An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / **School name**	Saint Oliver Post Primary
Seoladh na scoile / **School address**	Oldcastle County Meath
Uimhir rolla / **Roll number**	71990R

Date of Evaluation: 14-03-2018

An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

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

How to read this report

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

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

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

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

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Date of inspection	14-03-2018
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

Saint Oliver Post-Primary School operates under the patronage of Louth Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB). Currently, there are 567 students enrolled in the school, which includes an autism unit called *An Grianán*. The school provides the Junior Cycle, Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Transition Year (TY) is also provided as an optional programme.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of school leadership and management is good, with aspects of very good practice identified including senior management's leadership for learning; some aspects of curriculum provision and the deployment of resources require attention.

- The quality of learner experiences is at the core of all decisions made.

- The quality of care provided for students is very good; class tutors play an important role in promoting positive relationships and behaviour.

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good; there is scope to improve planning for differentiation and to further develop in-class questioning strategies.

- Very good progress has been made in the implementation of recommendations from previous inspections.

- The school self-evaluation process is effective and the staff demonstrates a very high level of commitment to and good capacity for school improvement.

Recommendations

- Management should ensure that the allocation of resources for the provision of support to students with additional learning needs is in accordance with Department Circular 14/2017.

- To promote high-quality learning experiences, teaching approaches that support effective questioning and differentiation practice should be further developed and integrated into lessons.

- The school should put procedures in place to ensure the consistent implementation of a broad programme for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).

- Senior management needs to ensure that all senior students have the appropriate time allocation for Physical Education (PE).

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

The overall quality of school leadership and management is good with aspects of very good practice identified. Some aspects of curriculum provision and the deployment of resources require attention.

Leadership for learning by the senior management team is of a very high quality; learner experiences are at the core of all decisions made within the school. Very good practice was evident in the active promotion of a culture of innovation with a view to improving the learning experience and outcomes for all students. The senior management team endeavours to set high expectations and to lead staff to continuously share their teaching, learning and assessment practices through initiatives such as peer observation and an online sharing platform.

The school has a teaching and learning team which is led by the deputy principal. The team places a strong focus on providing effective and structured support to staff through internal facilitation of continuing professional development (CPD). This good practice maximises opportunities for staff to share their expertise. Additionally, the senior management team ensures that teaching and learning in the school is informed by external CPD including Teaching for Learning in the 21st Century and Instructional Leadership.

The quality of curriculum provision is good. During the evaluation, students commented favourably on their access to the wide range of subjects and programmes on offer. Valuable learning opportunities for students are also available through an extensive range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. The school has good systems in place to inform parents and students about subject choices. Commendably, the school is currently considering the viability of providing the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

It is commendable that the school has a board of studies that advises on curriculum matters. In almost all cases the time allocation for subjects is appropriate. However, timetabled provision for PE in most of the senior-cycle classes is below the recommended time allocation. While acknowledging the school's efforts to address this, the current arrangements should be reviewed in accordance with the allocation set out in *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools*.

Overall, there is very good engagement by school management and staff in the ongoing implementation of the New Framework for Junior Cycle. Teachers have attended whole-school and subject-specific CPD, and are engaging with subject learning and assessment review (SLAR) meetings. Planning for teaching and learning of the new subject specifications is progressing well.

The school has an optional TY programme. The very high uptake of TY reflects the level of student satisfaction with the programme. Notably, an evaluation of the programme is completed annually and this review informs incremental developments of the programme. The school seeks parents' views of the programme informally. Consideration should now be given to seeking their views on a more formal and systematic basis. Strong links have been developed with the local community and include TY involvement in a peer reading programme with a local primary school.

TY students carry out work experience one day a week. In addition, students also complete two one-week work placements. While work experience provides valuable opportunities for students to develop an understanding of the world of work, there is a considerable amount of tuition time being afforded to these arrangements. School management should keep the time allocated to work experience under annual review in the light of the possible impact on the overall breadth of the TY curriculum.

There is a good student uptake of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The school's LCVP programme has a work experience module which is completed over three days; the school should consider increasing the duration of work placement for this programme to enhance student learning.

Overall, quality of student care is very good. A key strength of the school is its very good range of student support systems. Class tutors play an important role in promoting positive relationships and behaviour. A year head oversees the academic and pastoral achievements of students as well as discipline. A comprehensive whole-school guidance plan and weekly meetings of junior and senior care teams ensure an integrated, coordinated approach to student care.

Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is timetabled for all year groups and includes a module in RSE. While the school endeavours to keep the school community informed of the RSE programme, findings from questionnaires and from discussions with students indicate that there is a lack of consistency in the implementation of the RSE programme and a lack of awareness of the RSE policy amongst a significant minority of the cohort surveyed. It is recommended that the school puts procedures in place to establish the consistent implementation of a broad RSE programme and that appropriate CPD is provided to staff.

The school is committed to supporting students with special educational needs (SEN) and effective structures are in place. A core team of qualified SEN teachers coordinates SEN provision effectively including An Grianán. However, some aspects of the organisation and operation of learning support provision should be reviewed. Currently, the main method of providing support is individual and small-group withdrawal. Some team-teaching and in-class support is provided in subjects such as Mathematics. The school should investigate the expansion of co-operative teaching teams to include in-class support or team teaching as additional approaches. The school is implementing the new resource allocation model and it is a positive action that student support files are being developed. The school should continue to progress this work.

At the time of the evaluation, a significant minority of hours allocated by the Department for supporting students with SEN were not being allocated for their intended purpose. It is recommended that school management ensure that the allocation of these resources is in accordance with directions provided in Department Circular 0014/2017.

The school has introduced very good reporting structures to track student attainment and progress. The student progress reports are sent to parents at regular intervals throughout the year. Included in the reports are the results of cognitive ability tests, baseline markers for improvement and a feedback section completed by teachers. Some subject areas give very good directional information on improvements. The use of this type of formative feedback should be extended to all subjects.

Managing the organisation

The senior management team, comprising the principal and deputy principal, manages and leads the school community very effectively. They employ their complementary skills to ensure that the school is very well organised and runs smoothly; this success was strongly endorsed by the positive responses to questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation.

The board of management was appointed in 2014. Due to a very recent retirement, the board has one vacancy currently. The continued absence of a Louth Meath Education Training Board (LMETB) representative results in the board not being fully constituted. It is acknowledged that the LMETB has plans in place to address this vacancy.

In general, communication between all of the stakeholders in the school is very good. The principal keeps the board very well informed on school matters. The board compiles an agreed report at the end of all meetings, and the report is then delivered orally by the parent and teacher nominees to

their respective groups. It is advised that a written copy of the agreed report be circulated to the relevant stakeholders. Teaching and learning is a regular agenda item on board minutes. It is very good practice that opportunities are provided for the student council to communicate directly with the board.

A very effective system of policy development and review is in place. All of the mandatory policies have been adopted. While an appropriate level of consultation with the student council and parent association representatives has informed policy review, findings from questionnaires and from discussions with a student focus group indicate that a wider consultation with the general body of parents and students merits further consideration.

Effective progress in whole-school planning is evident. A three-year overarching strategic plan is being progressed currently. School management has identified priorities for school development and good progress is evident.

The code of behaviour sets out clear expectations for the students. All stakeholders indicated a high level of satisfaction with the manner in which the code is being implemented. During the evaluation, classroom management and student behaviour were observed to be of a very high standard.

The school is very well maintained and all classrooms are well resourced with good ICT facilitates. At the time of the evaluation a digital learning plan had not yet been developed. This should be advanced and as a first step, an overall vision for ICT as a teaching and learning tool should be agreed. There is a very good awareness of health and safety in the school and staff contribute to the completion of risk assessments.

Leading school development

School management is dedicated to providing high-quality teaching and learning and has a very clear vision to support this agenda. A culture of on-going improvement and collaboration in teaching and learning is actively promoted; this is evident through the peer observation programme that has been developed. It is commendable that learnings from these reviews help to inform the ongoing developments in teaching and learning, planning and assessment.

The school enjoys a high level of parental support. A proactive parents' association supports many school activities. Parents are kept informed of the work of the school through the principal's report provided at all meetings of the association and through the question-and-answer forum on the school's website. Findings from parent questionnaires indicate there may be a need to strengthen mechanisms that inform the wider parent body of the work of the parents' association.

Leadership roles for students are very good and include a student council, a peer mentoring system, prefects and digital leaders. Appropriate training takes place for peer mentors and prefects. It was reported that the student council do not receive training and this should be addressed.

Developing leadership capacity

Collaboration is valued and central to all aspects of school life. Responsibilities for various aspects of school provision are distributed among a middle-management team. Post holders submit an end-of-year report in accordance with very good practice. A review of posts has not been carried out in recent times. While post holders have shown flexibility and willingness to take on additional tasks, there is a need for a review of the schedule of posts to include greater leadership opportunities for instructional leadership and curriculum development.

Commendably, outside of the post structure, teachers have taken on a range of significant responsibilities that contribute to a broad curricular and co-curricular educational experience for students.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good overall. There was scope to develop classroom practice in relation to questioning and differentiation, to deepen and challenge the learning.

Learner outcomes and experiences

Interactions among students and between students and their teachers were respectful and positive in all lessons visited. A stimulating learning environment was provided in the majority of lessons, with many of the classrooms laid out to facilitate collaborative learning.

Commendably, most lessons began with a recap of prior learning. The learning intentions were shared at the start of almost all lessons and revisited at the end to assess and consolidate learning. Elements of good learner reflection were noted in many lessons. For instance, good use was made of show-me boards, traffic lights and exit strategies to assess student progress and understanding. In many instances, these practices created a shared ownership and understanding of the planned learning.

Students were provided with opportunities to work collaboratively in most lessons. Best practice was observed when students engaged purposefully in meaningful learning activities, and worked collaboratively on problem-solving tasks in pairs or in groups. While pair work was observed to be effective, there were instances where the use of group work was not always as effective. At times, it was left to one or two members of the group to complete the task on behalf of the others. Highly effective group work was noted when meaningful roles were assigned to all members of the group and each individual had a specific contribution to make to complete the task successfully as a member of the team. This approach should be adopted more widely.

The overall quality of in-class assessment was good. Questioning was the predominant form of assessment in most of the lessons observed. At times, there was an over-reliance on global questioning, leading to chorus answering or the same students answering a number of questions. Best practice was evident when the questions were put to the class, sufficient wait time was given, and then the question directed at specific students who were challenged to defend or expand on their answers. More variation of questioning strategies, to include higher-order directed questions, is recommended.

In some instances, teachers facilitated peer assessment. Very good practice was observed in a few lessons where success criteria and marking schemes were shared and discussed with the class. Students assessed the work of their peers and provided formative feedback. The emphasis was on affirming good elements of the work and identifying areas where further improvements could be made. This very good practice should be extended.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

Teachers' preparation for lessons in almost all cases was very good. There was worthwhile use of demonstration, presentations and well-designed teacher worksheets. The pitch and pace of most of the lessons visited were suitable and enhanced by very good classroom management. Effective strategies were used in many lessons to develop students' literacy and numeracy skills. The best outcomes were seen where teachers ensured students understood and used the relevant key terminology in classroom discussions. The target language was used effectively as a means of instruction and communication in language lessons.

The need to provide differentiated tasks was noted as an area for ongoing development. This practice would serve to support further the range of student abilities within lessons. In a few of the lessons observed, ordinary-level students were at times left to answer examination questions on

their own, while the teacher focused on working with the higher-level students in the class. In a small number of the lessons observed, some students were not challenged sufficiently and completed the task too soon. In a few instances, the quality and challenge of the homework set did not match the high quality of teaching and learning of the lesson itself. As many of the class groups are of mixed ability, it is recommended that teachers further integrate differentiated methodologies and resources into their lessons to ensure that all students are appropriately challenged to achieve their full potential.

Some very good examples of formative feedback were noted in the correction of students' work, but this practice was not universal. It is recommended that all teachers seek to provide formative feedback and ensure that students take note of the advice, and follow through on it.

Overall, the quality of subject planning documentation was good. A collaborative approach is taken to subject department planning. Positive trends have been noted in student attainment in certificate examinations in recent years, particularly at junior cycle. The school have focused on closer monitoring and tracking of student progress from first year onwards. Very good whole-school structures are in place to monitor and track students. However, there remains further scope for a more thorough analysis of student attainment by individual subject departments and the development of action plans for ongoing improvement.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Overall, very good progress has been made in implementation of recommendations from previous inspections.

Leadership and Management
Management has acted upon recommendations arising from previous inspection reports in a very effective manner. For example in a recent subject inspection, it was recommended that the school undertook an analysis and review of the factors influencing subject choice among first-year students. The school implemented new procedures this academic year. Additionally, senior management has adopted a systematic approach to planning for CPD, with a good level of engagement evident among teachers.

Teaching and Learning
Implementation of previous recommendations in respect of teaching and learning is very good overall. The recommendation that students act on the formative feedback provided has been implemented in the English department. However, lesson observations indicate that there is scope to further extend this practice to other subject areas.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school's engagement with the school self-evaluation (SSE) process is effective. Good strategies to promote literacy and numeracy at whole-school level have been implemented. Currently, the school is progressing work on assessment for learning (AfL) and a number of in-house and external surveys inform this work. To strengthen the management of the SSE process, it is recommended that the success of the various initiatives be monitored more closely.

The school improvement plan for AfL is shared with the wider school community on the school website. A report outlining the school's implementation of literacy is also shared. However, a numeracy summary report was not evident during the evaluation. In line with Circular 0040/2016, the board should prepare and include a numeracy summary report for dissemination to all of the stakeholders.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school's capacity for ongoing improvement is very good as a consequence of the highly effective leadership in the school and the great commitment and drive from staff. The willingness of staff to embrace change and their openness to innovation in the classroom are highly commendable.

5. CHILD PROTECTION

During the evaluation, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The school principal is aware that revised child protection procedures for primary and post-primary schools came into effect on 11 December 2017 and arrangements are in place to begin the process of implementing these procedures.
2. The name of the designated liaison person for child protection matters was prominently displayed in the school's reception area.
3. The school has a Child Safeguarding Statement in place.
4. All teachers are aware that they are mandated persons and of their responsibilities in that regard.

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

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 Oliver Post Primary School welcomes the observations of the inspectors regarding:

- the quality of care provided for students;
- the quality of teaching and learning;
- the progress of implementation of recommendations from previous inspections;
- the very high level of staff commitment to school improvement;
- compliance with Child Protection procedures; and
- the high quality of leadership for learning by the senior management team.

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

- The board of management accepts the recommendations in the report and wishes to confirm that measures are in place to address all recommendations
- The vacant position on the school's board of management has been filled since the WSE-MLL inspection.

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;