![An Roinn Oideachais / Department of Education logo]

Whole School Evaluation: Management, Leadership and Learning
Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	McEgan College
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Macroom Co Cork
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	71030J
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	19-10-2023
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	07/02/2024

What is a 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. Quality of support for students' wellbeing

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.

Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:	
Child Protection	*Anti-bullying*
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 (revised 2023). 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 (revised 2023). 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	1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the *Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)* and this policy is reviewed annually. 2. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides a report to the board at least once a term on the overall number of bullying cases reported (by means of the bullying recording template provided in the *Procedures*) since the previous report to the board. 3. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and pupils. 4. The school has appropriate initiatives in place to promote a positive and inclusive school culture and environment. 5. All teachers visited report that they have read the school's policy on anti-bullying and that they are aware of their roles and responsibilities in preventing and tackling bullying.

and Post-Primary Schools (revised 2023). 7. School planning documentation indicates that the school is making full provision for the relevant aspects of the curriculum (SPHE, Stay Safe, RSE). 8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.	

The school met the requirements in relation to checks 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8 of the child protection checks. It did not meet the requirements of check 5 of the child protection checks. However, the school subsequently furnished evidence of compliance with this requirement. The school met all the requirements in relation to the anti-bullying checks above.

Whole-school evaluation – management, leadership and learning

Date of inspection	19-10-2023
Inspection activities undertaken • Meeting with Board of Management • Meetings with principal and deputy principal • Meetings with key staff • Review of relevant documents • Student focus group	• 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

McEgan College is a co-educational, multi-denominational school that operates under the auspices of Cork Education and Training Board (ETB). At the time of the evaluation, the school had a student population of 264 students. There was a wide-ranging curriculum, including the Junior Cycle, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), a compulsory Transition Year programme (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), and the Leaving Certificate (Established) (LCE). The school participated in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education for educational inclusion. In addition, there was a class for students with autistic spectrum differences (ASD) and students with mild general learning disabilities (MGLD).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good overall.
- In all lessons, there was an exceptionally positive relationship between teachers and students and between students and their peers.
- Teachers displayed high expectations regarding student behaviour and learning to which students responded very positively.
- The highly effective use of digital technology by teachers and students was frequently evident during the evaluation.
- The quality of school leadership and management was very good overall.
- A clear culture of distributed leadership had been developed.
- Very good work had been undertaken in the area of DEIS action planning.
- The quality of support for students' wellbeing was very good.

Recommendations

- In a small number of instances, collective task design at the end of units of work was evident. Subject departments should adopt this approach across subject plans over time, where teachers identify the key learning in each unit of work and collaboratively design assessment tasks for formative purposes at the end of units with common success criteria linked to the key learning.
- While the school had an inclusive ethos and had undertaken some very good actions in this regard, a number of points for development were identified in the area of special education, including: the requirement for a more focused approach to the use of specific special education resources; the need to reduce the number of teachers involved in the

provision of additional supports; and the need to ensure that students withdrawn for support are organised in small groups based on similarity of need. The board and senior management should undertake a strategic review in the area of special educational needs to address these points.

- Planning had begun with regard to the development of student voice. The school should ensure that this incorporates, as a key element, explicit communication with the student council and the wider student body regarding current developments in teaching and learning. Such an approach will consolidate and extend good practice already underway.

Detailed findings and recommendations

The quality of teaching and learning was very good overall.

1. The quality of teaching and learning

Learner outcomes and experiences

The overall quality of learner outcomes and experiences was very good. Where, in a very limited number of instances, areas for development were identified, these focused on the need for greater clarity on the part of both teacher and students with regard to the learning underway. In all lessons observed, there was an exceptionally positive relationship between teachers and their students and between students and their peers. Student behaviour in classes was of a very high standard. Lessons were universally conducted in a warm, caring and supportive environment, which was inclusive of all students. Where students engaged with digital technology, specifically with regard to the school's digital platform, their comfort and ease in using the platform was very evident.

Learning intentions were used regularly in lessons to ensure clarity for students with regard to the learning underway. This was further enhanced where teachers checked in on the learning intention throughout and at the close of the lesson. Overall, learning intentions were used effectively in lessons and clarity with regard to learning was achieved in almost all instances.

A regular and very positive feature of most lessons was the use of pair and group work to support students' engagement with their learning. The use of such activities underpinned students' capacity for semi-independent and independent work, along with their appreciation of the key skill of working with others.

Students reacted to the use of group work and pair work very well and particularly effective practice was observed where cooperative learning activities were organised which incorporated through their structure, key areas such as accountability, wait time, security in learning and formative assessment on the part of the teacher. In some instances, there was a possibility to further develop student voice in the classroom through a rebalancing of teacher and student talk.

A particularly striking aspect of teachers' practice in a range of lessons observed was the manner in which student voice was captured as part of formative assessment practice. Where this worked especially well, teachers modelled work, used students' work as examples, expected students to provide constructive, critical feedback, and provided immediate verbal feedback to students on the basis of their work. These practices served to effectively develop students' appreciation of quality in the subjects involved, providing students with the means to be responsible for their own learning and resilient in reacting to constructive criticism of products of that learning.

Teachers individual and collective practice

Teachers displayed a very high level of knowledge with regard to the students they were teaching. Very regularly, this translated to a keen consciousness of the need to differentiate for students' learning and language needs. Lessons were very well prepared in almost all instances.

The use of the school's digital learning platform was a regular feature of classrooms visited by inspectors. Teachers often used the platform as a means of differentiating for students' needs, facilitating students by ensuring notes could be taken down in class, and if this was not accomplished within the constraints of lesson time, that students were reassured that these were available on the platform. The omnipresent nature of teachers' use of technology speaks very strongly to the very good work undertaken in the school's digital learning strategy.

Where team teaching was observed, it worked well, allowing for very good care and support for all students in the classroom.

Currently, most teachers are not assigned baserooms. However, in a number of rooms very good efforts had been made to develop the learning environment for the benefit of students. Very good practice in this area was observed. In one instance, a room had been developed to further emphasise students' sense of connection to the school community. In another room, students' subject literacy was supported through the incorporation of key symbols and terms. This was very worthwhile and it is advised that this focus on key vocabulary is a worthwhile area for teachers to focus on in the development of classroom environments. The very good work undertaken by teachers in the development of specific classrooms should continue and be expanded across all classrooms, as far as is practicable.

Teachers' collective practice was of a very high standard overall. Of particular note was the sharing of professional learning and expertise that had become a clear part of the school's culture. This was embodied by the teach-meets organised and attended by teachers outside of the school day and by the organisation of a 'peer observation October' where teachers could visit each others' lessons to observe colleagues and garner new ideas.

Beyond this, it was evident that the school's digital platform already served as a key communication tool in the life of the school and its teachers. The platform supported very regular and effective communication across the school. Subject planning was developing very well overall, with a number of examples of very high quality collective planning. In these instances, teachers had developed time-linked schemes of work which effectively linked to key learning for the subject. In addition, in a small number of instances, collective task design at the end of units of learning was evident. Such an approach should be adopted across subject plans over time, where teachers identify the key learning in each unit of work and collaboratively design formative assessment tasks at the end of units with common success criteria linked to the key learning in the unit.

2. Quality of school leadership and management

The quality of school leadership and management was very good overall.

Leading learning and teaching
Very effective leadership of learning and teaching was evident through the activities of both the senior management team and at other levels of the organisation.

The school's curriculum was expressive of a very clear commitment to ensuring all students would achieve their potential. Thus, all programmes were provided for students. Beyond this, Level 2 Learning Programmes (L2LPs) were being undertaken by a number of students. It was particularly positive to note that learning outcomes from the Priority Learning Units (PLUs) had begun to be incorporated in subject department plans. With respect to students' participation in L2LPs, the school is advised that it should adhere to the guidance with regard to the target group for these programmes outlined in *Level 2 Learning Programmes: Guidelines for Teachers*.

The school had maintained a developmental approach to its curriculum, in order to best serve the needs of its students. In a small minority of instances, a very small number of students were withdrawn from SPHE lessons for additional support. This practice should be discontinued with respect to SPHE.

The school had recently moved to adopting a system of pre-established subject blocks in first year and for students entering senior cycle. This facilitated greater opportunities for students to develop skills in their subject choices at an earlier stage. While acknowledging the rationale for

this decision, it is important that the outcomes of this approach with regard to student satisfaction, engagement and ability to switch subjects be evaluated on an ongoing basis.

The school's provision of special classes for students with autism and students with moderate general learning disabilities was further testament to its strong ethos of inclusion. The expression of this ethos was observed by inspectors on numerous occasions through expert differentiation by teachers for the wide range of abilities and backgrounds in their classrooms. This awareness amongst teachers spoke to the very good, dedicated work of the special educational needs team in developing and communicating student support files and student targets to the wider teaching staff.

A range of supports was provided for students with special educational needs in mainstream classes. These included team-teaching, as well as withdrawal classes. In the context of the very good practice already outlined in the area of special educational needs, it is recommended that the school should review its practice in a number of areas. Currently, some resources are being used to support the school curriculum and class sizes. All resources provided for students with special educational needs should be allocated appropriately, in accordance with the *Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational needs in Mainstream Schools.*

A very large number of teachers in the school are involved in the delivery of lessons to support students with special educational needs. The school should move strategically to develop a smaller core team of teachers to deliver these hours. Such an approach will aid organisation of resources, team meetings, management of support, flexibility of support, and will optimise opportunities for upskilling among this core group. The development of a core group of teachers will also support the organisation of withdrawal groups of students exempt from Irish so that they achieve consistency of assigned teachers from year to year. Finally, greater consideration of the specific needs of students in each withdrawal group will be possible with such an approach. This is necessary to ensure that specific, tailored support can be planned for and provided.

Managing the organisation

The board of management was appropriately constituted. Members of the board displayed a strong sense of commitment to the school and were conscious of the importance of their role in supporting the senior management, staff, and the student body.

The board communicated an agreed report to the school staff following each meeting. This was very good practice. As a further means of supporting links between the board and the teaching staff, it is suggested that teachers with leadership responsibilities should be given the opportunity to report on their activities to the board on a regular basis. In addition, the posting of the agreed report from the board of management on the school's website and digital communication platform would be worthwhile. The principal currently summarises information regarding inspection reports conducted in the school for the board, along with actions to address any recommendations made. To further bolster the board's governance role, this approach should be formalised and should incorporate the distribution of inspection reports to board members.

The senior management team worked very well together. They displayed significant dedication to the school, along with a keen interest in achieving the best outcomes for all of their students. They attended to the day to day organisation of the school while also adopting leadership roles with regard to key initiatives underway.

A wide range of school policies had been developed with the involvement of the school community, including parents, teachers and the board. These included the code of behaviour, which incorporated clear references to the manner in which students will be supported when they come into contact with the discipline system. An admissions policy and annual admissions notice were also in place, alongside a range of other policies.

Good structures were in place to keep parents informed regarding developments in the school. The parents association held a number of meetings each year. In light of feedback from parent questionnaires, it is suggested that some further development of links between the parents association and the wider parent body may be useful through the incorporation of a parents association section on the school website and highlighting of its work on the school app at

planned intervals. Overall, questionnaires distributed during the evaluation suggested a very high level of satisfaction from parents with the school's work. A home-school-community liaison co-ordinator was in place who also supported links between the school and students' homes. A range of activities was organised to support links with parents and clear communication.

Leading school development

The school's infrastructure had undergone significant upgrades in the recent past. These had included considerable development of equipment and facilities in specialist rooms, some of which was still underway. In addition, the continuing development of digital infrastructure was clearly evident.

The school had developed an extensive DEIS action plan. The DEIS action planning process is the school self-evaluation (SSE) process in DEIS schools. This plan had been led and developed by a number of staff groups, appropriately underpinning ownership of the plan across the school community. The plan had been incorporated into subject plans, ensuring effective communication, and action plans linked to the overall action plan had been developed by subject departments. This was excellent practice.

It is suggested that, in order to ensure a clear focus on developmental sections of the plan, key actions for improvement over the lifetime of each plan should be highlighted, while actions which were already embedded as part of the school culture could be included in a separate section. It is recommended that a specific target dealing with students who are struggling readers should be included in the literacy section of the plan through the planning of a specific literacy intervention. Of particular note was a recent curricular initiative whereby teachers of mathematics explicitly linked their teaching to the experiences of students in primary school as an aid to effective transition between the two sectors.

Alongside, reflective of, and informing the DEIS plan, was a substantial digital learning plan. A very effective approach had been taken to the development of the plan. A digital learning team had been formed and baseline data was collated through the use of an EU survey tool. As was the case with the DEIS plan, the inclusion of links to the digital learning plan permeated the subject department planning process.

Developing leadership capacity

A distributed leadership model had been adopted, whereby teachers were afforded the trust and opportunity to lead projects, policy development and continuing professional development (CPD). This was obvious in the nature of communications throughout the organisation, the lead role of teachers in providing CPD to their colleagues, the level of trust in teachers' capacity and the support from senior management for teachers interested in developing their educational skills and understanding.

A number of members of staff had recently been assigned to develop the area of student voice and students met during a focus group felt a new vision for the student council had begun to be developed. During this focus group, students highlighted that they felt that feedback from students was both welcome and acted upon. Most students endorsed this view in a questionnaire distributed as part of the evaluation. In addition, the board planned to have a presentation from the head boy and girl with regard to their work in the new year.

As a further development of these very good actions, it is recommended that the planned development of student voice should incorporate explicit communication with the student council and the wider student body regarding current developments in teaching and learning including noting where student views have informed decisions, the responsibilities assumed by the school as a result, and the responsibilities to be assumed by students in this context.

3. Quality of support for students' wellbeing

The quality of support for students' wellbeing was very good.

This was best exemplified through the very positive relationships observed between members of the school community, and, overall, very positive responses with regard to care for students in teacher, student and parent questionnaires distributed as part of the evaluation.

A comprehensive whole-school guidance plan had been developed. It included a wide-ranging guidance programme to support students throughout their years in the school, incorporating curricular, co-curricular, and counselling elements. This included a range of visiting speakers, visits to third-level institutions, support for parents and students regarding potential pathways, and links with students' homes. A wellbeing programme had begun to be developed by a staff team which was utilising a school self-evaluation (SSE) process whereby baseline data was being collated in advance of specific targets and actions being developed.

Central to care for students' wellbeing were weekly meetings of the student support team. This team included representatives from the special educational needs department, the school completion worker, the home-school-community liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator, and the guidance counsellor and supported ongoing identification and intervention for students where appropriate.

Beyond this, year heads and class tutors performed important functions in the care system. One element of this was the provision of tutor time at the beginning of each school day. While recognising the value of this meeting with students, it is important that a clear programme of instruction for students be incorporated at this time.

A range of additional extra-curricular activities and supports was also evident throughout the school, with a number being linked to the school completion programme (SCP). These included a breakfast club, homework club and a number of lunchtime clubs. The SCP also intervenes for target students, where necessary, with a number of different programmes.

Very good support for the transition of students into the school were in place. Some of these included the big brother/big sister programme, a first-year induction day for students and one for parents. Fifth-year and sixth-year students had teacher mentors. This is very positive and the possibility of establishing teacher mentors for students in the LCA may also be worthy of consideration.

In a student focus group met during the evaluation, students were extremely positive regarding the school environment and highlighted a variety of extra-curricular activities as very positive elements in their experience of the school.

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	*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;

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

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

McEgan College welcomes this very favourable WSE/MLL report. It reaffirms our collective commitment to excellence in teaching and learning, leadership and management.

A comprehensive teaching and learning plan, a well-established digital platform, a robust DEIS plan and an evolving curriculum to cater for our diverse student population is well embedded into the school's culture. Considerable time, resources, and effort have been deployed to develop a caring, nurturing and holistic approach to student wellbeing.

Our mission statement "to care equally for all" resonates through the classrooms and corridors of McEgan College.