

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole-School Evaluation**  
**Management, Leadership and Learning**  
**REPORT**

**Scoil Mhuire**  
**Ennistymon, County Clare**  
**Roll number: 61950W**

**Date of inspection: 6 February 2014**



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS  
AGUS SCILEANNA** | **DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION  
AND SKILLS**  
**INSPECTORATE**

# **Whole-School Evaluation**

## **Management, Leadership and Learning**

A whole-school evaluation of management, leadership and learning (WSE-MLL) was undertaken in February, 2014 in Scoil Mhuire, Ennistymon. This report presents the findings of the evaluation and makes recommendations for improvement. During the evaluation, the inspection team met with the school's board of management, in-school management, and groups of teachers, parents and students. Inspectors also reviewed a range of school documentation and responses to questionnaires and examined other data in relation to the operation of the school. As part of the evaluation, a range of lessons across a number of subject areas was inspected. The board of management of the school 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.

### ***Introduction***

Scoil Mhuire Ennistymon is a voluntary secondary school and is under the trusteeship of Catholic Education an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). Founded in 1872 by the Sisters of Mercy, the school opened in its present location in 1979. Through its organisation, structures and programmes, the school promotes the principles of care, respect, responsibility, justice, initiative, personal growth and leadership, as articulated in the CEIST charter.

The school is one of three providers of post-primary education in Ennistymon. It is an all girls' school, although some classes at senior cycle are mixed due to collaboration with the local boys' school. The school serves a large catchment area and the current enrolment stands at 280 students. The amalgamation of the three current schools in Ennistymon and the development of a new community school under public private partnership has been agreed by the Department of Education and Skills.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

### ***Key Findings***

- Scoil Mhuire is a high functioning, very well managed school, with very effective leadership of staff and students.
- The school is very true to its Catholic ethos and the CEIST charter and its identity as a CEIST school is fundamental to all school activities.
- Both the board of management and the parents' association are well-informed, very active and provide a high level of support to the school.
- The school is student-centred, innovative and progressive and a noteworthy sense of community and partnership that involves parents, students, staff and the board of management is evident.
- Shared experiences have produced very good relationships among staff and students based on care and respect.
- Very high levels of volunteerism, diligence and collegiality are evident amongst the staff.
- Regular meetings of the amalgamation committee and shared continuing professional development (CPD) across the three local schools is commendable and demonstrates a readiness for amalgamation.

- The carefully planned shared access with the local boys' school in relation to a number of optional senior cycle subjects is laudable and demonstrates very good collaboration.
- A commendable range of student support structures and various interventions to support student welfare exist, with scope to formalise a support team.
- High quality teaching and learning was evident in the majority of lessons observed with some exemplary practice noted.
- The school demonstrates very good capacity for change and improvement.

### ***Recommendations for Further Development***

- A student support team should be formalised to consolidate the very good existing support structures.
- Good practice in relation to the use of active learning methodologies and the various approaches for differentiation used by teachers should be shared within and across subject departments.

## **1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP**

### ***1.1 School ownership and management***

The board of management is well informed, appropriately constituted and functions collaboratively and effectively. The board with its various sub-committees is progressive and fully committed to the school's on-going development and success. The values of CEIST underpin the work of the board and educational expertise, strong community links, and long-serving commitment are key features of the board's membership. The board is very supportive of the school and oversees school planning and policy development.

There is good communication between the board and senior management as well as with the wider school community. This is supported by a regular principal's report as well as an annual report to trustees on the operation and performance of the school. There are plans to circulate the school's annual report more widely in future. To further enhance communication and build on partnership, the board should organise a meeting with key members of the student council, at least on an annual basis.

The board supports the continual development of school facilities and maintains a good overview in relation to curriculum provision in the school. There are plans to re-establish the school's advisory board of studies. In addition, the board takes an active interest in the outcomes of all evaluations of the school that are conducted by the Department of Education and Skills. In order to further increase the board's focus on teaching and learning, it should seek annual progress reports from subject departments that outline the sharing of professional practice, as well as contextualising attainment and developments within subjects. In addition, the board should formalise existing review procedures for post of responsibility duties.

The parents' association is well-informed, very active and effective in supporting the school as well as providing funding for various school initiatives. The parents' association contributes to policy formulation and review and demonstrates high capacity to support school developments into the future. Responses from student and parent questionnaires indicate many positive aspects about the school with a few aspects meriting further consultation.

The various stakeholders expressed an agreed vision for the school and collectively they have identified a range of developmental priorities: maintaining a broad curriculum and a

wide range of extra-curricular activities, promoting high standards of teaching and learning through supporting staff CPD, promoting national initiatives, engaging in ongoing policy review, further developing capacity for school self-evaluation, improving school facilities and environment and promoting the amalgamation. These priorities reflect the forward-thinking focus of the school and significant progress has been made towards achieving many aspects of them.

### ***1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning***

The principal and deputy principal are very caring and highly committed to the school and together they form a very effective senior management team. They work in partnership and provide high quality leadership and a clear vision for school development focussed on achieving high standards and on enabling students to reach their full potential. The principal is innovative, progressive and ambitious for the school. She demonstrates a high level of instructional leadership and adopts a proactive approach to school development. The deputy principal is heavily involved in day-to-day management and assists in providing the organisational structure required to achieve the vision shared by the school community. Their individual talents and abilities are complementary and their management style is collaborative and consultative. Building leadership capacity among staff and promoting collaborative work practices are key characteristics of their management style. They lead by example and have successfully driven and managed change across a number of areas of school life. They are well established in their management roles, are professional in the way they work and they set high standards for themselves, the teaching staff and the students. Both discharge an extensive range of duties and their involvement as classroom teachers exemplifies the highly visible role they have in leading learning in the school.

A key strength of the school is its committed and hardworking staff who are afforded, and avail of, opportunities to lead many initiatives to support school improvement. They demonstrate a strong sense of community and care for students. There is a high level of engagement with CPD, the outcomes of which are shared at whole-school level. Whole-staff training has been provided on a range of topics with some delivered by staff. Teachers reported feeling empowered and leadership opportunities are embraced. Non-post holders make a significant contribution in this regard. Ancillary staff contribute in supporting school activities. Staff welfare is a significant priority for senior management. Very good lines of communication have been developed across the school supported by regular staff meetings, newsletters and the use of staff email.

The middle management team is an important structure in supporting senior management and members are given autonomy in leadership roles. Post-holder duties are collaboratively reviewed regularly to meet the needs of the school most effectively. To reflect best practice, procedures should be further developed for structured reporting on the performance of duties to senior management and a yearly report to the board. There is a very good focus on the ongoing development of systems and processes, centred on promoting a positive and supportive school environment.

Senior management oversees school planning, thus ensuring a number of priority areas are progressed simultaneously. Policy development is well advanced and is underpinned by a rolling cycle of review. The development of a tracking mechanism would support this further. As policies are revised they should be dated and should include a proposed review date. The permanent section of the school plan outlines the school's operating structures and includes all policies ratified by the board. The developmental section of the school plan incorporates action planning, detailing various methodologies and these are undertaken by key priority teams. To further enhance this work success criteria and details regarding ongoing monitoring and review should be included.

The curriculum is reviewed regularly and the needs of students are central to decision making. Providing shared access with the local boys' school in relation to a number of optional senior cycle subjects and creative ways of arranging classes are all commendable and allow the school to offer a broad and balanced curriculum. The school's participation in an action research project called the Learning School Project, in conjunction with the Clare Education Centre, has energised teaching and learning. Now in its third cycle, the project has focussed on various initiatives in relation to information and communication technology (ICT), literacy and numeracy. A positive start has been made by teachers with regards to peer observation, although challenges are acknowledged.

The optional Transition Year (TY) is a well-developed, very successful programme and uptake is very high. The uptake of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) should be kept under review. Timetabling construction is generally good and it provides for some concurrent timetabling. There are some timetable issues which should be addressed in relation to Music, LCVP, junior-cycle Religious Education (RE) and Physical Education (PE) for seniors. Junior students should have access to one English lesson per day in line with Circular 25/2012. A highly commendable range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities contributes to students' holistic development. The exceptionally high levels of collegiality and volunteerism demonstrated by teachers, supports school activities well and is laudable. The school promotes and celebrates achievement by students in many aspects of school life. In addition, the school is conscious of its role within the community and caters for adult learners through night classes.

The school operates an open and inclusive admissions policy. Practices in relation to the management of students are very good and are facilitated through the school's code of behaviour which is currently under review. Very good standards of behaviour and respectful student-teacher relationships were evident during the evaluation. Attendance and punctuality are closely monitored and a range of regular assemblies supports this good work. Students' achievements in certificate examinations, at the levels taken, are of a high standard in general in the school. Retention after junior cycle and progression to further studies is exceptionally high.

Student leadership is facilitated effectively through such mechanisms as the student council, the buddy system, and the Green-Schools programme. The student council is enthusiastic, well organised, democratically elected and takes an active part in the life of the school.

Students' welfare and educational needs are at the heart of the school and are regarded as a responsibility of all staff members. A range of formal and informal structures support students well, a finding which was endorsed by students and parents. Year heads and the guidance counsellor play a pivotal role. Social, personal and health education (SPHE) and relationships and sexuality education (RSE) programmes are appropriately delivered. School policy in this area supports students well. A range of retreats and liturgical celebrations is undertaken in line with the school ethos. A student support team should be formalised in line with the National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS) Guidelines, to strengthen and consolidate the very good existing supports.

A whole-school approach to Guidance is evident and support is provided through a well-developed programme of personal, educational and vocational guidance. There are good supports for students and parents at various transition times. First-year students undertake a year-long subject sampling programme and then select their optional subjects from pre-set subject bands. This arrangement should be kept under review in consultation with the partners. An open choice of subjects is offered at senior cycle in line with best practice. A guidance plan is in place; however, it should be updated to reflect ongoing changes.

There is evidence of very good planning and communication in the area of additional educational needs. There is comprehensive testing of students and good work on needs analyses leading to good profiling of students. Retesting with regard to literacy and numeracy is recommended. Flexible models of provision are tailored for students' needs. This is underpinned by ongoing review and improvement. Very good work is ongoing with regards to individual education plans for students. The school is currently building capacity in terms of formal training in the area of learning support and special educational needs (SEN).

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 building is exceptionally well maintained. A good range of facilities and resources is available to support teaching and learning and there is very good commitment to maintain and upgrade the school accommodation and facilities.

Currently there is a strain on existing space in the school building and a pressing need for some additional accommodation. The school makes use of the local sports centre for PE. The school demonstrates great readiness for the amalgamation of the three current schools in Ennistymon and the development of a new community school. The site for the new school has been identified. Very good ICT facilities are provided throughout the school. Four Green Flag awards reflect the school's huge commitment to its environmental responsibilities. A comprehensive health and safety statement, based on risk assessments was updated in 2014.

## **2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

### **2.1 The quality of learning and teaching**

Programme and subject planning is firmly established and is quite advanced in a number of areas. The majority of plans are very well developed and some positive features of the best subject plans reviewed included: time bound outline and detailed schemes of work, learning outcomes, methodologies, resources, assessment, support for students with SEN, literacy and numeracy strategies, results analysis, ICT, CPD, records of meetings and evidence of self-evaluation. To further enhance provision for teaching and learning, collaborative discussion should lead to plans being expanded as necessary in relation to the above areas. Following the analysis of certificate examination results each subject department should use their subject-specific insights to contextualise students' attainment regarding strengths, targets and actions for improvement.

Teachers' individual planning and preparation for lessons was of a high standard with appropriate resources sourced and prepared in advance. In most of the lessons observed, teachers elicited students' prior knowledge and used this as a basis for further learning. Learning outcomes were used to frame the lesson content in some instances and the majority of lessons concluded with a recapitulation of the content to consolidate student learning. Homework was assigned, where appropriate, in all lessons and most lessons commenced with a review of the homework arising from the previous lesson.

The quality of learning and teaching was good or very good in almost all of the lessons observed with very good practice predominant. The most effective lessons contained a

range of activities to stimulate students' interest. Such activities varied from those requiring whole-class interaction to activities which required students to work independently on a given task. In a very small minority of lessons, there was scope to include more student-centred activities.

Lesson content was differentiated well in most lessons through the use of targeted questioning, one-to-one assistance and group tasks. There was scope to make greater use of differentiated strategies and extension activities in a minority of cases to cater for the range of abilities evident. In a small number of lessons, the use of whole-class questioning and chorus answering was predominant. The use of targeted questioning in lessons, combined with a suitable amount of wait time, allows teachers to tailor questions to the abilities of individual students and is, therefore, a more effective approach.

ICT was used as a teaching aid, where appropriate, in most of the lessons observed. ICT usage ranged from the delivery of text-based presentations to the use of video content and animation. Teachers are encouraged to continue to explore the potential of ICT to enhance learning and teaching in lessons through the use of more dynamic and interactive content.

In almost all of the lessons observed, the learning environment was enhanced with relevant displays of subject-specific content, some of which has been produced by students. Students were generally punctual for lessons and presented with all of the resources they required for the class.

Teachers set high expectations for student learning and were affirming in their interactions with students. High levels of student engagement were observed in lessons and students participated actively in lesson tasks. Students displayed very good levels of knowledge, understanding and skills commensurate with their ability. Students' work was well presented in almost all of the copybooks reviewed and some very good examples of oral and written feedback to students on the quality of their work were noted. The existing assessment policy is brief and should be further developed into a more comprehensive school assessment policy.

### **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

#### ***3.1 Management***

The school has made very good progress in the implementation of recommendations related to whole-school provision and this is indicative of the high levels of support given to subject provision.

#### ***3.2 Learning and teaching***

Very good progress has been made in implementing previous recommendations related to teaching and learning. Most have been fully addressed, however, given the pedagogical nature of some of the recommendations, continuing work is necessary to address them adequately into the future. Therefore areas such as active learning and the use of a range of differentiated teaching strategies to support students' varying abilities are in need of ongoing and continuous development.

Practice in the school is for developments and improvements in one subject area to be shared with and influence improvements in practice in all subject areas.

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

The school has very good capacity to initiate change and drive school improvement to support its high quality of education provision. A key priority for the principal is teaching and learning and the ongoing promotion of excellence and quality improvement. The school has good experience in various aspects of school self-evaluation due, for example, to its involvement in the Learning School project, over recent years.

A number of well-developed self-evaluation activities have been undertaken across various aspects of school life. These include parent and student surveys, end-of-year programme evaluations, staff discussions, feedback from the parents' association and the student council, curriculum review, policy review, and analysis of examination results. The analysis of the data gathered is used to inform the school's developmental priorities. In the context of subject planning, action planning should be formalised and further developed to support the implementation of the school's developmental priorities.

Senior management and staff are energetic, motivated and ambitious for the further success of the school. There are very good levels of involvement in CPD with a focus on building capacity among staff. The school willingly embraces new initiatives to support key priorities and this is supported by a team approach to key roles.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board welcomes the positive affirmation of all aspects of school life in the report.

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

- In line with our school's commitment to constant and continuous school improvement, we have incorporated in the school plan, as action plans, recommendations and suggestions for enhancement.

To date:

- A student support team has been established and meets weekly to “consolidate the very good existing support structures”
- “Good practice in relation to the use of active learning methodologies and the various approaches to differentiation used by teachers,” is a priority on the agenda of Subject Department Meetings. A report from each subject department will be presented at a Board meeting in November 2014.