

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Confey Community College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Confey Leixlip Co Kildare
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	70691C

Date of Evaluation: 07-02-2018



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	05-07 February 2018
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with Board of Management• Meetings with principal and deputy principals• Meetings with key staff• Review of relevant documents• Student focus-group interviews	<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

Confey Community College is a co-educational post-primary school operating under the aegis of Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board and the Archdiocese of Dublin. The school offers the junior cycle, an optional Transition Year Programme (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate (Established) programme. At the time of the inspection the school had an enrolment of 749 students.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- Leadership and management, at all levels, is good overall, with areas of highly effective practice in evidence as well as areas in need of development.
- A broad range of curricular and subject options are available in the school; aspects of the timetable require review.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in most lessons; there is further scope for more robust review of student uptake and attainment in certificate examinations.
- The range of supports available to students to support their pastoral needs is highly commendable; aspects of special educational needs (SEN) resources and timetabling require attention.
- Good progress has been made in the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations.
- School staff have engaged positively with the school self-evaluation (SSE) process; further refinement of whole school targets and ongoing review is advised.

Recommendations

- School management should address the erosion of tuition time for LCA and other senior cycle students in line with Circular letter M29/95, and the board should review the impact of curricular decisions in order to effectively plan for the successful implementation and sustainability of subjects, programmes and initiatives.
- SEN allocation is in need of review in line with the 2017 *Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools* and Circular letter 0014/2017; the number of teachers involved in SEN provision should also be reduced in order to build expertise amongst a smaller team.
- Subject departments should develop the practice of devising targets that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) in order to monitor emerging trends and improve outcomes in teaching, learning, uptake and attainment.

- The SSE process within the school should be enhanced through setting more precise whole school targets at the outset; greater analysis of the whole-school impact of SSE initiatives on teaching and learning is also advised.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

A very broad range of curricular programmes is available in the school and a short subject-sampling programme is in place for first-year students to allow for more informed subject choice. In an effort to actively promote innovation and creativity in the curriculum offered, the school has diversified the range of subjects on offer to include, for instance, Coding at junior cycle and Politics and Society at senior cycle. Mandarin Chinese is timetabled at junior cycle and students who opt for the subject progress towards internationally recognised examinations in the language.

The timetable, in terms of time allocated and scheduling of subjects, is mostly good. There are, for instance, no split double lessons and class groups are not shared amongst teachers. The allocation of a single period of instruction per week in Physical Education (PE) at senior cycle should be increased to a double period for all students. Where the scheduling of lessons for some subjects is overly concentrated within the afternoons, this should also be reviewed in order to enhance the learning opportunities for students at varying time intervals across the week.

Timetabling arrangements, in terms of instruction time offered to students within the school, require review. At present, a significant numbers of students in senior cycle are not in receipt of the minimum 28 hours of instruction, as per Circular letter M29/95. The reported reasons for this include the scheduling of lessons aimed at specific groups of students in Mathematics and LCVP, as well as to facilitate a weekly care team meeting. LCA students are particularly affected under current arrangements, with no tuition time provided for three lesson periods on Thursday afternoons. For many other fifth and sixth-year students, there are no lessons last period on Thursday. These practices should cease. As the time allotted to tutorial forms part of the school's 28 hours of tuition, a programme of instruction should also be developed for these lesson periods.

In meetings with the inspection team, staff identified pastoral care as a key priority for the school and a highly commendable range of supports for students is available to support their pastoral needs. Particularly noteworthy is the well-being class period in first-year and an anxiety prevention and resilience building programme for second-years.

Student and parental feedback in questionnaires and meetings indicated a lack of awareness as to the provision of the Relationships and Sexuality (RSE) programme as well as education on topics related to drugs and alcohol. At present the RSE programme is delivered by both the RE and SPHE departments. A review of the continuity of content delivery in SPHE and RSE should take place in order to ensure that all aspects of the programmes are being implemented.

There are two qualified Guidance teachers in the school. The Guidance policy was recently redrafted and ratified by the board. In relation to the Guidance provision plan, it is advised that the time-bound aspect of delivery be further outlined. It is also advised that the links between Guidance, SPHE and well-being, be strengthened and documented.

A co-ordinator and small SEN team is in place, both of whom are qualified. In addition, a significant minority of teachers are timetabled to provide support to students; this should be reviewed in order to build up the expertise of a smaller team. Appropriate arrangements are in place in terms of the SEN models in operation and, at staff meetings, presentations have been provided on a variety of SEN-related areas. This is good practice. Exceptionally able students are also identified and facilitated, for example, through Applied Maths and extra-curricular programmes in Science.

At present, not all SEN hours are being deployed for their intended purpose. A portion of the allocation is being used to sustain some small class sizes for optional subject offerings. The school should review these practices in line with the 2017 *Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools* and Circular letter 0014/2017. Future curriculum review should also consider the sustainability of optional subjects where uptake is low.

Managing the organisation

The board meets for at least five meetings during the year and is appropriately constituted. Board members demonstrated strong commitment to the school. A review of minutes of the board meetings indicated items for discussion included policy review and ratification, school initiatives and administrative matters.

The board receives presentations from teachers regarding teaching and learning initiatives within the school and has also begun to receive presentations from members of the students' council. An annual report will be provided each year by the council to the board. This is very good practice. Agreed reports are prepared at the end of board meetings for school staff, however it is recommended that these reports are more readily disseminated amongst staff.

The board is provided with an overview of certificate examination results. A review of the data by the inspection team indicated a number of trends meriting further review, including favourable results at ordinary level and downward trends in uptake of higher level in some subject areas. Going forward, the board should oversee a more robust analysis of emerging trends in both student attainment and uptake in certificate examinations.

Mandatory policies are in place, including the recently ratified Attendance Strategy. The Admissions Policy is generally open and inclusive; however, references that place conditions on the enrolment of students with SEN, such as the provision of additional resources, should be removed. Aspects of the Code of Behaviour should also be reviewed in due course in order to provide greater clarity to students in terms of the sanctions and language used. Separate policies for suspensions and expulsions clearly outline the procedures to be followed in either instance. The board should now develop an overall policy framework document in order to allow for greater cyclical and systematic review of policies.

The Senior Management Team (SMT) comprises the principal and two deputy principals, one of whom is recently appointed. Responsibilities are being gradually redistributed amongst the team in light of this new appointment. The principal takes ownership of the deployment of teachers and ensures, to the best of his ability, that all teachers are suitably qualified and registered with the Teaching Council. The principal also deals with matters including human resources, finance, liaising with the board, and acts as the designated liaison person for child protection. With the established deputy principal, the principal also reviews the curriculum plan and supports the induction of new staff to the school. The established deputy principal focusses on policy development, attendance and examination data review. The newly-appointed deputy principal is currently leading SSE, managing Professional Master of Education (PME) applications and learning how to create and manage timetables.

Day-to-day management of the school during the evaluation was found to be highly effective. The SMT work well together and present as a collegial team whose work is based on a strong culture of mutual trust, respect and shared accountability.

Overall, clear lines of communication are established within the school. Staff meetings take place frequently and indicate a variety of areas for discussion, including administrative matters and topics related to teaching and learning. It is also noteworthy that feedback from teacher questionnaires was overwhelmingly positive and that, at meetings during the evaluation, staff indicated their belief that their voice is heard by SMT.

Middle management (MMT) comprises six assistant principals (AP) and four special duties post-holders. At present, an informal annual report is provided to the principal on their work. It is now timely that this approach is formalised and that an annual report on duties is presented to the principal and board. While, overall, duties are carried out diligently and effectively, there is some overlap in duties concerning the management of year groups. This is due to end shortly. In light of the recent Circular letter 0003/2018, as well as recently appointed AP posts within the school, a review of the post structure should also be instigated by the board to reflect the school's changing needs and to give due consideration to posts that support teaching and learning.

Leading school development

The board is committed to the school and current priorities include raising awareness of Confey Community College in order to increase enrolments and support the board's vision to become the "school of choice" in the locality. An overarching school plan is in place in line with ETB Articles of Management.

In September 2017, an Irish language stream, An Sruth, was introduced to the school with the support of KWETB, as a means of providing additional choice to students from local primary Gaelscoileanna. Teachers providing instruction through the medium of Irish in An Sruth are either degree-level qualified in Irish or have undertaken initial CPD in Irish language training in order to further their linguistic skills. The ongoing provision of such CPD is recommended in order to ensure that students in the programme receive a consistently high quality teaching and learning experience. Numbers opting for admission to An Sruth in this initial year were low. To ensure the ongoing viability of the programme, as well as to observe the school's admission policy, SMT should closely monitor the numbers applying for participation in the programme and adopt a more structured approach to the long-term planning for the programme.

Successful links have been established with the local community such as paired reading with local primary schools, engagement with local business' to support TY work experience and a joint mental health awareness event with another local post-primary school. Such involvement has served to raise the profile of the school in the locality and to improve educational opportunities for students.

Representatives of the parents' association were very positive and support the school in many ventures. One area for future development would be to include parents more in the SSE process within the school.

Developing leadership capacity

Independent of the post-structure, there are very good distributed leadership opportunities for staff, including the leadership of students' council and involvement in initiatives such as Droichead, the integrated professional induction framework for newly-qualified teachers.

Eleven teachers in the school are involved in TL21, a programme that promotes innovative practice and professional learning communities. This is commendable. Leadership capacity has also been developed through teacher involvement in instructional leadership and the implementation of Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies.

Staff have engaged in continuing professional development (CPD), such as instructional leadership, whole-school information and communications technology (ICT) training and have also provided staff-to-staff presentations arising out of such CPD, for instance in the area well-being. This very good practice should be developed, particularly in the area of ICT where there is scope to further share the very good practice observed in a number of lessons. This should serve to increase the impact of the school's decision to introduce tablet devices for students and enhance the overall learning experience for students.

Staff provide a very wide range of extra and co-curricular activities, including sporting activities, educational programmes and trips. This is commendable and impacts positively on the student experience by broadening their opportunities to extend their learning beyond the classroom.

There are very good opportunities for student leadership including the students' council, prefects and paired reading. The students' council is democratically elected and, while members did receive training for their roles in the past, this has fallen into abeyance over recent years. This should be reinstated.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in most lessons, with aspects of exemplary practice in evidence. In a significant minority of lessons, teaching and learning was found to be satisfactory.

Learner outcomes and experiences

Excellent student behaviour was noted in all lessons observed. Teachers were affirming and supportive, and a very good rapport was in evidence.

Students were engaged in lessons that were characterised by a clear lesson introduction, a process of sequential student activities and a concluding review at the end. In such lessons, opportunities were provided for the student to reflect on their own progress and that of their peers. These highly effective opportunities should be extended where necessary.

High quality verbal and written formative feedback on student work was in evidence in many, though not all, lessons. Where this was not the case, it is advised that more regular provision of written formative feedback on key pieces of student work be provided.

A variety of questioning strategies was observed within lessons; best practice was noted where adequate wait time was given to students, where the questions promoted deeper levels of thinking and where a range of students was targeted for questioning. In most lessons, student responses to teacher questions also indicated good subject knowledge and understanding.

Where the questioning strategies were less successful, it is recommended that greater wait time be provided to students, as well as to use more higher-order questioning and to ensure that questions are widely dispersed amongst the student cohort.

Seating arrangements were most effective when they allowed students to readily participate in pair and group work. Where feasible, a review of traditional seating arrangements should take place in order to facilitate greater student collaboration.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

The most effective lessons observed were well planned in advance, well-paced and structured, with a good to very good level of challenge afforded to students. In these lessons, students learning was progressed commendably.

In many lessons, there was a very good focus on clearly explaining learning Intentions at the outset of lessons and a review of the learning was initiated either during or at the end of the lessons to assess student progress.

In other instances, while the learning intentions were outlined clearly, there was insufficient time at the end of the lesson to adequately assess and monitor the learning. This was due, in part, to planning that provided an over-supply of tasks to be completed within the allotted time. It is therefore recommended that time be set aside to review the learning Intentions either during or at the end of each lesson and, where necessary, that planning more carefully considers the allotted time-frame for the specific lesson.

Active learning methodologies featured in most lessons and there was generally a very good balance between teacher and student input. In many instances, these opportunities for pair and group work were well planned and executed by the teachers and thus served to enhance the learning experience for students. In the lessons where the teacher voice dominated, the balance should be redressed to ensure a greater balance between teacher and student input. Greater collaboration in the area of differentiation of teaching approaches is also advised in order to develop and implement teaching and learning strategies that are effective within the context of Confey Community College.

There was notable attention to AfL strategies observed in many lessons in terms of peer assessment, think-pair-share, very good questioning strategies and formative feedback. This worked to very good effect.

Tablet devices were introduced to the school for junior cycle students in recent years and ICT featured to varying degrees in the lessons observed. At its best, ICT was employed creatively such as through online quizzes to revise and extend learning activities, and through the use of the tablet devices as show-me-boards. These activities served to enhance the overall learning experience for the students in those lessons.

In other lessons, the tablet devices were either employed as textbooks or were not a feature of the lesson. The school has been proactive and staff have received CPD related to the use of ICT. Furthermore, a recently established tablet review committee has been tasked with reviewing and promoting the effectiveness of ICT as a teaching and learning tool within the school. This review should lead to a greater emphasis on CPD that will allow all staff members to see the potential for ICT to enhance the student learning experience through creative and judicious use of the available technology.

Best practice to promote literacy and numeracy included the teaching of subject-specific keywords, the meanings for which were carefully elicited from students. In many lessons, however, such strategies were absent. A clearer whole-school focus on literacy and numeracy is recommended.

Subject planning is well established. Documents reviewed varied in quality; some were very detailed, including minutes of meetings, good evidence of self-reflection and analysis of attainment. However, other subject plans lacked minutes of meetings, were overly generic and lacked any detailed analysis on attainment or uptake within specific subject areas. It is recommended that a common approach to the development of a more rigorous and detailed review of emerging trends in data, within the levels of assessment in certificate examinations, be undertaken. From this review, there would then be scope to use this baseline data to develop SMART targets for attainment and uptake, as well as to ensure that student and teacher expectations are set that are appropriately challenging in terms of uptake of higher level, where appropriate. This should also inform future planning for teaching and learning strategies.

Overall, programme planning documentation is good. The TY plan includes a very detailed calendar of events, while evidence of good reflective practice was observed in the LCVP plan. Future development should include greater self-evaluation in the TY and LCA programmes, and a greater emphasis on methodologies to promote differentiation in the LCA plan.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

Good progress has been achieved in a number of areas, including more opportunities for staff to teach senior cycle History. An increased number of subject meetings and the ability to attend such meetings has been implemented following related recommendations arising out of the subject inspections in History, Technical Graphics and DCG.

Teaching and Learning

Overall, good progress has been made in implementing recommendations relating to teaching and learning. The TY mathematics programme has developed a focus on research and problem solving for projects. Good AfL strategies were observed, for example, in the teaching and learning of Science and should now be extended to all subjects.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school has led an ambitious engagement with the SSE process. Current identified priorities include literacy, numeracy, reporting and learning to learn. Both teachers and students have been surveyed regarding whole-school SSE initiatives. SSE strategies observed in lessons included the successful integration of learning intentions and peer assessment.

Current plans for literacy and numeracy either detail targets that are too broad, and thus difficult to measure, or lack whole school targets. To further SSE processes, it is advised that, at the outset, targets need to be set that are measurable and sustainable.

Co-ordinators have been appointed to lead a variety of aspects of the SSE process. At present, a rotating weekly period is allocated to the *Drop Everything and Read (D.E.A.R.)* initiative in order to promote student interest in reading. The SMT are aware of the need to keep this initiative under review, in order to further analyse its impact and effectiveness.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

With a greater refinement of target setting and ongoing review of initiatives, as well as ensuring that all stakeholders are aware of the agreed targets, the school's capacity for improvement is very good. The SMT and board are proactive and open to innovation as are a number of staff members who have either led initiatives or engaged in CPD.

5. CHILD PROTECTION

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

1. The school principal is aware that revised child protection procedures for primary and post-primary schools came into effect on 11 December 2017 and arrangements are in place to begin the process of implementing these procedures.
2. The name of the designated liaison person for child protection matters was prominently displayed in the school's reception area.
3. The school has a Child Protection policy in place.
4. All teachers are aware that they are mandated persons and of their responsibilities in that regard.

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

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 of Confey College welcomes this very positive WSE/MLL report.

The areas identified by the inspectors for special commendation include:

1. Recognition of the efforts made to actively promote innovation and creativity in the curriculum offered to all students.
2. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in most lessons, with aspects of exemplary practice in evidence.
3. Highly commendable range of supports for students is available to support their pastoral needs.
4. Excellent student behaviour was noted in all lessons observed. Teachers were affirming and supportive, and a very good rapport was in evidence.
5. The school's capacity for improvement is very good.
6. There are very good distributed leadership opportunities for staff.
7. Staff provide a very wide range of extra and co-curricular activities, including sporting activities, educational programmes and trips.

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 acknowledges the recommendations made by the inspectors and are committed to their implementation. Since the initial feedback of the WSE-MLL process, the school has already set about addressing the recommendations in the following ways:

1. The timetabling arrangements for 5th year student and LCA 1 is now in line with Circular letter M29/95. Students now receive 28 hours of instruction. 5th year students are now timetabled for two periods of PE each week. These changes will continue into 6th year in September 2019.
2. The board has initiated a robust analysis of emerging trends in both student attainment and uptake in certificate examinations. The findings will be reported to the Board.
3. Alongside the two qualified SEN teachers a smaller number of teachers have been timetabled for SEN classes. The school will now set about building up the expertise in this team.
4. The Admissions Policy has been reviewed and ratified by the Board. References that placed conditions on the enrolment of students with SEN, such as the provision of additional resources have been removed.
5. The Board instigated a review of the Post of Responsibility structures in line with Circular letter 0003/2018. The Board is now in a position to fill the 2 AP1 posts and 6 AP2 posts that will reflect the school's changing needs and support teaching and learning.