

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills**

**Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning**

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Mulroy College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Milford Letterkenny County Donegal
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	712200

Date of Evaluation: 26-10-2016



WHAT IS A WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING?

Whole-School Evaluations – Management, Leadership and Learning report on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. They affirm good practice and make 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

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	26-10-2016
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

Mulroy College operates under the trusteeship of the Donegal Education and Training Board (ETB). The school provides the full range of programmes, including the Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the established Leaving Certificate. Enrolment is growing and currently stands at 395 students: 233 boys and 162 girls. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department of Education and Skills action plan for educational inclusion.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The school is very well supported by Donegal ETB and by the board of management.
- The principal and deputy principal comprise a highly effective senior management team and are very well supported by middle management and staff.
- The school promotes a strong culture of improvement, collaboration and innovation in learning, teaching and assessment and has undergone significant, positive developments in recent years.
- The strategic development, DEIS and school self-evaluation (SSE) planning processes are very good; there is scope for subject departments to develop action plans aimed at continued improvement in learner outcomes.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good, but a review of students' journals demonstrated an uneven and inconsistent approach to the recording of homework.
- The whole-school approach to student support is of a very high quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Subject departments should develop an action plan based on the analysis of learner outcomes in each subject, in line with the guidelines set out by the senior management team.
- The school should review its policy and practice in relation to homework at whole-school level and promote the wider use of comment marking on students' work.
- The school should develop additional strategies to facilitate staff to observe and share very good practice in the classroom.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

1.1. School ownership and management

The quality of school management and leadership is very good. The board of management is properly constituted and fulfils its statutory obligations effectively. The board is very supportive of the school and is very well supported by Donegal ETB. School management is committed to managing the human, physical and financial resources to create and maintain an effective learning organisation. Formal training and the sharing of best practice are very well facilitated through cluster meetings of boards of management, school leaders and staff within the Donegal ETB school network.

The board has full confidence in and is very supportive of the senior management team. The board makes a very good contribution to policy and decision-making. It has adopted and ratified all of the mandatory school policies.

The school fosters a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity and the holistic development of each student. Students with special educational needs (SEN) are welcome in the school; they are included in school activities and are well supported through the care system. This welcoming and inclusive approach to students with SEN is not fully reflected in the admissions policy. It is recommended that the school policy be reviewed to ensure that it fully reflects the actual positive practices in relation to admissions.

It is evident from the minutes of board meetings that curriculum planning, student learning and attainment are at the core of decision-making and that appropriate advance planning is being made to cater for the needs of an evolving and increasing student cohort. It is commendable that the board and school management support and facilitate teacher professional development in a wide range of areas. It is also noteworthy that the board and Donegal ETB have provided additional resources for teaching and learning, including enhanced facilities for information and communications technology (ICT).

The board keeps a good record of its work and endeavours to communicate with the wider school community through the various nominees on the board. It is good that opportunities for the student council to communicate directly with the board are to be provided. In questionnaires, the responses of parents, students and teachers indicated a very high level of satisfaction with the way the school is managed and run. However, both teachers' and parents' responses indicated that they would welcome greater communication and information on board matters. It is recommended that the board consider issuing an agreed report of its main decisions after each meeting.

The strategic development, DEIS and SSE planning processes are very good and very well integrated. The school carried out a needs analysis in 2012 and again in 2015. The school plan is comprehensive, and very clearly outlines the strategic goals, the members of staff responsible for each aspect of the plan and timeframes for implementation. The initial focus has been on school improvement in the areas of increased enrolments, attendance, retention and progression, and developing closer links with primary schools and the wider community. It is a credit to the school community that many of the targets set were achieved successfully by Autumn 2016. Commendably, the current focus is on the introduction of the Junior Cycle Framework, promoting teaching and learning, student attainment, staff professional development, team work and leadership.

Student leadership is promoted through the student council, the head-boy and head-girl system, peer mentoring in first year, and a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

The parents' association was re-established in 2012 and is very supportive of the school. It is well informed about school matters, subject inspection reports and the new Junior Cycle Framework. In their responses to questionnaires, almost all parents agreed that they feel welcome in the school. Parents have been consulted on a number of policies, but there is scope for a more in-depth role by parents and students in reviewing and developing school policies generally. The parents' association has been involved actively in improvements to the school library and road safety. There is good communication between the home and the school through the student journal and the school website, but some parents would welcome additional information on school activities. Consideration should be given to the regular publication of a school newsletter.

The principal and deputy principal comprise a highly effective senior management team who lead by example. Their roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and comprehensive. Their open and approachable style supports, empowers and encourages leadership and initiative among staff. The senior management team has led school engagement in a continuous process of self-evaluation and school improvement. Significant changes and developments have taken place in recent years under their stewardship, including the facilitation of distributed leadership among staff, the promotion of more collaborative teaching and learning methodologies, restorative justice practices and increasing enrolments. The day-to-day management of the school is highly effective due to the very good systems that have been established.

The middle management system provides high-quality support to the operation of the school. The team comprises four assistant principals, ten special-duties posts and a programme coordinator. Significant duties are attached to almost all of the posts and they are carried out well. The development of enhanced capacity for school leadership among the staff has been facilitated by the good practice of monthly meetings between the senior management team and the assistant principals. The posts of responsibility are reviewed regularly to ensure that the duties assigned are in line with the priorities identified in the school plan.

Other members of staff are involved actively in the life of the school through their work as tutors and team leaders, through their participation on school and subject planning consultation groups, and through their contribution to the broad extracurricular programme. The senior management team strongly values the commitment and contribution of staff.

1.2 Effectiveness of leadership for learning

Leadership for learning is very good overall. The principal and deputy principal provide very effective leadership for learning, by promoting a culture of improvement, collaboration and innovation in learning, teaching and assessment. They encourage and facilitate teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) in many areas, including instructional leadership, subject-specific CPD, the new Junior Cycle Framework, and in the area of assessment for learning (AfL). Training has also been provided to staff in restorative justice practices and positive behaviour management, positive mental health, child protection and first aid. A professional support team, providing peer mentoring for new teachers, has been established. The senior management team strives continuously to raise student, parent and teacher expectations.

The school offers a very broad and balanced programme that includes a commendable range of practical and academic subjects. A comprehensive and effective transfer programme for incoming first-year students has been established; this includes visits to the primary schools, a

series of open days, an information evening and a subject-sampling day. The home-school-community-liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator maintains very good links with the local primary schools, between the school and parents and with outside agencies.

At the end of third year or TY, students decide on subject choices and programme options for senior cycle on the basis of guidance and advice from staff. Students and parents indicated that they would appreciate additional support when making such decisions. It is recommended that the school consult with parents and students on ways to enhance the supports already provided.

Core teams have been established for each of the optional programmes provided. TY and LCA students provide some feedback on the programmes by completing a short survey at the end of the year, but there is scope for a more detailed questionnaire and analysis of students' views. Such feedback would help to inform future developments and improvements to the programmes. A full day's work experience per week is a key feature of the school's TY and LCA programmes. This is a significant commitment as it represents twenty per cent of total tuition time. It is recommended that the time allocated by the school to work experience should be kept under review to ensure its optimal use.

Subject departments work collaboratively and share materials and resources on line, to which students also have access. Schemes of work for each subject have been developed and best practice was evident where intended learning outcomes were clearly outlined, together with the methodologies, resources and modes of assessment to be used.

The school engaged a company recently to carry out a comprehensive analysis of student uptake and attainment in the state examinations. A small number of subject departments have included this analysis along with an action plan for further improvement in learner outcomes in their subject folders, but this practice is not widespread across the school. It is recommended that subject department plans follow the guidelines outlined by the senior management team, and include a stronger focus on continued improvement in learner outcomes.

Most classes are mixed-ability, although there is banding of classes in Maths, Irish and English from second year onwards. JCSP students are not assigned to a particular class group, but are integrated well into mainstream classes. The JCSP students receive additional supports in relation to literacy, numeracy and personal development at set times during the week.

Support for students with additional learning needs is well organised. The core team of teachers has a high level of expertise and training. Students also benefit from the support of special-needs assistants. The main method of providing support is through the creation of small groups. It would also be worthwhile exploring the extended use of team teaching as an addition to the current model of provision.

There is a structured, whole-school approach to student support that is of a very high quality. There are a number of lunch-time clubs and support groups in the school. Themed events including *Friendship Day*, *Road Safety Awareness* and *Wellbeing Week* are held annually as part of the school's participation in the *Health Promoting Schools* programme. Students also benefit from a breakfast club and a homework club, while the feasibility of running an after-school study programme is being explored currently.

The weekly meetings of the student-support team provide an effective forum for ensuring that the care needs of students are met. The meetings are attended by senior management, the SEN co-ordinator, the guidance counsellor, the HSCL co-ordinator, the co-ordinator for the school completion programme, the co-ordinator of the student-support team and the ETB psychologist.

Very close links have been established with community organisations and external support agencies.

The code of behaviour works in conjunction with the support systems noted and centres on positive discipline and restorative justice practices. The rules are communicated clearly and the code is implemented very effectively. There is a well-structured ladder of referral for dealing with breaches of the code. The school only applies sanctions, including rare cases of suspension, when other measures fail. During the evaluation, students presented as happy, confident and respectful in their dealings with teachers and with each other. In questionnaires, both parents and students agreed that students were treated fairly and respectfully in the school.

Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is provided to all groups at junior and senior cycle. However, students in the current second year and third year have only been receiving a sixteen-week module per year in SPHE. This is not in line with the requirements of Department Circular M11/03. The school is aware of the issue and is taking steps to amend the provision of SPHE in the next academic year. In senior-cycle classes, relationships and sexuality education (RSE) is provided mainly through the SPHE senior-cycle programme.

Though in its early stages the introduction of academic mentoring for sixth-year students is working well. Teachers liaise with students to discuss their progress, give advice and set targets for improvement. Feedback from students will provide valuable insights on the further development of this initiative. It is commendable that the guidance counsellor provides a valuable analysis on the initial destinations of students who have completed their Leaving Certificate, with a view to improving progression rates to college.

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*.

1.3 Management of facilities

The current school building was completed in 1999 and is maintained to a very high standard. There is very good provision of resources for teaching and learning including ICT. The sports hall is fully equipped and this valuable resource is used extensively by the school and the local community. An application for repairs to the school roof and for refurbishments to some of the specialist classrooms has been made to the Department.

School management is keen to maintain a safe, secure and healthy environment. The health and safety statement has been updated recently and fire drills are held regularly. The canteen area is bright, open and welcoming and acts as a focal point for students and teachers to meet informally; this contributes to the sense of collegiality and belonging that characterises the school.

2. QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

The quality of teaching and learning observed ranged from good to very good. While all of the lessons observed were either effective or highly effective, there was scope in a minority of lessons to use more stimulating resources, methodologies or styles of presentation to further engage student interest.

The very good lessons observed were characterised by a sense of purpose and fun, an appropriate pace and challenge, high levels of energy and creativity, and a strong sense of engagement and

enjoyment by the students. Higher-order questioning was encouraged and student learning was demonstrated through the successful achievement of the specific learning intentions.

Teacher explanations were clear and concise. All lessons were well planned and structured. While lessons had a clear focus or topic, there was scope for sharing the specific learning intentions with students in a majority of lessons. This would allow a more in-depth review of progress at the end of lessons. Most teachers took account of prior knowledge when introducing new material and included a recapitulation of learning as the lessons closed.

ICT was used to present information in most lessons and as an on-line tool to set homework and access school resources. On-line surveys and short video clips were used occasionally to enhance lessons. There was scope to develop the use of ICT more creatively as an interactive resource to enthuse and support learning.

Lessons were well managed. Classroom routines were well established and students worked well with their teachers. Seating in many classrooms had been arranged purposefully to optimise group or pair work. Activities such as *think, pair and share*, placemats, interviews, discovery and investigation were used effectively to engage learners in many of the lessons observed. There is scope to extend these methodologies to other lessons.

The quality of assessment observed was good overall. AfL practices were evident in some cases, with clear advice and encouraging comments included on written work occasionally. Additionally, in some lessons students were encouraged to engage in self-assessment exercises, by marking their own progress out of ten, completing exit tickets or engaging in peer assessment or peer support. It is recommended that the use of these AfL practices be extended, as appropriate.

A review of students' journals demonstrated an uneven and inconsistent approach to the recording of homework among some classes and year groups. It is recommended that the school review its policy and practice in relation to homework at whole-school level.

There is a strong culture of sharing methodologies and teachers have presented to each other at staff meetings and CPD seminars on a range of topics, including literacy, numeracy and AfL. It is recommended that the school explore additional strategies that would facilitate staff to observe and share very good practice in the classroom.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

3.1 Management

The implementation of recommendations that were made in previous evaluations in relation to management has been very effective. All of the recommendations have been implemented, including the provision of board training, the systematic review of school policies and the establishment of a core SEN team.

3.2 Learning and teaching

Overall, good progress is evident in the implementation of the recommendations made in the areas of teaching and learning. ICT was integrated effectively into the majority of the lessons observed, although there remains some scope for improvement. Improved questioning strategies were observed in most lessons. Successful implementation of recommendations regarding the increased use of constructive feedback on students' work and the more regular recording of homework by students remain a work in progress.

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

The school demonstrates a very good capacity for ongoing improvement. The high quality of strategic planning has ensured that the school continues to adapt to meet students' needs in a comprehensive and holistic manner. This is evident in the positive developments already made and in the achievement of all DEIS targets to date. Members of staff have demonstrated a great capacity and willingness to lead new initiatives. The school self-evaluation (SSE) process is being used currently to assist the school in introducing relevant aspects of the Junior Cycle Framework. In line with the requirements of Department Circular 0024/2016, the board should make arrangements for the dissemination of a summary SSE report to parents and the wider school community.

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 of Mulroy College welcomes the exceptionally positive WSE/MLL report completed by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills. The Board is appreciative of the very wide range of aspects of school life which have been commended and applauded in the report and the acknowledgement of progress/growth made in the last number of years. The Board is particularly appreciative that the dedication, diligence and professionalism of all members of the school community are recognised and affirmed.

The key findings of the Inspectorate underline the very positive contributions of all partners within the school community towards providing a unique educational experience for all students in the school. It is indeed very gratifying for the Board of Management that the quality of management and leadership and the high standards of teaching and learning as well as the overall impression of the school as an inclusive, caring and supportive educational environment have been highlighted in the report.

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 of Management of Mulroy College is committed to building on the high standards across all aspects of school life as outlined in the findings of the report. The recommendations of the Inspectorate will be addressed as part of the school's improvement plan in the immediate future.

As stated in the report, the school demonstrates a very good capacity for ongoing improvement. The high quality of strategic planning has ensured that the school continues to adapt to meet students' needs in a comprehensive and holistic manner. The board will ensure this remains at the centre of all actions in Mulroy College.

Senior management will meet with subject departments to ensure a consistent approach to action plans based on the analysis of learner outcomes. There will be a full review in relation to homework and an emphasis on more formative approaches to homework assessment. Senior management will also ensure opportunities for teacher collaboration and observation in an effort to share already very good practices in the classroom.

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 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;