



ST. MARY'S SECONDARY SCHOOL

School Self-Evaluation Report

Evaluation period:
September 2024 to June 2025

Report issue date:
June 2025

Strand V: Inclusive Learning Community



School Self-Evaluation Report 2025

1. Introduction/ School context

St. Mary's Secondary School, Ballina is an all-girls school of circa 528 students and has a total staff of approximately 53 people.

In 2007 trusteeship of the school transferred to Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). Formerly under the patronage of the Sisters of Mercy, the Mercy ethos is embedded in the school's motto: "The school with the warm welcome, caring heart and the guarantee of excellence", which is lived out daily. St. Mary's is now located on a new green-field site (opened Sept. 2022).

St. Mary's encourages the pursuit of excellence and a high standard of both academic and personal development. By providing a balance of educational activities, the school fosters growth in self-esteem and respect for others.

With an open enrolment policy, the school provides a range of subjects and programmes. As well as Junior Cycle (JC) and Leaving Certificate programmes, it offers the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme, and an optional Transition Year (TY). All subjects are organised on a departmental basis and linked to a subject ePortfolio, headed up by a rotating coordinator. Management is supported in the planning and implementation of school development, by API and APIL personnel, Student Support team, AEN department (with Junior and Senior Coordinators) committees and all relevant staff.

The last St. Mary's WSE Inspection Report (published December 2023) was very positive and noted the focus on continuous school improvement is evident.

"The board of management and senior management have been working proactively toward the realisation of the guiding vision for the school, evident from strategic planning actions they have identified in the school plan...."

"... the school's culture, ethos and context as highlighted in the school's overarching focus for the 2022-2026 cycle of SSE which is to further develop an inclusive learning community...The team has developed a comprehensive plan and accompanying range of resources to support the SSE process..."

The Inspectorate also highlighted the strong focus on wellbeing. *"The quality of whole-school promotion of student wellbeing is very good. Student wellbeing is central to the vision of the school which embodies a warm welcome and a caring heart. The principal, deputy principal and other leaders in the school foster a positive school culture. Very respectful and affirming teacher-student relationships were noted during the evaluation...."*

1.1 Outcomes of our last improvement plan (September 2024-June 2025)*

- Focus on streamlining target areas within Inclusive Learning Community
- Embed sharing of Learning Intentions (incl. action verbs) and promotion of Active Learning

** Following WSE-MLL Report publication, we worked on the recommendation "identified targets should be translated into narrowly defined actions and plans..."*

1.2 The focus of this evaluation

We undertook self-evaluation of teaching and learning during the period September 2024 to June 2025. We evaluated the following aspect(s) of teaching and learning:

- Learning Intentions/Action Verbs (magnetic school-wide resource)
- Activity levels in the classroom/Active learning methodologies currently in use
- Interactive learning through use of One Note

2. Findings

2.1 This is effective / very effective practice in our school:

General Teaching & Learning & Assessment:

- Subject Coordinator appointed in every department circulating meeting agendas in advance of meetings with use of online agenda now embedded.
- Comprehensive subject planning in place in all departments (new template post WSE-MLL)
- Strong collaborative environment.
- Consistent participation in CPD. Regular Oide Advisory Visits.
- AEN provision is strong, with established practice of Student Support Files/resources
- Microsoft Teams used by 100% of staff. One Note now used by 79% staff.
- Team teaching is well established.
- Assessment Coordinator in place with very efficient roll-out of examinations.
- All teachers analyse results of State Examinations against school performance and record reflection on MS Subject Department Team.
- Access to Athena Tracker
- Points System now established, following trial 2022/23.
- Bi Cinealtas now in place.
- Cothu inter-schools collaborative project commenced in 2024/2025 school year
- Positive Behaviour for Learning Initiative NCSE – *Respect, Responsibility, Readiness to Learn*
- Accepted to the School of Excellence in Creativity Award pilot phase two - 2025/2026

Specific to 2024-2025 SSE:

- School-wide delivery of subject-specific action verbs as selected by each subject department – high visibility of T&L environment. (Some depts. ordered second tranche)
- Majority of teachers see benefit in shaping learning using action verb.
- All Junior Cycle students exposed to new learning methodologies across subjects
- Majority of teachers reported methodology trial was beneficial and collaborated with colleagues as part of the roll out
- Students can see the link between doing and learning – strong awareness in surveys.
- Student enjoyment levels 91% – wellbeing in action.
- General awareness of SSE is strong – posters, notice board, website; Student Council; Focus Groups; SSE Teacher Welcome Pack, assemblies, regular updates via Teams and email. Coordinator and steering committee in place. Teaching and Learning on the agenda at all staff meetings, as well as being discussed at departmental level and presentation/handout/video progress shared at each BOM meeting.
- All available CPD completed e.g. Taking Stock (Sept. 24 and May 25) and Oide Visits

2.2. This is how we know:

We have used mixed methods research (qualitative and quantitative)

- Whole school SSE Survey (*communal survey strategy October 2024 & May 2025*)
(Latest results as of May 2025)
 - 50% students said action verbs used daily to share learning (11% every class, 39% every day)
 - 62 % teachers said action verbs used daily to share learning (12% every class, 50% every day)
 - 89% of students felt sharing intended learning with action verb was effective (combined result)

- 92% of teachers felt sharing intended learning with action verb effective (combined result)
- 80% students stated methodology was linked to specific learning intention (action verb)
- Majority teachers*75%* felt methodology helped deliver intended learning (combined result)
- 91% of students enjoyed active learning - soft data showed huge engagement.
- Five phases of active learning trial methodologies in each subject department (one per term)
- WSE-MLL Report (published December 2023) <https://www.gov.ie/en/school-report/8obdcf/>
- Minutes of subject department meetings
- New subject department planning template (teacher reflection, student voice)
- Whole staff discussion (every staff meeting)
- Student Focus Group Audio (shared with staff) and all SSE data shared with school community
- Anecdotal evidence
- Attitudinal survey (exit cards)
- Focus Groups (continuous and random during year)
- Parent/Teacher/Student Meetings
- Student Support meetings
- Student Support Files
- Student Council/Assemblies
- Parent Response Bi Cinealtas/Positive Behaviour for Learning feedback
- French Subject Inspection feedback (Feb 2025)
- Cóthu Survey
- End-of-year class surveys (selection)

2.3 This is what we are going to focus on to improve our practice further

Cognisant of the progress made to date and in line with WSE-MLL Recommendations and incorporating Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice

Focus on Action Verbs: Use of magnetic action verbs in every class.

- Support student understanding by use of subject-glossary/worksheets explicitly taught at start of academic year and throughout.
- Student Journal information section.

Promotion of Active Learning: Increase active learning methodologies across all subjects.

- Modelling active learning strategies at staff meetings, as part of data gathering.
- Subject Departments to assign periods of planning meetings to discuss new methodologies; allocate, plan, deliver and share resources to others in the department (Collaboration)
- Use subject notice boards (incl. electronic) to promote learning methods.
- Teach-meets to share practice.

3. See School Improvement Plan* (September 2025-June 2026) *SIP & Summary Sheet

- The **targets** for improvement we have set
- The **actions** we will implement to achieve these
- **Who is responsible** for implementing, monitoring and reviewing our improvement plan
- How we will measure **progress** and check **outcomes** (criteria for success)

As we implement our improvement plan we will record:

- The **progress** made, and **adjustments** made, and **when**
- **Achievement of targets** (original and modified), and **when**