

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Castlerea Community School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Castlerea Co. Roscommon
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	91493P

Date of Evaluation: 25-01-2018



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	15 – 17 January 2018
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with board of management • Meetings with principal and deputy principal • Meetings with key staff • Review of relevant documents • Student focus-group interview 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with parents • Analysis of parent, student and teacher questionnaires • Observation of teaching and learning • Examination of students' work • Interaction with students • Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers

School context

Castlerea Community School was founded in 1993 as a result of the amalgamation of the two pre-existing post-primary schools in the town. The school draws its students from a predominantly rural area, with approximately nineteen feeder primary schools, and seven neighbouring post-primary schools. The school's context is therefore affected by the range of choice available to students within its hinterland. At post-primary level, because of this choice, students can potentially attend any of the eight schools within the region, leading to challenges in student recruitment. The large number of dispersed primary schools creates challenges in terms of maintaining communication and of ensuring integration of students when they enrol in the school.

The profile of students who are enrolled is diverse. At the time of the evaluation the enrolment stood at 352 students drawn from ten different nationalities. A key feature of the school is that it provides a wide curriculum to meet students' needs. In addition to junior cycle programmes the school offers the Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme, Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) programmes, and Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- School leadership and management are of a very high quality.
- The school staff has openly embraced change and its care for students is highly commendable.
- Parents and students expressed positive views about the school; there is scope for the school to engage more with parents and students.
- In almost all lessons, the quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good; in lessons where improvement was needed, further developing the use of active methodologies would have enhanced students' learning.
- Commendable progress has been made in implementing the recommendations from previous inspections; embedding the use of assessment for learning (AfL) practices is work that remains in progress.
- Through the school self-evaluation (SSE) process, good progress has made in developing literacy, numeracy and academic monitoring; however, ensuring a whole-staff approach to using measurable targets is needed.

Recommendations

- Parents and students should be more actively engaged as stakeholders and the school should systematically and frequently seek their views on key aspects of the school.
- Active methodologies should be used in all lessons and should be supported by assessment for learning practices which are implemented as part of a whole-staff approach.
- Enhancing teaching and learning through the use of information and communications technology (ICT) has been identified by the school as an area for development and this should be progressed as a priority under the aegis of the SSE process.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

School leadership and management are of very high quality. This manifests in the quality of care for students, which is very good. This care incorporates not just care of students at the social and emotional levels but also care for students' academic and cognitive development. For example, it was notable that students reported very positive views about how their teachers encourage them to do their best. The structures that are in place to support students are wholly suitable and are very well managed.

The supports provided for students are both informal and formal and span the areas of pastoral and academic. Students reported that there was always someone whom they could speak to if they had an issue. Indeed, observation of the interactions between students and their teachers showed that positive relationships were part of the fabric of school life. In terms of formal supports, the school has an extensive array of supports in place. These include initiatives such as a breakfast club and after-school study and also include counselling where it is required.

The holistic care of students extends to the wide range of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular learning opportunities available to them. Just one example is the very broad curriculum that the school provides. The school endeavours, within its resources, to provide as many subjects as students require and there is evident goodwill among staff members to support this. While the wide range of subjects is a significant strength of the school, it has large resource implications. There is a need for the board to initiate a curricular review and decide about the number of students that are needed for a viable class grouping as well as to review how programmes such as study skills are delivered.

The work done in preparing for the new junior cycle programme is wholly commendable. In addition, good work has been done in planning for the well-being programme for students. The provision for students with special educational needs is of a very high standard and is well co-ordinated. It is commendable that the school offers a very wide range of learning options for its diverse student cohort: QQI level 1 and level 2 programmes; L2LPs and post-leaving certificate courses.

Staff continuing professional development (CPD) is well supported by the school. It is very positive that staff members have delivered CPD training to their colleagues within the school, indicating the development of a community of learners, sharing their talents, knowledge, skills and experiences.

Very good work has been undertaken to develop the use of ICT to support the school's work. For example, parents of students in junior cycle have access to an online platform that lets them view their child's results. In addition, a strategic plan has been prepared to guide the development of ICT and, through this, to support the enhancement of teaching and learning. It is recommended that this initiative be progressed as a priority under the aegis of the SSE process. A key feature of this work will be that of setting measurable targets and monitoring progress in their achievement. A key benefit of this is that it helps to generate and sustain momentum for change as well as promote the school's successes.

The range of extra-curricular activities available to students is supported by staff, and the staff members' commitment and work is highly commendable. These activities include basketball, in which the school has been very successful at a national level, Gaelic football, athletics, debating, GAISCE awards, school bank, and SciFest.

Managing the organisation

The board of management provides very effective governance. The board is comprised of a committed team with a diverse range of beneficial skills and experiences. The board has very good processes in place to support and manage its work. For example, policy development and review are staple features of the board's work and are very well managed. As part of its policy review work, the board should, as a priority, review circular M29/95 Time in School, to ensure that the school meets its requirements for all year groups, as some year groups are a little short of the required number of tuition days. To further enhance its communication with staff, students, parents and other stakeholders, the board should develop an annual report on the operation of the school. As part of this, were the board to identify a small number of annual and longer-term priorities, then these could be used to frame the annual report to stakeholders as well as provide focal points for the school community in its work. The priorities already outlined in the very comprehensive "Know Your School" booklet that was produced by the principal will provide a helpful resource in this work.

There was ample evidence from interviews with teachers, feedback from questionnaires and the very obvious work done by the teachers on a voluntary basis that teacher morale is high in the school. To support this, it would be beneficial to explore how in-school communication can be extended, perhaps through further developing the use of ICT systems.

The school facilities are well maintained. It is commendable that there are plans in place for ongoing improvement and development of the facilities, with the existing library and science laboratories earmarked for development next. During the evaluation, heating was a topic that was remarked upon frequently by those who met with the inspectors. Notwithstanding the work done in 2014 to add insulation to part of the school façade, the board should investigate options to upgrade the heating system. Given that the school was built in the early 1990s it is now nearly 30 years old. Work has been done to enhance its aesthetic appearance with, for example, very varied and colourful displays in the corridors and classrooms and models of students' work on display in parts of the school. One way of further developing students' sense of ownership and pride in the school would be to involve them in a co-ordinated way in planning and improving the aesthetic appearance of the school, in collaboration with the senior management and staff.

Leading school development

The senior management team of the principal and deputy principal has worked very well to provide very high-quality leadership and management. The evidence for this was apparent from the orderly and pleasant school environment, the goodwill expressed by staff, the positive views expressed by parents and students and from examination of records provided by the school, such as policy and planning documents. For example, staff members, in responding anonymously to questionnaires administered during the evaluation, strongly held the view that the senior management values their views in the decision-making processes in the school. The results of these questionnaires, and those completed by parents and students, provide valuable data for the school, and the senior management team should examine the results in collaboration with the board to aid in future planning.

One of the most significant elements impinging on the school has been a steady decline in its enrolment. Since their appointment in 2014, the current principal and deputy principal have worked assiduously in co-operation with the staff to arrest the decline and that has been achieved in the current academic year. This was accomplished through a number of strategic initiatives. First, the senior management team decided to place an emphasis on ensuring very high standards of behaviour. To aid this, the code of behaviour was reviewed. With the co-operation of the staff a renewed focus was placed on expecting and achieving good behaviour among students. The results of this work were apparent in the fact that the number of serious disciplinary matters has reduced very significantly. Another source of evidence – the questionnaires completed by students – showed

that students were very familiar with the systems used to manage discipline, prevent bullying, and monitor attendance. This shows the success of the school, as a team, in working to improve and develop.

One area in which there is scope for future development is that of increasing the involvement of parents in SSE and in policy work. This is likely to be demanding for the school as the parents' association has only recently been reconstituted and there is evidence to suggest that engaging the parent body as a whole has been a challenge. However, the identification of a small number of annual priorities, which is recommended in this report, and making visible successes in achieving these can help to create positive momentum. *Looking At Our School 2016*, may be of use in framing the priorities.

The school plan was viewed during the evaluation and it is of very good quality. A sample of subject plans was viewed. Overall, they were of good quality, though, a few needed improvements. To aid subject planning, it is recommended that subject departments identify a small number of priorities for action each year and these priorities should flow from the school's identified priorities; the agenda for subject department meetings should include scope for discussion about teaching and the minutes of meetings should be shared with senior management.

Developing leadership capacity

The middle management team in the school has very notable strengths. In addition, a very significant number of staff members are acting as leaders by taking on roles in a voluntary capacity. The roles fulfilled by the post-holders and by those who undertake duties voluntarily are all focused on the needs of the school. The very broad willingness among the staff to embrace change in a positive, enthusiastic and professional manner is a very significant strength of the school. It is commendable that the post-holders report formally to the board on an annual basis and this information will be useful for the board's annual report.

Discussions with students showed that they have positive views about the school and this was also reflected in their responses to the questionnaires. The ideas put forward by students during interview with the inspectors highlighted the leadership potential they have. Current initiatives such as the student council and students' engagement in the Green Schools project have laid a foundation for student engagement in aspects of school life. It is recommended that the school develop students' involvement and responsibility in the school by engaging them more in issues of school planning, SSE and teaching and learning.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Learner outcomes and experiences

In almost all lessons the quality of students' learning ranged from good to very good; in a very small number of lessons it was satisfactory or fair.

The school has decided to focus on improving the uptake of subjects at the higher level for the certificate examinations. This focus, coupled with the introduction of academic monitoring, means that there is a commendable emphasis on setting high expectations for students.

In lessons that were observed, the inspectors spoke with the students, and it was clear that, in the main, the students held positive attitudes to their learning and to school. However, the results of the student questionnaires did not completely reflect the extent of positive attitudes expressed by students during lessons. Therefore, it would be beneficial to explore the results of the student

questionnaires in relation to students' attitudes to teaching with a view to understanding the factors that influence students' views. This is an area in which it may be possible to extend the involvement of students.

The best lessons set clear learning intentions, included a range of active learning methods and incorporated opportunities for both students and their teachers to assess the progress in learning. In such lessons, students demonstrated high levels of motivation and enjoyment. Where there was scope for improvement, this would be achieved primarily by adopting more active approaches to help students in their learning.

In the main, students experienced high levels of individual support from their teachers. Their work and efforts were affirmed and praised by their teachers and they were encouraged to develop and improve their learning in a supportive manner.

Students demonstrated that they had achieved suitable levels of skills and knowledge in almost all lessons and they contributed well to class discussions and activities. It was notable that, when facilitated, students worked well together and that their team-working skills were of a high standard. Discussions with students during lessons showed that they had good social skills, were able to express themselves articulately and were open in their attitudes and thinking.

Analysis of students' journals and copybooks showed that students' work was, generally, of a high or very high standard. It is commendable that students in Transition Year include a reflection on their week when completing their journal. It was also evident that the school has placed a suitable emphasis on monitoring students' journals and this is good practice.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

The quality of teaching ranged from good to very good with only a very small number of lessons where practices were fair or satisfactory. Overall, teachers' preparation for lessons was of a very high standard. They had clearly reflected on the topics to be taught and had ensured that teaching methods were suitably chosen to facilitate optimal student learning. This diligent and professional approach by the teachers is indicative of their support for students' learning. To help teachers to support each other with the introduction of the new junior cycle programme, it is recommended that the school begin work to put in place structures to facilitate professional collaborative review.

In all of the lessons, student behaviour was very good and lessons were well managed. The relationships between students and their teachers were clearly foundational to the positive atmosphere that prevailed.

The best lessons involved the use of active learning approaches. In these lessons, the students were supported by their teachers and suitably challenged by the learning activities. These lessons often interspersed teacher instruction and direction with short student activities, enabling students to work individually and in groups.

Extending the use of ICT in teaching and learning has been prioritised by the school. In doing this, the school should decide on a suitable platform and facilitate students as well as teachers to record their work using this platform. The use of ICT offers new possibilities to encourage research and presentation skills and its embedding in the teaching approaches used will help to support attainment of a range of key skills relevant to the new junior cycle programme.

Questioning was the main method used by teachers to assess students' progress. Where it was used best, students were given sufficient time to compose answers and the questions were adapted to suit students' abilities. There was evidence in a number of lessons and in samples of students' work of teachers using formative feedback techniques to help students improve their learning. The use of formative feedback should be extended so that it is a feature of all lessons. One way in which this

could be supported is by getting students to be involved in setting their own learning targets for each subject, and this is recommended. These targets should focus not just on examination attainment but also on knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The learning environment was very positive. It was enhanced by displays of students' work and suitable charts and posters.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

The recommendations from previous evaluations that related to leadership and management have been very diligently progressed. For example, the SSE process has been initiated and progress has been achieved in a variety of areas. In addition, the school has undertaken a review of its curriculum, timetabling, and class grouping practices and this has resulted in positive changes. The inspectors confirmed this progress during the evaluation.

Teaching and Learning

The recommendations that related to teaching and learning focused mainly on expanding the range of assessment practices in use and developing the use of assessment for learning strategies. Based on classroom observation and examination of records the inspectors considered that good progress had been achieved. However, further development of assessment for learning at a whole-staff level is needed to ensure that formative feedback practices are intrinsic parts of each lesson.

Overall, the school's progress in implementing recommendations from previous evaluations has been commendable.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

Good progress has been achieved in implementing and embedding SSE in the school. Areas such as literacy, numeracy and academic monitoring have gained traction and have shown positive outcomes. The staff hold positive attitudes to using SSE to support their work. The school's self-evaluation reports and improvement plans show a realistic, data-driven, strategic approach in using the SSE process.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

Work in SSE will be improved by further engaging parents and students in the SSE process and by embedding the use at a whole-staff level of measurable targets. It was clear during the evaluation that the school has very strong capability to support ongoing improvement. This derives from the goodwill of staff members, their dedication and professionalism, coupled with the leadership of the senior management team and the board.

5. CHILD PROTECTION

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

1. The school principal is aware that revised child protection procedures for primary and post-primary schools came into effect on 11 December 2017 and arrangements are in place to begin the process of implementing these procedures.
2. The name of the designated liaison person for child protection matters was prominently displayed near the main door of the school / in the school's reception area.
3. The school has a Child Protection policy in place.
4. All teachers are aware that they are mandated persons and of their responsibilities in that regard.

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

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 wishes to express its satisfaction with the very positive report on the recent Whole School Evaluation, MLL undertaken in Castlerea Community School.

The Board welcomes the findings of the inspectorate on the very high quality of school leadership and management, the dedication of the staff and their contribution to the overall development of the students – both academic and pastoral, the very high standards of behaviour observed and the positive feedback from parents about our school. The Board note that in almost all lessons, the quality of students learning ranged from good to very good, which is the highest quality achievable.

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

The Board takes cognisance of the inspectors' recommendations and have begun the process of implementing them.

As part of the recent Post of Responsibility review process, the "Parent and Student Voice" was identified as a key priority for the school and will therefore have a formal structure supporting greater implementation across all aspects of school life.

While active methodologies form part of the teaching and learning in most classes, a whole school approach is being adopted under the school's SSE plan to further embed active learning methodologies across all subjects and classes in the school. This will incorporate formative feedback in all lessons. CPD is already planned for August 2018 to support staff in embedding this practice.

Through the school's Digital Learning Team, the use of a suitable learning platform will be investigated to further enhance and consolidate the existing use of platforms such as Edmodo and Schoology. This research will include gathering feedback from all partners – teachers, students and parents and any decision will follow thorough training in the desired platform to ensure smooth implementation across the school.

The Board are pleased with the wide range of subjects and programmes available in Castlerea Community School and endeavour to continue to provide these, where feasible from year to year.

The Board welcomes the recommendations, contained in this report, and is committed to their implementation.

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;