

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Curragh Post-Primary School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	McSwiney Road Curragh Co Kildare
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	706600

Date of Evaluation: 06-02-2020



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agus Scileanna**
Department of
Education and Skills

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

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

How to read this report

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

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

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

The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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 did not meet the requirements in relation to 7 above and therefore was not fully compliant with the checks undertaken.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	03-02-2020 - 06-02-2020
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with Board of Management• Meetings with principal and deputy principal• Meetings with key staff• Review of relevant documents• Student focus-group interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with parents• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers

School context

Curragh Post-primary School is a co-educational Community College located in the Curragh Camp. The school has a current enrolment of 125 students, and operates under the trusteeship of Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB). The school offers the Junior Cycle Framework, established Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of leadership and management is good; the principal demonstrates excellent leadership skills and empowers the highly committed staff to maximise their potential.
- The principal has a clear vision for the future development of the school, however consistent whole-school approaches to planning and implementing strategies for improvement are not yet fully developed.
- The school provides a very good range of meaningful interventions to support students' pastoral and learning needs, the majority of which are external to the mainstream classroom.
- The board of management is highly supportive of the school, however there is significant scope to improve its leadership role, particularly in aspects of compliance.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good or very in most lessons, particularly in student-centred lessons where expectations of student engagement and attainment were high; a whole-school approach to subject planning for improvement is in the very early stages of development.
- Implementation of previous recommendations has led to significant improvements in the school's self-evaluation process and DEIS planning for improvement, but there is scope for greater consistency in implementing actions; the school's capacity for improvement is very good.

Recommendations

- School leaders should strengthen existing structures and systems that support planning for improvement by ensuring that DEIS targets and actions are implemented consistently at whole-school, subject department and classroom level.

- To enable students to maximise learning from the skills acquired in the very good behavioural and learning support interventions provided, all teachers should consistently implement agreed interventions in mainstream lessons.
- The board should develop its leadership role and ensure that all compliance-related issues are addressed, including the development, review and ratification of relevant mandatory policies, and provision of senior cycle Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).
- To optimise students' outcomes and experiences, subject teams should take a more consistent and collaborative approach to evidence-based planning for improvement, and the current system to track and monitor students' progress should be extended to include all students.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

Leadership of teaching and learning is very good overall. The school has undergone significant staff changes in the last decade. A new deputy principal was appointed this year and the senior management team (SMT) work very well together. They are reflective and consultative, and have a clear vision for the future development of the school. The principal, appointed in 2016, demonstrates excellent leadership skills, and has led the school very effectively to its current phase of growth and stability.

Senior management manages the planning and implementation of a relatively broad academic curriculum. In general teachers are deployed appropriately and deliberate efforts are made to meet the needs of students through the range of subjects and programmes offered. The introduction of LCA at the beginning of this school year has reportedly had a very positive impact on fifth-year student engagement and behaviour.

Some aspects of provision need to be improved in senior cycle. School management should ensure that all students are provided with the required tuition in RSE, in line with Circular Letter 0037/2010, and in compliance with child protection procedures. The school is cognisant of the need to improve students' attendance at Physical Education (PE) lessons, and has implemented a resilience programme designed to bring students out of their comfort zones and build confidence. This programme has begun to improve attitudes to physical activity outside timetabled lessons. Structures to ensure greater uptake of mainstream PE in senior cycle now need to be strengthened.

Student welfare is at the heart of the school and is promoted through a wide range of programmes and pastoral supports including the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) and School Completion Programme (SCP). The care team meets weekly, targeting students in need of additional support. The wellbeing programme in junior cycle provides appropriate provision of Social, Personal and Health Education, PE and Civic Social and Political Education. Additionally, a range of whole-school initiatives and calendar events aim to build students' resilience, and expose them to life outside their local environment. In line with national requirements to increase overall provision of wellbeing, the school needs to plan for the expansion of timetabled wellbeing-related lessons.

The code of behaviour outlines a clear ladder of referral for behavioural issues. The school has created individualised, holistic behaviour plans containing positive behaviour interventions for targeted students, including mentoring, suspension intervention, and restorative practice. Valuable mainstream-class interventions include behaviour matrices in all classrooms, and a recently reviewed credit system. However, the matrices were under-utilised and the language designed to support behaviour interventions was not consistently applied by teachers in lessons observed. While existing interventions have seen some positive student outcomes, there is still a high level of suspension in the school. External classroom interventions now need to be extended across all areas of school life to enable students to apply their skills in a variety of contexts and recognise their importance in life beyond school.

The year heads aim to promote a culture of improvement for students. This is supported by the class tutor system that effectively builds strong student-teacher relationships. Class tutors check journals during the short daily tutor period. While journals are used effectively to record homework and communicate with parents on day-to-day matters, their potential to enable students to monitor

their own progress and attendance is under-utilised. Commendably, during the evaluation a draft workbook was created for this purpose. This should be now used as starting point for the development of an enhanced tutor programme to support students' readiness to learn at the start of each day, and to enhance the range of behaviour and learning support interventions in place.

The guidance department has developed a comprehensive draft whole-school guidance plan with information about the aims, objectives and implementation of all aspects of guidance. To maximise its delivery in all years, guidance personnel should consider means to plan and implement the continuum of guidance support that meets the needs of all students. In addition to the very good timetabled provision in senior cycle and individual meetings with first-year students already in place, this could include a schedule for class visits and modules in all years, targeted at specific points in the year where additional support is needed.

A very good induction programme is in place to support students in their transition from primary school. Incoming first-year students participate in a short subject-sampling programme which assists students in making informed subject choices. However, questionnaire data and interviews with students and parents indicate that there is significant scope to ensure that they fully understand the implications of subject choice on their future third level options. Most notable is the low uptake of Modern Foreign Languages in the school. The guidance department in collaboration with senior management should address this.

Very good structures are in place to support students with special educational needs (SEN). In line with good practice, students who are withdrawn from lessons for support are grouped on the basis of similar needs, and a range of appropriate short-term interventions are implemented outside mainstream provision. It is excellent practice that the timetable for provision, including team teaching and withdrawal, is regularly reviewed, and amended according to student need. Student support files have been prepared which outline strategies to address specific needs of students, with clear targets for improvement. While these are shared with all teachers, they are not consistently implemented in mainstream lessons. To maximise supports for students with SEN all teachers should be aware of the links between students learning needs and their behaviour in lessons, and should ensure that the actions devised and targets set for students with additional needs are consistently implemented in lessons.

Managing the organisation

The SMT manages the school's organisational structures and human resources very well overall, and the day-to-day running of the school is very good. It is praiseworthy that, within the school's culture of collaborative review, the principal consults with all teachers annually through a face-to-face meeting, to discuss their work and to plan for the following year.

The school buildings are owned by the Department of Defence. While this imposes some restrictions, such as having no physical school boundary, and the limited potential to expand the school, the students have the benefit of access to some facilities at certain times. The existing structure is very well maintained and learning spaces have been optimised by teachers who have created attractive learning environments through subject-related displays and student work.

A new building for the school was announced in 2018, and much of the board's work in recent years has appropriately focused on planning for this future development. In the interim, the board should plan for the development of teaching, learning and DEIS planning for improvement within the school's current context to ensure that the needs of existing students are addressed.

Leading school development

The new board, appointed in November 2019, articulated its key priorities for school development as the realisation of the ministerial announcement of a new school. The board meets regularly, and demonstrates a keen interest in the work of the school and an openness to engage with any recommendations for improvement. The principal keeps the board well informed of school issues and achievements and the board is very supportive of the SMT. The board is aware of some responsibilities, such as its general oversight role, however there is considerable scope to develop its leadership role.

Aspects of policy development are in need of immediate attention: some mandatory policies such as digital learning plans are not in place, the RSE policy is significantly out of date, the guidance plan has not been ratified, and the wording of the admissions policy concerning the admission of students with SEN needs to be amended to reflect the school's inclusive practice. It is praiseworthy that the recent review of the code of behaviour incorporated the views of students, parents and teachers. This approach should be taken in the review of all policies.

The parents' working group, which functions as a parents' association, is strongly supportive of the school. The group meets regularly with the HSCL and is encouraged to participate in school life and input to some policies. The school uses a range of effective means to communicate with parents. This was corroborated by parent questionnaires.

Developing leadership capacity

The principal proactively encourages and supports staff to maximise their potential. Teachers are afforded very good opportunities to develop leadership roles such as subject co-ordinators and staff teams. Teachers are encouraged to attend and share learning from continuing professional development (CPD), and are empowered to lead and take part in a range of initiatives to enhance teaching, learning and student support. The school should now consider a CPD audit to ensure that chosen initiatives are targeted to enhance the implementation of identified whole-school strategies.

Middle management comprises a team of highly committed assistant principals who contribute significantly to the overall management of the school. A review of posts of responsibilities was recently undertaken, with new roles to support teaching, learning and wellbeing identified. In line with good practice, post holders are provided with clear descriptions of their roles, which are reviewed regularly. Consideration should now be given to post holders reporting on their work to the board.

The school regularly provides placements for student teachers. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome, and provides valuable professional benefits for all involved. New members of staff are effectively supported through Droichead.

Some very good opportunities for student leadership are promoted through the work of the student council and sixth-year prefects. While the school aims to promote student voice, student questionnaires indicated that there is still significant scope to improve students' perceptions of having a voice. This should be investigated with a focus on learner voice in the classroom.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The overall quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in most lessons, with some instances of excellent practice. A significant minority of lessons were satisfactory.

Learner outcomes and experiences

Learning intentions were shared in almost all lessons. In the best lessons, time was taken for students to discuss and reflect on these, and to make links with success criteria. While student behaviour was excellent during the evaluation, their engagement was best in lessons where teachers made reference to behavioural matrices, and skilfully managed the integration of positive behaviour supports which optimised learning and supported well-being. In these lessons students had a very clear understanding of behavioural and learning expectations, and meaningfully applied themselves to tasks. All teachers should consistently implement such approaches by linking agreed interventions to learning intentions and success criteria.

Motivation and enjoyment were optimised in lessons where students were purposefully engaged with lesson content, and where students' input was appropriately balanced with that of the teachers. Student engagement was best in lessons where their interests and input to activities were exploited, enabling them to make relatable and meaningful connections with the lesson content. Such approaches should be taken in all lessons.

Group work successfully engaged students in most lessons. In a few instances, where appropriate structures supported collaboration, students were facilitated to very effectively share ideas, peer assess, peer instruct and interact. In these lessons, students negotiated their learning and built autonomous skills. In instances where large groups were formed randomly and instructions were less clear, some students disengaged from group-work activity. To maximise collaborative learning, teachers should implement structures such as the arrangement of desks, student roles, timing and expectations for student responses in post group-work plenary sessions.

There was considerable variation in the quality and presentation of students' written work reviewed, and in the provision high quality written formative feedback. In lessons where teachers communicated high expectations through the provision of such feedback, students' engagement in learning and the quality of work was best. All subject departments should develop a consistent approach to assigning, monitoring and assessing students' written work that promotes high expectations.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

Class teachers' professionalism and enthusiasm for their subject motivated students to enjoy their learning. In all lessons, the relationships between students and their teachers were very caring and supportive.

Digital technologies were used as tool to support teaching and learning in most lessons. Teachers used static presentations regularly to frame lessons and selected a range of very useful online resources, and video and audio clips to support learning. Digital learning was best when students were provided with worksheets and prompt questions to focus their attention and maximise the impact of the media. In a few lessons students used digital technologies effectively to assess and enhance their own learning and check their understanding and knowledge. A digital learning plan should be developed to expand students' creative use of digital technology and to enhance their learning.

Reactive differentiation was the primary mode of customisation that teachers used to support the wide range of learners' needs. This was most beneficial when teachers provided individualised support and altered their questioning style appropriately. There were instances of outstanding responsive differentiation, when teachers skilfully led students to problem solve and use incorrect answers to scaffold and develop their own reasoning. However, there was scope to further integrate planned, differentiated tasks in the majority of lessons. This should be informed by the identified needs of students, including those whose first language is not English. The school provides a peer-

learning week where teachers observe their peers' lessons. This valuable opportunity could be linked to existing team-teaching approaches, and extended to build teachers' capacity in supporting students with additional needs, where the most expert teachers model interventions and share practices more frequently.

In all lessons teachers assessed students learning through a variety of questioning styles and strategies. Assessment was best in lessons when teachers allowed for peer and self-assessment through prediction exercises, the use of "show-me" boards and differentiated worksheets. While questioning was a successful tool to assess learning, teachers should distribute questions to target all learners. In many lessons, students were encouraged to reflect on what they had learned through use of exit slips. To build on this good practice, outcomes of student reflection should be used to inform subsequent lessons.

In line with the DEIS plan, students' literacy skills were supported through a consistent approach to the implementation of literacy actions to address devised targets. This was evident in many lessons where key word emphasis, exploration and focus supported attainment. Literacy support was best when teachers' scaffolded students learning by using a continuous line of progressive questioning to draw on the students own knowledge and build reasoning. While numeracy actions are less cohesive, there was a good focus on various aspects of numeracy in many lessons.

The quality of collaborative subject department planning varies considerably. The most effective subject plans reviewed were characterised by learning outcomes that were explicitly linked with appropriate methodologies, assessment, and skills development. Planning documentation indicates that priority learning units for students completing the level two learning programme are generally implemented in a mainstream setting, highlighting very effective collaborative planning between SEN and subject teachers. The school recently introduced a system to track and monitor the progress of a few students in each year group. This needs to be extended to support all students to achieve their potential.

With the exception of literacy and numeracy, actions pertaining to DEIS targets do not generally focus on teaching and learning, or on students' experience in the classroom. The role of the teacher in implementing whole-school strategies is mainly administrative. Senior management has already begun to implement plans to embed all DEIS themes into subject planning documentation and subject departments have begun to address this on an individual basis. To maximise the work of staff teams and to provide optimal outcomes and experiences for students, actions to achieve DEIS targets to improve attendance, retention, progression and attainment should include teaching and learning strategies. The role of the class teacher in implementing cohesive actions to achieve targets should be clearly identified in the DEIS plan and used to inform subject planning for improvement.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

The overall quality of implementation of recommendations from previous inspections is very good.

Leadership and Management

Overall, very good progress has been made in implementing leadership and management recommendations. School management has made substantial improvements in DEIS planning since the DEIS evaluation.

Teaching and Learning

Very good progress has been made in recommendations to improve methodologies to share learning intentions and differentiate learning in the majority of lessons. Subject departments have begun to incorporate some DEIS targets to support teaching and learning in subject plans, however this is on a subject-by-subject basis. A more cohesive approach is now needed to ensure that strategies agreed to achieve targets are implemented consistently.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school has utilised some very good school self-evaluation processes to develop an effective three-year DEIS plan. The principal has created staff teams for each DEIS theme and substantial progress has been made in school improvement planning that is now practical and action focussed. Its implementation is supported by a high-quality, ongoing review process. The collaborative approach used to progress DEIS planning is illustrative of very good practice.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school has very good capacity for improvement. Staff members are highly committed, and willing to take on leadership roles and work on staff teams. The board and SMT supports CPD and staff and very open to taking on new initiatives and developing professionally. The principal supports staff to identify and develop their strengths and to strive for improvement. To achieve the potential for improvement, school management should ensure that whole-school initiatives are applied school wide in a cohesive and consistent manner.

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;