

**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>	The Abbey School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Station Road Co. Tipperary
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	65490L

**Date of Evaluation: 20 September 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
- 5.

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

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

Dates of inspection	18 - 20 September 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

The Abbey School is an all-boys post-primary school, which operates under the Edmund Rice School Trust (ERST). School history spans seven hundred years. The building dates to 1955, but was extended in 1979 and in 2003. Further development is pending. Current enrolment is 418. In addition to the Junior Cycle programme and the established Leaving Certificate programme, students have the option of participating in a Transition Year programme (TY), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Applied programme (LCA). A significant percentage of the teachers are past pupils.

### Summary of main findings and recommendations:

#### Findings

- Senior management strategically manages curriculum planning, constantly reviewing provision in the best interest of the students.
- As a result of good support for teachers' continuing professional development (CPD), there is positive incorporation, at individual classroom level, of innovative approaches to teaching and learning.
- In addition to the very good support and guidance provided by all staff to all students, a student support team is proving valuable in meeting the needs of students identified as requiring specific supports and interventions.
- Senior management, with the support and assistance of the board of management, very effectively manages the school, teaching staff and students; leadership of teaching and learning is an area for development.
- An extremely positive learning atmosphere pertains throughout the school, and in the majority of lessons, the quality of teaching ranged from very good to good; the further development of formative assessment would be beneficial.
- The school has engaged with school self-evaluation (SSE), with work being undertaken in the areas of literacy and numeracy, but there is scope for development in implementing SSE processes.

#### Recommendations

- Both the board and senior management should take a lead role in whole-school planning for the further enhancement of teaching and learning across the school, and this work should be influenced by current Department of Education and Skills priorities, informed by teachers'

formal reflective enquiry, and supported by a systematic and incremental CPD plan and programme for both management and teachers.

- A whole-school approach to the use of formative assessment merits consideration, particularly in light of the Framework for Junior Cycle.
- All concerned, both management and teachers, should familiarise themselves with and fully implement current SSE requirements, as set out in *Circular 0040/2016 - Continuing Implementation of School Self-Evaluation 2016-2020*.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1 QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

#### Leading learning and teaching

Senior management strategically manages curriculum planning, constantly reviewing provision in the best interest of the students. The recent addition of Music and the reintroduction of LCA are but two examples that support this finding.

A broad and balanced curriculum is on offer. A large range of subjects is provided, and subject choice systems seek to ensure that students' preferences are well accommodated. Students are well supported in making informed choices through, for example, the provision of subject sampling in both first year and TY. The timetable demonstrates sound planning principles, and class organisation is commendably based on mixed ability. All of this signals the school's commitment to inclusion and equality of opportunity.

With a view to enhancing students' learning experiences, and in order to support their holistic development, teachers provide a comprehensive programme of co-curricular and extracurricular activities respectively.

Senior management supports teachers' engagement in subject-specific and programme-related CPD. Whole-staff CPD is also accommodated. Lesson observations demonstrated that as a result, there is good incorporation, at individual classroom level, of new approaches to teaching and learning. However, a co-ordinated whole-staff approach was not apparent, and this is identified as an aspect that senior management should lead. In due course, once priority areas in relation to enhancing teaching and learning have been agreed, it is recommended that a relevant whole-staff CPD schedule be designed and accommodated.

Admissions, transition and induction procedures are very thorough. Much thought has been given to the introduction of approaches designed to ease the anxieties associated with starting secondary school including, for example, a unique, school-specific *A to Z Guide for Students and Parents*. In addition to routine duties, the special-needs assistants (SNAs) are empowered to provide very valuable support to students in need at this important point of transition. It is clear that the SNAs fully embrace this opportunity, as well as the associated challenges.

All staff recognise the role that they play in the management and leadership of students, with the deputy principal, year heads and class tutors playing significant roles. Essential aspects such as student attendance and behaviour are, therefore, well monitored and managed. Related communication between all parties is most effective, benefitting greatly from a school atmosphere that is anchored in high levels of co-operation and collegiality. Year heads assume a key leadership role linked to a comprehensive tracking of students' progression and attainment. Working collaboratively with the students, they identify the supports that students need in order to further progress and achieve. It is suggested that regular assemblies led by year heads, alongside a well-planned, weekly tutor class, could make a valuable contribution to student management and leadership. Students' participation and achievements are acknowledged daily, and also through the annual merit awards.

A student support team, and a related weekly meeting, is proving valuable in ensuring adequate provision of support for students. The approach to the provision of guidance is well balanced and supports students' educational, vocational and personal needs. Provision of timetabled educational and vocational preparation and Guidance in senior cycle, and the provision of inputs in junior cycle as deemed important and necessary, are noted as hugely beneficial.

The school is being proactive in relation to addressing the key recommendations contained in the evaluation report that followed the recent Special Educational Needs (SEN) evaluation.

### **Managing the organisation**

The board provides effective management, and its work benefits greatly from the members' collectively diverse range of experiences and qualifications, as the latter informs and influences discussions and consensual decision making. It is properly and democratically constituted and members understand the role, responsibilities and statutory obligations of a board.

Minutes demonstrate that the board is a reflective, solution-focused entity. Discussion with members indicated that the board is: very supportive of the senior management team; committed to improvement; aware of the need to provide a comprehensive curriculum; supports teachers' desire to enhance expertise through CPD; and keenly aware of maintaining the school's person-centred culture.

The board is very conscious of the potentially positive impact of maintaining, updating and developing the school building, and associated outcomes are positive, including the imminent construction of a sports hall. This work has been intensive, both in terms of time and energy, and members are ready now to divert their attention to other developmental priorities.

The board is aware of the school's developmental priorities, but it is recommended that the board ensure greater emphasis into the future on initiatives which will have a direct impact on teaching and learning, including, for example, School Self-Evaluation (SSE) and the Framework for Junior Cycle. It is recommended, with reference to section 20 of The Education Act, 1998 that the board prepare and circulate an annual report to parents.

The board is involved in policy development and review, and a relatively comprehensive suite of policies exists. It is recommended that the admissions policy be reviewed, with particular consideration given to aspects that may suggest conditional enrolment. At the earliest possible opportunity, the board should provide for the ratification of the updated anti-bullying policy, and board members should ensure that termly reports are provided by the principal to the board. It is strongly suggested that ratification and review dates be provided on policies, and that a schedule of policy review be developed. It is advised that Department templates, sample policies and related guides be consulted as part of any policy review. The board is reminded that, in addition to the child protection policy, both the anti-bullying policy and the health and safety policy require annual review. Publication of policies on the school website needs further consideration.

The principal and deputy principal form a very effective senior management team. They demonstrate a complementary partnership and work well together. A team approach prevails, and high levels of mutual support for one another are evident. Both are accessible to all, and both maintain a visible presence in the school at pivotal times in the day. Daily meetings support their informed and considered responses to day-to-day events.

Senior management's person-centred management style helps to sustain what was described by the teachers as a "healthy and happy community". Staff feel consulted, informed and valued. Communication is most effective, with many mechanisms in place to support both the giving and receiving of information and feedback. Scheduled, weekly meetings are noted by staff as particularly important in terms of fostering a team approach and promoting consistency.

Overall, provision for specialist subjects is appropriate. The school has continually sought to keep up-to-date in terms of information and communications technology (ICT); classrooms are well equipped and internet access is very good. In the next review of the health and safety policy, specialist subject departments should complete their own risk assessments for inclusion in the policy. The plan to achieve Green Flag status is fully encouraged.

Strong links have been forged with many organisations and agencies, both local and national, all of which seek to enhance student learning and the promotion and support of students' development and wellbeing.

Questionnaires administered to students, parents and teachers as part of this evaluation, demonstrate high satisfaction levels with the school.

### **Leading school development**

Both management and teachers have an in-depth understanding of and appreciation for the school's unique traditions and culture, and work to ensure that the positive aspects of both are maintained and lived out.

Much work has been undertaken in relation to development planning. It would be valuable at this point to draw together, in one single document, namely the school plan, all resulting documentation. The permanent section of the plan should contain details of the school profile, mission, and policies, while the developmental section of the plan should contain action planning related to priorities.

The task group approach, which proved so successful in the recent posts of responsibility review, should inform and shape all work linked to future development and improvement. To support the work of task groups, action planning related to identified priorities should be embedded.

Communication with parents is very effective, benefitting from a myriad of communication modes. Parents spoke favourably about the accessibility of management and staff, the regularity of reporting on students' progress and achievement, and the high-quality newsletters. The members of the parents' council described feeling included and informed, and they believe that this is the reason why a relatively high number of parents attend the regularly convened meetings. It was very clear from discussions with council members that they play an active role in school life, and that their contribution is both valuable and valued.

### **Developing leadership capacity**

Delegation to all interested parties is facilitated, including post holders and non-post holders, and staff feel trusted and empowered. Staff are strongly committed to all assigned roles and responsibilities and carry out associated tasks in an efficient and effective manner.

Students are given the opportunity to be members of the students' council. Democratic principles inform its formation, and good systems support its organisation and operation. From discussions held with students during the evaluation, there is a clear sense that they could be further mobilised to play an even more significant role in school life.

### **Child Protection Procedures**

Confirmation was provided that the board 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**

In the majority of lessons, the quality of teaching ranged from very good to good, and there was ample evidence of student learning. In a number of lessons, elements of teachers' practice were noted as outstanding. In a significant minority of lessons, essential areas for improvement were identified, and these should be addressed so that student learning is enhanced.

### **Learner outcomes and experiences**

An extremely positive learning atmosphere pertains throughout the school, one founded on very high levels of mutual respect and regard. Care and concern for the student and his learning was apparent.

Students demonstrated an enjoyment of learning coupled with a motivation to achieve. They remained curious and attentive throughout lessons. Almost all teachers demonstrated high expectations with regard to participation and learning, and in these instances, students were appropriately challenged.

Classroom climate was most positive, borne out by the finding that students were: comfortable to ask questions; willing to offer an opinion or comment; and happy to risk incorrect responses. Teachers were appropriately generous in their encouragement, acknowledgement and affirmation.

In a minority of lessons, students were required to engage with both self-assessment and peer assessment. At times, students were asked simply to identify a positive feature and a suggested area for development in the work that they were assessing. On another occasion, the teacher began by discussing the features of what constitutes high quality work, and then students used this information to evaluate and mark the work of a peer. This is noted as excellent practice.

Rooms were largely print-rich, often displaying good quality student work alongside inspiring teacher-curated displays.

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

Teachers were well prepared for lessons, and a range of quality resources had often been sourced or created. The lesson plan was generally shared with students, although the emphasis was on content to be covered as opposed to student learning. It is recommended that teachers' understanding and subsequent use of learning intentions be strengthened.

Students' prior learning and experiences were utilised to introduce or refine new concepts and skills. In most lessons, teachers' explanations were very clear, accompanied at times by valuable use of the whiteboard, well-executed demonstrations and high-quality visuals. Overall, lessons were highly student centred. Best practice was where a variety of requirements was placed on students. Questioning was noted as a key inclusion strategy. Best practice, as observed, was when there was: equal distribution; differentiation; promotion of higher-order thinking; adequate wait time; no chorus answering; encouragement, acknowledgement and prompting.

It is positive that in the majority of lessons, co-operative learning was facilitated, although it was most effective where it was obvious that the approach is used regularly. In general, the approach adopted was one which saw groups of students being given the opportunity to simply discuss an aspect of the lesson. Best practice, as observed on occasion, and which resulted in more meaningful and productive collaboration, included: the provision of clear participation guidelines by the teacher; teacher monitoring of engagement, with the provision of support as necessary; when students were facilitated to provide valuable input to a subsequent whole-class discussion; the identification, agreement and logging of key learning. This best practice should be adopted to a greater extent across lessons, in particular for the additional opportunities it provides to differentiate student learning and to develop key skills. Teachers are also encouraged to explore the many strategies associated with co-operative learning.

Notetaking was observed in some lessons and, on occasion, it was effective. This was where it followed on from whole-class discussion, teacher explanation and subsequent presentation, and where it emphasised key information. That said, note-making is recommended as an alternative to notetaking as it promotes greater student engagement with subject matter and a deeper understanding of related concepts and information.

Formative assessment strategies were utilised in some lessons. It is recommended that a whole-school approach to the use of formative assessment be considered. In time, this should build to the full inclusion, by all staff, of learning intentions, criteria for success, quality questioning, self and peer assessment and, oral and written formative feedback.

Due attention was paid to the monitoring and correction of previously assigned homework activities. Homework designed to deepen understanding and learning supported the consolidation of in-class learning.

Commendably, in the context of the school's literacy plan, the teaching of subject-specific terminology was apparent. Where appropriate, there was also a strong focus on the development of examination technique.

ICT was employed in almost all lessons. Its primary use was as a presentation technology; therefore, it would be valuable to develop a vision for use of ICT in the classroom. Electronic presentations were effective when they were rich on visuals, where text was kept to a minimum, and when key points or concepts were highlighted. When observed, animations were very valuable in supporting students' understanding of difficult concepts.

The subject department structure is supporting the development of a common approach to the assessment of students' progress and achievement.

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

#### **Leadership and Management**

Senior management, in conjunction with the board and the teachers, has worked to address all recommendations pertaining to leadership and management provided in previous evaluations. This includes recommendations made in the 2006 whole-school evaluation report relating to curricular planning, timetabling, guidance planning, resourcing, and health and safety. It also includes those provided in the SEN, geography and physical education (PE) reports, relating to planning, timetabling and deployment respectively.

#### **Teaching and Learning**

Work to develop or improve aspects of teaching and learning identified in previous subject inspection reports has either been completed, is underway or is planned. A small number of recommendations remain to be addressed. These include: the approach to the reporting of progress in PE, and the assessment of progress and achievement in PE in both third year and senior cycle. All subject departments should consider the relevance of any teaching and learning findings and recommendations offered in evaluation reports.

In conclusion, all concerned give serious consideration to the findings and recommendations of reports provided by the Inspectorate, and improvements are apparent.

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

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

The school has engaged with School Self-Evaluation (SSE), with work being undertaken in the areas of literacy and numeracy but, overall, it is an area of work where there is scope for development.

Some members of staff do not appear to link literacy and numeracy with SSE. Simultaneously, some teachers appear to be unfamiliar with related targets, and appear unsure about the contribution that agreed strategies have made to students' overall literacy or numeracy development. It is evident, therefore, that while teachers are engaging with SSE, the process is not fully understood by all and its potential impact is not fully recognised.

It is recommended that all concerned familiarise themselves with current SSE requirements, as set out in *Circular 0040/2016 - Continuing Implementation of School Self-Evaluation 2016-2020*. With a view to supporting deeper understanding of and engagement with the process, consideration ought to be given to the establishment of an SSE team. Furthermore, it would be valuable to avail of the supports available to schools to help with the required implementation and embedding of SSE including, for example, the Inspectorate's publication entitled *Looking at Our School 2016 – A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools*, Inspectorate advisory visits, and the Department's dedicated website.

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

The school's engagement with and response to external evaluation, demonstrates that there is a clear openness to feedback and a willingness to embrace change. Furthermore, it is evident that there is a desire and capacity to improve.

Much evidence was gathered over the course of the evaluation to indicate that review and evaluation specific to teaching and learning is ongoing. Whilst acknowledging the change and development that has been inspired by personal reflection, or that has been identified through conversation and consultation, the overall approach to this valuable work needs to be formalised. Consideration should be given, therefore, to the further development of tools and structures designed to support and promote formal reflective enquiry relevant to teaching and learning, be that at the level of the individual teacher, the subject department, or the whole staff. SSE will also support this, and the Framework for Junior Cycle should inform this work. It is further suggested that the resulting evidence would support the identification of meaningful targets, the design of actions that would promote the desired change, and the development of realistic improvement plans. It is also suggested that such review needs to be more inclusive of student voice, and as relevant also, parent voice.

### 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
<b>Very Good</b>	<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
<b>Good</b>	<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
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<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
<b>Fair</b>	<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
<b>Weak</b>	<i>Weak</i> applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;

## **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

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

The Board of Management very much welcomes the findings of the WSE-MLL inspection Report. We are very pleased that the many extremely positive activities and relationships that exist in the Abbey were recognised in the report.

In particular, we acknowledge the recognition of the school's:

- commitment to inclusion and equality of opportunity
- the school's person-centred culture
- the extremely positive learning atmosphere throughout the school
- the very good support and guidance provided by all staff to all students
- the school's willingness to embrace change, to continually improve and implement the recommendations of previous inspections
- the high satisfaction levels amongst the students and parents with the school
- that students demonstrated an enjoyment of learning coupled with a motivation to achieve.

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

#### **Since the inspection**

Having considered the findings and recommendations of the report and consulted with the staff, the Board has advertised for a new Assistant Principal whose responsibilities include Junior Cycle Reform coordination and the roll out of a CPD plan for management and staff. A whole school approach to formative assessment will be a priority for this position.

The Board of management has held a meeting following the inspection to review and approve new policies in the following areas:

- School Admissions Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- School Attendance Strategy

The Board of Management and senior management are very committed to fostering leadership within the teaching staff to drive future initiatives in teaching and learning. The school is in the initial stages of participation in the Droichead induction programme which also provides opportunities to further develop leadership at middle management level.

#### **Into the future**

A second Assistant Principal will also be advertised with responsibility for School Self Evaluation.

These two post holders in conjunction with senior management and a selection of non-post holders will form the SSE team which will drive improvements in **teaching and learning across the school into the future.**