

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole-School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Coláiste Muire
Seoladh na scoile / School address	College Road Ennis Co Clare
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	61930Q

Date of Evaluation: 07 December 2016



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 in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	07 December 2016
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

Coláiste Muire is located in the town of Ennis, Co Clare. It is an all-girls' post-primary school under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). It is one of four post-primary schools and the only single-sex school in the town.

A very important element of the school's context is the manner in which its ethos is lived out by staff members at all levels. From the range of evidence collected during the evaluation the CEIST vision of compassion and justice and the CEIST mission of supporting a holistic education were clearly in evidence in how policies are framed, how students are dealt with and how staff members are supported and support each other. In addition, the culture and atmosphere of the school has been such as to create a positive climate of much goodwill and volunteerism. It was evident throughout the evaluation that staff members have embraced change in a positive and dedicated manner and this is highly commendable.

The student intake is drawn from a very large number of primary schools and admissions practices are open and inclusive. The school has experienced significant growth in enrolment, approximately doubling in numbers since 2008. Enrolment currently stands at 931 students.

The school offers a very wide range of curricular programmes: Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate Student Award, established Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, an optional Transition Year programme, and the Leaving Certificate Applied.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The school's ethos is lived out in its everyday practices, with the atmosphere being one of warmth, care and support.
- Staff members' commitment, volunteerism and pride in the school are cornerstones of the school's success, academically and pastorally.
- The quality of school leadership and management is very good; at the organisational level, this quality is exemplified by the way in which the school runs in a very organised and efficient manner, and with a strong vision; at the individual level, this quality is exemplified by the range of opportunities, challenges and supports the school provides for students.
- The quality of teaching was either good or very good in almost all lessons observed, with only a small number of instances where it was in need of improvement.

- Students' learning was of good or very good quality in almost all lessons observed, with the learning environment being of very high quality and students' attainment being very good.
- The school community has a professional capacity of very high quality to pursue and achieve improvement where needed, based on its very effective implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations and on its effective engagement with SSE to date.
- At the time of the evaluation, the teachers of English were not implementing the school-based assessment aspects of the new junior cycle specification for the subject.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In the context of the expansion of the senior management team, the duties attached to posts of responsibility and in particular the duties associated with the deputy principal roles should be adjusted to maximise their focus on leadership and management responsibilities.
- Further developing the use of assessment for learning and extending the use of formative feedback with students, orally and in writing, are recommended to further develop teaching and learning.
- Communication with and the involvement of students and parents should be extended, particularly in the areas of school self-evaluation (SSE) and academic tracking.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1. School ownership and management

The board's work is of very high quality and shows a level of reflection and commitment that is highly commendable. The members of the board of management bring a wide and valuable array of skills and talents to their roles. They are wholly committed to the school and to its underpinning values and are supported in their work by the principal and by the provision of a very comprehensive principal's report for each board meeting.

The board is committed to a partnership approach with all stakeholders. Evidence gathered during the evaluation indicated that parents hold very positive views about the school. There are very strong links with parents, the re-design of the school's website being one example that indicates the school's commitment and approach to supporting high-quality communication with stakeholders. There is also a very large amount of goodwill from parents towards the school. Thus, there is the potential to build on these strengths by further developing channels and frequency of communication.

All of the requisite school policies are in place. The board has, since its inception, engaged in policy review as part of its work in supporting school planning. To support the board in prioritising its policy agenda, an overall plan for policy development and review should be developed and agreed. An initial priority should be to examine the school calendar and to confirm annually its alignment with the requirements of Circular M29/95 in relation to number of teaching days that should be available to all classes each year.

The school's trustee, CEIST, provides support to the school by a variety of means such as the CEIST middle leaders' programme in which staff members have participated, as well as support in the areas of faith development, school support, information technology, and finance support. The school has played an active role in CEIST by, for example, hosting seminars for CEIST school leaders.

The parents' association (PA) provides very good support to the school and a very wide range of examples of this support were provided during discussions with parents. It is commendable that the PA has a presence at parent-teacher meetings and that it has involvement in policy review.

1.2. Effectiveness of leadership for learning

The very high quality of the work done by the senior management team, led by the principal, is evident in the manner in which the school operates. The views expressed by parents, students and staff, in anonymous questionnaires that were administered as part of the evaluation, as well as the observations of the evaluation team provided ample evidence that the school is very well run. Student discipline is exemplary. The spirit and ethos of the school permeate its daily operation and were evident in the manner in which staff members, at all levels, dealt with students. Indeed, students commented very positively on the atmosphere in the school and it was likened to an extension of their home.

The school systems that are in place all operate very effectively, with post holders and non-post-holders alike making very valuable contributions to school life. The plans also provided evidence of the progressive approach taken by the school to students' learning. For example, the school is participating with seventeen other partners in a European Union learning project called *Assessment of Transversal Skills 2020* (ATS 2020). The collegiality of staff and the openness of the principal in dealing with staff were repeatedly cited as key strengths of the school during interviews that took place as part of the evaluation. The culture of goodwill and volunteerism that has been created and fostered in the school is exemplary and derive from the principal's excellent leadership of staff and staff members' dedication to the school.

At the time of the evaluation the school was anticipating that it would be in a position to begin a process to appoint two additional deputy principals before the end of the academic year. Currently, the role of deputy principal focuses primarily on dealing with student discipline. In the context of the expansion of the senior management team, the duties attached to posts and in particular the duties associated with the deputy principal roles should be adjusted to maximise their focus on leadership and management responsibilities.

The teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) is very well supported by the school. The result of this support and the staff's willingness to embrace change have seen significant developments in areas such as the introduction of school self-evaluation (SSE), information and communications technology (ICT) platforms, instructional leadership, and the introduction of tablet devices for students.

These initiatives are all highly commendable and demonstrate the progressive nature of the school. However, they also pose challenges as there is a need to ensure that they are adequately resourced to support their ongoing development. For example, the roll out of new ICT developments has brought with it very significant work and the level of work involved in maintaining the system and developing it into the future will need the school to prioritise from its resources the assignment of additional personnel to be involved.

In building on the theme of instructional leadership within the school, it is now timely to review the use of tablet devices by students and to develop a plan for the future on how to maximise the benefit from the devices. In relation to school self-evaluation, a priority for its continued development should be that of seeking to maximise the input of parents and students into the process and so build on the strong support that both groups have for the school. One example of where the school has already engaged with parents is in the revision of the school's homework policy, as parents have been

surveyed to ascertain their views. This very good practice should be extended to encompass SSE priorities on an ongoing basis.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and students are afforded every opportunity to select the subjects they want to study. The Transition Year programme is a very positive experience for students. One of its features is that it provides an opportunity for students who want to take up a subject for Leaving Certificate and who did not study it at junior certificate level to study the subject. The Leaving Certificate Applied programme is also well supported by the school and provides very beneficial learning experiences for students. The school's commitment to a balanced and holistic education, in keeping with its ethos, was evident from the breadth of programmes, subjects and activities which it supports and resources. In addition, the level of extra-curricular activities available to students is highly commendable, all of which are supported by teachers in their own time. The commitment and dedication of staff in academic, pastoral and extra-curricular activities is outstanding.

The teachers of English, Business Studies, and Science have not attended the relevant training provided by Junior Cycle for Teachers for teachers of these subjects since 2014. The reason for this was reported to be industrial action. Teachers of these three new specifications have prepared schemes for them and, without the benefit of CPD, are delivering them to the best of their ability. The teachers of English are not implementing the school-based assessment aspects of the specification. The reason for this was reported to be industrial action. It is recommended that the teachers plan collaboratively for all aspects of the specifications for the benefit of students.

The management of students is of the highest quality, with parents resoundingly expressing the view that their child is safe and well looked after in the school and is treated fairly and respectfully. Observations by the evaluation team during break times, before and after school as well during changes between lessons and during lessons showed very good routines and practices in place for managing students. The school has a focus on encouraging positive behaviour and attitudes and this was borne out in the atmosphere during lessons, on corridors and around the school. The code of behaviour emphasises that students are rewarded for good behaviour and good attendance. Among the rewards is that of contacting parents to inform them about their daughter's good behaviour or attendance. This is indicative of the importance that the school places on partnership with parents and is to be commended.

There are very good pastoral supports for students with care for students being a core value of the school. The role played by the school chaplains is highly valued by staff and students alike. Guidance is very well structured, planned for, and integrated into the school's curriculum and into students' experience. One feature of particularly noteworthy practice is that parents and students are invited to attend the open night on subject choice for senior cycle together. In further supporting students, it would be worthwhile exploring students' expectations in respect of any additional supports they would like when choosing subjects at times of transition.

The school ensures that support for students with special educational needs (SEN) is centred on meeting their needs, to the best of the school's capacity. The co-ordination of special educational needs is of very high quality. The SEN plan is a very well-developed document and it is praiseworthy that it also refers to supporting exceptionally able students as well as students who experience academic challenges. Team teaching is but one example of the positive and collegial approach taken to ensuring that provision is of optimal quality. However, with the large number of teachers currently timetabled for SEN support, the school should explore how to consolidate the team, especially in the context of the changed allocation model for schools, and in further supporting more staff to gain additional qualifications in SEN.

Students play lead roles in a wide range of school activities and they do so in a very impressive manner. Examples of some of the activities in which students participate are the school musical; Young Social Innovators; the Green Schools programme; the school orchestra; *Féile na hInse*; Coder Dojo and a

wide range of sports. The prefect and student council system provide opportunities for student leadership as do the peer mentors who provide support for first-year students and help them to settle in to the school. Nonetheless, feedback from the questionnaires that students completed indicated that there is considerable scope to address students' perception of their role as stakeholders in how the school operates. Thus, the school should investigate the data from the questionnaire responses to identify actions that would help to inform students' views on their role as stakeholders and further empower them as stakeholders where necessary.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools* without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools*.

1.3. Management of facilities

The school facilities are in very good repair. The classrooms, corridors and school grounds generally were clean, bright and in very good condition. The learning environment is very attractive and feels safe, secure and welcoming.

The ICT facilities have recently been updated with the introduction of new electronic sharing, communication and management platforms. Very substantial work has been undertaken in these areas and this is to be highly commended as the enhancements have great potential to benefit the school, along with the improved ICT backbone infrastructure.

A health and safety statement is in place and is reviewed regularly, which is wholly appropriate. To support this practice it is recommended that all staff who are assigned to a particular room or area should complete a risk register for that room or area, and review it as needed, presenting the risk register to management for action.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

2.1. The quality of learning and teaching

A total of thirty-three lesson periods were evaluated and the quality of teaching ranged from very good to good overall. Of the lessons that were evaluated as being very good, which is the highest level of quality, exemplary practices were noted in a significant number of these lessons. Suitably high expectations were set for students and the very positive rapport and relationships among students and their teachers meant that students could comfortably question their teachers and seek support when necessary. There was very good use of a range of appropriate methodologies. In the very small number of lessons where improvement was needed, this would have been achieved by ensuring more active participation by students during the lesson, and in another instance by consistently assigning written work for students. Very good differentiation approaches were being utilised by teachers in a very significant number of lessons.

Lessons were very well managed with teachers setting a suitable pace, and ensuring that learning was focused and purposeful. It was particularly noteworthy that students' own thinking was encouraged during lessons. This is a very powerful teaching strategy to encourage engagement and deep learning. In the lessons that were visited, literacy support strategies were mostly in evidence, with some numeracy support strategies. Where the strategies were used they were successful. Since literacy and numeracy form the initial focal points of school self-evaluation, it is recommended that the school

further emphasise the need to ensure that literacy and numeracy strategies are embedded in all lessons.

The quality of learning also ranged from very good to good, overall. Learning intentions were used well by teachers. Active learning was a feature of nearly all lessons observed and it was used well to enhance students' learning. Students engaged well in all lessons and they displayed positive attitudes to their learning. Teachers were committed to ensuring a positive, encouraging learning environment and they supported students in their learning. In building on this support it is recommended that the area of feedback to students, particularly the use of formative feedback, orally and in writing, be developed as part of the school's plan to extend the use of academic monitoring and tracking across all subject departments. An additional component of this initiative to help develop students' learning should examine the factors that students identify as making lessons most interesting and enjoyable, and adapting teaching strategies as appropriate. Integrating these priorities into the school's work would help to address the recommendation made in this report about engaging with students as stakeholders and developing their role within the school in this regard.

A sample of subject plans was viewed and the quality of subject planning was very good. The plans were comprehensive, informative and, beneficially, referred in many instances to how SSE initiatives would be integrated into teaching and learning. Very good practice was noted where the minutes of subject department meetings indicated that teachers discussed pedagogical as well as operational matters and where the subject department agreed areas for development for each school year. It is recommended that this practice be adopted by all subject departments.

The systems that are in place in the school have created and supported a very positive learning environment where students are cared for and where high expectations are set for them. An analysis of the outcomes of the certificate examination results for the school revealed very good attainment by students overall. Co-curricular activities are also a notable strength of the school, with the range of such activities in Transition Year being particularly praiseworthy. With these strengths as the foundation, it is recommended that at a whole-school level a focus be put on each subject department developing a plan for academic tracking and monitoring by systematically introducing the use of target setting for students as individuals, and developing the use of feedback in a systematic way to help students further improve their learning. The school's existing programme of testing, which is of very high quality, would be a helpful source of data on which to base a systematic approach to target setting for students' learning.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1. Management

Recommendations from previous evaluations that related to whole-school and management issues have been very diligently progressed. For example, the previous whole-school evaluation recommended exploring the use of a sampling programme for first-year students and the school presented evidence that this had been comprehensively explored. There was also evidence that all inspection reports are given full consideration by the board of management when it meets, and this is good practice.

3.2. Learning and teaching

Staff members have engaged very positively in implementing recommendations that were made in relation to teaching and learning. For example the science teachers have set out a clear plan on how they have addressed the recommendations of a recent subject inspection. The Music subject plan also included clear strategies to address the recommendations that were made following a subject inspection. For subjects that have evaluations, it would be recommended to set out a plan for how the subject department will address any recommendations. Based on lesson observation, improving the use of formative assessment practices remains an area in which a continued focus will aid ongoing improvement of teaching and learning and this is recommended.

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

The school's engagement with SSE has been commendable. The SSE process is having a positive effect in the school as it has provided a foundation for ongoing school development. For example, very good examples of teachers' reflective practice were noted during lessons. In developing the use of SSE, the school should focus on increasing the involvement of parents and students. One way by which the school may further strengthen its work in SSE would be by resourcing its coordination. This should be considered in the context of any adjustment to duties with the expansion of the senior management team. Resourcing the co-ordination of SSE would strengthen the management of the process and ensure ongoing monitoring and reporting of progress as well as support for teachers.

There is clearly very substantial professional capability among the staff and expert leadership in this school to support future school improvement and development.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The BOM at Coláiste Muire welcomes the WSE/MLL Report. The Board is pleased to note that the report captures the excellent holistic education provided at Coláiste Muire. It is particularly pleased that the manner in which our ethos is lived out by staff members at all levels was very evident, particularly how students were dealt with and how staff members are supported and support each other.

The Board welcomes the Inspectors' observations including;

- * The schools ethos is lived out in its everyday practices, with the atmosphere being one of warmth, care and support.
- * The quality of school leadership and management is very good;
- * Staff members commitment, volunteerism and pride in the school are evident.
- * The learning environment is of a very high quality and students' attainment are very good.
- * School community has a professional capacity of very high quality.
- * The school offers a very wide range of curricular programmes.
- * The quality of teaching is good or very good.

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 welcomes the recommendations received. It is fully committed to continue working in partnership with staff, students, parents/guardians and the wider community to implement with immediate effect the recommendations of this report. The Board particularly welcomes the two additional Deputy Principal Posts and looks forward to the development of these roles focusing on leadership and management responsibilities.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

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

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