

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Dominican College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	204 Griffith Ave Drumcondra Dublin 9
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	60690R

Date of Evaluation: 06-12-2018



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

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Whole-School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning reports on the quality of teaching and learning and on the quality of management and leadership in a school. It affirms good practice and makes recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of educational provision in the school.

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspectors evaluated and reported under the following headings or areas of enquiry:

1. Quality of school leadership and management
2. Quality of teaching and learning
3. Implementation of recommendations from previous evaluations
4. The school's self-evaluation process and capacity for school improvement

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

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, RSE and 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	3, 4 and 6 December 2018
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with board of management • Meetings with principal and deputy principals • 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

Dominican College is a Catholic secondary school for girls and operates under the patronage of Le Chéile Trust. There are currently 740 students enrolled. The programmes provided are the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

Summary of main findings and recommendations

Findings

- The quality of school leadership and management is very good; aspects of the board's strategic planning and provision for special educational needs (SEN), Guidance and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) require further development.
- Leadership for learning and teaching is very effective and includes many examples of exemplary practice.
- The school has fostered a very positive climate, characterised by respectful relationships, high expectations, care for students' wellbeing and a focus on their holistic development.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good with very good practice noted in a significant number of lessons; further embedding of teaching practice that facilitates differentiation and deeper learning is required.
- Very good progress has been made in the implementation of many of the recommendations from previous evaluations; there is scope for further progress in the area of differentiation.
- The school's self-evaluation (SSE) process is very effective and 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 for the future development of the school.
- Deployment of additional teaching resources for special educational needs (SEN) should be revised to align fully with the principles of the revised resource allocation model, as outlined in Circular 0014/2017.
- Guidance provision should be enhanced through the scheduling of classroom guidance for all senior-cycle groups; provision for Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) and RSE should be reviewed to ensure a consistent quality across all relevant year groups.
- Differentiated teaching approaches should be developed and good practice should be shared in the use of student-centred methodologies in order to facilitate learners to consolidate and reflect more effectively on their progress in lessons.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of school leadership and management is very good.

Leading learning and teaching

The quality of leadership for learning and teaching is very effective and includes many examples of exemplary practice. The senior management team shares a common vision that seeks to place students at the core of all decisions made in the school. They play an essential role in ensuring that the school is a calm and respectful place to work and learn. They strive to ensure that students reach their full potential. To achieve this aim, a very broad range of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities is provided by a very supportive and committed staff.

The principal works very effectively with the board of management to maintain a learning organisation that delivers high-quality learning experiences for all. School management and staff foster a very positive school climate, characterised by respectful relationships, high expectations, care for students' wellbeing and a focus on their holistic development.

The principal has delegated to the two deputy principals the responsibility for spearheading specific developments in teaching, learning and assessment, the embedding of the *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015* and mentoring of newly qualified teachers through the *Droichead* programme. Commendably, staff teams have been established to lead improvements in these areas and this work is progressing very well. Students are encouraged to sign up to a Code of Learning, in which they commit to becoming more reflective, critical thinkers and to take increasing responsibility for their own learning.

There is an emerging culture of creativity and innovation in the school. Continuing professional development (CPD) in Instructional Leadership and educational management is facilitated for teachers and generously supported by the board, in addition to centrally provided subject-specific CPD. Commendably, teachers share expertise through extensive consultation and making presentations at staff meetings and at lunch-time workshops. While many active methodologies and approaches have been adopted by the staff, there is inconsistency evident in the effectiveness of their application in the lessons observed. It is evident that it will take more time, and further support, before these student-centred approaches are embedded in a very effective manner in all lessons across the school.

A broad range of subjects and programmes is offered and an informative booklet on subject choice at senior cycle is published annually by the school. Incoming first-year students and their parents benefit from a comprehensive induction and information programme. Questionnaire responses indicate that both parents and students would appreciate more guidance from teachers in regard to subject choice.

The curriculum has been expanded at senior cycle with the recent introduction of two new Leaving Certificate examination subjects, namely Physical Education (PE) and Politics and Society. Innovation in the curriculum is also a hallmark of the very successful and well-organised TY programme. Learning activities include core subjects, a musical, a mini-company and work experience. Modules in Russian, Korean and Chinese are also provided, in addition to the three modern foreign languages of French, German and Spanish already available. In keeping with management's commitment to expand students' experience of more practical subjects, TY students are also offered modules in Technology and Woodwork. The introduction of an e-portfolio for all TY students is a very positive development.

It is commendable that in recent years school management introduced the LCVP as an option for senior cycle students. The programme has proved popular and successful, with over twenty students availing of the option most years, including the current sixth year group. Take up of the programme in the current fifth year has fluctuated, with only nine students doing the Link Modules at the time of the evaluation. In view of these fluctuating participation rates, it is recommended that school management explore ways to further promote the benefits of the LCVP programme to students. Consideration should also be given to timetabling an alternative learning experience at Link Modules time to ensure that the range of learning needs of students who decide to discontinue with LCVP is appropriately addressed.

Care for students is of a high quality. In their responses to questionnaires, students reported that they feel very safe and well cared for, they are proud of their school, and that there is a good atmosphere in the school. Effective student support structures are in place, including a Student Support Team that meets frequently. Year heads meet weekly with form teachers and with the senior management team.

Students benefit from the services of two guidance counsellors and a school chaplain. The guidance team recently hosted two very successful careers fairs. Currently classroom guidance is timetabled for TY students only. It is recommended that a module of classroom guidance be formally scheduled for every senior cycle class group to enhance Guidance provision in the school.

The school provides a number of interventions and activities to support student wellbeing. Lessons in SPHE are provided at junior cycle. Senior cycle RSE is provided as part of Religious Education. Interactions with staff and questionnaire responses from both parents and students highlighted inconsistencies in the quality of provision of both programmes. It is recommended that provision for SPHE and RSE be reviewed to ensure a consistent quality across all relevant year groups.

A school-designed wellbeing programme has recently been introduced in first and second year. While this is a highly commendable initiative, planning for teaching and learning in this area is still at the developmental stage. It is advised that a core wellbeing learning and teaching team be established and that cross-curricular opportunities that exist between all relevant subjects be further exploited.

As recognised by the school, the management of aspects of SEN provision needs to be reviewed. A SEN co-ordinator was formally appointed at the beginning of this academic year and a three-year strategic plan has been developed, beginning with an audit of current provision. Support files for a number of students have been compiled; it is important that this work is progressed to include all students who are receiving support.

At the time of the evaluation a small proportion of the hours allocated for designated SEN support was being used to create small classes in English and Mathematics. There is a very large team of teachers delivering support. This makes coordination and review of specific supports difficult. It is recommended that deployment of additional teaching resources for SEN be revised to align fully with the principles of the revised resource allocation model, as outlined in circular letter 0014/2017.

It is a positive development that teachers volunteer to mentor sixth-year students to maximise their academic potential and to support their wellbeing. There is scope to further develop academic monitoring and tracking of attainment across other year groups.

The school reported that it regularly provides placements for student teachers and has established strong and mutually-beneficial links with local universities. Such engagement in initial teacher education programmes is welcome.

Managing the organisation

The board of management is proud of the school, its ethos and its tradition of care for students. It has good collective expertise and operates effectively.

Both the principal and the board have identified a number of developmental priorities that include improving educational provision in the school. However, at the time of the evaluation the school's developmental plan did not contain timelines or measurable targets. It is recommended that the board, in collaboration with all the relevant stakeholders, further develop its strategic plan for the future development of the school.

The board members are aware of their statutory obligations. Through good sub-committee structures, they develop clear policies to ensure the safety and well-being of all. They affirm the achievements of everyone in the school community.

All mandatory policies are in place and they are subject to systematic review, although there is scope to include the wider parent and student body in the consultation process. At the time of the evaluation, the Code of Behaviour was being reviewed to reflect more accurately the school's emphasis on promoting positive behaviour, in line with the Tusla guidelines. During the evaluation students' behaviour was observed to be exemplary.

The principal and the two deputy principals work very effectively together as a team. Their roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. They oversee the very smooth day-to-day running of the school. They model and develop a strong culture of trust, respect and shared accountability.

Responses from questionnaires demonstrate a very high level of satisfaction among students, parents and staff with how the school is run. Parents feel very welcome in the school. Staff agree that their views are valued in the decision-making process and that the positive school climate has contributed to their own sense of wellbeing.

Commendably board members conduct an annual inspection tour of the school and its environs. The board maintains the buildings and grounds to a high standard. Improving the school's infrastructure and specialist rooms has been identified as one of the board's key priorities and the board has been proactive in planning accordingly.

Leading school development

The senior management team motivates students and staff to achieve ongoing improvements through the school's self-evaluation processes, and they keep abreast of changes in the broader educational environment.

The school maintains very constructive relationships with parents, past pupils, local businesses, the Le Chéile trust and other education partners to extend learning opportunities for students and staff.

The school has a very active Parents' Association whose members demonstrate a keen interest in improving the school's educational provision and resources, including ICT. Commendably, parents have input into school policy development and the school self-evaluation processes. While the general body of parents has access to a school app, texts and a newsletter, questionnaire data indicate that parents would welcome greater consultation in relation to school matters.

Developing leadership capacity

The senior management team delegates responsibilities appropriately and strategically. They empower teachers to take on leadership roles through the effective use of distributed leadership and encourage teamwork in all aspects of school life.

The post holders have a range of responsibilities commensurate with their positions and carry out their roles to a high standard. Nine of the post holders are year heads or assistant year heads. During the evaluation there appeared to be a lack of clarity about the role of the assistant year head. It is advised that school management keep the necessity of having assistant year heads at junior cycle under review. The school has recently been allocated two new posts and a review of the schedule of posts has been carried out. It is positive that, in line with Circular 03/2018, responsibilities for aspects of the curriculum, teaching and learning and SSE have been added to the revised schedule.

Students avail of leadership opportunities through active participation in school activities. Prefects are drawn from sixth year and they assist in many areas of school life, including mentoring first-year students. The Student Council is democratically elected and has already brought about changes to the school uniform. Other students host an annual Clubs Fair and participate in the blessing of the animals and other fun-day events. Their active engagement adds to the strong sense of community in the school.

The student voice is actively promoted in the classroom and in the many opportunities provided to students to represent the school. Questionnaire data indicate that there is further scope for the school to facilitate students to have a greater input into how things are done in the school.

QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good, with very good practice noted in a significant number of lessons.

Learner outcomes and experiences

Overall the learner experiences were very good in the lessons observed. At all times the quality of classroom interactions was very good. Students were confident to ask questions. Class teachers' own enthusiasm motivated students to enjoy their learning. The cluster arrangement of desks noted in many classrooms facilitated collaborative learning activities. In almost all lessons students demonstrated high levels of motivation, were engaged keenly in class activities, and wanted to improve as learners. In the language lessons observed students and teachers made very good use of the target language.

The quality of learner outcomes was good overall, with some very good outcomes noted. Lesson structure and design impacted on the quality of student outcomes and experiences. When lessons were clearly built on students' prior knowledge, and the planned activities provided a sufficient scaffold to support the acquisition of new knowledge, learner outcomes of a very high standard were noted.

In all lessons learning intentions were shared with students. Highly-effective learning was facilitated when the intentions were expressed as meaningful and attainable targets. In a minority of lessons there was scope to clarify or contextualise the learning intentions further. Highly-effective learning was also noted when the planned intentions were sufficiently differentiated and discussed with students.

Some good use was made of strategies such as show-me boards, success criteria, exit tickets and traffic lights to enable teachers to assess progress in the planned intentions. There is scope to further develop these practices to provide for deeper levels of student reflection. In some instances there was little reference to the learning intentions once the lesson progressed and opportunities for students to recognise and reflect on their learning were lost.

Students were given ample opportunities to participate in collaborative activities in lessons. Learning was highly effective when the assigned tasks were clearly linked to the learning intentions, appropriately challenging, and when the plenary session enabled the students to process the information in a meaningful way to support deep learning. Highly-effective student engagement in group work was noted when the activity was time bound, and student roles within the group clearly assigned. In some instances the learning potential of collaborative activities was not optimised. Further consideration should be given to the design of collaborative activities to ensure that the tasks are sufficiently challenging and that the key learning is effectively consolidated, recorded and reflected on by students.

In the lessons observed, students made some very good use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to support their learning. Timetabled provision for Digital Media is assisting students to use the school's digital platform effectively.

In some lessons students were afforded the opportunity to peer teach, question each other and to extend their learning in creative ways. As evidenced by the quality of work in student copybooks and the quality of interactions in lessons, students have a significant sense of pride in completing high-quality work. Homework is set and corrected regularly. Some junior cycle students, in their interactions with inspectors, expressed the view that sometimes they were assigned too much homework, and that there was scope for teachers to coordinate the setting of homework more evenly to achieve a more balanced distribution of deadlines across the week. Student copybooks were well organised with some very good note-making, as opposed to note-taking strategies noted.

Teachers' Individual and Collective Practice

A wide variety of teaching approaches was observed in the lessons visited. The whole-school focus on supporting teachers to use a wide range of methodologies is proving very effective. Teachers should now focus on embedding the highly-effective use of student-centred methodologies to ensure that learners successfully consolidate and reflect on their progress during lessons.

There was evidence of advance planning and preparation for all of the lessons observed. Highly-effective lessons had a suitable pace and material was pitched at a level appropriate to students' needs.

In many lessons, students worked collaboratively, at times assessing their own work and at times learning from peer assessment. This was observed to be most effective where the teacher facilitated the learning, by providing an appropriate level of whole-class specialist input and ensuring the lesson was in line with the intended learning outcome. On occasion there was an over-reliance on activity that was teacher-led or student-led, with limited opportunities to explore misconceptions and improve students' depth of understanding.

Learning was of an exceptionally high standard where teachers had a high level of awareness of individual students' capacities, and adapted the teaching approaches accordingly. While some good differentiated teaching approaches were noted in a small number of lessons, a whole-class approach to teaching and learning prevailed in almost all lessons, with the same content and tasks provided to all students. Given the range of student abilities, differentiated teaching approaches should be further developed and integrated into lessons.

Questioning was a popular formative assessment strategy. In the highly-effective lessons, there was a good balance between questions that demanded recall and more challenging questions that opened opportunities for higher-order thinking and creativity.

Some very good formative feedback was noted on some copybooks, class tests and summative assessments. There is scope to extend the use of formative feedback on key pieces of work. Consideration should also be given to how students record and use the very good oral feedback provided in lessons.

The quality of teachers' collaborative practice is very good overall. Subject departments are well established. Exemplary practice is apparent in the in-school structures to supporting the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning and on the school's electronic platform.

Planning for the new Junior Cycle specifications is well underway. Very good practice was noted in plans that detailed key areas of learning together with specific teaching and assessment approaches for each unit of work. Some senior cycle plans would benefit from further development. To complement the *Framework for Junior Cycle*, summative assessment practice is moving towards outcomes-based examinations.

It is good practice that subject teams review student attainment data and some very positive trends were noted. There is significant scope to analyse trends in student attainment data more deeply to inform key pedagogic practice and to inform subject-specific targets and actions to support student learning.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

Very good progress has been made in the implementation of recommendations regarding leadership and management. Issues relating to timetabling, middle management structures and the TY programme have all been addressed.

Teaching and Learning

Good progress has been made in the implementation of recommendations regarding teaching and learning. The sharing of learning intentions with students is now embedded in lessons. Peer observation has been promoted in the Irish department and is slowly being extended to other subject areas. As observed in lessons, more work needs to be done to develop differentiation strategies and facilitate deep learning.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school's SSE process is very effective. The school has identified key areas for improvement and core teams have been established to promote ongoing improvements in literacy, numeracy and aspects of teaching, learning and assessment. The current focus is on formative assessment and formative feedback. In line with good practice, the teams regularly survey students, parents and staff. While ambitious goals and targets are set, there is scope for closer monitoring and a more detailed analysis of progress. It is recommended that when setting SMART targets for improvement the teams also plan for the assessment of the achievement of those targets.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school's capacity for improvement is very good. Both management and staff demonstrate a very high level of energy, enthusiasm and commitment to ongoing school 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;