

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Kieran's College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Secondary School College Road Kilkenny
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	61560J

Date of Evaluation: 28-09-2017



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	28-09-2017
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting with board of management• Meetings with principal and deputy principals• 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 Kieran's College is a voluntary secondary school for boys under the patronage of the Bishop of Ossory. The school draws a diversity of students from urban and rural backgrounds and has a current enrolment of 764 students. In addition to the Junior Cycle, the school offers the established Leaving Certificate and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The board of management and the principal work to ensure that legislative and policy requirements are met and they are proactive in establishing and maintaining a guiding vision for the school; overall quality of leadership and management is good.
- The quality of care for students is very good; student care strategies demonstrate very high levels of commitment to the wellbeing of students, co-ordinated by committed teachers.
- The principal provides clear educational leadership, is establishing systems and structures to meet the priority needs of the school and empowers staff to take on leadership roles.
- Some areas for development were noted in terms of reviewing posts of responsibility, maintenance of science facilities, subject planning and timetabling.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed; it was satisfactory in most of the remaining lessons and was fair or weak in a small number of lessons where active methodologies and assessment for learning practices were not sufficiently in evidence.
- The school's capacity for improvement is good; the effective implementation of some recommendations made in previous inspection reports is good, but there has been limited progress with other recommendations.

Recommendations

- The review of posts of responsibility should be prioritised so that teachers with posts assume positions that promote leadership of learning.
- Notwithstanding the ongoing efforts of the board of management to solve this issue, maintenance of the science laboratories, associated services and storage of chemicals is not in line with best practice and should be reviewed in the interests of health and safety.
- Some subject plans require substantial development to include planning for the Framework for Junior Cycle 2015 and subject specifications.
- The allocation of study periods on teachers' timetables and the utilisation of this teaching resource requires improvement.

- In order to extend the very effective teaching, learning and assessment observed, active methodologies, assessment for learning practices and formative and developmental written feedback on assignments should be developed and embedded in whole-school practice.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1 QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

The overall quality of leadership and management is good. The board and senior management promote excellence in teaching and learning; for example, through supporting purposeful teacher continuing professional development (CPD), which is encouraged as a means of improving teaching and learning. To further inform the board on important curricular changes, teachers could be given opportunities to address the board on current and proposed initiatives.

There are generally high expectations for students. There is evidence that the code of behaviour is implemented consistently and fairly. Attendance is very good overall and is monitored consistently.

The principal and other school leaders are committed to junior cycle reform and have taken measures to help ensure successful implementation. School management and staff have availed of training provided by the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) in support of the implementation of the Junior Cycle Framework 2015. Further specific training is planned. The vast majority of staff has embraced new approaches to teaching, learning and assessment promoted through the school improvement process and the Junior Cycle Framework.

Students achieve to a very good standard in many subjects and programmes. The guidance service coordinates assessment testing for incoming first years, cognitive ability testing for TY students and in collaboration with senior management, is involved in monitoring student progress. The school has plans to further develop tracking and monitoring at whole-school level. It is suggested that added focus be placed on the roles of the special needs co-ordinators, guidance service, year heads and deputy principals in working together to strategically and systematically monitor and help students reach their full potential.

The curriculum offered at junior and senior cycle is generally broad and balanced, endeavours to meet students' needs and provides a variety of learning opportunities. Evening study was reported to benefit student wellbeing and learning.

The diverse TY programme enables students to achieve valuable experiences inside and outside the classroom. Former and current TY students reported positive and valuable learning experiences. Students develop their social awareness through the Enrichment Programme and Young Social Innovators, for example. Assessment in TY includes an end-of-year interview in which students receive valuable feedback on their work throughout TY. Some TY subject plans and modules are not fully developed and could be redesigned as Transition Units as outlined on the NCCA website. There is a considerable coordination resource put into the organisation of TY. The school should consider if some of this resource could be better utilised by re-introducing the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) following appropriate consultation.

The curriculum plans for some subjects are developed to a very good standard for the Junior Cycle Framework but other subjects with new specifications are not so well developed. The good practice

should be extended for all subjects. While references were made in some plans to specific subject-related literacy, numeracy and assessment for learning strategies, very limited reference was made on how the agreed whole-school targets, including peer collaboration, as part of the school self-evaluation (SSE) process, could be embedded. This should be addressed.

Very well-organised student support structures are in place. The school has developed and is implementing effective policies and practices to support students' educational, social and personal wellbeing. The guidance and chaplaincy services provide very good supports for students and work effectively together as part of the pastoral care team. The introduction of the new Wellbeing programme in first year also supports student welfare and transitions. Responses from student, parent and teacher questionnaires indicate very effective systems for student support.

The overall quality of care for students is very good. Student care strategies demonstrate very high levels of commitment to the care and wellbeing of students, co-ordinated by dedicated and committed teachers. All teachers indicated that students are encouraged to maximise their potential in the school. Students are encouraged academically, spiritually, physical and emotionally in pursuing their individual talents. The school mission is lived out in practice. Chaplains meet weekly and the pastoral team meets monthly. New teaching staff members are well supported by the school's induction programme. The school has developed good links with other schools, the community and external agencies.

The range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities support students' holistic educational development in line with the school ethos. Students are encouraged to participate in a wide variety of sports and other activities. The one-hour lunch break supports these important activities. The school is a renowned hurling academy and has a recognised tradition of excellence in this regard. The school is endeavouring to strengthen its connections with past pupils. Student successes are celebrated in many ways, including on visual displays around the school, at assemblies, on the school website and at the end-of-year awards. The school has recently achieved the Amber Flag in recognition of its commitment to mental health awareness.

For the most part, teachers work effectively with each other and with parents to support students with identified learning needs. The learning support team works effectively with the pastoral care team, year heads, form tutors, subject teachers, parents and school management to identify students in need of additional support. The school is moving away from withdrawal of students from lessons and focusing more on team teaching. This is good practice. However, the large number of teachers involved in special needs provision should be reviewed in order to create a more focused team approach.

Managing the organisation

The board of management and the principal are aware of their statutory obligations and work to ensure that legislative and policy requirements are met. Policies are regularly reviewed. An inclusive school community is promoted through the consultative development and fair implementation of school policies. Plans to review the special educational needs policy are timely. The board and principal fulfil their responsibility to create and maintain a climate of security and wellbeing in the school. The board has received management training from the Joint Managerial Body and training in child protection. The principal keeps the board very well informed on school business and the board is very supportive of decisions which are taken in the best interests of students.

The senior management team, consisting of the principal and the deputy principals, jointly manage and oversee the smooth day-to-day running of the school; promote a learning culture; actively support school improvement; develop and implement effective systems for communicating information and

adopt a partnership approach to leading students. The principal and deputy principals foster a positive school climate and encourage respectful interactions at all levels in the school community.

The principal and deputy principals manage the school's human resources well overall. Some changes in this regard will be necessary in order to meet the needs of the school. At the time of the evaluation a large number of teachers had study periods on their timetables. This issue was highlighted in a previous inspection report. The school took some measures to address this during the evaluation; however, further action is required. It is recommended that tuition time be maximised for all students and that study time not be formally included in the 28 hours of tuition time.

Six post duties include roll taking. This valuable human resource should be better utilised to meet school needs. It is praiseworthy that the school community has identified the need to review posts of responsibility so that prioritised school needs are addressed. This review should now be progressed so that teachers with posts assume positions that promote leadership of learning.

The principal provides clear educational leadership, liaises with the trustees and the board, is establishing systems and structures to meet the priority needs of the school, empowers staff to take on leadership roles and is willing to distribute significant leadership responsibilities. The deputy principals take an active role as part of the senior management team, have a significant on-the-ground presence, support the principal and take specific responsibilities for other areas including liaison with teachers, parents and year heads. The role of the new deputy principal as a full member of the senior management team has yet to be fully defined.

The way in which the senior management team supports leadership for learning and the holistic development of students is exemplified in many areas including support for a positive and caring learning environment.

The board of management maintains the buildings and grounds to a good standard overall and ensures the provision and maintenance of teaching aids and equipment. The school has made considerable investment in developing information and communication technology (ICT) facilities. Classrooms and specialist rooms are well maintained.

Leading school development

The board and principal provide a variety of learning opportunities for students and are proactive in establishing and maintaining a guiding vision for the school. In line with the principles of partnership and collaboration between all stakeholders, the board welcomes the ongoing contribution of staff, parents and students to all aspects of school life.

The board has overseen the development of the school plan. There is a strong focus on creating a caring community, promoting partnership and SSE. There is a definite focus on improving teaching and learning. It is good that the board is actively pursuing plans for the development of the school infrastructure. Short, medium and long-term school priorities were outlined in the presentation from the board. These priorities should be integrated into the school development plan and shared with the school community. Whole-staff review and input to the school plan through focused thematic working groups is recommended.

The parents' association meets regularly with school management, is consulted with on relevant policies and supports ongoing school activities. The board and the principal value and support partnership, good relationships and communication with parents and the wider community; for example, there has been successful engagement with parents on the healthy eating survey. In the questionnaire responses, almost all parents agreed that there is a good atmosphere in the school and

that the school is well run. More widespread consultation with parents through the SSE process is advised to further fulfil parents' partnership and advisory role.

Those in leadership and management roles are aware of educational developments and of the school's changing needs and seek to respond to them. They see their relevance to the school and seek to use these changes constructively.

Developing leadership capacity

Opportunities are provided for students to assume leadership roles; for example the good *Cairdeas* programme, which assists with students' transition from primary to post-primary school and the democratically elected student council. There is an acknowledgement from students and school leaders of the need to place more emphasis on promoting the development of the student voice. Responses from student questionnaires and interactions with students support this. This should include greater opportunities for students to engage in decision making, consulting students on their own learning and purposefully promoting more substantial student responses during lessons.

School leaders, including the senior management team, have availed of recent training and recognise the importance of maintaining their own professional development.

There is evidence that the principal endeavours to build teachers' capacity to develop their teaching, learning and assessment practices. For the most part, the principal deploys teachers with a view to making good use of their specific strengths and skills. In a few instances, teacher deployment to particular class groups should be reviewed in the interests of utilising particular teacher skills to maximise student learning opportunities.

Teachers are encouraged to share their practice through peer collaborative review as a means of improving teaching and learning; this has been very successful in some instances. The challenge now is to build on this and to extend this culture at whole-school level.

Year heads effectively oversee the welfare of their year groups. Year heads reported that they are very well supported by senior management. Coordinators carry out their roles and duties very effectively. Junior cycle form tutors carry out a vital support for students in collaboration with year heads and senior management. There is very good evidence that teachers are aware of child protection procedures.

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

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed. It was satisfactory in most of the remaining lessons and was fair or weak in a small number of lessons.

Learner outcomes and experiences

In all lessons, there was a good atmosphere for learning, students were motivated to learn and showed high levels of respect toward their teachers and each other. Students' positive approach to classwork and homework had a significant impact on the quality of learning.

Students understood the value of participating productively in the tasks that were set for them and in contributing good answers to teachers' questions. They were very focused and able to work purposefully as individuals, in groups and as a class. Students experienced opportunities to develop key skills and developed a sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning. For the most part, students achieved the intended learning outcomes.

Students developed high levels of interest and participation in learning. In some lessons, students were enabled to reflect on their progress as learners. This was very effective and it was achieved by teachers using learning intentions as a means of assessing students' progress during and at the end of lessons, and by giving formative developmental feedback at relevant points during lessons.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

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 a significant minority of lessons that were predominately teacher-led, there was some scope for improvement in these aspects.

Teachers created orderly, secure learning environments based on affirmation and high expectations of students' behaviour. Lessons were generally very well prepared and delivered with enthusiasm. Activities, including think-pair-share, oral language development and investigation meaningfully supported student learning.

For the most part, teachers responded well to individual learning needs and they provided good assistance to students during group activities. In a small number of instances, there was a need for the teacher to provide greater in-class support that would progress learning for individuals.

In the majority of lessons, teachers used questioning effectively and continually checked for understanding. Best practice was observed when questioning reinforced and consolidated new learning and when it enabled students to think, explain and develop their understanding. In a small number of instances, better use of higher-order, probing and directed questioning and giving more time to students when answering would have deepened students' knowledge. In a few lessons, there was limited checking for understanding by the teacher and, consequently, little student engagement.

The use of assessment to support learning was good or very good in the majority of lessons. For the most part, teachers provided students with constructive developmental oral and written feedback on their work. Best practice was observed when students were made aware of their strengths and areas for development as learners and when they took responsibility for improving their work. While instances of exemplary assessment practices were noted, overall there is scope to further develop the quality and frequency of written feedback on students' work.

In some of the lessons observed, teachers collaboratively planned learning experiences and worked together to support students' with identified learning need, through the use of team teaching or small group learning settings.

3 IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Good progress is evident in the effective implementation of some recommendations made in previous inspection reports but there has been limited progress with other recommendations.

Leadership and Management

The issue regarding the maintenance of the science laboratories, associated services and storage of chemicals which are located in a shared facility owned by Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board (KCETB) was raised in previous inspection reports. Currently, notwithstanding the ongoing efforts of the board of management to solve this issue, maintenance is not in line with best practice and should be reviewed in the interests of health and safety.

Some subject plans are well developed, others require substantial development. The continued allocation of study periods on teachers' timetables was still an issue at the time of the evaluation. A Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy is in place and the school's full RSE programme is available on the school website. However, since the current RSE policy states that RSE is taught through Religious Education (RE) classes, there is a need to adjust this policy in order to clearly distinguish curricular provision for RSE in senior cycle as a distinct programme, which is unrelated to RE. Attendance monitoring and the teaching resources allocated to roll taking are still excessive. This needs to be addressed.

Teaching and Learning

Overall teachers have attended well to the implementation of many of the recommendations made in previous subject and programme evaluation reports. Improvements were noted in the development of students' language skills and in the use of co-operative learning. Areas still requiring attention in some lessons include: the use of active methodologies; assessment for learning practices and the provision of formative and developmental written feedback on homework assignments. These areas should be developed and embedded in whole-school practice.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

Those leading SSE engage with it as a structured process with a focus on improving teaching, learning and assessment. The current SSE focus on peer collaborative review, when fully embedded, will greatly support the sharing of best practice.

The principal and those leading SSE seek to use the SSE process as a means of managing change. The SSE team meets to review, assess and develop learning. The principal encourages staff to engage in collaborative review of their practice through SSE. This good practice is praiseworthy and should continue to be developed, integrated and extended. Integration of SSE at whole-school level requires improvement. Evidence from lesson observations and review of subject planning indicates that further work is required to fully embed assessment for learning and explicit literacy and numeracy supports in teachers' practice.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school's capacity for improvement is good. The school has the capacity to improve since a culture of review, improvement and self-evaluation has been established by school management in collaboration with teachers. It is very good that teachers work collaboratively on a number of teams which support student wellbeing and learning. 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 improving learning. SSE processes have been established and determined in the current school improvement plan (SIP), which is based on time-bound action plans and which focuses on prioritised outcomes to be achieved. Teachers are generally committed to remaining upskilled and are open to building collective expertise in the skills and approaches necessary to facilitate curricular reform and student learning for the future.

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 very positive report following the recent WSE MLL. Our mission states that academically, spiritually, physically and emotionally our students are encouraged to strive for all that is possible in the relentless pursuit of perfecting their individual gifts and talents. It was heartening to see that the inspectorate saw that this “mission is lived out in practice”. In particular we welcome recognition of the fact that “the board and senior management promote excellence in teaching and learning”, that we “promote a culture of learning” in St Kieran’s, that “very well-organised student support structures are in place “and that as a result our “students were very focused and able to work purposefully”. Finally an appreciation of the manner in which “in all lessons, there was a good atmosphere for learning, students were motivated to learn and showed high levels of respect towards their teachers and each other” is very affirming of the dedication and commitment of our students, staff, management and parents who all work so closely together to create this positive school environment.

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

In observing “since a culture of review, improvement and self-evaluation has been established by school management in collaboration with teachers” the inspectorate notes that “the school’s capacity for improvement is good”. In continuance, therefore, of this ongoing self-evaluation all recommendations will be integrated into the regular development and improvement so much part of the fabric of daily life in St Kieran’s College.

Work, which was already begun, is ongoing in the reviewing and updating of our posts of responsibility to continue to ensure they best promote leadership in learning. We are heartened by the ongoing response and enthusiasm of staff in this area. This resonates with the approach, recognised by the inspectorate, of management who “empowers staff to take on leadership roles and is willing to distribute significant leadership responsibilities”.

The Board will continue its pursuit, now many years in progress, for even better facilities on behalf of our students. We welcome, therefore, the inclusion of the school on the list of those who are to be in receipt of significant capital projects in the more immediate future and we look forward to working with the Department of Education and Skills in realising this long held dream. In the short term any and all works possible will, as always, be carried out on the science facilities.

The report recognises that “the principal and other school leaders are committed to junior cycle reform and have taken measures to help ensure [its] successful implementation”. Work is, therefore, ongoing, and collaboration taking place, to ensure that all subject plans best reflect the framework for the New Junior Cycle.

As was recognised by the inspectorate a review of study periods as part of the timetable structure has already begun and before the inspection was over all those study periods in the teachers’ timetables had been removed and the remaining work will be brought to a completion by the end of this academic year.

In endeavouring to extend the “very effective teaching, learning and assessment” observed by the inspectorate, work will be undertaken to continually promote more active methodologies, assessment for learning practices and formative developmental written feedback on assignments all undertaken within the framework of our ongoing SSE. This remains part of the observed “definite focus on improving teaching and learning” so much a part of St Kieran’s College.

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;