

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

School name	Scoil Ui Mhuiri
School address	Barn Road Dunleer Co. Louth
Roll number	71780G

Date of Evaluation: 22-11-2018



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

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

How to read this report

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

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

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

The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, 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, Stay Safe, RSE, and 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	19, 20 and 21 Nov-2018
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

Scoil Uí Mhuirí, Dunleer is a co-educational post-primary school under the patronage of Louth and Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB). All curricular programmes are offered and the school has a current enrolment of 544 students. Transition Year (TY) is optional for students. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of leadership and management of many aspects of school life is good; communication systems with staff are not always effective.
- The board of management is very committed to the school and provides a high level of support to the principal; it provides a satisfactory oversight role.
- Good student support systems have been established and staff are very committed to student care but some of the resources for students with special education needs (SEN) are not being used for the intended purpose.
- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Good progress has been made in the implementation of recommendations from previous inspection reports.
- Management is focusing on promoting a culture of continuous improvement through engagement with *Looking at our Schools 2016 (LAOS)*; target setting is satisfactory.

Recommendations

- The board of management, supported by LMETB, should enhance its oversight role in the school in relation to DEIS target setting and policy development.
- A review of the communication systems between senior management and staff should be carried out and improvements should be made where necessary.
- The current provision for students with SEN should be reviewed in line with the *Guidelines for Post Primary Schools Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* and the school should ensure that all of the SEN resources are appropriately deployed.
- A more strategic approach to target setting should be taken in the school's DEIS planning process.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management of many aspects of school life is good. There is scope for further development in some areas, such as leadership of staff.

Leading learning and teaching

Leadership of learning and teaching is good, overall. Senior management has facilitated staff to engage with *Looking at Our School 2016* (LAOS) as part of the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) process. Very good work has been undertaken in this regard and recommendations identified by staff in this analysis are now being progressed. School management has facilitated continuing development (CPD) opportunities with high levels of staff engagement evident.

The school timetable demonstrates sound planning principles. The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum at Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate as well as an optional TY programme and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). All programmes are well-co-ordinated. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) is provided in sixth year but due to low uptake the school was unable to provide LCA in fifth year. In line with its SSE process, management is exploring the provision of courses at a similar level. The rationale for and feasibility of these options should be explored with the teaching staff.

Organisation of the provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) is satisfactory. The SEN department is in the process of adopting the new model of provision for students with SEN, in accordance with Circular 0014/0017. Changes in the leadership and composition of the core SEN team have negatively impacted this process. Senior management will need to become fully appraised of the new model of provision for students with SEN in order to successfully lead the development of a comprehensive and stable core team. The school is in receipt of a significant allocation to provide additional education support for SEN students. At the time of the evaluation, some of the SEN allocation was not being used for its intended purpose. Senior management should ensure that all allocated SEN hours are used in line with the continuum of support for students.

The quality of provision for SEN students is good. Advice and student documentation in relation to students' SEN needs are available to teachers on a shared staff platform and this is good practice. The school includes two special classes for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Some students are included in mainstream lessons where appropriate and this is very good practice. Small group or one-to-one support for students with SEN is provided in the mainstream school, mostly when students have an exemption from Irish or where students do not study a modern foreign language. The use of co-teaching is a relatively new means of supporting students with SEN and could be developed further. The school should avail of additional whole-staff CPD on the new model of provision for students with SEN and for the model of co-teaching.

Care for students in the school is very good. The responses to questionnaires and interviews with students referenced the high level of care and commitment of teachers to students. A junior and senior care team has been established. However, while year head and care team meetings are timetabled, they do not always occur and this should be addressed.

Overall, there is scope for improvement in communication between senior management and staff. It is recommended that senior management develop more effective communication systems in relation to areas such as the scheduling of meetings and the dissemination of information.

Managing the organisation

Management of the school is good overall. The board of management demonstrates a high level of commitment to the school. It meets regularly and its members have received training. The board is appropriately involved in the management of the school in areas such as student transfers, the acquisition of two ASD units, and the ongoing building work in relation to the school extension. The board comprises members who have a wide range of experience and provides good support to the principal. The board is informed annually of students' success in certificate examinations. As part of the board's oversight role of the DEIS plan for attainment, it should ensure that targets are set and used to inform planning. Under the direction of the board, the school should ensure that the summary report of the school improvement plan is disseminated to the school community.

The school regularly provides placements for student teachers and such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is commendable. However, the number of Postgraduate Masters in Education (PME) students accepted into the school is very high. A policy regarding the number of PME students accepted in any one year should be developed in order to ensure that the PME students and the school receive optimum benefit from the experience.

The principal and deputy principal demonstrate dedication to the school and manage the organisation effectively in many areas. They have agreed duties and work in a collaborative and collegial manner. In addition to their individual roles, they have taken on other roles such as year-head duties. These additional roles add significantly to the onerous nature of their management duties. The principal and deputy principal have an agreed approach to many aspects of management including the implementation of the code of behaviour.

Effective student management systems are in place including those which reward positive behaviour. Significant work has been undertaken by senior management in this regard. A strong emphasis is placed on restorative justice practices which have proven to be very effective. A clear ladder of referral is now in place and this is very good practice. The behaviour of students was exemplary during the evaluation. Students, in their discussions with the inspectors, were very positive towards management and staff.

All class groups are timetabled for Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) at junior cycle. The timetabling of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in senior cycle requires review as it is currently scheduled only for the latter part of sixth year.

Leading school development

Policy development is effectively supported by LMETB and all mandatory policies are in place. The board of management has reviewed a number of policies. The board should complete an annual policy and legislative checklist as an internal record of their ongoing process of policy development and review.

A DEIS plan was developed through a consultative process and a number of staff committees are in place in line with the DEIS themes. Targets have been developed under each theme and these should now be reviewed in order to ensure that they are accurately meeting the needs of the school. Identified actions for improvement should focus to a greater extent on the improvement of learners' experiences and outcomes at classroom level and should have a stronger focus on the development of teachers' individual and collaborative practice.

Subject departments have engaged well with Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) training and planning for the revised specifications has commenced. Some very good practices in implementing the new specifications were evident and management should explore how these can be shared among all subject departments.

Very good links are maintained with the community through participation in the School Completion Programme and through the work of the Home School Community Liaison teacher. There is also very good provision for students through initiatives such as the breakfast club, homework club and after school study.

Representatives of the parents' association interviewed as part of the evaluation, demonstrated a very strong commitment to the school and have been consulted, as appropriate, in relation to the development of some school policies. They have been involved in a number of educational initiatives where they have linked with other schools, for example in targeting cyberbullying. Feedback from parent questionnaires indicates that there is a need to improve communication between the parents' association and the wider parent community of the school.

Developing leadership capacity

There is evidence of good leadership capacity in the school. Post-holders play an important role in the smooth running of the school; they perform the duties attached to their roles with commitment. The middle management team of assistant principals takes responsibility for a range of pastoral, administrative and co-ordination roles which assist in the effective operation of the school and enhance student outcomes.

A review of the schedule of posts has taken place and while some changes were made, some positions have yet to be filled. Descriptors outlining specific responsibilities and duties for each role should be developed in order to provide clarity while maintaining the flexibility of responsibility associated with a middle management position. In addition, teachers have engaged with projects and initiatives in a voluntary capacity which demonstrates the high level of commitment of staff to the school.

Student leadership is promoted through the student council and more recently the prefect system. A range of extra and co-curricular activities is provided in the school, including sporting activities, the musical and educational trips. This provision is commendable and impacts positively on the student experience by broadening their opportunities to extend their learning beyond the classroom.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Twenty-one lessons were observed during the course of the evaluation. The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was very good.

Learner outcomes and experiences

The learner experience was very good in the lessons observed. Students demonstrated high levels of motivation and engaged keenly in all tasks set. Interactions between students were very respectful and there was a very good rapport between students and teachers in all lessons.

In a small number of lessons there was scope for more clarity in the learning intentions, more targeted use of active learning methodologies to engage all students, and an increased focus on strategies that would enable students to take responsibility for their own learning.

Students, in the main, achieved the intended learning intentions. Commendably, in some lessons, students were afforded time and opportunity during and towards the end of the lesson to reflect on their work and progress. Excellent practice was observed where learning intentions were differentiated for content and outcomes.

The school has very good whole-school practices in place to support wellbeing. For example, the classrooms and corridors are used to display positive and affirming messages about wellbeing, learning and individual responsibility. Student behaviour was good in all lessons and students engaged well with the given tasks. In almost all lessons learning was supported by visual resources.

In highly effective lessons, there was sufficient challenge and a good balance of student and teacher input. In most lessons, students worked collaboratively through a number of set tasks, assessing their own work and at times learning from assessment of their peers; this is highly effective practice. Student enjoyment of learning and their sense of achievement was very evident. Means to disseminate this good practice should be explored.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

The majority of lessons were characterised by the use of active learning methodologies which gave students opportunities to collaborate, discuss, reflect and voice their own opinions. Typically, students were set tasks where they worked in pairs or in groups. In almost all lessons the teacher provided appropriate support to individuals and groups where necessary. In some instances, there was a need to give learners more time to engage fully with the task before the teacher introduced plenary discussion. In some lessons, students were afforded the opportunity to question each other and to extend their learning in creative ways. It was evident that teachers have engaged well with CPD to support the new Junior Cycle.

Good use of questioning was a feature of most lessons. Questions were differentiated and in the highly effective lessons; there was a good balance between questions that demanded recall and more challenging questions that opened opportunities for higher-order thinking and creativity. In some lessons there was scope to encourage more fully developed answers.

A review of student homework journals and copybooks indicated that good routines around correcting and checking student work were in place in all of the lessons observed. Homework was set and corrected regularly. Good quality written formative feedback was provided in many instances which gave useful direction to students on how they could improve their work. It was reported that regular assessment of student progress feeds into lesson planning but there was scope for more detailed tracking of individual student attainment which could be used to identify students' needs, inform decisions around appropriate supports and recognise incremental progress.

Digital learning technologies were well used in the classes visited. In many lessons they were primarily used to present information. Particularly good practice was seen where students interacted with the technology in use in the lesson. The recently published *Digital Learning Framework* should support this work further.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

Overall, good progress has been made in implementing recommendations from previous reports. Amendments to timetabling and assessment in the subjects inspected have been made and the RSE policy has recently been ratified.

Teaching and Learning

Good progress has been made in this area. Teachers are providing written formative feedback to learners on the quality of their work and recommendations in relation to methodologies have been acted upon and some very good differentiated practice was evident in lessons.

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

The school has engaged well with the process of self-evaluation. A three-year DEIS plan is in place with actions identified under all themes. The current SSE coordinator has been recently appointed. Working groups have been set up to progress areas identified for development. It is noteworthy that the DEIS targets were a feature of some subject plans and this good practice should be more widespread.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school demonstrates good capacity for improvement. Management is working on promoting a culture of continuous improvement through engagement with LAOS, through progression of actions under each of the DEIS themes and the establishment of working groups to progress SSE targets. Improved capacity could be attained by a more focused approach to target setting, for example in the use of SMART (specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and time-bound) targets.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

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

Communication systems with staff have been improved and will continue to be improved going forward – since inspection (a) a weekly staff bulletin is distributed each Friday outlining events for the following week, (b) staff meeting agendas are distributed at least one week in advance of meetings, (c) minutes of whole staff meetings are distributed to staff within five days of the meeting, (d) teachers are emailed a report on Senior Management team meeting each week, (e) staff are given copy of agreed report following board of management meetings, (f) care team and senior management team meetings are held weekly and minutes distributed within two days. A review will be undertaken of utilisation of Croke Park hours with a view to increasing the number of whole staff meetings held each year.

Provision for students with SEN has been improved and will continue to be improved – greater use of cooperative teaching has been facilitated, staff training has been organised re. best practice in this area. Training for staff in L2LP's has been organised. Next year all SEN resources will be appropriately deployed. A smaller, more specialist SEN team will be working in this department. One teacher will be facilitated to complete specialist SEN training (Post Graduate Diploma in Special and Inclusive Education) to increase expertise in this department. Planning for students is now following the new allocation model guidelines for schools.

The school's board of management will be more fully engaged going forward in DEIS target setting and policy development, thus increasing its oversight role. We have sought guidance on best practice in this regard.

A more strategic approach to target setting is being taken with regard to the school's planning process. The whole staff team are continuing their work using the 'Looking at our Schools' document to carry out a comprehensive SCOT analysis of all aspects of school life. At the same time three committees within the school have met and are working on three key target areas – (a) teaching and learning, (b) assessment and (c) pre-employment provision in the school. The school has sought guidance on best practice in this regard.

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;