



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning Report

REPORT

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| Ainm na scoile/School name | Scoil Mhuire |
| Seoladh na scoile/School address | Greenhill Carrick-On-Suir Co Tipperary |
| Uimhir rolla/Roll number | 65280A |
| Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation | 27-09-2023 |
| Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report | 17/01/2024 |

What is a 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. Quality of support for students' wellbeing

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.

Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

| During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted: | |
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| <i>Child Protection</i> | <i>Anti-bullying</i> |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">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 (revised 2023).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 (revised 2023).6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all school personnel on the | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the <i>Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)</i> and this policy is reviewed annually.2. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides a report to the board at least once a term on the overall number of bullying cases reported (by means of the bullying recording template provided in the <i>Procedures</i>) since the previous report to the board.3. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and pupils.4. The school has appropriate initiatives in place to promote a positive and inclusive school culture and environment.5. All teachers visited report that they have read the school's policy on anti-bullying and that they are aware of their roles and responsibilities in preventing and tackling bullying. |

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| <p>Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023).</p> <p>7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE).</p> <p>8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.</p> | |
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The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning

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| Date of inspection | 27-09-2023 |
| 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 meeting | <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

Scoil Mhuire is an all-girls post-primary school in the Mercy tradition that operates under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). It has operated at its current site since 1974, following the amalgamation of the Mercy and Presentation Secondary Schools. At the time of the evaluation, the school had an enrolment of 461 students, drawn from the town and its surrounding hinterland. It offered Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year programme (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate (Established) (LCE). Since September 2022, the school has participated in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education for educational inclusion.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good and reflected the high level of commitment demonstrated by teachers.
- Leadership and management at all levels in the school were of a very high quality, supported by highly effective leadership structures.
- School leaders were responsive to students' needs and interests and this was reflected in the breadth of curriculum on offer, which was supported by collaboration with another local school.
- The school provided an excellent range of opportunities for students to develop their leadership capacity.
- Very positive relationships were evident, and care for the needs of each individual student was a priority.
- Supports for students and their wellbeing were of a very high quality and were a key strength of the school.

Recommendations

- While classroom tasks allowed for some differentiated student responses, teachers should differentiate through task design and assignment and use more structured group work to further support student learning in mixed ability classes.
- To reduce the organisational workload on the core special educational needs (SEN) team and to facilitate a more consistent experience for students with SEN, management should increase the size of the core SEN team, while reducing the number of teachers involved in delivering provision.

- While very good work had been done in developing DEIS planning, a specific focus on teaching and learning had not been identified. The school should identify a specific teaching and learning focus which can support a number of DEIS themes and this focus should be reflected in subject department plans and implemented in lessons.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of teaching and learning

The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good.

Learner outcomes and experiences

A highly respectful, encouraging atmosphere prevailed, where students' opinions were valued and where they felt comfortable asking questions. Regular affirmation of students' contributions supported their willingness to share their thoughts and ideas. The very good relationships between students and their teachers had a positive impact on students' motivation and it was evident that the students were enthusiastic, interested in their work and eager to learn.

In almost all lessons, teachers shared the intended learning with students at the outset and revisited this at the end, facilitating student reflection on and assessment of their own learning. As a result, students could confidently explain the process and outcomes of their learning activities and could identify areas for further development.

The use of a very good variety of tasks during lessons ensured continued student motivation and engagement. Many student-centred activities were utilised, such as think-pair-share, matching activities and brainstorming. During these activities, teachers provided good one-to-one and group support for students, especially those with special educational needs. While these classroom tasks and activities allowed for differentiated responses from students, greater use of differentiation in task design and assignment, to include an element of student choice, would further support and challenge students in such mixed ability settings.

Group and pair work were regularly used during lessons and students worked diligently to complete all tasks assigned. However, although the students were regularly seated together in groups, they often completed the tasks individually. To ensure greater student collaboration, teachers should plan more structured group tasks and consider the assignment of roles within the groups.

Teachers used digital technologies very well to support student learning. Students also had some opportunities to use digital technologies to enhance their own learning through activities such as recording oral work and engaging in online polls and quizzes. The school's planned purchase of extra devices should allow for increased student engagement with digital technologies to support their learning.

Teachers individual and collective practice

An excellent level of lesson preparation was characterised by high-quality resource materials and well-sequenced activities. Lessons were presented as part of a coherent block of learning and clear links were established to prior learning and to students' own lives. Active learning methodologies predominated and there was a very good balance between teacher input and student participation. High expectations with regard to learning were communicated to students, while the pacing of lessons was sensitive to students' needs.

Teachers used questioning very effectively to elicit learning, with a good mix of higher and lower order questions as well as directed and general questions. Teachers also re-directed questions to extend and deepen students' understanding, which had the effect of keeping all students involved and engaged in their learning. Some good formative assessment practices were observed in lessons. These were particularly effective when teaching was adapted as a result of student responses. The school's planned move towards more formative assessment practices

in reporting to parents is positive and should provide parents and students with a clear picture of the quality of student learning and the steps required to progress.

At the time of the evaluation, team teaching was operating in a limited capacity. Where observed, this was very successful in meeting students' learning needs within a mixed ability setting, while very good collaboration between the cooperating teachers ensured that students received appropriate levels of support. The school should explore the possibility of extending team teaching opportunities to optimise inclusive practices in mainstream settings.

Teachers were very committed to providing a high-quality education to their students and had engaged in regular professional learning opportunities with the support of school management. Positive, supportive relationships between staff supported a very good level of informal collaboration. Teachers also shared expertise at staff meetings as well as through co-teaching opportunities. To build on this culture of sharing and to further improve teaching and learning, the teachers should consider engaging in peer observation.

Teachers' collaborative practice was very good and was evident in their willingness to become involved in DEIS planning and curriculum-related committees. Substantial work had also been done on planning in almost all subject departments. However, the layout of subject department plans lacked consistency. To address this, the staff should agree a common planning template to be followed by all departments. This template should include a section which refers to the whole-school teaching and learning focus identified in the DEIS Plan. Individual departments should adapt this whole-school teaching and learning focus to reflect the specific pedagogies of their subject.

2. Quality of school leadership and management

The overall quality of leadership and management was very good.

Leading learning and teaching

The school's collaboration with another local school allowed it to offer a broad, balanced curriculum where students had a wide variety of subjects to choose from. During a focus group interview with students, they indicated that subject choice was very student-centred and expressed their satisfaction with the support they received when choosing their subjects. Examples of these successful supports included the subject sampling programme offered to first-year students and the various subject presentations and careers talks provided at senior cycle.

The school's focus on inclusion and flexibility and its commitment to the welfare of each student was reflected in the decision to introduce LCA to meet the needs of learners and to provide the broadest possible educational options for students. Level Two Learning Programmes (L2LP) had also been introduced in Junior Cycle in order to meet the learning needs of a small number of students, while management had been proactive in seeking a special class to support students with autism.

It was positive to note that wellbeing lessons were timetabled for each year group from First Year to TY and that Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) was taught to all year groups. All teachers timetabled to teach these subjects had received training in suitable pedagogies to engage students and were following a specific RSE programme at senior cycle to ensure consistency. The school also delivered the FUSE anti-bullying programme to second year students. The learning in these lessons was reinforced by the very positive, respectful student-teacher interactions that were a feature of all lessons observed. The results of the student surveys carried out during the evaluation reflected this, as most students indicated that the adults in their school treated everyone with respect and that students follow clear rules about not hurting other people by what they say or do.

Students with additional educational needs received highly effective support. It was commendable that students were grouped in terms of similar needs, while the staff providing learning support were well matched to the particular needs of students. Very clear student learning targets were shared with those teachers providing learning support and these were

regularly monitored. However, over half of the teaching staff were involved in the delivery of SEN provision, the organisation of which considerably increased the workload of the SEN core team. To reduce this organisational burden and to facilitate a more consistent experience for students with SEN, management should increase the size of the core SEN team, while reducing the number of teachers involved in delivering SEN provision.

Teachers were very committed to engaging in professional learning to support students' needs and their attendance at such learning events was facilitated and supported by management. Opportunities for professional learning were also provided at staff meetings. Considerable progress had been made in upskilling teachers and students in the use of the school's online learning platform, while digital devices had been provided to teachers for classroom use. Staff members had shared their expertise to support their colleagues in the use of digital devices as teaching, learning and assessment tools, while a digital plan had been prepared to guide further developments in this area. This was commended. Students had access to a class set of devices and junior cycle students used these to record their reflections on the development of junior cycle key skills. The school was planning to buy more student devices, which should facilitate greater use of digital technologies by students to support their learning.

In September 2022, the school was selected for inclusion in DEIS, the action plan of the Department of Education for educational inclusion. Planning committees were established, and considerable work had been done to gather baseline data and identify targets for each of the DEIS themes. The plan incorporated a large number of measures under each theme to achieve these targets. It is suggested that to aid communication and implementation of the plan, current developmental priorities under each theme should be set out separately from those measures which are already embedded within the school's culture. A specific focus on teaching and learning had not been identified as part of DEIS planning. The school should identify a specific teaching and learning focus which can support a number of DEIS themes and this focus should be reflected in subject department plans and implemented in lessons.

Managing the organisation

The current board of management, which was appropriately constituted, had reached the end of its term, and a new board was being elected at the time of the evaluation. Board members demonstrated a keen awareness of their responsibilities and a clear sense of commitment to the school. Meetings were held regularly and were informed by the wealth of experience of the members of the board, who worked very effectively to attend to ongoing areas for development.

A wide range of policies had been developed and implemented, while some policies such as the anti-bullying policy and the code of behaviour were under review. The importance that the board attached to teacher, student and parent voices was evident in the way in which these groups were consulted in the development of these policies. The school had also begun to review its assessment policy and this was at an early stage of development. The school's admissions policy was very clear in terms of the criteria for admission to the school. Some amendments were suggested to the admission criteria for the TY and LCA programmes to better reflect the school's very good, inclusive practices.

The principal and deputy principal demonstrated very high levels of commitment to the school, and worked very effectively as a team. They collaborated very well and employed their complementary skills and approaches to ensure the effective day-to-day running of the school. They activated the professional expertise and experience of staff members by encouraging and supporting many staff-led initiatives in the school. Members of staff spoke highly of the support they receive, and in their responses to the surveys carried out during the evaluation, a very high percentage of staff indicated that the school is well run.

Effective formal communication systems were in place within the school and with parents. To further improve communication, the school was exploring a new platform to communicate with parents and to track student attainment and attendance. The school also demonstrated very good use of social media platforms to promote and share school activities.

Leading school development

The school had forged very positive relationships with the local community by linking with the community fitness centre for physical education (PE) lessons, with another local school to

provide greater subject choice for students, and with local businesses to organise work experience for students in TY and LCA. The parents' association was open to all parents to join and was active in organising various fundraising events to support the school.

Many building initiatives had taken place in recent years, including the development of an astro-turf pitch and basketball courts and the refurbishment of the laboratories, art room and library. The school had demonstrated its responsiveness to the needs of students by introducing programmes such as the LCA programme and L2LPs, while the board of studies was exploring other potential developments such as one-hour lessons.

Developing leadership capacity

Very effective practice was observed in the school's development of leadership capacity. School leaders were reflective and willing to work on areas requiring improvement. Senior management encouraged members of staff to take on leadership roles and responsibility for different projects. Many teachers were involved in the promotion of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and participated in formal networks within the school. Effective collaboration between staff was evident through their involvement in DEIS planning committees, the sharing of expertise at staff meetings and their engagement in team teaching.

The board recognised students' capacity for leadership and promoted this by supporting various student-led initiatives. The student council was democratically elected and very good consultation had taken place with the board regarding matters such as the design of the school PE tops and the introduction of a hot drinks machine for students. All students in the school had the opportunity to see themselves as leaders when their opinions were sought in relation to how the school could become happier and more successful. Fifth-year students had the opportunity to become Meitheal leaders, a programme which not only provided support for first-year students during their transition to the school, but also helped the leaders themselves to develop new skills. Other leadership opportunities were provided through engagement in peer facilitation training, charitable fundraising and involvement in the varied student committees and lunchtime activities, many of which were student-led.

3. Quality of support for students' wellbeing

The overall quality of support for students' wellbeing was very good and was a key strength of the school.

The school's ongoing commitment to students' welfare and to forging positive relationships with parents was very evident. One example of this was the meeting held with first-year parents during the first term each year. This provided an opportunity for parents to get to know their daughters' friends and their families as well as the staff of the school. Opportunities such as this helped to encourage respectful interactions at all levels within the school community and contributed to the very positive culture of the school.

A very high level of care, and the very warm, welcoming atmosphere in the school were mentioned by both parents and students in their engagement with inspectors. In the survey completed by the teachers during the evaluation, all staff indicated that there was a good atmosphere in the school. Parents particularly appreciated the phone call they received from school management prior to their daughters joining the school. They indicated that they felt reassured after this phone call and that school staff were genuinely interested in getting to know their child. Continued connections with parents were supported through the work of the home school community liaison (HSCL) officer and the open-door policy that existed in the school.

The school's care team was very effective. It met weekly to discuss how best to support student needs and had good mechanisms in place to share this information where necessary. The team was ably supported by the work of the year heads, the SEN team and the class tutors. The guidance structures were also very effective and suitable supports were provided to students at each stage of their journey within the school. The school's focus on inclusion was very evident, with a range of supports available for students to support their sense of belonging and connectedness to the school. Many of the lunchtime clubs helped students to make social connections and to meet like-minded students. A coloured card system, which students could use to communicate their needs to teachers in an unobtrusive way was very successful,

allowing students to feel comfortable in the knowledge that their needs were understood by the school staff.

The breadth of the school's curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular provision reflected its commitment to the provision of a holistic education to its students. Every effort was made to maximise subject choice and new programmes were introduced in response to the needs of students. Many of these initiatives were made possible by the commitment of the school's dedicated teachers. Wellbeing Wednesday activities were organised as part of the Meitheal peer mentoring programme to promote student activity and to provide opportunities for first-year students to socialise with their peers, while relationships between students and teachers were fostered through their involvement in the staff-student choir. In the student survey conducted during the evaluation, a very high percentage of students indicated that they were given the opportunity to take part in any school activity in which they were interested, reflecting the wide variety of opportunities available to them.

The board and senior management were proactive in providing opportunities for teacher professional learning to support the diverse needs of students, having organised training for teachers to enable them to understand and engage in DEIS planning. The school recognised a need to include restorative practice in their code of behaviour and were in the early stages of implementing this. To support this implementation, management had organised some professional learning experiences for teachers in the areas of behaviour management in the classroom, restorative practice and trauma-informed practice. Staff were very supportive of the introduction of LCA to provide choice for students who would benefit from this programme and to encourage better retention and attendance by providing a curriculum to suit their needs.

The school had liaised with many external agencies when providing support to students and had engaged with Jigsaw's One Good School initiative to support the mental health and wellbeing of young people. As part of its work in creating an inclusive and welcoming environment, the school had engaged with the Belong To Quality Mark Programme.

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

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

Scoil Mhuire board of management is very happy with the contents of the inspection report and delighted that the work of the school community - staff, students, parents, trustees and board of management has been affirmed and acknowledged in such a positive way.

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 school, having considered the recommendations contained in the report, has commenced work on improvements.

The embedding of reading comprehension skills and associated study skills has been identified as a singular teaching and learning focus in the current year across all year groups. At a whole-staff gathering, planning took place for the introduction and implementation of specific comprehension skills and teachers are currently implementing these strategies across the school. This will enhance the work already underway in DEIS planning.

Differentiation and group work will be a focus for planning and teacher CPD in the coming school year with an emphasis on task design and assignment in accordance with recommendations.

The need to reduce the number of teachers involved in the delivery of SEN teaching is acknowledged and the Board will make every attempt within the resources available to implement these recommendations. Teachers wishing to attain additional SEN qualifications will have the support of the Board of Management.

The Transition Year team is working to prepare proposals for admissions criteria to TY and LCA programmes, to be considered by the parents' council, student council, staff, and board of management.