment and homework. Through the new staff handbook, senior management is taking action to promote greater consistency in student management, assessment for learning and homework. Teachers identify good teaching and learning practices at staff meetings, and they are given dedicated time at planning sessions to discuss these among subject departments. At times, subject departments use the *Looking at our School* framework to identify effective practice. While there is recognition among teachers of what good practice looks like, there has not been sufficiently deep discussion on how teachers are embedding identified practices. The whole staff should regularly engage in reflection and evaluation of what the school is doing well and what needs to develop in classrooms in order to improve learning and to bring cohesion to agreed whole-school practices.

Senior management supports CPD. A number of staff took part in instructional leadership training that included assessment for learning. Some teachers are currently pursuing CPD in the Magenta principles. Individually, teachers avail of CPD, including aspects of special education. Whole-staff CPD in recent years consisted of training in a digital strategy and in-service in the Junior Cycle. It is recommended that, following attendance at all CPD events considered to enhance students' learning experiences, the participating teacher should lead a whole-staff discussion on how the new approaches might fruitfully be implemented and embedded in lessons. Given the wide range of student needs and abilities and mainstream mixed ability, CPD in differentiation should become a priority.

There is very good support from staff and management for the provision of a holistic education. A high proportion of parents agree the school helps their child's social and personal development. Good procedures are in place to support student care, including an effective pastoral care system involving year heads, class tutors, senior management and the guidance counselling service.

Students and teachers demonstrate very positive attitudes to inclusion. A significant number of staff possess qualifications in SEN and a core team of teachers delivers learning support lessons. The school has a special class for Autism Spectrum Disorder and these students are included in mainstream lessons. Learning plans are prepared for individual students, and mainstream teachers should avail of them in lesson planning for differentiation. While schemes of work have been developed for students in receipt of learning support lessons, there is considerable variance in the quality of these; they ought to be reviewed by those co-ordinating SEN.

The school, relative to its size, offers a wide range of subject options to meet the needs of students. There is general satisfaction among students with the subjects provided and the systems for choosing subjects. Students and parents appreciate the six-week subject taster programme in first

year. Within the Junior Cycle programme, the school should examine how Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) may meet learners' needs and might be incorporated. Within senior cycle, the established Leaving Certificate is the only option for fifth and sixth years, and a few students would be better suited to an alternative curricular programme. There is very good provision for Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in junior and senior cycle. There is good provision for Physical Education (PE) in junior cycle and TY, but better provision should be made in fifth and sixth year, so that PE is not included as an option or provided as Games.

The school's TY programme offers new experiences, personal development, opportunities to develop skills, and modules in new areas of learning. The introduction of a community service component would provide further balance within the programme. Ways to develop the assessment of students' progress in TY could be explored; those leading the programme should lead this, guided by the *Transition Year Programmes Guidelines for Schools*.

In designing the Junior Cycle programme, consultation took place on the timetable, lesson duration, and subjects and short courses for certification. Further discussion should take place on the vision for the school's own programme. There is a need for more frequent and deeper discussion among staff on how the school is addressing curriculum reform. Those leading Junior Cycle could commence dialogue on students' experiences of the key skills, wellbeing indicators and the learning approaches. Greater use should be made of guidelines and materials from the JCT and the NCCA. It is recommended that senior management regularly meet with subject departments in relation to curricular change and curricular requirements and discuss how these are being implemented and embedded in practice.

Managing the organisation

The management of the organisation is generally good, but change is necessary in the management of resources for SEN. The principal leads the distribution of the support hours provided to the school through the resource allocation model. The majority of the allocation of teaching support hours is not being used for intended purposes and is being directed to general subject teaching. The principal should ensure the hours are used in their entirety for additional education needs, not mainstream subjects. The teaching support hours that are in use, are principally allocated to timetabled learning support lessons for students not taking Irish or French. There should be much greater flexibility in the use of SEN hours. Where need arises during the year and support for a student is necessary for educational, social, emotional or behavioural purposes, the timetable should have the flexibility to provide response. The principal should bring all practices in line with the principles of the resource allocation model, Circular 0014/2017 and the associated *Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools*.

The board is kept well informed on matters by the principal. It upholds good practices in child protection, student welfare and policy development. The board and senior management oversee the maintenance of the buildings, grounds, facilities and teaching aids to a good standard. Recently, the board and senior management, with the support of the parents' association, added a canteen for students. The board should take steps to further its communication about its leadership and management role and report annually to parents on the work of the school. The board's oversight of attainment outcomes is limited to reviewing 'points' achieved. It should establish routine oversight of trends in certificate examination and classroom-based assessment outcomes in subjects, and discuss the findings.

The principal and deputy principal reported that since appointment they have worked to develop a culture of positivity in student management and maintain an orderly learning environment. They acknowledge and praise students' achievements through announcements, assemblies, newsletters and rewards, and display students' work. They and the staff take action to build positive relationships with students and parents and encourage regular school attendance and participation

in academic and extra-curricular opportunities. During the evaluation, good student behaviour was observed.

Students, parents and staff indicated generally positive views relating to student welfare, including a good school atmosphere and effectiveness in anti-bullying. Responses from students and staff indicated, however, that fair treatment and consistency are issues for some; these ought to be examined by school leaders as part of ongoing school development.

The principal and deputy principal maintain communication with staff on day-to-day matters and school development. In relation to decision-making processes and having a say in how things are done, possibilities for improvement exist in enabling all members of the school community to play their part. This should be developed at school level by senior management. Further time should be given to discussion at staff meetings and, to accommodate distributed leadership, it is recommended that teachers lead the discussions.

Leading school development

The leadership of school development is good. The board's priorities include consolidating assessment for learning practices and the instructional approaches to learning, implementing the SIPs, and enhancing the use of computer technology in lessons. The principal uses the SSE process to inform improvement planning and, with the board's support, leads action planning. Through improvement planning, the school is progressing. The principal provided data showing increased use of assessment for learning methodologies, including teachers' use of learning intentions, formative feedback and homework. Senior management and teachers reported on enhanced student management and affirmation. Progression to third level education and apprenticeships is increasing.

Constructive relationships have been built with the parents' association and the wider community. A very high proportion of parents said they feel welcome in the school. The association is consulted on many areas of school development. Very useful surveys have been used to garner the views of parents and students, including the most recent survey on using mobile phones as a learning resource.

In leading developments, including the restructuring of the posts of responsibility and the timetable, the principal and deputy principal engaged in consultation with staff. Within the SIP, consistency of practice is listed as an area for improvement. To further school development and the adoption of improved learning experiences for learners, both the SIP and the WSE-MLL recommendations should be actively progressed by all staff, and engaged with by all those with leadership responsibilities, including assistant principals.

The school's mission of providing holistic education and valuing each student drives the decisions of the board and senior management, and many aspects of the mission are lived out. Suggestions are made to further two aspects of the mission statement: *recognising and catering for individual needs to enable each student to reach their full potential* and *enabling responsibility*. Greater use could be made of existing data on students' cognitive ability and academic progress to support class teachers and year heads in academic tracking. The code of behaviour could place further emphasis on ways students can develop responsibility. Individual needs would be supported by the recommended improvements in the use of SEN resources and differentiation.

Developing leadership capacity

Leadership responsibilities were recently restructured. Distributed leadership is evolving, but not yet fully optimal or equitable as some restructured posts involve greater leadership than others. The board should use Circular 003/2018 to further distribute leadership. Middle-management positions should include regular formal review processes. As well as posts, teachers take leadership

opportunities through class tutor, school committees, extra-curricular activities and training teams. In order to extend leadership practice among all staff, teachers should take greater lead in progressing agreed developmental targets. It is suggested that the board could invite all those with leadership responsibilities to periodically discuss their work.

Student leadership, voice and involvement is generally appropriate, with areas for improvement. There is a vibrant, capable student council and dedicated students act as prefects and mentors. While school management, the board and teachers value students' views, they could optimise their involvement. Responses from questionnaires and interactions with students indicate the need to place increased emphasis on developing and listening to the student voice. School leaders should examine ways to increase the opportunities for more students to develop their practice as leaders, including engagement in decision-making and policy review, and addressing students and parents. The student council could take the lead in consulting with and debriefing the student body on a wider range of matters. The board has plans to increase the opportunity for students to meet them.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Twenty-two lessons were observed. The quality of teaching and learning was mostly good. It was good or very good in the majority of lessons and satisfactory in a significant minority.

Learner outcomes and experiences

Students demonstrated very high levels of respect and courtesy. They generally experienced a very positive learning environment and classroom atmosphere. They received good clarity regarding the purpose of lessons. Lessons were relevant to their everyday lives and interests, and this contributed greatly to lesson enjoyment. Learning was mostly active, with good levels of task-based work and generally productive discourse, although these were sometimes areas for development. Students' learning was most effective when they experienced a range of methodologies and the lesson provided opportunities to develop skills as well as understanding, thereby sustaining engagement.

In assigned tasks, students did their best according to their ability, demonstrating very good focus and attentiveness. They often worked together and helped each other in a spirit of collaboration. Their productivity was generally good, although in some instances would have been enhanced with greater differentiation; sometimes the task or worksheet did not match an individual's level of ability and attainment. A few students needed greater support with written literacy, including sentence construction. Enhanced differentiation could include modified worksheets for different learners, greater formative assessment of written work, and, in some instances, focused interventions, such as team teaching.

In the lessons where highly effective practice was observed, questions and tasks were differentiated and highly productive, and the students were given extensive opportunities to express their learning verbally. In these lessons, high levels of inclusion and a 'can do' approach to challenging learning and skills development prevailed. The learning was fun, engaging and enjoyable.

While all learners responded to questions during lessons, and most answered confidently and articulately, some were reticent. Overall, students' voicing of their understanding was satisfactory. A few times, overly-lengthy teacher instruction caused students to remain passive or give very short responses. In some instances, there was insufficient planning and differentiation of activities to build students' confidence and expressive vocabulary.

The visual learning environment provided in most classrooms was very good and often included displays of posters and students' work and good use of ICT. The arrangements of some rooms facilitated co-operative learning. Most of the classrooms layouts were traditional, however. Student attainment in certificate examinations is generally good. Attainment in many subjects is good.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

Teachers' interaction with students was supportive and affirming. Teachers generally prepared lessons well and this included resources that supported learning; planning for differentiation and assessment require development.

Teachers began lessons by making good links with prior learning. They shared learning intentions, displaying them on the board; best practice was observed when these were expressed as actions, rather than just lesson content, and when they were revisited during lessons. The use of learning intentions to review learning was limited. Teachers could, at times, differentiate learning intentions to facilitate progress for different groups of students. The very good strategy of developing success criteria with students based on learning intentions was evident in a few lessons. This helped teachers and students make judgements about learning.

Collaborative learning was facilitated. Well-planned and well-structured tasks enabled students to think, discuss and develop independent learning and key skills. In some lessons, the potential to engage students in productive think-pair-share could have been exploited. Almost always, teachers circulated productively, checking progress and providing support.

Teachers asked lots of questions and used these to engage all learners. Questioning in the majority of lessons was of good quality, with some highly effective practice noted where extension questions encouraged students to explain their responses. Teachers used subject-specific terminology well. In some lessons, explicit emphasis was placed on developing literacy and numeracy; it is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on this within lessons. To further develop writing and independent learning, and to consolidate learning at key points, teachers could pause at times and encourage students to note what they have just learned. In language lessons, teachers' use of the target language was good, and in some instances very good. There were instances where highly effective development of students' use of the target language took place.

The use of assessment to support learning was good or very good in approximately half of the lessons observed. Overall, assessment for learning practices need to be further embedded at classroom level.

Through SSE, there has been enhanced practices in homework; however, journals and copybooks provided mixed evidence of homework allocation. Greater variety could be provided in homework tasks. While there was good evidence of constructive developmental formative assessment in some copybooks, it was not widespread. There is much scope to develop students' practice in taking action on feedback provided on their written work so they make the required improvements.

During the evaluation, teachers were open to ideas and suggestions. To bring greater consistency to teaching practice that enables students at all levels of ability to achieve their potential in all subjects, management and staff are encouraged to develop practices that promote differentiation, key skills, student voice and formative assessment.

Teacher collaboration is developing and is supported by staff planning sessions. The quality of subject planning varied from fair to very good. Very good planning was evident in a very small number of curriculum plans that included detail on how key skills will be developed, and in which assessment was aligned with learning outcomes and planning was reflective. Some plans were overly content-focused. Those leading the Junior Cycle and TY programmes should support teachers in using the wide range of available materials that assist planning.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

In recent years, the school had subject inspections in Science, Maths, business subjects, SEN, and an evaluation of the TY programme. Some recommendations related to leadership and management. Since the TY evaluation, a core team was formed to support its leadership, planning and evaluation. Within the programme, work experience was reduced slightly. Since the last WSE, the board is more involved in improvement planning. In light of new Guidelines on SEN, those recommendations require revisiting.

Teaching and Learning

Areas for development included extending the use of challenging questioning, co-operative learning, differentiation, ICT, consolidating learning, and correction of copybooks. During the evaluation, practice in some lessons demonstrated very good progress with the recommendations, while in others the progress was partial. As noted, across the school there was scope to further develop differentiation, formative correction of copybooks, and consolidating learning.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The principal led the staff's engagement in a continuous process of SSE for many years. Very good processes are employed in gathering evidence, using the data to identify aspects of focus and measuring progress. Use is made of surveys of students, parents and teachers, and the outcomes inform the process. The principal drafts an action plan on the basis of the evidence and gives time at staff meetings to discuss the plan. To support the implementation by teachers, time is also devoted at staff planning sessions.

Measurable improvements have been made; there has been increased use of assessment methodologies over the duration of the SIP. The current SIP for homework, commendably, requires action by all teachers in giving, collecting and monitoring homework. It places emphasis on increasing the understanding of the nature and purpose of homework assignments. Commendably, through SSE, there has been enhancement in practice across the school in relation to homework and assessment for learning. However, in the lessons observed there was mixed practice. Overall, there is a need for more consistent implementation of agreed whole-school teaching and learning approaches so that the desired impact in the classroom is fulfilled.

In the restructuring of posts, the devolution of the leadership of SSE was a recognised priority and this has been reassigned to an assistant principal.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school has good capacity for improvement. Whole-school improvement will require the development of leadership, greater consistency in teaching and learning, and a cohesive vision for the curricular programmes.

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;