

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Sacred Heart Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Convent Of Mercy Clonakilty Co. Cork
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	62170B

Date of Evaluation: 30-01-2018



What is 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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	16-18 Jan 2018
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with Board of Management• Meetings with principal and deputy principal• Meetings with key staff• Review of relevant documents• Student focus-group interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with parents• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers

School context

Sacred Heart Secondary School was founded, as a boarding and day school in 1941 by the Sisters of Mercy. It operates under the trusteeship of CEIST and provides post-primary education to girls from Clonakilty and the surrounding areas. Current enrolment is 547. The school offers a broad post-primary curriculum. Programmes offered are the Junior Cycle, a compulsory Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate established and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) as well as the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of school leadership and management is very good and there is a clear focus on improvement in learning and teaching.
- There is a very effective school development process; while the development of leadership capacity among staff is good, leadership aspects of middle management could be further developed.
- Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment ranged from very good to good, with the majority of lessons observed being very good; collective practice could be enhanced through further collaborative planning for the junior cycle curriculum.
- Very good quality student care is provided, and while some good practice was observed regarding provision for students with special educational needs (SEN), it remains an area for development.
- There has been good progress in the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations
- The school has proactively engaged with the school self-evaluation (SSE) process and has a very good capacity for implementing an improvement agenda.

Recommendations

- In the context of Circular 03/2018, the school should take the opportunity to enhance and spread the leadership roles attached to posts of responsibility, particularly at assistant principal level, thus enhancing the middle management capacity of the school.

- Further collaborative development of junior cycle plans is required as training is accessed, with a clear focus on the place of learning outcomes and the key skills in each subject area, as applicable.
- The school should review the current range of supports for students with SEN with a view to extending the use of cooperative teaching where appropriate as a more effective means of providing additional support.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of school leadership and management is very good and there is a clear focus on improvement in learning and teaching.

Leading learning and teaching

Senior management provides highly effective leadership for the school. Their energetic team-approach and open-door policy is central to leading very good learning and teaching in the school. They display a deep commitment and support for students, staff and the wider school community.

The board of management is dedicated to enhancing teaching and learning. Board members' support of teachers' engagement in continuing professional development (CPD) is testament to this commitment. Discussions at meetings facilitate the board in having an oversight role with regard to teaching and learning. This is very positive. Teachers' willingness to further upskill and to provide support to new colleagues is illustrated by involvement in initiatives such as Droichead and CPD events.

Senior management strategically and efficiently manages curriculum-related planning. The school provides a comprehensive curriculum to nurture the talents of all students academically, in sport and through other extracurricular activities. Programmes are well organised and subject-sampling of optional subjects is provided both in first year and TY. The TY programme in particular offers students learning experiences which facilitate the development of a range of educational, vocational and personal skills. While the LCVP enhances students' vocational education, the LCA provides effective educational experiences and develops learning for those students who do not wish to follow the traditional Leaving Certificate route. The school is aware that Physical Education (PE) should be provided for LCVP students and is investigating how this might be achieved.

Commendably, whole-school awareness and understanding of the requirements of the Junior Cycle Framework have been developed through; presentations to the staff, board and parents' association; the work of the co-ordinator; and continuing professional development (CPD) days for teachers. The school has changed aspects of reports to parents as a precursor to reviewing the whole-school assessment policy in the context of students' completion of classroom based assessments. There is some evidence of clear engagement with the new specifications within relevant subject departments.

The commitment of staff to providing a very broad range of extracurricular and co-curricular activities, which provide a myriad of opportunities for personal development and development of skills beyond the classroom, is highly commended.

Staff meetings provide an effective forum to discuss issues relating to teaching and learning with a view to enhancing student achievement. It is positive that teachers take lead roles as relevant during these meetings. A proactive system of academic tracking occurs and early identification and follow up of cases of concern is undertaken by the student support team. This is very good. Overall student attainment is very good. An annual awards ceremony celebrates the achievements of students.

Care of students is a key element of the school's work and a systematic approach is taken to it. The student support team has a significant role, as do the voluntary class tutors. Almost all students and parents surveyed agreed that "the students feel safe and cared for in the school". The transition process from primary to post-primary is well developed. Great care is evident in the induction of incoming students. Particularly noteworthy are the roles undertaken by the peer mentors and young social advocates at this time. Enhancing students' wellbeing is clearly important. Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) are timetabled for all year groups, as is mindfulness in TY.

Managing the organisation

The school is very well managed. All teachers and almost all parents surveyed said that the school is well run. The school has a very effective board of management and members are very well informed. The board and senior management work collaboratively in setting the direction for the school. The outcome of managements' efforts is a well-run, smoothly operating school.

The board of management is properly and democratically constituted, and roles and responsibilities are well understood by the members. Detailed discussion at regular meetings, together with members' openness to unpacking differing opinions, supports consensual decision making. The board members' rich experience leaves it well placed to assist senior management and teachers in creating and maintaining a learning organisation that delivers good learning experiences for students and staff. Communication with stakeholders is very good.

Senior management works very effectively to create and maintain a positive learning organisation. Great satisfaction was expressed by staff at the open-door policy of senior management, and staff members said that they would be listened to and supported in trying new initiatives. Almost all teachers agreed that their views were valued in decision making processes. The principal and deputy

principals seek to remain informed and upskilled in their respective roles through continuing engagement with CPD.

A recent consultative review of posts has resulted in a new schedule. Notwithstanding this, the level and type of responsibility assigned to the different posts varies at assistant principal and special duties teacher levels. In the context of the new Circular 03/2018 and building on good practice, the school should take the opportunity to enhance and spread the leadership roles attached to posts of responsibility, particularly at assistant principal level, thus enhancing the middle management capacity of the school.

The school has a clear behaviour policy which the survey, carried out as part of this evaluation, indicated is very well understood by students. Positive behaviour is encouraged through activities such as student receipt of Éacht letters. During the inspection, students were very well behaved, cooperative and polite. The school's admissions policy clearly sets out the procedures around enrolment. The school should remove conditional clauses that do not reflect the school's open and inclusive practices.

The school expends significant energy in providing a positive, visually rich learning environment. The current buildings, spread over the old and new schools and a number of prefabs, are well maintained overall. Despite the dispersed nature of the campus, there is very good provision for information and communications technology (ICT). The board has been particularly proactive with regard to advancing the building project. The Department of Education and Skills has recently taken ownership of the convent and boarding school. The board is now pursuing the renovation of these buildings as a matter of urgency, both to increase accommodation and for health and safety reasons. Commendably, the school has an up-to-date health and safety statement and regular risk assessments are undertaken.

The school values and supports partnership with parents. Almost all of the parents surveyed say they feel welcome in the school. Parents interviewed during the evaluation expressed great satisfaction with the school. The parents' association values its role in terms of policy review and acting as a sounding board for management in relation to school matters. School events are very well attended by parents. Effective communication mechanisms, including the use of social media and APPs, exist between the school and parents. A significant minority of parents surveyed disagreed that the school sought their views on school-related matters, or did not know if the parents' association kept them informed. These findings are worth exploring. More use might be made of website or other social media to further enhance communication with parents. Work on the parents' association section of the website should be advanced.

Leading school development

The board of management and senior management have a clear vision for the school and have a role in identifying priorities. Underpinning their vision is the focus on implementing CEIST values, which is to provide a holistic education in the Catholic tradition. The school also strives to ensure that planning is underpinned by a culture of high aspiration for staff and expectations for students. Positive steps are taken to support, motivate and build capacity among staff and to set high expectation for learners.

A strong spirit of volunteerism and dedication to professional development is evident among teachers. This has a positive impact on learners' experiences.

Senior management along with relevant boards of management, have identified developmental priorities each year. While the key short-term priority has been progressing the building issue, management has ensured that there is ongoing policy development and review, in addition to proactively engaging in initiatives to enhance teaching and learning. These include SSE, Junior Cycle implementation, Droichead, Instructional Leadership and digital learning. This report acknowledges the significant amount of time and energy that has gone into resolving building issues.

The school works very well with CEIST, accesses CPD provided by CEIST and utilises the support of other relevant professional networks.

Developing leadership capacity

Senior management clearly understands, and appreciates, the importance of building leadership capacity amongst staff, and important roles and related responsibilities are well distributed to all interested parties. Teachers are eager to engage with and are empowered to take on leadership roles. These roles include year heads, junior cycle implementation, and leading and participating on SSE teams. Staff carry out associated tasks in a committed and effective manner. Teamwork is strongly encouraged and facilitated. The voluntary contribution of staff on teams is very valuable. Weekly care team meetings and regular meetings with assistant principals contribute to whole-school development. They provide formal opportunities to discuss issues and assist senior management in developing and implementing actions.

In line with the school's vision for the holistic development of students, the school provides many opportunities to empower students and develop their leadership skills. Student council members, young social advocates and peer mentors, all of whom receive training, have very valuable

leadership roles. A recent innovation is the setting up of an overarching 'student voice' committee, which provides a cohesive structure for the other student leadership groups.

The student council is consulted on policy review and has good communication with the student body through the use of social media platforms and the school's website. Students' views have also been sought through many surveys. However, it would be worthwhile reviewing how feedback is given to students after such consultations as surveys conducted during the evaluation indicated that many students do not feel they have a say in how things are done in the school

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment ranged from very good to good, with the majority of lessons observed being very good; collective practice could be enhanced through further collaborative planning for the junior cycle curriculum.

Learner outcomes and experiences

The quality of learner outcomes and learning experiences provided was very good. In a number of cases, teaching and learning was of an outstanding quality, supported by highly effective use of co-operative learning, along with purposeful student-centred activities. In a small number of instances, areas for development were highlighted. These centred on the need for a greater emphasis on independent learning and, in a few cases, an increase in the level of challenge with regard to student learning.

Relationships between students and teachers, and among students themselves, were very positive. In lessons observed, students displayed a high level of motivation and interest in learning. Students felt able to contribute in lessons and ask for clarifications where necessary.

Students responded very well where teachers used group work in lessons. In a number of instances, highly effective use of cooperative learning activities was observed; clear assignment of roles, strong co-operative structures, the inclusion of wait time and the provision of formative assessment all served to enhance students' confidence as they undertook the tasks. The school is currently reviewing seating arrangements in order to support the use of co-operative learning, where practicable.

In some cases, advice was provided to suggest greater clarity with regard to the matching of particular strategies to the tasks in hand. In a small number of instances, it was recommended that a

greater emphasis be placed on providing opportunities for students to enhance their collaborative skills. A good focus on students' numeracy skills was observed, where appropriate.

A very good feature of many lessons was the provision of opportunities for students to access prior learning and to reflect on their learning during and at the end of lessons. These included very effective use of a 'feedback tree' and 'think-pair-share'. These approaches would be of benefit in all subject areas.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

The quality of teaching and assessment was very good or good, with the majority of lessons being very good. Almost all lessons were well-prepared to support the learning underway. In a few instances, some additional consideration with regard to the level of challenge for students and the need for differentiation would have been beneficial. Teachers displayed very good classroom management skills.

Learning intentions were shared with students in lessons to enhance clarity with regard to the learning underway. Where these were used most effectively, they were explicit and specific, linked to the skills being explored, and therefore provided a clear structure and additional motivation to the students for their learning. In addition, these learning intentions were linked to recapitulation during the lesson, thus facilitating teacher assessment and student-self-assessment of learning. This very good practice should be embedded across the school.

Teachers modelled the use of the target language and subject-specific vocabulary very well and encouraged students to engage in discourse. This included examples of students' engagement with the four literacy skills in a number of instances, with students displaying little difficulty in rising to the challenge of lessons solely through the target language. In a small number of instances, teachers were advised, when planning their lesson, to provide more opportunities for students' use of oral language and subject-specific vocabulary.

Appropriate use of ICT was observed in numerous lessons. In the context of the next strand of SSE, digital learning, the school should consider providing opportunities for students to engage with ICT. Beyond this, it is recommended that the school provide visualisers in classrooms, within the limits of available resources. These could enhance teaching and learning through use for provision of global feedback, modelling of key subject skills and explicit teaching of assessment strategies. In some lessons, inspectors observed limited whiteboard space available when ICT was in use. It is suggested the school might audit rooms to explore opportunities for whiteboard space to be expanded.

Subject department planning is well-embedded as a feature of school culture. In the case of junior cycle, good examples of subject departments' engagement with the new curriculum were observed. It is recommended that this approach now be adopted across all subject departments, with a clear focus on the need for collaborative planning, along with the place of learning outcomes and the key skills in each subject area, as applicable. Analysis of students' performance in the certificate examinations is undertaken. Student achievement in the examinations is very good.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

There has been good progress in the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations. Some, particularly those relating to SEN, require further attention.

Leadership and Management

Strategies are in place to address recommendations made during previous inspections. Some recommendations such as the provision of SPHE and RSE, the development of an RSE policy, the reduction of the size of the teaching team in Mathematics and addressing safety concerns in the science laboratories, have been fully addressed. Progress has been made in implementing some of the recommendations in relation to SEN. The process of reducing the core teaching team has begun, particularly in junior cycle, thus facilitating continuity of support. Phasing out the use of some of the allocation at senior cycle to provide a broad curriculum has commenced, and will be completed from the next school year. However, smaller class groups should not be created for the purpose of supporting students with SEN. The school should review the current range of supports with a view to extending the use of cooperative teaching, where appropriate, as a more effective means of providing support.

Teaching and Learning

Commendably the school reviews recommendations made in relation to teaching and learning and these inform identification of whole-school priorities in this area. Recommendations were made in a number of inspections in relation to the use of co-operative learning strategies, enhancing students' ownership of learning and assessment. While there was evidence of the effective use of these strategies in many lessons, in a minority of instances students' learning experiences and engagement in learning were reduced by the absence of such student-centred strategies.

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

The schools' self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement is very good

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school has proactively engaged with SSE. A systematic, strategic approach is being taken to the SSE process. Reports and school improvement plans have been devised for literacy, numeracy, and effective feedback. Progress is monitored. The school has identified the next area for improvement as digital learning and has begun the process of evaluation. SSE is reported to the school community. Over and above the requirements of formal SSE, there is a strong element of professional self-reflection in the school.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school has very good capacity for managing its affairs and implementing an improvement agenda. This is facilitated by the: strong leadership of the board and senior management, the support of the patron, the commitment of the staff and enthusiastic students.

5. CHILD PROTECTION

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

1. The school principal is aware that revised child protection procedures for primary and post-primary schools came into effect on 11 December 2017 and arrangements are in place to begin the process of implementing these procedures.
2. The name of the designated liaison person for child protection matters was prominently displayed in the school's reception area.
3. The school has a child protection policy in place.
4. All teachers are aware that they are mandated persons and of their responsibilities in that regard.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

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

The report reflects the holistic education provided to our students and affirms the commitment of staff to providing a comprehensive curriculum to nurture the talents of all students academically and to providing a very broad range of extra and co- curricular activities. The fact that the quality of the learners outcomes and learning experience provided was very good, and in a number of cases was of outstanding quality is particularly pleasing. The Board is pleased that the warm, positive relationships that exist were evident during the inspection, as was the high level of motivation and interest in learning among the students. The care of students was seen as a key element of the school's work.

The Board would also like to acknowledge the extremely positive results of surveys carried out.

Almost all students' and parents' surveys agreed that "the students feel safe and cared for in the school", that "the school is well run and that "they feel very welcome in the school".

All staff agreed that: the school is well run; there is a good atmosphere in school; the core values are being implemented; there are good student support systems in place; the behavior of students is good; the curriculum is sufficiently broad; and students are encouraged to achieve their potential.

The Board and is pleased that the report acknowledges 'the significant amount of time and energy that has gone into building issues' and the advancement of the proposed renovation remains its key priority.

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 the context of Circular 03/2018, a review of leadership and management is currently being undertaken
- The enrolment policy has been reviewed to reflect the school's open and inclusive practices.
- Subject departments are collaborating on the development of Junior Cycle, with a focus on key skills and learning outcomes.
- The school is currently engaged in planning for an increase in the use of cooperative teaching as a means of providing additional support for students with SEN for the coming school year.