

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation**  
**Management, Leadership and Learning**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	St. Mary's Holy Faith Secondary School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Brookwood Meadow Killester Dublin 5
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	60791A

**Date of Evaluation: 29-11-2017**



## **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

<b>Date of inspection</b>	29-11-2017
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with board of management</li><li>• Meetings with principal and deputy principal</li><li>• Meetings with key staff</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Student focus-group interview</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with parents</li><li>• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers</li></ul>

### School context

Saint Mary's Holy Faith Secondary School is a voluntary Catholic secondary school under the trusteeship of the Le Chéile Schools Trust with a current enrolment of 325 girls. The Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational programmes are provided. Transition Year (TY) is an optional programme for students.

### Summary of main findings and recommendations:

#### Findings

- The senior management team manages the running of the school very effectively and provides exceptionally high-quality leadership for learning.
- A very-high standard of care is provided and students with special educational needs (SEN) are very well supported; however, a small portion of the SEN allocation is being directed currently towards sustaining curricular choice for students.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall; there is scope for further sharing of good practice and in some instances better planning for hour-long lessons.
- Students are given very good leadership opportunities and the student-voice committee's contribution to teaching and learning is particularly valuable.
- Very good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations made in previous evaluations.
- There is an excellent whole-school planning process in place and this is supported very effectively by school self-evaluation (SSE); however, there is scope for improvement in subject and programme planning.

#### Recommendations

- The school should ensure that all of the SEN allocation is used for its intended purpose.
- The good practice observed in the majority of lessons should be extended through collaborative lesson planning and peer observation.
- A review of TY should be carried out to ensure that the learning value of all activities is optimised.

## **DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

The quality of leadership and management in this school is very effective.

#### **Leading learning and teaching**

Leadership for learning is of an exceptionally high quality. In the past seven years, there have been several changes in senior management and a sharp decrease in student numbers. The uncertain future of the school and consequent teacher redeployments contributed to low staff morale. However, in the three years since they took office, the leadership of the current principal and deputy principal has helped to transform the school into a vibrant community of learning. Student enrolment is increasing. Discussions with teachers and students and the questionnaires administered as part of the evaluation, provide overwhelming evidence that teaching and learning and staff relationships have improved greatly.

The senior management team actively uses *Looking at Our School* as a reflective tool to promote improvement. There is an emerging culture of innovation and creativity aided by teacher collaboration and very good planning and a concerted focus on teaching, learning and assessment in the SSE process. The senior management team conducts a yearly review of subject plans in order to monitor progress in teaching and learning. The leadership of the principal and deputy principal has inspired and motivated students, staff and the whole-school community, and set high expectations for learners.

There is a student-centred approach to subject choice. Students are given an open menu on the basis of which subject-option bands are created. There is a good variety of subjects and programmes. The introduction of Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) should be considered as student numbers grow as there is a cohort who would benefit from this programme. The availability of an extensive range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities provides valuable learning opportunities for students and enriches the sense of belonging in the school.

School management supports engagement with continuing professional development (CPD) that is chosen strategically to meet the current and upcoming needs of the school. Capacity is also developed through very high levels of teacher collaboration. Teachers also share their expertise through making presentations at staff meetings. To support staff development, the senior management team meets teachers once a year to discuss their work. To facilitate further sharing of practice, teachers should engage formally in collaborative lesson planning and peer observation. Additionally, teachers should be further encouraged to participate in professional networks.

One-hour lessons have been introduced recently throughout the timetable. This change was widely viewed as successful by teachers and students alike. Commendably, teachers' openness to this change has contributed to an embracing of new methodologies and approaches in their lessons.

Students with SEN are very well supported through differentiated teaching, and one-to-one and small group withdrawal. There is very good use of data and the continuum of support to identify and meet students' needs. There is excellent communication between the SEN team and mainstream teachers. Teachers are very effective in supporting students with SEN in their classrooms. A small part of the SEN allocation is being directed currently towards sustaining curricular choice for students. The planned timetable for 2018/2019 and anticipated changes in curricular demand will address this anomaly. The school should ensure that all of the SEN allocation is used for its intended purpose.

The quality of care provided for students is very good. The care team meets weekly to assess students' care needs. An efficient system is in place to inform teachers of students' needs as they arise and of

supporting appropriate responses. The students, in their focus-group meeting, spoke very highly of the caring relationships they have with their teachers and the support they receive.

A comprehensive transfer programme helps first-year students to settle in successfully. The school maintains very good links with feeder primary schools and parents. A meeting is held with every student and their parent/guardian prior to entry. The quality of the information gathered is very effective in helping to provide targeted support to students in their transition to post-primary school.

The guidance department supports students' vocational needs well. It is positive that personal counselling is provided by a counsellor and psychotherapist who visit the school one day per week. Going forward, the guidance department should keep a record of all consultations carried out, and this should be monitored by school management.

### **Managing the organisation**

The board of management is very effective in its role in managing the school. Its members provide very good support and advice to the senior management team. The members of the board are very committed to their work and bring a variety of valuable experience and expertise to the school.

There are very good systems in place to provide oversight in terms of financial reporting, child protection and SSE; all are standard items on the board's agenda. All of the mandatory policies are in place and there is a systematic approach to policy review and development. Communication between the board and the wider school community is very good. The minutes of the board meetings are comprehensive and an agreed report is shared as appropriate.

The principal and deputy principal manage the day-to-day running of the school in a highly effective manner. During the evaluation, they demonstrated a very good working relationship and have established roles to suit their expertise and experience. They share a clear vision on providing excellence in student outcomes. They provide an open-door policy for parents, students and teachers and work to create a sense of warmth and welcome in the school.

Leadership is distributed very effectively through widespread formal and informal consultation processes. Consultation committees have been set up to inform decision making in a range of important areas. Communication between the senior management team, middle management and the wider school community is extensive. The students make a valuable contribution to decision making about issues of relevance to them including teaching and learning. There is an active and developing parents' association with parents given the opportunity to input into decision making.

There is a culture of reflection in regard to school's policies and practices. For example, three subject departments per year are selected for an in-depth review. Additionally, a comprehensive analysis is carried out each year of students' achievement in the certificate examinations against national norms and student intake data. In keeping with very good practice, this analysis informs subject and whole-school planning.

The code of behaviour is based on respect and is positive in tone. Student behaviour was observed to be exemplary during the evaluation. There is a clear ladder of referral in managing students that is understood by all. The senior management team is highly visible on the corridors interacting and supporting students. Tutors, class teachers and year heads all make a positive contribution to caring for students and addressing issues if they arise.

### **Leading school development**

The board of management has overseen considerable improvement in teaching and learning, and in the school's physical infrastructure. The board members attend special events in the school: for example, recent Jubilee celebrations. Currently, the board is developing a shared vision through the identification of 'Four Key Wisdoms' which will inform the work of the school.

The quality of school planning is excellent. The planning process is informed by the views of relevant members of the school community. The plan is a comprehensive yet concise document that outlines relevant information for running the school. It is improvement focused and contains a medium to long-term strategic plan. The roles and responsibilities of key personnel are outlined clearly therein.

### **Developing leadership capacity**

Leadership capacity is being developed very well within the school. There are three assistant principal post holders, one programme coordinator, and seven special duties teachers who support the school very effectively. The posts of responsibility are sufficiently substantial. They are meeting the needs of the school very well and are adapted as needs change.

The senior management team empowers the members of the middle-management team through giving them appropriate autonomy to develop initiatives and carry out their duties. Post duties are matched to teachers' interests and talents. In line with best practice, the senior management team and the assistant principal post holders collaborated extensively in the development of the strategic plan. This collaboration was very effective in building trust and developing leadership in the school.

Students are given very good leadership opportunities through participation on the student council and in their roles as mentors for first-year students. They also develop leadership through their role as ambassadors for 'Cycle Against Suicide' and through acting as wellbeing leaders. It is excellent practice that the students' view on teaching and learning are sought through the student-voice committee. These views reflect positively on the recent changes and offer constructive suggestions for improvement. There are plans for student representatives to address the board of management; this would be a welcome initiative.

## **2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The quality of teaching and learning was very good overall. Students participated with interest and enthusiasm in the majority of lessons. Some lessons, although they had good aspects, would have benefited from better planning for the one-hour class periods.

### **Learner outcomes and experiences**

Learner outcomes and experiences are very good, overall. Students' contributions and their application to observed lesson tasks indicated very good learning. In the majority of lessons, students engaged purposefully in higher-order activities such as exploring concepts, presenting, predicting and investigating, and discussing ideas. Additional highly effective learning was evident when students personally identified with the intended learning, engaged in brainstorming activities and learned from each other. Students' attention and engagement waned when lower-order activities such as the passive taking-down of notes from the board or repetitious reading aloud from the textbook were overly used.

In most lessons, learning was very well monitored through teacher observation as students worked individually or collaboratively. Strategies such as the use of mini-whiteboards and random selection of students for questioning also facilitated good assessment of learning. Students' contributions indicated very good understanding and achievement of the intended learning outcomes. In a few lessons, assessment mainly took the form of one-to-one teacher-student interactions with not all students included in the questioning. It is recommended that the good assessment practices outlined above be extended to all lessons.

In some language lessons, highly effective learning was evident where students had the opportunity to hear, read, write, and speak the target language. In these lessons, there was extensive use of the target language by teachers and students alike. In other language lessons, there was scope for an

increase in the use of the target language for routine instructions and conversations. Learning activities that facilitate students' oral language development, and in particular improve their accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence, should be extended to all lessons.

Student outcomes in the certificate examinations are monitored carefully by subject departments and senior management and show good levels of achievement. There is a very valuable student academic mentoring and target setting system in place which encourages students to reach their potential. In keeping with good practice, the mixed-ability arrangement in the junior cycle allows students to develop as learners before decisions about levels are made.

The TY programme is good. The plan outlines a wide range of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. However, from the review of student copybooks and in discussions with teachers and students, it was evident that there is some disruption to curricular instruction caused by students' attendance at activities and events held outside of class. This disruption and the relatively low allocation of lesson periods per week affects the continuity in learning in some subject areas. It is recommended that a review of the TY be carried out to ensure that the learning value of all activities is optimised. The focus should be on activities that will support learning in the senior cycle, inform subject and career choices and develop key skills.

TY work experience takes place on one day per week for the full year; this represents a large portion of time allocated to one aspect of the programme. Additionally, some students complete work experience in one placement only and this placement is not always well aligned to their career interest. Measures should be taken to ensure that work experience forms a more meaningful part of students' learning and skills development.

### **Teachers' individual and collective practice**

In the main, teachers' individual practice was found to be very good. There was a very good balance in most lessons between clear and effective teacher instruction, group or practical activities, and opportunities for student discussion. Students were skilfully facilitated to collaborate in pairs or groups. This approach was very effective when the instructions were clear, the tasks were well-designed and timed, and where specific roles were assigned to individual students. In some lessons, while there was high-quality teacher instruction evident, there was need for more focus on active learning and student-led activity. A good variety of learning activities should be facilitated in all lessons. In a few lessons, better planning and tighter management were needed to ensure that students remained focused on the key learning. It is recommended that the good practice observed in the majority of lessons be extended through peer observation.

In most lessons, learning tasks were differentiated very well to suit differing ability levels through the use of methodologies that allowed students to work at their own pace. Well-timed assistance was provided to students experiencing difficulty. All teachers had a very good awareness of the needs of SEN students and used a range of valuable strategies for meeting those needs. In some lessons, appropriate levels of challenge were provided for higher-achieving students; there was scope for additional challenge to be provided in a significant minority of lessons.

High-quality lesson planning was evident in most classrooms visited. Most observed lessons included a wide variety of engaging tasks which facilitated deep learning. However, in a few lessons better planning was required. For example, in one lesson a significant portion of class time was allocated to students to start their homework. In another lesson, it was evident from the review of homework journals that students are completing certificate examination papers as early as first year. It is recommended that activities that facilitate more meaningful engagement with the key learning be planned for all lessons.

In most lessons, a variety of literacy strategies was used effectively to help students understand subject-specific terminology. There was scope in some lessons for keywords to be highlighted and their meaning used more effectively to explain concepts.

There is evidence of good development in respect of teachers' collective and collaborative practice. The quality of subject planning and programme planning is good overall. Many of the subject folders contain planning material accumulated over several years. It is recommended that they are streamlined to outline only current provision and planning. In some subjects, the programmes of work should be developed to incorporate specific learning outcomes, methodologies and resources. Some subject plans are maintained in hard copy and others are available in electronic form. It is recommended that a common system be adopted by all subject departments. To facilitate ease in sharing resources and methodologies, electronically stored documents should be considered.

### **3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS**

Overall, there has been very good implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations.

#### **Leadership and Management**

Very good progress has been made in implementing previous recommendations in the area of leadership and management. The infrastructure and equipment in the science laboratories have been improved in line with the recommendation made in an inspection of Science and Chemistry. The mathematics evaluation recommended that data available from diagnostic tests and the primary schools should be included in the school's analysis of students' achievement and this recommendation has been implemented fully. The school was also advised previously to review its admissions policy in order to better reflect its commitment to inclusion; this recommendation has been implemented.

#### **Teaching and Learning**

Very good progress has been made on implementing teaching and learning recommendations made in previous evaluations. Assessment-for-learning (AfL) strategies were recommended in a number of subject inspections and they are now well integrated into lessons. Most observed lessons included active learning methodologies and the use of peer learning activities. The implementation of these recommendations was supported by well-chosen CPD and the school's SSE process.

An increased level of challenge, more inclusive questioning, and questioning that encourages critical thinking were recommended in previous evaluations. While there has been very good improvement in these areas, there was some scope for improvement observed in a few lessons.

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

Overall, the SSE process and capacity for school improvement are very good.

#### **The School's Self-Evaluation Process**

The SSE process is supporting improvement very effectively. SSE has been used as a cohesive framework for communicating expectation, delivering transformation, and measuring impact. On foot of extensive consultation to identify areas for improvement, literacy, numeracy, assessment, feedback and collaborative learning have been the focus of SSE. During the evaluation, the strategies outlined

in the SSE plan were used in all classrooms to some extent and were observed to be embedded practice in the majority of classrooms.

The six-step SSE process is a well-established practice. SSE is led by a teacher coordinator, the principal, deputy principal, and a core team of teachers. There is very good use of consultation committees, surveys, and focus-group discussions to garner the views of teachers, parents and students. The SSE report and school improvement plan are published on the school's website.

### **The School's Capacity for Improvement**

The school has very good capacity for improvement. Its vision is based on facilitating excellence in teaching and learning, and ensuring positive student experiences. The senior management team has worked hard to gain the trust and co-operation of teachers. The perspective of the middle-management team is used very well to inform improvement planning. There is a willingness amongst staff to implement changes and improvements.

## **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.

## **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. Mary's Holy Faith Secondary School welcomes this highly positive WSE-MLL.

The Board is affirmed that teaching and learning in the school is very good overall and in particular acknowledges the exceptionally high level of leadership for learning identified in the course of the inspection.

The Board applauds the excellent quality of School Development Planning and School Self-Evaluation referenced in the report.

The reporting of high levels of professional collaboration and distributed leadership identified in the course of the inspection is very welcomed.

The Board is particularly happy that the exemplary behaviour of the students was commended.

The Board is pleased with the very high satisfaction levels that were recorded by the pupils and parents.

The development of student leadership opportunities is a priority within the school plan and the Board is happy that this was acknowledged by the inspectors in the course of the evaluation.

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

Since the evaluation, work has commenced in subject departments to streamline subject plans and relocate these to our electronic platform.

The School Management will continue to provide opportunities for collaborative planning which will focus on further development of active teaching methodologies and good assessment practices.

Changes to the SEN provision will be made in the next academic year to use the allocation as intended.

A review of the Transition Year programme will commence in the coming weeks with a view to incorporating curricular changes for the next academic year.

## 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;