

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Brendan's College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Belmullet, Co. Mayo
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	72050U

Date of Evaluation: 07 February 2017



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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Date of inspection	07 February 2017
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 Brendan's College is a co-educational post-primary school which operates under the auspices of the Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB). The school is one of three post-primary schools in the region and has a current enrolment of 342 students. A broad curriculum is provided and 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, with regard to both the board of management and the senior management team, is of a very high standard.
- Leadership roles are well distributed through the posts of responsibility structure and through outstanding levels of volunteerism in key areas.
- The overall quality of teaching was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed; there is scope for some further improvement in teachers' collaborative planning.
- The overall quality of student learning was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed; active engagement with the content of the lesson is an area for improvement in some cases.
- There has been a good level of engagement with recommendations from previous inspections.
- Overall, a very high capacity for any future school improvement was evident.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The work that is currently being undertaken to ensure that all health and safety requirements are met should be completed without delay.
- Best practices in relation to subject department planning, evident in some of the plans examined, should be shared with a view to improving the quality of subject planning in some cases.
- Learning opportunities should be maximised in lessons by ensuring students are actively engaged, have clear learning intentions and are given more responsibility for and independence in their own learning.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1. School ownership and management

The overall quality of management and leadership is very good. The board of management is appropriately constituted and members bring a range of expertise to St Brendan's College. The work of school management is supported by the MSLETB. The board has a visible presence at school events and maintains strong links with the local community. Members are well informed in relation to all relevant school matters through presentations from staff, principal's reports and attendance at school events. It is clear that all board members have a genuine interest and pride in their work with St. Brendan's College.

The principal and deputy principal are diligent and hard-working. They have a very good working relationship and complementary skills which they use very effectively. Both show exceptional levels of commitment to the school and work hard to keep the profile of the school high and positive. They are very well informed in relation to current educational issues and facilitate and partake in relevant continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities.

There is a partnership approach to all school developments, and positive, productive relationships with all stakeholders are evident. Creating, fostering and maintaining positive relationships is an integral part of what management sees as important. Parents, students and teachers all expressed very high levels of satisfaction with school management.

Strong leadership qualities are evident among middle management post holders and staff members who have undertaken additional responsibilities voluntarily. Exceptional levels of commitment and volunteerism are key strengths of the school. This is achieved through a distributed approach to leadership which fosters a great sense of pride among staff members. The sense of purpose and school ownership was highly evident as staff members described their roles and responsibilities. The outstanding commitment, diligence and dedication shown by the middle management team has a very positive impact on the school and ensures that many of the school's needs are addressed through the post structure. All decisions made are student-centred. There is a biennial review of posts of responsibility and annual reporting to management, both of which are good practice.

The parents' association is made up of members who bring a range of experience and expertise to their roles. They work closely with teachers and staff, particularly with the home-school community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator, to create opportunities for involving parents through various initiatives. For example, a parents' coffee morning was organised this year for the first time to enable first-year parents to meet each other and members of the parents' association. It is envisaged that this will become an annual event due to its success. The parents' association also plays an integral role in fostering and maintaining links with the community and past pupils. The members value their role in policy review and are currently working on improving the communication channels with the wider school community. They meet occasionally with the student council and it is advised that these links be maintained and strengthened. Productive links with the board of management are fostered through the parents' nominees on the board.

The student council is democratically elected and is representative of the entire student body. Members take their roles seriously and are valued as partners in the school's operation. The members are very proud of their involvement in securing the school's first Green Flag. The work of the student

council is supported by a link teacher who meets with them regularly. The council has a role in policy review and demonstrates confidence that its input is valued and considered.

1.2. Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Senior management facilitates, encourages and supports teachers' engagement with CPD. It recognises the value of CPD in supporting and enhancing teachers' practice as well as the positive impact it can have on students' learning. All opportunities and suggestions for training raised by management and teachers or subject departments are considered and, where possible, facilitated. The sharing of information from individual or group events and courses with the entire staff is common practice and is highly commended.

Academic expectations for each individual student aim to be both high and realistic. The holistic approach to development ensures that students develop emotionally and socially as well as academically, and each individual is assessed on their own merit, abilities and interests. All students' requests, academic and otherwise, are considered. Timetable options change annually to accommodate the subject choices of as many students as possible. High levels of commitment from staff members facilitate a broad range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. As well as this, links fostered and maintained with community groups, some of which use the school hall, ensure that students have additional opportunities to experience a vast range of activities and sports. The achievements of students and teachers are celebrated and recognised, both for in-school and other successes. This helps to build and maintain the palpable sense of community within the school.

The school provides a balanced curriculum. As well as the established Leaving Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) are offered to senior-cycle students. All students are supported to remain in school and to attain the established Leaving Certificate. This has been achieved by pro-active and collaborative measures undertaken by the HCSL and the School Completion Programme (SCP) teams as well as school staff and management. The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme is not currently offered in the school. It is advised that this be kept under review.

All current first-year students have been included in the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and the intention is to continue with this practice. In line with the ethos of the school, the co-ordinator and teachers involved with JCSP are more than willing to accept the additional workload that this involves, particularly since the JCSP statements of learning have a relevance and a value for all students. New junior-cycle specifications are being engaged with in full.

Agricultural Science has been introduced recently in response to requests from students. Where feasible, low-demand subjects are provided for individuals or small groups, particularly at senior cycle. Due to the relatively small number of students, demand can drop after the junior cycle for particular subjects and many students and subjects have benefited from teachers facilitating these individual or small classes.

Students with additional needs are supported in an integrated and inclusive manner. The HSCL co-ordinator, SCP team and special educational needs (SEN) co-ordinator, along with the entire staff body, work diligently and collaboratively, to ensure that students are supported and encouraged to achieve to their potential, both academically and personally. The SEN co-ordinator liaises closely with feeder primary schools and parents, as well as assessing students' in school, to ensure that all needs are identified and adequate supports are provided. Individual and small group lessons, as well as recently introduced team-teaching for specific subjects, are the main forms of educational support provided. The SEN co-ordinator is always timetabled to teach first-year students to further ensure that

any potential issue is identified and duly supported, as well as fostering positive relationships with students.

There is a whole-school guidance and counselling plan which outlines the areas in which the guidance counsellor has responsibility for supporting students. Academic and personal supports are provided and are interlinked as appropriate. There are many methods of referral to the guidance counsellor, including self-referral. It is recommended that the referral system be formalised and recorded. A care team, which meets weekly, helps to ensure that issues related to students' wellbeing are identified, that students are supported and that details are recorded and maintained securely.

Forward planning has led to the introduction of forty-minute class periods this year as a pre-emptive move to meet requirements for the coming school year. The move required consultation and agreement with the neighbouring school, and with transport providers, as it resulted in a change of school finishing times.

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

1.3. Management of facilities

The working and learning environments for all at St Brendan's College are clean and orderly. There are displays throughout the school which celebrate various achievements, some of which are for academic excellence. Along with the continual work of the diligent and highly valued support staff, students are given responsibility for the maintenance of clean and litter-free communal areas. The overall sense of pride from all who work and study in St Brendan's College is highly evident.

Specialist rooms are well equipped and there is a well-developed information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure in place. Training opportunities are provided and availed of to ensure teachers are adept and confident at maximising the potential use of ICT. Subject departments are well-resourced and additional requests for materials to support learning and teaching are provided on request, where feasible. The school's sports facilities are very good. Allowing community groups to use the facilities helps keep the school's profile high and is an example of the very good support provided by the school and its management for the local community.

During the inspection, management was working to ensure that all health and safety requirements were met. There was evidence of considerable progress being made before the inspection was completed. Although the working environments were orderly and well-maintained, not all practical rooms complied with health and safety requirements and there was a need to put evidence-based systems in place to check and rectify identified or potential risks.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

A good standard of planning was evident in the sample of subject and programme plans reviewed. Most of the plans reviewed followed a consistent planning template. The best plans were underpinned by detailed schemes of work which outlined specific learning outcomes for each year group and for each level of study; these schemes of work, in turn, were linked to associated methodologies, resources and assessment modes. In some cases, subject plans were more generic in nature and did not provide sufficient detail to guide teaching and learning. In such cases, opportunities for

collaborative planning should be further exploited with a view to sharing best practice in relation to curricular planning.

In almost all instances, individual lessons were well prepared and lesson planning included methods of assessing prior knowledge and progress. Where well-executed pair and group work was observed, students were enthusiastic and learning opportunities were maximised. In all instances, there was a very positive and respectful rapport between students and staff, and among the students themselves.

The standard of teaching ranged from good to exemplary in most of the lessons observed and was of a satisfactory standard in the remaining lessons. The standard of learning was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed. Where practice was of a very high standard, a student-centred approach was adopted, a range of methodologies was used to engage students and the lesson was differentiated in terms of content, task and outcome. Teachers, in such lessons, demonstrated a mastery of their subject matter, exercised calm and respectful control of lesson activities and provided a clarity of purpose that allowed students to successfully assess their own level of progress. Students enjoyed these lessons and successfully reached the high expectations set for both the quality of work to be presented and level of knowledge to be acquired.

In a minority of lessons, teachers adopted a style that was overly based on presentation. There was scope, in such lessons, to facilitate students in engaging more actively with the content of the lesson. In a few instances, valuable whole-class learning opportunities were missed as were opportunities to facilitate peer support and peer assessment. It is therefore recommended that the good practices observed in relation to active learning continue to be shared among teachers with a view to further disseminating best practice. Collaborative and individual planning should build on the very good rapport, with and between students, to facilitate further peer co-operation to enhance learning.

ICT was used in almost all of the lessons observed. Particularly effective use was noted in lessons where ICT facilitated efficient progress through the lesson content. This was achieved in a variety of ways including the judicious use of video content, the display of imagery, assisting in the process of project design and the use of dynamic software to control the timing of an activity. It was also noteworthy that very good practice was achieved in a number of lessons without the use of any ICT.

Good or very good engagement with literacy and numeracy strategies was observed in more than half of the lessons. Opportunities to introduce meaningful and relevant terminology and concepts were maximised in the best lessons and students showed a high level of skill when including them in their discussions and activities. It is recommended that the school's literacy and numeracy improvement strategies be included in as many lessons as possible.

A broad range of questioning strategies was used in almost all lessons. Teachers demonstrated skill in framing a combination of higher-order and lower-order questions and in most cases, teachers selected students to answer. This optimal strategy ensured that all voices were heard, understanding was checked and students had opportunities to elaborate on their responses. Where questioning was less effective, the expectations for student knowledge and ability were low and the teacher provided many of the answers. It is recommended that questioning strategies be discussed and best practices shared across all departments to ensure that maximum learning and teaching benefits accrue.

In almost all of the lessons observed, the learning environment was enhanced with relevant displays of subject-specific content, much of which has been produced by students. In many lessons, the learning environment was further enhanced through the adaptation of seating arrangements to suit

the lesson format and to facilitate collaborative learning. Positive student behaviour and respectful interactions between teachers and students were highly evident in all lessons.

The current focus on assessment will further support learning and many individual teachers were reminded that written feedback should include guidance on how to improve as well as affirmation for specifics, where possible. There is also room to build on the good practice of self-assessment, noted in a few lessons, where students were asked to reflect on what they learned.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1. Management

The board was fully aware of all recommendations made in previous inspections and senior management has been instrumental in supporting and monitoring progress and implementation. All whole-school recommendations made during the previous whole-school evaluation have been addressed and are contributing to the success of the school.

3.2 Learning and Teaching

Subject department planning recommendations from previous inspections have been well addressed. However, there is a need to improve the quality and effectiveness of some subject plans by sharing best practice among all subject departments.

Recommendations to increase levels of active participation by students and to further support the integration of ICT into learning and teaching have informed lesson planning. Further development in both areas is recommended.

A range of effective assessment strategies was evident during the inspection and the sharing of these should help to influence further development and improvement in lessons. Assessment is an area requiring continued improvement. The school self-evaluation focus on assessment for learning (AfL), and the consolidation and sharing of existing practices will further support students' learning.

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

Self-evaluation is an integral part of the school's developmental approach. This is achieved through active engagement with DEIS action planning and SSE. The promotion of high standards in literacy and numeracy has been high on the school's agenda since it began its engagement with DEIS action planning in 2006. SSE has provided the school with an additional vehicle through which to advance standards in teaching and learning and the school has engaged with this process enthusiastically and assuredly. As well as literacy and numeracy, the school has chosen AfL as an area of focus. The gathering of baseline data involves all relevant stakeholders, targets are realistic and time bound and the monitoring of progress and the implementation of review mechanisms are the shared responsibility of all staff members.

Discussions with students, parents and staff, in conjunction with the responses to questionnaires indicate that the school community shares an immense sense of pride in what the school has achieved

and continues to achieve. The school's highly effective management structures and the dedicated, hard-working and vibrant staff provide assurance of a very high capacity for school improvement well into the future.

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. 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;