**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** | Saint Aidan's Comprehensive School |
| **Seoladh na scoile / School address** | Cootehill<br>County Cavan |
| **Uimhir rolla / Roll number** | 81005Q |

## Date of Evaluation: 11-05-2017

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

**WHAT IS A WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING?**

Whole-School Evaluations – Management, Leadership and Learning report on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. They affirm good practice and make 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

**INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION**

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| **Dates of inspection** | 11-05-2017 |
| **Inspection activities undertaken**<br>• Meeting with board of management<br>• Meetings with principal and deputy principal<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**

Saint Aidan's Comprehensive School is a co-educational school under the trusteeship of Bishop Leo O'Reilly and the Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board (ETB). The school has a current enrolment of 519 students and includes a unit for students with a hearing impairment (HIU). In addition to the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes, the school offers an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme (LCA).

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**FINDINGS**

- The board of management functions effectively in its role and has set clear priorities for school development.
- The senior management team shares a common vision; leadership for learning is very good and is underpinned by teacher participation in various models of continuing professional development.
- The quality of student support is very good; the deployment of teachers to deliver learning support needs to be reviewed.
- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from very good to good in almost all lessons; there was scope to enhance teaching approaches to support differentiation and facilitate active learning.
- Some preparation for the new Junior Cycle Framework has been completed; planning meetings are not taking place at present due to industrial action.
- There is a broad and balanced curriculum and timetabling is in accordance with syllabus requirements for almost all subjects; however, all senior-cycle students do not have appropriate timetable provision for Physical Education (PE) and while clarification was provided about the provision of some learning-support lessons, the main timetable, was not up to date.
- The school demonstrates a commendable capacity for school improvement and implementation of recommendations from previous inspections is very good overall.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Whole-school strategies that support differentiation and active learning in lessons should be further developed in order to provide appropriate challenge for all learners.

- A smaller core special educational needs (SEN) team should be established.
- Senior management needs to ensure that all senior students have appropriate PE provision and that the main timetable for learning support is accurate and reflects current provision.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

### 1.1. School ownership and management

Work of a very good quality is evident in relation to school ownership and management. The recently appointed board of management is constituted appropriately and functions effectively. Board members have a very good range of expertise and are dedicated to the ongoing development of the school.

The board demonstrates a good awareness of its role and responsibilities, and has set out priorities for development that include student and staff welfare. The provision of high-quality teaching and learning is central to the work of the board and a review of board minutes indicates that teaching and learning is an agenda item for all meetings.

It is established practice for the board to circulate an agreed report from its meetings. In addition, information relating to the operation and performance of the school is shared with the school community, for example through the regular distribution of a school newsletter. The board operates an ongoing system of policy development and review and its work in this area is indicative of very good practice. All mandatory policies have been adopted.

The senior management team of principal and deputy principal leads the school very effectively. They share a vision for a student-centred, happy school. The senior management team has established a schedule of daily meetings and had a strong visible presence in the school during the evaluation. Formal in-school communication mechanisms are good. Examples of this include a clear format for staff and subject-department meetings and an effective inter-staff email system. Many staff commended the open-door policy of senior management. However, a small number of teachers who responded to the teacher survey disagreed that there is good communication among staff in the school; this should be explored further at school level.

An in-school pastoral care team, comprising the guidance counsellor, chaplain, a SEN co-ordinator and senior management, works in a very effective manner. The work of the team is characterised by a very good level of co-operation and they communicate appropriately with the whole school on pastoral care matters. The team meets regularly to co-ordinate actions and follow-through on particular issues.

Commendable effort is made to develop partnerships with parents. The parents' association has been re-established and is very committed to supporting the school. Parents have participated in school committees such as the *Health Promoting School* committee; such good practice also serves to further strengthen links with parents.

Many leadership opportunities are provided for students. A link teacher supports and works with the student council to build its capacity and profile. The student council has been proactive in its various initiatives. Creditably, it has completed an evaluation of its work; it has determined the need to contribute further to assemblies as a means to highlight its purpose amongst the student body. Further mechanisms to enhance links between the student council and the wider school community

should be explored, for example through presentations to the board of management. Findings from the student questionnaire indicate that the majority of students are proud to be in the school and feel that there is a good atmosphere therein. Findings also indicate the need to consider additional ways to encourage and accommodate student voice across the school.

### 1.2. Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The quality of leadership for learning is very good. The senior management team has a considered approach to school improvement and is committed to providing high-quality teaching and learning. Commendably, the school has initiated an academic mentoring programme for senior students which uses comprehensive data to inform and direct their learning. The work of year heads in systematically monitoring academic progress further complements this initiative.

It is very positive that programmes of work have been designed for exceptionally able students in areas such as creative writing, Mathematics and Science. The school has begun to develop further programmes of work for exceptionally able students in a range of other areas including coding.

The senior management team is committed to supporting teacher participation in continuing professional development (CPD). Responsibility for leadership-for-learning roles is delegated effectively among staff. The school was a pilot school for the new Junior Cycle Framework and a number of staff have been involved with external agencies delivering inputs for teachers' professional development. Staff members demonstrate commendable levels of volunteerism in carrying out additional tasks; these tasks, such as class tutor and involvement in a range of extra-curricular activities, impact positively on the students' experiences.

At a whole-school level, there are effective systems in place for teachers to share individual learning from CPD. A number of working groups have been established including a teaching and learning committee. This committee meets to share expertise and explore effective teaching strategies. Aspects of peer observation are undertaken by some subject departments; consideration should now be given to extending this practice throughout the school.

The middle-management team of teachers with assigned posts of responsibility works effectively. The duties attached to the posts have been reviewed recently at whole-school level to ensure that the duties align to the identified needs of the school. At the time of the evaluation, a small number of posts had yet to be formally agreed; the board should ensure that all posts are formally adopted as soon as possible.

The school offers a broad and balanced range of well-organised programmes. The very high uptake of TY indicates ongoing satisfaction in the programme by students and parents. The LCVP is accessible to all students and availed of by most. LCVP and LCA are well planned and co-ordinated. The curriculum is complemented by a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that develop students' sporting, artistic, cultural and social talents. In-school reviews have been undertaken of these programmes, and the clear processes of review are commended.

Timetabled provision is in accordance with syllabus requirements for almost all subjects. However, a few timetabling issues need to be addressed. Provision for PE in senior cycle is not in line with the allocation set out in *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools*. Whilst efforts have been made to address timetabling provision for senior PE, there is need to ensure that all senior-cycle students have appropriate timetabled provision for the subject. It was noted that timetabling for learning support in the school's master timetable did not align with some of the teachers individual timetables; any such inconsistency should be addressed by senior management.

New subject specifications for junior-cycle English, Business and Science are being implemented. However, there has been no staff engagement with junior-cycle CPD or subject learning and assessment review (SLAR) meetings; this was reported to be as a result of industrial action.

The quality of care provided for students is very good and support structures are well organised. Year heads are very aware of individual students' academic and pastoral progress. Class tutors act as effective links with students and their work complements that of the year heads.

Very effective supports are provided at times of transition. Parents, in discussion and in questionnaire responses, were satisfied with the efforts made by the school to assist students' transition into the school and in supporting subject choice. Appropriately, junior-cycle students are provided with Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and students in senior cycle are provided with career-guidance classes and Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE).

The school is committed to supporting students with SEN. The SEN department is co-ordinated jointly by two teachers and the guidance councillor. This co-ordination team meets regularly and its members are committed to providing high-quality support, facilitated through good referral systems and effective methods of communication with the whole staff. Currently, a team of twenty-nine teachers delivers learning support through a variety of models of intervention, including withdrawal and in-class support. The school is reviewing its practice in the planning, delivery and tracking of progress of students with additional educational needs. It is recommended that, as part of this review, a smaller core SEN team be established so that planning and support for students with additional needs is distributed across key personnel, providing continuity of support for students and guidance for teachers. The recently published *Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools; Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools* should be used to inform the implementation of the actions arising from the review.

The admissions policy is clear and reflects the inclusive ethos of the school and includes the admissions criteria for students attending the HIU. The code of behaviour sets out clear expectations and a commendable emphasis is placed on enabling students to take responsibility for their own behaviour. Classroom behaviour agreements are drawn up in consultation with students and a merit-award system operates in junior cycle promoting positive behaviour. Classroom management and student behaviour were of a very high standard during the evaluation.

There are good practices in place to monitor student attendance, such as electronic tracking, a sign in-and-out system and attendance awards. In addition, two special-duties teachers are assigned attendance co-ordination duties as part of their posts. The attendance policy is reviewed regularly. Notwithstanding these efforts, it was noted that there was low student attendance in a number of lessons during the evaluation. This low attendance was reported to be as a result of several factors including participating in extra-curricular activities and general absenteeism. During meetings with teachers, many reported that improving attendance is an area of key priority for the school. The school should continue its efforts to improve attendance by reviewing the effectiveness of its current strategies to encourage better attendance and devising new approaches to addressing identified issues.

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 building and grounds are maintained to a very good standard. The school celebrated its fiftieth anniversary recently and participates in several different environmental initiatives as part of its ongoing and successful engagement with Green Schools. There is a clear sense of student ownership of the building with many displays of student work and awards exhibited throughout the school environment. Notice boards are well used to inform students about subject areas and whole-school initiatives.

A health and safety policy is in place which includes risk assessments for all rooms and offices. Staff and subject departments have contributed to its development.

## 2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality of teaching and learning ranged from very good to good in almost all lessons observed. There was scope for improvement in a few instances; areas for improvement include differentiation and active learning.

Learning intentions were shared with students in all lessons. Some teachers very skilfully articulated what students should know, understand and be able to do by the end of the lesson; it would be beneficial for such practice to be shared amongst teachers so that all have a similarly effective approach. Very effective practice was evident in instances where the learning intentions were differentiated sufficiently and used to support and assess students' learning in plenary sessions. In a small number of lessons, there was scope to adjust the pitch of the lesson content. In these lessons, teachers needed to be very mindful of differentiating lesson content in a manner that supported all learners.

Very good teacher-student rapport was evident in all lessons. In some classrooms, student work was exhibited purposefully. This practice is encouraged as it helps to celebrate students' efforts and to set expectations.

High-quality learning was noted when deliberate efforts were made to link the lesson content to students' experiences or prior learning, and where the teaching strategies chosen facilitated students to engage actively with or reflect on the learning. Some very good use was made of resources such as *show-me-boards*. In some instances, electronic presentations and video-clips were used in a manner that facilitated active learning, for example specific activities based on the visual stimuli were given to students to help focus their learning. Such practice should be extended across the school.

Teachers' general preparedness for the lessons was very good overall and a range of teaching methodologies was observed. Teachers made deliberate efforts to facilitate the active engagement of students in a majority of lessons. In a few instances, an over-reliance on teacher-led activity was observed where student-led activity would have been more appropriate to the work underway; it is important that teachers create regular opportunities to foster students' ownership of their learning. Best practice was observed in lessons where teachers had high expectations for student engagement and that involved the effective use of assessment-for-learning (AFL) strategies, including very good teacher questioning.

In the very good lessons observed, teachers organised highly effective group work where students were assigned a problem that necessitated their analysis and the application of lesson material. Observed activities were well structured and plenary sessions facilitated and reinforced the learning. In order to consolidate and extend this good practice across the school and to provide appropriate challenge for all learners, it is recommended that whole-school strategies that support differentiation and active learning be further developed.

In questionnaires, the vast majority of parents agreed that school reports and parent-teacher meetings give them a good indication of their children's progress. In school reports, a majority of teachers include comment about how students can improve their learning; such an approach should be taken by all teachers. The recent addition of an '*effort*' section in the school report is commended.

Subject planning overall is of a good standard and well established. Extensive planning documentation was available for inspection. Teachers demonstrate an openness to sharing resources and have developed common schemes of work and examinations. The school confirmed that there will be a focus on subject department planning in the autumn. A focus on creating more user-friendly subject plans which are working documents would be worthwhile.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

### 3.1 Management

Very good progress has been made in implementing previous recommendations in relation to management. Improvements were evident in areas such as the review of posts of responsibilities and using data systematically to track student attainment.

In line with good practice, all subject departments have been made aware of recommendations from previous subject inspections. School management expects all subject departments to consider recommendations from inspection reports and to implement action plans based on those recommendations. Sharing the progress of these action plans with the board should be considered as means of developing the board's focus on high-quality teaching and learning.

### 3.2 Learning and teaching

Overall, commendable progress has been made in implementing many aspects of previous recommendations in respect of teaching and learning. For example, learning intentions are now shared at the beginning of lessons. Good practice was observed in some lessons with respect to differentiation and use of active-learning opportunities. Further development of these aspects of teaching and learning should complement the school's focus on its third theme of school self-evaluation (SSE).

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

The inspection findings indicate that the school has a very good capacity for school improvement. The senior management team, in collaboration with staff, has engaged actively in SSE. In addition to fulfilling formal SSE requirements, senior management reviews various aspects of school life on an ongoing basis and changes are implemented as a result. For example, the academic mentoring project began initially with students in third and sixth year. After reviewing this system, the school decided to focus predominantly on senior students to encourage students' active participation in tracking their own progress and to focus them further on their own learning. School development planning is well established and responsibilities within two posts of responsibility have been dedicated to this area.

School improvement plans have been documented in aspects of literacy and numeracy. The literacy policy has been reviewed formally, and numeracy was awaiting review at the time of the evaluation. The board should now prepare and communicate a summary report on progress in SSE, in an accessible format, for the school community in line with Circular 40/2016.

# Appendix

School response to the report

## Submitted by the Board of Management

**Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management of St Aidan's Comprehensive School welcomes this very positive report and wishes to acknowledge the work of the previous Board of Management and Parents Association in embedding good practice. The Board of Management commends the excellent work of the staff Pastoral Care and Middle management team.

This report gives recognition to the commitment of staff to quality teaching and learning within their classrooms, as evidenced by the high level and quality of planning in subjects and programmes.

Staff provide a very high standard of care to our students and have very positive relationships with our parents and community.

Our Code of Behaviour is based on developing relationships that reflect respect and responsibility and this has enhanced classroom management and the quality of relationships between staff and students.

St Aidan's has just celebrated its 50th Anniversary. The Board will continue to work with all our partners to ensure this school will flourish as we move in to the next 50 years.

**Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection**

1

The high level and quality of planning both in programmes and subject areas highlights the commitment of staff to quality teaching and learning within their classrooms.

Teaching and Learning is our chosen 3rd strand for SSE. Currently, three staff are delivering Teaching and Learning workshops developing expertise in a variety of active learning strategies designed to further engage students and help teachers differentiate lessons more effectively. This process we envisage will lead to peer observation and extend team teaching within and among all departments.

2

During the recession, the SEN core team was decimated through allocation lost in areas including EAL, LCVP, LCA, and a temporary drop in numbers as families left seeking employment. Subjects and programmes were cut back and streamlined to meet student needs whilst working within allocation. All staff worked with us to ensure delivery of programmes, syllabi and SEN support.

Regarding the recommendations for a smaller core team, hours have been allocated to another staff member this year.

However, it has always been a priority for St Aidan's that all staff develop expertise in working with students with special needs, under the guidance of the SEN co-ordinators; this develops whole school understanding and expertise. This expertise is used by staff to create a more effective differentiated classroom environment.

3

The SEN timetable and the teacher timetables were accurate and all SEN students were receiving their support hours. The main timetable did not reflect two changes made, as extra hours were allocated. The changes were made to provide the best quality provision to students.

Regarding PE allocation and timetabling

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Core-Irish, English, Maths | 3 x 5 | = | 15 |
| Guidance | | | 1 |
| Religious Education | | | 2 |
| Options | 4 x 5 | = | 20 |
| | | | 38 |
| LCVP | | | 2 |
| | | | 40 |
| Registration (4 x 10 mins) | | | 1 |
| PE | | | 1 |
| Class periods TOTAL | | | 42 |

PE previously only had 1 period in 5th and 6th Year. A PE teacher was given 4 periods at lunchtime to work specifically with the seniors. This was in place for the academic school year 2016-17 and 2017-18.

Given the extent of the programmes and subject times and the requirement to offer RE at Senior Cycle, management has delivered the requirements as set out in so far as possible. There is no study class on our Senior Cycle student timetable and we comply with the DES 28-hour class contact rule.

We posit the question – Where do we introduce another PE class?

**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 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; |