An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Saint Columba's Comprehensive School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Glenties County Donegal
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	81010J

Date of Evaluation: 14-03-2018

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.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	12-14 March 2018
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with board of management • Meetings with principal and deputy principal • Meetings with key staff • Review of relevant documents • Student focus-group meeting	• 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

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School context

Saint Columba's Comprehensive School is a co-educational post-primary school under the patronage of the Bishop of Raphoe and Donegal Education and Training Board. The school caters for 367 students currently and provides a broad range of curricular programmes.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of school management and leadership is good; there is scope for development in areas such as planning and monitoring of school improvement.
- The quality of student care is very good; staff are very committed to ensuring there is an integrated approach to supporting student wellbeing.
- The school is committed to supporting students with special educational needs (SEN), however, a more strategic approach is needed with respect to the allocation of SEN hours.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good overall and this ranged from very good in a number of lessons to satisfactory in a few; differentiation and the facilitation of student-led activity require attention.
- Overall, good progress has been made in implementing recommendations from previous evaluations
- The school demonstrates a good capacity for school improvement although there are weaknesses in the formal school self-evaluation (SSE) processes around target setting, monitoring and evaluating progress.

Recommendations

- The board of management, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, should oversee the development of an over-arching school plan to support and review the achievement of priorities in the short, medium and long term.
- Whole-school provision and planning for students with SEN should be based on the guidance provided by Department Circular 0014/2017.
- Teachers should make more use of student-led activities and differentiated approaches in order to appropriately challenge all learners.
- A core teaching and learning team should be established in order to progress the SSE process more effectively.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of school management and leadership is good.

Leading learning and teaching

The board of management, senior management team and staff promote a caring learning environment, where the range of student abilities is nurtured and respected. For example, a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities reflects the core values of the school. School management and staff are committed to the ongoing implementation of the new Framework for Junior Cycle and have engaged fully with training, planning and subject learning and assessment review meetings.

The school has effective systems in place to inform parents and students about subject choices. Student questionnaires indicated that some students may require further advice in this area. Students have access to a broad range of subjects and option bands are based on their choices. First-year students have an opportunity to sample some optional practical subjects for a day before making their subject choice prior to entry. A few subjects such as Music and Art are sampled for the full year. Some concerns raised by parents and students that students who wish to continue with both these subjects beyond first year are unable to do so, should be kept under review.

Valuable opportunities are available for students taking the TY programme. The programme is coordinated effectively with well-developed subject plans in place. While the programme provides a number of core and optional subjects, there is scope to review the TY timetable to provide further opportunities for students to sample a range of senior-cycle subjects. TY is highly valued and supported by all staff: however, uptake levels have fluctuated in recent years. The programme is evaluated regularly by the school and the views of students and parents are appropriately used to inform future planning. An evaluation of the views of students who do not choose TY may also provide useful insights.

Uptake of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) programme is good. An important component of LCVP is work experience and strong links with the local community help students to find work experience opportunities in line with their interests. Work experience is well managed with effective preparation and follow-up procedures in place.

For the most part, the timetabling allocation for each subject is in line with syllabus and specification guidelines, however not all LCVP students have access to Physical Education. In conjunction with the continued implementation of the new junior cycle and to address concerns raised by parents and students around subject choice the school should conduct a review of the curriculum it offers.

Student care is very effective. Staff are very committed to their work as class tutors, assisting year heads and the provision of a range of extra-curricular activities. Year heads work closely with class tutors, senior management and the chaplain to ensure an integrated approach to student care. Students are very well supported at times of transition during their school life, for example, a comprehensive transfer programme assists incoming first years. In addition, the school provides a commendable range of career and personal guidance supports and a comprehensive whole-school guidance plan is in place.

During the evaluation, student behaviour was exemplary. Positive relations between staff and students was evident. The school has identified a need to review the current code of behaviour. In completing this review, it is advised that school management and staff revise current arrangements for the supervision of all students during break times.

The school is very committed to supporting students' wellbeing. All staff have received training and a core team is in place. This team has collaboratively created an interesting programme for all first-year students with an emphasis on healthy living, organisational skills and careers. It was intended that the classes would be concurrently timetabled to facilitate team teaching. However, this was not possible for all classes. Going forward, more effective communication between the core team and senior management around timetabling requirements is necessary to ensure all students experience the full range of the programme as planned.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is provided to all junior-cycle and some senior-cycle students. All junior-cycle students receive Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) as part of the SPHE programme. At the time of the evaluation, it was reported, that in first year, elements of the RSE programme are taught separately to boys and girls. This practice should cease as lessons should reflect an inclusive approach to learning. RSE for senior-cycle students is similarly part of either SPHE or religion lessons. However, no provision was made for TY students. As a matter of priority, the school should ensure that all students are timetabled for RSE in line with Circular 0037/2010.

The school is committed to supporting students with SEN. It is good practice that student-support files have been developed for some students in receipt of additional support in consultation with parents. However, at the time of the evaluation, not all support files had been completed. Work on the remaining files should be progressed.

Planning for learning support is carried out by the SEN coordinator and a core team of appropriately qualified teachers. Learning support is provided mainly through withdrawal of individuals or small groups from Irish and French. In addition, a larger group of teachers also provide learning support at these times. It was acknowledged by school management that aspects of the organisation of learning-support provision should be reviewed as the current approach does not always facilitate support for students who need it due to the unavailability of specialist teachers. The school should consider additional methods of delivering learning support, such as team teaching and in-class support.

The senior management team and class teachers appropriately monitor and track student progress through an analysis of class tests and certificate examinations results. There is scope to enhance procedures for tracking students' attainment at whole-school level. For example, through greater collaboration between senior management, year heads and subject teachers to monitor students' progress.

Managing the organisation

The board of management is constituted appropriately and all members have engaged in training. They are very committed to the school and have a commendable level of shared expertise. Board meetings are held regularly and nominees report to their respective groups; however, no agreed report is issued. Questionnaire data indicates a need to enhance communication between the board and relevant stakeholders. This could be achieved through an agreed report and developing

procedures for consulting all stakeholders on matters relating to the operation and performance of the school.

All statutory policies are in place. However, at the time of the evaluation a number of policies needed to be reviewed. To assist the board in managing the review of school policies, it is advised that a more systematic approach to policy development and review be established. Revised policies should be clearly dated and outline the specific roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in implementing the agreed procedures.

The admissions policy sets out clear procedures for admissions and enrolment. In the context of programme provision, it is advised that some amendments be made to reflect current procedures for TY and LCVP in the event of over-subscription.

The senior management team demonstrated a very good working relationship during the evaluation and oversee the smooth day-to-day running of the school effectively. They have developed an open and consultative management style with a high degree of support from the staff and board. Effective in-school practices have been established to keep staff informed of curricular changes and Department circulars.

At the time of the evaluation, a significant number of hours allocated by the Department for supporting students with SEN was not allocated by management for their intended purpose and instead used to generate additional classes for Mathematics, English, Agricultural Science and LCVP. Management should ensure that the allocation of these resources is in accordance with directions provided in Department Circular 0014/2017. Particular attention should be given to ensuring that hours designated for the purpose of providing additional support for students with SEN are allocated to staff who hold specialist qualifications or have appropriate specialist knowledge.

School infrastructure is of a very high standard. All areas are well maintained and very good displays of student work create a very positive environment. All classrooms are well resourced with good information communications technology (ICT). The board has prioritised the development of an eLearning Plan. As a first step, an overall vision for ICT as a teaching and learning tool should be agreed collaboratively to inform the eLearning actions.

Leading school development

Building on the work of the previous board and informed by the principal's reports, the current board has identified a range of appropriate developmental priorities such as infrastructure upgrade, SSE, and continued support of teachers' professional development. While some progress in these priorities is evident, the absence of a documented over-arching action plan limits the school's capacity to measure actual progress. It is recommended that the board, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, develop short, medium and long-term plans to progress whole-school priorities. Action plans that support the achievement of each priority should be documented in the school plan and progress should be reviewed regularly.

 The school is very welcoming of parents and has a strong sense of community. Parents and students interviewed during the evaluation highly commended the approachability of staff and the quality of the professional relationships within the school. The principal attends all parents' association meetings and good working relations have been forged. The parents' association engages actively in school-related matters and good procedures are in place for communicating with parents, such as

text messages and letters. However, questionnaire findings indicate that there is scope for the parents' association to keep the wider parent body more informed about their work.

Developing leadership capacity

Responsibilities for various aspects of school provision are distributed amongst a middle management team comprising of two assistant principals and ten special duties teachers. It is timely that a review of the posts of responsibilities has started in response to Circular 03/2018. Management and staff are agreed that that the post structure, as currently operating, is not optimal and senior management has taken on additional duties to fill current gaps. In the forthcoming review, it is advised that post-holder duties provide greater opportunities for instructional leadership and curriculum development.

Students have good leadership opportunities through the student council, their role as mentors to first years, involvement in the Health Promoting Schools Initiative and through their participation in sport and coaching. Commendably, the student council has represented students' views at meetings with the principal and made presentations to staff and the board of management. Despite such positive action, the responses from the questionnaire of students indicated that the general school body would like to have more of a say in how things are done in school. This should be explored by the school management, staff and students as a means to further incorporating student voice in the operation of the school.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning was good overall, and this ranged from very good in a number of lessons to satisfactory in a few; differentiation and the facilitation of student-led activity require attention.

Learner outcomes and experiences

In all lessons, there was a good atmosphere for learning and interactions between students and teachers were mutually respectful and positive. Students demonstrated high levels of interest and their motivation to learn was supported by the use of clear learning intentions which linked prior learning to the new knowledge, skills and content to be developed. This approach was highly effective in a small number of lessons where the learning intentions were co-constructed with students and success criteria for planned tasks were shared. In addition, a key feature of a these highly effective lessons was the on-going monitoring of student progress through the integration of activities which supported students to reflect on their learning.

In the majority of lessons, students engaged in a meaningful way with learning through practical tasks, problem solving or presentations that challenged them to process, apply and discuss their knowledge. In highly effective lessons, a discovery approach to learning was adopted. In these lessons the emphasis was on students discovering the best approach to use, collaborating with others in their group to predict the outcome of their approach and evaluating their decisions. These types of student-centred approaches facilitated student ownership of learning. There is scope to make more use of these approaches to provide greater differentiation particularly for more able students.

In most lessons, a variety of literacy strategies was used effectively to develop students understanding of subject-specific terminology. In some very effective language lessons, students were fully immersed in the target language. Students readily used the target language to ask questions of each other and their teacher.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

In all lessons observed, teachers were well prepared. In the effective and highly effective lessons, learning activities were well structured, ensured that students were challenged by a range of individual and collaborative tasks and the pitch and pace of these lessons were suitable. Teachers skilfully managed their own input to optimise student participation. There was evidence that a number of teachers clearly engaged in reflective practice that ensured lesson content responded to students' needs. For example, in one highly effective lesson the teacher identified oral presentation as an area for development. The teacher designed a series of lessons to develop these skills linking public speaking and performance. Student engagement was significantly enhanced through this reflective approach to lesson planning.

In a small number of lessons, a more didactic approach to learning was observed with an over-reliance on teacher-led exposition and global questioning. Consequently, students in these lessons had a more passive learning experience, with few or no opportunities to talk and reflect on their learning, with insufficient revisiting or reinforcing of learning.

Some creative and engaging worksheets were used in a small number of lessons. In the best examples, these worksheets provided a series of well-structured tasks to scaffold student learning. For example, in one lesson, a well-designed worksheet with an extension task was used to challenge more-able students. However, the majority of lessons observed were characterised by a whole-class approach to teaching with the same material, tasks and homework assigned to all students.

Students' progress was assessed in the majority of lessons through teacher observation and questioning. This approach was effective when sufficient 'wait time' was given and where there was a good balance of directed and higher-order questions to challenge students. However, in many lessons, there was an overuse of broad global questions to the whole class with only a few students providing a response and others being mostly silent throughout the lesson. In a few lessons, some very good use was made of 'show-me' boards, and peer and self-assessment strategies as alternative formative assessment approaches. There is scope to extend these highly effective practices and vary assessment approaches.

In lessons where it was used, ICT was employed effectively as a teaching tool to communicate lesson content using electronic presentations. Video clips and the use of visualisers were also optimised in a few lessons. These were most effective when accompanied by pre-identified questions to maximise student engagement. More use of ICT as a learning tool is an area that should be explored further as part of the school's digital strategy.

Subject departments are well established and collaborative plans are in place. These plans outline organisational aspects of each department appropriately. In the very good plans reviewed, consideration had been given to the integration of whole-school initiatives such as literacy and numeracy approaches.

It is good practice that subject departments are analysing results of certificate examinations. However, the consequent target setting and action planning for improvement need considerable attention. Subject departments should reflect on teaching and learning to identify and implement specific actions that would support improvements.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Subject inspections in Science, English and Irish have been conducted in the school in recent years.

Leadership and Management

Very good progress has been made in implementing the management-related recommendations. Science has now been incorporated into the TY programme, and timetable allocation of Irish is in line with the junior-cycle specification.

Teaching and Learning

The subject departments and teachers involved have made good progress in the implementation of recommendations that related to teaching and learning. Recommendations from previous reports focused on improvements in the area of planning, the use of learning intentions in lessons, and collaborative approaches to learning and in language classes to facilitate students to engage in discussions around current and topical issues. As observed, there is scope to further develop some of these recommendations at whole-school level.

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

The school demonstrates a good capacity for school improvement although there are weaknesses in the formal school self-evaluation (SSE) processes around target setting, monitoring and evaluating progress.

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school has engaged appropriately with the SSE process and developed school improvement plans for a number of areas. The senior management team has led the SSE process to date, however there are weaknesses in the formal SSE processes around target setting, monitoring and evaluating progress.

Recently, the school developed an attendance strategy in consultation with parents, staff and students. Commendably, this approach to planning for improvement followed the six-step SSE process and this model should be used to support future improvement plans.

 The School's Capacity for Improvement
The school demonstrates a good capacity for school improvement using the SSE process. In using this process the targets identified in school improvement plans should be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) and distinct from the strategies and actions designated to achieve them. To support the SSE process, it is recommended that a teaching and learning team be established to assist school management. This team should identify clear targets for

improvement in whatever area is chosen as the focus of SSE. In addition, the team should develop appropriate actions to achieve those targets and monitor the implementation and success of the agreed actions over time.

Parents and students' responses to questionnaires indicate that there is a need to devise further strategies to incorporate the views of the wider student and parent body in the SSE process. Moreover, to keep parents better informed the board should prepare a summary report of its school improvement plan and share this with the school community.

5. CHILD PROTECTION

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

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

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

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 commits to implementing the recommendations from this inspection report.

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

Good progress has already been made with regard to some of the recommendations.
- The board of management is preparing a 3-year plan to structure the key priorities for the school's development.
- The school has availed of an advisory visit for SSE and a further visit is planned for the first term next year to guide progress in this area.
- Work has begun to share the best practices identified in subject plans and in teaching and learning and to incorporate teaching and learning on the agenda for all staff and Board of Management meetings.
- The RSE module for TY has been delivered and the SPHE plan updated accordingly.
- The principal and deputy principal have sourced and taken a workshop on the timetabling of SEN hours in accordance with C/L 14/2017 and work has begun on the necessary changes for the timetable for 2018/19.
- All Student Support Files for SEN students are now fully completed.

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	*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 *very good* 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;