

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Brigid's College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Loughrea Co Galway
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	71280J

Date of Evaluation: 28-09-2016



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

Dates of inspection	26 – 28 September 2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with board of management• Meetings with principal and deputy principal• Meetings with key staff• Review of relevant documents• Student focus-group interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with parents• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers

SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Brigid's College, Loughrea is a well-established school that operates under the auspices of Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board (GRETB). The school has a current enrolment of 620 students, who come mainly from a rural catchment area surrounding Loughrea. Student numbers have been very stable for the past ten years and the board's aim is to maintain this level of enrolment to ensure continuity in provision.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The school has a long and successful tradition of promoting achievement across many aspects of school activities.
- The staff, management and students are hardworking and committed to the school.
- Structures to support students are well-established, though there is scope to promote how all students can have a greater say in how the school develops.
- The school provides a very broad range of subject options for students, which has implications for how the school allocates its teaching resources.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good with a number of examples of exceptional teaching practices.
- The school is developing its capacity for school self-evaluation by using in-school data systems to support the development of teaching and learning initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The roles of the pastoral care teacher, prefects and student council should be reviewed in the context of an evolving student support system.
- The deployment of additional teaching resources for students with special educational needs should be more closely aligned to their needs and the provisions of circular 0070/2014.
- A number of whole-school and subject-specific teaching and learning strategies should be identified, agreed and implemented to promote effective collaborative learning among students.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

School ownership and management

The board of management functions very effectively. Meetings are held regularly and the board, since its inception, has engaged in detailed discussion on many issues in relation to the management of the school. The board has been prepared to make difficult decisions and the needs of students have always been central to its decision making processes.

The board is newly appointed, has a well-balanced composition in its membership and brings a freshness of approach to its work. It has focused on informing itself about the school and has a clear view of its development. The minutes follow an agreed structure, and as part of its initial work a lot of policies have been reviewed. The finance committee reports regularly with respect to centrally remitted funding and school-managed funds. At the board's inception, members availed of training provided by GRETB and are shortly due to avail of further training.

The board has a plan for the further development of the school's physical infrastructure and has a clear focus on student support and informing itself in a range of areas including student attainment and engagement with the student council.

The parents' representatives interviewed during the evaluation were strong advocates for the school. The parents' association operates a cluster system, which is very effective for promoting student enrolment, and has a presence at school functions. It liaises closely with the principal regarding its work. In further developing its role, it could link some of its activities to supporting curricular areas, for example, Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE), as it has previously done with an internet safety talk. It could also explore the use of existing resources, for example the school's website, to promote its role and work to the wider parent body.

Effectiveness of leadership for learning

As the senior management team the principal and deputy principal are very effective and have a shared understanding of the school's context and priorities. They lead by example, both are dedicated to the school and have a highly visible presence in the school. A key motivator in their work is the promotion of success across many aspects of the school's activities. The recent review of posts has offered them the opportunity to reprioritise their own roles and functions, and they plan to use this opportunity to document their own roles and responsibilities. In more recent years, they have initiated greater involvement in the aspect of leading learning, through their attendance at subject planning meetings. They also propose the development of additional team teaching opportunities, as a means of promoting shared learning opportunities among staff. It is clear that the expectations among the school community are high, and this places a pressure on management, and the teaching staff, to deliver on student and parent expectations in relation to students' academic outcomes.

The senior management team, and in particular the principal, is also a main reference point for parents. Another aspect of their work has been dealing with staff changes and ensuring that the recruitment of new staff provides the school with the opportunity to maintain curricular priorities.

Overall they have an outcomes-focused leadership style that permeates through the school community. The traditional focus on academic attainment has served the school well and will be of benefit in developing the capacity of staff to adapt to the changing educational environment of new models of assessment and of reporting to students on their progress.

The staff has recently engaged in a process of reviewing the duties attached to the school's middle management structure. The process involved staff involvement identifying priorities and follow-up meetings were held with the principal. The school's assistant principals (APs) have a large workload as many have retained a range of duties in addition to the year head role which is the primary focus of the AP structure. Post holders, including special duties teachers, should have annual meetings with the school's senior management. The purpose of these meetings should be to review the operation of the posts and determine if changes are required due to the evolving developmental priorities of the school. Also, where duties are no longer relevant, these can be discussed.

The school's curriculum provides a wide breadth of subjects. First-year students experience a short taster programme in addition to sampling optional subjects during the open day. Access to subjects is very good and movement in options is facilitated within reason when subject choice is not suited to the students' needs. Following a curriculum review in 2011, and in line with junior cycle developments, junior cycle students take a maximum of nine subjects and CSPE for certification, and this year has seen the introduction of coding with first-year students, as a short course in the new Junior Cycle. The school's transition year (TY) programme has grown very well in recent years and planning for the programme, including the management of TY options, is very good.

The school prides itself on academic success and actively promotes itself as a centre in which students will achieve high results. This culture permeates the systems and processes at school level with competition high among optional subjects in attracting students. It was evident that students often selected subjects on the basis of encouragement from teachers and parents and perceptions about possible attainment and progression into the future. The school should continue to develop its existing systems for providing information to parents and students to ensure that the reasons for students selecting particular subjects are based on the skills and interests of the students.

A well-developed system is in place for the transition of students into first year. The principal visits the feeder primary schools and an open day is held early in the school year. Later, prospective first-year students attend an induction day in the school that focuses on introducing students to the range of optional subjects. On the first day, students are assigned to their class groups in the morning and, by the afternoon, classes commence. The position of first-year year head is fixed and this allows for the development of specific expertise in dealing with the needs of students transitioning into the school.

The school has both a student council and prefect system in place. The student council comprises representatives from each year group except sixth year, with the officers selected from among the elected senior students. Prefects are sixth-year students who are selected for their position by the teaching staff. For transparency and clearly defined roles, the duties and responsibilities of prefects should be agreed and set out in a document. In delineating its role from the student council, the prefect leadership role should be enhanced, for example as a support to first-year students in their transition to second level. Given that the responses of students to the questionnaire administered as part of the evaluation process indicate that students would like a greater say in how things are done in the school, a formalised mentoring or leadership skills programme should be considered.

A student support system is in place and the year heads are active in their role in conjunction with the guidance counsellor, the special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinator and senior management. Each class group has an assigned pastoral care teacher. As the role is voluntary it has largely remained unchanged for a period. It is timely that the role would be reviewed to share and develop good practice. In particular, this review should consider how the role would evolve as part of the student support system and to build on providing opportunities to develop student voice, for example by inviting members of the student council to address class groups during tutor time.

The school's admissions policy and code of behaviour have recently been reviewed. It is advisable that future reviews of the code of behaviour reflect more fully the student-focused practice that operates in the school, and consider both the rights and responsibilities of all concerned.

A recent change in procedure means that assessments are conducted with first-year students before entry and this information is used to form mixed-ability class groupings in first year. Also, additional resource lessons in English and Mathematics are provided as appropriate. Over time, the school should review the benefits of this arrangement in the context of mixed ability with first-year groups including for example, the benefits of in-class support. The school is also involved in a pilot scheme on assessment testing operated by the Educational Research Centre. This will enable the school to track students' progress through junior cycle and will give rich data to evaluate the success of educational interventions in students' achievements.

The special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinator is recently appointed and is being mentored in the new role through the goodwill of the previous post-holder. A detailed register of the needs of students has been compiled. However, it is recommended that the work of previous years, where individualised learning targets for students were set be repeated as it would be advantageous in delivering the supports to students who are entitled to them.

In mainstream settings, the learning support and resource hours are mainly deployed to withdrawing groups of students for additional support in English and Mathematics. A proportion of the school's additional educational support allocation is used to provide additional class groupings in Mathematics and Irish at senior cycle and to maximize curriculum provision. This practice should be reviewed to ensure that the deployment of additional teaching resources for students with SEN is aligned with their needs, and in accordance with circular letter 0070/2014.

There is an exceptionally high level of commitment by the teachers to the school and to supporting students' involvement in a wide-ranging extracurricular programme. The school enjoys regular success at national level particularly in the sporting field and in international competition in the area of technology. These successes and the wide range of supports available are underpinned by the involvement and generosity of the staff.

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*.

Management of facilities

The school has well-developed digital resources. It has promoted the use of tablet devices with students with varying degrees of success. As the school looks to developing its digital direction it should evaluate further the overall direction of the approach by reviewing and developing its eLearning plan. Continued development will require parent, student and teacher buy-in to the direction to be taken.

The school's data management systems are developing very well and will support the tracking of student attainment, with the potential to support school self-evaluation, and the progression of the attendance strategy.

Of particular merit is the work to date and the work planned to enhance the school's physical infrastructure. The final phase planned will provide the school with an integrated site. Student movement around the site, and facilities to support learning have been, beneficially, prioritised in the work to be completed.

QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality of learning and teaching

Preparation for lessons was good overall. Where teachers were using learning intentions it was very good, as the links with previous and anticipated learning were clearly evident. Teachers planned well for the lesson activities and the provision of additional resources. In a small number of the lessons more explicit sharing of the lesson intentions with the class groups, either in written or oral format, would have provided students with greater understanding of the overall learning outcomes.

Student movement between lessons was really well regulated in the context of the dispersed nature of the school site. Also, the school's senior management has a highly visible presence throughout the school. Overall, the layout of classrooms could be adapted more successfully to encourage group work, and the seating arrangements should be planned to match students more closely as learning supports for each other. In line with the whole-school strategy for promoting the print environment to support literacy and numeracy, posters were evident in many classrooms, though there is scope for greater presence of more student-developed resources. A school strength is its digital environment and there is a very good provision of well-equipped ICT specialist rooms. A significant strength in the learning environment is the positive and respectful interactions between students and teachers.

The quality of teaching in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good. Many lessons were characterised by very good use of oral questioning as a strategy for differentiation. Students were supportive of other students' responses, and they initiated questions seeking clarification and additional information. Teachers' knowledge of students' capabilities was good and they ensured an even spread of questions through the class group. There was an occasional tendency by some teachers to overemphasise the links with examination papers in their in-class questioning. This overemphasis could be easily addressed by framing the questions to the students' everyday life or to design questions that explore the links between areas of learning.

As teachers are almost always assigned to their subject specialism, their knowledge and instruction was clear and accessible and they showed a liking for their subjects. Demonstration was used effectively in a number of lessons, including student demonstration. However, many lessons were teacher centred and in these lessons learner experiences would have been enhanced by greater opportunities to work collaboratively in groups. Group work would also allow for the differentiation of content.

Classroom management was consistently good and there was strong evidence of students being organised for lessons. Interventions to manage behaviour if required were subtle and effective. The school's changeover to forty-minute lesson periods has been well managed by teachers in terms of planning for lessons.

Students' journals indicated that they were assigned a lot of homework mostly a combination of written and learning tasks. In the main, homework is corrected as a whole-class activity and while

there is some evidence of teachers providing students with written feedback for improvement on extended question sets, there is scope to develop formative feedback approaches as a whole-school strategy to support learners. Among the strategies to develop are the use of peer and self-assessment.

The school operates a system of monthly tests and reports go home four times each year for non-certificate examination classes. Further development of the whole-school assessment strategy should explore the links whereby assessment of learning can be linked more strategically to assessment for learning approaches. This would help to ensure that a balance is maintained in the teaching and learning approaches that support the development of students' knowledge, skills and attributes.

Students were busy in all lessons. Activities and instructions were clear and teachers' planning considered the range of ability levels within groups. Teachers clearly communicated expectations and this influenced students' engagement in lessons. Quite often the difference between a good and a very good lesson was the extent to which teachers were able to motivate students to internalise the value of the learning for themselves. Checks on students' learning during lessons were evident though there was scope in a number of lessons to check how well the lesson intentions had been achieved.

At subject department level, each department is required to analyse the outcomes attained by students in the certificate examinations and report annually to the board in this respect. Where very good approaches were evident, the subject department reflected on the attainment in order to adjust planning and/or teaching strategies to improve outcomes for students. Where best practice was evident in planning, learning outcomes were closely aligned to specific rather than generic teaching strategies. This can enable consistency and continuity in approaches among subject teams.

IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Management

Good progress has been made on progressing recommendations with a whole-school dimension. In particular, good progress has been made on recommendations in relation to access to subjects.

Learning and teaching

Following an analysis of previous inspection reports, the inspectors followed up on progress on specific recommendations made in relation to learning and teaching. It was evident in the lessons observed that specific learning intentions were widely shared with students at the start of lessons, though there remains scope to look at how they can reinforce students learning later in the lessons. The provision of well-structured opportunities for students to work collaboratively was mixed. Further development of this recommendation would be supported by teachers reviewing the structures of these activities and determining more clearly what the expected learning or outcomes from the activity would be. In providing students with developmental feedback on their work, good practice existed in relation to the provision of oral feedback and the development of written feedback is ongoing. Key effective strategies for differentiation were teachers' use of structured questions, prompts and visual supports. Key word journals have been introduced in the current school year to further progress the development of the key work strategy, as current practice is varied.

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

The school has been actively engaged with the self-evaluation (SSE) process. There is a co-ordinator in place and teams working on both themes of literacy and numeracy. Additionally, SSE reports and school improvement plans are available in relation to each theme. Data gathering and analysis is a feature of both normal decision making and decisions in relation to literacy and numeracy strategy. Opportunities should be explored to engage parents more formally and seek their views when developing or introducing initiatives with a teaching and learning focus.

The school demonstrates strength and capacity to engage in self-evaluation. Among the indicators of this are: the commitment of staff to implement literacy strategies as part of SSE; the teams that are in place to lead planning for the school's literacy and numeracy strategy and the systems and practices that have been established for tracking students' attainment.

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 St Brigid's College Loughrea, on behalf of the stakeholders, warmly welcomes this positive WSE/MLL inspection report.

We are pleased that the report affirms many of the very good practices in existence at the school including:

- The positive endorsement of the high standards of Leadership and Management of the school by the Principal and Deputy Principal.
- Acknowledgement of the high standards of teaching and learning that permeates the school culture and focus on academic achievement for all students.
- Acknowledgement of the school's committed and hard working staff.
- Quality of teaching, learning and assessment ranged from good to very good with a number of examples of exceptional teaching practices.
- Recognition by the Inspectorate of the wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities of a sporting, musical, artistic, scientific, technological and social nature available to students.
- Ongoing policy reviews.
- Reviewed and agreed middle management structures.
- Provision of the broadest possible range of subject options for students.
- Active engagement with the SSE process.
- Recognition by the Inspectorate of the very good planning and management of the Transition Year programme.

The Board wishes to congratulate and thank the whole school community for its contribution to these outcomes listed above as well as all the other positive findings mentioned in the report. The Board is particularly happy that the exemplary behaviour of the students was commended and that the mutually respectful interactions between staff and students were noted.

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

The Board is fully committed to the implementation of the recommendations and suggestions in this report, all of which will be addressed over the coming year.

- A Task Group has been set up to review the roles of the Pastoral Care Teachers, prefects and student council with review to be completed by June 2017.
- Additional supports for students have been reviewed and are now in line with circular 0070/2014
- Annual meetings with all Post Holders will be scheduled with senior management from April 2017 and at regular intervals throughout the school year from August 2017.
- Formal systems for sharing and implementing high-quality teaching and learning strategies are being further explored by school management and staff.

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
Very Good	Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	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	Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. Overall, learners have access to a basic level of provision. 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	Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;