

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Whole School Evaluation
Management, Leadership and Learning

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Blackrock College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Blackrock College Co Dublin
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	60030V

Date of Evaluation: 12-12-2019



**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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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, Stay Safe, RSE, Wellbeing).
8. Child protection records are maintained in a secure location.

The inspection visit did not include inspection of the school's boarding facilities, their management or their compliance with the Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2017

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

WHOLE-SCHOOL EVALUATION – MANAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING

Date of inspection	12-12-2019
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

Blackrock College is a voluntary fee-charging day and boarding secondary school under the trusteeship of the Spiritan Education Trust. The school has a current enrolment of 1026 male students and caters for students from second year to sixth year. Students complete first year in Willow Park First-Year School. In addition to the Junior Cycle, the school offers the established Leaving Certificate and a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of leadership and management is very good; the board of management and the principal promote an inclusive and caring school community where high expectations are set, where learning flourishes and where there is a culture of continuous improvement.
- The quality of care for students is very good; there is a high level of whole-school commitment to the wellbeing of students; personal responsibility and values are strongly promoted.
- Some areas for development were noted: enhanced distributed leadership, subject planning; timetabling and student learning experiences in TY; classroom practice to focus on student-centred activities, differentiation and assessment for learning.
- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the majority of lessons; the quality of most of the other lessons was good with a few lessons of satisfactory quality.
- The effective implementation of some recommendations made in previous inspection reports is good; there has been limited progress with other recommendations.
- The level of engagement in the school self-evaluation (SSE) process is good overall; the school's capacity for improvement is very good.

Recommendations

- The board and senior management should explore ways in which leadership opportunities can be more widely and equitably distributed and leadership of learning is enhanced in accordance with Circular 3/2018 and 'Looking at Our School 2016'.
- School management should review the organisation and management of TY to ensure that the learning experiences for students are in accordance with Department guidelines for the effective implementation of the TY programme.

- Subject plans should be working documents, reflect teachers' ongoing engagement in the implementation of Junior Cycle specifications and include the further embedding of current SSE practices.
- Teachers should ensure learning is student-centred, differentiated to provide challenge and support as needed, and students should be provided with formative and developmental feedback on how to improve their learning.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. QUALITY OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of leadership and management is very good; the board of management and the principal promote an inclusive and caring school community where high expectations are set, where learning flourishes and where there is a culture of continuous improvement for staff and students.

Leading learning and teaching

Expertise is shared by teachers who are involved in various initiatives, programmes, continuing professional development (CPD) activities and working groups. This practice is actively encouraged by school management. The school has an education committee, a consultative and representative body of teachers which meets regularly to discuss matters relating to teaching and learning. Other consultative forums include the deans and care committee, a Wellbeing planning team, an information and communication technology (ICT) committee, subject department meetings, staff meetings, consultative and developmental meetings.

Purposeful teacher professional development in a wide range of areas is supported by school management and is availed of by teachers. This has led to improved teacher collaborative practices at whole school level. Implementation of the new Junior Cycle is ongoing and includes good quality CPD to support a student-centred curriculum. Discussions and planning for the trialling and possible provision of the one-hour lessons is ongoing at whole school level. Within the spirit of the Junior Cycle Framework, the formation of mixed ability groups should be maximised.

The overall TY programme is very well planned and documented. It provides for a wide range of valuable learning experiences and both parents and students expressed very positive views on the programme. Internal evaluation is a very good feature of the programme. However, there was evidence to suggest that some subjects continue to focus on preparation for the Leaving Certificate and that the learning experience does not reflect the aims of TY. Some subjects which are offered on a reduced timetable in the Leaving Certificate are also offered in TY. While this appears to make up for a shortfall in time in fifth and sixth year for some students, such practice is not in keeping with the principles of TY and should be reviewed. In accordance with the aims and principles of TY, taster subjects should be provided so that students can make informed subject choices having experienced them in TY. In addition, teachers should plan for all students' TY learning experiences to be in accordance with the aims of TY and that the focus on material from the Leaving Certificate in some subject areas be reduced.

There is significant acknowledgement, awards and celebration of student achievement, and a positive value system is promoted and supported. Heads of departments and teachers recommend students for subject awards. Student achievement in state examinations is very good with a laudable higher-level uptake of many subjects.

Students' holistic education is substantially developed through involvement in the wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. The level of student involvement, success and achievement in some activities outside school is exemplary. The college annual, the college newsletters and noticeboards highlight the many activities, student successes and endeavours. A student application

card system provides a weekly reporting link between the student, teacher, dean, parents and principal.

Guidance provision is delivered at junior and senior cycle by a dedicated team and is driven by a good whole-school guidance plan which documents provision for each year group. Counselling is utilised successfully to support students who may be vulnerable. A school counsellor is allocated to each year group and there is a sixth year chaplain and a college chaplain in place. Second-year students are well supported in settling into the school by teachers and student leaders. Strong links with Willow Park First-Year School support this. The wellbeing programme and its focus on anti-bullying, positive mental health and resilience, fosters a commitment to inclusion and the holistic development of each student in line with the school's vision.

The quality of care for students is very good; dedicated teachers, supported by senior management, demonstrate very high levels of commitment to the care and wellbeing of students; supervised study after school supports them in their work. The care team meets to identify appropriate interventions required for particular students and the additional education needs (AEN) coordinator and the deans attend the weekly care team meetings. Student support structures are very good, well planned, organised and implemented.

The learning support team works effectively with the care team, deans, subject teachers, parents and school management to support students with identified learning needs. The school aims to meet the varied needs of the student cohort; those with high expectations together with students requiring additional support or resource teaching. There is some individual withdrawal-based support and some limited team teaching provision. However, it is suggested that team teaching be further expanded to provide enhanced support for students. The school links with the Centre for Talented Youth at DCU in order to provide enhanced supports for gifted students.

Managing the organisation

The board and the principal fulfil their responsibility to create and maintain a climate of security, wellbeing and inclusivity. The code of behaviour promotes and supports a culture of positive discipline and core values.

Current policies are listed with dates when enacted and dates for future review. This is very good practice. Minutes reveal that the board is kept very well informed of school business by the principal through his comprehensive reports and the board is very supportive of all decisions which are taken in the best interests of the students. It is suggested that teachers with particular responsibilities that link with the school's priorities are invited on occasion to address the board.

The board of management maintains the school buildings and grounds to a very good standard. Classrooms and specialist rooms are well maintained by teachers and provide good physical learning environments.

The principal and deputy principals, who constitute the senior leadership team, foster a very positive school climate, work very effectively together and oversee the smooth day-to-day running of the school. They promote a culture of continuous improvement by supporting colleagues to become reflective practitioners. The principal and deputy principals manage the school's organisational structures and human resources very well overall. The senior leadership team actively supports school improvement by promoting a learning culture and implementing effective systems for communicating and sharing information.

The principal provides very high quality educational leadership, communicates effectively with staff and the education partners, successfully delegates appropriate responsibilities, encourages collaborative practice by facilitating staff to work in teams and is very aware of the school's changing and emerging needs.

Teachers and school management have reviewed posts of responsibilities and staff have demonstrated flexibility in and commitment to meeting school needs and to embracing change. There

are very good structures in place for the organisation of the school including the senior leadership team, deans, heads and assistant heads of departments, counsellors, APIs and APIIs, to ensure students are well looked after, and there is very good communication between all those involved.

Deans are responsible for student behaviour and wellbeing, tracking and monitoring of their progress, reporting and communicating with parents, and carry out organisational duties including attendance and punctuality. Deans reported that they are very well supported in this regard by the senior leadership team.

However, current school structures somewhat restrict distributed leadership and empowerment opportunities for some teachers. The board and senior management should consider exploring ways in which leadership opportunities can be more widely and equitably distributed and leadership of learning is enhanced in accordance with Circular 3/2018 and 'Looking at Our School 2016'.

The principal meets teachers to review and reflect on their role and duties. Very good consultative and development meetings take place with school staff.

Leading school development

The trustees, board and principal are proactive in promoting and maintaining the guiding vision for the school, based on the principles of students developing their full potential in a climate of personal responsibility and the core values 'be caring, be there, be truthful, be grateful'. The school's education philosophy promotes self-evaluation. The mission statement also promotes and encourages parental collaboration. The board should consider benchmarking the guiding vision against current practice.

The board has overseen the development of the school's strategic plan 2016-2021 which focuses on promoting key school priorities including student leadership and wellbeing, academic and extra-curricular programmes, excellence in partnership with the extended school community, best use of technology and ensuring sustainability. There is very good focus on promoting teaching and learning.

The board has proactively identified current priorities for school development including the review of posts of responsibility, timetable review and the development of a staff handbook. Curricular priorities also include the successful integration of wellbeing programmes, the full implementation of the new Junior Cycle, the Digital Learning Framework and the introduction of new subjects. The board has also prioritised capital development projects.

The senior leadership team has also highlighted the importance of recruiting high calibre staff and staff retention. It is suggested that all current school policies and procedures, school strategic planning and the school improvement plan be integrated into a coherent school plan which will act as a reference for school development and improvement.

School leaders are aware of educational developments and use the SSE process with increasing effectiveness as a means of supporting curricular programmes and managing change. Those leading SSE are working to ensure improvement plans are put into action on a whole-school basis. There is effective continuing internal review and evaluation of SSE implementation by senior management and teachers. The school improvement plan commendably focuses on key teaching and learning areas including students discussing their own learning and putting Wellbeing on the whole-school agenda. It is suggested that when the school improvement plan is reviewed that there is added focus placed on key teaching and learning priorities, targets are set and monitored and feedback mechanisms are further developed to measure improvement.

The board and principal value and support active partnership with parents as a means of supporting student learning and wellbeing. The parents' association is actively involved in supporting the school. Many parents regularly attend school meetings and events and there is ongoing effective communication with school management. Parents are actively involved in year committees and sub-committees, school social events, addiction awareness lecture series for students and a school development project in Kenya. Parent teacher meetings are convened for each year group. . The

weekly application cards and the monthly progress cards are well utilised for the purpose of reporting to parents.

The principal and other school leaders build good relationships with Willow Park, other schools and with the wider community. Collaboration with Willow Park supports teacher professional development, subject department meetings and the teaching and learning sub-committee of the board.

There are numerous links in place that support community volunteerism including music, performance and art, science, sport, school tours, language exchanges, debating, Green Schools. The school has strong network support including through the College Union, the Spiritan Education Trust and parents. TY students experience enhanced opportunities to be involved in outside activities, competitions and events.

Developing leadership capacity

There is an increasing culture of self-reflection among staff and a willingness to work individually and collaboratively on areas of practice that require improvement. School leaders, including the board, the senior management team and teachers, have availed of professional development and training. For example, a number of teachers have undertaken middle leadership training and the senior leadership team is actively involved in the principal's and deputy principal's network.

New members of staff are well supported through peer mentoring and are provided with informative school documentation. Professional Masters in Education (PME) students are facilitated with school placements and are well supported by co-operating teachers and senior management; newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are supported by senior management and teachers through the Droichead process.

Opportunities are provided for students to assume leadership roles and to support other students through forums such as the representative student council, year committees and the student house captains who undertake a comprehensive leadership programme. Students reported that the house system greatly supports their sense of belonging and wellbeing.

Students are actively involved and play significant leadership roles in areas such as the Green School's project, the student wellbeing committee and the committee for creative arts and digital learning. Student voice is promoted and acknowledged through extra-curricular surveys, learning reflections and sixth year exit interviews. It is suggested that a more formalised student mentoring system be advanced. School management and teachers value students' views and support students' involvement in the operation of the school, for example, on occasion, the student council is invited to address the board.

2. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Learner outcomes and experiences

Forty lessons were observed over a wide range of subjects, class groups, levels and programmes. The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the majority of lessons; there were some elements of exemplary practice; the quality of most of the other lessons was good and a few lessons were of satisfactory quality.

In the few lessons where learning was less successful, teacher instruction prevailed, there was an imbalance of student and teacher voice and the methodologies and activities used did not fully promote differentiation, active student engagement and formative assessment strategies.

In all lessons there were positive relationships between staff and students and effective affirmation of effort by teachers. Best practice was observed when clear learning intentions were shared and revisited and a wide range of learning activities including pair or group work was integrated into

lessons. More active methodologies and an appropriate balance between teacher instruction and student activity is necessary in some lessons.

Overall, students demonstrated very good interest and engagement in their learning. In highly effective lessons there were very good links with and reflection on prior learning; the range of tasks provided ensured that all students were well supported and challenged in their learning.

Assessment was effective when student responses to teacher questioning revealed curiosity, knowledge and understanding and when there were collaborative discussions in class. In a few lessons, students received written feedback on how to improve their work and in a small number of instances, teachers included comments to guide student improvement. However, in most lessons, the only evidence of teacher correction of student work was a date stamp. Teachers should provide formative developmental feedback on students' written work in order to develop and improve their learning.

Teachers' individual and collective practice

In almost all lessons, teachers had a passion for the subject and excellent subject knowledge. Best practice was observed where they planned and prepared resources in advance for lessons

Lessons were well paced and there was good and sometimes seamless transitions between activities. Audio visual resources were well integrated and, in a few of lessons, students were provided with the opportunity to carry out good research tasks using digital devices. The further integration and effective use of digital technology by students should be progressed in accordance with the school's digital strategy. In some lessons, teachers supported and consolidated learning by sharing resources electronically with students.

Teachers used formative strategies to assess learning and used higher-order questioning very effectively. To help each student attain their maximum potential, teachers should ensure that learning is student centred and differentiated to provide challenge and support as needed.

In a few lessons, teachers changed room layout to facilitate effective collaborative learning. This is very good practice and should be extended.

Heads of departments provide comprehensive annual reports on the business of subject departments. The subject department plans for most subjects are developed to a good standard and a few to a very high standard. In some cases however, subject plans did not reflect the high quality of teaching and learning in lessons. These plans were content focused and included details of textbook chapters and page numbers rather than a focus on learning outcomes, methodologies to achieve them and how they would be assessed. Subject plans should be working documents, reflect teachers' ongoing engagement in the implementation of Junior Cycle specifications and senior cycle curricula and include the embedding of current SSE practices.

To expand the very good practice observed in many lessons, staff and management should further develop formal systems for sharing and implementing high quality teaching and learning strategies across all lessons. It is suggested that a section on effective teaching, learning and assessment practices be included in the proposed teachers' handbook.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS EVALUATIONS

Leadership and Management

Some of the recommendations from previous inspection reports have been effectively implemented; there has been limited progress with others.

School management has overseen significant curricular reform, deployment of staff, post review and policy development. School management should prioritise timetable review in order to improve student learning activities. The establishment of a timetable review committee is acknowledged. While the display of student work and the celebration of student success is prominent in the corridors and specialist classrooms, some classrooms could be further enhanced in this regard.

Teaching and Learning

Teachers have availed of CPD in order to develop their practice in key areas. Teaching and learning is on the agenda and discussed at department meetings. The recently established 'Open Door Group' facilitates teachers to visit lessons and to share practice. Subject department collaboration has led to improved planning practice. Very good teaching and learning practices were observed in many lessons including a broad range of methodologies. Greater student-centred learning and differentiated activity leading to improved ownership and responsibility for learning is recommended in some lessons. Other teaching and learning areas that still require development include the provision of written formative feedback as part of assessment.

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

The School's Self-Evaluation Process

The school's engagement with SSE is good. Looking at Our School 2016 has been largely integrated into SSE planning. Student leadership has been promoted and strengthened throughout this process. There is good commitment to the process and its links to the implementation of the new Junior Cycle curriculum as reflected in school planning documentation. Recent focus on the wellbeing of students has strengthened these links and it is praiseworthy that use of digital technology in classroom based assessments (CBAs) will be further investigated. Literacy and numeracy actions at whole-school level and with Willow Park have been ongoing. The school plans to investigate attitudes to numeracy with a view to raising awareness. However there should be a higher level of visibility of literacy and numeracy actions in classroom practice. Current SSE focus is on creating awareness and promoting strategies that develop resilience of staff and students. It is envisaged that the school improvement plan for the next academic year will focus on implementing the Digital Learning Framework following staff surveys on the use of digital technology in teaching, learning and assessment.

The School's Capacity for Improvement

The school's capacity for improvement is very good. There is keen awareness of the school's changing needs and a strong commitment by school management and teachers to respond to these changes. Partnership and communication within and outside the school and with Willow Park is strong. Capacity building and empowerment among school management and teachers is good. A self-reflective culture of review has been established in the school. Teaching and learning practices are increasingly placing student ownership and responsibility at the core of learning.

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;