

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St Michaels College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Ailesbury Road Dublin 4
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	60561G

Date of Evaluation: 14-11-2019



**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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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	11, 12 and 14 November 2019
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

St. Michael's College is a fee-charging voluntary secondary school for boys under the trusteeship of the Spiritan Education Trust with a current enrolment of 664 students. The school provides the Junior Cycle, a compulsory Transition Year (TY) and the established Leaving Certificate programmes.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of leadership and management is very good; the board of management and senior management provide a caring, inclusive, positive environment in which learning flourishes.
- A highly effective senior management team works diligently to promote a culture of continuous improvement for staff and students; the principal and deputy principal are passionate, dedicated and proactive leaders.
- The school plan places good focus on improvement, there is scope to incorporate further strategies that support active teaching and learning.
- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good, practice ranged from very good to good with some elements of exemplary practice; in a small number of lessons there was scope for improvement.
- Engagement with the school self-evaluation (SSE) process is effective; there is scope for further development to support the embedding of agreed SSE strategies into teaching and learning practices across the school.
- There has been good progress with some recommendations made in previous inspection reports, with some scope for development in others; the school's capacity for improvement is very good.

Recommendations

- The board, in collaboration with all the relevant stakeholders, should further develop its strategic plan with a key focus on teaching and learning.
- Teachers should plan for the effective use of differentiation strategies, formative feedback, creative digital learning and the use of success criteria to support highly effective teaching and learning.
- The SSE process should be further developed so that all teachers are supported and encouraged to embed agreed SSE strategies into their classroom practice.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

The quality of leadership of learning and teaching is highly effective, and includes many examples of exemplary practice. There is a high level of commitment on the part of the board, senior management and teachers to strive for excellence in all areas of education. These include: embracing junior cycle reform, the holistic development of students and a focus on improving digital learning opportunities for students. Through effective collaborative practices, the school is using its resources in targeted and structured ways to meet the needs of students, for example, the consultation process with students in relation to the Wellbeing and TY programmes. A creative Wellbeing course has been designed and is being delivered to all first and second-year students. Management and teachers are highly committed to supporting students' wellbeing. A team is in place and a valuable range of activities is organised to support Wellbeing.

Care for students is of a high quality. In their responses to questionnaires, students reported that they feel safe and well cared for, they are proud of their school, and that there is a good atmosphere in the school. Findings from the questionnaires and meetings with students, staff and parents highlighted the very positive views about the school atmosphere, respect and anti-bullying procedures.

The 'It's Good to Talk' initiative is a highly commendable support system designed to offer further supports to students in the wellbeing space. Appropriate provision is made for the delivery of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) at junior cycle including Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). RSE is also appropriately delivered at senior cycle. As questionnaire responses from both parents and students highlight a lack of awareness about the SPHE and RSE programmes, it is recommended that provision for SPHE and RSE be reviewed to ensure a consistent delivery across all relevant year groups.

The school's guiding vision is articulated in its mission statement: 'believe, belong, become'. Staff display a strong commitment to realising this guiding vision in their work. Those with leadership roles effectively promote an inclusive school community which demonstrably values the holistic development of students.

Effective policies and practices support students' educational, social and personal well-being, including creative programmes that promote positive mental health, environmental awareness and mindfulness. The student support team is well structured and very efficient. There are regular meetings, with clear referral pathways, a wide range of supports and with appropriately qualified personnel involved.

There are very good supports for literacy in place. The school provides a library with a full time librarian offering research opportunities for students and staff. Teachers are effectively engaging with, and implementing the new Junior Cycle. There is an effective range of interventions for focus areas, identified by staff, such as differentiation. Collaborative and supportive approaches are adopted by teachers, with scope for further collaboration in the area of sharing best practice. This could be achieved through a structured peer observation model, and the further use of staff meetings.

Very good systems and routines are in place to ensure effective and responsive management of students including a well-structured and organised year head system. A highly effective board is supportive of the work of the school and has met with members of the students' council to discuss areas of strengths and those in need of improvement.

The school curriculum is meeting students' needs in the junior and senior cycles. The school provides a broad range of subjects, including three modern foreign languages. The curriculum has been expanded at senior cycle with the recent introduction of new Leaving Certificate examination subjects including Agricultural Science and Design & Communication Graphics. It is worthwhile that TY students are given the opportunity to taste all subjects prior to making subject choices for Leaving Certificate. Consideration should be given to providing a taster programme for first-year students to better support them in making informed choices about subjects when starting in the school.

First-year students confirmed that they settle well into the school and this view was reiterated by parents during the evaluation. However, a structured induction programme would further support this effective transition and would be of particular benefit to those coming from schools other than the feeder junior school.

There is an emerging culture of development and innovation across the school. Teachers actively discuss and implement interventions and classroom practices that extend students' learning experiences, for example, the introduction of a shared online platform for the sharing of resources. Commendably, staff teams have been established to lead improvements in these areas. The board and senior management are aware of the challenges involved in curriculum change and development and are strongly committed to building capacity among the staff. Teachers are engaging with a wide range of opportunities for professional development and are facilitated to share their expertise at staff meetings. Teachers work very well together and collaborate on a range of projects.

Managing the organisation

The school is very well run by the board and senior management team. It is an orderly, vibrant, healthy and well-maintained learning environment, with some excellent facilities. There are very good internal communication systems and this was acknowledged by teachers and students. A supportive, nurturing, positive atmosphere prevails throughout, which is conducive to learning and wellbeing. The principal and deputy principal work as a highly effective team. They are passionate, committed and dedicated leaders, using a co-operative approach through the delineation of responsibilities and drawing on complementary strengths. Their commitment to improvement is evidenced in the introduction of the new digital strategy aimed at improving learner outcomes and experiences across the school.

It emerged during the evaluation that the board's work in managing and developing the school is motivated by a commitment to achieve excellence in all areas of education. The board is aware of its statutory responsibilities, provides high levels of support to the principal and maintains careful management of the organisation. The board members have a range of experience and useful skills which help to steer the development and operation of the school.

The board's practice in developing and reviewing policies is of a high quality. A systematic review has been developed which ensures that policies are kept up to date. Draft policies are circulated to teachers, parents and students for their input, before being approved by the board and are available on the school website.

The school has a comprehensive school plan in place, but there is scope to improve strategic planning with a lens on teaching and learning. There is potential for the board to extend its oversight

of the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in the area of SSE through further collaboration with teachers and a key focus on classroom practice.

A highly effective middle leadership structure is based on distributed leadership to meet the school's identified needs and priorities as per Circular 0003/2018. Posts are in line with this circular and they are evaluated annually and are needs based.

The morale of the teaching staff is very high, and this was evident in the questionnaire responses. Staff stated that their views were highly valued in decision-making processes. Teams of teachers meet regularly during staff meetings, and in their own professional time to collaborate, upskill and plan for development and improvement. Commendably, there are a number of sub-teams in the school to promote and support improvement such as the SSE team and the digital strategy team.

The school is aligning its practices in relation to supporting students with special education needs with the principles of the Resource Allocation Model. It is recommended that those with qualifications in special education training (SET) are placed in key positions where possible. The school has recognised the need for greater levels of differentiation for all, however, the whole-school practices that underpin 'support for all' on the continuum of support and that require all teachers to differentiate have yet to be fully embedded. Team teaching is a positive development for the school and teachers are engaging very well with this new initiative. Management plans to provide training in team-teaching for all staff in order to extend and develop this practice.

Leading school development

The leadership of school development is very good. School management is aware of the need for sustainable leadership and is effectively overseeing the implementation of changes in education, including junior cycle reform. The principal expects, supports and encourages staff to evaluate and reflect upon their own practice in order to promote excellence in teaching and learning. This could be further supported through annual one to one meetings with all staff members to discuss their work and professional development.

The school maintains constructive relationships with parents and outside agencies. Good quality relationships are valued and fostered with the parents' association, past pupils' union, feeder schools and other key stakeholders.

School management and staff are clearly invested in school improvement and effective leadership is evident and emerging in this area. The school has good communication networks through the positive use of parent-teacher meetings, the school website and news updates. The quality of communication with parents about their child's learning is very good. There is some scope to improve school reports to incorporate student progress and achievement in other areas of learning, particularly in TY to highlight the broad experiences and skills students develop in this year.

There is a very high level of support for the holistic development of students and staff are committed to providing a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities in the areas of sports, (including rugby) the environment (bee keeping) and the arts (musicals and drama), to name but a few. There is a commendable focus on social justice and students take part in soup runs and other charitable endeavours such as immersion trips abroad during TY.

Management and teachers are engaging well with teacher support agencies and are availing of professional development opportunities available through Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT). Subject coordinators are in place to support reform, and to assist in teachers' effective collaboration. Subject meetings have a focus on teaching and learning and the minutes are shared and discussed with management. Teachers are collaborating to effectively plan for and deliver agreed programmes and a reflective approach is in place to ensure the school is meeting the evolving needs of students.

The school has an active Parents' Association whose members demonstrate a keen interest in improving the school's educational resources, including sports facilities. Commendably, parents have input into school policy development and the school self-evaluation processes. While parents have access to the school website, texts and a newsletter, questionnaire data indicates that parents would welcome greater consultation in relation to school matters.

Developing leadership capacity

Leadership is very well distributed in the school and staff have very good leadership opportunities. The board and senior management team recognises the importance of developing leadership capacity through existing and emerging structures. The principal and deputy principal support and encourage continuing professional development (CPD), and are proactive in maintaining their own CPD as leaders, for the benefit of the school community.

A number of privately paid leadership posts are evaluated and rotated every two years to meet the evolving needs of the school community. It would be worth considering ways in which the board can further support distributed leadership and ownership of the improvement planning process by extending invitations to school personnel to board meetings to make presentations on their work.

The school is highly commended for the very good support and opportunities offered to newly qualified teachers and Professionals Master of Education (PME) students. The principal creates and manages an effective mentoring programme to support newly appointed teachers, and to develop leadership capacity among the mentoring team. The deputy principal oversees the successful integration of PME students into the school community, and a highly effective support system has been put in place.

There are very good opportunities for student leadership development, leading to a sense of ownership and community. These include an active student council, *Gaisce*, sports, clubs and societies, and a range of very good leadership opportunities in TY. These strongly support students' own development as leaders.

The senior management team delegates responsibilities appropriately and strategically. They empower teachers and students to take on leadership roles and encourage teamwork in all aspects of school life. It is worth considering the development of a handbook for all staff, with reflective elements included and reminders of the SSE focus areas for classroom practice.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Thirty two lessons were observed which included a range of core, optional, practical and non-examination subjects in junior and senior cycle. The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good. The quality of teaching and learning ranged from very good to good with some elements of exemplary practice. There was scope for improvement in a few lessons.

Learner outcomes and experiences

Best practice was observed when a variety of well-planned differentiated strategies supported learning, when students were actively engaged in their lessons and when learning was investigative and challenging. In a few cases, lesson intentions were shared and revisited with appropriate reflective student input. Teachers allowed sufficient time for students to actively revisit and reflect on lesson intentions at the conclusion of lessons and to practise subject-specific, problem-solving and practical skills. In the majority of lessons, students had opportunities to experience ownership and responsibility of their own learning through discovery and inquiry.

In the small number of lessons where learning was less than good, differentiation strategies were not tailored to support the wide range of abilities in the group, reflection and evaluation of learning were not an integral part of the lesson, teacher instruction prevailed and students had limited opportunity to work collaboratively.

Students should be provided with the opportunity to reflect on their learning, to collaborate, and to provide teachers with feedback on their learning during each lesson. Teachers should plan for and create opportunities for students of different abilities to experience integrated and challenging differentiation strategies. Further opportunities for students to engage with digital learning opportunities, interesting resources, role play, debate, questioning and presentation of work to the class should be incorporated into lessons.

Most students engaged very diligently in classroom tasks and activities. Interactions between students and teachers were respectful, positive and conducive to wellbeing. In the best lessons, teachers provided opportunities for students to apply and develop their knowledge and skills through appropriate differentiation of activities, higher-order questioning and formative assessment strategies.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

The overall quality of teaching observed was good. Best practice was observed when teachers were very well prepared for lessons, the materials and resources selected were appropriate, and the sequence of learning activities was well planned. The most effective practice was noted where the learning intentions were stated by teachers in terms of learning to be attained by the end of the lesson, and not merely lesson content. This practice should be extended to all lessons. In addition, teachers should develop the habit of using success criteria so that students are more aware of their strengths and of the areas they need to develop.

Teachers' enthusiasm and expertise in their subject areas were prominent in all lessons. Positive teaching approaches helped ensure that learning was effective. Teachers' clear explanation of topics, demonstration of practical skills, effective management and monitoring of classroom tasks greatly supported student learning.

A range of resources was used very effectively to support learning. These included laminated boards, digital technology and subject-specific materials. Audio visual clips, presentations and visuals were well utilised to enhance learning.

In most lessons, teachers provided an appropriate level of challenge and support enabling students to be actively engaged in learning. Teachers made deliberate efforts to ensure that students understood and used subject-specific keywords and language. A few lessons would have benefitted from further attention to literacy and numeracy development.

Teachers used a variety of methodologies and teaching approaches effectively in many lessons. In language lessons, best practice was observed where there was an integrated approach to the development of the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing and where the experience of language immersion helped students to express themselves in the target language.

Effective assessment practice was noted when questions were differentiated and teachers encouraged students to explain their responses. The practice of providing developmental formative written feedback on homework and student assignments was noted which enabled students to build on their capabilities and address areas where they need to improve. The practice of providing developmental formative feedback to students should be extended to all lessons, learning experiences and homework assignments.

Some subject department plans were of good quality overall while many required substantial development in order to support teacher collaborative and reflective practice and awareness of SSE. The best subject plans reviewed included: differentiated, collaborative and reflective practices which

were integrated into the planning process. The plans created showed very good awareness of recent curricular developments including the new subject specifications in Junior Cycle. It is recommended that teachers continue to collaborate and develop their subject plans as working documents to help with the effective implementation of junior cycle specifications.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

Overall, the implementation of recommendations from previous inspection is good. School management has overseen significant development of the school planning process, policy review and development, post review, guidance provision and planning and development of digital technology. Subject department collaboration regarding planning and development of schemes of work has improved however SSE has yet to be fully integrated into this process.

Teaching and Learning

Very good teaching and learning practice was observed in many lessons with increased student-centred active learning, and practices leading to improved ownership of learning for students. Other teaching and learning areas that still require development include improved differentiation and integrated formative assessment practices.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The SSE process is effective. Reflective practice focused on improvement is evident in the school plan. In line with good practice, the school has engaged in highly effective gathering of data through the use of a shared digital platform to survey the whole school community. Themes progressed by the school to date include assessment for learning, differentiation through digital learning, increased pair work and a focus on Wellbeing. It is recommended that the school improvement plan includes the SSE process, and is balanced with a greater focus on teaching and learning. The SSE process should be further developed so that the themes are implemented consistently and effectively across the whole school.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

Both management and staff demonstrate a very high level of enthusiasm and commitment to ongoing school improvement as they strive to achieve excellence in every aspect of educational provision. Given the quality of school leadership and the teachers' commitment to improvement the school has a very strong capacity for improvement.

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;