An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Saint Brigid's School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Convent Of Mercy Tuam County Galway
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	63160D

Date of Evaluation: 14-November-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 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 met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	12, 13 & 14 November 2018
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with board of management • Meetings with principal and deputy principal • Meetings with key staff • Review of relevant documents • Student focus-group interview	• 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

St. Brigid's School is an all-girls voluntary secondary school, founded in 1884 by the Sisters of Mercy. CEIST, Catholic Education – An Irish School's Trust, has been the school patron since 2007. The school caters for a wide range of academic abilities, socio-economic backgrounds, and learning needs including the operation of Rang Réalta, a classroom for students with multiple disabilities. Enrolment has been steady with some small growth in the last number of years. At the time of the evaluation, there were 385 students enrolled. Current accommodation has been enhanced a number of times in the past and the board of management is currently working on seeking further upgrades and extensions to the facilities.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of leadership and management is very good, especially in the areas of leading teaching and learning, managing the organisation, and developing leadership capacity.
- The quality of care for students is very good and interactions between students and their teachers were very positive.
- The quality of teaching was good overall; good or very good practice was observed in most lessons, though satisfactory or fair practices were observed in a small number of lessons.
- The quality of learning was good overall, and was found to be very good in instances where students were actively engaged in their lessons and effective structures were used to support active learning methodologies.
- The school's implementation of previous inspection recommendations is very good overall.
- The school self-evaluation (SSE) process is good and has a positive impact on school improvement.

Recommendations

- The school development priorities need to be shared more widely with all stakeholders and time-bound action plans should be devised and implemented in order to assist the school in realising its future vision and goals.
- Forming an e-learning team to plan for greater use of information and communications technology (ICT) in lessons and more effective support for administrative tasks should be prioritised.
- Areas for further improvement in teaching and learning include effective use of learning intentions, better structures around collaborative learning and strategies that develop formative feedback to students.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is very good, especially in the areas of leading teaching and learning, managing the organisation, and developing leadership capacity.

Leading learning and teaching

The quality of leading teaching and learning is very good. The senior management team has many years of experience in the school and also brings experience of working with external agencies to their roles. The team enjoys a very high degree of support from the staff and the board of management. It has used the SSE process, previous inspection recommendations and experiences of working for, and with, external agencies very effectively to progress improvements in learning and teaching.

Through an open and consultative management approach, teachers have taken on a number of teaching and learning initiatives. The board has supported teachers in these initiatives by providing opportunities to avail of continuing professional development (CPD). Improving teaching and learning is an agenda item at all staff meetings. Evidence gathered during the evaluation suggests that the senior management team should prioritise subject department planning next and further enhancing the practices of active learning, assessment for learning (AfL) and strategies around formative feedback.

The school offers a broad curriculum. The school is one of forty involved with the new Computer Science subject at senior cycle. Subject timetabling is good overall. There is an open choice of subjects for students at times of transition. The school offers an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). TY is well subscribed and parents and students are provided with a detailed calendar of events for the year. The schemes of work for the various modules in TY were found to be inconsistent in relation to how they would be assessed as part of the whole programme. Thus, the accreditation system in TY should be strengthened and clarity should be provided to students in relation to the success criteria of their portfolio of work in subjects. LCVP is well established in the school and the core team regularly avails of CPD in this area. There is a need to replace the study period for students who do not take LCVP with an educational programme in order to meet their twenty-eight hour entitlement to tuition per week. Formal evaluations by parents of the LCVP and TY programmes need to be undertaken on an annual basis.

The school is very inclusive in keeping with the ethos of the Sisters of Mercy. The admissions policy is clear; the school should include detail with regard to oversubscription in relation to TY in this policy. Good transfer and induction systems for incoming students are in place. Senior students are involved in a mentoring system for the first-year students. There is scope to further expand on students' roles and activities in relation to this mentoring system by having a defined programme throughout the academic year. Student leadership is promoted in other ways also through initiatives such as the John Paul II awards, Green Flags, GAISCE and the student council. The student council operates effectively and is highly regarded by students and staff. The school should look to incorporate an annual hand-over system before a new council is appointed, and the student council could be given greater ownership of school-vision related projects on an annual basis.

Care for students is of a very high standard. A care team, which agrees on actions to support students in a variety of areas, meets weekly. An assembly occurs on Wednesday morning where all students hear relevant information and a period of reflection as part of the Wellbeing programme. Other structures, such as twice-weekly dedicated tutor time, are also supportive of students'

welfare. The school should consider developing and encouraging student organisational skills as part of its dedicated tutor time. Parents' and students' responses to questionnaires showed very high levels of satisfaction with regard to the welfare of students and a focus group of students described the atmosphere in the school as a home from home. The code of behaviour ensures that a good system of managing and monitoring student discipline is maintained. There is a clear ladder of referral in relation to sanctions. The school should consider placing the positive behaviour mentioned in the code to the fore of the document; this would be a better reflection of how the policy is enacted throughout the school.

A whole-school guidance plan is in place and the school has access to the services of a chaplain. Currently, there is one guidance counsellor on the staff. Senior management should look at increasing the guidance provision either through upskilling or new recruitments in order to build future capacity.

The special educational needs (SEN) department is well resourced and includes six qualified staff members. The multi-disability unit, called Rang Réalta, caters for four students currently. The SEN team uses educational passports and specific diagnostic tests as well as systematic testing and retesting to identify learners' needs and to monitor the progress of students with SEN. Individual student support files are created in conjunction with parents and students, which outline strengths, areas of need and support strategies. SEN support is provided predominantly through in-class support and in small-group settings. Mainstream teachers are informed of incoming students' needs. However, there is need for mainstream teachers to implement clearer short, medium and long-term targets and strategies in working to further support students with SEN in the mainstream setting.

Managing the organisation

The school is very well managed. The board and senior management manage school budgets, staff recruitment and the maintenance of the school facilities very effectively. Statutory policies, such as the child safeguarding statement and anti-bullying, are in place and there is a suitable rolling review of all polices so that the board is aware of the number of policies each year that are in need of review and ratification. Detailed minutes of board meetings are maintained and meetings are informed by the principal's report. Agreed written reports are provided to the staff. While the parents' association is informed verbally about the relevant outcomes from board meetings, a written agreed report would be useful also.

In conjunction, the staff and senior management run the school very effectively. This was evident from the calm and orderly atmosphere in the school and the high morale among staff. Teachers' and parents' questionnaire responses indicate agreement that the school is very well run. Very effective communication systems are in place for students, parents, and staff and good use is made of the website, newsletters and social media in this regard.

Facilities are good and have been upgraded recently, including the creation of additional computer rooms. The campus is spread out over a large area due to the extensions that occurred in the past. The board is seeking to develop an all-weather pitch to further support extra-curricular activities. Classrooms are primarily teacher-based and good-quality specialist rooms are available for practical subjects.

The staggered start and finish to the school year means that most year groups are not provided with the required minimum 167 days of tuition in line with circular M29/95, *Time in school*. The board should ensure that this issue is fully addressed as an immediate priority.

Leading school development

The leadership of school development is good overall. Very good links have been established with feeder primary schools and wider community for partnerships and work experience.

The school's strategic plan is in need of streamlining so that timeframes, targets and actions to be undertaken are clearer. The priorities should also be shared more widely with stakeholders so that they may assist the school in realising its goals and vision. Currently, most of the focus in terms of the developmental plan is centred on the upgrading of the facilities and using the SSE process to enhance teaching and learning. While this is commendable, there is scope for other areas to be considered. For example, there would be value to increasing parental involvement with the school and parents' association, and in further developing ICT structures for administration, particularly as pertains to the recording of attendance and academic monitoring.

In planning for ICT integration into teaching and learning, an e-learning team should be created to assist the school in engaging with the Department's digital strategy and ensure that a plan is devised which ensures that there is a shared vision on curriculum integration and the CPD needs of staff. Teachers could consider trialling a variety of strategies and reporting back on the benefits and disadvantages of each for whole-school discussion.

It is good that the board of management meets with the student council on an annual basis. In developing the role of the council, the school should consider facilitating a meeting between the student council and the parents' association, to engage in discussion about aspects of developmental priorities. A meeting of board and representatives of both the students and parents could then be considered.

Developing leadership capacity

The development of leadership capacity among staff and students is very good. The teachers present with a strong work ethic and a strong commitment to the school and the welfare of the students. A wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities is available for students due to the ongoing involvement of staff. The teachers reported that collegiality among staff members is very high and that they are encouraged to avail of CPD opportunities. There is high uptake of CPD by teachers. The practice of sharing the learning from external CPD is well established and teachers update their peers regularly on the progress of initiatives in the school. Post holders reported that they are consulted and meet weekly with the senior management team. Teachers new to the school are provided with a good-quality handbook which contains organisational details and useful contacts. The senior management team reported that it would look to be involved in the Droichead professional induction framework into the future.

The school reported that it provides placements for student teachers regularly. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome and is included among the standards in the Teaching Council's *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* as it can provide valuable professional benefits for teachers, student teachers and the teacher education institution.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning was good overall.

Learner outcomes and experiences

The quality of learning was good overall. Students enjoyed their lessons and were motivated to achieve and progress. Learning intentions were shared with or were clear to students in almost all lessons observed. The best use of learning intentions was when they focused on what the students were to know by the end of the lesson or topic. There was scope for improvement in a number of lessons in terms of checking on the intended learning as the lesson progressed or ended. This can be

achieved through better use of questioning or further use of AfL strategies. Students should be encouraged to use learning intentions as a study aid or reflection on their learning.

Opportunities for students to engage in group, pair or independent learning were observed in many lessons. In a number of instances, better structures were needed for collaborative learning tasks. Timeframes, assigned roles, the size and ability levels of groups should be planned carefully to enhance these activities. The method of receiving feedback from groups should be prioritised in the planning stage in order to maximise the learning for all students.

Peer assessment was used very well in some lessons, though there was scope for improvement in other cases. Peer assessment was best when students were aware of the success criteria, and provided areas for improvement to their peers and made a record of any new learning obtained as part of the process. Homework is assigned frequently and corrected regularly. Teachers provided students with formative feedback in many instances. It was evident that oral feedback was provided more often than written feedback. The school should focus on teachers developing both written and oral practices to ensure that areas such as accuracy, presentation and effort are included as part of an improvement plan for students' work. The whole-school assessment policy should include information on effective practice in relation to peer assessment, questioning, and AfL strategies. The policy should seek to achieve a greater variety of assessment modes and types of homework in order to achieve a good balance between formative and summative practices. The timing of the classroom-based assessments (CBAs) should also be discussed and the importance of ensuring that CBAs are not used as summative events should be related to teachers of all subjects.

A very positive atmosphere of rapport and mutual respect was observed and the behaviour of students was very good throughout the evaluation. Classrooms were in good condition and subject-specific material such as charts, posters and students' work were used as learning aids in some cases. Some classrooms had desk and seating arrangements that promoted and supported collaborative learning; this should be considered more widely in the school.

Student engagement with learning was good or very good in most lessons. The best lessons had strong links to students' interests and experiences and prior knowledge of topics was ascertained at the start of new topics. In most cases, a very good balance between the time spent on teacher instruction and student activity was evident. Due to the active learning practices in these lessons differentiation and inclusion practices were generally very good. In a small number of lessons, there was an over-reliance on teacher instruction, resulting in periods of student passivity. There is a need for more active methodologies with clear structures to be used in such instances.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

The quality of teachers' individual practices was good overall. Good or very good practices were observed in most lessons, though a small number of lessons included satisfactory or fair practices. Some very good examples of student-centred approaches were evident where students worked in groups. In these instances, roles were assigned to group members, the tasks were differentiated, the activity was timed and the outcomes from the task were shared with all the class group. These practices facilitated students to create their own notes and learning aids for future reference, and should be shared and used more widely by all teachers.

The standard of preparation for lessons was good overall. The best lessons ensured that the resources and methodologies chosen by the teachers were linked to the learning intentions. The pace and timing of lessons were an issue in some cases; this should be addressed in terms of adequately planning and facilitating activities. Teachers demonstrated good levels of pedagogical knowledge and very effective classroom management skills.

The majority of teachers demonstrated commendable questioning skills. The best use of questioning occurred when it was used to check for understanding, distributed across the cohort of students,

differentiated, and adequate time was provided for students to formulate a response. These very good practices should be shared and implemented on a whole-school basis. The school should also consider other AfL practices to help monitor intended learning during lessons. There was also scope for greater improvement in the areas of oracy and communication skills for students when presenting feedback or answering questions.

The quality of teachers' collective practice was good overall. A subject co-ordinator was appointed to assist in the smooth running of the department. The duties and role of the co-ordinator should be agreed and documented. While some minutes of meetings contained discussion in relation to improvement strategies and targets and the sharing of effective practices, there is a need for greater consistency across all plans in ensuring that all subject departments adopt these practices.

Some subject departments have created good schemes of work which are useful as working documents. However, the practice in other cases is not as successful. Where not already the case, schemes should ensure that learning outcomes are linked to specific methodologies and a variety of assessment modes. Ideally, all schemes should provide clear details in relation to timeframes and a teacher-review section for more efficient planning. Such an approach should enable schemes to be used more beneficially as working documents and help to promote greater sharing of pedagogy and practices.

Subject departments should broaden the analysis of their own certificate examination results. The context of the year group should be taken into account and strategies and targets should be devised and set for improvement. These should be recorded in planning documentation and form part of most departmental meetings. Subject departments should formally report on the findings and strategies to the senior management and board annually.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

The implementation of previous inspection recommendations is very good overall.

Leadership and Management

Very good progress has been made in this area. The senior management team has taken a systematic approach to advancing and implementing whole-school recommendations, especially in relation to leading teaching and learning. Currently, the whole-school assessment policy is being drafted for consultation with stakeholders.

Teaching and Learning

The quality of implementing teaching and learning recommendations is good overall. Very good progress was observed in relation to differentiation. Based on the lesson observations, effective use of learning intentions, better structures in relation to collaborative work, and written and oral formative feedback remain areas for further improvement.

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

The SSE process is good and the school has very high capacity to implement any future improvements.

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The quality of the SSE process is good. The areas of focus to date centred on classroom practices and gathering good quantitative and qualitative evidence from stakeholders. The school should consider gathering evidence from parent focus groups in the future. A committee of teachers was formed to assist in the judgement-making phase of the process leading to the agreement of a whole-school approach and in-class strategies. The school has produced and shared the SSE reports and school improvement plans with the wider community on the website. There was good evidence that teachers had begun to embed the agreed strategies in their teaching practices. There is some improvement required in relation to learning intentions and collaborative work, as mentioned previously in this report, and the school should monitor the effectiveness of previous SSE strategies especially in relation to literacy and numeracy.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school has very high capacity to implement any future school improvements, based on the work of the board, the senior management team and staff in successfully addressing improvements in the past. There was a strong sense of collegiality evident an excellent work ethic which centred on ensuring that the students have the best possible educational experiences and outcomes.

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, representing all stakeholders and the pupils of the school, wishes to endorse the key findings of the inspection. The Board is extremely pleased with comments made by the inspectors throughout the report. In particular, the Board notes that the inspection found the school's performance overall to be good or, predominantly, very good in all key areas of leadership, management, teaching and learning. The Board acknowledges the Inspectorate's comments regarding the very high capacity shown by the whole staff to continue to implement improvements in the areas of teaching and learning and agrees that the staff is enabled by their strong sense of collegiality and excellent work ethic. The Inspectorate has found that the implementation of all previous inspection recommendations is very good overall and this practice will continue in addressing the recommendations outlined in this report.

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

There are three main recommendations in the school report

- New practices will be introduced to improve the communication of the school developmental priorities between all stakeholders. The agreed report from board meetings, staff meetings, parents association and student council will be part of the agenda of each meeting held by individual stakeholders. Within this framework, the implementation of developmental priorities of the school, already in place and agreed, can be monitored and shared by all stakeholders
- The senior management has already attended PDST in-service on formulating a new digital strategy for the coming year. It is hoped that the e-learning team will be in place with priorities identified for this academic year agreed in line with SSE best practice before this report is published.
- The school's teaching and learning committee will be meeting early in 2019 to continue its work in implementation and review of the school SIP. This committee reports regularly at staff meetings as part of the collaborative practices currently in place. The formulation of a new assessment policy will be a central priority for development within this collaborative SSE framework. This will facilitate the school in examining and further developing effective formative feedback strategies.

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;