An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Loreto Abbey Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Dalkey Co Dublin
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	60130C

Date of Evaluation: 15-11-2018

An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

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.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.
4. The Child Safeguarding Statement meets the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017.
5. The records of the last three board of management meetings record a child protection oversight report that meet the requirements of the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary schools 2017.
6. The board of management has ensured that arrangements are in place to provide information to all school personnel on the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2017
7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE, Wellbeing).
8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	13, 14, 15-11-2018
Inspection activities undertaken: • Meeting with board of management • Meetings with principal and deputy principal • 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 management team, board of management and teachers

School context

Loreto Abbey School is a fee-charging voluntary secondary school for girls under the trusteeship of the Loreto Education Trust. There are currently 642 students enrolled. It provides the Junior Cycle programme, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- A highly committed and effective board of management gives clear direction and support to the senior management team and is facilitative of curriculum change and staff development.
- Senior management leads and manages the school very effectively with a clear shared vision for school development and improvement.
- The quality of teaching and learning was effective overall with instances of effective or very effective practice noted in most lessons; some areas for improvement were identified in relation to the further development of formative assessment and differentiation in a minority of lessons.
- Learners enjoyed their lessons, demonstrated very positive attitudes to learning and worked well together; however, in some lessons opportunities to further challenge students with higher-order questions were not always fully exploited.
- A culture of development and innovation exists in the school and many teachers have engaged with teaching and learning initiatives and professional collaborative strategies which have enhanced learner experiences and outcomes.
- The school has engaged very well with the school self-evaluation (SSE) process and there has been good progress with the implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations; capacity for improvement is very good and the school community is continuously striving to improve.

Recommendations

- Senior management and staff should further develop formative assessment and differentiation practices by engaging in continuing professional development (CPD) and building on the highly effective practice observed in some lessons.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

Leadership of learning and teaching is very good. The principal is a motivating leader and has high expectations of staff and students for effective teaching and learning. Senior management is aware of the challenges involved in curriculum change and is building capacity among staff. Teachers are encouraged and facilitated to engage with CPD with a view to enriching students' and teachers' learning. Their commitment to improvement is evidenced by a culture of engagement with pilot programmes, including Senior Cycle review. Teachers work well together, share resources and collaborate on a range of projects, including the team-teaching and the peer-observation projects. There is good engagement with and implementation of the Junior Cycle programme. The board of management is very supportive of curriculum change and staff development and supports individual staff members engaging in further relevant studies.

The principal and deputy principal work as a highly effective team, and run the school with a strong focus on improvement. They collaborate to lead action planning for improvement. One example of action planning is the newly introduced formative assessment system which seeks to encourage students to engage with corrections and take responsibility for their own work. Teachers participated in substantial CPD in a range of areas, including technology in the classroom and language teaching. Following this, additional language exchange programmes were established and a further exchange programme is planned. These exchanges build on the long established Spanish exchange programme. The exchanges provide TY students with an opportunity to spend up to a month abroad strengthening their language skills.

The school's curriculum is largely academic. LCVP is offered to senior cycle students and this broadens the breadth of provision. Within the school's resources, consideration should be given to broadening the scope of the academic curriculum to include a wider range of practical subjects to meet the needs of all students. The TY programme is availed of by almost all students. The TY programme is well established and both parents and students appreciated the positive learner experiences and outcomes. The TY programme provides a range of skills development, opportunities for learning through work experience and charitable endeavours, as well as co-curricular activities. Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Wellbeing are all priorities within the curriculum, and are delivered in line with guidelines.

Certificate examination results are analysed by management and staff and discussed by the board. Inspection reports are also discussed and the implementation of the recommendations is reviewed by the board.

The principal works effectively with the board and the trustees to implement the mission statement. The guiding vision and Loreto ethos is clearly communicated to all and was observed in action during the evaluation. A strength of the school is its inclusive ethos that is evident in the school community.

The school provides placements for Professional Masters of Education student teachers and is also involved in the Droichead programme. Newly appointed teachers reported that they were very well supported and provided with an induction programme.

Managing the organisation

The school is very effectively run. This was acknowledged by parents, teachers and students. A supportive, nurturing and positive atmosphere prevails and is evident in respectful and encouraging

interactions. Positive relationships exist between the school trustees, the board and senior management. The board and senior management are very aware of their statutory responsibilities.

A comprehensive school plan is in place including a school strategic plan. There is a systematic approach to policy development and review including a consultation phase with the staff, students and the parents' association. Board members take a commendable interest in school life, attending school ceremonies, masses, musicals and dramatic productions.

The school is very well maintained. A highly effective and attractive learning environment has been provided. In recent years, the board led infrastructural developments, including a sport's hall and the creative refurbishment of spaces to promote wellbeing and a love of reading. Future priorities for the board include developing an additional Astroturf pitch and updating the laboratories.

Senior management and staff are committed to providing a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities in the areas of sport, musical recitals and productions, the arts, including creative writing and debating, the sciences and languages. There is a key focus on social justice as evidenced through ongoing school initiatives and awards such as the Green Flag award and the Cycle against Suicide Ambassador Award.

An active parents' association meets regularly and effectively supports senior management and the school community. The association works to support parents by providing a range of targeted workshops and social events. There is a strong focus in all events on promoting communication between the school and parents.

Leading school development

School development is highly effective and is led competently by the principal and the board. The Inspectorate's quality framework, *Looking at our School,* is used as a means to identify and inform best practice and is referenced, together with the *Junior Cycle Framework* and the *National Digital Strategy*, in the school's strategic plan 2018-2023. The plan articulates a vision and a number of areas for further development, such as SSE, promoting student wellbeing and a digital strategy. It includes actions, timeframes, success criteria and responsibilities for implementation.

Senior management and staff provide a safe and caring environment for students where a holistic education is valued and learners are encouraged to engage in a wide range of sports and activities designed to support wellbeing. There are very good supports available to students when they transition from primary school. The student mentoring system which links each first-year student with a sixth-year student was reported to be highly effective by students and parents.

Students with additional education needs are supported by a motivated team for special education needs (SEN). Individual and small group withdrawal and team teaching are used to support students. The SEN department is effectively co-ordinated and staffed by a core group of teachers. The school is commendably inclusive and strives to meet the individual needs of all students.

A staff-student mentoring system was introduced a number of years ago for fifth and sixth-year students in order to track and guide them academically and personally and ensure that they are reaching their potential overall. This system is also designed to prepare students for third-level education.

Developing leadership capacity

The development of leadership capacity is a priority for senior management. The assistant principals, programme co-ordinator and post holders support senior management very effectively. Regular meetings are held between senior management and post holders. In implementing Circular 0003/2018, the school is encouraging leadership development and distributed leadership. There is

an emerging culture of innovation and creativity which amplified is by teacher collaboration and good planning. Teachers are encouraged to share their expertise and skills through presentations at staff meetings and delivering workshops, such as digital workshops. Teachers also make presentations to the board on aspects of their work such as wellbeing and digital literacy.

Students are afforded excellent opportunities to take leadership roles. There is a mentoring system for first-year students. There are two anti-bullying ambassadors in each year group who play a key role in bullying prevention. A SPHE support group has been established which advises teachers and management on areas for attention. Fifth and sixth-year students are working on an SPHE lesson plan to teach aspects of SPHE to first years. There is a very wide range of clubs and groups that students can join and which are in many instances led by the students themselves, such as the music groups and the Green school committee.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching and Learning

Twenty-three lessons were observed, covering core, optional, practical and non-examination subjects, and all programmes offered. Highly effective teaching and learning was noted in many lessons, and in some others there was scope for improvement. Overall, teaching and learning was effective.

Learner outcomes and experiences

In all lessons observed, students demonstrated a willingness to learn and a positive attitude to their work. The learning environment was nurturing and affirming, and encouraged students to apply themselves well. Their behaviour was exemplary, and they engaged very diligently with lesson topics and assigned tasks.

Lessons were characterised by positive and respectful interactions between the students and teachers, and also between students themselves when working together. Students clearly enjoyed active learning opportunities and working with others. Their ability and willingness to work co-operatively and to learn with and from each other represents a key junior cycle skill, and a key life skill, and is worth using and developing to the greatest extent possible.

In the highly effective lessons observed, students had opportunities to demonstrate their prior knowledge and to link it with new learning. Often this led to students asking questions and suggesting possible solutions, and showed how stimulating an inquiry-based approach can be, especially where students are highly motivated and well-informed.

Highly effective lessons also provided students with opportunities to exercise their considerable creativity, not only in the obvious artistic and creative disciplines but also, for example, in the sciences. Again, this is a founding principle and key skill in the junior cycle, and the opportunity to think and work creatively is a hallmark of a truly stimulating learning environment. Both the inquiry-based and creative approaches to learning are well worth promoting across the curriculum.

While many students contributed confidently to lessons, others showed a level of hesitancy, often but not exclusively in language lessons where, although possessing good vocabulary and understanding, they were reluctant to use the target language. Ways to engage students in purposeful dialogue with each other as well as with the teacher need to be identified. More generally, ways of creating a learning environment in which students are prepared to 'have a go' could be usefully discussed at whole-school level, with the involvement of students.

Students showed very good levels of organisation and readiness for work, coming to class well prepared, and getting down to the business of learning without delay. This contributed greatly to the prevailing atmosphere of productive and purposeful work. Students' copybooks and folders were well maintained and the general standard of presentation of work was very high. Students also

showed a good understanding of what formative assessment means for them, and how they can use feedback received to critique and improve their own work.

Given students' very positive dispositions to learning and their ability to apply themselves, it is worth considering how best the learning environment can be developed to encourage as many as possible to move from a place where learning is at a level of comfort to one where learning presents challenges which students are willing and enabled to meet. Students' own voices would be a valuable component of such an investigation.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

All lessons were characterised by the creation of an inclusive and positive learning environment built on mutual respect.

Teachers demonstrated very good subject knowledge and were able to call on it with ease in their presentation and explanation of topics. In highly effective lessons, teachers' enthusiasm for their subject was very evident. This brought a dynamism to the learner experience, and had a visible impact on students' engagement and enjoyment. The value of the teacher's role as a model of the engaged learner should therefore not be underestimated.

Almost all lessons were very well planned with clear learning intentions and resources selected to enhance the teaching and learning experience. The majority of lessons were explicitly shaped by learning intentions, which were displayed on the board and shared with students at the beginning of each lesson. Best practice was observed when the learning intentions were revisited during lessons, and used to review learning at lesson end.

In the most effective lessons, independent learning and the development of key skills were supported through well-planned and implemented individual and collaborative activities. Group work was most purposeful and productive when students were put into designated groups, given clear roles and instructions, and afforded opportunities for reflection and formative assessment at the end of the task. In some lessons, however, teachers talked over the task given, and this distracted students rather than supporting them in the development of independent learning skills. In the most effective lessons the teacher facilitated learning by moving around to individual groups to give focused support and direction as required.

Information and communication technology (ICT) was skilfully deployed in many lessons, but could have been used to better effect in other lessons to support learning. Highly effective practice was noted where the teacher skilfully used ICT to enhance learning, motivate the students and develop creative and analytical skills. The potential for ICT to be used to create learning experiences that develop skills and attitudes necessary for life-long learning was evident in such lessons. This invigorating and innovative approach to ICT in the classroom should extended throughout the school.

Teacher questioning was used to assess students' recall and progress, and, at a more skilful level, to guide and prompt students towards a deeper understanding of topics. This happened when teachers probed students' initial limited responses to stimulate more substantial engagement with the learning point, and challenged students to develop their answers, for example by providing a context. Best practice was noted where sufficient wait-time was given and where the questioning was targeted to individuals, rather than global questioning and group answering. This allowed for deeper engagement with the learning intentions, and extended the learner experience beyond the lesson.

In the highly effective lessons observed, the expectations for students' aptitude and prior knowledge were suitably high and the students demonstrated high levels of motivation and achievement. In a minority of lessons the pitch was below the students' stage of development, and students were not challenged to reach their potential. Best practice was observed when teachers ascertained what the

students already knew about a topic, and used that as scaffolding to move their learning forward, differentiating where necessary. It should be remembered that differentiation upwards as well as downwards is necessary to allow all students to reach their full potential as learners.

In the majority of lessons, oral feedback was central to formative assessment. Overall, there was good evidence of formative assessment found in the students' copybooks. The school is currently piloting a new method of formative assessment through the use of tailor-made formative assessment 'stickers'. There was clear evidence that teachers and students are aware of this initiative, and that teachers are beginning to use it as a method of providing constructive developmental written feedback. This initiative has the required support and encouragement of senior management and is highly commendable.

Teachers recognise that CPD and collaboration is key to their work. Teachers have engaged with many CPD opportunities in recent years and are sharing ideas and best practice through subject and whole-school meetings. An area that would be worth further focus on a whole-school level is the development of the democratic classroom, as a means of involving students as actively as possible in shaping their learning experiences. While this approach is at the heart of junior cycle reform, it is also entirely consistent with the philosophy of TY, and with key skills for the Leaving Certificate and for lifelong learning.

Subject departments effectively collaborate and meet regularly to identify and build on effective approaches. Many teachers are involved in a peer observation initiative in the school, and this is commended as it supports the sharing of highly effective practice and enhances the learning experience for all students.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

A WSE-MLL inspection took place in 2011. There has been good progress in relation to the recommendations made in that report. The admissions policy is reviewed every year and is in line with the Loreto Trust Board guidelines. There has been a review and restructuring of posts of responsibility. There is a common approach to programme and subject planning using collaborative meetings and a shared drive.

Teaching and Learning

Improvement in the following areas was recommended in the three subject inspections carried out since 2013: extension and development of schemes of work, development of literacy and numeracy strategies and further use of assessment for learning strategies. Commendably good or very good progress has been made in all of these areas. Additional use of on-line resources was also recommended and while this was observed in some lessons, it was an area for further development in others. ICT could be more fully exploited. The proposed digital strategy should help develop this.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school has engaged comprehensively with SSE since its inception. The development of the process and associated strategies have led to measurable improvements. Literary and numeracy strategies and initiatives are embedded; they are reviewed regularly to assess their effectiveness and impact on student engagement and progress. In promoting literacy, the library was developed, the school placed focus on the enjoyment of reading and the school achieved the Wellread National

Award. Currently, a creative writing group is encouraging students to express themselves through the medium of writing. The numeracy improvement plan was reviewed in 2018. Outcomes in numeracy show significant improvements in students' attitudes to Maths and attainment in problem solving. The current focus for SSE is on teachers' collective and collaborative practice. There is a clear understanding among senior management and staff of the principles of SSE and its beneficial impact on classroom and whole-school practice to enhance outcomes for learners.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

There is a culture of self-review and a continual focus on improvement. Senior management makes concerted efforts to stay abreast of national educational initiatives and oversee their implementation in a timely and focused way. Teachers were open to feedback from inspectors and discussions around progress and improvement. The comprehensive strategic plan identifies areas for improvement and development. The school has very good capacity for improvement.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management is pleased that the Loreto ethos was evident in action and was the guiding vision for the school. The supportive, nurturing and positive atmosphere commented on by the Inspectors is part of this vision and ethos.

Other strengths of the school included the very effective leadership and management of the school by the Principal, Deputy Principal and Board of Management. We are pleased that the quality of teaching and learning was recognised, along with the culture of innovation and creativity which is amplified by teacher collaboration and good planning.

We appreciate the recognition of the excellent opportunities for students to take leadership roles and the effective support to the school community of the Parents' Association.

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

Senior management and staff will address the recommendation concerning further development of formative assessment and differentiation practices in the next cycle of the school improvement plan.

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;