

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

School name	Sutton Park School
School address	Saint Fintan's Road Sutton Dublin 13
Roll number	60381E

Date of Evaluation: 17-01-2018



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 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	15-01-2018; 16-01-2018; 17-01-2018
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

Sutton Park School is a private, fee-charging co-educational and multi-denominational secondary school. Approximately a third of the student cohort is from an international background, some of whom board with host families. Enrolment trends show a recent increase in demand for places to the current figure of 355. The school provides the Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of school governance is very good; the board of management is well appraised of its functions and contributes to shaping key policies that are consistent with school ethos.
- School management and leadership are very good and lines of communication are open to all stakeholders; meetings of a number of key teams would benefit from a more formal structure however.
- There is a good whole-school approach to enhancing student wellbeing as an identified priority strand of the school self-evaluation (SSE) process.
- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in almost all of the lessons observed and some excellent practice was noted; in a few lessons the quality of provision was adequate and in some respects in need of significant change.
- Support for students with special educational needs (SEN) was satisfactory and a new focus is being added through the newly approved policy of supports for exceptionally able students; some elements of the SEN provision need to be reviewed.
- Very good progress was made in addressing recommendations from previous evaluations and there is very good capacity for school improvement.

Recommendations

- School management should ensure the full allocation of SEN hours is used in its entirety for the intended purpose, as specified in Circular Letters 0070/2014 and 0014/2017.
- By engaging in formal meetings, the various teams will develop a greater structure around their purpose and will be more fully engaged with whole-school activities.
- The school should devise a strategy to monitor and develop the impact of continuing professional development (CPD) in the classroom and consider a CPD portfolio as an integral part of teacher development.
- Encouraging students to ask more questions during lessons should become a more regular part of the learner experience in lessons.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leading learning and teaching

The overall quality of school management and leadership is very good. High levels of communication are evident with all stakeholders and morale is high among the teaching staff. Leading teaching and learning has been a shared key priority for the senior management team of principal and deputy principal since their appointment some eighteen months prior to the evaluation. Recently published subject inspection reports support this finding. The senior management team has identified CPD as the catalyst for driving improvement in teaching and learning and in recent years the school has supported teachers individually in obtaining additional professional qualifications.

A broad and balanced curriculum is provided and the school offers a good range of subjects and programmes. It is very good practice that option bands in senior cycle are generated to meet the subject choices made by students. Staffing resources are deployed to ensure that classes are formed, even where student numbers are very low, to accommodate demand for a broad range of subjects. The subject-sampling programme in first year provides students with a good opportunity to study optional subjects and to make an informed decision on subject choice. This good practice is also extended to the compulsory TY programme.

While courses and programmes of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) are central to the school curriculum, special provision is made for international students, in particular in the TY programme, to study English and Physical Education (PE) to the United Kingdom qualification of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level.

The overall quality of planning and provision for curriculum programmes is very good. The principal carries out an annual curriculum audit to review the effectiveness of the school's curriculum. Detailed subject and programme plans are in place that have a clear short, medium and long-term focus. Subject department plans should also reflect how pedagogical approaches will help to achieve the SSE targets relating to teaching and learning.

At senior-cycle, LCVP is offered to students and timetabling arrangements are very good. The uptake of the programme is poor however taking into consideration the expanded range of vocational subject groupings that are on offer. Consideration should be given to relaunching the LCVP programme. As part of that process there would be merit in providing an information campaign on the enhanced value of LCVP in admissions to third-level courses nationally and to redress the declared perception of the programme among parents as one more suited to academically less able students.

The school has been proactive in the area of provision for student wellbeing and DES guidelines inform the implementation of the wellbeing programme. A parent, with a specific skillset, has been appointed to lead its implementation with the teaching staff. A high-quality poster is displayed throughout the school setting out the principles and process of the wellbeing programme.

The quality of student care is very good. Student care is communicated clearly and understood as being the responsibility of every teacher and extending to senior students. Sixth-year students, for example, provide very good support to incoming first years through a buddy-mentoring system. An induction programme is provided to the mentors.

Guidance provision was being managed in a temporary acting capacity at the time of the evaluation. The guidance counsellor is timetabled for TY only; arrangements are made for access to Guidance for sixth-year students and access for one-to-one guidance should be formally timetabled.

Procedures exist for monitoring TY students while on work experience and for students' debriefing on completion of work experience. However, given the calendar slot at which students go on work experience, there needs to be clearer reporting guidelines on how the school communicates with outside agencies and students.

Positive student behaviour is celebrated and affirmed through various end-of-year awards. There is significant scope to develop a student-merit system to highlight and affirm student behaviour throughout the year. The school journal should be developed to implement this approach.

Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is provided to junior-cycle students. Questionnaire data from students and parents pointed to possible inconsistencies in the delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and SPHE programmes. This area should be addressed and developed to deliver a detailed programme across all years in the school.

There is very good communication with parents on their children's progress. School reports provide effective feedback on students' performance and development. Academic progress at whole-school level is monitored by a postholder and year heads. Overall student attainment is closely monitored at subject department level through comparison with published data of certificate examination results nationally. Student attainment for the school is very good with a high level of uptake of higher-level subjects in junior and senior cycles.

The provision of support for students with special educational needs (SEN) is satisfactory overall while a number of positives were noted. Some elements of SEN provision need to be reviewed. Membership of the SEN steering group is commendably broad and includes a qualified SEN co-ordinator teacher, the acting guidance counsellor, a counsellor and the senior management team. A team of eleven teachers delivers learning support through two main channels currently: in-class support and class withdrawal as identified on a needs basis. The form of intervention provided is well supported by documented evidence of needs.

SEN resources are used in timetabling mainstream classes in the current year however and this practice is not in keeping with the requirements of the new resource allocation model. School management should ensure the full allocation of hours is in accordance with DES Circular Letters 0070/2014 and 0014/2017. The additional allocation to provide supports for SEN should be used in its entirety for the intended purpose.

The allocation of over thirty per cent of teachers to providing SEN support should be kept under review and other models of provision such as team teaching should be considered. Given the SEN qualification deficit among staff delivering this form of support, it would be beneficial if peer CPD was provided more frequently by the SEN department to support subject teachers.

A very extensive range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities is provided with high uptake from students. The school has excellent sporting facilities and is competitive at national level in particular codes.

Managing the organisation

The quality of school governance is very good; the board of management is properly constituted and has close links to the trustee body, with some members common to both groups. Communications with nominating bodies are good and agreed reports are relayed to the teaching staff and the parents' association. There is scope to include more detail of the board's role and activities through the school website when updated.

The board has engaged well in policy development and all mandatory policies are in place. Evidence indicates that a wide consultation process informs policy review. The school, although fee-charging, seeks to broaden access through scholarship and bursary arrangements that are reviewed in the admissions policy and approved at board level.

The principal, also known as the head of school, and the deputy principal, form an effective senior management team. Their roles and duties are formalised in signed contracts, but both are flexible and work well together in the management of the school on a day-to-day basis. In driving improvements in teaching and learning, the senior management team has the confidence of all parties interviewed during the evaluation. Good systems have been established to facilitate effective communication, a strength that emerged strongly in questionnaire responses. Almost all parents surveyed indicated that the school was well run, as did all teachers who completed the survey.

Leadership is distributed effectively throughout the school. The middle-management team comprises three assistant principals as well as six year heads and a TY co-ordinator who are privately paid. Year heads have a very close connection to students in their year groups and the system provides very good support for student care. While senior management liaises frequently with the middle management team, there would be benefits to establishing a more formal structure of consultation and inclusion in the management structure of the school.

The deployment of teachers in the majority of cases is in line with their qualifications. A qualified teacher of Guidance is not available currently. There is a need also to address the deficit in Teaching Council qualifications in the home-economics department where one of the positions is currently assigned to an unqualified staff member.

The management of facilities is good. Teacher-based classrooms predominate and in addition to the specialist rooms are well resourced and maintained. The school library is a very good facility and was seen to operate after school to full capacity as a study and research centre. One area of concern was the absence of an extraction system in the home-economics room.

Leading school development

Senior management promotes a culture of professional reflection and development by encouraging teachers to develop their teaching, learning and assessment practices. They value the richness of experience that teachers' attendance at CPD events brings back to the school. The school should devise a strategy to monitor and develop the impact of CPD in the classroom and consider a CPD portfolio as an integral part of teacher development. Management has facilitated peer observation in recent times and developing this professional collaboration model could form an integral part of CPD portfolios.

Developing leadership capacity

In addition to the middle management team, there is a high level of volunteerism among staff across the school. A student-support team leads in providing student care. The student-care team meets with the rest of the staff on Wednesday mornings in an informal capacity. It is recommended that formal meetings are held to facilitate the growing needs of students.

Leadership within the student body is very effective. Student leadership capacity is developed through three key areas: the student council, prefect system and the buddy programme for first-year students. The student council plays an important role in school life and has presented recent findings to the board of management. They are also asked their views on school issues and indicated that they clearly felt that they had a say in how the school was run.

Innovative and purposeful planning is encouraged. The drafting and delivery of the wellbeing programmes is a good example. Work on developing subject plans and schemes of work is supported by a senior post of responsibility holder.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in almost all of the lessons observed and some excellent practice was noted. There were some areas for improvement and recommendations provided can help to achieve a consistently very high standard. In a few lessons the quality of provision was adequate and in some respects in need of significant change.

Learner outcomes and experiences

In the lessons observed, students in the main had a very positive experience of learning. This was evident in the positive atmosphere that characterised almost all lessons and in the very good level of student participation. Students engaged well with the learning challenges and, in most cases, presented as confident learners, willing to share their knowledge and collaborate respectfully with their peers and with their teachers. In the very best instances, this was achieved through teachers consciously involving students as much as possible in active learning where students were expected to routinely contribute ideas, explain and demonstrate knowledge or understanding.

In a very small number of lessons students engaged mainly with text in handouts where opportunities for oral engagement were limited. It is recommended that certain second language lessons expose learners to developing language skills in a more integrated way and that spontaneous oral production of language be prominent among those skills.

Experience of working in teams, whether in pairs or larger groups, was a recurring feature of the learner experience that showed good outcomes. Students collaborated very well in these settings and contributed good ideas to completing the assigned challenge or task as a cohesive team rather than as individuals within a team. Pair work and group work was efficiently organised with assigned roles.

Very effective practice was seen in some instances of consolidating learning where students responded well to the encouragement to ask questions rather than wait to respond to teacher questioning. In general students were observed to be much stronger and more ready to answer rather than to ask questions. It is recommended therefore that encouraging students to ask more questions become a more familiar part of the learner experience.

Learning intentions were introduced at the start of almost all lessons either orally or displayed on the board. Good practice in some cases saw success criteria shared with students to guide the attainment of the learning intentions. Excellent practice was noted where additional extension tasks were included that challenged students to go beyond the tasks set for the class in general. It is recommended that this practice be used more widely as a means to encourage students to extend their capacity to learn and should not be confined to targeting exceptionally able students only who are the focus of a recently drafted whole-school policy on special learning needs.

In most cases, the measuring of the level of success achieved in attaining the learning intentions was addressed towards the end of the lesson. Good classroom management permitted a very worthwhile review and recap of learning but classroom practice varied and was uneven. Revisiting the learning intentions should be a more consistent part of the learning experience.

Some subject-specific classrooms provided students with a stimulating learning environment and exemplars of students' work rightly formed part of the display material. In general, the quality of the learning environment in classrooms showed quite a range and should be considered an area for development.

Low student numbers in classes were a feature of the learning experience of students throughout the school. Representatives of parents, the board of management and students identified low class size as a key strength in the quality of provision in the school. Across the lessons observed, a very favourable student-teacher ratio obtained.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

Preparation for lessons was in most cases very good and the learning intentions shared in most cases gave a clear focus to how the lesson would develop. The very good-quality of subject planning and its close connection to schemes of work showed these plans are living documents that inform classroom practice.

Students' recording of homework in their journals showed quite a variation in practice while questionnaire findings showed a small level of concern at the regular correction of homework.

Commendably, almost all teachers avoided systematic explanation and used a good range of oral questioning to engage students and support learning. Questions were well dispersed among the students and were well differentiated.

Assessment strategies form one of the strands of school self-evaluation (SSE) that are focused on improving teaching and learning. Assessment of learning (AoL) was more pronounced than assessment-for-learning (AfL) strategies in the student copies examined. There is scope to embed this element of SSE work more in teachers' practice and to develop students' independent learning skills through the promotion of note making as a more challenging and rewarding skill than note taking. This skill was shared very well where a visualiser was used to show a teacher demonstrate note making in real time on a text but asked the students to create their own notes.

There was a range of quality in the use of Information and communications technology (ICT) resources to enhance learning. Hands-on use of ICT resources was primarily the preserve of teachers. First-year and some sixth-year students were seen to be avid and proficient users of hand-held tablet computers as a research tool. Electronic slides were used well and provided useful explanations and summaries of learning. Media clips supported by well-focused worksheets or questions added value to learning but this good use was not wholly consistent. Developing ICT skills provides an area for sharing good practice among teachers.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

The school has made very good progress in implementing recommendations from previous subject inspections in a whole-school manner.

The 2014 SEN report included a recommendation on minimising the number of teachers engaged in resource teaching and creating a core resource teaching team to better facilitate planning and coordination; this recommendation remains relevant.

Teaching and Learning

Overall, very good progress has been made in implementing recommendations within subject departments and in a whole-school manner. The close examination of recommendations has been supported by the assignment of an assistant principal post of responsibility holder to monitor subject planning and schemes of work development.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school's engagement with the SSE process is good and has reached the fourth strand. The first three strands addressed whole-school issues: literacy, numeracy and wellbeing. The fourth strand of provision for exceptionally able students through the lens of SSE emerged from the school's own audit of needs and is at the early stages of implementation. Several additional sub-strands, however, were identified which would be better addressed as discrete teaching and learning issues.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

There is very good capacity for school improvement. Senior management retains a clear focus on improvement; teachers are encouraged and facilitated to become associates with teaching and learning agencies such as the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). The three assistant principal posts are focused on developing teaching and learning practices within the school, work that is closely aligned to the SSE process and achieving ongoing improvements in teaching and learning.

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 in the school's reception area.
3. The school has a child safeguarding statement 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 warmly welcome this inspection report and appreciates the process undertaken. The board appreciates the recognition and praise in the report regarding:

- Strong ethos and encouragement of school leadership within the student body
- High level of volunteerism amongst staff
- High levels of planning leading to excellent learning experiences
- Favourable pupil teacher ratio and excellent learning environments
- Strong level of management and stewardship of the school and its strength of communication as well as the high morale among staff, noting that almost all parents surveyed indicated that the school was well run as did all the teachers
- The levels of CPD and peer observation
- Our approach to student wellbeing and the quality of our student care
- Our commitment to the development of CPD as a driving force
- Our commitment to school self-evaluation in particular referencing our ongoing policy with regard to exceptionally able students

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

We intend to reallocate our SEN hours in line with relevant Circulars. The number of teachers involved in SEN will be reduced in 2018/19 school year

Plans are in place to engage a middle-management role within the Assistant Principal structure to develop formal records of the existing strong coherence amongst various leadership teams. In tandem with this role will come responsibility for a school wide approach to CPD

We are proud of our teaching and learning strategies and will continue to encourage students to ask more questions

Our Guidance Counsellor is enrolled in a postgraduate Guidance Counselling course commencing in September 2018

Whilst welcoming the observation that the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in almost all lessons observed, ongoing CPD and peer observation are taking place to ensure that any areas in need of improvement can be addressed.

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;