

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

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

**REPORT**

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| <b>Ainm na scoile /<br/>School name</b>       | St. Cuan's College                             |
| <b>Seoladh na scoile /<br/>School address</b> | Castleblakeney<br>Ballinasloe<br>County Galway |
| <b>Uimhir rolla /<br/>Roll number</b>         | 62930V   |

**Date of Evaluation: 11-03-2020**



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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   | 11 March 2020  |
|---|--|
| 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 a parent</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> |

*This evaluation was paused due to the school closures arising from the Covid-19 pandemic. While the inspection activities took place in March 2020, the feedback meeting was not held until October 2020.*

### School context

St. Cuan's College is a Catholic diocesan co-educational, post-primary school located in Castleblakeney, County Galway. It operates under the trusteeship of the Catholic Bishop of Elphin. The school provides a broad curriculum with a range of programmes: it offers the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) as well as Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. The school has recently established a class for students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). At the time of the evaluation, 308 students were enrolled in the post-primary school. The PLC provision was not evaluated as part of the WSE-MLL.

### Summary of main findings and recommendations:

#### Findings

- The quality of school leadership and management is satisfactory overall.
- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good.
- The quality of support systems for students is satisfactory; informal systems are in place to monitor and support students' pastoral needs, and the majority of students and parents agreed that students were well cared for and safe.
- The hours provided to support students with special educational needs (SEN) are not appropriately used in their entirety or in a sufficiently targeted manner.
- The implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations is fair.
- While progress in respect of school self-evaluation (SSE) has scope for development in a number of areas, the school demonstrates good capacity overall for school improvement.

#### Recommendations

- There should be a review of how resources provided to the school to support students with SEN are deployed.
- The guidance plan should be reviewed to provide a whole-school, comprehensive document detailing the specific guidance programme for the school.
- A student care team should be established and the related roles and responsibilities of chaplain, year head and relevant post-holders agreed, recorded and shared with all students, parents and staff.

- There should be greater focus on students' active engagement with lesson content, the use of formative assessment strategies, and ensuring tasks are suitably differentiated in all lessons.
- There is need for a collaborative approach between the board of management and senior management to set improvement targets and to use the SSE process purposefully to monitor and modify progress and support whole-school implementation of agreed strategies.

## **DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

The quality of school leadership and management is satisfactory overall.

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

At the time of this inspection, certain aspects of the leadership of learning and teaching were fair. The board of management was in year one of the current term of office, and members brought a broad range of expertise and experience to the board. Some members had served on the previous board which supports work continuity. The senior management team is well established having been in situ for over eight years. The principal and deputy principal meet regularly, both formally and informally. In practice, they both have clearly defined roles and responsibilities; going forward, these should be documented clearly and reviewed systematically, as are the roles and responsibilities associated with the middle-management layer within the school.

Feedback from students indicated that they generally feel well cared for, and almost all parents agreed that their children feel safe and well looked-after in the school. Interactions between students and teachers during the inspection were positive and supportive. In their everyday engagements, management and staff provide a high level of support to students. The school should now put in place more formal support systems which are clearly outlined in relevant documentation with details of the roles of year heads, chaplain, post-holders and all others involved with student support. The school was compliant with the child protection checks undertaken for the inspection. However, management needs to ensure that every staff member is fully aware of their obligations and follow required procedures.

The school does not have a qualified guidance counsellor. However, it was reported at the feedback meetings that a permanent member of staff had begun a part-time degree course in Guidance Counselling. Having the skillset of a qualified career guidance teacher will be a significant benefit to the students. In the interim, priority should be given to developing a cohesive, up-to-date whole-school guidance plan which reflects practices in the school.

The school provides a broad curriculum with a range of programmes. Commendably, student choice for options dictates the timetable and significant efforts are made to meet student requests. A number of senior-cycle classes have small numbers for optional subjects: in some cases, these classes are provided voluntarily by teachers. French has become an optional subject for the senior cycle; it was reported by school management that students and parents are well informed of possible implications for access to some third-level courses before subject choices are made. It is important that the broadest range of subjects is available to students in a sustainable manner. To ensure this, there is a need for long and short-term strategic planning, including a recruitment plan to fill any gaps in the skillset of the current staff cohort.

Some aspects of the provision for students with additional needs and/or SEN are working well. However, certain aspects require significant improvement. There are strengths in school practice in regard to the range of strategies used to support students with SEN, such as small group settings, one-to-one withdrawal and in-class support. Whole-school training for teachers on differentiation, autism awareness, dyslexia and co-teaching has been provided as part of the school's continuing professional development (CPD) programme. The school has recently established a class for students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD); a classroom has been modified for this purpose which doubles as a lunchtime games room. Students from the ASD class are supported to attend mainstream classes for the majority of their tuition time, and the school reports that this integration is working well.

Areas for development include the need to ensure that resource hours for SEN are allocated appropriately and that the strategies outlined in student support files are meeting the identified needs of each student. Parents and students should have purposeful input into the target-setting process. Support strategies and targets need to be monitored and modified regularly throughout the year and mainstream teachers should be fully aware of the identified needs and support strategies for each student. Supports should be in place from the beginning of the school year.

The school reported that it regularly provides placements for student teachers. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome and is included among the standards in the Teaching Council's *Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers* as it can provide valuable professional benefits for teachers, student teachers, students and the teacher education institutions.

### **Managing the organisation**

At the time of this inspection, management of the organisation was fair overall. The board meets a number of times per year and reports that much of its work to date has been focused on financial and human resource issues. Currently, a brief outline of the topics discussed at board level is shared with the wider school community on the school website; this is good practice. The board should consider including more detail in future reports.

There is a good working relationship between the board and school management. The board has set expectations in areas such as policy development, promoting the school ethos, managing accounts and developing middle-management structures. School management is working hard to meet these expectations. The board should continue to develop its oversight role, knowledge of, and engagement with, the improvement and development processes happening within the school to support student care and the quality of students' learning.

There are significant gaps in the provision for Physical Education (PE), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Career Guidance. The school should put in place a strategic plan for teacher recruitment without delay. Decisions on recruitment should be based on curricular needs. At the time of the inspection, the teachers who were timetabled for SPHE, Career Guidance and PE were not qualified in these subject areas.

The school is compliant with the minimum weekly tuition time of twenty-eight hours per week. All students are not receiving the minimum of 167 days' tuition as per circular M29/95 *Time in School*, however. It is recommended that the board and senior management set out the annual calendar, which complies with minimum tuition guidelines, and share it with all stakeholders at the beginning of each school year. It would be very useful if this calendar included details of parent-teacher meetings and dates for classroom-based assessments (CBAs), where relevant.

It was reported that post-holders work diligently in support of school management and students. It would be worthwhile to review the roles and responsibilities of post holders to ensure they are more purposefully aligned with the domains of *Looking at our School 2016* to further support

improvements in teaching and learning. An outline of the role of year head should also be agreed to ensure consistency of provision for students.

Teachers demonstrate high levels of commitment to the school and students by volunteering to take on the roles of year head and providing a broad range of extra-curricular activities. These activities include the organisation of a very successful school musical, a folk group, art competitions, tours and a number of sporting opportunities.

### **Leading school development**

The leadership of school development is good. The school has been successful in its effort to gain funding from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to replace existing pre-fabricated classrooms. School management also oversaw a new building extension and an astro-turf pitch, which opened in December 2019. Recently too, the school received a sports capital grant to purchase health-related fitness equipment. The resulting equipment remains in storage; plans to utilise the equipment are not yet in place.

The school reported that it receives very high levels of support from parents for all school events. Questionnaire responses indicate that parents feel the school is well run and they are welcome therein. It is very positive that the school is endeavouring to work more closely with parents in reviving the parents' association. This will be beneficial as a means to ensure there is purposeful parental input in regard to school developments as well as strengthening lines of communication with parents, both of which are areas in need of improvement.

There are very good links with feeder primary schools. The principal visits each feeder school annually and provides opportunities for the pupils to visit the school in advance of enrolment. An information night for parents enhances awareness of the 'settling in' programme and mentoring system. The school has been successful in increasing overall enrolment in the past few years.

### **Developing leadership capacity**

The development of leadership among staff is satisfactory. Teachers have been supported to avail of professional development opportunities and all year heads are volunteers. Teachers are supported and encouraged when adding to the extra and co-curricular programme of events.

Teachers in middle management have regular meetings with the principal or deputy principal to discuss issues and to report on progress with their duties. In line with good practice, an annual report is required by the board from each post-holder, and a process has been established of post-holders attending board meetings to present on their work.

Going forward, the board and senior management need to find other ways to harness the very good capacity among staff in meeting the priority needs of the school. A proactive, systematic approach should be taken to identify the needs of the school and to support and encourage staff members to upskill and train in these areas.

The development of leadership among students is commendable. They have opportunities, particularly in TY, to organise and become involved in a range of events and activities. There is a democratically elected student council and a separate prefect system. The student council consists of students from each year group who are elected by their classmates and a link teacher supports their work to good effect. There is scope to further develop the role of the student council to ensure that the general student body is fully aware of who their council representatives are, and to afford them a greater say in how things are done in school. At the end of fifth year, students self-nominate to become prefects in sixth year; teachers select the successful candidates and also the head boy and head girl from this group. The prefects are involved in a beneficial mentoring system with first-year students.

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

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was good; this included some very good practice in a few lessons and significant scope for improvement in a small minority of lessons.

### **Learner outcomes and experiences**

Learner experiences were most fruitful when tasks were engaging and developmental, and students were able to contribute their opinions and experiences to class discussion. Students enjoyed learning most when purposely engaged with activities which allowed them to feel a sense of challenge and success. This was most evident in lessons which were well differentiated. There was scope for improvement in some lessons where teacher instruction dominated with limited opportunity for collaborative learning and purposeful active engagement.

In some lessons, a broad range of methodologies was used. These included role play, group discussion, students' presentation of work to the whole-class group, peer questioning, debating, the students' identification of possible solutions and their development of definitions. In the most effective lessons, expectations by teachers of students' ability and knowledge were suitably high. The in-house expertise observed during this inspection should be shared and could form part of an effective CPD plan for all staff.

Some teachers were very skilful in their use of learning intentions; the intentions were differentiated appropriately, phrased simply, and built on students' prior knowledge, experience and skills. However, this was not the case in all instances with some teachers using learning intentions as a 'to-do' list rather than as a way to share clarity in the learning journey. It is recommended that further whole-staff discussion be facilitated on this area. Effective use of learning intentions to assess progress was noted where teachers used them to reflect on the work of the lesson. As a next step, all teachers need to encourage and support students to reflect on their own learning.

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

Individual teacher planning and preparedness were good. Some teachers included the differentiation of learning activities with meaningful extension tasks, supported by digital learning technology. Teachers' enthusiasm for, and levels of expertise in, their subject area helped motivate students to engage positively with subject content. The application of structured, time-bound, active learning methodologies by all teachers, as outlined in recent school-based CPD documentation, would complement the strategies observed.

Teaching practice had scope for improvement in a number of instances, particularly where teachers did not demonstrate sufficient awareness of the students' learning needs or adopt suitably inclusive teaching approaches. In many observed lessons, teachers employed a whole-class approach where every student was set the same tasks, often closed. In reviewing their practice, teachers should employ more open and differentiated tasks to ensure students experience elements of challenge as well as success. To do this well where two teachers are assigned to one class group, there is need to co-plan effectively.

In a few lessons, digital technology was used very well to support teaching and learning. Teachers used it to share and present information digitally, to provide apt online examples and as a resource to gather and analyse information which added to the learning experiences. There is significant scope to expand the use of digital technology to support teaching and learning in other classrooms and to utilise the potential of the investment made by the school in acquiring a bank of laptops from DES digital strategy grants.

At the time of this inspection, digital technology to support teacher collaboration was at its beginning stage with a few teachers having engaged in initiatives for sharing best practice. It was reported at the feedback meetings that the use of digital technology to support sharing and collaboration had greatly improved during the period of school closure. This now needs to be extended.

While individual teachers used a range of assessment strategies skilfully, a collaborative approach to the development of ongoing, authentic assessments is required, in line with the Junior Cycle Framework 2015. There is no whole-school policy on assessment. This should be addressed without delay, to include formative and summative assessment practices.

Teachers used questioning to good effect in the majority of lessons. Best practice was noted where a combination of global and targeted, higher and lower-order questions was used and sufficient wait-time was given. Further staff discussion and agreement around the use of questioning as an effective assessment tool and learning methodology in all lessons would be beneficial.

There is considerable variation in the quality of subject planning. The most effective planning documents included units of learning where the assessment modes were varied and aligned with the learning intentions. At the time of this inspection, subject plans were in printed format and maintained in folders. It is recommended that the advantages of an online platform be exploited for subject planning, and to better facilitate collaboration and sharing of resources for all subjects.

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

The implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations was fair.

#### **Leadership and Management**

While there was evidence of progress in regard to some recommendations from previous evaluations, there remains significant scope for improvement in areas such as time in school, SEN, guidance, SSE, school policy development and the review of the duties of post holders.

#### **Teaching and Learning**

Differentiation, formative assessment, as well as active and collaborative learning opportunities for students were recommended as areas for improvement in previous evaluations. Many examples of good practice were observed in individual lessons and subject department plans. There remains scope to work collaboratively within departments and at the whole-school level to ensure good practices are shared and extended to support lesson improvement.

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

Progress in respect of SSE has scope for development in a number of areas. Overall, the school demonstrates good capacity for school improvement.

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

Progress in respect of SSE has scope for development in a number of areas. Currently, responsibility for SSE, the school improvement plan and policy development rests with an individual assistant



principal (AP) 2. The duties outlined in the role descriptor do not indicate a whole-school approach with meaningful input from all stakeholders. While the post-holder works diligently, the potential impact for improvement is limited without purposeful whole-school engagement. There was no evidence in the subject department plans examined that SSE targets for improvement were incorporated into lesson planning.

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

Overall, the school demonstrates good capacity for improvement. School management and staff are committed to the school and demonstrate a readiness to engage with progressing the school's developmental priorities. It is recommended that a more focused, formalised and progressive approach be developed to bring about improvement in an effective, expedient manner.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board accepts this report with a mixture of appreciation and disappointment. We are grateful for its affirmation of the consistent good work of many of our teachers, with the support of our principal and deputy principal, and its acknowledgement that they go the extra mile on an on-going basis. We also appreciate matters brought to our attention, which with few exceptions, were already works in progress, and are well documented in the minutes of our meetings. This report has been particularly helpful in affording us an outside critique of our current priorities, drawing on voices from within our school community from which we are always glad to hear.

Our disappointment pertains to the failure of the process to acknowledge developments in our school community which have impacted very positively, e.g. increased expenditure in support of teaching and learning as a result of key financial decisions, a very significant increase in CPD provision, a major and much needed investment of time and energy in developing the middle-leadership tier in the college and the development of St. Cuan's School Chaplaincy service.

## **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 has met on four occasions since the Inspectorate visited St. Cuan's College in March and are likely to have met more frequently were it not for the Covid 19 Pandemic. We are committed, with the support of the school leadership team and staff, to honour all recommendations mindful of our Catholic values and identity. At the time of writing:

1. The Board has taken feedback from parents of children with special education needs as part of a consultative process regarding a new Additional Education Needs policy. We have also sought additional input from relevant staff and taken the view of the Inspectorate into consideration. We anticipate we will be in a position to ratify this policy in January 2021 and that it will be implemented thereafter.
2. Two staff members are currently up-skilling in the areas of Career Guidance and PE and staff, with support from the School Leadership Team, are undertaking a revision of a School Guidance Plan. Parents will also be invited to contribute before Board ratification.
3. A Student Care Team has been established and the Board looks forward to dialoguing with the team through the principal and deputy principal regarding terms of reference before 28th February 2021.
4. The Board has recommitted to a review of posts of responsibility during the Spring of 2021 and looks forward to prioritising further support for school self-evaluation, teaching and learning. We wish to put on record that our previous review also underpinned teaching and learning in St. Cuan's College.
5. With regard to school planning, we recognise we have fallen down at the level of reporting as distinct from planning. Targets achieved in recent years have been subject to meticulous planning and our approach has been very favourable to on-going development regarding prevailing concerns. We thank the principal, deputy principal and staff for their ongoing contributions.
6. We acknowledge both our school community's need and the advantages of promoting a stronger culture of school self-evaluation in support of teaching and learning, leadership and good governance. We hold the report does not adequately reflect the foundational work in support of this undertaken in the past two years. In keeping with our characteristic spirit as a Catholic school, we

remain committed to undertaking such work with due regard for the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity and through collaborative processes that facilitate the integration of the goodwill and energy of all stakeholders.

7. Being a Catholic Education provider also carries significant demands. We remain committed to honouring these as well as those identified above, i.e. in the best interests of all students and in keeping with our mission statement.

## 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;   |