

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 | St Mary's Secondary School |
| Seoladh na scoile / School address | Edenderry Co Offaly |
| Uimhir rolla / Roll number | 65582Q |

Date of Evaluation: 05-04-2017



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

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

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| Dates of inspection | 05-04-2017 |
| 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

St. Mary's Secondary School is a co-educational, voluntary school serving the communities in and surrounding Edenderry. The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum, including Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme to its 770 students.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The newly appointed board demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting ongoing school development and improvement and has identified an ambitious programme of work for its term of office.
- Senior management has very effectively led and managed a significant programme of changes in recent years, however further important school improvement and developments are still necessary.
- Leadership roles are distributed and staff are committed to the school.
- The school's curriculum is designed to provide students with a much choice as possible.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.
- A number of circular letters outlined in this report require attention by the board of management.
- Students have not been facilitated to undertake the Assessment Task as outlined in State Examinations Commission Circular S20/17.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The board of management should complete a strategic plan for the school, and include action plans with SMART targets for its implementation with regular monitoring and updating of the plan as key developments progress,
- A review of the overall timetable for the school should be initiated with a focus on the optimal use of the available resources, the long-term planning for the school's curriculum and ensuring that all subject areas and programmes are in receipt of the recommended time allocation
- The overall academic performance of students should be tracked and monitored more rigorously by individual subject departments with the findings used to inform the most appropriate delivery of the subject content to challenge all students.

- The practice of streaming classes from second year should be stopped with current educational research used to inform best practice in class formation.
- The agenda of subject department planning meetings should allow for discussion and decisions on appropriate teaching and learning strategies that are suitably differentiated to challenge all students to make progress in their learning.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

School ownership and management:

The board of management is appropriately constituted and began a new term of office in October 2016. Newly appointed board members have received training for their roles and carry out their work to a very high standard. Although in the early stages of their term of office, collectively, the board demonstrated a very strong commitment to promoting and maintaining excellence in the school and are mindful of the financial and infrastructural demands on the school.

Within a short period of time the board has been very proactive in dealing with the governance of the school. There is evidence that the decision-making procedures of the board are open, clear and in the best interests of the school community. New structures and practices have been introduced to ensure that the agenda for board meetings is addressed in an efficient and effective manner, with subcommittees established to progress the work of the board.

The board is very well informed about the operations of the school and receives a detailed principal's report at each meeting. Oral presentation are made by the principal to teaching staff and the parents' association after board meetings. To formalise this practice an agreed report should be prepared and issued to the school community following board meetings.

An ambitious programme of work has been identified by the board to be achieved within their term of office. Priority areas have been correctly identified including; the development of a strategic plan, curriculum development, infrastructural development, staffing promotions and maintaining and developing the school's ethos. It is now timely that action plans with specific and measurable targets should now be developed to progress these priorities.

Mandatory policies are in place and many others have been adopted. Some of the core policies including; the admissions policy, code of behaviour and the guidance policy require additional attention. It is also recommended that a schedule of all policies be developed to include the name of all policies, the ratification date and review date. In line with best practice relevant policies should be regularly reviewed and developed in consultation with the education partners.

The principal and deputy principal (senior management) are highly effective in their individual and collective roles in the management of the school. Both work to maintain and oversee the smooth day-to-day running of the school, supporting both staff and students and assisting in maintaining the good order that is prevalent in the school. They meet on a regular basis and attend continuing professional development (CPD) occasions and attend other events to keep informed about national developments in education.

Senior management has worked tirelessly to implement a significant programme of change management within the school since their appointments five years ago. Much, but necessary, time was taken in the development of structures and systems to support key operations and developments of the school.

Middle management undertake a range of duties in an efficient manner, however the current range of post of responsibilities is inequitable. As the school moves into its next phase of development and with the changes at both senior and middle management level, the board of management should oversee a root and branch review of the posts of responsibility structure within the school and ensure that regular and ongoing review of the posts scheduled is undertaken to meet the needs of the school and that the duties are commensurate with the level of the post. An annual written report by post holders to the board of management should be used to highlight achievements while identifying areas for future development.

Very good distributed leadership opportunities are provided for all staff. A range of subcommittees has been identified to progress the key priorities of the school including; a board of studies, post of responsibility review and school building. In addition, a weekly meeting of year heads with senior management is convened to discuss school improvement and development.

There are very good opportunities for student leadership in the school including a democratically elected student council along with a prefect system that facilitates sixth years to act as mentor to first-year students as they transition into post-primary school. However, the voice of the student should be developed within the school with their responses to the questionnaires administered during the evaluation used as a basis for discussion.

A very supportive and committed parents' council meets regularly and works to support the school. Their work primarily focuses on fundraising events for school improvements. They are very well supported by management with the principal attending their meetings and presenting an end of year report on overall school operations. More regular inclusion of parents' opinions should be sought and included when developing school policies.

1.1. Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The senior management team is highly effective in leading and managing the organisational structures in the school. They strive for excellence in all aspects of school life and are very cognisant of the need for additional school development and change.

Communication with staff is maintained via emails, and notices are displayed on a range of staffroom noticeboards. Staff meetings were convened on a regular basis but this year due to industrial action it has proved more difficult to arrange them, thereby limiting opportunities for whole staff meetings. Whole-school communication is maintained through a very informative and regularly updated school website.

Staff are encouraged by school management to participate in continuing professional development (CPD) including; subject specific areas and projects such as TL21 and Toraíocht. Opportunities at staff meetings should be provided for the sharing of learning from participation at CPD events and updates from programme co-ordinators.

The time allocated to almost all subjects is appropriate. However, this year Civic Social and Political Education is not timetabled for first-year students nor is Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE)

provided for second-year students. Both subject should be provided for in line with Circular Letter 0015/2017 in future curriculum timetabling. In addition, timetabling arrangements for Leisure Studies in LCA should be increased in line with requirements and the provision of RSE requires attention.

Teaching staff are mostly deployed in line with their subject specification. However, not all permanent staff are deployed for the minimum of 18 hours instruction time. Current timetabling arrangements are resource heavy and there are many constraints placed on it by, for example, the deployment of additional teachers to the division of classes into two small class groupings or the provision of several optional subjects. It is recommended that a significant review of timetabling be undertaken to include the long-term sustainability of current curriculum provision and to allow for the optimal use of the available teaching resources.

On entry to the school, first-year students are provided with a taster programme to sample the optional subjects, resulting in a half-year rotation of these optional subjects. The merit of having such an extended sampling period should be reviewed in the wider context of a curriculum review.

Mixed-ability class groupings are formed for first year, with a combination of banding and streaming of classes from second year. It is recommended that the practice of streaming be stopped, with reference to current educational research in this area and the impact this division into ability setting is having on students' overall attainment and motivation.

An extensive range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities is provided in the school supporting and promoting subjects, sporting and cultural events while providing a holistic education for the student thereby offering students many opportunities to experience success. Teachers' support and involvement in these active is highly commended.

A significant restructuring and organisation of the overall provision of support for students with additional educational needs has been very effectively led by the deputy principal. The school benefits from the availability of qualified special educational needs (SEN) personnel.

Additional allocations provided by the Department of Education and Skills are being utilised for their intended purposes. A comprehensive SEN policy and individual learning plans have been developed and timetabling of support is integrated at the development phase of the school's timetable. This is very good practice.

Student attendance is effectively monitored in an organised and systematic manner. Appropriate systems of communication are in place to contact a parent of absent students. All teachers took a class roll during the lessons observed.

The quality of care provided for students is very good and provides a well-organised student-support structure including: a care team, an Anti-Bullying team and a counselling services from both in-house and through referrals to outside agencies. The proposed re-introduction of a re-structured class tutor system is to be welcomed.

The guidance counsellor supported by staff and in collaboration with all partners in education should review the current guidance plan and update it to strengthen links between, for example, SPHE, TY and LCVP. Guidance should be formally timetabled for all senior cycle students. It is also recommended, that the guidance teacher deliver the Guidance module in LCA in line with programme requirements.

The school's admission policy, although reviewed annually, requires further development to provide greater clarity in its procedures and practices for enrolment into all curricular programmes and the

school's special classes, the transfer of students into the school and practices in relation to the capping of school numbers and the operations of a waiting list. Information on parental financial contributions should be stated in the enrolment policy and clarity in relation to what the monies are used should also be communicated to parents of all year groups in line with Circular 0065/2010.

The current code of behaviour is lengthy and lacks sufficient detail in relation to sanctions. Current procedures for the recording and monitoring of discipline issues in the school, is very time consuming and requiring a significant number of teacher resources. It is recommended that the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the current model, including the daily lunchtime detention, be reviewed in tandem with a review of the code of behaviour. Responses from student questionnaires should be drawn upon during the review.

As is the priority of school management, improvements in the participation by students at higher level in many subjects in the state examinations have been achieved in recent years.

Each subject department should undertake a more systematic approach to monitoring and tracking of students' progress. Factors such as how class formation in junior cycle is undertaken, general student motivation, and the impact of teaching and learning methodologies should be the focus of whole-school discussion. The findings should then be used to support subject department planning and necessary adjust of schemes of work. Action plans with SMART target should be developed to allow for improved student outcomes. Subject department meetings should have clear agendas and minutes retained to reflect discussion on all aspects of planning with particular reference to pedagogy.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification, however SPHE classes is not timetabled for second-year students nor has the school completed the annual review of the policy. Therefore the school is not compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

1.2. Management of facilities

Overall school accommodation is maintained to a high standard and management staff and students' efforts in this regard are acknowledged.

Displays throughout the school celebrate students' activities and achievements, and also promote subjects, student learning and wellbeing.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

Thirty lessons were observed, across the wide variety of subjects and programmes, and in a variety of settings. While the quality of teaching ranged from fair to very good, in the majority of classes teaching practice was good. Some significant scope for improvement was noted in a minority of lessons.

Most lessons were very well prepared in the context of the availability of resources and the lesson content. Many teachers had prepared their own supplementary materials but in some lessons there was an over-reliance on the textbook as a teaching tool.

While all classrooms had information and communications technology (ICT) availability, in general there was limited use of this resource to support learning. Purposeful, appropriate and creative uses of ICT should be explored to support teaching and learning strategies.

In the best lessons clear and specific learning intentions were shared with students. While the lesson topics were presented in almost all lessons, it is recommended that the learning intention, alongside the content, be shared with a review of the learning intention taking place in all lessons.

A variety of teaching approaches was noted in lessons. Many of the lessons featured a teacher-led approach, resulting in an imbalance on occasion between the teacher voice and students being more active in their learning. Best practice was observed where students were facilitated through guided discovery and active learning in some lessons.

In the lessons where there was effective pair or group work there was a clear rationale and good structures for students to collaborate appropriately and purposefully. In a minority of these lessons, a plenary session was used to share feedback from the collaboration. Where pair or group work was used, teachers are reminded to plan effectively with a clear rationale for its use.

A range of questioning strategies featured in the lessons observed. In the majority of lessons, questions tended to be closed, lower order or procedural in nature and lacked sufficient challenge. In a small number of lessons, higher-order questioning was used that developed students' critical thinking skills. This very good practice could be further developed by, increasing the time to allow students to reflect and think, where necessary.

During many lessons observed there was a reluctance in many instances for students to ask questions or volunteer responses or, in particular, to risk incorrect responses. This should be investigated and strategies put in place to encourage greater student participation in their own learning. Staff are encouraged to build student confidence in sharing responsibility for their own learning. Student responses to questionnaires administered at the time of the evaluation should be used to develop strategies for greater student participation

In all lessons, teachers circulated and provided oral feedback to students. Some high quality written formative assessment was noted in a small minority of student copy books. A more consistent approach to constructive formative written feedback, with clear directions for improvements, should be developed across all subject departments.

Some assessment for learning (AfL) strategies were employed in lessons, including mini whiteboards, fishbone diagrams, teacher circulation.

Overall, classroom management was very good. When suitably challenged, students were on-task and demonstrated a positive attitude to their work. In some lessons, students were less motivated and, at times, were passive in their learning.

Differentiation was largely facilitated through individual attention, questioning and extensions tasks. This should be further developed. Within streams, teachers should be cognisant of the different abilities and plan for differentiation appropriately to challenge and extend students where necessary.

Homework was assigned regularly in most lessons. The recording of the homework in student journals was inconsistent and requires a whole-school approach to systematic monitoring of students assigned work.

Seating arrangements were traditional and did not support the pair or group work witnessed in some lessons. To facilitate student collaboration, arrangements of classroom furniture should be considered.

Classrooms had subject-specific posters and charts and a limited range of student work. In some lessons, very good use was made of visual stimuli to support and enhance the learning.

Keywords were effectively used in many lessons and, on occasion noted on the whiteboard and referenced, which was good practice. Numeracy did not feature to the same extent in the lessons observed and this should be addressed through the SSE process.

Lessons were based on current and relevant subject syllabi and specifications as is appropriate. However, students have not been facilitated to undertake the Assessment Task as outlined in State Examinations Commission Circular S20/17. Teachers should implement all aspects of the English specification, including Classroom-Base Assessments (CBA) and engage in Subject Learning and Assessment review meetings after CBAs have been completed

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1. Management

The implementation of recommendations from previous inspection reports has been slow, but some very good progress has been made particularly in relation to the overall restructuring of SEN. There is scope for further improvements by management as many of the recommendations made in previous evaluations are highlighted again in this report.

3.2. Learning and teaching

Satisfactory progress has been made in the implementing of recommendations arising from subject inspections however, many previously identified areas for development have been restated in this report including differentiation in teaching approaches and the provision of formative written feedback.

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

Aspects of the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) cycle have been used including a whole-school survey administered to staff, parents in 2013. School improvement plans for the periods 2013 -2016 and 2016-2018 were developed but are more in keeping with a whole-school strategic plan. However, the SSE process as it was intended has been in abeyance as the school has prioritised other areas that required immediate attention some of which supported teaching and learning.

As the procedures and requirements have now been clarified, it is recommended that the board of management ensure that the SSE process is in compliance with Circular Letter 0040/2016.

Robust data gathering including the views of staff, parents, and students should be used to develop good quality targets and prepare a clear school improvement plan in line with the principles of the SSE.

There is much evidence of capacity among the school staff and management to undertake and work towards school improvement.

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 <i>very good</i> 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 St Mary's Secondary School wishes to acknowledge receipt of the report and to welcome both its positive observations and recommendations. We welcome in particular, the recognition of teachers' commitment to a wide curriculum and programme choices as well as extensive co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. The report also notes that the care provision for students is very good and that there has been significant restructuring and organisation of the overall provision of support for students with additional educational needs. The report notes the significant programme of change implemented by management in recent years and the continued commitment of the leadership team, the staff, the Board of Management and the Parents' Association towards continuous school improvement. The report observes that classroom management is very good and that students demonstrate a positive attitude towards their work. Furthermore, it notes that the opportunities for student leadership are very good in St. Mary's.

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 is fully committed to the implementation of the recommendations in this report. It is developing a plan of action and priorities to address matters raised in the report. Work is continuing on a Strategic Plan which will complement the School Self-Evaluation process. The Board will continue to work with its education partners and its sub-committees to address issues raised in the report through regular review and consultation in order to ensure continued innovation, progress and high standards.

The Board of Studies has met to discuss the appropriate allocation of time for SPHE and CSPE. Its suggestions have been discussed by the Board of Management and immediate action has been undertaken.

Strategies to support the tracking of student attainment by subject departments will be discussed in the new term and will be shared with the Board of Studies to facilitate a whole-school approach.

The Board of Management will undertake to set specific targets in our self-evaluation plan. Policy development procedures are under immediate review and key policies have been highlighted for ratification or further development.

All of the recommendations of the report serve as a valuable blue print in our pursuit of excellence in St. Mary's. Each will compliment all future planning endeavours at subject department, sub-committee and Board of Management levels to ensure a collaborative, whole-school approach.