An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / **School name**	Mountrath Community School
Seoladh na scoile / **School address**	Dysartbeigh Mountrath Co. Laois
Uimhir rolla / **Roll number**	91550B

Date of Evaluation: 26-10-2017

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 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	26-10-2017
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with Board of Management • Meetings with principal and deputy principals • Meetings with key staff • Review of relevant documents • Student focus-group interview	• 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 leadership team, board of management and teachers

School context

Mountrath Community School, founded in 2009, caters for students from a large rural hinterland and the town of Mountrath. Currently, 764 students from a range of socio-economic backgrounds are enrolled. A broad curriculum, including an optional Transition Year (TY), is offered to students.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The senior leadership team works hard to effectively manage the day-to-day operation of the school; post holders work effectively, although their leadership role is understated; and there is a high rate of staff volunteerism.
- A high-quality student care system effectively monitors and supports students.
- Policy development and leadership of learning are underdeveloped at board level.
- School self-evaluation (SSE) processes are underused in the school improvement process.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good to very good in the majority of lessons observed.

Recommendations

- The leadership role of post holders should be exercised through leading the implementation of developments in teaching and learning.
- The board should enhance its leadership and oversight role through leading learning and through a programme of policy development and review.
- The process of SSE should be developed and applied as a means of improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- The development of aspects of the teaching and learning process should be progressed through the work of collaborative subject departments.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1 QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

Senior school leadership works hard to provide effective leadership of learning and teaching. However, much time has been taken up in dealing with legacy issues. A new senior leadership team was appointed three years ago and an additional deputy principal was recently appointed. The senior leadership team is now in a position to promote a culture of school improvement, a process which has already started.

A number of initiatives are underway both at whole-school and classroom level, supported by positive staff engagement in a range of continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities. The school's engagement with Forbairt exemplifies a positive approach to improving teaching and learning. Teachers are encouraged to collaborate with colleagues through active subject department structures, to share expertise and to plan for how classroom improvements can most effectively be implemented.

The school is very inclusive and provides a broad curriculum, designed to meet the needs of all students. However, the length of the school year for some students falls short of the requirements of circular M29/95 and this must be rectified. In TY, clearer and more precise programmes are needed in some subjects and the imbalance in provision whereby in excess of twenty-five percent of time is spent on one aspect should be reviewed. The use of substantial additional time for the link modules classes for some Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme students should be planned for, as should the modern European language module. Planned programmes for Relationships and Sexuality Education at both junior and senior cycle are needed. Both Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and Religious Education (RE) programmes should reflect this provision. An SPHE co-ordinator should be appointed and allocated class time should be used for the intended purpose.

The current model of special education provision is well managed. However, the support classes in junior cycle bring together students with very diverse needs and this is not always appropriate. Some students do not meet the criteria for inclusion in the support classes but still have significant needs. In addition, some of the support classes are akin to grinds in specific subjects. These classes should be used to support students' literacy and numeracy needs and to facilitate access to the curriculum. Issues in specific subjects should be broadly managed through appropriate differentiation in those subjects. The use of individual education plans should be extended to all SEN students. The range of interventions used should be reviewed and the most appropriate means used to support students. A core team should be established and should be involved in the review of processes and interventions.

A review is needed of some aspects of the otherwise good guidance provision. The subject-choice process for incoming first-year students and the guidance input into the transfer programme from primary school should be reviewed. Additional classroom support for third-year and fifth-year students should be provided while maintaining an appropriate balance between individual counselling and classroom contact. Collaboration with the school chaplain and guidance inputs to the LCVP programme and other specific areas should be described in the reviewed guidance plan.

The high-quality pastoral care system is one of the strengths of the school and this is acknowledged by parents and students. Extensive collaborative work underpins this quality. Students can be referred to out-of-school support agencies if circumstances demand. Substantial work is ongoing to promote positive mental health and the school has achieved an amber flag. Pastoral care procedures are

grounded in a number of policies. It is recommended that an overarching document be prepared to tie together all the diverse policies and procedures that comprise the care system.

There are issues that need to be investigated in relation to some specific subjects. Over thirty percent of students do not take a modern European language for the Leaving Certificate examination and the reduction in the proportion of students taking some subjects at senior level is also very high. It is recommended that the board put a formal structure in place to deal with the issues that emerge from analyses of outcomes in certificate examinations.

However, it is evident that the senior leadership team has high expectations of students' learning and promotes the setting of high expectations by teachers. CPD for teachers is strongly encouraged and supported; and an analysis of certificate examination results, prepared by senior leadership, is shared with subject departments.

Timetabling is very good. Deployment of teachers according to relevant qualifications, skills and experience is appropriate and teachers' time is well used. Time is made available for staff meetings, for the work of the year heads and the care team, and for both CPD and planning. The work of subject departments and collaboration amongst teachers are encouraged and supported by management and efforts are made to consult with staff to the greatest extent possible.

Managing the organisation

The overall effectiveness of management of the school is satisfactory, with many elements of good management practices evident. The recently appointed board of management is urged to access training, as a full board.

Required policies have been developed but most have still to be ratified and many are in need of review. A schedule of rolling reviews should be set up to ensure that all policies are reviewed and ratified. The adoption of a school plan and timeframes for the completion of this work should be agreed at an early date.

A number of specific changes are needed in existing policies and draft policies. The statement in the admissions policy on conditional enrolment of students with additional educational needs should be removed. The code of behaviour sets out high expectations for students. However, more detail is needed on promoting positive student behaviour. Greater use of students' journals to promote positive behaviour is also recommended. The statement in the code of behaviour, that an out-of-school suspension may be imposed pending the resolution of an issue, should be removed. The statement that students can be refused entry the following year for failure to complete end-of-year examinations should also be removed and references should be included to the anti-bullying, homework and substance-use policies. The internet acceptable-user policy should be extended to cover all users of the school's ICT systems.

The process of requesting payments from parents should be re-examined. The school is not in keeping with the terms of circular 0065/2010 in respect of some charges levied and this needs to be remedied. The annual re-enrolment of students serves no clear purpose and should be stopped or, if deemed to be necessary, should not be linked to payments. There should be no threat of the loss of a place in the school for not re-enrolling.

The principal and deputy principals work very hard to manage and oversee the smooth day-to-day running of the school. They have a partnership approach to their work and communicate very effectively. They maintain a high visibility on the school corridors, assisting staff in maintaining the

very good order that is prevalent throughout the school. The senior leadership team has a vision for school development and this needs to be clearly articulated and shared with all partners.

It is notable that, with the considerable support of interested and dedicated teachers, the senior leadership team is driving the process of school improvement, focussing on pedagogy. This process is a model of how shared goals and good communication can lead to very positive and valuable improvement work taking place.

The school's website has the potential to be used for improving communications with all partners and for the provision of information. However, it is out of date and its use should be reviewed in the context of the ongoing development of the school app.

A recent review of the schedule of posts of responsibility has ensured that posts are meeting the needs of the school. Most post holders conscientiously carry out a wide range of pastoral and administrative functions. The leadership aspect of this layer of management should be further developed, to support the teaching and learning initiatives, in a defined and practical way. It is recommended that post holders provide detailed annual written reports to senior leadership which should form the basis of discussions regarding the further development of posts.

Teaching staff demonstrated a commendable level of volunteerism. Examples include the role of class tutor, in the work of the teaching and learning group, and in the provision of co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities in a wide variety of areas to address students' sporting, social, moral and academic development.

Leadership opportunities for students are very well managed through the representative students' council which liaises with school management on bringing about improvements for students; the *Meitheal* group provides invaluable support to incoming first-year students; and the school prefects who support teachers and school management in a variety of areas.

School accommodation is maintained to a high standard. Appropriate and up-to-date high-quality resources are available to support teaching and learning. The school has engaged with the Green Schools initiative and it is recommended that greater student participation be encouraged.

Leading school development

The outgoing board has included the development of teaching and learning as a priority and much work has taken place. It has also prioritised the encouragement of peer review and stronger collaboration amongst teachers. However, there is little evidence of any structures to progress this priority. It is recommended that the new board re-examines priorities in relation to teaching and learning and engage with the six-step SSE process in progressing those areas chosen for further development. The board should ensure an evidence-based approach to improvement is adopted, using data from analyses of in-house and certificate examination results and other sources, and linking in with the outcomes of the ongoing CPD. This process should be implemented through the subject planning process and subject co-ordinators should submit plans and report annually on progress.

In addition, the board should examine a means of improving communications with all partners, and especially with staff, in the interests of supporting school improvement.

An active parents' council works in partnership with the school to promote the involvement and interests of parents. There is good communication with the school leadership team and the parents' council is consulted on policy development.

Developing leadership capacity

Many good examples of teamwork are evident, including the literacy and numeracy teams, the care team, the SEN team and the teamwork evident amongst the year heads. The quality of teamwork at subject department level is disappointing and needs to be revisited within the context of the agenda for improvement. The role of subject department co-ordinator provides a significant leadership opportunity and should be further developed.

The chairing of staff meetings by teachers and the manner in which individuals and groups take on responsibility for managing extra-curricular activities, exemplifies both teamwork and distributed leadership. A positive appreciation was expressed amongst staff in general of senior leaderships' support for teachers who come to them with suggestions for a variety of initiatives.

Confirmation was provided that the board of management has formally adopted the child protection procedures for primary and post-primary schools without modification and that the school is compliant with the requirements of the child protection procedures for primary and post-primary schools.

2 QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Learner outcomes and experiences

The quality of teaching and learning in the majority of lessons was good or very good. A variety of features characterised the best lessons which were very student centred and active-learning methodologies were prominent. The quality of student-teacher and student-student interaction in these lessons was also very high.

Group and pair work were evident in many lessons, especially in the more practical lessons. This was at its best when there were clear and well-understood tasks for students, backed up by probing questions and very good teacher support. Some good examples were observed of peer assessment, engaging and informing students and helping to set high expectations. Overall, however, there is scope to make more use of these techniques.

Students mostly achieved the learning intentions of lessons. However, in quite a few lessons these were not shared with students or were not reviewed at the close of the lesson. This should be rectified.

The quality of literacy and numeracy interventions was uneven. However, some very good literacy practices were observed in a few lessons and very good numeracy practices in some more practical lessons. Overall, there is scope to get students to speak more about their learning or to present to their peers, opening up opportunities to enhance their literacy and numeracy skills development.

Teachers had high expectations of students in most lessons and students were mostly well challenged. Students engaged very well and worked purposefully. Classroom interactions were at all times respectful and inclusive. Students, in most lessons, were affirmed and encouraged for their efforts and a positive learning atmosphere was evident in almost all classrooms.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

The use of good quality questioning techniques was evident in many lessons. Some good differentiation was achieved through the use of a good mix of lower-order questions and more challenging higher order questions. Some very good examples of building on students' responses to further develop the lesson were also observed.

Most differentiation was achieved by teachers moving through the classrooms, evaluating the work of individual students and supporting them as necessary. In general, there is scope to differentiate learning intentions and in particular to cater more for the needs of the exceptionally able.

A range of assessment approaches was observed, oral assessment being particularly good in some lessons. Written developmental feedback, on students' written work, was uneven although some very good examples were observed and there is a need to increase the frequency of such feedback in most subjects.

Classroom management was uniformly very good. Teachers were well motivated and appropriate resources were in place for lessons. A range of appropriate teaching methodologies was well used and good work to integrate the use of resources was evident. Lessons were generally well structured with clear opening, developmental and closing phases. The closing review was not sufficiently catered for in some cases or was missing entirely. Students' prior learning and their interests and experiences were well used in a number of lessons as starting points.

Long-term and short-term curricular plans are in place for most subjects but these tend to be content driven and focussed on scheduling course delivery. There is little collaborative engagement evident on pedagogical matters. For those subjects concerned, folders show little evidence of planning for new junior cycle approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, with no references to learning outcomes. For subjects in general, there is little in department folders to reflect the SSE work on literacy and numeracy, or the current teaching and learning initiatives. Work in relation to evidence-based improvement is entirely absent.

There is substantial scope for a more pedagogy-based conversation. The promotion of improved teaching and learning should be enhanced through subject department planning. Syllabus statements and specifications should form the basis of this planning. Subject departments should analyse their own certificate examination results and report annually to senior leadership on their work towards evidence-based improvement.

The corridors of the school are well used to display photographs of school-related activities, to publicise upcoming events, and to celebrate success. However, classroom displays are somewhat inconsistent and there is scope to make greater use of classroom walls to display students' work. Students' successes are celebrated in a number of ways, including the end-of-year awards ceremonies, and TY and sixth-year graduation events.

3 IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

A number of prior recommendations have been successfully implemented including the introduction of LCA and the formation of a planning team although, due to industrial relations issues, this has been unable to meet. The board has actively supported CPD provision through providing funding for initiatives in relation to teaching and learning.

In addition, attempts were made to introduce an adult education programme. However, sustaining this was not feasible due to costs and local circumstances. The academic monitoring project was dropped but the use of school management software is being examined as a means of reinstating this project.

Teaching and Learning

Collaborative planning for teaching and learning still needs to be prioritised in subject departments. There is still considerable scope to consistently provide developmental written feedback on students' written work. The sharing of learning intentions is another area of inconsistent practice with further development needed.

It is recommended that the school put in place a formal structures to implement recommendations from inspection reports. Implications of recommendations for other subject departments should be examined and, where relevant, implemented as part of the school improvement process.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school has engaged to a limited extent in SSE and both literacy and numeracy plans have been prepared. In spite of much effort, these are scantly reflected in classroom practice or in subject planning folders. The implementation of these should be revisited and the use of the wonderful school library should be documented in the literacy strategy.

The current initiatives in teaching and learning should be underpinned by SSE processes to improve target setting, monitoring and evaluation, and a short report and school improvement plan should be put in place and shared with the school community. A means by which subject departments could engage with and enhance the implementation of the plan should be explored.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

A strong desire has been expressed, at all levels, to bring about school improvement. The quality of expertise and experience available within the school is very high. The senior leadership team has a vision for the development of teaching and learning and staff have positively acknowledged this. Ultimately, the capacity for school improvement rests on the willingness of all concerned to engage and work together for the benefit of the students.

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	*Very good* 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 *outstanding* 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	*Good* 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 *very good* standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	*Satisfactory* 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	*Fair* 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	*Weak* 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 would like to the many strengths of Mountrath Community School as identified by the MLL. The Board would also like to acknowledge the very positive Teacher, Parent and Student Surveys.

The Board acknowledges the quality of the LCA students and the LCA team, as stated by the Inspectorate to Staff, the School Leadership Team and the Board. The Board acknowledges the areas for improvement as identified and will endeavor to address these issues accordingly. The report, which will serve as a measuring point in the SSE process.

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

The Board acknowledges the many positives that emerged from the report.

- The effective management of the school on a day to day basis.
- The number of CPD opportunities concentrating on Pedagogy offered to staff by the Board.
- The school's positive approach to Teaching and Learning.
- The good management of the provision of SEN
- The very good Timetabling provision.
- The good communication between the active Parents' Council and the school Leadership team.
- The provision of leadership opportunities for both teaching staff and students.
- The high quality of up to date and appropriate resources to support Teaching and Learning.
- The development of the school library.

The Board is particularly pleased to acknowledge
- The good to very good quality of the Teaching and Learning.
- The very high quality of student/teacher interaction
- The high-quality pastoral care system.
- The high quality of expertise and experience within the school.
- The very good order that is prevalent throughout the school
- The commendable level of teacher volunteerism.

The Board acknowledges the areas for improvement as identified and will endeavor to address these issues accordingly. The report will serve as a measuring point in the SSE process.

The following areas will be reviewed and addressed by the Board:

- The need to review the provision of RSE, SPHE and Guidance classes.
- The need to review the number of students taking language at senior level
- The need to develop the leadership aspect of the post-holder layer of management with specific regard to the development of Teaching and Learning.
- The need to review the requesting of payments from parents.
- The need to take on board the recommendations for Teaching and Learning.
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The following areas have already been or are being currently addressed:

- The need to update some policies.
- The need for training of the new Board.
- The need to amend the Admissions Policy and the Code of Behaviour.
- The need to underpin the current initiatives in teaching and learning using the SSE processes to improve target setting, monitoring and evaluation.
- The need to share the school improvement plan with the school community.
- The need to develop subject departments more prioritising collaborative planning for teaching and learning in subject departments.