

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**REPORT**

**Mount Saint Michael  
Rosscarbery, Co. Cork  
Roll number: 62470N**

**Date of inspection: 17 May 2016**



**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 May 2016 in Mount St Michael. 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 accepts the report as the final inspection report available for publication and wished to respond formally to the report. The Board agrees that the response submitted will be included as an appendix to the published report. The board's response is submitted below.

### ***Introduction***

Mount Saint Michael was founded in 1894 by the Sisters of Mercy. It is a co-educational voluntary secondary school since 1964 and was a boarding school until mid-2000. It operates under the trusteeship of CEIST. It has a current enrolment of 385 students and offers the Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme and the established Leaving Certificate.

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

#### ***Key Findings***

- The school is truly inclusive, student-centred and caring, with the mission statement and associated Catherine McAuley ethos key to the decision making processes in the school.
- The board is committed to the school's mission statement, the development and refurbishment of school facilities, the maintenance of its broad curriculum and its ongoing development as a centre of learning.
- The school has very strong links with the wider community through all aspects of both its co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, and comprehensive TY programme.
- The parents' association is very supportive of the school.
- The quality of school leadership is very good and is forward looking.
- It is clear that all staff are very committed to the school and to delivering the best possible learning experiences for the students.
- Leadership is distributed effectively among middle management through the post of responsibility structure.
- There is a very broad curriculum maintained at both junior and senior cycles.
- All staff are involved in providing a high level of student care through their respective roles, with an effective and wide range of care structures in place to support student welfare.
- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in lessons was good or very good with a number of examples of excellent practice.
- It is clearly evident that the school has considerable capacity to initiate change and drive school improvement.

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

- The Board should issue an annual report to stakeholders on the operation and performance of the school in line with requirements of Education Act (Section 20).
- The Health and Safety Statement, which includes the policy and risk assessments, needs to be completed as soon as possible.
- The whole-school approach to student support, which is evident, needs to be documented in a whole-school guidance plan that clearly identifies the roles of all staff involved.
- In relation to special educational needs (SEN), a smaller core teaching team should be put in place in line with best practice.
- The board, together with the senior management team, should lead the implementation of recommendations provided in relation to teaching and learning, with a particular focus on whole-school implementation of strategies that would enhance levels of student participation and responsibility in class, and initiatives to support a greater sharing of observed best practice.
- The school should continue to develop its numeracy plan while identifying and planning a third area as part of its school self-evaluation (SSE) work.

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

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

The board is relatively newly formed. It is properly and democratically constituted, clear on its role and responsibilities and conscious of statutory obligations. The board is committed to: the school's mission statement; the development and refurbishment of school facilities; the maintenance of the school's broad curriculum; and the school's ongoing development as a centre of learning. The board, in partnership with the school community, has identified a range of developmental priorities, with strategies in place for the monitoring and achievement of these priorities. It is clear that they understand the importance of having a physical learning environment that is inclusive and conducive to students reaching their full potential.

There is a very good level of experience among board members which serves the school well, with relevant training undertaken by the members. The board is supportive of continuing professional development opportunities for staff.

The board functions effectively with decisions made through a process of open consultation and consensus. It is very positive that the board discusses student attainment and curricular provision. In the last number of years, the board has had to make difficult decisions in relation to maintaining the broad curriculum available to students. It is positive to note that any decisions made in this regard are reviewed on a regular basis and bear in mind the needs of the current student cohort.

The board has a clear and coherent understanding of the procedures that need to be further developed in order to achieve its plan and vision. A policy table is in use to track the development and review of policies. It is recommended that the Health and Safety Statement, on which considerable work has already been done, be completed and ratified as soon as possible.

Communication between the board and other stakeholders is good. An agreed report of board meetings is conveyed to the relevant partners through their representative nominees. Almost all teachers agreed that the board of management keeps them informed about its

leadership and management role. To strengthen this communication between all stakeholders, and as required by Section 20 of the Education Act, the board should issue an annual report to stakeholders.

The parents' association is committed to the school and has taken an active role in organising and supporting many initiatives. It is pro-active in promoting attendance at its meetings, which the principal or deputy also attend. The association feels that it has good communication with the parent body, and while the website and webtext systems are useful communication tools, results from questionnaires completed as part of this evaluation suggest that this relationship needs strengthening. As the board's policy review process becomes strengthened, it is recommended that there be greater collaboration with the parent body through the parents' association.

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

The quality of school leadership is very good and is forward looking. The principal and deputy principal provide strong leadership and are an effective team with clearly delineated roles that complement each other, working in partnership. They lead learning through the management of effective curriculum-related design, planning and implementation. It was evident that the staff feel very well supported by the principal and deputy principal. The staff and students are acknowledged and affirmed for their efforts by the senior management team.

Staff are empowered through the use of a distributed leadership model, with leadership distributed among middle management effectively as part of the post structure. It is very positive that the post structure and associated responsibilities were systematically reviewed and changed in consultation with staff in order to ensure that key school needs continue to be met, with available skills matched to the requirements of the school. It was evident that the duties attached to the various roles are undertaken in a diligent manner. Teachers' willingness to undertake leadership roles and manage tasks on a voluntary basis is acknowledged.

To develop this leadership capacity further, assistant principals should have regular meetings as a group and play a role in whole school planning, acting as an advisory group for the senior management team. It would be beneficial if all postholders met annually with senior management to facilitate review and reflection of their valuable work.

The staff are professional, open and caring. There are good lines of communication between the senior management team and the staff through staff meetings. There is evidence that decisions are undertaken in a collaborative and consultative manner and in a spirit of collegiality.

Subject plans examined indicate that subject department planning is firmly established. It is recommended that teaching and learning should now feature as a standing item on the agenda of all subject department meetings. The introduction of the analysis of certificate examination results in all subject areas, with departments encouraged to comment on trends seen in the data, is positive. To further develop this, subject departments could compare their results to a moving average of their own results from past years. If any trends are noted, strategies to address these trends through common teaching and learning approaches should be collectively discussed as a department and employed.

The school provides a comprehensive curriculum that aims to nurture the talents of all students and includes successful TY, LCVP and LCA programmes. Extensive work has

been undertaken by the Advisory Board of Studies in order to ensure that students' needs are met when setting up option blocks at all stages of their schooling.

An expansive range of extracurricular activities is offered to students. These have a very positive impact on students. The significant commitment on the part of a large number of teachers is acknowledged. A spirit of volunteerism with respect to curricular work is very strong, with extra support being offered to students outside class times.

The student council have undertaken significant in-school projects, such as the development of the canteen, and have strong links with the wider community. It is notable that the student council have presented to the board of management to keep the board informed of their work. As indicated by the results of questionnaires completed as part of this evaluation, communication with the student body needs to be strengthened so students realise that the student council is their voice in how things are done in the school. Consideration should also be given to including first year representatives on the council. In addition to the student council, there is a wide range of opportunities for students to develop their leadership capacities.

Student progress, attendance and retention rates are monitored very effectively, with the use of software to assist the process. Student support is coordinated through weekly care team meetings, with year heads and class teachers playing key support roles for the students. There is a wide range of valuable structures and interventions in place to support student welfare. There are effective strategies in place for the transition of students between primary and post-primary levels, including a strong induction process for students. A comprehensive guidance programme has been devised and all students have access to this programme. This valuable whole-school approach to student support should now be documented in a whole-school guidance plan.

Significant care is given to provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) to ensure that individual students' academic, social and organisational skills are developed as required. Good communication flows to staff about identified needs and strong relationships with parents have been developed. The coordinator works and communicates very well with key personnel to ensure that the requirements of students with SEN are met. There are termly, formal meetings between coordinator and special needs assistants (SNA). To strengthen this communication, it is suggested that the coordinator meet with the core teaching team regularly. It is recommended that team-teaching should also be a core mode of delivery of support, in addition to the varied modes already available. It is evident that the teachers in the SEN department, including the SNAs, are clear on their roles and responsibilities; this, and how they liaise with other staff should be documented in the SEN policy.

It is positive that planning for the delivery of SEN support informs the school timetable as it is constructed. Currently, a large number of teachers are involved in the delivery of support. In line with best practice, a smaller, core, teaching team should be put in place, particularly in junior cycle where teachers develop students' literacy and numeracy skills using a cross-curricular approach.

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 is well maintained and has earned its fifth Green Flag award. The corridors and general areas provide a visually stimulating environment, with information to staff and students regularly updated via TV screens.

In a minority of instances, a stock audit should take place to continue the removal of obsolete resources and the organisation of required resources. The lack of health and safety markings on the floor in the engineering and woodwork rooms needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

Management is aware of the limitations to access in some areas of the building and possible infrastructure issues should the adjacent convent rooms no longer be available to the school. With advanced plans in place, as reported by the school, management has stated that, should the convent building be acquired, all of the above issues would be addressed.

Notwithstanding the above, management has made every effort to upgrade the currently available facilities. Information and communication technology (ICT) facilities have been improved and aid the continuing integration of ICT into teaching and learning.

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

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

The observation of twenty periods took place over the course of the evaluation. Overall, lessons were well prepared and well planned. Most lessons commenced with a valuable review of prior learning or the correction of homework. Very good practice was observed when clear learning intentions were shared with students at the outset of lessons and were revisited in order to check learning. It is recommended that this approach to lesson design be used in all lessons.

A very positive learning environment permeates throughout the school. A supportive, caring and respectful atmosphere was evident in the interactions between teachers and students. In almost all instances, classroom management was very good and students were well behaved. On the occasion where this was not the case, a differentiated approach could have been used to ensure students were sufficiently challenged by the tasks being undertaken.

Clear, purposeful instructions and explanations were a feature of lessons observed. Teachers supported students very well in their work. Teachers' questioning was very good and included a range of directed and general questions as well as higher and lower-order questions. Very good quality of lesson structure was observed where whole-class questioning and discussion were seamlessly interspersed with purposeful student activity.

A range of teaching approaches and resources were used in lessons. ICT was used in some lessons. Its use was particularly effective in enhancing learning when students were given key questions to answer while watching a short video clip and where visual images, which were illustrated on presentation software, invited a response from students in advance of displaying key terms.

Generally, a good balance was observed between teacher inputs and student activity, although in some lessons, students were a little more passive and lessons were dominated by teacher inputs. Highest levels of engagement occurred where students worked on individual tasks and where they collaborated in pairs or groups to discuss the lesson's ideas

or to undertake practical activities. In some lessons, there was scope for development in the use of methodologies to support active learning. Building on the good practice observed in a number of lessons, it is recommended that all subject departments give greater attention to the planning for, and the effective use of co-operative learning strategies.

In practical lessons, students demonstrated a very good level of skill training, with due regard given to the balance and incorporation of theory, practical skill and health and safety issues. In language lessons, the target language was used at all times by the teacher and, in the majority of cases, by students also. As a result, students' oral skills were enhanced.

It is good to note that the development of students' oral literacy and student use of subject-specific terminology was effectively facilitated through student group work and whole-class discussion and questioning. On occasion, more opportunity or time was suggested to facilitate the further development of students' literacy skills. Homework, designed to consolidate or extend classroom learning, was assigned in almost all lessons.

Students' numeracy development was enhanced in some lessons through the use of methodologies that address skills such as verbal reasoning and spatial understanding, in addition to the development of mathematical skills in mathematics lessons.

Differentiated learning was most effectively facilitated where students worked at their own pace on individual or group tasks and when additional, more challenging, tasks were set for the more able students. It is notable that students were comfortable seeking help from their teachers and willing to help each other. In all lessons, students' contributions were encouraged and affirmed.

In one lesson, assessment for learning strategies were very effectively used. Students engaged in peer assessment of another student's written work, thus providing the opportunity to enhance their own learning also. There is scope for the greater usage of self-assessment and peer-assessment as a form of feedback to increase the level of responsibility given to students and to further develop their critical thinking skills. Web-based learning platforms that are currently in use by teachers across the school could assist with this.

Exemplary practice was observed in a small number of lessons, and in such lessons, student participation and learning was maximised. In a very small number of lessons, there was scope for the development of teaching practice. It is advised that the introduction of peer observation would support a greater sharing of the observed exemplary practice.

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in lessons was good or very good with a number of examples of excellent practice. Student learning was highest in the lessons where students were thinking, doing, discussing, and collaborating.

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

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

The school has made very good progress in relation to recommendations from previous reports. Significant progress has now been made in addressing recommendations about Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), which are now timetabled for all students.

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

The subject departments that were the focus for previous inspections have made very good progress in relation to implementing the recommendations that were made. Management

should look at how the feedback that relates to generic teaching and learning from inspection reports can be disseminated to staff effectively.

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

The school community is engaged in ongoing planning with the SSE processes. It is clearly evident that the school has considerable capacity to implement and drive change. A positive culture of self-review is embedded in the work of the school as evident in the monitoring of the effectiveness of literacy strategies. The literacy targets that were set indicate very high expectations of students and there is now a need to bring these same high expectations and levels of monitoring to the current numeracy strand of the SSE process. A third area, relating to teaching and learning, should now be identified and a plan developed.



# **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 Mount Saint Michael Secondary School, on behalf of our Senior Management team, the Staff, and the entire school community, wishes to acknowledge receipt of our WSE-MLL report. The report affirms many of the excellent practices in existence in our school and we are particularly proud to see that the truly inclusive, student-centred caring school, which is in line with our Mission Statement, was noted and acknowledged. Among the many positive findings made by the Inspectors in their report, we are particularly encouraged by the following:

- The very positive comments on the commitment of the Board of Management in relation to the school as an ongoing centre for learning, its commitment to a broad curriculum and to the future provision of the school building.
- Acknowledgement of the high quality of Senior Management and their ability to initiate and lead change in driving school improvement.
- Recognition of the Staff's obvious commitment to the school in delivering the best possible learning experiences for our students and the effective, wide-ranging support structures in place for student support.
- The very positive contribution of all partners in education including the support of the Parents' Association, the active involvement of the Student Council and our close links with the local community in West Cork.

## **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 acknowledges the recommendations made by the Inspectors and some work has already commenced:

- The Board of Management will issue an Annual Report to all its stakeholders.
- As recommended, the Health & Safety Statement will be reviewed and updated. The necessary markings on the Engineering and Woodwork room floors have been addressed.
- The whole school Guidance Plan will be put in place, clearly identifying the roles of all staff involved.
- Senior Management will examine the possibility of a smaller Special Educational Needs team as a matter of priority.
- The current school self-evaluation process will take on board the recommendations in the WSE-MLL Report to further enhance teaching and learning.

The Board of Management, in consultation with the Principal and the Deputy Principal, will monitor the progress of these improvement plans to ensure that there is full compliance with the Inspectors' recommendations. Such best practice adhered to by the Board of Management in the past, is acknowledged in the body of the Report. We thank all those who engaged with, and embraced, the WSE-MLL process in a very professional and positive manner.