

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

School name	Gallen Community School
School address	Ferbane Co Offaly
Roll number	91515W

Date of Evaluation: 08-12-2016



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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Date of inspection	08-12-2016
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

Gallen Community School is a co-educational post-primary school. The school operates under the trusteeship of Laois Offaly Education and Training Board, the Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnois, and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny. The majority of students come from Ferbane and its hinterland. In recent years enrolment has been in decline. Currently, there are 366 students enrolled. The school offers the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the established Leaving Certificate.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The board of management is committed to ensuring the school's place as a focal point in the community.
- The senior management team works hard to promote a culture of school improvement.
- Student care is at the heart of Gallen Community School.
- The quality of learning and teaching ranged from very good to weak with most lessons in the good and satisfactory categories.
- There is scope for improvement in participation rates at higher level and attainment in general in a significant number of subjects in certificate examinations.
- Engagement with school self-evaluation reflects some very good practices.
- The specification for junior cycle English was provided but the associated Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) and subject learning and review (SLAR) meetings were not implemented: the reason for this was reported to be industrial action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The work of the current school self-evaluation team needs to be refocussed on school improvement.
- A special educational needs team should be established, resources should be appropriately deployed, and the team should plan strategically for the further development of team teaching and in-class support.
- Recommendations in this evaluation concerning teaching and learning, and available data on student attainment, should be used to inform the revision of targets and actions in the improvement plan for student engagement; and in informing action planning for

improvement in participation rates and attainment at higher level in certificate examinations across a significant number of subjects.

- As has been recommended in previously published evaluation reports, a core team should be established for TY to support the implementation of the programme.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1. School ownership and management

The board of management is correctly constituted and members are well informed on the board's role in governing the school. The board is highly committed to improving the functioning of the school. The board recognises and places a strong emphasis on the school as the focal point for the community and promotes the school as such.

Minutes of board meetings indicate very good practice in keeping key aspects of the functioning of the school, such as school self-evaluation (SSE), policy development, child protection and links with the parents' association (PA), current. All mandatory school policies have been adopted including school improvement plans for literacy, numeracy and student engagement. Minutes of meetings also indicate that there is some engagement with student attainment in certificate examinations. In order to establish a more factually-based baseline for improvement, and the development and agreement of realistic improvement targets concerning student attainment, it is recommended that more robust discussion on student attainment across the curriculum in summative assessments is facilitated at board level.

Policy development and review processes reflect the very good practices of teamwork and the inclusion of all stakeholders, as appropriate. The best policy documents included dates of ratification and review, success criteria, and identified those responsible for their implementation and monitoring. It is recommended that this excellent practice be adopted as standard practice.

The board's priority areas for development are generally well balanced and reflect its keen awareness of the need to consider factors that are impacting on the school's enrolment while also continuing to support staff in achieving the school's vision of academic excellence. Time-bound action plans should, however, be developed for these priorities.

As evidenced in meetings and in responses to questionnaires, parents are very welcome in the school. The PA is representative of the school's catchment area, is active in the functioning of the school and has a strong voice in policy development. Responses to the parent questionnaire suggest that there is scope for better communication between the PA, the board and the broader parent body. School improvement plans for literacy, numeracy and student engagement should be shared with the wider school community in line with Circular 39/2016.

1.2. Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The school's principal and deputy principal, both in an acting capacity, work well as a senior management team (SMT). They have used their complementary skills well to inform the development of their clearly defined roles and have established the very good practice of daily meetings. The SMT strives to promote a culture of improvement in teaching and learning through the SSE process. There

is, however, a separation between identified targets and strategies and what transacts and is understood at in-school and classroom levels.

The school self-evaluation and pastoral care teams support the SMT in leading and managing the school. As reflected in the recent review of posts of responsibility, SMT is cognisant of the need to ensure that the responsibilities assigned meet school needs. The introduction of the post of academic monitor is commendable as is the process of annual review of the functioning of posts. To support the role of the academic monitor in a more structured manner, it is recommended that year heads, who also have duties concerning the monitoring of students' academic progress, document and report to the academic monitor on their analysis of outcomes in in-house summative examinations.

The SMT has been strategic in identifying and supporting teacher engagement with third-level led initiatives that espouse actions related to the school's improvement plan for student engagement. The SSE team is representative of teachers from across the curriculum and the regular discussion of pedagogy which has been initiated as part of this work is highly commendable. To progress this work, it is recommended that discussions are linked more effectively with the targets in the improvement plans and that a practice of peer collaborative review be established: this should enrich and broaden the discussions about pedagogy and the impact on learner experiences and outcomes.

To enhance and formalise aspects of school improvement and help embed the SSE process at different layers in the school's functioning, it is recommended that the current SSE team refocuses with a greater emphasis on school improvement. This should include systems and processes that support the monitoring and implementation of school improvement plans. Within the SSE team, it is suggested that responsibility for various aspects of school improvement be distributed among a greater number of teachers.

The Cluny Centre (Autistic Spectrum Disorder unit) is highly organised and has a separate admissions policy. Student progression is guided and monitored by detailed individual education plans which are developed collaboratively with students, parents and external support agencies as relevant. Students' timetables and participation in various whole-school activities reflect the school's commitment to inclusive practices.

The school has considerable additional teaching resources available to support learning in mainstream settings. The deployment of these resources is fragmented and involves a large number of teachers. While initial steps have been taken to introduce team teaching, individual and small group withdrawal are the main models of provision. To ensure that available resources are more effectively deployed, the establishment of a special educational needs team is recommended. The team should include the resource and learning-support co-ordinators, the guidance counsellor and a small number of teachers core to the provision of support. As part of its remit, the team should plan strategically for the development of team-teaching practices. Not all resource and learning support hours are used for the intended purpose. Some are, for instance, allocated to support the English language needs of exchange students. This issue needs to be addressed.

The pastoral care of students is at the heart of Gallen Community School. This was corroborated in responses to questions on this aspect of school life in parent and student questionnaires. Pastoral care is supported by form tutors, year heads and a multidisciplinary pastoral care team. Job descriptions are clear on the role of the year head and the form tutor, as is the code of behaviour in the case of the year heads. Consideration should be given to revisiting the role of the form tutor in the context of *Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools* (National Educational Psychological Service, 2014). Regular meetings of the pastoral care team are scheduled and there is a commendable focus on student wellbeing.

The SMT efficiently manages curriculum-related planning. A broad range of subjects is offered and science has been introduced as a core subject in junior cycle. The school operates a good transfer programme from primary school that allows students experience optional subjects prior to entry. Time allocation for subjects is generally good with the exception of Physical Education (PE) in the case of sixth year. All students should be provided with access to a double period of PE.

In addition to the established programmes, the school offers the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and TY. As part of the annual curricular review, it is recommended that consideration of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) be kept on the agenda. The current model of work experience in TY whereby students are on work placement one day per week, in addition to the late start and early finish of the programme calendar, limits student' access to instruction. It is welcome that school management is committed to reviewing this arrangement at the end of this academic year.

Leadership opportunities for students are limited and responses to student questionnaires suggest scope for the development of the student voice. While the student council is representative, elections are at a late stage in the school year. It is recommended that elections take place earlier to ensure that students have opportunity to engage more effectively with their role in providing a voice for students. Other student leadership opportunities are created through ambassador roles for mental health promotion. Consideration should be given to more leadership opportunities for students and to facilitating opportunities for the student council to meet with the board with a view to collaborating on relevant issues.

The very good range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities offered, including the staging of an annual musical, reflects the commitment of staff to extending students' learning experiences.

The application of the school's admission policy reflects its commitment to inclusion. Wording around criteria, which is open to misinterpretation, or that which could be construed as obstructing student access, should be addressed. In addition, it is recommended that information on class size attributed to the Department be omitted or correctly referenced.

The guidance plan is satisfactory and is due for review. In addition to the timetabled provision in sixth year, and as resources permit, consideration should be given to integrating guidance into fifth year. The plan provides a general outline of the guidance counsellor's work and associated policies. There is scope to develop more detailed schemes of work for the provision of guidance modules to each year group and the role of the guidance counsellor in the analysis and monitoring of student attainment. Links with Social Personal and Health Education, TY and LCVP should be strengthened.

Teachers had not engaged with the classroom-based assessments (CBAs) for junior cycle English in accordance with Circular 0024/2016. The reason for this was reported to be industrial action. It is recommended that teachers implement all aspects of the English specification, including the CBAs, and that they engage in subject learning and assessment review (SLAR) meetings.

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 school and its grounds are very well maintained. The principal liaises closely with the onsite management company to ensure efficiency in resolving any maintenance issues.

School management is aware of its environmental obligations and the school has been successful in achieving Green and Energy Flags. Student engagement in these programmes is commendable.

Specialist rooms are well equipped and their use maximised to support learning. The lay-out of some general purpose classrooms was designed to maximise opportunities for co-operative learning. Consideration should be given to extending such desk arrangements.

The school has a very good information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure. Some examples of the clever use of ICT to present material in a manner that helped support and scaffold learning were observed. However, the use of ICT was not optimised in most instances. This was corroborated by responses to the student questionnaire. It is recommended that teachers use the in-house expertise already available and explore how the use of ICT could be maximised to support improvements in student engagement.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1. The quality of learning and teaching

The quality of planning for learning and teaching at subject department level varied from very good to satisfactory. Best practice was observed where the schemes of work were informed by student progress in learning and, in particular, where real analysis of student attainment in in-house and certificate examinations informed target setting for improvement. A number of schemes of work included teacher reflections on progress. These very good practices should be extended to all plans.

The quality of planning for individual lessons was mixed with exemplary practice observed in a minority of cases. In these instances resources, such as visuals, that supported differentiated learning were carefully sourced or prepared.

The quality of teaching and learning varied. Most lessons were in the good and satisfactory categories. A small number of lessons were very good and a small number of lessons were weak. In general, lessons were guided by learning intentions that were shared with students. In the best lessons, the learning intentions were referred to and used to monitor progress and to consolidate learning at the end. Extending these good practices to all lessons is recommended. In addition, and in keeping with the school's plan for improved student engagement, the differentiation of learning intentions is encouraged to ensure the varying learning needs of students are better met.

Lessons in almost all instances were conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect and students' contributions were affirmed. In the majority of lessons, classroom management was good. Where there was scope for improvement in this aspect, there was a need to plan more carefully appropriate teaching and learning approaches that would elicit purposeful student engagement.

In the best lessons, teachers' expectations of students were high, but appropriate, and they strategically selected and used approaches such as questioning strategies, co-operative learning activities and visual supports to engage and meet students' learning needs. The best examples of group work were characterised by carefully planned activities, clear instructions, defined roles for students and an identified timeframe for task completion.

A significant number of lessons were teacher led allowing minimal opportunity for students' meaningful engagement in active-learning. A better balance between teacher input and student activity is recommended. In this context, teachers are also encouraged to prioritise students' oral competence during lessons.

Some good examples of the development of independent learning skills were noted, including enquiry-based research, the use of e-dictionaries and of ICT platforms to share information and work. Wider use of such skills that support learner autonomy is urged across the curriculum.

In the majority of lessons, global low-cognitive questioning was used to good effect to check for understanding and in-class monitoring of homework. Chorus answering in lessons should be discouraged and substituted with targeted questioning. The development of higher-order questioning on a whole-school basis is recommended so that students are challenged and encouraged to think divergently and creatively.

Homework was set and monitored in the majority of lessons. A number of good examples of formative feedback on written work was observed. More consistent use of formative feedback in the form of meaningful and constructive comments on students' work is recommended.

A review of student outcomes in certificate examinations indicates scope for improvement in participation rates at higher level, and in attainment in general, across a significant number of subjects. Commentary and target setting based on these outcomes was in evidence in one subject plan. In the context of improving student attainment, more consistent engagement with available data on in-house summative and certificate examinations at subject-team level and in setting targets for improvement at whole-school level is recommended.

Student work is celebrated on corridors and many classrooms included displays of commercially-produced print materials. Best practice in the use of these resources was observed where they were used to support learning in lessons.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1. Management

Minutes of meetings and school responses to inspection reports indicate that the board gives due consideration inspection reports. Overall, good progress has been made in implementing recommendations from previous reports. Arising from the inspection report on French (2016) the board has committed to employing an *assistant* to support the teaching and learning of French.

Very good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations in the report on Irish (2012) and particularly in incorporating the analysis of student attainment in summative in-house assessments. Good progress has been made by the department also in setting targets to improve participation and attainment in certificate examinations in the subject. The practice of analysing outcomes in in-house examinations should be incorporated into practice by other departments to inform progress on the implementation of improvement targets.

The recommendation of establishing a core team for TY which was made in the TY evaluation report (2008) remains outstanding. It is again recommended that a core team, ideally from distinct curricular areas, be established for TY to support the implementation of the programme.

3.2. Learning and teaching

Arising from recommendations in previous inspection reports, the tasks assigned to students during lessons, the opportunities for them to engage in co-operative and independent learning, and the development of their oracy skills were included in the evaluation of the quality of learning and teaching. Generally, some progress has been made in implementing recommendations in these areas. The school's identification of student engagement as the third SSE strand is particularly relevant to supporting subject departments in sharing and embedding best practice identified during the course of external evaluations.

Management and staff are well placed to build on progress and improve learner experiences and attainment across the curriculum.

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

The school engages in some very good self-evaluation processes, including the participation of all stakeholders in identifying areas for improvement, devising and agreeing improvement plans. In addition to literacy and numeracy plans, the school has in this academic year commenced the implementation of an improvement plan for student engagement. This evaluation confirms that this third area is appropriately identified as an area for improvement.

There is, however, a need to revisit the monitoring of the school's improvement plans for literacy and numeracy and the targets and associated actions for student engagement. Varying levels of focus on whole-school strategies for literacy were evident in one third of the lessons observed and less in the case of numeracy. The targets and actions in the case of the student-engagement improvement plan need to be more specific, measurable and informed by available data on student attainment.

The board and senior management team demonstrated a good capacity to lead school improvement and are well placed to lead a more cohesive whole-school approach to the improvement processes.

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;

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board of management acknowledges the positive MLL report as undertaken by the Inspectorate in December 2016. The BOM welcomes the affirming comments regarding the inclusive ethos in Gallen Community School and student care being at the heart of the school which was corroborated in responses to questionnaires by both parents and students. The board is proud of the acknowledgment in the report of their commitment to ensuring that Gallen CS remains a focal point for the community. The report recognised that parents are both welcome in the school and have a strong voice in policy development.

It is gratifying for the board of management that the quality of management and leadership, teaching and learning, as well as the overall impression of the school as an inclusive, caring and supportive educational environment have been highlighted in the report.

We are pleased that the broad range of subjects and the co-curricular and extra-curricular activities reflect the commitment of the staff to extending students' learning experiences and the acknowledgement of progress on the implementation of previous recommendations. The Board appreciates confirmation of the third strand of SSE being best placed for our school and that management and staff are well placed to build on progress and improve.

The board would like to thank all members of the school community for their hard work and commitment to our school.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The recommendations of the Inspectorate will be addressed as part of the school's improvement plan in the immediate future. As stated in the report, the board and senior management demonstrate a good capacity to lead school improvement. Senior management will meet with subject departments to ensure uniformity in their planning based on the analysis of learner outcomes. Senior management will also continue to support teacher collaboration and observation in an effort to share already very good practices in the classroom.

Since the inspection took place, work has already commenced on steps to implement the recommendations contained in the report. These include:

- Review of TY work experience is completed with parents, students and employers and a TY team in place.
- An SEN team has been set up and all resources will be appropriately deployed.
- Timetable for September 2017 will allow sixth years have a double PE class.
- Our application for a French Assistant has been approved.
- The student council welcomes the opportunity to undertake leadership training and have suggested ways of extending student involvement across the school.

All recommendations in the report will be progressed, and we will continue to work in partnership with staff, parents, students and the wider community to achieve the excellence to which we aspire.