

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Coláiste Cholmáin
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Claremorris Co Mayo
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	64610N

Date of Evaluation: 12-10-2017



What is whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning?

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning reports on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. It affirms good practice and makes recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspectors evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. Quality of school leadership and management
2. Quality of teaching and learning
3. Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations
4. The school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	10 – 12 October 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 Colman's College, Claremorris is an all-boys', voluntary, Catholic secondary school. It was founded in 1945 by Fr John Colleran at the request of the local community and is under the trusteeship of the Catholic Archbishop of Tuam.

At the time of the evaluation the students were drawn from the mainly rural hinterland surrounding Claremorris and the school catered for students from nine different nationalities. Enrolment has grown from 357 students in 2010 to 405 students in 2017.

The school is situated in its own grounds just over a kilometre from Claremorris. The campus comprises a variety of buildings with the oldest dating from 1945.

Central to the school and its characteristic spirit is a focus on positive interpersonal relationships. This was evident throughout the evaluation.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- Positive relationships are a foundational strength of the school.
- The quality of school leadership and management is very good.
- Teaching was, overall, good or very good; further enhancement of the use of active learning strategies and assessment for learning are areas identified for development.
- Students' learning was, overall, of a good or very good standard.
- Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations has been very successful.
- School self-evaluation (SSE) progress has been satisfactory; there is scope for further improvement.
- The leadership potential of the students is a core strength of the school; developing their leadership roles in the school will give them further scope to contribute to school life.

Recommendations

- SSE should be improved by developing its co-ordination; agreeing whole-staff goals; devolving responsibility to subject departments to implement and monitor progress; and further engagement of parents and students with the SSE process.

- Students' leadership roles should be expanded.
- Building on the examples of very effective practices identified during the evaluation, subject departments should further develop the use of active learning and assessment for learning practices.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

The quality of care for students and the provision of support for students is very good. Students are supported and cared for by staff members who fulfil roles within the school's well-defined support structures. In addition, students report feeling comfortable approaching staff members to help with addressing any issues that arise. There may be benefit in reviewing and discussing the practice whereby the year head for each year group changes each year. One possibility is that a year head retains the class group for a number of years, perhaps for junior cycle or senior cycle, so as to facilitate continuity of care. Students' holistic development is fostered by providing a very broad range of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular learning opportunities. At the core of the school's work is its commitment to ensuring that students are safe, cared for, and that they are given every opportunity to learn and grow in a positive, nurturing environment. In summary, it was clear that school leadership and management were of a very high quality.

A broad range of subjects is offered by the school at both junior and senior cycles. With the introduction of the revised Junior Cycle programme and the opportunity for the deputy principal's role to engage further with curriculum matters it is recommended that the school review its curriculum and timetabling to ensure that it continues to meet students' needs. This review should seek input from staff, students and parents. For example, timetabling could be discussed at a whole-staff level following submissions from subject departments.

The development of information and communications technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning has had good success with the implementation of an electronic information management system. Plans are in place to further enhance the electronic platforms available within the school. To support this work and to ensure a coordinated approach to planning for professional development, it is recommended that a skills audit be undertaken and that continuing professional development (CPD) be planned on foot of the results of this analysis. The very good work which has already been done by the school in identifying areas for CPD – group work and differentiation – should feed into the resulting CPD plan.

Managing the organisation

The board of management is appropriately constituted and meets regularly. Board members have availed of training and new members are provided with the opportunity to access training at the earliest opportunity. The board has been actively engaged in policy development as well as dealing with the upkeep and improvement of school facilities and with matters concerning student management, when they arise. The board meets regularly and attendance at meetings is very good. The focal point for current development is the provision of an all-weather playing surface.

Observation during the evaluation showed that the school was well run with clear routines in use, the management of students being of very high quality and suitable procedures in place to facilitate the school's operation. In addition, responses to questionnaires that were administered during the evaluation and that were completed anonymously showed that not a single parent disagreed with the statement that the school is well run.

There is a very good range of school facilities, with very good playing facilities and extensive grounds. The upkeep of school facilities is very good with a proactive approach taken to regular maintenance, refurbishment and development. There is some scope to enhance the current facilities by further

development in relation to additional storage spaces for gear bags and ongoing upkeep and maintenance for some of the pre-fab classrooms.

The possibility of amalgamation has been raised with the school in the past by the Department of Education and Skills and with the neighbouring girls' school in the town. At the time of the evaluation the school's future in respect of amalgamation was unclear and thus it is advised that the patron engage with the Department to seek clarity for the school's future and so enable the school to plan for the future in a fully informed manner.

A review of policy documentation showed that, overall, the school's policies are of high quality. However, a small number of policies – health and safety; relationships and sexuality education; admissions, and guidance – are in need of review and further improvement in a number of minor areas.

Leading school development

Senior management provides very high quality leadership and management. The principal's role in leading teaching and learning is pivotal and he discharges this role in a most dedicated and professional manner. His expertise and qualifications in a wide range of areas, spanning education, law and special education needs is complemented by the excellent interpersonal skills he uses when dealing with the range of school stakeholders. The principal is ably supported by the deputy principal. The deputy principal had, until the current academic year, because of the school's teacher allocation, carried a very extensive teaching timetable which significantly constrained his availability. Now that more time has become available due to a reduction of the teaching load, developing the deputy principal role has been prioritised and this is fully supported by the deputy principal and the principal. The areas of leading SSE, curriculum development and implementation of the revised Junior Cycle programme are recommended as areas in which the deputy principal could play a lead role formally, in association with the principal.

In terms of communication, very good minutes are kept of board meetings. In addition to regular text alerts the school operates a range of social media accounts through which it updates parents and students on school activities. The school plans to further engage with parents by surveying them annually and this is to be commended. The parents' association (PA) plays a very valuable role in supporting the school and maintaining links between parents and the school. The voluntary work undertaken by the members of the PA is highly commendable as is the reflective manner in which the members of the PA engage with their role. For example, the PA intends to explore and further develop the ways in which it keeps parents informed of its work.

A school plan is in place to guide school development. In terms of planning for teaching and learning, subject planning was of good quality. To help further support subject planning it is recommended that all subject departments identify a small number of actionable priorities for each year and that each subject department meeting allow time to discuss both operational and pedagogical matters. Very many subject departments have moved to digital plans and this commendable practice should be adopted by all of the remaining departments.

Developing leadership capacity

Staff members who hold posts of responsibility fulfil their roles diligently. One indicator, for example, of the positive atmosphere in the school has been the willingness of staff members to take on new roles. This has happened as a result of two reviews of the posts of responsibility in recent times. In addition, due to retirements, the school has lost a number of posts which have not been replaced. This has resulted in additional workloads and these have been taken on by post holders, by senior management and by staff undertaking leadership roles voluntarily. This is another strong example of

the spirit of community and teamwork that characterises the school staff. The work that post-holders do is very valuable and as such, to enhance the visibility of that work, it is recommended that post-holders report formally annually to the board on their work during the year. In addition, this report will prove useful to the board for its annual report to parents.

Students have represented the school at regional and national level across a very wide variety of sporting and non-sporting activities. Student of the Year Awards take place each May, with a number of students in each year group being recognised. Award winners are selected on the basis of dedication to study, co-operation, punctuality and school spirit. The way in which the school uses these awards to acknowledge student leadership is commendable. Indeed, the leadership potential of the students is considerable and is a significant strength of the school. Developing the roles played by students will serve to support the school in going from strength to strength. One way of doing this is to continue the work that has been done in revitalising the student council and developing its democratic mandate among the student body. Students could become involved in an annual review of the Student of the Year Awards to ensure that they remain a current and vibrant element of celebrating students' roles in the school. Developing the induction programme for first-year students by seeking their feedback and that of their parents at regular intervals as well as ensuring that the peer mentor programme, which is a very beneficial initiative, begins as soon as first-year students attend, will help to support and enhance students' experiences in the school.

The sharing of expertise is a valuable established practice, with staff members presenting to each other at staff meetings, as well as sharing expertise informally. Peer collaborative review, where colleagues discuss aspects of teaching and learning, has begun and it is recommended that this be encouraged and further developed in line with the school's SSE priorities.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Learner outcomes and experiences

The quality of student learning was good or very good in most of the lessons observed and was satisfactory in the remainder.

In the best lessons, students were facilitated in working at a pace that suited their level of ability and encouraged them to extend their learning through engaging in a variety of suitably challenging tasks. In such lessons, students demonstrated high levels of enjoyment and motivation and had a clear sense of the learning intentions for the lesson. In some instances, students did not have sufficient opportunities to engage actively with the content of the lesson because of a focus on teacher presentation. Thus, teachers, should, in their subject departments, discuss best practice in relation to active learning with a view to ensuring the widest possible range of active learning strategies are used in lessons.

The standard of student behaviour was found to be exemplary in all of the lessons. This was clearly due to the existence of a high level of mutual trust and respect between teachers and students. Where this was most evident, students openly and confidently expressed their ideas, concerns, fears and aspirations.

In most lessons, students demonstrated high levels of prior learning and skill development, contributed to discussions and activities articulately and asked searching questions of their teachers and their peers. In some lessons, where group activities were organised, the activity would have benefited from more careful planning to ensure that each member of the group had a clearly defined

role. In some cases, the assignment of different tasks to different groups would also be worth considering.

In all of the lessons observed, the learning intentions of the lesson were shared with students at the outset. Where this practice was found to be of most benefit, teachers returned to these learning intentions at the conclusion of the lesson to check on the students' attainment. This was achieved through questioning students or through some form of recapitulation exercise or activity. In a small number of lessons, a wider variety of learning intentions was desirable to ensure that the full range of students' knowledge, understanding and application skills was progressed.

In most of the classrooms visited, students' work and achievements were celebrated through the display of project work including posters, artefacts and models. This content was augmented by displays of additional relevant content including key terminology and commercially sourced art work and posters. In addition, many teachers have altered the seating arrangements in classrooms in order to facilitate discussion and group collaboration. The aesthetic and visual elements of the school are important components of the learning environment. In supporting the leadership role of students it is recommended that they become involved in exploring how to further enhance the school's visual and aesthetic appearance.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

The quality of teaching was good or very good in most of the lessons observed and was satisfactory in the remainder.

Teachers have created inclusive, orderly and student-centred learning environments based on mutual respect, affirmation and trust. Individual lessons were well planned in most cases. Where lesson planning was most effective, content and resources were prepared in advance and the range of learning needs was taken into account through the formulation of differentiated learning intentions. This structure facilitated the setting of high expectations and in such cases students responded admirably. Where the setting of high expectations was not achieved as successfully, planning for greater differentiation of learning intentions and the inclusion of a wider variety of learning activities would be of benefit.

Questioning of students was used as an assessment tool in all of the lessons observed to varying degrees of success. In the best cases, questions were addressed to specific students and were distributed around the room. Maximum benefit was achieved, in such cases, where questions were tailored to the aptitudes of individual students and sufficient wait time was provided. Where questioning strategies were less successful, there was an over-reliance on global questioning and chorus answering. In such cases, it was difficult for answers to be heard and used to assess and build further learning.

Formative feedback was provided to students in most lessons, both orally and in writing. There were some very good examples of written formative feedback evident in students' copybooks and folders in which teachers had carefully identified the strengths in the students' work and guided them towards improvement. Where oral feedback is given, it would be worthwhile for students to make a note of this feedback with a view to developing a catalogue of advice to further their learning and to use as a revision tool. To build on the very effective assessment for learning practices, including those relating to self-assessment and peer assessment that were noted during the inspection, it is recommended that they be extended to all lessons in conjunction with active learning strategies in order to help support ongoing development of students' learning.

An analysis of students' journals and their copybooks showed that their work was, generally, of a high or very high standard. It was particularly notable that first-year students seemed to have a very significant homework workload. The senior management and the board concurred with the inspectors

and agreed that the school needs to address the amount and frequency of homework to ensure that students have a balanced workload. Work had already been done by senior management on this matter and it is recommended that this issue be prioritised for whole-staff discussion and agreement.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

Recommendations on whole-school and management issues have been very diligently progressed. The school identified all of the recommendations made in past evaluations and highlighted the progress that has been made in each of them. For example, middle management roles have been reviewed and rebalanced, a vision statement has been created, and the offering of sampling programmes has been comprehensively addressed. The inspectors confirmed this progress during the evaluation.

Teaching and Learning

Staff members have engaged very positively in implementing recommendations relating to teaching and learning. Reports from each subject department that has experienced an evaluation showed that very good progress has been made. Some examples of the progress that has been achieved include the work that has been done in updating schemes of work, adapting to revised junior cycle specifications, implementing new teaching methods and further supporting students with special educational needs. The inspectors concurred with the reportage from the subject departments.

Overall, the school's progress in implementing recommendations from previous evaluations has been very good.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The SSE process has been established in the school and satisfactory progress has been made to date. It was notable that very good use has been made of a variety of data-gathering tools. In addition, there was a good sense of awareness of the process inherent to SSE and a positive disposition among staff to using SSE to support their work. However, it was reported that issues such as changes in staffing/personnel and a lack of meeting time due to industrial action have inhibited progress in recent years.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

Work in SSE will be improved by developing its co-ordination through the work of the newly appointed co-ordinator; agreeing whole-staff goals; devolving responsibility to subject departments to implement and monitor progress; and further engaging parents and students in the SSE process. It was clear during the evaluation that the school has a very strong professional capability to support its ongoing improvement. This derives from its committed and professional staff and the high quality of school leadership.

5. CHILD PROTECTION

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.

The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	<i>Very good</i> applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is <i>outstanding</i> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	<i>Good</i> applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	<i>Satisfactory</i> applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	<i>Fair</i> applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	<i>Weak</i> applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;