

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

School name	Coláiste an Átha
School address	Kilmuckridge Co. Wexford
Roll number	71650Q

Date of Evaluation: 16-10-2019



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 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.

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, 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	14-16 October 2019
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

Coláiste an Átha is a co-educational post-primary school in the patronage of Waterford Wexford Education and Training Board. The school participates in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) action plan for inclusion. It has a full-time home-school-community liaison coordinator. It enrolls pupils from local primary schools and further afield. Enrolment is on an upward trend. Currently, there are 326 students enrolled. All curricular programmes are provided, including the Junior Cycle programme and Junior Cycle Schools Programme (JCSP). The Transition Year (TY) is compulsory for those not entering the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. Options after TY include the Leaving Certificate established or Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of leadership and management is very good and this is supported by distributed leadership responsibilities and the commitment of senior management, staff and the board to continually improve the learners' experience.
- School support systems for students are very good; the school is highly responsive to the needs of the entire student cohort and uses its resources in very well-organised, targeted and structured ways to support high-quality learner experiences.
- Very good co-ordination of planning for students with special educational needs (SEN) is evident; senior management is aligning school practices with the new Resource Allocation Model for SEN, but further progress is necessary so that all teaching hours are deployed.
- The quality of teaching and learning observed was good or very good; the many strengths identified in teacher collaboration can be harnessed to further extend the good practices.
- Good progress has been made in implementing recommendations from previous inspections.
- School development is good and staff take ownership of school improvement, including the DEIS action plan, but there is a need to ensure that the school self-evaluation (SSE) process is used as the key driver for ongoing internal strategic review of all systems and practices.

Recommendations

- Senior management should ensure that all the teaching resource hours for SEN are fully and appropriately used and continuously review the deployment of teaching resources for Maths and a modern foreign language to support numeracy and progression in the DEIS context.

- Senior and middle leaders should progress the planned review of the code of behaviour so that it reflects current positive behaviours for learning, the supportive learning environment and wellbeing indicators.
- Teachers should further develop and extend the use of written formative feedback on students' work and provide opportunities that challenge students to be independent and reflective in their learning.
- All those with leadership roles should use the SSE approach to support their work and report on progress, and formally involve parents and students in self-evaluation of whole-school, curricular and policy matters.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

Leadership of learning and teaching is highly effective. Through the commitment of the principal, deputy principal, teachers and the board of management, the school is continually improving the learners' experience. Over recent years, the patron, Waterford Wexford Education and Training Board, supported a teacher training programme that enhances student engagement in learning and thinking in daily lessons. This has led to systematic improvements in collaboration and professional conversations among a significant number of teachers. An ongoing in-school process of peer observation of lessons and the holding of in-house teaching and learning meetings are leading to developments in reflective practice and the sharing of teaching approaches.

Teachers are engaging with a wide range of opportunities for professional development and professional collaboration. Training in the Junior Cycle, JCSP, TY, LCVP and LCA programmes and with local communities of practice, including special education, music and digital clusters, engagement with *Droichead* and the work of staff as curriculum advisors are all contributing to the culture of improving teaching and learning. With careful oversight, the principal and deputy principal encourage and affirm these active participations of teachers.

The school is highly responsive to the needs of the entire student cohort and, overall, uses its resources in targeted and structured ways to address those needs. Those with leadership roles actively collaborate in the provision of targeted interventions, agreed classroom practices and the use of whole-school approaches that extend students' learning and wellbeing.

Decisions on the deployment of resources to best support student learning are well thought through and underpinned by evidence. In order to support early and progressive development of wellbeing and good routines for successful learning, junior cycle students receive teaching in skills-related shorter units of learning that develop resilience, connectedness and responsibility. A targeted vocabulary enrichment programme combined with a whole-school plan for developing the literacy and numeracy of all students is delivered in response to information from assessed needs and the professional views of teachers involved in student support. Teachers work with identified students and groups on programmes designed to meet their social, emotional and academic needs so they can achieve and succeed in school.

Provision and organisational structures for students with special educational needs are very good. A core team of coordinators, who maintain ongoing training in SEN, is responsible for leading this area. The team does highly effective work in planning and monitoring the education of students. They provide guidance to mainstream teachers on the strengths of individual students and priority learning approaches that help them succeed in learning. This informs lesson planning. The team delivers models of co-operative teaching and in-class support to assist students in inclusive ways. The team has made very good progress in aligning school practices with the principles of the new Resource Allocation Model and Circular 0014/2017. Senior management is taking steps to ensure that all the teaching resources allocated in this model are appropriately used, but recognises that further progress is necessary so that the hours are used fully and appropriately. The principal should ensure that all hours are fully used in line with the *Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools*.

The very good student support systems involve class tutors, year heads, senior management and trained personnel with expertise in behaviour for learning and guidance counselling. Weekly student support team and year head meetings ensure a high level of collaboration among those with middle

leadership responsibilities for students. The teams work at whole-school, class group and individual levels to promote positive relationships and behaviours for learning. Their daily work is reflective and responsive. Developments in student support are ongoing: a revised use of tutor time is being tried, and an emerging system of tracking students' test scores and academic progress could help emphasise the 'leadership of learning' focus within the student support roles.

In leading learning, the school has responded very well to recent educational changes. In the new Junior Cycle programme, careful consideration is given to matching the wellbeing programme to students' needs. The TY programme, which was introduced four years ago in response to the need to develop learner independence in senior cycle, is proving very successful.

In the context of a DEIS school, working to deliver equality of opportunity, essential considerations are given to the timetable to be provided annually. It was reported that timetable decisions are based on accrued evidence of the profile of each cohort. In addition, and increasingly, senior and middle management are making use of data to support timetabling and the DEIS plan. For example, in response to information on the incoming cohort's numeracy abilities, the numeracy coordinator makes necessary adjustments to the DEIS targets and actions that support whole-school approaches to numeracy and the uptake of higher-level Maths. Maintaining careful review of the timetable for Maths is a very important and necessary approach in the DEIS context.

All curricular programmes are provided, giving the curriculum breadth to meet the needs of all students and enabling the development of key skills in the junior and senior cycles. The range of subjects provided is good and includes academic and practical subjects that match the interests of students. Subject choice is generally good, but access to a modern foreign language is limited to one band throughout junior cycle as an option alongside practical subjects. This ought to be kept under review so that students don't limit their options for progression too early. Findings from the questionnaires and meetings with parents and students suggest that subject choice merits ongoing consideration.

The leadership of and provision for a varied extra-curricular programme and the widespread celebration of students' many achievements on social media, on notice boards and in annual award ceremonies greatly support the holistic education provided. This was one of the main reasons cited by students and parents in choosing this school.

Managing the organisation

There are significant strengths in the management of the organisation. The principal and deputy principal operate as a highly effective team; their evident co-operation, commitment to the learners and their consultative leadership have led to the creation and maintenance of a learning organisation. Working relationships among staff are fostered and staff feel strongly that their views are valued in decision-making processes. The middle leadership structure is based on distributed leadership to meet the school's identified needs and priorities. The board supports the principal and maintains very careful oversight of the organisation. In addition the board manages the school, including complex situations, very effectively and with fairness.

The school is very well run. It is an orderly and well-maintained learning environment. Robust school systems and very good internal communication support students' educational and personal development. Findings from the questionnaires and meetings with students, staff and parents showed very positive views about school atmosphere, fairness, respect and anti-bullying procedures.

The building and grounds are kept to a very high standard. Plans are being advanced to extend the facilities and social areas for students. Teaching aids, equipment and classrooms are well maintained to ensure their optimal use in lessons. Staff members continually enhance the learning environment; vibrant displays provide inspiring and positive messages related to learning and promoting equality

of opportunity, including attendance, literacy and numeracy. Overall health, including positive mental health and physical activity, is promoted. The school has gained Amber and Green Flags.

Overall, the principal and deputy principal manage human resources very effectively to ensure the maximum impact on student learning. They deploy teachers strategically to make the best use of specific strengths and skills.

Key policies are in place and a number of these are being reviewed and updated. The whole-school guidance plan is drafted and due for ratification. There are plans to review the code of behaviour, and there is recognition of the continuing care needed to ensure it places emphasis on the core work of learning; this should be progressed directly to reflect actual positive behaviours for learning, the supportive school environment and the ongoing actions that develop wellbeing indicators.

Leading school development

Leadership of school development is good. Senior management is mediating change, responding to the evolving needs of students and fulfilling the mission statement. There is very good emphasis on action planning for improvement in all DEIS themes. Teachers have taken greater ownership of the DEIS action plan and now actions have a direct relevance to enhancing teaching and classroom practices. There is a commitment to measuring impact and teachers are using data to support action planning.

While the school is very reflective about its ongoing development, there is a need to improve the school's strategic engagement with in a continuous process of self-evaluation and to harness the SSE approach to support all working groups. This is an identified area for development.

Senior management is committed to sustaining ongoing school improvement. They and those with middle leadership roles have kept up with developments in education and use this information positively for school benefit. Partnerships with primary schools, agencies and local businesses are good. School leaders make positive use of parent-teacher meetings, open days, postcards home and news updates to promote the school's work. The quality of communication with parents about their child's learning is generally good, and senior management is taking steps to improve school reports so that they report on student progress and achievement.

Developing leadership capacity

Both the board and senior management recognise the importance of sustainable leadership and of developing leadership capacity through existing and emerging structures. Responsibility is delegated and leadership is distributed. Post holders, coordinators and teachers are given roles that acknowledge, empower and develop their skills and the leadership capacity that clearly exists. Strong leadership at senior and middle levels combined with staff investment in improvement, has led to the highly effective teachers' collaborations in the sharing of good practice.

The board is experienced and conscientious in leadership. It is highly supportive of and attentive to the work of personnel in leading learning. It would be worth considering ways the board can further support distributed leadership and ownership of the improvement process through invitations to leaders and coordinators to share information on ongoing progress and strengths.

Opportunities for students to develop their leadership capacities are improving and emergent. They include the student council, *Meitheal*, *Gaisce*, clubs and societies, speaking at school events and on the intercom and the range of opportunities provided during TY. These strongly support students' own development as leaders. Interaction with students and responses from the questionnaires indicate that there is scope for greater consultation with students during the school year on their experiences of teaching and learning and of the various programmes, so that their voice on the core work of the school is highlighted.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The teaching and learning observed was good or very good in almost all instances. Overall, the strengths observed during the evaluation included exceptionally high standard teacher-student relationships for learning, very good student-centred learning, high levels of student voice and student productivity, and the highly supportive, affirming and inclusive learning environment. There was scope for improvement in a few aspects. Overall, areas for development included extending written formative feedback, embedding the agreed literacy and numeracy strategies, and further challenging students to be independent in learning.

Learner outcomes and experiences

Overall, learner experiences were very good and learner outcomes were good. Interactions among students, and between students and teachers, were respectful and positive. A key strength observed was the affirmation of effort and the focus on wellbeing. Lessons were characterised by exceptionally high quality relationships and the strong presence of productive student voices.

Students experienced high-quality learning environments in classrooms that were enhanced with posters displaying positive messages about learning, wellbeing and subject literacy. The arrangement of desks into group settings in some rooms proved productive.

In lessons, students were afforded many opportunities to work collaboratively, and they were often given time and guidance to think before pairing and sharing their thoughts. Students' involvement in and production of their work was good and they were diligent learners. They displayed effective collaborative skills, with an ability to learn with and from each other.

Overall, students were well organised, motivated to learn and had a clear understanding of the work being undertaken. In a number of lessons, learner outcomes were enhanced where the intended learning and success criteria for tasks were communicated clearly.

It was evident that each learner was known as an individual in terms of their strengths, interests and needs and this had a positive impact on outcomes. Often the activities, questions and tasks were subtly and appropriately differentiated. Students responded very well to questions including, probing and targeted questions that exploited their critical-thinking skills. Students could justify their responses and display good subject knowledge. In the best lessons, students were encouraged to take ownership and responsibility for their learning through the use of peer assessment and self-assessment activities which encouraged reflection on learning. Best practice was noted when the plenary activity was used by students to make adjustments to their own written work.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

Classroom management was very good and appropriate levels of support were afforded to students to optimise success. In the most effective lessons, teachers modelled enthusiasm and demonstrated subject knowledge that inspired engagement. Lessons were very well paced overall with opportunities for students to be active in their thinking. Tasks were well dispersed throughout lessons and there was a very good balance between teacher input and student activity. Almost always, students were placed at the centre of the learning experience, and teachers designed specific learning activities to elicit an authentic student voice.

Teacher's prepared effective resources tailored to meet students' needs and to support the development of skills. Digital learning was deployed in some lessons to stimulate interest and enhance learner outcomes. A small numbers of lessons would have benefited from the further use of more engaging resources.

In most lessons, teacher questioning was used effectively to assess students' recall and progress, and, at a more proficient level, to encourage higher-order thinking skills and a deeper engagement with content. In the best lessons, teachers encouraged students to apply and develop skills during tasks and supported them in making links to the application of the learning outside the classroom.

In effective lessons, teachers achieved a good balance of support and challenge by differentiating tasks. They ensured that all students received the support to experience success as learners. Some good practice in supporting learners through written formative feedback was observed but, in the majority of instances, this was identified as an area for improvement. It is recommended that the school introduce a strategy in response to this identified need in order to sustain and extend opportunities for high expectations and high challenge.

Teachers availed of opportunities to promote literacy and numeracy. However, agreed literacy and numeracy interventions for the week, which were universally displayed, were not used in many lessons. There is a need to discuss how this agreed approach could be embedded in practice.

In some highly effective lessons, teachers shared or co-created success criteria with students, and afforded them opportunities to reflect on their learning. It is envisaged that collectively, the school could achieve the full impact of these strategies through further professional collaboration.

The culture of effective teacher collaborative practice is evident in the work of subject departments through the leadership of co-ordinators. The subject plans reviewed were generally good and meeting minutes indicate a regularity in collaborative planning. Possibilities exist for senior management to support a learning focus of subject planning meetings, perhaps through developing a shared agenda and invitations to coordinators to meet and share ongoing progress. Commendably, each subject department conducts analysis on the outcomes of certificate examinations, sets common assessments, and many teachers actively engage in peer observation.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

Overall, management has made good progress in progressing recommendations and has used inspection reports to further the school improvement agenda. Further progress is necessary to oversee a review of the Relationships and Sexuality Education policy and the integration of agreed classroom actions for DEIS outcomes in subject plans.

Teaching and Learning

During lesson observation, it was clear that substantial improvement has occurred in many aspects. Overall, teachers are enabling students to become more independent and reflective learners, making them aware of the skills they are developing in lessons as well as their knowledge of the subject. There is improved active and collaborative learning. The school has developed the use of differentiation, higher-order challenge and assessment for learning. There was some good quality corrections of students' written work, but this could be extended.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The quality of reflective practice among leaders and practitioners is good. A clear focus on improving the learning and wellbeing of all students is evident in the very good DEIS plan, programme plans and the student support plans.

There is a need, however, to strategically apply the SSE process of reflection and evaluation to the work of school teams and subject departments. In addition, the SSE approach could be used to build on ways to report on progress for those with leadership and reporting roles. There is a need to involve parents and students formally in policy development and SSE. The board too, could use the SSE process to report annually on the work of the school using criteria such as: what is working well, how we know, and how can we make our school even better.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

Management and teachers display a commitment to ongoing improvement. The work of those with leadership responsibilities is development-focused. The value teachers place on applying their learning from continuing professional development is also contributing greatly to improvement. The many strengths identified in teacher collaboration can be harnessed to further extend the very good teaching practices identified. Teachers' openness to sharing best practice and extending invitations to observe lessons supports learners' experiences and the desired consistency in agreed whole-school approaches. The school, therefore, has very good capacity to bring about any necessary improvements in its practices.

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

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

- The board of management, and the patron Waterford and Wexford Education and Training Board, WWETB, welcome the very many positive findings in this inspection report including the acknowledgement of the highly effective leadership of teaching and learning and the board of management's conscientious support for those who lead learning.
- The board of management and the WWETB are pleased that the involvement of the school leadership and teachers of Coláiste an Átha in CPD programmes provided by the WWETB, particularly the Magenta principles, communities of practice such as Digital Leaders, SEN and Pobal Ceoil, and other networks is recognised. The significant effort to enhance student engagement in learning and thinking in daily lessons which has led to systematic improvements in collaboration and professional conversations among a significant number of teachers within the school is central to the mission statement of the school and WWETB.
- The board of management is particularly pleased that the WWETB core value of learner focused provision is explicitly identified by the inspectorate and that the considerable effort within the school to be "highly responsive to the needs of the entire student cohort" and to utilise "resources in targeted and structured ways to address those needs" is acknowledged. It is also appreciated that the inspectorate witnessed the "exceptionally high standard teacher-student relationships for learning, very good student-centred learning, high levels of student voice and student productivity, and the highly supportive, affirming and inclusive learning environment" and that "It was evident that each learner was known as an individual in terms of their strengths, interests and needs and this had a positive impact on outcomes".

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

- A whole school curriculum review will be completed for September 2020 to ensure that all the teaching resource hours for SEN are fully and appropriately used.
- The school intends to apply for a Classroom Language Assistant to assist with the further development of modern foreign languages in the school and to support progression in the DEIS context.
- The review and development of a revised Code of Behaviour is ongoing and will be completed for September 2020.
- Monthly progress reports and school reports to home have been modified to facilitate written formative feedback and the focus has moved to the classroom situation where oral and written feedback will be given in more formal and structured ways to provide students with opportunities to reflect on their own learning.
- The SSE approach will be used to support future planning at wholeschool, curricular and policy planning and development matters. The school continues to strengthen student voice and to involve parent and students in the self-evaluation and improvement process.
- The school will complete a review of the Relationships and Sexuality Education policy for implementation in September 2020.