

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St. Gerald's College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Newport Road Castlebar Co. Mayo
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	64580H

Date of Evaluation: 19-10-2017



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

Date of inspection	19-10-2017
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with board of management• Meetings with principal and deputy principal• Meetings with key staff• Review of relevant documents• Student focus-group interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with parents• Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers

School context

St Gerald's College is a boys-only voluntary secondary school located in Castlebar. The school operates under the trusteeship of Le Chéile Trust. The current enrolment of 621 students represents a thirty percent increase since 2013.

The school offers the junior cycle programme, a compulsory Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate, and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme, which it introduced this year. The principal took up the role in October 2013 and the acting deputy was appointed in October 2017.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of school leadership and management is of a very high standard.
- The post holders carry out the duties assigned to their posts capably but the post structure does not meet all of the current needs of the school.
- An innovative school development plan which is based on *Looking at our school 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools (LAOS)* is being developed; the process of identification of priorities needs to have a broader base of consultation and represent views of all stakeholders, including parents, students and staff.
- The quality of teaching and of learning was good or very good in the majority of lessons, and satisfactory in a significant minority of lessons; areas for further improvement include differentiation, the use of information and communications technology (ICT) and active learning.
- The overall quality of assessment was satisfactory; a more consistent, whole-school approach is needed to the development of teacher understanding and expertise in relation to assessment for learning practices such as the provision of developmental oral and written feedback on students' work and the use of homework tasks in optimising learning.
- The school has very good capacity for change and improvement, based on its ongoing school self-evaluation (SSE) work and its overall good implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations.

Recommendations

- The board and senior management need to explore and implement strategies that enhance engagement between the school, the parents' association (PA) and the wider parent cohort.
- A review of all posts of responsibility and associated duties is required to ensure that the current needs of the school are being met; this review should seek to ensure equity and sustainability in the duties of all leaders in the school.
- In supporting a collaborative approach to sharing pedagogical knowledge, a mentoring programme for teachers should be established; this would support teachers experiencing difficulty and teachers who are new to the school.
- To support further improvements in student learning, formative assessment practices and further embedding of digital technologies should be consistently implemented.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1 QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

The overall quality of school leadership and management is very high.

The board of management is appropriately constituted, meetings are held regularly and minutes indicate good practice in recording the board's main decisions. The board is very well supported by Le Chéile and has a good understanding of its governance role in relation to procedures for school policies. It directs financial resources towards supporting teaching and learning and is kept well informed about school life. The board should adopt a systematic review cycle to ensure that all school policies are regularly reviewed. In response to growing enrolment numbers, the admissions policy needs to be reviewed to ensure that admission criteria are more closely aligned with the school's mission statement, and that clearer procedures for over-subscription for programmes is included.

The quality of leadership and management from the principal and deputy principal is of an exceptionally high standard. (An acting deputy started in the position on the week of the MLL evaluation). Senior management work together as a very effective team in the day-to-day running of the school. All teachers reported in their questionnaires that they feel that school is well run and that communication between the senior management team and staff is very good.

The principal and other school leaders in the school expect and encourage teachers to develop and extend their teaching, learning and assessment practices. It is praiseworthy that pedagogic practice is discussed at all staff meetings and some subject department meetings. Such good practice should be extended, and the templates and resources provided to departments by senior management should be utilised to a greater extent.

Initiatives such as team teaching were organised in a well-considered and strategic manner this year. Based on classroom observations during this inspection, it was evident that team teaching is embedding well and that students are benefiting, especially students with special educational needs (SEN). It is suggested that planning for team teaching is worthy of consideration by all subject departments.

Staff members are encouraged to avail of continuing professional development (CPD) and have done so extensively in areas such as the new SEN allocation model, electronic portfolios and LCA. There is

potential for staff reflections from CPD, particularly from CPD to support the new junior cycle, to be shared more systematically at a central forum so as to establish goals for the development and consolidation of classroom practice at whole-school level.

The principal and deputy principal work purposefully to ensure that the school curriculum provides all students with valuable learning experiences. Overall current timetabling provision is very good and a very good range of subjects and programmes is available. Deliberate efforts are made to ensure that the curriculum meets evolving student needs and the recent addition of LCA, wellbeing and digital media literacy are examples of this. The TY programme is well established and it provides students with an extensive range of learning experiences. Assessment of TY is undertaken through the use of an electronic portfolio which empowers students to take greater responsibility for their learning. There is, however, the potential for this portfolio to be embedded to a greater extent into teaching, learning and assessment. The proposed new school extension will provide opportunities to enhance curriculum provision further.

Those with leadership and management roles develop and implement highly effective policies and practices to support students' educational, social and personal well-being. Curricular provision of Guidance, Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is very well coordinated. A good system of induction is in place for first-year students. Good links are made with the local primary schools and an induction day where students engage in a study skills workshop is organised. In addition, fifth year students, who receive training when they are in TY, act as mentors to first-year classes and support their transition.

Effective student support structures are in place which are underpinned by the central role of the pastoral care team which meet weekly. A number of student-support initiatives are taking place in the school, including an Amber Flag project, which promotes positive mental health. 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 committed to supporting students with SEN and provision in this regard is very well coordinated. Effective communication systems are in place to share sensitive information with all staff through a coding system. Students are provided with additional support through individual or small-group withdrawal, along with some recently-introduced team teaching. Individual education plans (IEPs) are managed through IEP mapping software and parents contribute to their son's plan through this software. There is scope to improve support for exceptionally able students through further development of upward differentiation in lessons. Commendably, a number of teachers have specialist qualifications in SEN and, as SEN was identified as the third SSE focus area, they contribute to the coordination of this SSE initiative.

Very good whole-school guidance planning is in place and practices in support of students include regular formal and informal meetings of key personnel, meetings with parents and good monitoring of student academic progress. There is timetabled provision at senior cycle and targeted interventions at junior cycle. It is suggested that extra capacity be developed in the guidance department to respond to the increase in student enrolment.

Managing the organisation

School management has been very effective in maintaining existing school facilities and in seeking additions to those facilities. A proposed school extension is at an advanced planning stage and a sub-committee has been established to manage the redevelopment of the school playing pitch. The school are partaking in the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) pilot programme and have received significant funding. An action plan for the use of this funding is in place and work has

commenced on making the school more energy efficient. There is an opportunity for the Green Schools committee to have a greater role in this SEAI initiative.

A well-developed information and communications technology (ICT) hardware infrastructure is in place and during this evaluation ICT was used effectively in a small number of lessons. A five-year digital strategy has been developed and the school has been selected to participate in a trial of the digital learning framework. There is an opportunity to utilise this digital learning framework to further develop the embedding of digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment.

The principal manages human resources (HR) well, seeking to maximise students' learning opportunities. A HR plan has been established to plan for meeting the current and future needs of the school.

Health and Safety is good in the school. Annual risk assessments should be undertaken by teachers, in line with HSA guidelines 2010, and the related school health and safety policy should then be updated every year.

The board of management and principal are aware of their statutory obligations, and work to ensure that all legislative and policy requirements are met. However, 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 all classes. It is recommended that the board of management ensures compliance with Circular Letter M29/95 in this regard.

Leading school development

The school has demonstrated a very high capacity to continually improve and develop; school staff and management have embraced opportunities for change and they demonstrate willingness for further school development.

The principal is proactive in establishing and maintaining a guiding vision for the school. A progressive school development plan which is based on the *Looking at our school 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools* (LAOS) is being developed. The process of identification of priorities needs to have a broader base of consultation and represent views of all stakeholders. Informed by those consultations, the plan should present long and short term priorities, to provide a roadmap for implementation.

The board has established practices for reporting on the operation of the school to the parents' association and staff. The wider parent body is kept informed about general school activities and events through the use of text messaging, the school website and letters. However, to enhance communication, the board should consider issuing a written agreed report after meetings and an annual report to the community informing all parents of matters relating to the operation and performance of the school.

The principal and other school leaders in the school build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between the school and the wider community. However, parental involvement in policy review and school development is satisfactory. In the questionnaires, a significant minority of parents felt that the school does not regularly seek parental views. Communication with parents in relation to gathering feedback and involvement in strategic planning to help support change should be enhanced.

Developing leadership capacity

Very good lines of communication exist between the senior management team and the staff. Regular weekly meetings of class heads and leadership groups with the principal and deputy principal form a key element of this management system, and facilitate communication and consultation. A variety of tasks is carried out by both post holders and non-post holders and there are very high levels of volunteerism evident among the staff.

Staff are encouraged and supported to lead new initiatives and the principal has created a culture of distributed leadership. Examples include managing ICT, leading the implementation of the new junior cycle programme and coordination of GAA future leaders programme. Subject departments are provided with an annual budget which provides the opportunity to prioritise and manage their own resources. Despite the diligence of post holders in fulfilling their current duties, the schedule of posts of responsibility does not effectively meet all of the current needs of the school. A review of all posts of responsibility and associated duties, including those of senior management, is required. This review should seek to ensure equity and sustainability in the duties of a leaders in the school.

Valuable efforts are made to foster student leadership through the *peer 4 peer* programme, student council, Green Schools committee, mentoring programme, Pope John Paul II award and GAA leadership programme. The student council is functioning effectively, is diligent in the recording of its minutes, is supported by a liaison teacher, and has brought issues to the attention of management and changes have been made to meet those needs. Also, students have been regularly surveyed as part of the school self-evaluation process. The questionnaire data, however, shows that just less than half of the student body surveyed do not agree that they have a say in how things are done in the school.

Child Protection Procedures

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

Twenty lessons were observed during the evaluation, comprising all year groups, levels and programmes. The quality of teaching and of learning was good or very good in the majority of lessons, and satisfactory in a significant minority of lessons. The overall quality of assessment as observed was satisfactory.

Learner outcomes and experiences

The good rapport between teachers and students was a very positive feature of all lessons. Learning intentions were shared at the outset of almost all lessons. Best practice was evident when the intentions supported a developmental and incremental approach to learning. Where the intentions were shared in a student-friendly manner, and revisited, students were enabled to reflect effectively on their learning and additional opportunities were provided to assess progress.

In some lessons, high expectations for student learning were set and a very good balance between teacher input and student activity was achieved, along with very good skills development, higher-order thinking, reflection and autonomous learning. In those lessons students were very engaged by

the learning activities, were achieving as learners and were guided by constructive oral feedback. It is recommended that a plenary be carried out at the end of group tasks to allow students to demonstrate and share their learning. The commendable practice of maintaining exemplars of students' written work to enrich the learning experience of other students should be extended to exemplars of oral work in languages.

Some very good examples of differentiated tasks were observed in a minority of lessons. Overall however, there was limited evidence of explicit differentiation, particularly with regard to challenging the higher-ability students. Teachers should ensure that their lessons are designed to support all students equally.

Developmental feedback on students' work is an area which requires attention. Practices in relation to written developmental feedback should be implemented consistently across departments in keeping with the school's assessment policy. Future subject planning should take account of the need to develop a broader range of assessment strategies, to include expectations around formative assessment and the further development of AfL strategies. There was good practice in relation to homework when it arose naturally out of lessons and served to consolidate and in some instances to extend learning. There was a large variation in the quality and recording of homework in student journals. In line with the school's homework policy, homework should be set and reviewed more consistently to support further improvements in student learning.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

In very good lessons, teachers' individual planning was of a very high standard. Video clips, electronic presentations, and well-designed handouts were used effectively. In a small number of lessons very good practice was seen where ICT was used as a natural and integral aspect of the learning; for example where students utilised an online learning platform to evaluate, monitor and record progress in their learning. In two lessons, students made presentations confidently and provided very clear explanations of ideas and concepts using key words and subject-specific terminology. Further embedding digital technologies in teaching, learning and assessment by utilising the digital learning framework and SSE process is recommended.

Highly effective practice was noted where teachers used their expertise and enthusiasm to create and exploit rich learning opportunities for students. Excellent practice was observed where lesson resources were differentiated to meet students' needs and used to provide a scaffold in order for students to engage with their learning at a level suited to their ability.

Language departments should agree an approach to the judicious use of the target language in lessons. This approach should seek to incrementally build the use of the target language from first year to completion of the Leaving Certificate programme. Planning, both long and short term, for language lessons should seek to integrate all language skills. The sharing of such agreed practices can be incorporated in the induction of new teachers to departments.

In lessons where team teaching was observed, the lead and support model and co-teaching model were effectively employed. This enhanced the quality of learning, while also providing opportunities for peer observation of teaching practices. In supporting a collaborative approach to sharing pedagogical knowledge, a robust mentoring programme for teachers should be established; this will support teachers experiencing difficulty and teachers who are new to the school, as well as an overall vehicle to support reflection on teachers' individual collective practice.

Subject departments are well established. A review of planning documentation indicated that there is variation in the quality of subject and programme planning. Best practice was noted where the

learning outcomes recorded within schemes of work demonstrated incremental progression and were linked to specific teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

3 IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

Very good implementation of recommendations made in relation to the management sections of previous evaluation reports is evident. Examples of the positive response to the recommendations made include the development of a homework and assessment policy, an increase in provision for English in TY and the provision of templates and exemplars to provide teachers with a structure for planning.

Teaching and Learning

Partial progress is evident in the implementation of recommendations of previous inspections relating to teaching and learning; some areas require further work. Learning intentions were established in most lessons, however there is a need to effectively use these to assess learning throughout all lessons. ICT was used to enhance learning and teaching in a small number of lessons.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school's engagement with the school self-evaluation (SSE) process shows evidence of positive practice but also possibilities for improvement. Three comprehensive school improvement plans (SIP) were developed for aspects of literacy, numeracy and SEN. Each SIP includes clear, achievable, measurable targets with a plan as to how the strategies will be implemented. Commendably, data analysis was used in target-setting and measuring outcomes. There is, however, a need to revisit the monitoring of the school's improvement plans for literacy and numeracy and the targets and associated actions for student engagement; currently a number of the targets are narrow and focus only on the mathematics and English departments. Varying levels of focus on the whole-school strategies for literacy and numeracy were evident in the lessons observed, with effective use of strategies evident in a small number of these lessons.

The outcomes of the school's self-evaluation process have been communicated clearly to the board of management and staff, and should now be communicated to all parents annually. The board should review the implementation and impact of targeted strategies in the area of SSE at appropriate times throughout the school year

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school demonstrates very good capacity for improvement through its reflective approach and openness to change. Those in leadership and management roles are aware of the school's changing needs and are committed to responding to them in the interests of further improving learning outcomes and the overall experience of learners.

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 this report. The Board of Management acknowledges the observation that the quality of leadership and management from the principal and deputy principal is of an exceptionally high standard. The Board of Management also acknowledges the following insights:

1. The quality of teaching and of learning was good or very good in the majority of lessons.
2. The BOM directs financial resources towards supporting teaching and learning.
3. Overall current timetabling provision is very good and a very good range of subjects and programmes is available.
4. A good system of induction is in place for first-year students.
5. Effective student support structures are in place which are underpinned by the central role of the pastoral care team which meet weekly.
6. The school is committed to supporting students with SEN and provision in this regard is very well coordinated.
7. The school has demonstrated a very high capacity to continually improve and develop; school staff and management have embraced opportunities for change and they demonstrate willingness for further school development.

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

To address the following recommendations, the school has taken appropriate steps to address these areas of improvement.

- i. The board and senior management need to explore and implement strategies that enhance engagement between the school, the parents' association (PA) and the wider parent cohort.
- ii. The Principal is working with the Parents' Association on strategies to enhance engagement.
- iii. A review of all posts of responsibility and associated duties is required to ensure that the current needs of the school are being met; this review should seek to ensure equity and sustainability in the duties of all leaders in the school.
- iv. A review of posts of responsibility was activated on the 6/02/2018 in line with circular 03/2018
- v. In supporting a collaborative approach to sharing pedagogical knowledge, a mentoring programme for teachers should be established; this would support teachers experiencing difficulty and teachers who are new to the school.
- vi. The school has enrolled in the Droichead Programme which is the integrated Professional Induction Framework
- vii. To support further improvements in student learning, formative assessment practices and further embedding of digital technologies should be consistently implemented.
- viii. St. Gerald's DLS College is one of the Digital Learning Framework Pilot Schools and has also applied for the Schools Excellence Fund – Digital.

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;