

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

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

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Scoil Mhuire
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Kanturk Co Cork
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	62290L

**Date of Evaluation: 07-12-2017**



## **What is whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning?**

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

## **How to read this report**

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

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

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

The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

## WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Date of inspection	07-12-2017
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with Board of Management</li><li>• Meetings with principal and deputy principal</li><li>• Meetings with key staff</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Student focus-group interview</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with parents</li><li>• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers</li></ul>

### School context

Scoil Mhuire, Kanturk is a co-educational voluntary secondary school which was founded by the Mercy Order in 1895. It operates under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). The school offers the Junior Cycle programme, an optional Transition Year programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), and the Leaving Certificate (Established). The school has a current enrolment of 270 students.

### Summary of main findings and recommendations:

#### Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good, with examples of excellent practice.
- The school has a very good senior management team supported by a dedicated and professional teaching team.
- The board displays considerable commitment to the school with a well-developed school plan, although a small number of policies should be reviewed.
- In addition to very good implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations, strategic priorities have been identified; the inclusion of an action-planning approach would further support very good work underway.
- The school strives to offer a wide and innovative curriculum for its students, although provision in PE should be extended.
- A culture of evaluation and review is embedded in the school with an opportunity now for the next phase of school self-evaluation (SSE) to further support this in the area of teaching and learning.

#### Recommendations

- An action-planning process to support the strategic priorities identified by the board of management and the school community should be initiated.
- Provision for Physical Education in the case of a number of year groups should be enhanced.
- Some adjustment and review of a small number of policy documents should be undertaken.
- A specific teaching and learning strand, underpinned by the SSE process, should be incorporated in the strategic action plan.

## **DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

The quality of school leadership and management is very good.

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

The quality of leadership for learning is very good. There is a very good senior management team. The principal and deputy principal have clearly defined roles and work very well together as a team. The team has achieved very significant progress in the context of challenges faced by the school in recent years. These have included: changing demographics in the local catchment area; the impact of the moratorium on posts of responsibility; and significant curricular change. Responses to questionnaires distributed to teachers and parents highlighted the success of the senior management team in running the school.

The school offers a broad curriculum, seeking to maximise its capacity to provide subject and programme choice for students. Comprehensive Transition Year (TY) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) programmes are in place. There is a subject sampling system in first year, ensuring that students' understanding of the nature of different subjects is enhanced, prior to subject choices for junior cycle being made. In both junior and senior cycle, an open subject choice system operates, basing option blocks on the preferences of students, as is good practice. Very good support with regard to students' subject choice is provided for parents and students. This is provided through a variety of meetings, guidance classes, visiting speakers, visits out and subject option evenings.

Currently, there is limited provision for Physical Education (PE) for third year students, with only one lesson per week timetabled. This arises from recent requirements from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) for structural change in the school timetable. It is planned that this provision will be enhanced in the very near future. In addition, access to PE for some class groups in senior cycle is limited to one lesson per week, while no PE is offered in some cases. It is planned that this will be addressed in the near future through adjustments to the subject choice blocks in senior cycle. Overall, it is recommended that the school should address the current limitations with regard to PE provision in some year groups.

In the recent past, there has been a considerable emphasis placed on the development of effective transition arrangements from primary school for both parents and students. These arrangements include an evening for parents, meetings between the principal and all parents of new first year students, and a peer mentoring programme between TY students and first year students. Beyond this, a new standardised ability test has been put in place as part of entrance arrangements to aid the school in effectively identifying students in need of additional support. It is advised that the optimum point at which this test should be administered is the spring preceding students' commencement of first year.

The school has begun the process of enhancing its community's awareness and understanding of the new junior cycle curriculum. Significant strategic planning for the implications of the new curriculum has already taken place. Some further areas which might be considered in the light of curricular reform include: manageability with regard to current and new assessment arrangements; the reporting of different assessment modes; the use of descriptors in reporting student achievement; and the place of teachers' collective practice in planning for the new curriculum.

Very good care structures are in place. These are clear and effective and incorporate regular year head meetings which include the guidance counsellor and a representative from the special educational needs team. A very good whole-school guidance plan is in place which incorporates very good developmental action plans, as well as review mechanisms. The plan is focused on achieving the best outcomes for students – personal, educational and vocational.

The school is pursuing an inclusive culture, as is evident in the priorities of the board of management, which include moves to develop two special classes to meet the needs of students with complex educational needs arising from a diagnosis of Autism and Moderate General Learning Disability. In addition, good work has been undertaken to meet significant recommendations in a recent subject inspection report for special educational needs. A core special educational needs team has been created and regular meetings of the core team are organised. Continuing professional development has been provided for members of the core team and for the wider staff group. Additional qualifications are also being pursued by member of the core team. The role of special needs assistants has been more clearly defined and student support files have begun to be developed. The school's inclusion policy is also under review, as is appropriate in light of the new allocation model for special educational needs support hours. This good work should continue.

### **Managing the organisation**

The board of management makes a valuable contribution to the functioning of the school. Members of the board display significant dedication and commitment to the school. The board is appropriately constituted and there is very good communication from the board to the school community through the mechanism of agreed reports.

A well-developed school plan is in place. School policies are developed with input from all of the relevant partners, as appropriate. It is planned that school policies will be published on the school website in the near future. This is a positive move and should be advanced. In addition, the checklist available at [www.schoolself-evaluation.ie](http://www.schoolself-evaluation.ie) should be adopted to support the work of the board in ensuring compliance with relevant circulars and policy requirements. This should be linked to a cover sheet detailing ratification and review dates for policies in the school plan.

A code of behaviour has been developed, which is communicated very effectively to students. This was clearly reflected in student questionnaires distributed during the evaluation. It is suggested that aspects of the code which pertain to the promotion of positive behaviour should be included at the beginning of the policy document and in students' homework journals. An admissions policy and an attendance strategy are also in place and have been ratified by the board. The admissions policy currently includes elements which do not align with the school's current policy and practice in the area of inclusion. It is recommended that these aspects of the policy should be reviewed and adjusted to more fully reflect the school's practice and to ensure an inclusive school culture. A comprehensive anti-bullying policy is in place. In this context, it is recommended that the board should review the anti-bullying policy on an annual basis and provide written notification of the review to school personnel and the parents' association. The policy should be published on the school website and reports of bullying incidents should be made to the board once per term. Work is currently underway on a critical incident policy. This work is worthwhile and should be completed.

Very good communication structures are in place throughout the school and this is particularly evident in the very high level of awareness expressed in teacher questionnaires regarding the work of the board. Beyond this, the school community is kept abreast of developments through a newsletter, an information sheet, text messages, parent teacher meetings, school assemblies, information evenings and the use of social media.

Management of the school facilities is very good. The school is currently pursuing the redevelopment of prefabricated accommodation as part of its planned provision of special classes. The board has displayed considerable commitment to this project. In addition, the board has been very supportive of the development of the information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure and administrative software. The board is aware that the development of a digital learning plan represents the next step in the school's engagement with ICT to support learning.

A safety statement has been developed and a safety committee meets informally on a regular basis. A number of subject specialist plans incorporate very good health and safety audits. It is recommended that meetings of the safety committee should be formalised and a comprehensive review of the safety statement should be conducted using the *Guidelines on Managing Safety and Health in Post-Primary Schools*.

### **Leading school development**

The board has identified appropriate strategic priorities. These include: student enrolment; the implementation of the new junior cycle curriculum; continued support for the school self-evaluation (SSE) process, with links to ICT; and provision of the two special classes for students with complex educational needs. To add to the very good work already undertaken in identifying these key strategic priorities, which has been ably supported by the senior management team and the school's SSE team, the development of a strategic action plan to support their advancement is recommended. As one of the actions to underpin this work, it is suggested that a presentation regarding the new curriculum in junior cycle should be accessed for the board.

There is an active parents' association which is very supportive of the school. It has been involved in the policy development process, the school open day and has supported the school in a variety of ways including fundraising and sponsorship. The school has, in turn, been proactive in communicating changes in the junior cycle curriculum to the parent body.

### **Developing leadership capacity**

There is a very good level of teamwork and distributed leadership. Of particular note is the strong spirit of volunteerism on the part of the staff in adopting leadership roles throughout the school. This has been of significant benefit in the context of the recent loss of a significant number of posts of responsibility.

Teachers are supported in accessing continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities. In addition, examples of members of the teaching staff presenting on different topics were highlighted during the evaluation. In the context of the very good standard of teaching and learning observed, this is an area that should continue to be developed.

A student council has been elected which includes representatives from all year groups. The council is democratically elected and is a worthwhile vehicle for the development of student voice. However, students did not express a clear awareness of their role in the decision-making structures of the school in student questionnaires distributed during the evaluation. With this in mind, it is recommended that regular contacts between the student council and the board of management should be formalised. In addition, some consideration with regard to how the student body can be made aware of and involved in the SSE process in the school should be undertaken.

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

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was very good with examples of excellent practice. Where recommendations were made, these centred on minor developments in the use of ICT, the balance of student and teacher talk as a means of addressing a tendency for passive learning, and some consideration with regard to the structure of co-operative learning activities.

### **Learner outcomes and experiences**

Throughout the evaluation, students displayed high levels of engagement and enjoyment in their lessons.

The quality of students' collaborative work, arising from well-organised learning environments, was very good. Students supported each other in their work and were very comfortable in engaging with peers to advance their learning experiences and outcomes. There were very good examples of co-operative learning activities throughout the evaluation which facilitated students' sense of security in discussing their learning. It is suggested that the careful structuring of co-operative learning activities presents as a potentially fruitful point for discussion and sharing of practice at both subject and whole-school levels.

Student learning was scaffolded effectively by strong, clear structures in lessons underpinned by logical sequencing of learning. Pacing was appropriate in all instances. The use of learning intentions to clarify, support, consolidate and recapitulate learning was a particularly strong feature of teachers' practice. Various, where this approach was used most effectively, teachers 'checked in' on the learning intentions during the lesson as a means of providing a 'signpost' on the learning journey, and reviewed learning through the learning intention.

In most lessons, students were empowered to engage and participate in their learning through the aforementioned activities. In some lessons, the relevant lifeskills were referenced as a further means of motivating student learning. Beyond this, students in practical settings were provided with ownership of their project work and given opportunities to progress, challenge and question the development and application of their efforts. In a very small number of cases, some student passivity with regard to learning was observed due to an overemphasis on teacher delivery and this should be rebalanced.

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

A particularly striking feature of teachers' individual practice throughout the school community was the development and maintenance of very positive student teacher relationships. Interactions were observed to be mutually respectful throughout the evaluation.

High expectations were evident in lessons and students universally rose to these expectations. This was particularly evident in lessons where students were engaged in well-thought through tasks that advanced their learning and that were linked to the overarching learning intentions of the lesson. Teachers provided good language models to support disciplinary thinking throughout the evaluation in each of their subjects. In a number of instances, this was of an exceptionally high standard.

The use of ICT to support learning was evident in lessons. This included the use of presentations to teach particular topics. Where this approach worked best, students were expected to contribute content and analysis, which was then consolidated using ICT. This strategy should inform all use of such approaches. Audio and visual clips as well as digital photographs were also used effectively. In addition, a number of teachers have begun to investigate the potential for virtual learning

environments to further support student learning. In a number of lessons, recommendations were made with regard to the potential for greater use of the visualizer. In particular, this should be considered as a means of highlighting student work and providing effective feedback, as well as explicit instruction with regard to assessment in the relevant subject. Overall, as highlighted earlier in this report, the opportunity now presents for the school to consider the place of ICT as a means of empowerment for students with regard to their learning through the development and implementation of the digital-learning plan, with specific links to classroom practice.

A culture of subject and programme planning is well-established. A range of subject schemes and plans were reviewed during the evaluation. Some good examples were in evidence which were well-developed with regard to learning outcomes and action planning. This approach should be adopted over time, across all subject plans. This suggestion is of particular relevance in the light of current curricular changes in junior cycle and the opportunity to access relevant CPD in the near future. Such approaches might also be considered with regard to planning in TY, along with a consideration of a balanced approach to summative assessment which can link effectively to the recent widening of assessment modes in junior cycle.

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

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

#### **Leadership and Management**

A number of strategies are in place to ensure that recommendations from previous evaluations are used to inform and develop practice in the school. In addition, senior management has recently implemented an audit of previous recommendations from inspection reports to aid in reviewing practice in the school and to inform planning going forward. A very positive feature of this work has been the involvement of the board of management, through its oversight role, and the professional engagement of the teaching body.

Recent recommendations in the area of leadership and management have been addressed at both a whole-school and departmental level. These include recommendations in areas such as curricular provision, timetabling and support for continuing professional development (CPD)

#### **Teaching and Learning**

Examples of the implementation of recommendations in the area of teaching and learning were observed during the evaluation.

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

Overall, the school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement are very good.

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

A tradition of evaluation and review is embedded as part of the school culture. This is best exemplified by the ongoing school improvement work of the school self-evaluation group. The group meets regularly and has advanced a range of new initiatives including developments in assessment arrangements and ICT infrastructure.



The school has engaged with the first phase of SSE through the development of whole-school approaches to the improvement of students' literacy and numeracy skills. In addition, effective arrangements have been made to report on the process of SSE to the school community.

For the next phase of SSE, the area of digital learning has been identified as a priority. In this context, it is recommended that a specific teaching and learning strand, underpinned by the SSE process, be incorporated in the strategic action plan recommended earlier in this report. This will allow the school to avoid unnecessary duplication and make visible links between curricular reform, e-learning and the overarching vision for the school's development. In addition, such a format will ensure that the SSE process maintains a focus on the improvement of teachers' practice and students' learning in classrooms.

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

The school has identified appropriate priorities to support its development in the future. Together, the board, senior management and staff have displayed a track record in seeking and achieving improvement in the service they provide for their students. The school is well-placed to continue this tradition.

## **5. CHILD PROTECTION**

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the child protection procedures for primary and post-primary schools without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the child protection procedures for primary and post-primary schools.

## 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;

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

### **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management of Scoil Mhuire, Kanturk acknowledges receipt of this very positive WSE-MLL report which affirms the very good practices and high quality work in our school.

We are particularly pleased that the report endorses the significant dedication and commitment of the Board of Management to the school, the active Parents' Association which is very supportive of the school, the very good senior management team supported by a dedicated and professional teaching team, very good care structures and the very good quality of teaching, learning and assessment with examples of excellent practice.

### **Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

The Board and school community wish to reiterate their commitment to the pursuit of excellence in Scoil Mhuire, to achieve the best outcomes for students-personal, educational and vocational.

The Board of Management acknowledges the recommendations outlined in the report and work has commenced with progress already made in the following areas:

- Priorities identified by the Board of Management and school community shall be incorporated into the strategic action plan and developed further going forward.
- Provision of PE shall be enhanced in the coming school year.
- Adjustment and review of a small number of policy documents, followed by ratification by the Board of Management has been undertaken.

The SSE team is currently working on the specific teaching and learning strand, as identified and discussed with inspectors during the inspection, which shall be incorporated into the aforementioned strategic action plan.