

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

School name	Dominican College
School address	Sion Hill Blackrock Co. Dublin
Roll number	60070K

Date of Evaluation: 21-02-2018



What is whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning?

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

How to read this report

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

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

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Dates of inspection	5 th , 20 th and 21 st February 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 • Interaction with students 	<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 • Feedback to senior management team, board of management and teachers

School context

Dominican College Sion Hill is a voluntary secondary school in Dublin for girls, under the trusteeship of Le Chéile. Enrolment has been incrementally increasing for some time, and there are 441 students currently attending. The school is providing the new junior cycle, a compulsory Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of leadership and management is very good with excellent practice in the principal and deputy principal's leadership of teaching and learning and in the promotion of student voice and student leadership.
- Enabling each student to reach her full potential academically, spiritually, physically, emotionally and socially is the highest priority; to achieve this the school provides a very wide range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities and has developed very good systems for monitoring students' academic progress and for their holistic development.
- A highly effective student-support structure is in place but the formal structures for special educational needs (SEN), including co-ordination, planning and review, and the use of the additional teaching resources, require development.
- Very good teaching and learning was observed in a significant majority of lessons but there was some variation in the quality of assessment.
- Very good progress has been made in meeting recommendations from previous evaluations.
- Senior management uses the school self-evaluation (SSE) process very successfully to manage the school's responses to changing needs and to make ongoing improvements to teaching and learning; the school has already proven it has exceptionally high capacity for improvement.

Recommendations

- Senior management should establish a core team for SEN, and, in collaboration with this team, ensure that the school's procedures and the use of additional teaching resources for students are brought in line with Circular 0014/2017 and the *Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools – Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools*.
- To build on the highly effective practices observed in lessons and ongoing continuing professional development (CPD), teachers should continue to focus on developing their assessment for learning practices.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is very good.

Leading learning and teaching

The quality of leadership of learning and teaching is excellent. The senior management team, comprising the principal and the deputy principal, has a strong professional relationship with staff. They have a clear focus on continuous improvement, and have long fostered this culture by supporting teachers to be reflective practitioners and by promoting collaborative practices. Within the school community, they model and develop mutual trust, respect and shared accountability. They use a consultative leadership style and actively promote teacher and student voice in key decisions. The principal regularly seeks evaluative feedback through surveys of teachers, students and parents and uses the findings to drive the improvement agenda. The principal meets teachers annually to discuss their work and professional development, and visits lessons to observe teaching and learning. Staff and student motivation and solidarity are notably strong.

Discussions at staff meetings are focused on learning, teaching and school improvement. Subject departments share teaching strategies and plan for the implementation of junior cycle and the school improvement plan (SIP). A teaching and learning group has been established comprising teachers committed to improving their own practice as well as researching effective methodologies and disseminating good practice.

For many years, management has strategically focused whole-school CPD on developing capacity in teaching and learning. Most recently, the focus has been on furthering assessment for learning practices with a view to enhancing learner outcomes and also supporting junior cycle implementation. Considerable CPD has been undertaken by individual teachers in a range of areas that greatly enriches learning. Teachers routinely share their learning from these events.

The results of the Inspectorate's questionnaires by teachers, parents and students on the quality of management, leadership and learning were highly positive.

Enabling each student to reach her full potential academically, spiritually, physically, emotionally and socially in a happy secure environment, is the school's mission and its highest priority. This was attested to by the board of management, senior management, staff and students. To achieve this priority, the school provides a very wide range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities, including an innovative range of leadership opportunities and committee roles for students.

To ensure that each student is reaching their full potential in all realms, the school has developed exemplary systems for monitoring and reporting on progress. The system for academic tracking and monitoring is highly-developed. To determine expected levels of achievement, students take tests in cognitive ability, interests and attitude to learning at key stages. This, in combination with, a rigorous review of the outcomes of school examinations and monthly assessments in subjects, relative to each student's ability, is used to inform mainstream teaching, or to provide support or mentoring. In addition, the school's unique *spirit* point's system is used to record participation and effort in extra-curricular and leadership activities. Awards ceremonies acknowledge student performance in each area of their education. These are all effective motivators and contribute to the highly positive students' attitudes noted during the evaluation.

Key to supporting educational and personal well-being is the pastoral care system involving class tutors and year heads. The structure operates very well. Year heads meet regularly with senior management and the tutors. There are clear referral pathways with good communication and record keeping. Student well-being is highly valued and is a defining characteristic of the school.

The school has an inclusive intake, including students from other countries, students with additional education needs, English as an additional language (EAL) and gifted students. The emphasis in EAL is on developing all four language skills, enabling access to the curriculum. Support for students with SEN is provided for academic, emotional, social and communication needs. Special tuition is given to those with exemptions from Irish and for short-term individualised interventions. In some groups, SEN teaching support hours are used to reduce the student-teacher ratio for Maths and English; this is unsatisfactory and should be reviewed. A greater emphasis should be placed on team teaching. It is positive that an established SEN filing system enables the sharing of information with all subject teachers and that some good support plans are developed. However, some plans were not fully developed. Nor was it clear that they were being informed by regular reviews of progress or adjustments in the priority learning targets. While in-class support for student needs was very good, there is scope to develop the infrastructure and procedures for co-ordinating, planning, monitoring and reporting on progress in SEN. It is recommended that a core team with responsibility for SEN be established. The role of co-ordinator should involve advising mainstream teachers and year heads on teaching and learning and guiding on the implementation of support plans. At the time of the evaluation, management was making plans to facilitate a staff member to pursue a qualification in special education.

The board and senior management manage the planning and implementation of the curriculum very well. The school, for its size, provides a broad curriculum. Management makes informed efforts to meet the needs of students. The evolution of the curriculum is based on good consultation, including feedback from surveys and discussions at meetings. As enrolment increases, the range of subjects is expanding. The LCVP programme, Applied Mathematics, Spanish and Accountancy were introduced in response to needs. Plans are in place to introduce Computer Science, Politics and Society and Leaving Certificate Physical Education (PE) as an examination subject. In implementing Junior Cycle reform, the school moved to one-hour lessons.

The curriculum includes provision for PE, Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Personal Development. Commendably, on foot of feedback from TY students, the school made additional provision for RSE in TY. On the basis of information from the Inspectorate's questionnaires, the school should take steps to ensure that provision for substance use education and RSE is consistent and understood by students and their parents.

A very valuable TY programme offers a range of new experiences. TY is greatly enriched by the calendar events, afternoon activities, social awareness elements and modules in new areas of learning. It is good practice that in some modules, the curriculum plan is developed as transition units and some subjects use an inter-disciplinary approach. In the current TY programme slightly too much weighting is given to work experience and this should be adjusted when reviewing the programme. In addition, formal assessment should be more explicitly linked to each student's achievement of the aims of the national TY programme.

Managing the organisation

The board of management oversees school operation in a very efficient pro-active manner. Current and previous boards have endeavoured to ensure the range of abilities and interests among students are met by developing the infrastructure, facilities, curriculum and teaching. The board is keenly attentive to the outcomes of surveys as indicators for further improvement. Progressing teaching and learning is discussed at board meetings. The board strongly supports the developments

in academic tracking, student leadership, student mentoring and the student-support system. In its governance, the board could take a role in overseeing quality of examination performance in subjects.

The board is aware of statutory obligations and is committed to ensuring that legislative requirements are met, including developing and implementing required policies to ensure the safety and wellbeing of students. The board should now update the admissions' policy as it is outdated. The board should also ensure that a report from the principal on child protection is a standing item on the agenda for all meetings and that a record of the principal's report on anti-bullying is recorded in the minutes at least once every school term.

The board promotes an inclusive school community. It maintains effective communication with all partners, including teaching staff, the parents' association and the students' council. It has enhanced links with the local community for social, educational, sports and music events. The board is now focusing on further developing its partnership with students and has held a recent meeting with members of the students' council.

The board, the principal, deputy principal and key staff have established an orderly, secure and healthy learning environment and it is maintained through effective communication. The code of behaviour is based on the principles of respect and responsible behaviour. It is clearly understood by students, teachers and parents. This was reflected in the exemplary behaviour of students and their feelings of care and safety. Communication structures among staff in the school are effective. In the questionnaires and in meetings, teachers were very affirming of the quality of communication. The board and senior management liaise appropriately with relevant agencies to support students.

Senior management, with the support of the board, oversees the smooth day-to-day running of the school. They work effectively to maintain a learning organisation that delivers high-quality facilities for staff and students. Buildings and teaching resources are maintained to a very high standard. Highly-beneficial developments have taken place in recent years, including the astro pitch, library, main entrance, café, music room, information and communication technology (ICT) facilities, including an E-learning platform, and the highly-innovative step of establishing a student leadership room. Plans to further upgrade facilities are part of the board's set of priorities.

Management deploys teachers with a view to optimum use of their subject qualifications. Human resources are managed very effectively to maximise learning across the curriculum. As already identified, there is scope for improvement in aspects of deployment for SEN.

Leading school development

The school communicates a clear guiding vision through its mission statement. The board of management is proactive in maintaining the guiding vision and using it to lead school development. The senior management team clearly communicates the guiding vision to teachers, parents and students in a way that empowers the whole school community to translate the mission into action.

Senior management uses self-evaluation processes very effectively to lead school development. The principal leads staff in a continuous process of SSE, and has, for many years, been making systematic use of the outcomes of surveys to inform and to monitor progress in school improvement planning. In the responses to the Inspectorate's questionnaires, all teachers agreed that SSE is used to improve students' learning.

The senior management team mediates change in response to evolving needs and changes in education. They demonstrate a clear understanding of change processes. In leading school development, the principal and deputy principal seek and listen to the opinions of others and formally engage in very effective dialogue with all partners.

Very good actions are taken to involve the parents' association in its partnership and advisory role. The association is committed, proactive and participates in school life. The school communicates very well with parents about their child's progress and well-being. It is currently developing the quality of the reports that are sent home to parents, including developing teachers' comments on students' learning in subjects. The E-administration platform enables parents to access information on their child's academic performance, attendance, behaviour and extra-curricular participation.

Developing leadership capacity

The principal and deputy principal actively promote the development of leadership capacity. They have created exemplary models of teamwork and distributed leadership among staff and students.

Senior management empowers groups to take on key areas and to lead aspects of school development according to their expertise, thus building leadership capacity. This has engendered high levels of motivation and commitment. Staff leadership roles are wide-ranging. They include leadership of the student-support team, learning and teaching committee, class tutors, mentoring gifted and talented students, training school teams and liaising with the student committees. Teachers rotate the co-ordination of subjects departments. The programme co-ordinator is given significant responsibility in leading learning in LCVP and TY. The unique system for academic tracking was developed in-house.

Leadership capacity is also facilitated through the school's posts of responsibility. Many of the posts have considerable leadership responsibility and accountability as members of a middle leadership team. A review of posts took place three years ago and some assistant principals undertook year head roles. Plans are in place to conduct another review of posts and this is timely. The principal and deputy principal have short and medium-term targets to further develop leadership capacity through the posts of responsibility.

Promotion of student voice, student leadership and student involvement is exemplary, wide-ranging and innovative. The roles and decisions of the student council and student leadership groups are highly-valued, representative, and seen as catalysts for change. The principal actively consults and engages with students in evaluating teaching, learning and assessment practices. Students take on leadership roles through the student council, as prefects and team captains and on committees. There are student leadership committees for the arts, environment, library, sports, social awareness and mind, body and soul. In their positions as leaders, students are encouraged to share their enthusiasm, help others to participate and strengthen school life.

The principal and deputy principal actively involve themselves in professional associations for school leadership and they demonstrate learning from these associations in their practice.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of learning and teaching was highly effective in a significant majority of lessons observed; there was scope for improvement in a few lessons.

Learner outcomes and experiences

In most lessons, learner outcomes and experiences were very positive. Students' enjoyment of learning was evident and arose from a sense of making progress in their learning; this contributed to their well-being and engagement. Lessons were highly active and interactive in nature. Across all year groups, students experienced high-quality, meaningful curricular activities that developed understanding, key skills and attitudes necessary for successful learning.

The student voice was very well-developed and prominent in lessons. Students had very high levels of interest and participation in learning, working collaboratively in a very purposeful and productive manner. They gave very confident and competent responses and contributions in class. Interactions were very respectful.

Overall outcomes in terms of student attainment in the certificate examinations is consistently very good in most subjects. In the lessons observed, it was evident that students expected to achieve as learners. They demonstrated a positive and reflective approach to their classwork and homework. In some instances, students demonstrated very strong ownership of their learning, having developed independence in their note-making and in taking responsibility for improving their work. This approach could be extended across the school to gain further improvements in attainment.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

Teachers established very positive learning environments based on respect and affirmation. They modelled enthusiasm for their subjects and showed a passion for learning, thereby creating learning environments where students were self-motivated. Teachers generally set high expectations for students' work and communicated these effectively. Their competence and proficiency in the skills and knowledge of their subject areas were evident throughout the evaluation. Teachers used a sequence of learning tasks and activities that purposefully progressed students' knowledge and skills according to the curricular requirements and programme objectives.

In most lessons, teachers used highly-effective and differentiated questions to elicit information, facilitating deeper engagement and extending learning. This challenged students and enabled them to experience success while helping them to make meaningful links with other areas and transfer their learning to new contexts. In almost all lessons, in-class support for students was very good. Teachers circulated productively to challenge and support individuals and to move them forward in their learning, according to each student's potential.

Throughout many lessons, very good practice was observed in the use of formative feedback to students on their progress and in the regular review of learning by both the teacher and students. Across lessons, however, there was variation in the use of assessment for learning strategies. While teacher correction of copybooks and the use of the school's exam cover sheet in returning class tests were noted, the quality of formative comments to guide student improvement varied. It is positive that the school has identified the need to continue to focus on embedding assessment for learning.

In almost all lessons, teachers used ICT, including the school's E-learning platform, while students used ICT in the majority of lessons. Teachers made effective and explicit use of literacy strategies in most lessons and made effective use of numeracy moments in some lessons.

Teachers' collaborative practice is well developed. Teachers value their role as leaders of learning within a professional organisation. Many teachers actively engage in constructive collaborative practices such as the learning and teaching committee, sharing expertise, collaborative review of lessons and using professional time to plan together for the implementation of junior cycle.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

Management has taken very good action on previous recommendations. These have brought about positive changes for students. Since the previous whole-school evaluation, the timetable was revised to ensure sufficient tuition time and the child protection and the RSE policies were reviewed. Responses to subject inspections include: reviewing subject plans, improving the deployment of teachers to PE and increasing the uptake of subjects. Commendably, actions were promptly taken to address recommendations in the recent inspection of Guidance, including establishing a guidance office, career files, a whole-school guidance plan and including Guidance lessons in senior cycle.

Teaching and Learning

Teachers have taken very good actions on recommendations relating to teaching and learning. In lessons, active and collaborative methodologies and assessment for learning practices were observed. There is an evident focus on exploring and sharing good practice within and across subject departments. Students' project work, in a wide range of subjects, is widely displayed.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school's SSE process is a highly effective, collaborative and reflective process of internal improvement. The procedures for investigation and review are excellent. Over the years, teachers have engaged to a high extent with the implementation of school improvement plans.

The board of management presented an overview of the plans, ongoing implementation and the changes that have been attained through SSE since 2013. Successes include developments in the numeracy strategy, digital learning, the procedures for correcting student written work and the ways that subject-specific vocabulary is supported. Developments achieved in teachers' individual and collaborative practices include: making increasing use of attainment data to inform subject planning, using learning objectives, engaging in peer-collaborative-review, sharing resources and developing assessment for learning.

The current SIP is wide-ranging. Planning in literacy is targeted at reading interest and library use. Planning in numeracy is targeted at improving problem-solving through the use of numeracy moments. Planning to improve students' learning experiences includes further integrating technology and attainment tracking into teaching and learning practice. Much of the current SIP has been initiated and is now being consolidated into practice.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school has already proven it has exceptionally high capacity for improvement. The school has developed considerably over the past number of years, principally through a rigorous improvement planning process. Management and staff have created and continue to sustain a very effective culture of improvement through collaboration and their motivation for high-quality 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 Protection policy in place.
4. All teachers are aware that they are mandated persons and of their responsibilities in that regard.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above except that the minutes of board of management meetings do not show that child protection is presented as a standing item at each board meeting. This should be addressed.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board is particularly pleased that the outstanding work of the Principal, Deputy Principal, teaching staff and other staff – over many years – has been recognised in this outstanding report which acknowledges the excellence which is being achieved in management, leadership, teaching and learning.

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 Inspector's suggestions for building on the highly effective practices observed will be considered by the Board, Senior Management and the Staff as part of the school's philosophy of on-going School Self Evaluation (SSE) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD). In particular, as suggested by the Inspectors, a core team for Special Educational Needs (SEN) will be formed in order to build on current work in this area in line with the 2017 DES Guidelines.

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;