An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Aidan's Community College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Ballincolly Dublin Hill Cork
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	71101G

Date of Evaluation: 08-11-2017

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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	06, 07, 08-11-2017
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with Board of Management • Meetings with principal and deputy principal • Meetings with key staff • Review of relevant documents • Student focus-group interview	• Meeting with parents • Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires • Observation of teaching and learning • Examination of students' work • Interaction with students • Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers

School context

St. Aidan's Community College is a designated, co-educational community college, under the joint trusteeship of Cork Educational and Training Board and the Diocese of Cork and Ross. The school has a current enrolment of 418 students. It offers the Junior Cycle programme, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), a compulsory Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. It has a large catchment area with a number of feeder primary schools. Recently it has begun to participate in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The senior management team provides highly effective leadership of learning and teaching.
- Overall, the quality of teaching was very good with some examples of excellent practice; there is scope for further development of formative assessment practices.
- The quality of learning ranged from good to very good in almost all lessons.
- Care of students is a key aspect of the school's work and the allocation for special educational needs (SEN) is significant; however, there is need for the school to review the use of its allocation of teaching resources for special educational needs (SEN) and its code of behaviour in light of their respective impact on student's learning and behaviour.
- A broad and balanced curriculum is provided although current organisational practices restrict student access to some subjects and levels of study in junior cycle.
- A systematic, strategic approach is undertaken to school self-evaluation (SSE) and the school demonstrates a willingness to embrace change and to improve.

Recommendations

- In line with the school's focus on assessment for learning, further development and use of formative assessment strategies and success criteria is required.
- In accordance with Circular 0014/17, teaching resources allocated for SEN should be used in their entirety to provide additional and focused support for students identified with SEN and a reorganisation of provision is required.
- Students' access to subjects, particularly at junior cycle, should be reviewed to ensure that there is greater equity for students.
- The sanction procedures and interventions outlined in the code of behaviour should be reviewed in light of their impact on student behaviour.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1 QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

The senior management team provides highly effective leadership. This team is dedicated to improving learning and teaching and displays very good commitment and support to students, staff and to the wider school community. Their dedicated team-approach leads school development and they share a very positive and complementary working relationship. Their open-door policy facilitates a very good level of collaboration and communication with the school community. Senior management maintains a visible presence in the school at pivotal times in the day. Almost all teachers surveyed reported that there is good communication among the staff of this school. Teachers' participation in continuing professional development (CPD) is encouraged to support high quality learning and teaching.

A significant change agenda has been developed, including a planned review of posts of responsibility, and whole-school engagement with the Framework for Junior Cycle, SSE and the DEIS programme.

A wide range of care structures and interventions support student welfare. These include the very effective student support team which involves key school personnel. Year heads and class tutors have significant roles in the care of students; assemblies help to maintain contact with students and promote a calm atmosphere throughout the school at times of transition. Very good links have been developed with a range of external agencies to support students' both academically and personally.

The allocation for SEN is significant and students are supported predominantly through co-operative teaching teams. However, some of the allocation is used to create mainstream class groups, with a reduced student-teacher ratio, which are streamed according to ability. To enhance engagement of more vulnerable students and in line with the findings of international research, the school should re-examine this approach to the organisation of class groups.

At junior cycle, students in these streamed classes are identified primarily through information from the student passports, in addition to an entrance assessment of reading and mathematics ability. A cognitive ability test would be a more useful indictor of aptitude. At senior cycle, a significant number of hours are used to provide small LCA classes. The additional teaching resources allocated for SEN should be used in their entirety to provide additional and focused support for students identified with SEN, and the greatest level of support should be provided to those students with the greatest level of need, as per Circular 0014/17 and the associated guidelines. Reorganisation should also include the development of a core team of teachers who would provide most of the additional supports to students, particularly in junior cycle, based on their identified needs and abilities.

Commendably, a whole-school guidance plan has been documented. The written guidance programme should identify interventions in junior cycle. Counselling is provided by the chaplain. A strong induction process provides very good support for students and parents during transition from primary school. TY and sixth-year classes have formal access to time-tabled lessons in Guidance. Extending formal access to Guidance for fifth-year students should be considered.

Social, Personal and Health Education and Relationships and Sexuality Education are appropriately delivered. The school has implemented the Junior Cycle Wellbeing programme, commendably including a Life-skills class. However, JCSP classes have a reduced programme for Wellbeing. This

imbalance should be addressed. Literacy and numeracy development could be integrated into these programmes**.**

A broad and balanced curriculum is provided and the school makes deliberate efforts to meet the curricular needs of students. The school has engaged fully with the implementation of the Junior Cycle Framework and changes to the curriculum have been applied following whole-staff consultation.

In senior cycle, concurrent timetabling of the core subjects facilitates student choice of levels for examination and the organisation of option bands for Leaving Certificate is based on student choice. This is very good.

At junior cycle, many students can chose appropriate subject levels and are encouraged to pursue higher level. For some, however, current timetabling does not encourage or facilitate pursuing different levels across the core subjects. The school should therefore explore the provision of concurrent timetabling for the core subjects in the second and third years of junior cycle. In addition, the organisation of the curriculum does not facilitate open and equitable subject choice for all students in junior cycle. The provision of a stand-alone lower-ability JCSP class may preclude other students at-risk of early school leaving from accessing the valuable elements of the programme. This organisational approach should be re-examined in order to develop a truly inclusive school curriculum.

The TY programme is comprehensive, incorporating core, subject-sampling, modular and calendar events. Commendably, it assists in furthering students' holistic development in addition to providing remediation when necessary. All elements of the LCA programme are appropriately provided, although the guidance element of Vocational Preparation and Guidance should be delivered by a qualified guidance counsellor.

The school analyses student performance in certificate examinations. Building on this good practice and in the context of DEIS, whole-school and subject-specific targets should be set. Uptake at various levels and trends across subjects should be examined. If the school persists with its policy of streaming, it will be important to instil higher expectations in lower and middle-streamed classes.

Managing the organisation

Senior management, with the support and assistance of the board of management, manages the school very effectively.

The board of management, which is in its third year and is properly constituted, provides very effective management of the school. Board members bring significant experience, expertise and commitment to their role and strong links exist between the board and the trustees. The board meets regularly, follows well-structured agendas, and observes good reporting mechanisms to stakeholders. The board is aware of its statutory obligations and responsibilities, and child protection and anti- bullying procedures have been developed.

Discussion with members indicated that the board is: very supportive of the senior management team; committed to improvement; aware of the need to provide a comprehensive curriculum; and supports teachers' desire to enhance expertise through CPD.

Commendably, board members have accessed training with regard to their role. Whilst acknowledging that board members are made aware of new Department circulars as they arise, the board should consider availing of further opportunities for discussion and upskilling in areas such as the new junior cycle curriculum and DEIS. The board circulates an annual report to parents through the parents' council. Use of the school's website should be considered in order to enhance circulation.

Commendably, open and inclusive enrolment practices operate in the school. The admissions policy has been recently reviewed and includes admissions procedures for entry into LCA. However, the school should remove any conditional clauses linked to admissions. This would ensure that the enrolment policy aligns with actual practice.

The code of behaviour has been recently reviewed. It is recommended that the sanction procedures be reviewed for lower-level behaviours, as non-attendance at after-school detentions is leading to high levels of suspensions. The class tutor role could be extended to include a weekly lesson focusing on the development of student wellbeing. This would facilitate the provision of early interventions for the more vulnerable students. This should be supported through a formalised plan.

Overall, the school is well maintained and there is continued focus on upgrading the school plant. In the science laboratories, chemicals should be stored in accordance with guidelines. The school canteen provides a very good service. Provision of information and communications technology (ICT) is good and planned improvements to the ICT infrastructure are worthwhile.

The school corridors and many classrooms feature artwork and displays which reinforce the school's identity as a community of learners and celebrates students' achievements.

Commendably, the health and safety policy and statement is reviewed annually. It is very positive that the statement is displayed and risk assessments have been completed.

Leading school development

A good whole-school structure has been put in place to lead DEIS planning. To enhance the DEIS process, a limited number of SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-linked) targets arising from relevant baseline data should be identified for each area of DEIS and key strategic actions should be agreed at whole-school level and subsequently implemented. The subsequent review process should focus on the implementation and evaluation of the impact of agreed strategies at classroom level.

Whole-school procedures are in place for policy development. The student council and parents' association should be included in the consultation process as relevant. The school should devise a review schedule to assist in this work. Appropriate monitoring of attendance takes place and an attendance strategy has been devised. Consideration should be given to reviewing this policy alongside work in relation to the DEIS theme of attendance.

Parent representatives who were met during the evaluation are committed to, and very positive about, the school. Parents are strongly encouraged to attend school events such as the awards night, graduation night and subject choice meetings. It is good to note that senior management continues to strive to put a proactive parents' council in place. Recent meetings with the parents of the first-year students have been helpful in this regard. The development of a joint project between the student council and the parents' association should be considered.

Developing leadership capacity

Developing leadership capacity within the staff is a focus for senior management. Their person-centred approach means that staff feel consulted, informed and empowered. Teachers are consulted through staff meetings and middle management meetings. Leadership and teamwork are fostered among the whole-staff through, for example, the subject department system and the DEIS teams, which are co-ordinated by assistant principals. Leadership roles are also cultivated through the extracurricular programme and other school activities. Almost all teachers surveyed agreed that the in-school management system is effective.

There is a clear willingness among staff to engage with the work of the school and the commitment of staff is very evident. A well-established middle-management structure, incorporating assistant principals and special duties teachers, is in place. Any review of posts should consider leadership roles for middle-management which would support the vision of senior management for the school.

The subject department structure is well established. Some subject plans are more detailed and advanced than others. A clear focus on learning outcomes should be a feature of all subject department plans. Plans for the new junior cycle indicate that subject departments unpack the learning outcomes. This is very good. Subject plans should provide an integrated approach to teaching the key skills at junior cycle. It is positive that subject content and modes of assessment are agreed at subject department meetings. Building on this good practice, it is recommended that sharing teaching and learning strategies be a standing item on the agenda of subject department meetings.

Commendably, varying modes of assessment are used in TY. In the context of the Framework for Junior Cycle, there is a need to discuss and agree assessment strategies at whole-school and subject department level.

Student leadership is facilitated primarily through the elected members of the student council, who meet regularly. The council is supported very effectively by senior management. It is recommended that council members receive training to help them in their role.

Child Protection Procedures

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.*

2 QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Overall the quality of teaching was very good, with some examples of excellent practice. In lessons where teaching was very good, the quality of learning ranged from good to very good.

Learner outcomes and experiences

The quality of learning ranged from good to very good in almost all lessons. There was scope for the development of inclusive teaching approaches in one lesson, whereby student experiences and engagement were less than satisfactory.

Differentiation was used to challenge and to support students in some lessons. This approach enhanced student motivation to learn. In this way, good quality learning was facilitated through; providing students with choices; providing examples and clear instructions; creating opportunities to provide individual support for learning, and careful design of purposeful student-centred tasks. These included think-pair-share and scaffolded activities, visuals, quizzes and games.

There is scope for the development and encouragement of more independent and enquiry-based learning opportunities for students. This might be positively promoted through the school's e-learning plan. Based on students' responses to questionnaires, and an examination of student work, further development of formative assessment strategies is required.

Student engagement in their learning was enhanced in some lessons when they were encouraged to think critically, make links and create meaning through real-life experiences. Their motivation to learn was further enhanced in lessons where inputs from students contributed to the development of lesson content.

A very positive rapport between students and teachers, and among students themselves, was evident throughout the school. When group or paired activities were carefully planned and structured, students were confident in speaking and contributing to class discussions and to their own learning.

Classroom management ranged from good to very good. When required, discipline was unobtrusively maintained. In a small minority of lessons, student management and engagement would have been better if purposeful, independent and group tasks were planned and lesson content matched the varying abilities of the students. Such planning would also provide early intervention and prevention strategies for students, who may be particularly at risk of disengagement in their learning.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

The quality of teaching was very good, with some examples of excellent practice. Commendably, intended learning was shared with students in lessons observed. In a minority of lessons, enhanced clarity in relation to intended learning was advised. Generally, review of learning intentions took the form of teacher questioning. Linking to the school's focus on the use of assessment for learning, it is suggested that students themselves would review intended learning using shared success criteria.

Lessons were well-structured and overall were student-centred. Best practice was observed where whole-class discussion and teacher questioning was interspersed with short, meaningful student group activities, leading to clear progression of learning. In the very good lessons, teachers' advance preparation of appropriate learning tasks enhanced purposeful engagement and progressed student learning.

In some of the lessons, where two teachers worked together to support students in their learning, support was most effective when the teachers' subject knowledge and collaborative relationship facilitated the provision of very good team-teaching. In these instances, teachers were clear on their roles in enhancing students' learning experiences and outcomes, through seamless interactions with students at whole-class and individual levels. In other lessons, where the second teacher's role was to provide in-class support for students, deeper collaborative planning and discussion on how best to support the identified needs of students should take place.

Some very good use of ICT by teachers was observed. Such use included use of visuals, animations, social media platforms, video clips and links to relevant websites. Generally presentation software was used to highlight key points or questions. This approach was particularly good when the key points were illustrated following student activity and whole-class discussion. A short video clip was used to introduce or develop content in a minority of lessons. This was particularly effective where students were given clear instructions on the focus of the learning in advance of watching the video. In one very good lesson, students used ICT as a tool for learning as they researched a topic of their choosing, based on their interests. In a minority of instances, strategies were recommended to increase the relevance of material for students, and provide opportunities to think-pair-share where appropriate. A remaining challenge for the school is how to encourage more student use of these technologies in lessons to aid learning. The school's e-learning plan and teacher collaboration should help to advance this.

Questioning was a strong feature of all lessons. In lessons where practice was excellent, students were encouraged to reflect on their learning. This was achieved through; very good open-ended and developmental questioning making links with prior learning; providing students with success criteria for the task and using assessment for learning strategies and student presentations of their work.

In many lessons, a good emphasis on promoting students' oral literacy was observed. Questioning, small-group and whole-class brainstorming activities facilitated student use and extension of vocabulary. Literacy development was also a feature of some lessons through: supporting spelling; understanding of new and subject-related vocabulary; pre-teaching key words and definitions;

encouraging students to guess and create their own meanings; developing mind maps as lessons proceeded and direct teaching of literacy.

3 IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

The school has made good progress in relation to recommendations from previous inspection reports. Planning for an enquiry-based approach, identifying development of practical skills for the learner, has begun in Science. This work should be progressed. A formal mechanism should be put in place to provide oversight of the implementation of recommendations.

Teaching and Learning

Commendably, the use of active learning strategies to challenge students were observed in many lessons. A more widespread use of this approach could take place. Management should look at how the feedback from inspection reports in relation to generic aspects of teaching and learning could be disseminated to staff.

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

Overall, the school engagement in school self-evaluation and its capacity for school improvement is very good.

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

A systematic, strategic approach has been taken to the school self-evaluation process. SSE reports and school improvement plans (SIPs) have been developed in the areas of literacy and assessment for learning, the latter with a particular focus on questioning and 'wait time'. An evidence-based approach was used to identify the specific focus of the evaluation, the setting of targets and selection of strategies. This is good practice. Review of the LCA programme also provides evidence of the school's willingness to evaluate its own practices.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school's engagement with and response to external evaluation, demonstrates that there is an openness to feedback, a willingness to embrace change and has the capacity to improve. The school has recently been given DEIS status and its enthusiastic, committed and focused initiation of the planning process is clearly evident.

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;

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 Aidan's Community College, on behalf of all the stakeholders, wishes to acknowledge receipt of this very positive WSE-MLL report. The report affirms many of the excellent practices in existence in the school and the teaching staff and management were encouraged by many of the findings including the following:

- The Board provides very effective management of the school
- The Senior Management team provides very effective leadership, including a strong focus on School Self Evaluation
- Overall, the quality of teaching was very good with some examples of excellent practice.
- A wide range of care structures and interventions support student welfare. These include the very effective student support team which involves key school personnel.
- The school shows a willingness, enthusiasm and commitment to engaging with DEIS planning and implementation

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 of Management has already begun to implement the recommendations contained in the WSE-MLL including:

- The SEN team and in-school management team are reviewing school policy and practice in accordance with Circular 14/2017
- Policy planning has progressed through a school committee – outlining a proposed schedule commencing with a review of the Admissions policy and sanctions within the Code of Behaviour
- A review of students' access to subjects has started through the curriculum planning working group
- Further strategies to enhance student learning will be supported by the schools' SSE/DEIS targets
- Check and Connect mentoring programme has started to support students with behavioural issues
- The use of technologies in lessons to aid learning is being considered by the focus group on e-learning
- In the Science laboratories, chemicals are now stored according to guidelines
- A presentation to the Board has been made on the new Junior Cycle curriculum