# An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

# Department of Education and Skills

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

## REPORT

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| **Ainm na scoile / School name** | Skibbereen Community School |
| **Seoladh na scoile / School address** | Gortnaclohy<br>Skibbereen<br>Co Cork |
| **Uimhir rolla / Roll number** | 91516B |

## Date of Evaluation: 18-04-2018

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 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, RSE, Wellbeing).
8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.

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

# WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

| **Dates of inspection** | **16 - 18 April 2018** |
|---|---|
| Inspection activities undertaken<br>• Meeting with board of management<br>• Meetings with principal and deputy principals<br>• Meetings with key staff<br>• Review of relevant documents<br>• Student focus-group interview | • Meeting with parents<br>• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires<br>• Observation of teaching and learning<br>• Examination of students' work<br>• Interaction with students<br>• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers |

**School context**

Skibbereen Community School, which is under the joint trusteeship of CEIST, the Diocese of Cork and Ross and Cork Education and Training Board (ETB), was established in 2016. It is a successful amalgamation of Mercy Heights Secondary School, St. Fachtna's De La Salle College and Rossa College. It is a co-educational, multi-denominational, fully inclusive school. Current enrolment is 838. It offers a comprehensive curriculum including: Junior Cycle; Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP); Transition Year (TY) programme; Leaving Certificate established; and Leaving Certificate Vocational programme (LCVP).

**Summary of main findings and recommendations:**

**Findings**

- The senior management team, with the assistance of the board of management, provides very effective leadership and management of the school.
- Leadership of learning and teaching is of a very high quality, supported by a learning culture that is driven by high expectations for all and fuelled by high levels of staff commitment, interest and enthusiasm.
- The quality of support and care provided to students is very high, and provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) is excellent.
- The principal recognises the importance of school development planning and of building leadership capacity, encourages teachers to take an active role and devolves key leadership roles; teachers' response is extremely positive.
- The quality of learning and teaching was good overall and in a significant minority of lessons, it was very good or excellent; there was scope for development in key areas of teaching in a small number of lessons.
- School self-evaluation (SSE) informs whole-school development and improvement, but the contribution it can make to enhancing teaching and learning needs further consideration and action.

**Recommendations**

- The use of effective teaching and learning practice, such as that relating to active student listening, the processing of student feedback, use of learning intentions, collaborative learning, teacher questioning and formative feedback, should be extended.
- With the goal of advancing the overall quality of learning and teaching from good to excellent, the further development of a coordinated, focused, systematic, whole-school approach aimed at enhancing teaching and learning is recommended; SSE should support the realisation of this goal.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The senior management team, with the assistance of the board of management, provides very effective leadership and management of the school.

**Leading learning and teaching**

Leadership of learning and teaching is of a very high quality. This is supported by a learning culture driven by high expectations for all and fuelled by high levels of staff commitment, interest and enthusiasm. The work of the principal and two deputy principals in leading teaching and learning is well informed by a set of refreshingly contemporary school aims. Senior management's decision to assume lead roles in the three teaching and learning task groups is indicative of the desire to lead development in this core area.

It is positive that during the current establishment phase, there is a strong focus on the development and refinement of structures and systems intended to support provision for quality learning and teaching. Senior management promotes staff involvement in this work, and whilst adherence to best practice guidelines informs this work, innovation is also supported.

The importance of continuing professional development (CPD) is appreciated by all, with high levels of staff engagement noted. New staff benefit from a culture of support and sharing and a developing mentoring programme. There is ongoing review of how to further develop related structures.

The school's vision of supporting the holistic development of all students is transacted through its formal and informal curriculum. A broad and balanced curriculum is provided, with consideration being given to providing additional programmes such as, for example, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. There is high quality co-ordination of JCSP, TY and LCVP and related activities are very well organised. Planning for the further development of a junior cycle wellbeing programme is underway. It is recommended that: a rebalancing of programme and subject content in TY be considered; fifth-year LCVP students be timetabled for an additional lesson period; and all LCVP students be timetabled for Physical Education. The wide and varied extracurricular programme, as well as the extensive co-curricular programme accommodated, is a tribute to teachers' dedication.

The school timetable demonstrates sound planning principles, with the deployment of appropriately qualified teachers being very much prioritised. Equality of opportunity for students is promoted and supported through: first-year subject sampling; student-centred subject choice systems; and largely mixed-ability class organisation.

The quality of support and care for students is very high. This is influenced by: comprehensive admissions, transition and induction procedures; high quality support structures and systems; and excellent levels of collaboration and communication. Guidance provision is prioritised, and the approach is balanced in terms of providing for students' personal, educational and vocational needs. A highly committed guidance team, solid organisational structures, highly effective communication and whole-staff co-operation results in a very effective programme.

Whole-school support and provision for students with SEN is excellent. A co-ordinator, with the support of a core-team, very effectively manages provision. Interventions are well informed by the continuum of support. Planning is collaborative, purposeful and thoughtful, and is responsive to individual student's needs and abilities. Clear communication of information assists teachers to prepare inclusive lessons. The special needs assistants (SNAs) are highly valued and their work was observed to appropriately foster students' meaningful participation, whilst promoting their independence. Funding from Delivering Equality of Educational Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) supports after-school programs in key subjects and the provision of homework clubs.

**Managing the organisation**

The senior management team, with the support and assistance of the board of management, provides very effective management of the school.

The board is appropriately constituted and is keenly aware of its role, responsibilities and statutory obligations. Members' collectively diverse experiences, qualifications and expertise positively informs their work. Decisions are: consensual; informed by deep discussion; and predicated on the aim to provide high-quality educational experiences.

The principal and deputy principals are an outstanding and dedicated team. A complementary wealth of experience, expertise and qualifications enhances their leadership capacity, which is further supported by their ongoing engagement in CPD. Individual roles and responsibilities have been clarified, while joint decision-making and collaborative planning for the future is well accommodated. High levels of mutual support and respect were apparent. They provide highly effective leadership and management of the school's organisational structures. They maintain a visible presence, and together with staff, smoothly manage the day-to-day running of the school. Senior management has developed strong communication mechanisms and staff feel well informed. Scheduling of a comprehensive series of weekly meetings is particularly positive in fostering a team approach and promoting consistency.

The code of behaviour is based on respect and restorative practices and is positive in tone. The related ladder of referral is clear and well understood. The year-head role and the student support team are central to student management and care, and morning assemblies are a valuable support.

The school building and facilities are of a very high standard. Specialist rooms are well resourced, equipped and maintained, and provision for information and communications technology (ICT) is good.

Strong links have been forged with many local organisations and agencies, all of which seek to enhance student learning, development or wellbeing. The school has been awarded its first Green Schools flag.

**Leading school development**

The quality of school development planning is very good.

The establishment of a guiding vision for the school was a clear priority of the joint trustees, interim board and the principal in the management and leadership of the amalgamation. The outcome has been creatively captured in the school crest. The five overarching aims inform policy and practice and have, in particular, resulted in the establishment of very effective pastoral and educational support structures.

A three-year, action plan has been prepared and much progress is evident. Developmental priorities have been valuably linked to *Looking at Our Schools 2016*. The effectiveness and impact of related outputs was measured at the end of the first year through senior management's facilitation of an inclusive review process.

Supported by the very effective work of the school development planning co-ordinator, an extensive suite of polices, including all mandatory policies, has been ratified by the board. A development and review schedule has been prepared. A strikingly positive feature of all policies is the clear identification of the roles and responsibilities of all partners. The development process is inclusive of staff consultation and further consideration is being given to how student and parent voice can be better included. The development of student-friendly versions of key policies, a review of the admissions policy to provide for the removal of aspects that may suggest conditional enrolment, and the further publication of policies on the school website, were advised.

Subject department planning is well supported and promoted by senior management. Considering the relatively short time that teams of teachers have been working together as newly established subject departments, a significant amount of work has been completed. Agreed, time-bound programmes of work are in place, although these vary in terms of approach and detail. It would be valuable to agree a whole-school template. Some plans provide for very good quality review and evaluation and this is further encouraged, as is the development of related action plans.

Much work is being undertaken to establish and maintain good relationships with parents. A range of media is utilised to keep parents informed in relation to matters relevant to their child, and the facilitation of appointments and meetings by both management and teachers supports two-way communication. Partnership with parents is valued and supported by all, as evidenced in the school's emerging parents' association.

The school has adopted a phased and very strategic approach to the establishment of a students' council. In the interim, however, students are very well supported to both influence and lead initiatives in the school, as evidenced by the current student-driven programme of extracurricular activities.

**Developing leadership capacity**

The principal is working very effectively to promote the development of the leadership capacity of teachers and students.

The principal recognises the importance of building leadership capacity and encourages and facilitates teachers to take on leadership roles. Teachers demonstrate high levels of commitment and work both efficiently and effectively in the fulfilment of their responsibilities. This is apparent in the very high quality outcomes linked to work undertaken in the year and half since the school door opened for the first time. Staff described feeling empowered, trusted and valued. The principal recognises teamwork as central to the effective organisation and management of almost all aspects of school life and resources such work accordingly. Task groups, which are chaired by assistant

principals II, and in which all teachers are expected to participate, support all staff to influence developments in key identified areas.

Students' views are very much valued in the school and, as a result, their insights are regularly requested. As part self-evaluation, they have, for example, been consulted in programme evaluations, and in individual teachers' review of teaching practice and related learner experiences.

The principal and deputy principals engage purposefully with national bodies that support the development of effective management and leadership practices.

## 2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of learning and teaching was good overall and in a significant minority of lessons, it was very good or excellent; there was scope for development in key areas of teaching in a small number of lessons.

**Learner outcomes and experiences**

The overall quality of the students' learning experience, as well as the related learning outcomes, was good. At times, it was noted to be very good or excellent. In a small number of lessons, the experience and outcomes could have been better.

Students enjoyed lessons, for the most part. High levels of enjoyment were observed when activities supported students to recognise their personal progress or achievement. Students were highly motivated when teachers shared learning intentions that focused on what students would achieve by lesson end and what, therefore, they would learn or do during the lesson. Excellent practice was observed where learning intentions were differentiated. As appropriate, it is recommended that further consideration be given to best practice in the use of learning intentions.

Teachers have high expectations for students with regard to participation and learning, and the majority of students respond favourably. Almost all students demonstrated a keen interest in the topics being explored. They listened intently, remained focused on assigned tasks, and worked effectively in pairs or groups. At times, teacher promotion of more active student listening to one another, in particular during whole-class processing of activities, was recommended.

Where teaching and learning was excellent, a developmental approach was adopted to the teaching of a concept. Students responded positively to the related increasing level of challenge.

Learning was enhanced where teachers sought to keep students actively involved, and further enhanced when a range of purposeful activities were provided. Provision for both independent and collaborative learning opportunities was apparent in all lessons. Clear instructions and good teacher monitoring supported meaningful student engagement with activities. Overall, students demonstrated good levels of application and persistence, and they were happy to request help. In general, teachers are encouraged to extend their repertoire of cooperative-learning strategies. It was advised that consideration be given to how room layout might better support collaboration. At times, the processing and management of students' feedback could have been improved.

Student-teacher interactions were very positive, founded on high levels of mutual respect and appreciation. Behaviour was very good in almost all lessons, which supported the creation of a productive learning environment. Low-level behaviours impacted negatively on learning outcomes for some students in a very small number of lessons. It would be advantageous to create co-operative teaching teams to support and enhance students' engagement and learning in settings where students' needs are diverse. The level of trust that teachers have fostered with students was clear in students' willingness to: ask questions; risk incorrect responses; and offer an opinion or

comment. Student input was encouraged and related effort, as well as successes, were appropriately acknowledged.

The incorporation of both self-assessment and peer-assessment in some lessons supported students to reflect on their learning, and that of their peers, and to identify relevant areas for improvement. It was recommended that the advance sharing of relevant success criteria would be very valuable.

**Teachers' individual and collective practice**

Teachers' individual and collective practice was good overall, with some very good or excellent practice also evident. The effective teaching practice observed during the inspection could now be usefully extended to the small number of lessons where there was scope to develop key areas of teaching.

All teachers had planned and prepared for lessons. At times, planning and preparation was observed to be of the highest quality, and this was where clear attention was paid to planning for differentiation and an integrated assessment of learning.

Clear teacher explanations were often accompanied by valuable use of the white board, high quality visuals, well-executed demonstrations, and teacher modelling. Students' prior learning and experiences were well utilised to introduce or refine new concepts and skills. A subject-specific keywords and key terms emphasis was apparent in almost all lessons.

In general, there was a very good balance between teacher and student input and activity. At times, it was advised that teachers need to consider how they might 'give less and get more'. On occasion, an individual teacher's enthusiasm for his or her own subject, coupled with his or her enjoyment of teaching, resulted in an energy that both pleased, energised and motivated students.

Activities were well organised and managed overall, and teachers' support of individual needs was very apparent at this point in most lessons. Greater monitoring, together with the provision of feedback and support, was needed in some lessons. At times, it was suggested that additional consideration be given to the number of activities provided, as well as to whether or not the activity made a sufficiently valuable contribution to learning.

Questioning was noted as a key inclusion strategy. At times, there was an over reliance on this strategy as a means of fostering student-centred lessons. It was recommended on a significant number of occasions that further consideration be given to what constitutes effective questioning.

ICT was well utilised in most lessons, although its use was primarily as a presentation technology. However, it is noted that a vision and plan for the further development of ICT as a learning tool, including the provision of teacher CPD and the development of a creative classroom space, is being formulated. This is fully encouraged, and the recently published Digital Learning Framework should inform this work.

Students' copybooks demonstrated that, by and large, teachers monitor students' work, but it was observed that the use of formative feedback was being underutilised. Greater provision of formative feedback is recommended.

Across subjects, there was an appropriate focus on the development of students' examination techniques. Rooms were largely print-rich, often displaying student work alongside displays designed to both inform and support learning.

It was abundantly clear that both individual teachers and subject departments are working to develop their practice in response to: the fresh start and new opportunities that the amalgamation has provided; a growing awareness of and appreciation for more student-centred approaches to teaching and learning; and curricular changes. It is recommended that the school establish a more coordinated, focused, systematic, whole-school approach to the further development of teaching and learning in the school. SSE would support this work.

## 3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

**Leadership and Management**

In the one previously published evaluation report, there was no recommendation provided in relation to leadership and management.

**Teaching and Learning**

It was clear, from both discussions and lesson observations, that due consideration is being given to recommendations relating to active learning and formative assessment provided in the one previously published report.

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

The school's capacity for school improvement is very good, while there is scope for development in relation to how the SSE process is being used to promote development and improvement in teaching and learning.

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

There is a good understanding of the SSE six-step process overall. The work of senior management in leading SSE is supported by a co-ordinator who effectively manages the process and the all-important action planning for improvement. SSE-specific task groups, which support whole-staff involvement in identifying aspects for development or improvement, is another positive feature of the school's SSE work. Evaluation and improvement plans are well informed by school-specific data. It was found that identified targets need to be more specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound i.e. SMART. It is recommended that the identified actions for improvement focus to a greater extent on the improvement of learners' experiences and outcomes at classroom level and, therefore, the development of teachers' individual and collaborative practice. Management is advised of the need to produce and circulate, on an annual basis, an SSE report, a school improvement plan and related summary reports for parents.

**The School's Capacity for Improvement**

Management promotes a culture of improvement, and this is recognised by all as essential to the establishment and development of the new school. Review and evaluation, both individual and collaborative, are well-embedded practices, and related activities were observed to be ongoing in nature.

**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** | *Very good* 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 *outstanding* 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** | *Good* 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 *very good* standard. | Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement |
| **Satisfactory** | *Satisfactory* 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** | *Fair* 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** | *Weak* 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 board of management of Skibbereen Community School welcomes the inspectors' findings set out in this report.

In particular, the board is pleased with the findings in relation to learning and teaching which recognised the very good/excellent quality of learning and teaching in some lessons, the good overall standard, the very high quality of leadership of learning and teaching, the culture of high expectations and the high levels of staff commitment, interest and enthusiasm.

In the two years of the school's existence, the board of management and staff of the school set out as one of its targets, the development of strong systems of support those with additional learning and care needs. The board is therefore, very pleased with the inspectors' recognition of the very high quality of support and care provided to students along with the excellent provision for SEN students.

**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 will continue to work with the management of the school to ensure that high expectations and standards reported will continue to grow and expand in the years to come. The board has agreed that the focus of school self-evaluation for the next number of years will be on further improving the learning and teaching practices outlined in the report. In this regard, the school's SSE committee has been expanded and tasked with the role of developing systematic whole school approaches designed to further enhance the overall quality of learning and teaching reported.

The board of management remains committed to developing a community of learners.