

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

DEIS EVALUATION

REPORT

School Name	Mercy Secondary School
School Address	Thomas Davis Street West Inchicore Dublin 8
Roll number	60872A

Date of Evaluation: 08-05-2019



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agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

DEIS EVALUATION

In 2017, the Department published the DEIS (*Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools*) Plan. The aim of this plan is to ensure better educational outcomes for learners in schools from disadvantaged communities and to maximise the chances of every child getting the best possible opportunity to fulfil her/his potential in life.

Schools are expected to develop action plans for improvement in the following areas (referred to as the DEIS themes): attendance; retention; transitions; literacy; numeracy; partnership with parents; partnership with other schools and educational providers, and with external agencies. Post-primary schools are also expected to develop action plans for improvement in examination attainment.

The DEIS Evaluation model evaluates and reports on the school's action planning for improvement.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspectors evaluated the school's action planning for improvement under the following headings:

1. DEIS action planning for improvement
2. DEIS themes

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

DEIS Evaluation

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Dates of inspection	07-09 May 2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interview with principal and relevant staff• Examination of school's current action plans for improvement• Observation of DEIS-related activities and interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student focus-group interview• Parent focus-group interview• Analysis of parent and student questionnaires• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of students' work• Interaction with students• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Mercy Secondary School participates in the DEIS action plan. It has the services of a full-time home-school-community-liaison (HSCL) co-ordinator and participates in the School Completion Programme (SCP). At the time of the evaluation there were 159 students enrolled in the school. It offers the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme and the established Leaving Certificate.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

The key findings in relation to the DEIS action planning for improvement process are the following:

- Management and teachers are strongly committed to doing the best for their students and to delivering equality of opportunity.
- A highly positive and inclusive learning environment is created and the retention of students is very good.
- The leadership of the DEIS action planning process is generally good, but the cyclical process of planning as a whole-school activity requires development.
- The school's practices in the formulation and implementation of the DEIS action plan are good, but monitoring should be improved.
- The impact of DEIS planning on teaching and learning was generally good to very good.
- Student outcomes in attendance require further attention.
- Good co-operation among all staff involved in DEIS and very good partnerships with agencies and the community enable the delivery of targeted, highly-beneficial supports for students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Aspects of the DEIS action planning for improvement process that require development include:

- The DEIS planning co-ordinator, with the support of the principal, should take action to appropriately engage all stakeholders in a structured process of devising, implementing and reviewing the DEIS action plan.
- The DEIS planning co-ordinator should involve mainstream teachers in monitoring the impact of the action plan; this should be more firmly grounded in purposeful collective analysis and reflection on available data, particularly the data for attendance, attainment and literacy.
- The principal and DEIS planning co-ordinator should commence and lead a focused, intensive, whole-school drive to improve attendance, including punctuality and leaving early, with a strong focus on how attendance supports attainment and equality of opportunity.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. DEIS ACTION PLANNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

Leadership of the DEIS action planning process is generally good but the cyclical process of planning as a whole-school activity requires development. Until recently, DEIS planning was undertaken jointly by senior and middle management. A review of middle leadership is introducing new responsibilities among assistant principals and the redistribution is providing scope for more focused leadership of the DEIS planning process. DEIS planning needs to be more fully understood as a whole-school activity that is led by the DEIS co-ordinator. The DEIS co-ordinator and principal acknowledge the need for a more clearly structured approach to the cyclical process of devising, implementing and monitoring the action plan and to the involvement of all stakeholders: students, parents, teachers and the board of management, as appropriate.

The work of the principal and the DEIS planning team is highly committed to the principles of equality of opportunity for the entire spectrum of students. The tangible commitment of all those involved in DEIS action planning and classroom teachers to doing the best for their students and to empowering each individual to realise prospects that are available to them permeates the school.

The current three-year DEIS action plan (2017-2020) is coherent and evidence-based. Targets are SMART and they are tactically linked to beneficial actions for students. Appropriately, targets relate to the whole-school cohort and sub-cohorts with specific needs, as relevant. A wide range of well-selected interventions and actions are included in the action plan. On receipt of support from the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and professional networking with other schools, the planning team reported that target-setting has developed significantly.

High levels of co-operation and communication among staff involved in student support, HSCL, the SCP service, class tutors and school leaders, and between the school and other services involved in DEIS enable the delivery of targeted supports for students. The school's student support system enables very effective and highly responsive support for students' care and needs.

Teachers and relevant personnel know and understand the DEIS action plan. Those leading DEIS planning and the JCSP regularly report to staff on the benefits of the interventions and the targets the school sets for itself. During staff meetings, teachers discuss the long and short-term initiatives delivered through the JCSP, SCP and HSCL. Across the school there is much informal, regular discussion on the implementation of the interventions.

While the DEIS planning team reported on improvements that are taking place and how they sometimes re-adjust the targets and interventions in light of the experience of implementation, monitoring practices should be more systematic. The school is responsive to changing needs, but there should be greater certainty on where exactly measurable improvements are or are not taking place as an outcome of the implementation of the plan, particularly in the themes of attendance, attainment and literacy. There is need for more explicit referencing and scrutinising of existing data among teachers. The building of whole-staff practice in critically looking at evidence would enhance and formalise the monitoring process. To make this manageable, one theme could be reviewed at a time. A whole-staff examination of the collated data for the attendance patterns would be the most beneficial.

The principal should provide a brief, clear summary of improvement planning to the whole-school community. This could include an account of the progress that has been made in areas of DEIS that

were the subject of evaluation and improvement in the previous year. The document could be framed as: what is working well in our school, how we know, what we are going to focus on to make our practice even better and how parents can help.

The resources available to the school including DEIS resources are used effectively and efficiently. Resources are strategically targeted to support individuals and groups of students. Resources are used to provide highly-valued interventions that include the breakfast club, a wide range of JCSP initiatives and counselling. The SCP-funded interventions including the Mentoring for Achievement programme (MAP) and art therapy are being implemented with target students. The HSCL service is being used to give time to home visits and interventions that support parents.

Good use is made of continuing professional development (CPD) to support DEIS planning for improvement. CPD included aspects of teaching and learning that support literacy, differentiation and positive behaviour management. Teachers find the in-house CPD in teaching students with additional educational needs and the student support plans very useful.

The allocation of teaching resource for students with additional educational needs is used to provide team teaching, support lessons for identified students and smaller groupings. Going forward, it is recommended that the hours be deployed with sufficient flexibility to provide both ongoing support and short-term intensive interventions to meet specific needs in aspects of literacy, numeracy and attainment, where such need is identified.

Teachers are aware of their commitments in fulfilling the agreed actions in the classroom. Good to very good practice in this regard was noted in most lessons observed. Implementation of strategies that support literacy, participation and attainment are proving beneficial. Lessons were notably highly interactive. It was evident that routinely teachers' create highly positive learning environments. Students receive a warm welcome to class and ongoing affirmation for participation and behaviour. In addition, students said that the interactive, collaborative and meaningful nature of lessons provides them with strong motivation.

The very good practice in translating the agreed classroom practices into subject plans, as demonstrated by a number of subject areas, is worthy of extension. The emergent practices and teachers' interest in co-teaching and peer-collaboration in lesson observation offers considerable opportunity to collectively extend the very good practices that exists in the school.

2. DEIS THEMES

2.1 Literacy, Numeracy and Educational attainment

The quality of action planning for improvement, implementation and outcomes in these areas are good.

Literacy

Three targets have been set in the current plan. These include one target for the use of keywords in all lessons and two specific targets for the development of vocabulary, reading and comprehension among target groups in first and second year. The targets are specific and measurable. A very large number of actions and initiatives for literacy are included. Students were positive about the impact of a number of these. It is suggested that focus groups and focused questionnaires be used to explore

their views in greater depth. This might help in the process of streamlining and refining some of the many interventions into those that can be more manageably monitored for measurable impact.

In relation to the use of keywords, it was evident in the lessons visited, that when teachers' explicitly linked keywords with the expectation that students would then use the words in oral and written sentences, and ensured that all students achieved this, the practice yielded the very best outcomes. This approach to using keywords merits extension. It is recommended that collectively, teachers discuss *how* they use key words in daily lessons and ground whole-school classroom practices in those that are demonstrating the greatest impact on students' vocabulary.

The very high levels of student interaction in the lessons observed, augurs very well for literacy development. Teachers place very good emphasis on students' verbal expression. In lessons, students were continuously encouraged to express their thoughts and explain their understanding and they did this confidently, both in the smaller-group and in whole-class contexts. Other very good practices included teachers explicitly modelling good writing on the board and the use of writing frames and differentiated worksheets that enabled students of all abilities to write complete sentences.

The school's library, mini libraries in classrooms and posters strongly promote reading for pleasure. It is recommended that classes be brought to the library more often and that a drive on using the library before, during and after school be rejuvenated. The learning environment throughout the school is highly print-rich and vibrant. A wide range of student projects showcase the ways that DEIS and school ethos are lived out. These also provide motivation for students to engage with aspects of numeracy, community partnerships, and transition to further education.

Numeracy

Highly appropriate targets and actions are taken to promote numeracy and to develop positive attitudes to Maths in the classroom. Activities such as Ninja Maths, Maths Week, Drop Everything and Solve are seen by students as fun, challenging and student-led. Early intervention with first and second years is having good impact. The very good quality of learning observed in Mathematics and the drive for higher level where possible is also yielding substantial outcomes.

Overall the definition of numeracy needs to be broadened and it is recommended to further extend the planning for and implementation of numeracy across all subject areas. Suggestions include month-long cross-curricular drives on the skills involved in drawing graphs/conducting surveys or a whole-school approach to implementing elements of the numeracy key skill.

Examination attainment

Targets and actions are focused on baseline data and on increasing the uptake of higher level in Irish, English and Mathematics and broadening the provision of science subjects. Tangible successes and improvements are being achieved through actions that links with the school's Guidance, SEN and support structures. The development of an attainment tracking tool has been planned measure for some time and ought to be pursued as soon as practicable. Notwithstanding the good understanding that class teachers and the guidance counsellor have of each student's attainment profile, a formalised tracking system, drawing on existing data, would be greatly beneficial to informing the monitoring.

Enhancing examination attainment is important to the whole school, and there is good recognition of the link between attendance and attainment. MAP, which is being implemented with a target group of students, although new, is already demonstrating improved outcomes for attainment. Staff are confident that aspects of this program may have merits for all senior-cycle students. This ought to be pursued. In order to maximise the transition from junior cycle and TY to the academic rigour of the

Leaving Certificate programme, it is recommended that modules promoting back to study skills and autonomous learning be introduced.

2.2 Attendance, Retention, Transitions

Overall, the quality of action planning, implementation and outcomes for students are very good in the areas of retention and transitions but require improvement in the area of attendance.

While many good actions are in place that support attendance, particularly the highly positive learning environment, outcomes for some students are not improving and this is impacting on learning. Possibilities for improvement exist in the planning for and monitoring of initiatives to improve attendance, including punctuality.

Targets set for attendance include increasing the number achieving full attendance, significantly decreasing the number of first and second years with absences of more than ten days and decreasing the number who go home early. The importance of regular attendance is communicated to parents. There is good recording of attendance. Issues of attendance are raised at student support meetings. Students with poor attendance are identified and contact with parents is instigated. Some initiatives to reward good attendance have been introduced. However, the significant absenteeism or lateness noted in some groups indicate a need to review the effectiveness of current strategies. When asked about punctuality, some students reported that the absences of consequences such as detention meant that they did not make great effort to be punctual.

Attendance should be prioritised within the context of attendance for improved attainment and transition to further education and the world of work. Action should be taken to develop a profile of school attendance and to critically analyse attendance data for specific cohorts. Consultation with students regarding their attitudes to absenteeism and punctuality should also be instigated for the purpose of increasing their awareness of the impact of attendance and punctuality on their overall educational outcomes.

Retention rates in the school are very good. The targets set, actions taken and whole-school climate greatly support positive attitudes to staying and completing post-primary education. The culture of support for both current and past students promotes the sense of belonging that fosters retention. The provision of LCA also contributes to retention.

The quality of planning and the implementation of initiatives to support transitions is very good. Students successfully transition from primary and there is full transition to senior cycle. A large number of students transition into further or higher education or work. A range of actions implemented by the HSCL, the guidance service and the SCP support transitions, while the pastoral relationships promoted by class tutors and peer support provided by the buddy system contribute to successful school integration. One of the most successful initiatives embedded is the College for Every Student (CFES) programme. This introduces students at a very early stage to a range of educational pathways to support their abilities, interests and ambitions. Interaction with students and the articulation of their desired career pathways demonstrated the success of this initiative.

2.3 Partnership with parents and others

The quality of planning and implementation in this area is very good. The HSCL co-ordinator is keenly aware of the requirements of the service and parents were highly appreciative of the work carried out to support them and their daughters. Significant time is given to home visits and parents are invited in for information evenings and celebratory events. Parents are informed of the different initiatives

taking place. They also praised the range and beneficial nature of the courses organised. The very good work carried out by the SCP contributes to student wellbeing and in turn that of parents. Apart from the work carried out to support student transfer from primary to post-primary education, additional counselling services are provided to supplement the guidance provision already in place.

Clear targets and strategic actions to promote partnership with others have been developed. These include optimising connections with STEM subjects in partnership with local primary schools, and increasing TY's and LCA's exposure to partnership organisations through Business in the Community, YSI, CFES and work experience. The school has taken highly effective approaches to developing partnerships that extend learning and educational opportunities for students.

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'/students' 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	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'/students' 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;