

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Ard Scoil Na Mara
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Tramore Co. Waterford
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	68141B

Date of Evaluation: 05-02-2020



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 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.

CHILD PROTECTION

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

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.
4. The Child Safeguarding Statement meets the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.
5. The records of the last three board of management meetings record a child protection oversight report that meet the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017.
6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all school personnel on the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2017
7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe and RSE).
8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.

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

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	3-5 February 2020
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with Board of Management • Meetings with principal and deputy principals • Meetings with key staff • Review of relevant documents • Student focus-group interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with parents • Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires • Observation of teaching and learning during 30 lessons • Examination of students' work • Interaction with students • Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers.

School context

Ardcoil na Mara is a co-educational post-primary school in Tramore, Co. Waterford and is under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The newly built school opened its doors in 2014 on a new campus at Summerhill, Tramore, following the amalgamation of Stella Maris and Christian Brothers' secondary schools. The school has a current enrolment of 1186 students, and high demand for places has resulted in an extension to the existing school being required. This extension is due to open in the current school year. The ERST tradition and ethos is greatly valued in all areas of school life and a very broad and balanced curriculum is offered including the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of leadership of teaching and learning is good overall: senior management is very reflective and has implemented some very good practices and procedures which support the further development of teaching and learning practices and pedagogy.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good in the lessons observed, with some excellent practice noted; some lessons would have benefitted from more active learning strategies to facilitate greater engagement of students.
- Significant numbers of teachers are involved in a range of innovative teaching and learning initiatives and a number of extracurricular activities, which support student wellbeing and development.
- There are very good support structures in place for students with special educational needs (SEN). In this regard, a small number of hours are not being used in accordance with the requirements of Circular 14/2017 and a need for greater coherence in the delivery of supports was noted.
- There are excellent systems of academic monitoring and comprehensive care structures in place. Overall questionnaire responses and feedback from students indicate that some aspects of the implementation of the code of behaviour need additional attention in order to ensure that they align with the school's very good support structures.
- Very good internal and external communication systems are in place, and the board has identified the improvement of relationships with all stakeholders, particularly parents, as a priority. The parents' association is not currently active as members' terms of office had come to an end due to their children completing their second-level education.

- The school has a very good capacity for school improvement; school self-evaluation (SSE) is operating very effectively and there are excellent systems in place to respond to recommendations from previous inspection reports.

Recommendations

- As part of the school's annual review of the code of behaviour, school management should ensure that all stakeholders have been comprehensively consulted with a view to increased inclusion of student and parent voice.
- Senior management and staff should work to further develop teaching methodologies which ensure that active learning is to the fore in lessons to encourage student participation in line with the principles of the revised junior cycle, and in order to optimise an enjoyable learning experience for all students.
- In line with the stated priorities of the board of management, and in order to build on the existing good communication channels between the school and parents and to increase parent agency in the school community, the parents' association should be revitalised as soon as possible.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

The overall quality of leadership of teaching and learning is good. The members of the senior management team are very reflective with regard to their own practice and have overseen the implementation of a range of systems and procedures that are operating very effectively. Among these are the excellent systems for academic monitoring and tracking of student performance and the very progressive manner in which school self-evaluation (SSE) is operating in many areas. Each member of the senior management team has clearly defined roles and duties which have emerged from a process of thorough consultation. The team is aware of the need to maintain high skill levels across a range of areas and tasks are rotated among the team members. This is very good practice. Staff members reported that both the senior management team and the board of management are very supportive of staff attendance at continuing professional development (CPD) events. Posts of responsibility are being reviewed this year and priority areas for such posts will be identified through a process of consultation with staff.

A very broad curriculum is in place and conscientious efforts have been made to maintain, sustain and expand the range of subjects and programmes for the benefit of students, even when doing so places a strain on teaching resources. The operation of all programmes is regularly reviewed and the arrangements for student, parent and teacher evaluations of the TY programme are particularly praiseworthy, as is the operation of student assessments in TY through the use of portfolios. There is a taster programme in first year and in TY, and a very open subject choice process. Open evenings, which are held for parents in all year groups, provide valuable information in this regard. Appropriate curricular provision exists for students in Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Wellbeing. The school has been innovative with regard to the introduction of Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LP) at junior cycle and proposes to introduce Leaving Certificate Physical Education (LCPE) from September 2020. Should student demand emerge for additional subjects, the school is open to the possibility of introducing new subjects. A comprehensive assessment calendar is in place outlining, among other items, dates for the many classroom-based assessments (CBA) taking place at junior cycle.

Very good transition arrangements are in place for students arriving from primary school and it is very good practice that members of the senior management team meet with all incoming first years and their parents. Standardised ability and achievement tests as well as the education passport are well utilised to identify students who may require learning support. Academic feedback in relation to assessments takes place and students are asked to set their own academic targets and include these in their journals in first year. The system of academic monitoring reviews these targets and is also linked to students' standardised test scores. This is excellent practice. The school should consider communicating the results of the standardised tests to parents. While very good use is made of a wide range of assessment data for academic monitoring, there is also the potential to expand the use of this data to identify students who are underachieving.

Very good structures are in place to support SEN students with an extensive range of supports in place. Regular testing and review take place to monitor the level of support provided to each student. The use of SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-bound) targets is commended as is the use of a shared drive to communicate targets to individual teachers. Overall, this process is very well managed. Regular meetings of the SEN core team with the SEN co-ordinator take place and the co-ordinator also meets with special needs assistants (SNA) each morning. While SEN hours are generally used for the purpose for which they are intended, there is a need to ensure that all allocated hours are used in line with the provisions of circular 14/2017. For example, the use of a small number of the hours for the creation of smaller mainstream class groups is not within the provisions of circular 14/2017. The SEN core team members are involved in the delivery of a significant amount of learning support; and a number of mainstream teachers are also involved in this provision. The current situation has resulted in some students having support provided by a number of teachers and the school is working to reduce this. Addressing this should bring further coherence to the students' learning experiences and enhance student outcomes. The SEN team should also be involved as early as possible in the timetabling process in order to support priority timetabling for students with SEN. Planning for the opening of an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) unit in the school is commended.

The senior management team ensures that teaching and learning is always on the agenda for staff meetings and teachers are encouraged to raise questions around teaching and learning to facilitate reflection and discussion. Management has observed increased use of formative assessment comments in student reports, facilitated by the provision of free text comments in reports. The school's digital learning team is working very effectively and expertise among staff members has been used to upskill colleagues. The use of online learning platforms has proved very successful and the use of statements from the DES Digital Learning Framework (DLF) as a focus for improved use of digital technologies in teaching and learning is particularly praiseworthy. The school regularly provides placements for student teachers and ensures that they are well supported. This engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome and provides valuable professional benefits for teachers, student teachers and the school. The school is involved in the initial stages of peer observation of teaching and learning and senior management is of the opinion that the Droichead framework has helped in this regard. It is very positive that senior management intends to disseminate learning from the initial steps taken regarding peer observation to all staff and to further support this aspect of staff development.

Managing the organisation

There is a wide-ranging guidance plan and extensive care and support structures are in place in the school. A comprehensive code of behaviour has been devised which is reviewed annually. Behavioural management training has been provided for all staff and good systems are in place for early intervention for students who need support, whether behavioural or pastoral. Senior management indicated that the intervention process has reduced the level of referrals for disciplinary issues and that the care team meetings also support this process. There are very good

attendance and punctuality monitoring systems in place. Feedback from students and some parents highlight the need for further clarification in relation to the implementation of the code of behaviour and how it supports learning in the classroom. For example, student questionnaire responses, reflections from a student focus group and feedback from some parents, indicate the need for all stakeholders, including students to be actively involved in the school's annual review of the code of behaviour. Management should ensure that all stakeholders have been comprehensively consulted with a view to confirming and promoting the inclusion of student and parental voice to ensure the needs of the school and the students can be met on a consistent basis.

There is very good whole-school work currently underway with regard to wellbeing which is a current focus of school self-evaluation (SSE) work. This specific focus will further underpin the school's current systems to support and encourage students. It is noted, and commended, that a stated priority of the board of management is to review and evaluate SSE initiatives to ensure that the student experience is improving. This stated priority should be reviewed regularly, by senior management and staff, encompassing a consultative process with students, to inform progress in this important area for student wellbeing.

The school has had a very high demand for places, resulting in the need for an extension to the current school building. While awaiting completion of the building extension, effective strategies to deal with pressure on physical space have been implemented, such as the use of staggered lunch breaks, and temporary restrictions on enrolment into first year and TY. Promotion of increased use of tablet computers has also helped to alleviate pressure on access to computer rooms. The board of management is commended for the manner in which it has led this process, particularly with regard to dealing with difficulties regarding admissions to the school.

Good systems are in place for the development and review of policies. The board reviews relevant policies annually and has a system in place to review all other policies systematically, following a pre-agreed schedule which ensures that policy review is a standing item on the board's agenda. This is very good practice. The school continues to consult the parents' association and the students' council regarding the formulation and review of all relevant policies. Previous consultation with students regarding the school uniform and the timing of pre-State examinations has been well received by students.

Leading school development

The board of management has identified key priorities for the future development of the school, including improving attainment and outcomes for students, the review of SSE initiatives to ensure an enjoyable student experience, and the improvement of relationships with all stakeholders, particularly parents. The school parents' association operated very effectively until the current school year. Key members of the association stepped down at the end of the last school year as the officers' children had completed their second-level education. Despite making many efforts to replace these parents on the association, the school has been unable to do so and the parents' association was unable to function for some months. In order to ensure the continued involvement of parents in all aspects of school life, the school should take measures to revitalise the parents' association as soon as possible. Notwithstanding this, the school has a very wide range of communication measures in place to keep the wider parent community informed. Positive relationships have also been developed with the local community and this has proved particularly important in locating valuable work experience opportunities for students of the school.

The school has made very good progress in the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning in recent years. A digital learning plan has been produced and the use of an online platform as well as portable trolleys containing laptops has resulted in heightened awareness among teachers and parents of the potential of such technologies in teaching and learning.

Developing leadership capacity

Very good development of staff leadership capacity is evident and frequent opportunities for autonomous staff leadership of a range of initiatives are presented to teachers. The senior management team and the board of management are very supportive of such initiatives. Regular meetings of core groups of teachers take place. A wide range of extracurricular activities is provided to students through the generous commitment of many staff members. Students praised the dedication of teaching staff and the fact that they often went to great lengths to assist them in many areas including providing extra classes to students, both before and after school as needed. This is highly commended.

The structures in place regarding the operation of the student council are good. For example, some good practices were evident in the support for the work of the student council, such as opportunities for students to present to the board of management and the involvement of students at parent-teacher meetings. The school should continue to examine ways in which the school community can further promote and facilitate the development of student voice, student participation and engagement, and student leadership in all areas of school life, as appropriate.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Learner outcomes and experiences

The overall quality of teaching and learning was good with some excellent practice observed. The quality of students' work and their responses to teacher questioning indicate a good level of learning. Learning intentions were clearly outlined and were attained in almost all lessons. Very good use of digital technologies by teachers was observed in many lessons and the school is aware of the need to increase student use of these technologies as part of their learning. Teachers often used creative classroom layouts and desk arrangements and this facilitated group and pair work in many cases.

Where scope for development was evident, in a number of the lessons observed as part of the evaluation, this centred mainly on some students not being active in their learning leading to reduced engagement with lesson content. Insufficient scope for student expression and creativity were observed in some lessons. These gaps were reflected in student questionnaire responses which revealed disappointing results in relation to students' enjoyment of their learning. Initiatives such as team teaching are having a positive impact in the school. It is very positive to note, for example, that Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) mathematics teachers who were surveyed by the school with regard to the impact of team teaching, reported that, while students' results did not always improve, their attitude to Mathematics improved significantly. This is noteworthy in terms of encouraging staff to investigate ways of improving the student experience. It is recommended that teachers reflect regularly on the student learning experience, with a view to ensuring student participation, enjoyment and engagement with lesson content, in line with the principles of the revised junior cycle.

Some very good practice was observed in lessons where peer assessment and review of learning intentions were facilitated, particularly through the use of post-it notes. Such practices could be extended across the curriculum. In some lessons, learning opportunities presented by group and pair work were not fully exploited. Where this was observed during the evaluation, the rationale for group or pair work was not well considered, resulting in some students doing group tasks as individuals. Care should be taken to ensure that the structure of group or pair work maximises student engagement and that the tasks require collaboration between students. In a similar vein, assessment for learning (AfL) tasks did not always facilitate formative feedback particularly when tasks allocated were not sufficiently interesting or challenging.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

Lesson preparation was very good overall. Frequent good practice was noted with regard to the correction of homework with very good formative commentary seen in many cases. The use of an online learning platform has been particularly beneficial in this regard. Teachers reported that team teaching has helped discipline and the correction of homework, although it can be difficult to get time for planning. Minutes of subject department meetings, as well as the high quality of subject planning, indicate that most subject departments are collaborating very well.

The use of questioning was generally very good with a good range of general and directed questions noted. There was scope for greater use of re-direction of student answers and greater use of higher-order questions focussing less on information retrieval. There is a clear expectation in the school that all class teachers are responsible for differentiation in their subject area. There was limited evidence of differentiation in task assignments in lessons observed. This is particularly important in classes of mixed ability and accordingly, differentiation should be prioritised as an area for development. Very good classroom management with clearly established classroom routines was evident and classroom interactions between teachers and students were very respectful.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

Excellent systems are in place to allow the school to respond to recommendations in inspection reports. It is very good practice that the template for subject department planning includes questions regarding actions arising from inspection reports and that the senior management team and board of management also routinely consider the implications of any recommendations for their work or areas of responsibility.

Teaching and Learning

The senior management team held meetings with teachers of Business Studies, French and Science following inspections and subsequent improvements were monitored. Following the science inspection, the senior management team focussed on work relating to the recording and correction of homework and put up homework boards in every classroom. This very good practice acted as a stimulus for a broader school-wide discussion on formative feedback.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school's SSE process is operating very effectively. Work already undertaken has focussed on literacy, numeracy, team teaching, digital learning, wellbeing and homework. The senior management team is very supportive of the process and a range of subcommittees meet to plan the development of each strand. This is excellent practice. The school has used a range of data gathering methods to inform its work, including surveys and testing. School improvement reports and school improvement plans (SIP) have been produced and circulated to the school community as required. It is suggested that these could also be placed on the school website as there was a low level of awareness of SSE among parents and students interviewed. Minor review of some of the SSE targets is recommended to ensure they are SMART targets. An increased focus on learner experiences and

outcomes is also recommended in line with the board's identified priorities. This could be linked to the baseline data collected using a very good, school-designed questionnaire, prior to the implementation of initiatives on team teaching. Focus groups have been used in the development of the wellbeing plan and it is suggested that this merits further extension, particularly through the use of student focus groups.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school has the capacity to implement the board's priorities for school improvement and the senior management team in particular have the commitment, drive and professional competence required to lead and manage this process. The recommendations for improvement referred to in this report will require a shared commitment to improvement from the board of management, the senior management team and staff to bring about the necessary changes.

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 welcomes this extremely positive WSE-MLL report and congratulates the school community of students, parents, staff and management for their ongoing support and commitment to our school. Ardscoil na Mara, which is immersed in the Edmund Rice tradition, is committed to developing the full potential of each student.

We are pleased that the report affirms the following:

- Very good practices and procedures of teaching and learning, with teachers involved in a wide range of innovative methodologies and initiatives;
- The very strong management team, provides by their example, very effective leadership which involves consulting, reflecting and reviewing strongly embedded practices, which supports the further development of teaching and learning;
- Our very good progress in the use of digital technologies in teaching and learning;
- Very good support structures that are in place for students with Special Educational Needs;
- Ardscoil na Mara is fully compliant in all matters relating to child protection procedures;
- Excellent systems of academic, attendance and punctuality monitoring;
- Comprehensive care structures are in place with early intervention systems for students who need support, whether behavioural or pastoral ;
- The wide range of extra-curricular activities that are provided to students through the generous commitment of staff members;
- Excellent systems are in place to respond to recommendations from previous inspection reports through the very effective school self-evaluation structures;
- A wide range of very good internal and external communication systems.

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 of Ardscoil na Mara takes great reassurance and encouragement from the report and are heartened from the affirmation contained therein. We look forward to implementing the recommendations of the report.

- As part of the school's annual review of the code of behaviour, school management will continue to consult with all stakeholders to ensure increased inclusion of student and parent voice.
- To further develop teaching methodologies that optimise an effective, differentiated and enjoyable experience for all students, we will continue to promote engagement with in-school teacher-led initiatives and continuous professional development (CPD), by management and staff.

- Building on the wide range of existing good communication channels which have developed very positive relations with the local community since the amalgamation, the newly formed Parents Association, in conjunction with the Student Council will facilitate further development of parent and student voice as valued members of the Ardscoil na Mara community.

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;