

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Meánscoil Muire gan Smál
Convent Road, Roscommon
Roll number: 65090S**

Date of inspection: 5 March 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 March, 2014 in Meánscoil Muire gan Smál. 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

Meánscoil Mhuire gan Smál is an all-girls' voluntary secondary school, with a current enrolment of 585 students. Students are drawn from a wide catchment area surrounding Roscommon Town. Founded in 1929 by the Sisters of Mercy, the school now operates under the trusteeship of Catholic Education - An Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). Links with the Sisters of Mercy remain very strong and the school's motto, '*We Cherish, We Challenge, We Care*' underpins its mission statement and the interactions evident throughout the school community.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key Findings

- The board of management is committed to the school and its developmental priorities are indicative of its dedication to promoting the school's ethos.
- The senior management team is very effective and enjoys a high degree of support from staff and the board.
- The last full review of the posts of responsibility was completed in 2009 and there have been significant changes in staffing in the period since then.
- Teachers are committed to enhancing the curriculum and the learning experiences available to students through their involvement in the school's co-curricular and extra-curricular programmes.
- Students' behaviour is very good and this is acknowledged widely within the school community.
- Care for students is a whole-school priority and the school's provision for it has many positive features, though, as a result of recent retirements, there is scope for further development of the relevant structures and processes.
- Senior management encourages continuous improvement of teaching and learning through promoting subject and lesson planning.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was generally good.
- In one third of the lessons observed exemplary teaching approaches that resulted in high quality learning among students were used.
- In a small number of lessons there was scope for development. This arose mainly from inadequate lesson planning or the lesson material not being appropriately pitched at the ability levels or the interests of the group of students.

- The school's capacity for school self-evaluation is very good.

Recommendations for Further Development

- In consultation with the post holders, senior management and the board should review the in-school middle management structure, and the duties attached to the posts of responsibility, on a regular basis.
- The operation of the school's student support teams should be reviewed using the guidance provided in the recently published document: *Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools*.
- In planning for teaching and learning across the curriculum, increased emphasis should be placed on incorporating the dynamic and interactive use of information and communication technology (ICT) in subject teaching.
- Greater emphasis is required by all teachers on the use of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies and there should be sharing within and across subject departments of the assessment of learning (AoL) practices that have been implemented and found effective.

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1 School ownership and management

The board is appropriately constituted and meets monthly during school term. Board members have good links with the local community. The board is currently in the second year of its term of office. One of its strengths is the long association of a number of its members with the school. Another is that several members have backgrounds and experience in education. The trustees have aimed to ensure that there is a range of expertise and backgrounds among the members of the board and have endeavoured to maintain a balance between continuity and innovation.

There is openness in the communication between board members. In this respect the board minutes include the text of the agreed written report which is finalised before the end of each board meeting. The agreed written report is then communicated by the principal, who is secretary to the board, to the parents' association and by the teacher representative to the staff.

A review of the work of the board indicates that it has both an operational and learning focus. There is scope for the board to enhance its practices for review and evaluation of key aspects of the school including, in particular, teaching and learning. For example, the board could review in greater detail students' attainment in the certificate examinations. To increase the board of management's awareness with respect to learning, it should regularly seek inputs from subject departments and those staff teams involved in development planning and other school-based initiatives. Also, following subject inspections, the relevant subject department could be asked to present the board with an action plan as to how it intends addressing the recommendations in the report.

The parents' association is very supportive of the work of the school and indicates that a broad base of parents are involved in its activities. It organises fundraising activities through its representatives from local clusters around the catchment area. Those members interviewed as part of the evaluation emphasised the academic reputation of the school as the main factor in school selection.

The results of the parent questionnaires administered as part of this evaluation indicate a desire among parents to have greater access to information about the work of the board and the parents' association. With that in mind, it is recommended that the board provide an annual report on the operation and performance of the school to the wider school community. In addition, the ongoing development of the school's website provides an opportunity for the parent body to be regularly updated on the work and activities of association.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The senior management team is very effective and enjoys a high degree of support from staff and the board. Following their appointments five years ago the principal and deputy principal defined and agreed their respective roles and areas of responsibility. This approach of building personal and professional relationships has worked very well as they have established a collaborative and well-organised approach to the completion of their roles. Their focus includes maintaining and progressing the school's developmental priorities. In addition, they actively lead learning through, for example, the work of the principal in directing subject planning and the deputy principal's role in the school self-evaluation priority area of numeracy. In co-operation with staff they have developed a school-based continuing professional development (CPD) programme and have promoted the school's involvement in *Forbairt*, a leadership development programme for second-level schools.

Among the critical factors influencing the work of the principal and the deputy principal is the management of personnel in the context of the retirement of long-serving members of the teaching staff and the recruitment of new staff. Retirements have also resulted in vacancies at middle management level that have impacted on areas including pastoral care and student support structures. Management has responded to this by absorbing many additional responsibilities and prioritising student support. They have been supported in this by teachers, including post holders, voluntarily refocusing their roles and areas of responsibility.

In co-operation with the post holders, senior management and the board should review the in-school middle management structure on a regular basis to ensure that the duties attached to the various posts are more closely aligned to the developmental priorities and the needs of the school. A primary consideration is the need to review the role of the year head in the context of the structure of the behaviour management system. The system in place supports the deputy principal's involvement in the management of low incidence infringements of the code of behaviour. It was evident that this approach is working very effectively, as student behaviour is very good. In addition, it is acknowledged among staff as being very effective in enabling the school to respond quickly on a needs basis to issues as they arise. Given this approach the role of the year head should be reviewed to strengthen its focus in other areas of responsibility such as academic monitoring.

The school's curriculum provides for a year-long taster programme in first-year which supports subject selection as students move into second year. In addition to the guidance supports provided to students when selecting subjects for senior cycle, subject departments have also been involved in supporting students' optional subject choices to senior cycle. One very positive approach observed during the evaluation was where the information provided by a subject department included, amongst the benefits of studying the subject, the generic learning skills that the subject promotes.

The school has a very well-established Transition Year (TY) programme which is very popular given the consistently high take-up level among students. The programme is very well managed and supported by the commitment of the co-ordinator and core team of

teachers. Additional strengths of the approach used in managing the programme are the links and the shared learning that exist between TY and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

The school works closely in co-operation with the adjacent all-boys secondary school to enhance curriculum provision at senior cycle in both schools. By offering access to specialist optional subjects including, for example, Chemistry, Art and Physics, both schools have been able to provide a wider subject choice at senior cycle to their students, while maximising the use of teaching resources. In the current school year, changes have been made to the school's timetable to ensure that class periods in the subjects where this co-operation occurs are scheduled around break times. This very good initiative aids in minimising loss of tuition time that might arise when students are moving between campuses.

The school's staff is highly committed to enhancing curriculum provision and students' holistic development through their involvement in the school's extra-curricular and co-curricular programmes. A broad range of activities were evident during the evaluation and these activities are co-ordinated by teachers and support students' learning well.

The school's ongoing development of its structures for the transition of students to first year, includes developing student leadership through the school's mentoring programme, *Cara*. Given that the responses of students to the questionnaire administered as part of the evaluation process indicate that students would like a greater say in how things are done in the school, the school should explore how the *Cara* programme can have a higher profile in the school as a mechanism for promoting student leadership and student voice.

The school has both a student council and prefect system in place. As the prefect system pre-dates the student council, it has a more established and has a somewhat higher profile in the school community. To further promote opportunities for leadership among students there is scope for a review of how the student council operates vis-à-vis the prefect system. Additionally, a review of how the work of the student council is centrally managed including, for example, the provision of annual action themes and areas of enquiry should be undertaken.

Provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) is characterised by a high degree of dedication from the key personnel involved. Good systems exist to support students with additional needs including language needs. Of particular merit is the work of the deputy principal and learning support teacher in developing systems and processes to support the school's provision for these students. As more teachers take on roles in learning support and resource it is desirable that a whole-school approach to teaching and learning approaches appropriate for students with SEN in mainstream classes is established. Among the strategies to consider are team teaching for specific interventions and peer observation.

The school's structures for student support have been going through a period of transition. Structural changes brought about through the retirement of post holders, especially those involved in the student support structure are relevant. The operation of the school's student support teams should now be reviewed using the guidance provided in the recent publication *Student Support Teams in Post-Primary Schools*.

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's facilities are well managed and recent developments led by the board have enhanced the school. The prioritisation of health and safety is apparent especially as regular updates are provided by the safety officer at staff meetings.

The school is developing its capacity to use its administration software package to provide additional support to gathering relevant base-line data to support school priorities. In particular, the increased use of the school's administration system by teachers will provide great capacity to assist in tracking students' attendance.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1 The quality of learning and teaching

Individual lesson planning was very good overall. In addition, progress is ongoing in relation to subject planning and there is a high degree of consistency between departments with regard to the organisation of subject plans. However, there is scope to develop short-term schemes of work in many subjects. These developments should focus on linking subject content with suggested teaching methodologies, assessment modes, and resources relevant to supporting teaching and learning.

The use of learning outcomes and lesson summaries was observed in most lessons and this approach provided a useful framework for focusing on students' learning. Students worked purposefully during lessons, though there is scope to provide increased opportunities for cooperative learning and to promote more active learning methodologies.

In many instances new topics were introduced using a brainstorming activity which was used to very good effect. Assessment of learning (AoL) through summative assessment instruments was frequent and varied though additional consideration is required as to how teachers should use the data gathered from the completed assessments to inform teaching.

A good range of question types appropriate to the mainly mixed-ability settings was used by teachers. While the questioning was used effectively in many lessons, there is further scope to maximise its use as a technique for differentiated learning. Where teacher demonstration was used to introduce theory or new material, it was done well. In addition, a number of very good examples were observed where students were facilitated in applying subject skills in practical ways.

In lessons where learning was most evident students were asking questions and key concepts were revisited to check students' learning a number of times as part of the lesson structure. Teachers made good efforts to cater for students' learning styles through the range of materials and resources used which were presented in a number of formats. In a small number of lessons peer learning and support was part of the lesson sequence and this was well managed. Students' learning in lessons was sometimes difficult to determine given that lessons didn't always include adequate opportunities for the student voice to be heard. To enhance students' learning, more opportunities should be included in lessons for students to interact, discuss content and reflect on learning. This will also enhance teachers' assessment of students' progress by judging the quality of student feedback.

In a good number of lessons the students' work was either collected for correction or annotated by the teachers within lessons. In a number of lessons the quality of feedback provided on students' written work was strengthened by the teachers' use of comment-based feedback. Lessons were structured to include revision and correction, including self-correction of the homework completed. Students' use of the journal to record homework

assigned was very good and the level of written homework assigned was also good. Where the homework task was revision or learning, consideration should be given as to how this work will be evaluated in follow-on lessons. One additional strategy for possible consideration in certain lessons is the earlier assignment of homework in lessons so that students can clarify its relatedness to the lesson content.

In almost all cases good rapport and affirmation was evident with high expectations set in terms of students' behaviour and academic progress. Students' attainment in the certificate examinations is being monitored at subject department level and compared against the national norms for the subjects. Good use is made of the student journal across all groups especially in TY, where the well-structured journal is used for student reflection and monitoring progress throughout the year.

The whole-school strategies of teachers and students dating their work, teachers introducing learning outcomes and students maintaining key word copy books was widely adhered to. Classrooms have been developed as print-rich learning environments with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy development. High quality work is evident in relation to progressing the school's numeracy strategy both within subjects and at whole-school level where timelines, number lines and distance charts are extensively visible.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

Significant progress has been made in addressing recommendations with a whole-school dimension. Of particular merit is the provision of a customised professional development programme in ICT to staff.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Among the areas identified from previous subject inspection reports for specific follow-up in the context of teaching and learning was the increased use of ICT a tool for teaching and learning. Despite the availability of the ICT infrastructure considerable scope still remains to improve the use of ICT in lessons. In more than half the lessons observed ICT was not used and in those lessons where it was used, it was employed in an interactive or dynamic way. Most progress was made in the increased use of active teaching and learning methodologies, primarily through pair and small group work. In addition, good progress has been made in the increased use of differentiation strategies within teaching to provide for the range of abilities and learning styles within class groups. In a number of lessons progress has been made in broadening the range of assessment for learning approaches used, however, this is an objective that requires ongoing development.

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

The senior management team has been actively developing the school's self-evaluation (SSE) process. In this respect the school's senior management has lead the school's involvement in the *Forbairt* programme with its focus on working with the school's partner school in developing the whole-school approach to numeracy. The school has completed its SSE report following a review of relevant baseline data and having surveyed, staff, students and parents. A school improvement plan with a focus on numeracy is also in place. Key to the successful implementation of the areas identified for improvement will be the

engagement of staff with the strategies that have been prioritised through the school's self-evaluation process.

A strength of the school is the capacity at school level to engage in self-evaluation. One indicator is the willingness of staff to develop strategies for implementing change intended to improve the school's systems and processes and those relating to learning, including the school's numeracy strategy. A team is in place to lead planning for the school's literacy and numeracy strategy. The responsiveness of management and teachers to the whole-school support and planning recommendations in subject inspection reports has also been good. While some subject departments demonstrate a greater capacity for review and improvement than others, it is evident that almost all teachers within the school have the capacity to engage with the change agenda and ensure that effective strategies are developed to progress the school's developmental priorities.

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 of Meánscoil Muire gan Smál welcomes the positive WSE-MLL report following the inspection undertaken in the school in March 2014. The report acknowledges and affirms the good practice and work being done by the members of our school community.

The Board is particularly pleased that the report noted that:

- The school motto “We Cherish, We Challenge, We Care” underpins our mission statement and the interactions evident throughout the school community
- The senior management team is very effective and enjoys a high degree of support from staff and the Board
- The school’s staff is highly committed to enhancing curriculum provision and the learning experiences available to students through the broad range of the school’s co-curricular and extra-curricular programmes
- Care for students is a whole school priority and the school’s provision for it has many positive features
- Exemplary teaching approaches resulting in high quality learning among students were observed
- Good rapport and affirmation was evident with high expectations set in terms of students’ behaviour and academic progress
- The provision for SEN students is characterised by a high level of dedication from the key personnel involved
- The school’s capacity for school self-evaluation is very good
- High quality work was evident in relation to progressing the school’s numeracy strategy both within subjects and at whole school level

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 Board of Management is fully committed to implementing the findings and recommendations of the WSE/MLL report.

The following actions have been undertaken since the completion of the inspection:

- A full review of the in-school middle management structure of the school was undertaken at the beginning of the current school year.
- A new constitution for the Student Council has been introduced this academic year. Where heretofore the Student Council operated vis-à-vis the Prefect system, the new composition provides further leadership opportunities for students and distinguishes both roles.

All other matters referred to in the WSE/MLL report will be addressed within the School Improvement Plan.