

**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>	St Tiernan's College
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Crossmolina Ballina Co Mayo
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	72100J

**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 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.

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

Dates of inspection	27 - 29 November 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

St Tiernan's College is a co-educational school that operates under the auspices of Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board (MSLETB). The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department's action plan for educational inclusion. The current enrolment is 228 students. Given increasing enrolment and resultant pressure for space in terms of general classrooms and specialist rooms, school management has applied for an extension to facilities. In addition to the Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate programmes, the school offers an optional Transition Year (TY) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

### Summary of main findings and recommendations:

#### Findings

- The principal and deputy principal work purposefully to ensure that aspects of the school curriculum are implemented in a way that provides students with valuable learning experiences; the needs of the students are put first in decisions taken at school level.
- The quality of school management and leadership is good; however, the board's leadership and oversight of teaching and learning, school self-evaluation (SSE) and policy development needs to be strengthened.
- Students, through interviews and surveys, indicated very high levels of positivity about the level of care they receive and the nature of their relationship with other students and with teachers; the school is prioritising the upgrading of its facilities to enhance learner experiences.
- The quality of teaching and of learning was good or very good in almost all lessons observed; areas for further improvement include assessment for learning (AfL), upward differentiation and advancing strategies to further support students with special educational needs (SEN).
- Good overall progress has been made in relation to the implementation of recommendations from previous inspection reports; however, there are a number of areas which still require attention.
- The school has good capacity for change and improvement based on its ongoing SSE work and the highly committed staff.

#### Recommendations

- The board should focus on progressing all of their identified priorities; in particular teaching, learning and assessment, and school self-evaluation (SSE).

- A more robust system of policy development and review is needed, including the areas of critical incident management, guidance, digital learning, a revised assessment policy, a revised DEIS plan, and a systematic health and safety management system.
- A coded system to communicate SEN information should be prioritised and this SEN information should be used to inform lesson preparation to meet the educational needs of all students.
- Assessment practices should be utilised effectively to provide adequate formative feedback to students on the strengths and areas for development in their learning.

## • DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1 QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

#### Leading learning and teaching

The overall quality of school leadership and management is good.

The senior management team of principal and deputy principal leads the school effectively. Their roles are clearly defined and communication within the team is very good. They constitute a cohesive and hard-working team, committed to creating a student-centred learning environment. Their individual skill set, together with their collaborative and consultative leadership style, serves the school very well.

In-school communication mechanisms are very good. Examples of this include a clear format for staff and subject-department meetings and open agendas at staff meeting. Many staff commended the open-door policy of senior management and the questionnaire responses also supports this.

The principal encourages teachers to develop and extend their teaching, learning and assessment practices. Staff who wish to avail of continuing professional development (CPD) are actively supported and the uptake among staff is very good. Currently, seven staff are engaging in leadership training with MSLETB and the school has recently completed the Forbairt Programme. This high level of engagement with CPD demonstrates the professionalism of the staff and is paying dividends in many aspects of school life, including the great benefit it brings to the students in the school.

The principal and deputy principal work purposefully to ensure that all aspects of the school curriculum are implemented in a way that provides all students with valuable learning experiences. Junior cycle curriculum planning is good and a well-constructed timetable is in place which is based on student preferences and this is facilitated by the willingness among staff and management to take on additional class groups. The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum, and following a curriculum review, TY and Music were added to meet the changing student needs of students in the school. The TY programme is very well subscribed, there is a coordinator and a core team in place, and there is a good balance between the four layers of the programme. The programme is reviewed and updated regularly, taking the views of teachers and students into consideration. This is good practice and there is an opportunity to include parents also in this review process. As the school has identified as a priority, there is a need to include Physical Education for 6th year students.

First-year students choose their optional subject choices prior to entry into the school. Very good supports are in place as students transition into the school and include an information evening, a three-day summer camp taster programme and a student mentoring system. These initiatives to support first-year students were identified as being very successful by the focus group of parents and students interviewed during this evaluation. There are also notable efforts made by the school to encourage parent participation in their children's education. Examples of this include the mathematics initiative for parents of first-year students, parent teacher meetings and the communication between the home school community liaison coordinator and parents.

Very high quality student-support structures are established and the school actively engages in strategies and practices to support students' educational, vocational, social and personal wellbeing. These include: social personal and health education (SPHE) being provided for all; the class tutor and year-head structure; Guidance; the *Sports for Girls* initiative; the School Completion Programme, and a SEN support team. Students, through interviews and surveys, indicated very high levels of positivity about the level of care they receive and the nature of their relationship with other students and with teachers. It is timely for the school to investigate how the junior cycle wellbeing programme will be formalised and students, parents and teachers all have a part to play in planning a programme that suits the needs of the students in their school. The school has developed very good links with the community and external agencies that support the care and wellbeing of students.

The school now has the resource of a fully qualified guidance counsellor, having shared the position with another school in recent years. There is timetabled guidance provision at senior cycle and targeted interventions at junior cycle. A review, in the context of the increased guidance resource available to the school, should be conducted to ensure the role of the guidance counsellor is optimally used. The current guidance plan requires development and this was identified as a priority by senior management.

While the class tutor system provides good support to students, there is an opportunity to explore the role of the tutor, as part of the school's junior cycle wellbeing programme, to ensure the best system at school level is in place. A focus on academic monitoring as a support to students' progress and expectations is an example of how the effectiveness of the class tutor system could be strengthened.

The structures for SEN are good; the co-ordinator has a specialist qualification in this area and has attended CPD on the new allocation model. The additional hours for SEN and learning support are well managed, with group withdrawal being the most used method of support. The development of individual student-learning plans should now be prioritised, and an agreed system of formally and confidentially sharing the key information contained in these plans with teachers, should be developed. This information should aid teachers to differentiate the curriculum and to meet individual student needs in mainstream lessons. To further develop this very important work, and in the context of growing student numbers and the new SEN allocation model, the involvement of more key staff is required to support SEN provision in the school.

A code of behaviour, which is currently in draft form, has been developed and the inclusion of positive affirmation is commendable. A small number of students indicated in the questionnaires that they do not feel the code is implemented consistently and fairly; this merits investigation by school management.

A comprehensive range of extra-curricular activities is available to students. These activities are clearly a very significant aspect of the student experience in the school. The voluntary commitment and contribution of staff members in this provision is recognised and commended.

### **Managing the organisation**

The board of management is appropriately constituted and its members have received relevant training. Its key focus over the past two years has been on improving school facilities. There is a need, however, for the board to engage in progressing all of its identified priorities, in particular teaching, learning and assessment, SSE and policy development. There is good ongoing communication between the principal and the board. As an additional means of communicating the school's priorities and its progress in their achievement, the principal's report should be further

developed into an annual report on the operation and performance of the school and be made available to the school community.

The minutes of board meetings indicate that child protection is included as an agenda item. However, the principal must report each term on the overall number of bullying cases in accordance with the Department of Education and Skill's procedures. This needs to be addressed.

At the time of the evaluation a number of the mandatory policies were in draft form as they were in the process of being reviewed. The board needs to put in place a structured method for systematic review and ratification of policies and must endeavour to ensure that key policies required by legislation are not left in draft form for long periods. The date of ratification by the board of policies should be recorded on every policy as well as a suggested date for review.

In response to growing enrolment numbers and the school approaching its capacity, the admissions policy needs to be updated to make reference to procedures and criteria for students who wish to repeat a year, and for enrolment into TY.

A review of the critical incident policy should be prioritised and role descriptors for each member of the critical incident management team, along with an expansion on the types of critical incident, should be included in this policy.

School management places high priority on the on-going development and management of facilities and has applied to extend and upgrade these facilities. There is ongoing pressure for space in terms of general classrooms and specialist rooms. The availability of the space for administration and resource education is also limited and the school is currently using rented PE facilities which has a cost implication for the school owing to the need to hire a bus to transport students for each PE lesson.

There is good provision for appropriate use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the school. The senior management team is at the initial stages of introducing a cloud-based service to enhance teacher and student experiences, and a number of staff members have received training in this area. A "Digital Learning Plan" now needs to be prepared, as per Circular 11/2018, to outline the school's targeted, incremental embedding of digital technologies in teaching, learning, and assessment. That plan will need to guide the way in which the "Grant Scheme for ICT Equipment" is used to improve learner outcomes for students.

An external health and Safety audit organised by ETB was being conducted during the course of this evaluation on foot of concerns from staff and from recommendations from previous inspections. Health and safety should be reviewed annually in line with relevant guidelines HSA guidelines 2010 and risk assessments undertaken.

Due to the staggered start for various year groups at the outset of the academic year, the minimum 167 teaching days are not provided for. It is recommended that the board of management ensures compliance with Circular Letter M29/95 in this regard.

### **Leading school development**

Those in leadership and management roles are aware of the school's changing needs, and seek to respond to them. The needs of the students are put first in decisions taken at school level.

A DEIS plan is in place which outlines a range of interventions to improve outcomes in the various DEIS themes. A review of this plan is warranted to ensure all targets and actions are reflective of evolving school contexts and the national changing situation at junior cycle.

A junior cycle (JC) coordinator has been appointed and a number of staff have engaged in teaching collaboration in their subject areas in clusters organised by MSLETB; sharing the experiences from these cluster meetings will help other subject departments in the school become familiar with the new junior cycle collective assessment practices.

The parents' association takes an active role in supporting many school initiatives, however, they should have a greater role in such areas as policy formulation and review. The senior management team links effectively with the parents' association. Parent and student survey returns gathered during this evaluation indicate mostly high levels of confidence in and support for the school.

### **Developing leadership capacity**

The day-to-day running of the school is very good, and duties carried out effectively by the middle-management team contribute significantly to this. Their roles are clearly defined and are reviewed regularly, which is good practice, and staff show a commendable willingness to modify and take on new roles to ensure that the needs of the school are met. A weekly leadership meeting is central to this consultative and leadership role. Non-post holders also carry out a range of duties to enhance student experiences and staff show a strong spirit of volunteerism and commitment to student welfare. In addition, they have been encouraged and empowered to take on a range of leadership roles.

A representative student council has been elected and is active in the school. Meetings of the council are held on a regular basis and its work is facilitated by the deputy principal. In addition to the student council, student leadership is promoted through the green school committee, student mentoring, Gaisce awards and student enterprise awards. A review of student questionnaires indicates that there is scope to develop the student voice in the school. This merits further investigation by school management and the student council.

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.

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

### **Learner outcomes and experiences**

The quality of learning was good or very good in almost all of the lessons. A very positive rapport between students and teachers, and between students themselves, was evident in all aspects of the school. This contributed to a calm and supportive learning environment which encouraged students to be positively engaged in their learning, and to be focused and on task.

Learning intentions were shared with the students at the beginning of almost all lessons. In many cases, the planned learning was further clarified by informing students of the success criteria. Excellent practice in this regard was observed in a few instances where students were asked to share what they expected to learn once the intentions and success criteria were shared. These very good practices should be established as general practice.

Homework is frequently assigned and generally provided students with the opportunity to check learning in the lesson. To support this approach it is recommended that homework be more strategically linked to the lesson intentions and assigned earlier in lessons, so that students can see the links between the homework assigned and the intended learning in lessons.

Students showed a good ability to work both independently and collaboratively in lessons where they were given appropriate opportunities. For example, group work, which featured in a small number of lessons, was very effective when clear roles and tasks were assigned. Many classrooms have been adapted to facilitate collaborative learning. In lessons where students were involved in projects or practical activities, they worked well on their own.

In most lessons, students were engaged in a variety of activities which helped to maintain their interest. Active learning was clearly evident in the very good lessons where students had to assimilate, and use in a different context, new knowledge or skills. In those situations, the focus was on the learner, with the teacher acting as facilitator. In a small number of lessons, the focus was more on what the teacher was doing, with students in a more passive role.

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

The quality of teaching ranged from good to very good in almost all of the lessons. The preparation for teaching was effective and relevant materials had been prepared and most lessons had an appropriate planned sequence of activities. Students' attendance was monitored and it was noted by inspectors that attendance levels during the inspection were high.

Teachers' practice was effective when learning was active, when the tasks were challenging and when they enabled all students in the class to make progress with the intended learning.

In the majority of lessons, teachers used questioning effectively and continually checked for understanding. Effective practice was observed when questioning reinforced and consolidated new learning and when it enabled students to think, explain and develop their understanding. There was scope for more differentiated questioning to challenge more able students in a significant minority of lessons.

Teachers' practice with respect to the assessment of students' written work varied. In some subjects, written work is corrected at whole-class level and students themselves are responsible for noting corrections. In a few subjects, students benefited from very good formative feedback on their written work; however, in many cases, no such feedback was provided. Formative assessment has been prioritised as the third SSE theme. As a part of this work, practices in relation to assessment should be reviewed collectively at department and whole-school level with specific emphasis on developing systems to provide students with formative feedback on their work. Capturing the agreed changes in a review homework and assessment policy is recommended.

Subject planning is well established in the school and the overall quality is good. A current move from paper-based to online planning systems is praiseworthy, as it will allow more efficient sharing of professional practice. Subject plans showed varying approaches. For example, some schemes of work were based on learning outcomes, others were based on topics to be covered. Whole-school and subject-specific strategies regarding literacy and numeracy were well developed in some plans, however, there was scope to further exploit these strategies in lessons.

The school is committed to improving student attainment and participation at higher level in state examinations. Statistical analysis of student outcomes was evident in subject plans. There is an opportunity to use this data, in conjunction with in-house examination data, to establish an academic monitoring system to assist students in making suitable progress appropriate with their ability.



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

#### **Leadership and Management**

Very good progress has been made in the implementation of recommendations to address the organisation of class groupings into mixed ability settings in Civic Social and Political Education (CSPE) and in regard to the provision of open choice of option subjects.

Progress to address health and safety issues is ongoing. Safe operating areas have been demarcated in the materials technology (wood) room and there was a reduction in the number of woodwork benches to enable this to happen. The extraction system in this room still requires work, as do the requirements for risk assessments and a relevant health and safety policy.

#### **Teaching and Learning**

A number of recommendations concerning teaching and learning were selected for specific follow-up in this evaluation.

Very good progress was made in the planning of lessons to ensure a balance between student activity and teacher input, and most lessons utilised effective questioning.

Ongoing areas for development are the provision of written developmental feedback on students' work, using learning intentions to assess learning and upward differentiation.

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

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

The overall quality of the SSE/DEIS process is good. A range of data including the views of students and staff is collated to inform targets for school improvement. However, there is a need to gather parental input as part of the process. The school has devised a school improvement plan (SIP) for their SSE themes; this now needs to be shared with the wider school community.

Areas for improvement that the school has identified or that are identified by this report such as reviewing the guidance policy, advancing strategies to further support students with special educational needs, establishing a system of academic monitoring, the use of formative assessment and upward differentiation can all be included in the school's SSE approach to addressing the different DEIS areas.

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

The school's capacity for improvement is good, given that a culture of review, improvement and self-evaluation has been established by school management in collaboration with teachers. The senior management team have a clear vision for the school, are self-reflective and have correctly identified areas for improvement.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

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

The Board of Management welcomes the report. It would like to acknowledge the following observations.

- Very High quality student-support structures with an emphasis on putting student first
- Very High levels of positivity in the school
- Quality of Teaching and Learning good to very good
- School Management and Leadership are good with a good capacity for change and improvement. Senior Management team have a clear vision for the school, are self-reflective and have correctly identifies areas for improvement
- Day to day running of the school is very good
- The recognition of a highly committed and professional staff and the positive rapport between teaching and students
- Very good progress has been made in the implementation of subject recommendations
- High level of confidence and support for the school in the community

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

1. The school have set up a policy review group to review and prioritize Policy Development.
2. The school has contacted the SEN Support Service with a view to liaise with best practice in developing a coding system to communicate SEN information and using this to inform lesson preparation to meet the educational needs of all students.
3. The schools third strand of S.S.E. is based on formative assessment and a whole school approach on this has been agreed.
4. The board recognises the need to prioritise areas such as Teaching, Learning & Assessment and to become more involved in the SSE process. These areas will be regular items on future agendas.

## 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;