

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

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

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Scoil Dara
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Church St, Kilcock, Co Kildare.
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	61691B

**Date of Evaluation: 09-05-2019**



---

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

## **WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING**

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning reports on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. It affirms good practice and makes recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

### **How to read this report**

During this inspection, the inspectors evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. Quality of school leadership and management
2. Quality of teaching and learning
3. Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations
4. The school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management 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.

### **CHILD PROTECTION**

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.
4. The Child Safeguarding Statement meets the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.
5. The records of the last three board of management meetings record a child protection oversight report that meet the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017.
6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all school personnel on the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2017
7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE, Wellbeing).
8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.

The school did not meet the requirements in relation 7 above and therefore was not fully compliant with all checks undertaken.

## WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	09-05-2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with board of management</li><li>• Meetings with principal and deputy principal</li><li>• Meetings with key staff</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Student focus-group interview</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with parents</li><li>• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers</li></ul>

### School context

Scoil Dara is a co-educational voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 901 students. The school operates under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST), and offers the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY), established Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

### Summary of main findings and recommendations:

#### Findings

- School leaders have a clear vision for the future development of the school, however there is scope to strengthen strategic planning practices to achieve this vision.
- The quality of leadership and management is good overall; the senior management team empowers staff to take on leadership roles.
- The school offers a very broad and balanced curriculum and staff provide a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to enhance student learning.
- The school provides a very good range of pastoral and learning supports, with student wellbeing at its core; Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) provision has increased substantially, and is now provided for all students except those taking the LCVP.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in lessons observed was good or very good, with scope to develop formative assessment practices; student attainment does not reflect baseline potential in a number of subjects.
- The school has very good capacity for improvement; school self-evaluation (SSE) is gaining momentum, but the potential of the formal SSE process is not yet fully realised.

#### Recommendations

- To bring the school's vision to full fruition, school leaders should develop an overarching strategic plan, and ensure that the necessary structures and systems to support planning for improvement are strengthened.
- All issues of compliance should be addressed, including RSE provision for students following the LCVP, and the development and ratification of some mandatory policies.
- As leaders of learning, assistant principals (APs) should progress the implementation of the proposed system to track and monitor students' progress, to ensure that expectations for achievement are appropriately high.
- Subject teams should develop a more consistent and collaborative approach to evidence-based planning for improvement, in order to support students achieve their potential.
- Formative assessment practices that facilitate student-led learning should be fully embedded in all teachers' practice.

## **DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

The overall quality of leadership and management is good. Some very good initiatives are currently underway, while some structures and systems which support students to fully realise their potential need to be strengthened.

#### **Leading learning and teaching**

The school has experienced several changes to senior management in recent years. The senior management team is strongly committed to building a culture of collaboration and innovation in teaching and learning.

Meeting minutes indicate that the principal keeps the board well informed of many school issues and events, and wider educational developments. It is welcome that teaching and learning is on the agenda for board meetings, and the board supports a wealth of teacher continuing professional development (CPD).

The principal presents broad data on attainment in certificate examinations to the board, and has identified the need to improve uptake of higher level in some subjects. Overall, student attainment is not in line with potential, based on students' incoming cognitive assessments. The principal's plans to enhance the current student tracking system, to make full use of baseline data to monitor student progress, set targets, and support action planning for improvement, should serve to address this. As leaders of learning, APs should progress the implementation of this system to ensure that expectations for achievement are appropriately high, and that learner outcomes and experiences are optimised.

The school offers a very broad and balanced curriculum, including a range of effective programmes. The school has planned for the ongoing implementation of the Junior Cycle framework, including the expansion of Wellbeing next year to include 'Learning to Learn'. The first-year sampling programme is highly effective in assisting students in making informed subject choice, however cognisance will need to be taken of subject specification time requirements, once the entire Junior Cycle framework is implemented. TY, LCA and LCVP programmes are well organised, and offer a good work-experience programme, with an additional social development aspect in TY. To ensure that the programmes continue to evolve, core teams should be established, and a more formal system of on-going review, incorporating student voice, should be implemented.

Some good timetabling practices are in place, including appropriate provision for almost all subjects. A few anomalies need to be addressed such as classes shared between two teachers. The absence of RSE for students taking LCVP needs to be addressed in line with Circular Letter (CL) 0037/2010.

A very good range of pastoral supports is in place. The care team meets regularly. Meetings with staff and parents during the evaluation indicated that student welfare is at the heart of decision-making processes. A range of whole-school initiatives support student wellbeing, such as the resilience programme for second years. A very good induction programme, which fosters strong links with feeder schools and is supported by the Meitheal student mentors, is in place for in-coming first-year students.

There is very good timetabled Guidance provision for senior cycle students. This commendable approach allows sufficient time to optimise the delivery of Guidance for all, using the continuum-of-support model. It provides opportunities for guidance personnel to identify students in need of additional support, and to provide personal counselling as appropriate. A clear system of referral is in place. The guidance plan documents the programme for delivery of Guidance and its links with

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in junior cycle, including modular class visits from the guidance team.

Year heads meet weekly as part of the AP and care team meetings. Their work, supported by the tutor system, plays a pivotal role in student care. With the exception of TY, the class tutor carries out tutor-related tasks during core teaching time. The school should review current structures in order to enhance the tutor role, and minimise time taken from class tuition.

Very good practices are in place to identify and support students with special educational needs (SEN). In line with good practice, support files are in place for students with identified needs, and the dedicated SEN core team and co-ordinator provide teachers with relevant information regarding students' needs and planned interventions. Senior management is highly supportive of the SEN co-ordinator in timetabling provision to best meet students' needs, through team-teaching and small group withdrawal. The SEN co-ordinator has correctly identified the need to review the grouping of students withdrawn, to ensure that their diverse needs are met effectively. Not all hours provided for students with SEN are currently being utilised. This should be addressed.

### **Managing the organisation**

The board is correctly constituted and members are highly committed to the school. While the board demonstrates a good awareness of its responsibilities, there is scope to strengthen procedures to support its oversight role in leading learning and teaching.

The members of the senior management team work very well together. Their individual skill sets, and collaborative and consultative leadership style, provides an effective synergy that serves the school well. They have clearly delineated roles, and manage the school effectively on a day-to-day basis.

The code of behaviour aims to facilitate a positive learning environment. Students' behaviour during the evaluation was very good, however responses to questionnaires and minutes of AP meetings indicated that the code of behaviour is not always implemented consistently, and that at times poor behaviour can disrupt learning. School management has put significant work into promoting a culture of positive behaviour, and a meeting with a focus group of students indicated that such approaches have already paid dividends.

The school building and grounds are maintained to a satisfactory standard. All classrooms are equipped with Information and Communications Technology equipment, but data from questionnaires indicated that there is significant scope to increase its use. This could be addressed through the implementation of a digital strategy, to ensure that funding supplied to the school as part of the national digital framework, is used effectively to support and enhance student learning.

### **Leading school development**

School leaders have made good progress in updating the permanent section of the school plan. The collaborative approach used to progress this work is illustrative of very good practice, however a few policies are still in need of development, including the General Data Protection policy. The board should develop a timetable for systematic policy review to ensure that all mandatory policies are reviewed on a cyclical basis.

Members of the board articulated their vision for the school's future in terms of continuing to provide a holistic educational experience underpinned by CEIST values, whereby students are enabled to gradually progress from dependence to responsibility for self, society and the world. The recent development of a new school crest and its motto *Tada gan larracht* (nothing without effort) espouses this vision.

The principal has prepared a report which outlines plans for school improvement, including targets and priorities for the next three years. This formed the basis of current SSE strategies and the recent post review. School leaders should now use the SSE process to instigate the initiatives necessary to bring the school's vision to full fruition, and develop a strategic plan with actions aimed specifically at the on-going development of learner outcomes and experiences. Consideration should be given to establishing a steering group to facilitate this work, and monitor its progress.

The parents' association is strongly supportive of the school. It contributes to school events, including the organisation of an exceptional careers evening. The association meets regularly and is encouraged to participate in school life. The school uses a range of effective means to communicate with parents, and the focus group of parents indicated that communication with staff and management is very good.

### **Developing leadership capacity**

Staff are afforded opportunities to develop leadership roles as subject co-ordinators, class tutors, and through organising an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. In recent years growing numbers of teachers have been empowered to lead and take part in initiatives, such as *Building Learning Power*. To ensure that strategies gleaned from these initiatives achieve optimal impact in the classroom, senior management should take a pro-active role to ensure consistent implementation.

Middle management comprises a team of committed APs who contribute significantly to the overall management of the school. Discussion at the regular AP team meetings centres mainly on the organisation of school events, issues of student discipline and punctuality, and the systems in place to address these. A review of posts of responsibilities was recently undertaken in line with CL0003/2018, with new roles to support teaching and learning identified. In line with good practice, post holders are provided with job descriptions, and it is welcome that post holders will report on their work at the end of this year. To ensure that maximum value is gained from the review of posts, middle management's role in leading learning and teaching should be strengthened.

The school regularly provides placements for student teachers. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome, and provides valuable professional benefits for all involved. New members of staff are effectively supported through peer mentoring and Droichead.

Very good opportunities for student leadership are promoted through the work of the student council, sixth-year prefects and Meitheal mentors. While the school aims to promote student voice, student questionnaires indicated that there is still significant scope to improve students' perceptions of having a voice. This should be investigated with a focus on learner voice in the classroom.

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

The overall quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in most lessons; assessment practices varied. A very good rapport was noted between teachers and students.

## **Learner outcomes and experiences**

Very good practice was noted in lessons where meaningful learning intentions were clearly communicated with students. Learner outcomes were significantly enhanced where the intended learning was linked with success criteria and the structure and pace of the lesson provided sufficient opportunities to consolidate and assess learning. These approaches should be extended to all lessons. Commendably, students' prior knowledge was explored and used as starting point in many lessons.

Student-centred approaches, including opportunities for students to collaborate in their learning, were provided in almost all lessons. While students generally engaged well in group activities, in some instances better structures were needed. Collaborative learning was most effective where roles were assigned to group members, timeframes were applied to tasks, and plenary sessions were structured to maximise learning for all students in the classroom. Such effective structures should be applied to all group-work activities.

High levels of student engagement were evident in lessons where the activities were planned to effectively support active and incremental learning. Student engagement was optimal in lessons where the planned activities supported meaningful student-led learning. The focus group of students indicated a positive move towards such approaches in lessons. Teachers should collectively explore the full potential of these strategies to enhance meaningful, active learning and support the student voice within lessons.

The effective and highly effective practices observed should be built on, using teachers' learning from CPD and initiatives they are involved in. The high level of expertise amongst teachers and the Teach Meet platform, which serves to encourage collaboration amongst teachers, should be utilised to embed approaches to learning and teaching that consistently place students' needs at the heart of classroom interaction, and put the emphasis on learning rather than on teaching.

## **Teachers' individual and collective practice**

A range of effective teaching approaches were taken in lessons. Teachers' presentations, explanations and responses to students' questions were generally clear and precise. Teachers worked in an inclusive manner and students engaged well in the learning process. Teachers were affirming of students' efforts.

Lessons were generally well prepared with appropriate resources and materials sourced in advance. Where learning was most effective, teachers differentiated their approaches and activities. In some lessons, a whole-class approach to teaching and learning prevailed, with the same content and tasks delivered to all students in the same way. In these instances, further attention should be given to planning for differentiation of instruction and tasks, based on students' individual needs and strengths.

Teachers used additional resources very well to support learning in some lessons, such as digital presentations and film clips effectively to illustrate information. Highly effective learning was facilitated when students were provided with prompt questions in advance of watching film clips or completing tasks. In some instances the use of a visualiser would have further aided teachers' explanations of concepts. Overall, students' use of technology to support learning is in need of development.

Classroom management was very good overall. In some instances lateness to class disrupted the lesson start. The recent review of the attendance strategy prompted the introduction of a range of effective strategies to encourage punctuality and attendance, including rewards and greater monitoring. The school should continue to build on recent improvements in attendance, and explore further strategies to encourage punctuality.

Questioning was used well as a teaching tool, to stimulate students' engagement, and as an assessment tool in most lessons. Teachers generally distributed questions evenly, and very good practice was noted where questions were targeted to meet the varied needs of students. Effective strategies used to elicit substantial student response included sufficient wait time, and a good range of question types. Very good practice was noted where students were encouraged to create their own questions based on their learning from the lesson.

A review of students' journals and copybooks indicated that homework is assigned regularly, and is generally monitored and corrected. Variation was noted in the quality, quantity and presentation of written work. Teachers could further enhance the assignment of homework by outlining expectations, and facilitating discussion of how the assigned homework would help to improve learning.

High-quality formative written feedback was noted on some samples of student copybooks. In many lessons, teachers provided valuable oral feedback to students. To maximise its effectiveness, students should be encouraged to note teacher comments. Self-assessment and peer-assessment strategies should be further developed, and a consistent whole-school approach to the provision of written formative feedback on key pieces of student work should be implemented.

There is considerable variation in the quality of subject planning. Subject folders generally contain long-term plans and substantial additional information on how subject departments carry out their functions. In some instances schemes of work were reliant on the textbook, not taking account of students' learning needs. The most effective planning documents include clear schedules outlining plans for learning and assessment, as well as for teachers' delivery of curricular content. While there are examples of highly effective plans in a few subject areas, overall subject planning is in need of improvement. Planning for Junior Cycle should take greater cognisance of classroom-based assessments, and of learning outcomes and success criteria.

Subject teams have begun to analyse certificate examination outcomes. Senior management provides templates to support subject teams in using such data to develop action plans. While a few subject teams use this data to inform evidence-based planning for improvement, overall a deeper level of analysis is required to improve attainment and raise expectations for students. Subject teams should now take a consistent and collaborative approach to identifying specific priorities and strategies that will support student learning and negate any identified barriers to success. The school's electronic platform should be exploited further to support this practice.

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

Recommendations from previous inspections are generally implemented adequately. While individual subject departments generally implement recommendations well, a greater whole-school approach is needed, with greater oversight by school management to ensure that all subject departments act on recommendations strategically and effectively.



### **Leadership and Management**

Good progress has been made on the review of TY, where students are now assessed through a portfolio and credit system. The attendance strategy and code of behaviour have been reviewed. SPHE provision has been addressed in junior cycle. Subject team meetings are now regularly facilitated. Recommendations regarding action planning for improvement, and senior cycle RSE, require further development.

### **Teaching and Learning**

Many recommendations, such as the development of students' language skills, have been implemented very well within subject departments. Others relating to subject planning for improvement and formative assessment generally require further development.

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

### **The School's Self-Evaluation Process**

Some good SSE processes are in place, such as the gathering of data from a range of sources, and the development of teams to explore strands. Highly committed staff members have contributed to a range of strategies including the review of literacy and numeracy, and are now in the data-gathering stage of strategies for formative assessment. To ensure the potential of the formal SSE process is fully realised, more consistent implementation and review of agreed strategies that focus on teaching, learning and assessment is needed. The school improvement plan should be shared with stakeholders.

### **The School's Capacity for Improvement**

The school has very good capacity for improvement. School management and staff have already begun to embrace new challenges and are committed to school improvement. The posts of responsibility filled during the evaluation and the evolving structures and systems will prove very useful in supporting the school improvement agenda currently underway. Parents and students are committed to the school and their further input is key in creating shared ownership of the school improvement agenda.

## The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	<i>Very good</i> applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is <i>outstanding</i> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	<i>Good</i> applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	<i>Satisfactory</i> applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	<i>Fair</i> applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	<i>Weak</i> applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

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

A key finding in the evaluation is that the school provides a very good range of pastoral and learning supports, with student wellbeing at its core, this is a welcome tribute to the dedication and committed work of teachers, members of the middle management team, senior management team and the partnership of the school with parents.

The Board congratulates and thanks all staff of the school for their work and commitment which is mentioned so favourably throughout the report. The generosity of teachers in supporting extra-curricular activities is appreciated by parents and the Board.

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

Follow-up actions planned since the completion of the inspection:

- (a) All issues of compliance will be addressed, including RSE provision for students in LCVP
- (b) The Board of Management and senior management team will have a greater oversight to ensure that all subject departments act on recommendations strategically and effectively.
- (c) Further develop formative assessment practices that facilitate student-led learning.
- (d) School Leaders will develop an action plan to systematically monitor agreed actions.