

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Douglas Community School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Clermont Avenue Douglas Cork
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	91396R

Date of Evaluation: 08-02-2019



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

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, 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	6, 7 and 8 February
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

Douglas Community School is an all-boys community school which operates under the trusteeship of the Cork Education and Training Board (ETB) and the Diocese of Cork and Ross. The school has a current enrolment of 536 students. It offers the Junior Cycle programme, a (compulsory) Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), and the Leaving Certificate (Established).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- Overall, the quality of school leadership and management is good; a new senior leadership team is undertaking a number of very good initiatives which are supported by an engaged board of management committed to necessary policy revision.
- The school has moved to enhance the quality of its transition arrangements through the incorporation of a modern assessment system; to date, classes in first year have been organised through a system of banding which is not in line with the spirit of the new Junior Cycle.
- Many elements of provision for special educational needs (SEN) are very good, with a dedicated SEN team in place; a very large number of teachers is currently assigned to the delivery of resource hours which impacts on continuity of provision for individual students.
- While some processes are in place to promote student participation in the life of the school, student voice is an area that requires attention.
- Overall, the quality of teaching, learning, and assessment was very good, including a number of instances of very high quality practice; some further consideration of assessment approaches would be worthwhile.
- Overall, appropriate provision has been made for the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations, although some possibilities for improvement exist.
- The school's engagement with school self-evaluation (SSE) is very good and it has a very good capacity for improvement.

Recommendations

- The school should carefully review and adjust its practice of assigning students to banded class groups in first year.
- The deployment of additional allocations of teaching hours to provide support for students with SEN should be planned for in advance, with due regard being given to reducing the number of teachers involved in providing additional teaching supports.

- While recognising good work already undertaken, it is recommended that the board, in partnership with the wider school community, including students, should oversee the development of a long-term strategic vision for the school which is accompanied by structured action planning and the review of a number of key policies.
- A whole school assessment policy should be developed that ensures a more coherent and consistent approach to assessment at whole school level and the use of a range of modes of assessment in classroom practice.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall, the quality of school leadership and management is good.

Leading learning and teaching

A new senior leadership team, which has been in place for a period of five months, is providing valuable leadership. The team has already put in place a number of very good initiatives to support school improvement. These include the development of good communication structures and processes within the school community.

The school offers a wide and varied curriculum. A very wide range of subjects is provided including, very positively, a choice of two language subjects. All students study a language throughout Junior Cycle. This is very worthwhile. The school is now moving from compulsory study of a language in senior cycle to making the study of a language optional. Work has also begun in the area of Wellbeing for Junior Cycle.

Very good work is evident with regard to the organisation of the different senior cycle programmes on offer. The TY programme provides students with a well-organised series of modules. The programme presents as one which has evolved with considerable thought over time. It is positive that consideration is being given to the undertaking of student and parent evaluations of the programme. It is important that this would take place and that it would be formally embedded as part of the programme.

Students choose two subjects prior to entry from pre-determined option blocks. Moves have begun to expand students' experience of option subjects prior to making their subject choice and it is suggested that this is an area the school should continue to develop. The TY programme provides students with the opportunity to sample a range of subjects for senior cycle. To date, there have been pre-set option blocks for senior cycle. This is being changed to an open-choice system this year. This new arrangement will reflect best practice.

Classes are banded in all year groups in Junior Cycle. It is recommended that the school carefully review and adjust its practice of assigning students to banded class groups in first year. This is particularly important in light of the potential affective impact for students of being a part of the second band at a very early stage in their own learning development. Consideration might also be given to the potential benefits of a mixed-ability approach throughout Junior Cycle.

A streamed approach is adopted in a number of subjects in senior cycle. In these subjects, it is recommended that the use of mixed-ability grouping within levels should be considered to support motivation and engagement, and to ensure the provision of a range of learning models across class groups.

Good work has been undertaken in the development of the new Junior Cycle curriculum. A Junior Cycle co-ordinator has been appointed. Information has been provided to parents and students

regarding the new programme and it is important that this should continue. Some adjustments to traditional assessment arrangements have been undertaken. Further consideration should be given to assessment arrangements in Junior Cycle in order to ensure manageability of assessment for students and teachers. With this in mind, it is recommended that a whole-school assessment policy be developed to ensure a more coherent and consistent approach to assessment at whole school level and the use of a range of modes of assessment in classroom practice.

Good care structures are in place. A pastoral care committee meets every week, complementing regular year head meetings. Beyond this, a class tutor system also supports care in the school alongside other initiatives to support student wellbeing.

A comprehensive whole-school guidance plan is in place. The plan incorporates the vocational, personal, and educational areas of student support. It includes clear descriptions of the role of different members of the school community and details a calendar for events throughout the year.

The school has a range of measures to support transfer from primary schools. A very good move to the exclusive use of standardised achievement and ability assessments to support the transfer process has been made this year. The anticipated use of this information to develop an innovative student tracking system is very important. This will primarily serve as a means of enhancing the school's capacity to ensure students' affective and academic needs are met. The potential for students to be involved in target-setting for their own learning as a further element in this system is worthy of exploration in the future.

Policies are in place for Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). It is recommended that consideration with regard to the organisation, communication, and reporting of both programmes, and other areas of the care structure in the school, be undertaken at this point in the context of parental and student responses to questionnaires distributed as a part of this evaluation.

It is clear that the school strives to achieve an inclusive culture. A core special educational needs (SEN) team is in place, with well-qualified personnel who are dedicated to achieving the best outcomes for their students. A special educational needs policy has been developed. The policy is comprehensive and well-thought through. Some revisions might be considered in light of the new SEN hours allocation model, as well as the need to amend minor inconsistencies with current school practice that are evident.

Currently, the number of teachers involved in the delivery of resource hours is very large, with limited consistency in the deployment of teachers for particular students. In the context of otherwise very good practice, it is recommended that the deployment of the additional allocation of teaching hours to provide support for students with special educational needs should be planned for in advance and included in the main timetable at the time of its construction. Due regard should be given to reducing the number of teachers involved in providing the additional teaching supports, thus allowing for greater continuity and ensuring less fragmentation of support.

Managing the organisation

There is good management of the organisation. Members of the board of management are committed to the school and provide valuable leadership. The board is properly constituted and is supportive of the leadership team. The board understands its roles and responsibilities with regard to governance of the school organisation.

A comprehensive school plan has been developed. An anti-bullying policy, consistent with the guidelines from the Department of Education and Skills has been ratified by the board. Regular reports with regard to incidents of bullying are made to the board. It is recommended that the board

should now ensure that the policy is regularly reviewed, as is required by, and outlined in, the relevant guidelines.

A code of behaviour is in place. It is recommended that the code should be reviewed. Student responses to questionnaires distributed during the evaluation strongly suggested a need to review the school's overall approach to behaviour. The positive interventions that the school has with regard to student care and behaviour should be foregrounded. In addition, a more detailed outline of the steps involved in the suspension and expulsion processes should be included in the code. Finally, the development of a 'student friendly' version of the code, emphasizing its care elements in particular, should be considered.

An admissions policy is in place. Overall, it is recommended that this policy be reviewed to ensure criteria regarding enrolment are explicit and that the inclusive nature of the school community is fully reflected in the documentation. In addition, it is recommended that the voluntary contribution requested of parents be decoupled from the admissions process and relevant application documentation.

Management of school facilities is commendable and moves towards improving the overall physical environs of the school are underway. A Health and Safety statement has been developed. A safety committee has been formed and this meets a number of times each year.

The school reported that it regularly provides placements for student teachers. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome and is included among the standards in the Teaching Council's *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* as it can provide valuable professional benefits for teachers, student teachers, students, and the teacher education institution.

Leading school development

Leadership of school development is good. A number of key priorities have been identified by the board. In addition, a rolling system of policy review is being put in place. The school has also identified the need to use the relevant school self-evaluation checklist to keep abreast of its responsibilities with regard to mandatory policies and procedures.

While recognising the good work already undertaken, it is recommended that the board, in partnership with the wider school community, should oversee the development of a long-term strategic vision for the school which is underpinned by a structured action-planning process at whole-school level. A good start in this area has already been made through the distribution of a strategic analysis to the staff at the beginning of the school year. In addition, the board has recently planned to undertake a day-long strategic planning session to support this aspect of its role. The findings of questionnaires, including those returned by parents and students, should usefully inform the work of the board in developing its strategic vision.

In questionnaires distributed during the evaluation, student and teacher responses with regard to access to and use of information and communications technology (ICT) facilities were very good. The school has begun to move towards the development of a digital learning plan. In this context, it is advised that the school should incorporate this area as a key element in its overall strategic planning process.

A Parents' Association is in place, which is affiliated to the National Parents Council Post-Primary (NPCPP). The association meets regularly throughout the year and maintains very good communication with senior management. Senior management has been responsive to the views of the association.

Developing leadership capacity

Effective structures to support and develop leadership capacity are in place. There are regular meetings of year heads for both the senior and junior school. A range of staff committees is also working in particular areas, including wellbeing and SSE. A particularly striking element of leadership in the school is the commitment of staff to providing a wide range of extra-curricular, co-curricular, and cross-curricular activities. The potential to further enhance leadership capacity through the development of a strategic plan for school improvement should be pursued.

A review of the post structure has recently been completed. It is expected that further reviews of the post structure will be conducted as necessary, in the context of circular 03/2018.

A student council is in place and regular meetings are organised. The council has met with the new principal on a number of occasions and key concerns have been met with a rapid response. In addition, links have been advanced between the council and the board of management and the parents' association.

It is positive that this work is underway. However, overall, it is recommended that the school should focus on the further development of student voice. This is of particular importance in the context of student questionnaires distributed during the evaluation which suggested a low sense of student influence among the student body. It is suggested that the student council could benefit from some greater formality regarding areas of its work such as minute-taking and the council noticeboard. In addition, the further development of the student council area on the school's website and regular updates on the school's social media pages should be advanced. Students' involvement in the SSE process should also be explicitly highlighted, alongside the impact that student inputs have on decisions made which affect them.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Overall, the quality of teaching, learning, and assessment is very good. A number of instances of very high quality practice were observed. Where areas for improvement were identified, these focused on the balance of talk in the lesson and enhanced approaches to the setting and assessment of student work.

Learner outcomes and experiences

The quality of learner outcomes and experiences was very good. A striking feature of lessons was the very good relationship between students and their teachers. Student behaviour in lessons was universally of a high standard with a clear focus on undertaking and completing the work at hand. Frequently, teachers displayed high expectations with regard to student participation in lessons and this was responded to in kind.

Students collaborated well where group work was organised. This provided opportunities for them to engage in experiences of exploratory talk and to assume greater responsibility for their own learning. In the vast majority of instances, students displayed a willingness and familiarity with working with their peers. The potential to further build on teachers' good practice in this area might be worthy of exploration, particularly in the form of structured, bespoke co-operative learning activities which students could be familiarised with and learn over their time in the school. On occasion, the balance of teacher and student talk might be considered. This could be addressed through some consideration of the deployment of strategies to extend student responses.

There was consistent evidence of student clarity regarding the learning underway in lessons throughout the evaluation. This was supported by clear explanations from teachers with regard to the sequence, activities, and learning in lessons. The use of learning intentions in lessons varied. This

area might be further explored with regard to the underlying benefits of this approach. In particular, the use of learning intentions to recapitulate the work at the end of the lesson; as a means of 'checking in' on learning during the lesson; and to provide a link to lifeskills being underpinned by the learning underway, is worthy of exploration.

The use of ICT by students in lessons was observed in a number of lessons. This was of a high quality, suggesting the worthwhile use of ICT by students and teachers as part of the school's approach to learning. This was particularly evident through the facility with which some students made use of technology to support research, as well as the frequent utilisation of the school's chosen virtual learning platform to support engagement with homework, study, and the sharing of learning materials.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

The quality of teachers' individual and collective practice was very good. In almost all instances, lessons were well-prepared and flowed smoothly, with good time-keeping. Teachers presented as good linguistic role models in their subjects throughout the evaluation. Student attendance was checked regularly. There was a sense of safety and security in lessons, with students answering and asking questions freely.

Learning environments in classrooms were generally very good. In a small number of instances, opportunities for development should be explored. It is suggested that, as an extension of teachers' very good practice in this area, the display of metacognitive strategies to support student thinking could be considered, along with an extension of current displays of subject-relevant vocabulary, including connectives.

There were very good examples of teachers' use of formative assessment. This was particularly evident in a number of senior cycle class groups where teachers intervened with verbal feedback in lessons regarding student work or projects. This was rapid and effective in nature. In addition, the discussion of examples of student work which led to the identification of key positive features, along with areas for improvement, was very effective practice. Such an approach will support students' performance at all levels of the school. With this in mind, it is recommended that the school should expand the availability and use of visualisers in classrooms, where practicable, and within the limits of available resources. The visualiser is a particularly effective tool in enhancing students' assessment skills and awareness of quality.

Subject plans and programme planning are well-embedded. It is positive to note that analysis of students' performance in the certificate examinations has begun in the current school year. In addition, subject departments have begun their own self-evaluation as a means of improving the experiences and outcomes of students. It is important that, where analysis of results has been undertaken, this should lead to action planning for the forthcoming school year.

It is positive to note that the school has placed an emphasis on the need for an improvement in the uptake of higher level courses in a number of subjects. This might be done through consideration of current practices with regard to the arrangement of class groups, analysis of relevant information from the certificate examinations, discussion with students, and the sharing of effective practice within departments.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Overall, appropriate provision has been made for the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations, although some possibilities for improvement exist.

Leadership and Management

To support this aspect of school improvement, it is recommended that a formal process be set up at board level to follow-up on key recommendations in inspection reports. In addition, recommendations arising from inspections should be shared across the teaching staff in order to communicate opportunities to enhance practice.

Teaching and Learning

Actions have been taken in a variety of areas to act on recommendations in inspection reports. These include enhanced collaboration and planning in subject areas, a review of the TY programme by teachers, as well as discussion with students, and CPD provided by the school.

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

The school's engagement with the SSE process is very good.

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school has undertaken significant work with regard to SSE. Regular team meetings have been held, along with a formal, professional approach to the SSE process. It is advised that a focus on the consistent incorporation of Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound (SMART) targets should now be emphasised in the next phase of the SSE process.

There is good communication with the school community. The further expansion of this approach to ensure that students are aware of the impact of their inputs to the process would also be worthwhile. The current focus in the SSE process on developments in the classroom is very important.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school has a very good capacity for improvement. The further involvement of students in the school improvement process will enhance the significant strengths of the school which were evident during the evaluation.

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;