

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna  
Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

<b>School name</b>	City Vocational School
<b>School address</b>	New Street, Kilkenny
<b>Roll number</b>	70610W

**Date of Evaluation: 27-10-2016**



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

## Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning

### INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	27-10-2016
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with board of management</li><li>• Meetings with principal and deputy principal</li><li>• Meetings with key staff</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Student focus group interview</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with parents</li><li>• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers</li></ul>

### SCHOOL CONTEXT

City Vocational School, Kilkenny is a co-educational, post-primary school which operates under the auspices of Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board (KCETB). The school participates in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) initiative, the School Completion Programme (SCP) and avails of the services of the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS). A wide range of curricular programmes is provided for students and includes the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

There are two sectors in the school, the traditional second-level ETB school with a current enrolment of 160 students and Ormonde College which provides post leaving certificate (PLC) courses for 290 students. The school also provides resources and teachers for a range of subjects for students of a neighbouring school. This evaluation will focus solely on the provision for students in the post-primary section of the school.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### FINDINGS

- School management is highly effective in progressing positive changes in the school through a proactive partnership approach that enables student learning to occur within a holistic environment.
- Teachers are exceptionally committed and work diligently to provide a high level of care and support for students; through post of responsibility duties and an extensive range of additional leadership roles, they make a significant contribution to the school.
- Currently, the principal's core work is within the post-primary school while the deputy principal has full responsibility for the PLC sector, this merits review.
- The quality of teaching and learning observed was very good in the majority of lessons, good in some lessons and satisfactory in a few lessons.
- Student behavior, courtesy and engagement in learning, as observed during the evaluation, were excellent.
- The culture in the school is one of self-evaluation, improvement, collaboration, innovation and creativity in teaching, learning and student support.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- KCETB should review the configuration and roles of the senior management team in the ETB school and Ormonde College to ensure equity in terms of governance and the continued development of both sectors.
- Teachers should further develop assessment for learning (AfL) practices.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

#### 1.1. School ownership and management:

The committed board of management, guided and aided by a supportive KCETB and a highly skilled senior management team, works collaboratively to provide very effective leadership in the school. Decisions and actions taken by school management are guided by the school's mission statement which focuses on providing an empowering and caring learning environment for students, their teachers and parents. The outcomes of board meetings are communicated orally by the principal to staff and the parents association. It is advisable that a brief agreed written report be prepared for staff and parents and that an annual report on the work of the board be circulated to relevant stakeholders.

The board is keenly aware of its responsibilities and is exceptionally well informed of all the day-to-day school activities by very comprehensive principal's reports which contain inputs from subject departments, care teams and students. The reports' focus on learners' experiences and outcomes enable the board to review, evaluate and make valid judgements on key aspects of the school.

Policy development is good and takes cognisance of expert and relevant stakeholder's knowledge and opinions. All mandatory policies, with the exception of a data protection policy which is in development, have been ratified. The board's timeframe for the review of policies could contain a shorter review period for those relating to student support. Policies such as the code of behaviour require updating so that they accurately reflect current positive practices and developments. In addition, a whole school guidance plan should now be formulated to comply with Department requirements.

A comprehensive school plan provides a clear overview of how the school operates. The developmental section of the plan includes annual targeted actions for DEIS planning and the numeracy, literacy and AfL targets as identified from the school self-evaluation (SSE) process. The plan also includes longer term priorities such as the embedding of the framework for the new Junior Cycle, increasing enrolment and promoting the school in the community. The collaboratively agreed priorities are underpinned by a desire of all stakeholders to provide a student-focused learning and caring environment.

Currently the principal and deputy principal have mutually agreed devolved responsibilities within the school. The principal's core work is within the post-primary sector while the deputy principal manages the PLC sector which is located off-site in Ormonde College. The deputy principal, aided by the principal, constructs the school timetable wherein provision has to accommodate students from a

neighbouring school and the sharing of some teachers within KCETB. The principal and deputy principal attend the board of management meetings of both the school and Ormonde College.

Due to his commitment at Ormonde College, it is not possible for the deputy principal to be in the school on a daily basis. The second-level school's one assistant principal assumes deputy principal duties which at the time of the evaluation were carried out by a teacher in an acting up capacity. It is recommended that KCETB review the configuration and roles of the senior management team to ensure an equitable distribution of duties and management posts that will support the continued development of both the school and Ormonde College.

The committed parents' association supports the school through fundraising activities, its involvement in school events and contributing to the development of school policies and educational and pastoral care initiatives. Parents are included as part of student celebratory events. The annual Christmas student and parent dinner and parents' involvement in some school committees is praiseworthy. The association should consider the use of the school's website to enhance awareness of their valuable work.

## 1.2. Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership and management at all levels throughout the school are highly effective and include: leading a learning community, managing the organisation, leading school development and developing leadership capacity. The principal's highly effective leadership of staff is valued by the board, and recognised by staff. School leaders promote a culture of improvement through their support of staff continuing professional development (CPD) on a whole-school and individual basis. Teachers are commended for their engagement in an extensive range of relevant CPD that is shared with colleagues to advance students' learning and care. The principal explores national and international best practice and literature on educational disadvantage as a means of providing a holistic learning environment that enables hope and success for students. This is very good practice. The school's implementation and monitoring of whole-school behavioural and educational initiatives has led to significant improvements in students' attitudes to learning and rapport with and between teachers and students.

A whole-school team approach has ensured that a strong culture of improvement, consultation, collaboration and innovation in professional practice and student care exists among staff. There is a strong whole-school focus on providing a high level of consistent practice in relation to SSE, numeracy, literacy and AfL targets, common homework and classroom routines in conjunction with NBSS positive behaviour initiatives. It is highly commendable that teachers have drawn up criteria from which their lessons can be evaluated by the principal to ensure there is consistent practice in relation to agreed whole-school strategies and to progress students' positive experience of school.

The principal has successfully devolved leadership to the assistant principal and four special duties teachers, programme co-ordinators, year heads and personnel involved in student support and learning support. The senior management team has developed and implemented effective systems for communicating information. The high levels of communication within the school are facilitated by the principal's open-door policy. There are regular meetings of the various teams to discuss and support student welfare, engagement and progress. Staff meetings provide a forum for discussion and input from staff to present on their areas of expertise and interest.

All teachers have undertaken a leadership role, both as part of and in addition to the post structure. Teachers also participate in school-based teams such as DEIS, staying in school and inclusion. In

discussions with staff, they expressed confidence in the principal who encouraged, empowered and supported them to be innovative in their teaching practice and to lead school-based initiatives. Teachers provide credible and valued input into the smooth running of the school and towards the care of their students. Teachers' high levels of commitment, flexibility and dedication to the school and its students has facilitated beneficial and systematic change in the school community.

Management and staff are resolute in ensuring that a high-quality, enabling, caring and inclusive learning environment is provided for students. The principles of inclusion are part of the everyday practice of school staff. As well as an open and inclusive admission policy, the school has a specialised unit for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Students availing of the ASD unit are integrated into mainstream class groups with appropriate flexibility and in line with best practice in meeting their needs. The effective deployment of teaching resources through well-executed team teaching reflects the high level of support for all students in the school.

The weekly meetings of the inclusion and DEIS team provide a forum to review pastoral care approaches, to assess the progress of students under the DEIS strands and to ensure that more vulnerable students and their families are supported. The consistent integration of the outcomes of both these teams throughout the school is praiseworthy.

Deliberate efforts are made to ensure that students' learning experiences are maximised. Curricular planning has been strategic as it ensured that credible links are forged between subjects and modules in junior and senior cycle and in many instances a progression avenue for third level has been provided. All junior-cycle students participate in the JCSP programme. The addition of a TY programme in the school this year is providing further opportunities for students to engage in experiential and self-directed learning, further develop their key skills and avail of certified courses.

In the context of a small school, a broad and balanced curriculum is provided for students. Management ensures that the curriculum is suited to the abilities, needs and interests of students. As school numbers increase, additional subjects should be considered.

Teachers are aware of their students' individual learning needs. Successful interventions include: the behaviour support programme, the consistent implementation of whole-school strategies, a continuum of support for students related to their level of need and differentiated teaching in the classroom. The adoption by staff of the recently-introduced DEIS profiling, academic monitoring and individual attendance plans for students will further enhance learner outcomes across a range of areas.

Designated hours allocated by the Department to support students with additional needs are used effectively for their intended purpose. The provision for students in receipt of learning resource and support is flexible and student-centred. Learning support is provided through the deployment of team teaching, small group and one-to-one teaching which is reviewed and adjusted throughout the year subject to each individual student's needs.

Admission procedures reflect the characteristic spirit and mission of the school. The school should state that it provides a six-year programme including a compulsory TY year in the admission policy. A very good student-centred primary to post-primary transition programme 'Belonging Plus' aimed at first years is delivered by the NBSS team and school staff.

Student attendance is monitored on a daily basis and there are strategies in place to follow up on absenteeism and late coming. Students are supported and encouraged to attend school by the home-school community liaison (HSCL) coordinator, SCP staff and relevant year heads. Through the use of

strategies, such as check and connect, the development of individual attendance plans to target poor attenders and the work of the stay in school committee, there has been an improvement in attendance rates. The target of increasing attendance rates should remain a high priority for the school, its students and the board.

The code of behaviour promotes and supports a positive and respectful learning environment and includes a clear ladder of referral for managing student behaviour. The notable work of the NBSS, the inclusion team and all teachers in implementing whole-school multi-layered initiatives and targeted individual programmes to promote positive student behaviour is apparent through the substantial reduction in suspensions. Student behaviour as observed during the evaluation was exemplary; students presented as courteous and engaged learners and were respectful to their teachers and each other. The school atmosphere was warm and friendly.

The time and commitment given by staff members has facilitated students to experience a range of extra-curricular activities such as dance, choir and sporting activities. In addition, students also have opportunities to participate in the very good range of co-curricular activities including, film making, art, enterprise, Young Scientist and Junk Kouture competitions.

Student leadership is promoted in the school through the democratically-elected representative student council and participation in the *Green Schools* and *Amber Flag* committees. The student council engages formally with school management and, of particular merit, is the manner in which the wider student population is regularly consulted for their opinions and views. Students have effected positive change in the school in the areas of uniform and lunch-time clubs. The responses to student questionnaires and interviews confirmed that students' opinions are valued. Through the TY programme, students are undertaking a module in leadership in which students could use their newly acquired skills to provide a mentoring system for first-year students.

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

### 1.3. Management of facilities

The overall upkeep and maintenance of school buildings and facilities are very good. Commendably the school has acquired its third *Green Flag*. On corridors, the vibrant displays of students' work, projects, achievements, photographs and notices and the zoning of areas for specific curricular information is praiseworthy. Classroom layout supports co-operative learning. The provision of a well-attended canteen that provides breakfast and lunch supported by the Department of Social Protection is beneficial to students. Currently, the facilities for Physical Education (PE) are a small outdoor basketball court and a large room that can be used for some PE activities and negotiated use of playing fields of a neighbouring school on occasion. A new school building on a green field site is currently being progressed.

## 2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

## 2.1. The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of teaching and learning observed was very good in the majority of lessons, good in some lessons and satisfactory in a few lessons. A high-quality learning environment was provided. Well-established classroom routines were consistently used. These included: procedures for managing students; organisation of group work; the use of everyday boards displaying learning intentions and homework; the integration of whole-school assessment for learning and literacy and numeracy practices. The routines contributed to a sense of common purpose, orderliness and well-being.

Students demonstrated high levels of participation in lessons. They had a clear sense of what was expected of them through teachers' consistent use of well-explained and attainable learning intentions which were reviewed as lessons concluded to ascertain the level of unstanding. Engagement in learning was strongly evident. The quality of dialogue and relationships was highly positive and it supported co-operative learning. Affirmation of students' effort and a sense of enjoyment were clearly evident.

Very good preparation for teaching was observed. Worksheets, activities and homework were differentiated to best support students' understanding of concepts and skill development. Lessons were very well-structured with distinct introduction, developmental and review phases. Best practice was noted when learning was supported with stimulating resources and imagery. In very few instances, closer attention should have been given to the strategies in individual education plans in lesson planning.

The highly effective teaching methodologies provided students with purposeful and progressive learning activities. Group work was well-designed and well-managed and this optimised participation. Best practice was observed when teachers circulated throughout lessons providing support for the diversity of needs, monitoring the quality of work. In a few instances, this merited extension. Best practice was also noted when the learning experiences enabled students to process, generalise, and apply their learning. Work in students' copies showed that learning was progressive and good work was completed. It was good that time during lessons was productively invested in preparing for homework. At times, there was scope for homework to be more challenging for some.

Team teaching featured in many lessons; it was well-planned and dynamic in delivery and impact. Teachers seamlessly altered lead and support roles. They worked effectively to support students with identified needs, enhance participation by individuals and yield improvements in students' written work. It is very good that teachers have collaboratively reviewed the school's team teaching practices in order to enhance student learning and their own professional development.

Teachers systematically used very good quality assessment to support learning. Students were appropriately challenged through varied, directed questions. The corrections of students' copies was very good in almost all lessons as teachers used the 'two stars and a wish' approach, providing students with constructive and developmental feedback. To build on the very good practices in assessment, it is recommended that students be required to follow-up on corrections, and use them to demonstrate progressive improvements in their written work. It is also suggested, at times, to teach students to use success criteria when evaluating peer-generated pieces of work.

Strong focus was placed on oral literacy; students spoke and listened very well and they were asked for and contributed opinions and experiences to class discussions. Literacy could be further enhanced by providing more opportunities for writing in subjects, particularly by requiring new words to be used in sentences, whenever possible, and by more frequently setting longer pieces of writing.

Numeracy was supported when students were provided with opportunities to estimate values prior to calculation and this merits extension. It is very good that the school's literacy and numeracy interventions have been collectively planned, reviewed and evaluated.

Collaborative subject department planning is well established. Subject plans included agreed SSE targets, DEIS planning targets and teaching strategies for students with additional educational needs. Almost all curricular plans are developed to a very high standard and are used as a manual for teaching and learning in the classroom. Exemplary practice was noted in many curricular plans as teachers documented their reflections on their teaching and students' attainment of learning outcomes.

### **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

#### **3.1. Management**

All of the main recommendations pertaining to school management such as ensuring students have twenty-eight hours tuition time, CPD for teachers involved in special education and the use of planning templates for students with additional educational needs have been addressed.

#### **3.2. Learning and teaching**

All of the main recommendations in respect of teaching and learning are currently being implemented by subject departments. For example, the use of AfL and the integration of literacy and numeracy strategies are now part of everyday practice in teaching.

Commendably, inspectorate evaluation reports are used as whole-school learning experiences and viewed as an opportunity to improve the school and student outcomes.

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

There is an exemplary culture of SSE in City Vocational School. School management and staff have demonstrated considerable commitment to SSE that have provided a positive impact for change and very positive outcomes for students. The six-step process of SSE is used to review pastoral care and learning initiatives including AfL strategies and team teaching. DEIS planning and attendance strategies also commendably utilise this process. The views of staff, parents and students have been gathered to assist in review and self-evaluation processes.

The school has very high capacity for continued school improvement. The strong whole-school commitment to ensuring that school practices continue to progress to meet the needs of its students is highly praiseworthy.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management of Kilkenny City Vocational School welcomes the exceptionally positive WSE-MLL report completed by the Inspectorate. It noted the very wide range of aspects of school life which commended and applauded in the report.

The Board is particularly appreciative that the school culture was described as *“one of self-evaluation, improvement, consultation, collaboration, innovation and creativity in teaching and learning and student support”*.

The Board and the school community are encouraged and affirmed by the report.

Kilkenny City Vocational School is committed to consolidating and building upon the positive findings outlined in the WSE-MLL report.

## 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.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very good</b> 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 <b>outstanding</b> 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
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b> 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
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> 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
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Fair</b> 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
<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b> 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;